



HOOD RIVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Testimony in favor of SB 214

Madam Chair and members of the committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you in support of Senate Bill 214 and the proposed 3 to 3 Literacy Initiative.

I am Dan Goldman and I'm currently in my second year as the superintendent of the Hood River County School District. Before coming to Hood River I was the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction for the Tigard-Tualatin School District, where our students far-outperformed students throughout the state on every state assessment at every grade level; and where the National Center on Educational Outcomes named Tigard-Tualatin one of the ten most effective school districts in the nation in terms of student literacy and other academic outcomes.

Within a five-year span, educators in the Tigard-Tualatin schools closed the racial achievement gap in reading outcomes by 36%, far outperforming state averages despite having a similar percentage of students living in poverty and far more students of color than the state average. On measures of college readiness, such as the ACT, low-income students from Tigard-Tualatin far surpassed state

averages where the primary district-wide strategy wasn't project-based learning or proficiency-based teaching; and it wasn't STEM or CTE. - it was ensuring that every single student was a proficient reader by the end of elementary school.

Why this singular focus? The research is clear about the importance of getting students to read by the end of their primary school years and the **resource drain** on education, human services, and public safety budgets that occurs when youngsters miss the important milestone of 3rd grade reading proficiency.

- In 2004 famed educational researcher Joe Torgeson established through a massive national analysis that poor readers in 4th grade struggled in literacy in Kindergarten
- Children who struggle to read in K-3 rarely achieve average reading skills (*Torgeson, Rashotte, Alexander, 2001*)
- In 2011, the NAEP established that children who aren't reading proficiently by 4th grade are **four times** more likely to drop out of high school.
- According to the National Center for Education Statistics in 2008, fewer than 45 percent of high school dropouts were employed.
- Adaptive functioning as an adult is highly dependent upon academic success or failure (Joe Lesnick, 2010)

This research should shock us and compel us to improve the reading outcomes for our youngest learners. If academic success or failure is so dependent on reading proficiency by third grade, and the precursor to adaptive functioning and economic and social independence as adults, then we need to get serious about investing in early literacy.

Last year only 66% of Oregon 3rd graders were proficient readers on the state assessment. This means 34% of our state's youngest students require significant intervention and investment in 4th grade - we also know from the research I just cited that they will likely need

specially designed interventions their entire academic career. A huge portion of K-12 budgets are spent intervening with struggling readers because we know a student just cannot make it in school or in this world without being able to read. Resources spent on intervening with students in middle and high school are funds not spent on CTE, STEM, expanding IB or AP courses, or any number of innovations that our community members, post-secondary institutions and Oregon employers expect from us. It's a huge resource drain and if we don't do something radically different around literacy development to change the reading outcomes for elementary aged students, you can be guaranteed, because it's borne out in study after study, that our human services and public safety budgets will continue to require the lions share of additional state funding as scores of illiterate Oregonians cannot find family-wage jobs.

The substantive programming elements in SB 214 were not pulled out of thin air. Here's what the Institute of Educational Sciences, the research arm of the US Department of Education says must be prevalent in an effective early literacy program:

1. School-wide, consistent screening assessments for reading difficulties for every student
2. Protected time for differentiated, daily reading instruction
3. Instruction must be sufficiently intensive and focus on the "Big 5"
 - Phonemic awareness
 - Phonics
 - Fluency
 - Vocabulary
 - Comprehension
4. Research-based interventions for struggling students must be intensive, systematic

5. There must be frequent and consistent progress monitoring for struggling readers
6. There must be additional time beyond the core reading time to learn and practice necessary literacy skills

SB 214 is aligned to these necessary components; it accelerates the critical relationships between school districts and community-based organizations focused on equitable outcomes for all students; it provides necessary resources to provide struggling students more academic time - something Oregon schools have not been funded to provide in any meaningful or sustainable way; and it focuses resources for research-based curriculum and intervention materials, professional development to use these materials at high levels, and valid and efficient assessments to monitor students' progress.

Oregon must invest in the strategies that work and stop believing that all of Oregon's youth will suddenly learn how to read by the end of 3rd grade just because we measure it and report it in the newspapers. Without significant investment in effective research-based early literacy programs and significant investment in partnerships with community organizations, like I Have a Dream and others, whose mission includes reducing the social and economic barriers to adaptive functioning, we cannot expect different results.

I applaud the 3-3 reading initiative because it is in line with the research and what we know works right here in Oregon in highly diverse districts like David Douglas, Tigard-Tualatin, Bethel, McMinnville, and others.

With human services and public safety budgets increasing at a much greater clip than state education budgets over the last 12 years, and with strategies for increasing state revenue highly unlikely in the short term, there is no more important investment than in early literacy for the state of Oregon - absolutely none. The elements in the 3 to 3 reading initiative as written in SB 214 are research-based, are proven to work right here in Oregon, will make an enormous long-term educational and economic impact for Oregonians - and must be funded.