

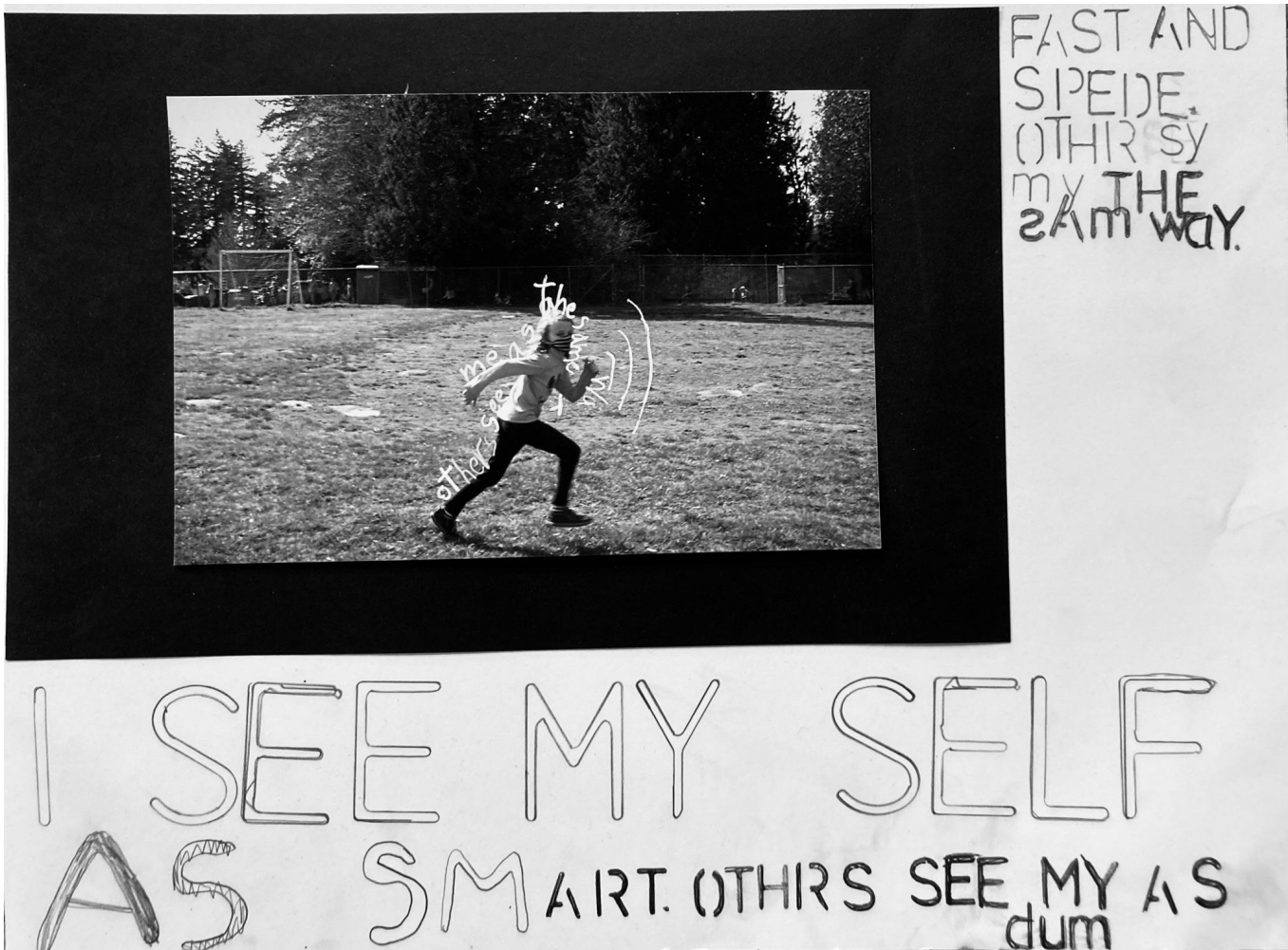
To: House Committee on Education  
Re: Strengthen HB 3198 Early Literacy Success Initiative  
April 3, 2023

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Wright, and Members of the Committee;

My name is Noelle Studer-Spevak and I am a parent of two children who are each 1-2 years behind in school because Oregon has not required colleges and districts to implement proven reading instruction methods. I am a constituent from Northeast Portland's Cully Neighborhood and **I urge you to strengthen [HB3198 amendment -3](#)** by including:

- Teacher training reform at state-funded colleges of education
- Audits every four years by the Secretary of State
- Teacher professional development in the summer, minimizing disruption to students

My 4th grader expresses anxiety about his reading/writing ability at bedtime on a weekly basis. Last month he said, "Mom, for just one day, I would like to see how it feels to be like all the other 4th graders in my class." He is worried about State testing coming up because his scribe from last year retired and he doesn't know if he'll get reliable help this time. He's not alone in his struggle. Many thousands of children have slipped through the cracks, unable to read by 3rd grade, and the rest of the class is moving on without them. There's a common saying: Up until the 3rd grade students learn to read, and after that, they read to learn. In fact, 61% 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 instruction.



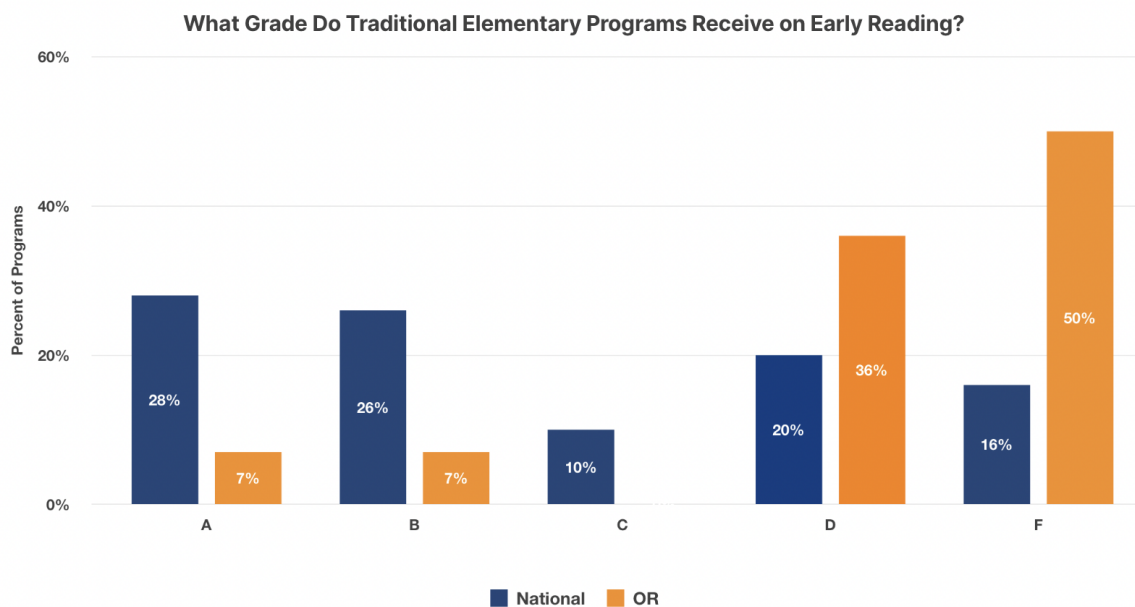
Created by my child spring of 3rd grade with artist in residence, Julie Keefe.

My children are very fortunate; we have paid \$16,000 for private reading tutoring 2x/week over the past three years and continue to pursue extra help. Neither of our children has a dyslexia diagnosis – but they do need direct instruction using scientifically proven methods. This should be a basic part of daily public education, not something special only a handful of families can afford after school. Tragically, the 79% of 4th graders in our neighborhood who have fallen behind their peers may never have access to science-based reading instruction that would help them get on track.

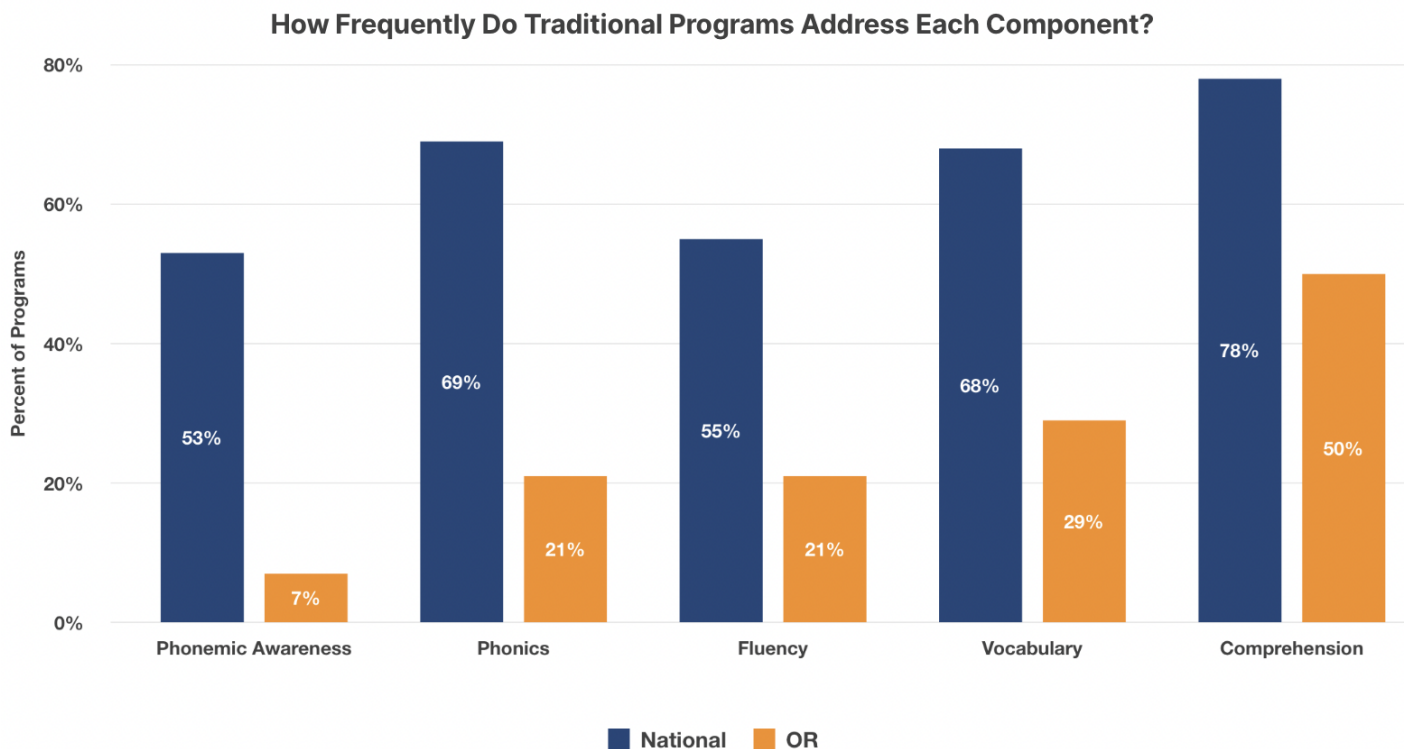
I first learned about Oregon’s literacy crisis by helping inmates learn to garden at Columbia River Correctional. A significant portion of the men had undiagnosed reading problems as kids, so the course materials were challenging. Then, trying to understand the front end of the school-to-prison pipeline, I interviewed school principals in my area. Our middle school principal said that it was a big shock for her teachers when boundaries changed and students from a Title 1 school started arriving in 6th grade unable to read – “Middle school teacher preparation programs do not include reading instruction, so they really had to innovate.” To help meet the need for 1:1 reading time, I worked with school staff to design a volunteer-powered tutoring program for our elementary school, but when I suggested bringing in retired teachers to help, one principal cautioned, “If scores go up too much, we lose our extra funding from the State.” No volunteer and parent education efforts can patch this gaping systems breakdown.

A major upstream problem is not addressed by HB 3198: 1) **Oregon’s teacher colleges are failing to modernize and adopt best literacy instruction practices** and 2) **the Department of Education has yet to enforce quality**. Leading states know that [new teacher prep matters](#). All [Oregon state-funded programs receive an “F” grade](#) from the National Council on Teacher Quality except Eastern Oregon U (see chart below comparing Oregon teacher program grades with teacher program grades across the nation). The most up-stream solution to the crisis is to ensure that all new teachers receive excellent training and follow-up coaching to implement direct literacy instruction in the classroom.

In other words: OSU, PSU, UO, and SOU teaching programs fail national standards. Each year these taxpayer-funded programs are sending hundreds of K-3 teachers into classrooms unequipped to teach reading.



The five pillars of early literacy are well established, but in Oregon, only 7% of teacher programs provide instruction on phonemic awareness, 21% on phonics, 21% on fluency, and 29% on vocabulary – all well below half the national average. (see bar chart below).



**[HB3198](#) leaves it up to individual districts to apply for literacy funding grants that address our early literacy crisis.** What happens to kids who live in districts that choose not to apply? How do we know this will be rolled out well to those who need it most? What lessons are we learning from states that have turned their 3rd grade literacy rates around? Please require districts with the most struggling readers to participate in this grant program and rapidly implement changes.

**Oversight by the Secretary of State is essential to ensure that the Oregon Department of Education** begins enforcing the implementation of quality teacher training and literacy instruction. This component of the original bill was removed in amendment -3. How will we know that the Department of Education is enforcing the districts' 2-year plans without regular audits? Our educational system is failing to provide a quality education to pockets of low-income and students of color across the state. In many cases, this is a civil rights issue. As a parent at a school experiencing structural inequities driven by district policies, it's hard to describe how important it was for us when auditors from the Secretary of State's office interviewed us and then published a [report requiring additional Department of Education oversight](#) to reduce disparities among schools (see pg. 27). This report documented district mismanagement and gave us hope that some part of state government was looking out for justice.

**When & how teachers are retrained matters.** A generation of teachers has not been taught data-backed literacy instruction practices and a great deal of professional development and coaching will be required to retrain all the K-3 teachers currently in the field. Taking teachers out of the classroom and replacing them with substitute teachers is highly disruptive – especially for K-3 students. Please keep in mind that there is a substitute teacher shortage in some parts of the state and many subs will not teach at high-needs schools.

Teacher professional development intensives should take place in the summertime and on inservice days to maximize instruction time for students who need it most.

**Please strengthen HB 3198 so Oregon kids have a bright future.** If Oregon is declaring an early literacy emergency, all interventions should be on the table.

I'd like to see Republican-style action on the teacher training issue. My mom is an educator in Wyoming, which has adopted science-based reading at [all teacher prep programs](#) and kids start out each day with intensive reading intervention; in Ohio, 71% of teacher prep programs receive A/B grades; and in Massachusetts, where my nephews live, 40% earn an A/B grade. **So why do just 14% of Oregon programs receive [A/B grades](#)?** This is a justice emergency.

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, like [Mississippi](#), where the states have taken direct responsibility for literacy and have seen impressive, sustained gains in reading.

**[HB3198](#) could be a good first step toward addressing our crisis, but the -3 amendment should be further strengthened to ensure our students get what they need.**

Please make the following changes:

- Add to Section 2(2)(e): Ensure that teacher training at state-funded colleges of education delivers all five pillars of science-based literacy instruction.
- Reinstate Section 5(3) of the original bill: Include audits every four years by the Secretary of State,
- In Section 3(2)(a) and Section 3 (2)(d)(B), specifically state that teacher professional development should minimize disruption to students.

An early literacy crisis deserves the strongest possible oversight backstops. Failing to get this right on a rapid timeline is a loss for everyone – the kids, their families, employers, our state.

Concerned parent seeking public accountability,

Noelle Studer-Spevak, MS/MPA