

April 21, 2021

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

I write to you as a parent of a dyslexic child, as a taxpayer, and as someone who is deeply concerned about the impact of illiteracy on individuals, our state and our country.

I'm asking you to appropriate funds to train teachers to teach the 60% of students who need direct, explicit, systematic instruction to learn to read. More specifically, I ask that you make funding available to train teachers in [Oregon lowest performing schools](#) in professional development coursework in the Science of Reading called LETRS ([Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading & Spelling](#)). These schools are in rural and urban areas, in districts represented by Democrats and Republicans.

Why Reading by The End of Third Grade Matters for Individuals and the State

Recent research demonstrates that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up. As several studies have now documented, the poor first-grade reader almost invariably continues to be a poor reader. In "Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation," and "Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of the Third Grade Matters," researchers show the link between reading proficiently by third grade, and improved academic and life outcomes.

Of students who do not meet third-grade reading benchmarks, 16% will not graduate from high school, a rate four times greater than for proficient readers. For children who are low-income and not proficient readers, the percentage rises to 26%. Adults who have less education than a high school diploma have the highest unemployment rates and lowest median weekly earnings. Nearly 85% of the juveniles who interface with the court system are functionally illiterate, and 70% of all incarcerated individuals cannot read at a fourth-grade level.

Oregon has a Reading Crisis because it has a Teacher Training Crisis

Statewide, only 46.5% of Oregon students were proficient in reading by 3rd grade. And that was before Covid. But let me be clear. **It is not that kids can't learn to read. It is that most are not being taught how to read by properly trained teachers.** The only states where students are making gains, such as Mississippi, are those that have committed to training all teachers and administrators in scientifically-based reading instruction.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) states: "While parents, tutors, and the community can contribute to reading success, **classroom instruction must be viewed as the critical factor in preventing reading problems** and must be the primary focus for change."

Last spring, in response to abysmal reading scores, [Portland Public Schools began training teachers and administrators in LETRS](#). Almost all teachers PPS hires are graduates of Oregon-based education preparation programs(EPPs). PPS is spending millions of dollars on LETRS

because their teachers, including those with reading endorsements, did not receive adequate training from their Oregon-based EPPs. In fact, many of the PPS teachers leading the charge for LETRS training are reading specialists who feel their graduate programs did not prepare them to teach children to read.

In a national ranking of Teacher Preparation Programs, Oregon ranked last in terms of how many programs adequately addressed the five components of scientifically based reading instruction. While I understand these rankings are imperfect, PPS's experience demonstrates there is a problem with many teacher preparation programs in Oregon when it comes to reading instruction.

LETRS Teacher Training Can Make a Difference

I understand change is difficult, but I also know it is possible.

Between 2017 and 2019, the only state with an increase in NAEP reading assessment scores was Mississippi. A central component of Mississippi's comprehensive literacy plan involves training all of their teachers in LETRS.

[Portland Public Schools committed funds](#) to train all K-5 teachers in LETRS over the next three years. More than 150 educators are on the PPS waitlist for this professional development coursework. Teachers want this knowledge so they can better serve all learners. We need more funding to make sure this training is available to all Oregon teachers.

Oregon will never achieve educational equity without making changes to the way teachers are trained to teach reading because BIPOC and low-income students are disproportionately impacted when teachers are not adequately trained. Well-resourced students are not making gains because their teachers are better trained, but rather because these students' families are spending thousands in private tutors, many of whom are trained in the science of reading.

My son is dyslexic. He reads at grade level only because our family was privileged enough to pay for a private assessment and two years of intensive tutoring.

With the money we spent on our one child, Oregon could train ten teachers in LETRS. In one year alone, those ten teachers could reach over 250 students. And the next year, another 250. And the next. Investing in LETRS training is an educational and economic win for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jennifer Schubert
Portland, OR