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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

My background is in Special Education. I saw children who had been referred for Special Education whose only issue was that they had not learned to read in first or second grade. Most of these children saw themselves as “losers” or stupid and were often angry and disruptive in their classrooms. I am the co-founder of Reading Results, a nonprofit that provides a reading acceleration program in low income neighborhood schools in Portland.

Failure to read poses a serious threat to a student’s long-term ability to learn. Risks soar for failure in school, leading to poverty and long-term dependence on public assistance.

Most students who have difficulty learning to read are no less intelligent than those who pick up this skill easily. They need a different approach than what is being taught in many Oregon schools. They need targeted instruction in the blocks of sounds that make up words, “Phonemic Awareness”. If these essential building blocks are carefully taught in the first grade, most students will be successful readers by the end of third grade. The U.S. department of education has reported that 88% of kids with poor word recognition skills in first grade were poor readers in fourth grade.

I am asking the Ways and Means Committee to support early literacy with significant and targeted state funding to enable school districts across Oregon to teach and support kids to read in ways that research clearly shows will have the biggest impact. As part of the funding, it is critical to support proven reading intervention programs for students who have already fallen behind. Identifying students who are not achieving at the same level and rate as their peers and providing appropriate interventions are two critical needs.

Intervention for struggling readers is urgently needed, especially in low-income schools where resources are scarce, and students face higher risks of being left behind. Studies by the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development recognize that if a child has not learned to read by third grade, he or she will flounder in fourth grade and beyond when the focus moves from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 85% of juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functioning low literate. And, 2/3 of students who cannot read proficiently by 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare.

It is time to end the “reading wars” and fund a new approach to literacy that teaches

to each student's strengths.