

Public Testimony Opposing HB 3454, HB3198
March 10, 2023

Dear Education Committee,

Over 60% of fourth-graders in Oregon aren't reading at grade level. The first thing I hope we do is to recognize that this is unacceptable. I've heard the governor say these words, but the bills put forward say the opposite. They say: the status quo is acceptable.

I'm asking you to oppose HB3454 and HB3198 unless amendments are made. I have included concerns below.

Without serious amendments, neither HB3454 nor HB3198 will lead to the systemic changes necessary to ensure all children, and especially Oregon's most struggling ones, learn to read. I also believe the bills will engender even more distrust in Oregon's public educational system, as well as reinforce the racist, classist, and ableist belief that some children cannot be taught to read.

I'm writing as a former Portland State University professor who saw many of their students struggle with reading, as a parent of a child with dyslexia, and as a well-resourced individual who was able to afford assessments and tutoring for their child. I'm also writing as a literacy advocate, who, for the past three years, has devoted their time to researching other states' literacy bills and talking with people who wrote and implemented policies that have now helped hundreds of thousands of children in states like Mississippi, North Carolina, Alabama, and Florida.

Dr. Kymyona Burk, who implemented Mississippi's literacy bill and now works with states to [enact comprehensive literacy strategies](#), says: "I look at these laws as equity laws. Some of these things are already happening in higher-performing or higher-income schools. They're not happening, and they're not required to happen, everywhere."

The current bills are not equitable. They do not require a district to make any changes unless it applies for the funding, meaning districts with the capacity to apply, and which are already engaged in changing how they teach reading, will be the main recipients of the funds. Equity means requiring *all* districts to teach their students to read and providing them with the resources to do it. These bills will not do this.

I have no financial or professional stake in the outcome of these bills. I am an Oregonian who believes literacy is a civil right, and for that reason, I care deeply about these bills. Our literacy policies must be about children, not adults—not politicians, teachers, administrators, or school board members, but about the more than 60% of children who are not being taught to read.

My son is one of the lucky ones in Oregon because when he wasn't taught to read, our family could afford private tutoring. I hope that with amendments, these bills can be the first step towards a comprehensive literacy strategy so we can begin moving towards a future where all Oregonians can thrive, not just wealthy ones like me.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jennifer Schubert

Below are key points I've learned from studying other states with comprehensive state-wide literacy policies, including Mississippi, which like Oregon, is a local control state. I've addressed HB3198 because the governor's office repeatedly told advocates that HB3454 was a "placeholder" bill. As of March 10th, no amendments have been issued for either bill.

- Systemic Racism and Classism require us to change our Systems.
 - HB3198 would provide \$300 million in additional funds without addressing the systemic changes required to efficiently and equitably direct new and *existing* funds.
 - Other states have needed to invest additional funds, especially around the initial retraining of teachers. However, their literacy bills were blueprints for how to restructure the relationship between their state departments of education and their districts so that existing funds were not wasted on discredited teaching practices, assessments and curricula.
- Local Control.
 - Like Oregon, Mississippi is a local control state, but they recognized that their department of education had a key role to play if they wanted equitable literacy outcomes.
 - We don't ask doctors and hospitals to research every drug they prescribe to their patients. Likewise, we can't ask teachers, school boards, and administrators at Oregon's 197 districts to research what curricula, professional development programs, and assessments, are most effective for teaching all children to learn to read. Other states have task forces of experts who vet resources, and districts are required to choose from these.
 - HB3198 is voluntary, meaning districts can continue using discredited teaching practices, assessments, and curricula.
- Metrics matter.
 - "Real-time assessments" that monitor student learning are essential, but to be effective, teachers must use reliable assessments, and be trained in how to use data to inform student learning. Because many educators don't receive training in data-driven practices in their degree programs, it must be part of any professional development in the Science of Reading.
 - HB3198 does not specify how assessments or teacher training will be vetted and does not require anything of districts not applying for funding.
- Professional development.
 - Teachers must have the knowledge, as well as the time and support to learn about the Science of Reading. They also need practice and ongoing coaching in how to teach reading in an explicit and systematic way.
 - Because many educator preparation programs(EPPs) are still teaching discredited methods, the majority of current in-service teachers will require this training.

North Carolina and Mississippi spent millions on professional development, but it was a one-time expenditure because they also changed how their EPPs teach pre-service teachers.

- HB3198 does not require teacher training, nor address EPPs.
- Cultural Competency and the Science of Reading.
 - Mississippi and Florida have seen literacy outcomes increase for all students, while also seeing a decrease in gaps for students of color, low-income students, and multilingual learners.
 - The science of reading is necessary, but not sufficient to address all of our educational inequalities. There is nothing incompatible about the science of reading and having culturally competent teachers and culturally specific materials.
 - A recent issue of *School Psychology* focuses on “[Connecting the Science of Reading to Social Justice](#),” and includes articles addressing issues such as: “the importance of considering AAE(African American English) and normalizing cultural dialects when assessing reading performance.” A teacher who is able to do this kind of assessment requires both a solid foundation in the Science of Reading and cultural competency in the specifics of AAE as it relates to reading development. This work is being done by [many excellent educators](#) who have expertise in both culturally responsive practices and the science of reading.
 - HB3198 includes references to “culturally sustaining pedagogy and teaching strategies for diverse learners,” and programs that are “culturally responsive.” The bill does not specify how these will be vetted and whether these pedagogies must be informed by expertise in culturally relevant pedagogies as they relate to literacy instruction, which is essential to addressing reading challenges.
- Multilingual Learners.
 - Oregon’s Response to Intervention (OrRTI) recently hosted Dr. Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan who presented “[Literacy Instruction for Multilingual Learners](#)” to explain the importance of Science of Reading to multilingual learners, as well as other supports necessary for them to succeed.
 - An Oregon teacher, who is a native Vietnamese speaker, fluent in Spanish and English, and works with multilingual students, [wrote a letter addressed to legislators](#) in support of training for all teachers: “Of all the training I have had as an educator, from classes in school to the plethora of professional development offered by Portland Public Schools over the years, the LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training was the most impactful and useful training I have received in making me an effective educator.”
- Specificity of Legislative Language.
 - States such as Mississippi began this work fifteen years ago and have learned that legislation needs to be extremely specific. When states began with language as vague as what is in HB3198, change came slowly or not at all.
- Parent Notification.
 - Other states have explicit requirements for parental notification about how a child is progressing and what must be done if a child is struggling with reading. HB3198 has no requirements.