

Submitter: Leslie Jenson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB3198

Dear Representative Kropf and Governor Kotek,

My name is Leslie Jenson and I am a former classroom teacher and current dyslexia interventionist. I am a constituent from Wilsonville, Oregon.

I am writing because over 60% of Oregon 3rd graders aren't reading at grade level- even though research shows that 95% of kids can learn to read, given clear, structured instructions. 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 our reading crisis. What happens to kids who live in districts that choose not to apply?

I am a former K-3rd classroom teacher, now working with students who have dyslexia. It has been my work with dyslexic students, and specifically learning about The Science of Reading and putting these explicit structured teaching methods into practice that have taught me how to teach reading to ALL students.

In the past, the school district curriculum that I used was focused on "Balanced Literacy" a top-down model that instructs children to use a 3 cueing method to solve unknown words. I naively thought that students who were underperforming in learning to read using 3 cueing would catch up. I have learned since then that the reality is that this rarely happens. If a student is struggling to read by 3rd grade the likelihood that he/she will catch up to grade level proficiency by later grades is highly unlikely and is linked to higher rates of school dropout.

I am especially concerned that:

- The bills 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 larger problem than infringement on local control.
- Oregon is ignoring best practices from other states where the states have taken direct responsibility for literacy and have seen impressive, sustained gains in reading.

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

- 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.
- Ensure the instruction and tools that 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.

- 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,
Leslie Jenson