

April 3, 2023

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Hudson & Wright, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Dr. Ronda Fritz and I am an associate professor of literacy education at Eastern Oregon University, and director of the EOU Reading Clinic. I also have the privilege of serving as a member of the board of the Children's Institute. Prior to continuing my education to obtain a Ph.D. in Special Education, I worked for 19 years as an elementary & middle school general education teacher, ending my k-12 career as a reading specialist in my rural school. I am also the daughter of a dyslexic father, wife of a dyslexic man, and the mother of a now-adult son with dyslexia. My experience with the men in my life, and especially my son, is what has driven me to ensure that no other child has the traumatic experiences they had as struggling readers in rural Oregon schools. It also drives me to make sure that all children have access to high-quality instruction regardless of their income level or zip code. Equally as importantly, it drives me to ensure that no teacher has to feel helpless in their ability to teach the children in their classrooms, and their personal lives, to read.

First, I want to commend the committee for considering this important literacy legislation. We know that the quality of the lives of our children is dependent on us getting this right. We also know that other states have been able to make marked gains with carefully-crafted legislation, so it is imperative that we learn from their successes and failures. I support HB3198, with a few recommendations:

Oregon has historically been a state that prioritizes context and local control over many aspects of governance. That priority is problematic in this bill. The bill gives districts the option to apply for grant funds but has not required any district to do so, regardless of their historical academic outcomes. This leaves too much to chance for some of our most vulnerable populations. Furthermore, other states, such as Utah, tried this approach with very little success.

Another issue with the bill as written is the lack of articulated direction in which districts could use funds. The bill gives too much flexibility on options for allowable uses, some of which, without careful vetting, are not likely to have any impact on student reading achievement.

Over the last 30+ years, most teacher training programs have failed to adequately train teachers to do the fundamental job of teaching reading. Consequently, we have many teachers who need to be retrained so they can be empowered to teach all of the children in their classrooms. As amendments currently stand, districts have the option to **choose** professional development and coaching, but will not be required to do so. This is a glaring error. Having well-trained teachers is foundational to systems change and cannot be optional. If professional development and coaching, firmly rooted in the best evidence around reading instruction, is not required or is not done well, this initiative will be a colossal waste of public dollars. Training and coaching need to be vetted for quality and need to be accompanied by access to high-quality vetted curriculum

that will give teachers tools to be successful. Once these foundational elements are in place, then funding for additional strategies outlined in the bill could be considered.

One of the first additional considerations should be high-dosage tutoring for children who are far behind expected grade-level outcomes. We have failed these children in our current system. It is our obligation to make things right for them. If we ignore these children, we are simply saying that we're not going to concern ourselves with their educational and life outcomes, and that we are willing to let yet another generation of students suffer the consequences of not being able to read and write well. Summer programs are also another important avenue, but this would be an excellent opportunity for community based organizations (CBOs) and schools to work together. CBOs can ensure that enrichment programs are part of summer programs, and that those enrichment programs are meaningful, engaging, and culturally relevant for the communities they are serving, while schools provide the vetted, skilled instruction and curriculum to improve reading and writing skills for the children being served.

I also want to emphasize that early literacy efforts need to be the priority. Given limited funds, focusing on providing support for teachers and children PK-3rd grade is imperative. Early literacy begins at birth and research supports prevention and early intervention for the most positive long-term outcomes. I am hopeful that the early learning elements of this bill can help to ensure a strong start for all of Oregon's children.

I am concerned about accountability efforts and how success will be measured both for schools and for the children who are receiving services funded through this bill. Language needs to be specific and clear regarding the expectations for outcomes. "Increasing early literacy" is not measurable, so we need to be sure that there is tighter language around assessment so we can easily tell whether the allocated dollars are reaching their intended goals.

I urge you to consider an appointed task force of literacy experts and stakeholders that would be able to vet teacher professional development, literacy coaches, curriculum, assessment, home learning, and tutoring programs to ensure that all school districts use the funds granted in ways that are evidence-based and likely to improve student outcomes, without each district having to attempt to figure this out on their own.

Please consider a pilot program to address the needs of the children in some of our most struggling schools. Support for these schools should be in all of the components outlined in the governor's plan. These schools should receive professional development for both teachers and administrators with built-in side-by-side coaching to ensure quality implementation. This should be accompanied by high-quality curriculum in which to implement methods they are learning. Additionally, their students in need of the most support should receive high-dosage tutoring to accelerate their learning and give them the chance to catch up to grade level expectations. These pilot schools could then serve as models as we scale up to include schools across Oregon.

I am hopeful that the Governor's efforts to move higher education toward preparing the next generations of teachers in ways that are aligned with the science around reading and writing acquisition. This is an absolute critical component of systems change that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

In summary, I believe that we need to take lessons from states who have successfully implemented legislation that has improved outcomes for the children in their states. We need to incorporate the language used in their legislation so we can obtain similar results. We need to be very clear about how funds need to be used and need to have a literacy task force assembled to help with prioritization of funding and vetting of all components outlined in the legislation. The science is clear on how children learn to read and write and the best practices for achieving proficiency effectively and efficiently. It is time for Oregon to make sure that our teachers are empowered with the knowledge and skills to teach all of our students to read and write.

Thank you for committing to the literacy of all children in Oregon.

With gratitude,

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