

March 14, 2023

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives

Members of the Minnesota Senate

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz

Commissioner Willie Jett, Minnesota Department of Education

Please support HF 629 and SF 1273 (The “Read Act, Bold Literacy”) and Governor Walz’s Bold Literacy Plan. Adopting these bills will change the downward trajectory of Minnesota proficient readers by training teachers and teaching students to read based on the “science of reading”.

Students who do not learn to read will have difficulty mastering academic content, succeeding in school, and fulfilling their life potential. Schools' fundamental responsibility is to ensure that all students read proficiently. “The most important thing schools can do is teach children how to read. If you can read, you can learn anything. If you can’t, almost everything in school is difficult.” (Emily Hanford, [School is for Learning to Read](#), New York Times (Sept, 2022))

Yet, most students in Minnesota are not proficient readers. In fact, Minnesota’s fourth and eighth graders did worse on national math and reading tests in spring 2022 than they have in decades. In 2019, based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only approximately 4 in 10 4th grade students scored proficient or advanced (39%/40%) in reading.

Who are those 60% of all Minnesota students not proficient in reading? Most of those students do not have a disability nor do they live in poverty. Only 12 of the 24 students in a typical first grade class gain the reading skills they need before the end of the year. Only 2 in 10 students receiving special education services in Minnesota receive instruction which closes the gap between them and their peers. Sadly, only 3 in 10 of Minnesota’s Black students read proficiently by the end of third grade. Students who are not reading proficiently by fourth grade have a less than 75% chance of ever catching up. We are failing all our children.

This situation is especially distressing because we now know that most students can learn to read irrespective of their backgrounds—*if* their reading instruction is grounded in the converging scientific evidence about how reading develops, why many students have difficulties, and how we can prevent reading failure (Lyon, 2002; Moats, 1999; Shaywitz, 2003). Unfortunately, many teachers in Minnesota do not have the background or training they need to access this information and implement evidence-based reading instruction in their classrooms. (The Science of Reading Research, G. Reid Lyon and Vinita Chhabra, ASCD, 2004).

While Minnesota reading scores continue to dramatically decline, Mississippi, which was once notoriously the worst-achieving state in reading, is now number one in growth on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). How did they do it? One critical piece was comprehensive training of their K–3 teachers, both pre-service and in-service, in the science of reading. (Cindy Jiban, NWEA (April 19, 2022))

The science of reading is a body of research that incorporates insights and research from disciplines that include developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive

neuroscience. The science of reading has been documented around the world, in all languages and cultures, in studies that cost hundreds of millions of dollars. In short, the science of reading has demonstrated the methods that best help children learn to read, from the earliest steps in spoken language to being able to successfully decode unfamiliar words.

The science of reading is the converging evidence of what matters and what works in literacy instruction, organized around models that describe how and why. It's been accumulating for a long time, providing solid guidance on how we can better help kids learn to read with understanding. It's here to help us better teach kids who are learning to read. (NWEA, July 2022)

Much can be learned from the success story of Mississippi where a concerted effort by multiple stakeholders to improve the reading achievement of students in Mississippi has resulted in that state showing the highest growth of all states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, where Mississippi was the only state to show improvement on the fourth-grade assessment. ([Knowing Better, Doing Better: Mississippi's Story in Literacy Success](https://tnscore.org/knowning-better-doing-better-mississippi-story-in-literacy-success/)) <https://tnscore.org/knowning-better-doing-better-mississippi-story-in-literacy-success/>, 2020)

Unlike what opponents are touting, schools will still be able to choose curriculum and have local control. There are many programs that in fact deliver curriculum in accordance with the science of reading and school districts and teachers will have great latitude in choosing curriculum and teaching preferences. However, those choices will provide what we know works for all students. Today, we are asking for you to support legislation to make Minnesota a leader in reading instruction and education by supporting the science of reading in schools.

Please contact us with any questions you may have about our request. We hope that we and the children and parents in Minnesota can count on your support of these initiatives.

Signed,

Autism Society of Minnesota
The Coalition for Children with Disabilities
Decoding Dyslexia MN
Groves Learning Organization
Minnesota Disability Law Center
Multicultural Autism Action Network
National Parents Union
PACER Center
The Reading Center