

Testimony to the Oregon Senate Committee on Education

Public Hearing for Senate Bill 221

March 30, 2017

Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Oregon has been very progressive in assisting students who struggle to learn to read, particularly students with dyslexia. We are very pleased that this legislation concerning reading instruction was passed in 2015, particularly HB 2412.

As you are well aware, the percentage of children who are failing to read at the proficient level is staggering. Consistent with the latest data nationally, 33% of fourth-grade students in Oregon are reading below Basic, and 66% are reading below Proficient. To be considered a proficient reader in fourth grade, the student must "...be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations." (NCES). Reading at the proficient level indicates that a student has the ability to read challenging material. Sixty-six percent of fourth-grade students and 64% of eighth-grade students in Oregon are reading below this level.

Academic success is highly dependent upon appropriate reading skills. Unfortunately, there is a crisis with regard to our nation's reading skills. Even more unfortunately, this situation has not changed in 25 years. The same percentage of students in 1992 and today are reading below the Basic and Proficient Levels. This is shocking given the enormous amount of data that indicates that reading failure can often be prevented and that appropriate interventions to assist struggling readers to become competent readers exists. This is not just the case for children with dyslexia, but for all children who struggle to learn to read.

The corpus of knowledge that includes what is known about reading acquisition and reading disabilities is referred to as the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading includes an enormous amount of information ranging from genetic influences, neurological functioning, information processing to identification and intervention procedures for struggling readers and, most importantly, how to teach reading acquisition to all children.

At this point, it is quite safe to state that there is adequate knowledge, with regard to the Science of Reading, to either prevent reading failure or to provide appropriate intervention techniques to students who are struggling readers. Unfortunately; the Science of Reading has not been embraced by those who train pre-service teachers; university faculty in colleges of education. Research examining pre-service and in-service teachers and their professors found that they all performed quite poorly on tenets of the Science of Reading and particularly on questions related to phonological processing, an area in which all teachers, especially those teaching reading acquisition, need to be intimately familiar. This knowledge is simply not taught in many colleges of education. For example, Greenberg, McKee and Walsh (2013) found that 78% of colleges of education provide no coursework addressing struggling readers. As a result, teachers are not adequately prepared to teach reading acquisition and are often confused and frustrated about how to teach struggling readers. In a study conducted by Cunningham, Perry and Stanovich (2004),

teachers indicated that they had not received formal instruction during their academic training in phonological processing.

The Science of Reading provides extraordinary insight and informs practitioners regarding how to teach reading and how to intervene for students who are struggling readers. Studies utilizing techniques that allow the examination of brain functioning during reading tasks have demonstrated that appropriate interventions actually improve the way the brain processes information in specific areas that are known to be involved with reading. Many other research studies have provided the requisite insight into accurate identification of students who are at risk for reading failure and how to provide appropriate interventions for them. It is not a matter of how to resolve the issue of reading failure as the Science of Reading has provided an abundance of evidence concerning this issue, it is a matter of disseminating that information to those who will be the practitioners involved in teaching those children. Not surprisingly, pre-service teachers desperately desire this information as they aspire to be highly trained, professional educators. Many pre-service teachers have no idea that this body of knowledge exists.

HB 2412 does exactly what is necessary. It is essential that HB 2412 remain as it is currently written. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Standards not only provide the essence of the Science of Reading, they also provide the appropriate framework for teaching reading, not just for children who have dyslexia, but for all children. This is an extremely important point. The concepts, abilities and skills outlined in the IDA Standards should absolutely be taught by college of education faculty and then demonstrated by pre-service teachers prior to pre-service teachers becoming in-service teachers. No other organization has provided the leadership in this regard. What is of paramount importance is that the knowledge contained within the Science of Reading, and expressed in the IDA Standards, be used to teach the children of Oregon how to read.

The issues relevant to reading, reading failure and its identification and remediation have been borne out by science. An enormous amount of information across several decades has been documented with regard to these issues. The next, necessary and critical, step is to utilize this knowledge to assist all students to become competent readers. Failure to do so will result in continued and unnecessary reading failure on the part of thousands of students in Oregon. The percentage of students who experience reading failure could be tremendously reduced by rejecting SB 221 and keeping HB 2412 intact.

Sincerely,

David P. Hurford, Ph.D.

Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology and Counseling

Director, Center for READING

Pittsburgh State University

Psychology and Counseling, Center for Research, Evaluation and Awareness of Dyslexia  
(Center for READING)

University: Pittsburg State University

[dphurford@pittstate.edu](mailto:dphurford@pittstate.edu)

Years in Education: 29

Elaine Cheesman, Ph.D., CALT  
Associate Professor  
Teaching and Learning  
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs  
[Echeesma@uccs.edu](mailto:Echeesma@uccs.edu)  
Years in Education: 46

Margie Gillis, Ed.D.  
Research Affiliate  
Reading and Language Development  
Fairfield University  
[mgillis1@fairfield.edu](mailto:mgillis1@fairfield.edu)  
Years in Education: 41

Nancy Mather, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Disability and Psychoeducational Studies  
University of Arizona  
[nmather@u.arizona.edu](mailto:nmather@u.arizona.edu)  
Years in Education: 40

Maryanne Wolf, Ph.D.  
John DiBiaggio Professor of Citizenship and Public Service  
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development  
Director, Center for Reading and Language Research  
Tufts University  
[Maryanne.Wolf@tufts.edu](mailto:Maryanne.Wolf@tufts.edu)

Lori Severino, Ed.D.  
Assistant Clinical Professor  
Teaching, Learning & Curriculum  
Drexel University  
[las492@drexel.edu](mailto:las492@drexel.edu)  
Years in Education: 31

Mary L. Farrell, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Center for Dyslexia Studies  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
[farrell@fdu.edu](mailto:farrell@fdu.edu)

Tiffany Hogan, PhD, CCC-SLP  
Professor  
Communication Sciences and Disorders  
MGH Institute of Health Professions  
[thogan@mghihp.edu](mailto:thogan@mghihp.edu)  
Years in Education: 12

Charles W. Haynes, Ed.D., CCC-SLP  
Professor and Clinical Supervisor  
MGH Institute of Health Professions  
[CHAYNES@MGHIHP.EDU](mailto:CHAYNES@MGHIHP.EDU)  
Years in Education: 38

Lesley Maxwell, M.S., CCC-SLP  
Associate Professor  
Director of Clinical Education  
Coordinator of the Speech, Language, Literacy Center  
Communication Sciences and Disorders School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences  
MGH Institute of Health Professions  
[lmaxwell@mghihp.edu](mailto:lmaxwell@mghihp.edu)

Bonnie Halvorson-Bourgeois, MS, CCC-SLP  
Assistant Professor; Coordinator of Literacy Services  
Communication Sciences and Disorders  
MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston  
[bhalvorson@mghihp.edu](mailto:bhalvorson@mghihp.edu)  
Years in Education: 6