

March 19, 2023

Dear Chair Youakim and Members of the Education Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HF 629 - The Read Act. My name is Dr. Catherine Cavanaugh. I'm a former elementary education teacher, a reading and learning specialist, a parent of a child who has dyslexia, and a lecturer at the University of Minnesota. My comments are not representative of, nor am I writing on behalf of, the University of Minnesota or its College of Education and Human Development.

As it is written, I oppose HF 629 - The Read Act due to the language related to reading. This bill is problematic due to the influence of The Science of Reading movement. By including the terminology, The Science of Reading, this bill is naming an ideological movement. This is akin to including other terms, such as whole language or balanced literacy, in laws and policies. I urge you to proceed with caution. As researchers note and in my experience, when trying to work with The Science of Reading advocates, they accept no compromise, present preferred views as self-evident or unmitigated scientific truths, and take a distinctly adversarial stance toward anyone who does not fully agree (Reinking, D., Hruby, G. G., & Risko, V. J., 2023). It is disturbing and problematic that advocates of The Science of Reading movement are adamantly opposed to adding an 's' to science. We need to use the **sciences of reading** to improve literacy in Minnesota. Let's band together to embrace ALL research and ALL science, not just research that is based in cognitive science.

I know that there is urgency related to HF 629. However, I urge you to take more time with this bill to get it right. There is too much at stake.

There are three issues with The Read Act that I would like to highlight:

1. The language related to The Science of Reading needs to be examined

As the bill is written, the terms 'evidence-based', 'structured literacy', and 'science of reading' are used in a variety of ways throughout the bill. We need clarity and transparency with these terms and how they relate to implementation. The term, The Science of Reading, is a moving target, it is coded, it is confusing, it is political, it is misleading - and people, groups, and companies are profiting off how the term is being used in policy and legislation. As many of us in education say, "Follow the money." When you follow the money, many for profit organizations are benefitting from legislation related to the Science of Reading movement.

2. The language in the bill needs to align with MDE's 2020 K-12 ELA Standards

As the bill is written, there is a narrow focus on a few of the foundational standards. However, the standards include more depth and breadth related to literacy learning. There has been significant time spent on developing these standards and they are being implemented in K-12 schools across the state. This bill must include critical aspects related to these standards. For example, the language related to the definition of

comprehension is EXTREMELY limited and problematic in HF 629: “Reading comprehension” is an active process that requires intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader. Comprehension skills are taught explicitly by demonstrating, explaining, modeling, and implementing specific cognitive strategies to help beginning readers derive meaning through intentional, problem-solving thinking processes the ability to read the words on the page and to understand and comprehend the words that have been read.”

3. We need to identify who qualifies as experts in literacy when implementing this bill

As the bill is written, there is language related to cultural and linguistic diversity, but it is unclear if the experts, as identified in the bill, are trained and qualified to implement these important aspects. For example, if a literacy specialist is only trained in structured literacy and The Science of Reading, are they able to implement aspects of the bill related to culturally and linguistically diverse students and offer support to teachers as they implement MDE’s 2020 K-12 ELA Standards?

Thank you for taking time to consider these aspects related to The Read Act. If you would like to connect and collaborate on anything related to HF 629, please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Catherine S. Cavanaugh, PhD  
Certified Reading Specialist  
Past President of The Minnesota Reading Association

Reference cited:

Reinking, D., Hruby, G., & Risko, V. (2023). Legislating phonics: Settled science or political polemics? Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education.