

Submitter: Scott Hays  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: HB3198

#### Members of the House Education Committee

I am a retired elementary and middle school teacher who has mixed feelings about HB 3198. With 20 years of experience in a multi-graded two room school (I taught the self-contained 4th-8th grade classroom), I am keenly aware of the importance of student literacy. I agree with the goals of the Early Literacy Success Initiative, however I have strong reservations about the path proposed to achieve them.

Decades of research supported by my own very direct experience leads me to conclude what almost everyone already knows to be true: children learn to read (as they learn anything) at different times, in different ways, and for different reasons. Most students benefit from some form of phonics instruction, and a large subset of that group benefit tremendously from the support and structure it provides. But another subset of those same students finds the structure to be boring and stultifying, chafing to read stories and books that interest them. On top of that, no two students transition from one group to the other at the exact same time, or in the exact same way.

This inescapable fact about learning raises two important concerns about the pathway outlined in the Early Literacy Success Initiative. The first and most obvious is that the one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum design (and the professional development that generally is needed to implement it) doesn't really work. I started my teaching career in the mid 1970s, when the first wave of "back to basics" instruction took hold. I have since watched the pendulum swing back and forth several times between it and the more holistic approach to reading instruction that apparently is once again falling out of vogue. Over what has been almost a half century of observation, I see the tendency of decision-makers has been to put all eggs into one basket and to lose sight of the fact that actual classroom teachers need as many baskets as possible. I fear this legislation will push the pendulum back to a prescribed approach which will force teachers to teach programs and not the actual students in their classrooms.

The second issue has to do with measurement. We all know how "proficiency" with phonics will be measured, but to spell out the obvious, let's at least state it clearly: more high stakes testing and data collection. After more than two decades of imposition, isn't it time to admit that the testing regimen has not produced the results it promised? Isn't it time to admit that the sorting of children for "remediation" created by the testing regimen has only acted to reduce their joy of learning and restricted

access to other equally important learning opportunities, such as history, science, art, music, geography, civics, PE, and most certainly the experience of discovery learning. And isn't it time to recognize the negative impact testing and data collection have had on the art of teaching, itself? Don't misunderstand ... I recognize the importance of testing and assessment in the learning experience. I just think it is time we move beyond reliance on single measures of academic success, which this bill likely will not help us do.

HB 3198 is being presented as an overdue solution to a very real problem. While we must find a way to provide teachers with the skills and materials necessary to better address phonemic awareness in the early years, this bill's fatal flaws mean it is not the best way to do that.