

**To:** Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the House Education Committee

**From:** Rita Moore, PhD

**Subject:** Comment on HB 3198-3: Early Literacy

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on HB 3198-3 authorizing an Early Literacy Success Initiative. My name is Rita Moore and I recently served on the Portland School Board (2017-2021).

It is encouraging that the legislature is considering an Early Literacy Success Initiative to help districts adopt evidence-based strategies to improve student outcomes.

In recent years, Portland Public Schools have embraced the science of reading and redirected resources to align with it.

- Our early educators, from Pre-K to Grade 2, now have high-quality, research-aligned instructional resources.
- Educators receive professional development to deepen their knowledge base about explicit and systematic reading instruction.
- As a school district, we have facilitated the participation of hundreds of our educators in a two-year professional course on the science of reading.
- And we're supporting our educators with instructional coaching.

These are the kinds of changes that are envisioned by HB 3198. But our experience, like other districts', shows that reorienting literacy instruction is complex and difficult. It requires sustained, intensive effort at all organizational levels, from Central Office to the classroom, coupled with significant resources – not just money, but also time & energy.

Any attempt to promote a wholesale shift in an instructional paradigm across 197 school districts, therefore, must balance incentives to persuade and controls to overcome initiative fatigue. Change is necessary, but must be doable.

While I strongly support this initiative in principle, I believe that school districts need more explicit expectations for science-based practice changes as well as the support of their institutional partners to achieve better student outcomes.

- ODE should be empowered to provide more active support to nudge all districts toward adopting the science of reading approach. As currently written, the legislation suggests that ODE's guidance will be fairly passive – until a hammer falls in the event of continued poor performance.
  - While it is important to recognize that districts are starting at different places, these new resources should not be used to support continued use of materials and practices that have demonstrably failed students.
  - At the same time, expecting a district to fully engage immediately and simultaneously in all of the strategies to support a student's literacy

acquisition runs the risk of over-extension and diffusion of limited resources before creating a strong foundation. Districts should be able to create a comprehensive plan for a sequenced roll-out, with ODE assistance and approval.

- To achieve the goals, districts need the funding for this initiative to be sufficient, sustained, and additive – supplementing rather than supplanting existing school funding. According to my sources, that means \$225 million for this biennium, and \$300 million for each biennium after that.
- Finally, we must address the teacher pipeline. This initiative will fail if it depends solely on individual districts’ professional development efforts. It is imperative that Educator Preparation Programs in Oregon fully adopt the science of reading as their model of literacy instruction so that future teachers graduate with the core knowledge and skills that have been proven effective.
  - Establishing a shared approach to literacy across all 197 districts will allow state-approved educator Preparation Programs to focus their training on science-based practices rather than trying to accommodate multiple, conflicting approaches.

As a member of the Portland School Board, I valued and defended the longstanding tradition of local control in Oregon. And as a former professor, I have a deep respect for academic freedom. But in the face of decades of testing demonstrating that what we’ve been doing does not work and an overwhelming scholarly consensus on what does, it would be unethical to allow the status quo to continue.

We have collectively failed generations of students by not providing them with the literacy skills they need to thrive. It’s time to change.

Thank you for making early literacy a priority.