



OREGON KIDS READ

March 12, 2025

RE: SB 141

Dear Senate Education Committee:

My name is Angela Uherbelau and I'm the founder of Oregon Kids Read, a grassroots literacy network. I'm writing today on SB 141 from a position of neutrality because of my concerns about the severity of our state's education crisis and the bill's lack of impact on today's students.

At the moment, this bill appears siloed in the education landscape, concentrating on districts' responsibility to students. We would like to see the bill connected to the entire system and to systemic change. In other words, how can the bill be amended to include the state's accountability to our kids and young people?

I'd like to give an example of what I mean and I'll use literacy as the context.

Since at least 2018, there have been 42 schools across Oregon - rural and urban schools - whose 3rd-5th graders have scored in the lowest-proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) throughout all of that time. 100 percent of these schools are Title I, meaning at least 40 percent of their students experience poverty. In the majority of these state-neglected schools, over 80 percent of their 3rd-5th graders are not at grade level in reading.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) has been aware of these schools and their struggles with reading for years and yet failed to take action to support them. In fact, in 2023, the then-director of ODE testified in front of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education against prioritizing literacy funding for lowest-proficiency schools.

In stark contrast, other states that have succeeded in improving literacy have taken concrete action that led to improved outcomes:

- A single statewide assessment to determine student proficiency
- Literacy funding prioritized for schools and students that struggle the most
- Tracking those funds to the school level
- Investing in teacher training based in the science of reading with a minimum number of hours, rigorous evaluations of learning, end of course assessment and documentation of training completion

Some states have taken system-wide steps like these voluntarily and seen remarkable gains, such as Mississippi whose students experiencing poverty now have the highest 4th grade reading scores in the country. Others, like California, adopted them on a smaller scale after being sued by families whose children were not learning to read.

There is no rational reason for the state of Oregon, and most especially our Oregon Department of Education, to actively withhold best practices from our students, teachers, schools and districts that need them the most. Shaming those same schools years later for failing to succeed is not accountability, it is negligence.

I urge the Legislature to amend the bill to expand the definition of accountability to include the state itself, with Oregon pledging to take quick, concrete action as other successful states have done.

Sincerely,

Angela Uherbelau
Founder, Oregon Kids Read
Mom of two Oregon public school students