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SB 214: 3-3 Reading Initiative

House Education Committee

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Good afternoon, Chair Doherty and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Karen Twain, director of Literacy for the Oregon Department of Education. Previously, I have been a teacher, counselor and administrator in the Tigard-Tualatin School District for over 30 years. I am here to testify in favor of SB 214 as amended, the 3-3 literacy initiative. Children would attend half-day or full-day kindergarten, whatever their district offers.

As an educator for more than 30 years, this is the first time I have seen a plan that covers all the parts of a comprehensive literacy program. When I was principal of Metzger Elementary, a highly diverse school, we used two of the parts of the initiative to improve the achievement and learning of our students: full-day kindergarten and effective, research-based methodologies that included strong and consistent core instruction and multi-tiered support systems. In doing so, we literally closed the achievement gap and were recognized for five years straight by the state for doing so. As the population in Oregon changes to be more diverse, I have come to realize that it will take much more for us to get all of our children in the state to be able to be able to read by third grade. As you know, reading by third grade is a major milestone in a child's career because it opens up all the pathways to future success. In order for this to happen, we will also need extra time to learn for the students who have struggled the most in the form of summer and after school programs. Additionally, by engaging community based organizations, we up the ante for parent engagement as we work together to bring in students and their families.

One of the most exciting parts to the 3-3 literacy is that the initiative spans from age 3 to grade 3 (or 8-year-olds). While there are pockets of collaboration throughout the state between Early Learning and the K-12 system, this is the first time that we have laid out a plan, in a qualitative way that ties the two together. We know this is the right thing to do because we have seen it work in many other states and through certain parts of Oregon. By having shared professional development, aligning of the academic and social-emotional standards, and working on the transition from the early years to the early grades, we know we can make a difference for our children.

Last year, we had 68% of our students reading by third grade in the state of Oregon, 32% that couldn't; mostly those unsuccessful students were students of color and those living in poverty. This is unacceptable. This means that more children are in interventions too late and being identified to go in to special education (a huge cost to our state). It also pushes us further from raising graduation rates and reaching our 40-40-20 goal. The only way to change this is to do something significantly different—that is what the 3-3 literacy initiative does. I highly encourage you to pass SB 214. It's the right thing to do for kids and it will change the economic and social face of Oregon forever.

