

Submitter: Monicah McGee
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB3198

My name is Monicah McGee, and I am a parent/literacy advocate and constituent from Lake Oswego, OR.

A staggering 60% of Oregon 3rd graders aren't reading at grade level, even though research shows that 95% of kids can learn to read when given explicit, structured instruction. I'm concerned that, as currently written, HB3198 and HB3454 leave it up to individual districts to choose whether to apply for literacy funding that addresses Oregon's reading crisis. As a parent of high school students, I know firsthand the importance of accountability for literacy practices in our Oregon schools. All boats rise with structured literacy, and these bills, if rewritten to include accountability and implementation measures, are an opportunity to create statewide, generations-long, positive change for Oregon and its residents.

I am especially concerned that HB3198 and HB3454 as written:

1. Prioritize district choice over student needs. In 2022, our Secretary of State's office warned that the Oregon Department of Education's failure to intervene to help students and safeguard taxpayer investments is a more significant problem than an infringement on local control. We've tried local authority, and it's left us with most students not reading proficiently. Follow the lead of other states, and change the model.
2. Ignore best practices from other states where the states have taken direct responsibility for literacy and have seen impressive, sustained gains in reading. My home state of North Carolina is implementing statewide change to support structured, explicit, cumulative, evidence-based literacy practices; North Carolina has decided that illiteracy is not a choice for its students and that teachers require training they didn't receive in their degree programs. I've advocated for these same evidence-based literacy practices for a decade and urge you, as Oregon's leaders, to make the same commitment as North Carolina and Mississippi.

HB3198 and HB3454 could be reasonable first steps toward addressing our crisis but should be amended to ensure our students get what they need and to see real progress in Oregon. I'm asking you to consider the following changes:

1. Center students who struggle the most with reading. Instead of a voluntary grant application process for districts, funds and resources should be specifically and explicitly dedicated to schools with the highest numbers of struggling readers,

administered and directed by the Oregon Department of Education.

2. Ensure the instruction and tools children need to succeed are grounded in scientifically based research about reading. An example of guard rails could be a Governor-appointed task force that vets specific assessments, curricula, teacher training, and other resources.

3. Prioritize tutoring and teacher training. Intensive, high-dosage tutoring helps struggling readers immediately, while teacher training is a long-term investment in our educators as professionals that pays dividends for generations. Both should be prioritized in funding, vetted by the above task force, and coordinated by the Oregon Department of Education.

Sincerely,

Monicah McGee