

A letter in support of READ Act (HF 629)

I am writing to the Education Policy Committee to express my support for the READ Act. This bill will put in place literacy programs based on the science of reading and appropriate money to implement this across the state.

My grandson attends Minneapolis Public Schools and I am very concerned about his ability to both read and write at his grade level. He is in the third grade and struggles to read books and quite frankly cannot write (letters are backward, cannot form many letters, cannot write a sentence properly, etc.) I reviewed the curriculum being used and found that the literacy program used is based on the “whole language” and “balanced literacy” approach. He is currently doing some remedial computer programs at home and I hope this will improve his reading ability. However, I have not observed that this stopgap measure is particularly effective.

I am literally losing sleep over this. I fear for his future. This whole situation has been stressful for him and his family. He is a bright kid, but he is being both punished and blamed for not reading or writing at grade level. That is not right.

What is happening to my grandson is happening to thousands of school children across Minnesota each year. People are fleeing our public schools (if they can afford private schools) so that their children can be taught to read and write. This is not fair. Solid, effective literacy curriculum needs to be used in all of our public schools so that all children regardless of their gender, economic background, family status, abilities, and race/ethnicity are taught to read and write. This is critical to prepare them to be confident, productive, and effective citizens and adults. Other states have implemented literacy programs based on the science of reading and are finding success with them.

I encourage the Education Policy Committee to support the READ Act and recommend it be passed into law. Minnesota has a literacy crisis. We cannot wait any longer to address it. I want public schools to teach my grandson and all of the other children in Minnesota to read and write. We owe it to our children and grandchildren.

Judy Zaunbrecher

Minneapolis, MN 55408

Date of Hearing & Bill Number: February 14, 2022; HF 629
To: Members of the Education Policy Committee
From: A group of concerned literacy organizations
Affiliation (ex. student, parent, advocacy organization): Parents and literacy advocates
City of Residence: Minneapolis

Dear Members of the Education Policy Committee,

Our community based organizations have coalesced around literacy needs of educators and students of all abilities and are pleased to support **The Read Act HF 629**.

The fundamentals of **The Read Act** will prioritize every student reading proficiently by supporting:

1. Educator professional development in the science of reading
2. Aligned curriculum to support educator needs
3. Coaching support through district literacy specialists.

Our organizations are committed to advancing literacy outcomes for students of all abilities. Our students and educators come from all backgrounds and have lived experience struggling with access to learning and professional development to increase outcomes in literacy.

We strongly support **HF 629 The Read Act** and we urge you to vote in favor of passing this bill out of the MN House Education Policy Committee.

Sincerely,



‘Ahead of the game’



Elementary Dyslexia Specialist Sue Keranen talks about Sondag System curriculum materials Wednesday at the District 742 Administration Office in Waite Park. DAVE SCHWARZ/ST. CLOUD TIMES

St. Cloud school district at forefront of statewide push for dyslexia screening

Jenny Berg St. Cloud Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

When Katie Schnider started as a language arts teacher at North Junior High School in St. Cloud, her philosophy was that if you put a good book in front of a student, they would — and could — read it. • She quickly learned that wasn’t always the case. • A former third-grade teacher at Discovery Community School, Schnider was able to evaluate her middle school students using elementary reading skill assessments. • It wasn’t a lack of motivation or lack of intelligence hindering her students. It wasn’t poor eyesight.



Schnider

Often, it was dyslexia, a learning disorder where students have problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words.

Now, as a part-time secondary dyslexia specialist for St. Cloud school district, Schnider teaches students foundational reading skills.

“One of my groups this year is a group of sixth-graders and by the second week, all of a sudden a boy was like, ‘Wait a second. Are you finally teaching us how to read?’” Schnider said during an interview this month.

“At first, it is questionable, especially at the secondary level because you’re having them do these things and they are looking at you like, ‘I thought this was what we did in elementary school,’” she said. “But then they start to feel it — and I don’t really know how to explain that — but all of a sudden they have that connection and then they are totally

invested.

“They just know it. They realize this is the answer to get them to where they’ve always wanted to be.”

While reading intervention is not new to St. Cloud school district, attention to dyslexia screening and intervention has heightened over the past few years.



Keranen

“St. Cloud is ahead of the game,” said Sue Keranen, elementary dyslexia specialist. “St. Cloud was the first district in the state to hire a dyslexia specialist. Now we have two.”

Experts: Treating dyslexia early is key

Untangling a student’s literacy problems at a young age is critical because it reduces problems later in life.

See **DYSLEXIA**, Page 7A

Dyslexia

Continued from Page 1A

Studies have shown having dyslexia contributes to a lack of self-esteem and peer acceptance, which can manifest as negative emotional and behavioral problems, leading to higher levels of suspensions, anxiety and depression, and suicide rates.

It's well documented that people with low literacy skills are more likely not to graduate from high school, live in poverty, be unemployed or experience homelessness.

There's also a link between literacy and crime: About 60% of America's prison inmates are illiterate and 85% of all juvenile offenders have reading problems, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

And the problem is more common than many people know.

The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates up to 20% of school-aged children in the U.S. have characteristics of dyslexia, although only about 2% have the most severe reading deficits.

"It ranges from mild to profound," Keranen said of the dyslexia continuum. "So if a child has a mild case, they might not need an intervention at all; there are just some accommodations a teacher could do in the classroom. If a student is showing profound characteristics, then (an intervention) program would work extremely well for that student."

State prompts more dyslexia screening

About five years ago, Minnesota adopted dyslexia screening legislation. A few years ago, the law became more specific: Each school district must identify students who are not reading at grade level by the end of kindergarten, first grade and second grade. Those students must be screened for characteristics of dyslexia and provided alternate instruction.

The school district hired Keranen in 2018 to help implement new dyslexia programming.

Shannon Avenson, director of student services for the district, credits the school board for its foresight on dyslexia services.

"We have an amazing school board," Avenson said. "I don't know of another district that has a dyslexia specialist. A lot of districts have reading specialists or literacy specialists. We have that in addition to this."

"That has been pivotal," she continued. "That's why we're so in line with the statute and so far ahead."

The district implemented a program called Sunday in the third trimester of the 2018-19 school year. The program is a well-regarded Orton-Gillingham literacy program that teaches connections between letters and sounds using sight, hearing, touch and movement.

"It's so important that people know we aren't just making this up willy-nilly," Keranen said. "We are following science and research. We are following the law."

If a student is identified as not meeting grade-level reading benchmarks, they will take a Sunday assessment, which identifies whether the student has mastered foundational reading skills.

"If they have, they can move to a certain level. If they have not, we start them out in their area of need. It's not just a one-size-fits-all program," Keranen said. "It's not just a six-week intervention. The law says students need to be reading at or above grade level and then they can exit the intervention."

This year, the district implemented a pilot to establish the Sunday curriculum in first-grade classrooms.

"It was really important to us to try it in a whole group instruction," Avenson said, noting all students learn the progression of reading in the same manner — just at different stages — and if a teacher follows the Sunday program as written, they will get results and learn how to teach effectively.

By embedding the program in first-grade classrooms, the number of students receiving Sunday instruction grew from about 300 during the 2019-20 school year to more than 1,100 this year.

Schneider is currently expanding the program at the secondary level by assessing students in grades 6-10 to see who might benefit from intervention.

District officials are considering adding the Sunday curriculum to second-grade classrooms next year, as well as adding reading interventionist positions at each building.

But like most initiatives in public school districts, finding funding can be a challenge.

"We have these two in these positions — and our district has made that a priority. Now we have to be creative with how we provide professional develop-



Sunday System curriculum materials are on display Wednesday at the District 742 Administration Office in Waite Park.

PHOTOS BY DAVE SCHWARZ/ST. CLOUD TIMES

ment and how we are purchasing our curriculum," Avenson said. "The hardest part with moving this work forward is it takes people. How do you assess 10,000 students? It's finding people to do the screenings but then when we have that information about which students would benefit from intervention or more support, providing the intervention."

"We just want what's best for all students, whether a child is showing characteristics of dyslexia or whether they are just a struggling reader."

Sue Keranen
Elementary Dyslexia Specialist

"Could we use like 15 more dyslexia specialists or assessors or people who are going to teach the intervention? Absolutely."

The district is in the middle of its five-year plan for implementing the dyslexia programming. In a few years, the district will be able to identify if the implementation of the Sunday curriculum in first-grade classrooms has helped more students meet grade-level benchmarks by the time they reach upper elementary grades.

"That data will truly tell us if this implementation plan has worked," Keranen said.

A shift in thinking: Handling dyslexia in schools instead of clinics

How educators and families view dyslexia has changed over the past decade, according to Amy Schulting, dyslexia specialist with the Minnesota Department of Education.

"In the past, dyslexia was thought to be more of a medical issue," she said. "And in the past 10 years, there has been greater understanding in Minnesota and across the country that struggling readers and those with characteristics of dyslexia are missing foundational reading skills that can be taught in the core classroom and with additional intervention as needed."

It was thought dyslexia should be handled in clinics — outside of school — where students would undergo medical exams costing around \$5,000 and often not covered by insurance.

"I think in the past dyslexia was thought to be extremely rare," Schulting said. "And now we understand that a larger number of students are on the dyslexia continuum and may be struggling with foundational reading skills that schools can support with explicit systematic instruction."

School districts cannot diagnose dyslexia; only a pediatric neuropsychologist can provide an official diagnosis, Keranen said.

While an official diagnosis might offer peace of mind for parents or the struggling student, it isn't required for the student to receive intervention services.

"We just want what's best for all students, whether a child is showing characteristics of dyslexia or whether they are just a struggling reader," Keranen said. "All the symptoms kind of overlap. We will give them what they need."

Jenny Berg is the cities reporter for the St. Cloud Times. Reach her at 320-259-3680 or jberg@stcloudtimes.com. Follow her on Twitter @bergjenny.



Elementary Dyslexia Specialist Sue Keranen displays materials used in the classroom Wednesday at the District 742 Administration Office in Waite Park.

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February 13, 2023

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Rep. Laurie Pryor, Chair rep.laurie.pryor@house.mn.gov
House Education Policy Committee
% Wilson Lee Wilson.Lee@house.mn.gov

Re: HF 629, Read Act

Chair Laurie Prior and Education Policy Committee Members:

Testimony of Gerald Von Korff

Please accept and distribute the following written testimony on behalf of the Read Act. HF 629. I am a former teacher with a masters in teaching, and I taught high school in Washington DC and New York. I have been practicing law in St. Cloud since 1978. I joined the St. Cloud District Board of Education in January 2003, and served on that board for 15 years. When our new Superintendent, Willie Jett, joined the district, he encouraged his administration and the Board of Education to take a hard look at how the district was serving students with dyslexia, and that effort resulted in adoption of a 5-year plan to integrate reading science into our elementary and secondary reading programs.

I chaired a board committee that studied this issue in cooperation with Superintendent Jett, and our committee and the Board of Education supported the superintendent in the transition. The Superintendent and the Board decided that it was our obligation to address the needs of students with reading challenges, and to that end, the District's leadership engaged in a careful study of the literature supporting the use of reading science. The district adopted a five year plan to meet the needs of struggling readers from K to 12. I've attached a 2021 article from the St. Cloud Daily Times describing that transition.

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Read Act Testimony JVonKorff-2-14-2023.docx
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As it happens, my wife, a former elementary school teacher, obtained Orton-Gillingham training in New York. After her classroom teaching ended, she started a tutoring practice for students with the characteristics of dyslexia. She became one of many established tutoring practices in Minnesota to address the needs of students which the public and private schools could not meet. Minnesota local school districts were simply unable to address the needs of the 15 plus percent of students with dyslexia. In our area, and across the state, if they had resources to do so, parents of struggling readers were increasingly hiring tutors. Students were not being identified, and when they were identified, parents were often advised to wait until 5th or 6th grade to see if the student eventually learned to read. In many districts the word dyslexia was treated as if it did not exist. Remedial programs often used the 3-cuing system, which emphasized guesswork instead of decoding.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel summarized the state of knowledge about effective reading practices. An article¹ summarizing the Panel's findings explains:

The Panel found that many difficulties learning to read were caused by inadequate phonemic awareness and that systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness directly caused improvements in children's reading and spelling skills.

The evidence for these casual claims is so clear cut that the Panel concluded that systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness should be an important component of classroom reading instruction for children in preschool and beyond who have not been taught phoneme concepts or who have difficulties understanding that the words in oral language are composed of smaller speech sounds — sounds that will be linked to the letters of the alphabet.....

The Panel also concluded that the research literature provides solid evidence that phonics instruction produces significant benefits for children from kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read. The greatest improvements were seen from systematic phonics instruction. This type of phonics instruction consists of teaching a planned sequence of phonics elements, rather than highlighting elements as they happen to appear in a text.

This approach is critical for struggling readers, but it pays dividends for all students. Despite these findings, almost all Minnesota districts resisted implementing these

¹ <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/findings-national-reading-panel>

recommendations and instead used curricular materials that ignored reading science.

You will hear today, I am sure, if you have time to listen, that still in many Minnesota districts, parents are still being forced to pay outside tutors to teach their children to read, because their local district refuses use materials of proven effectiveness, or in some cases, because their districts lack the resources and trained staff to deliver instruction in accordance with nationally recognized best practices.

Minnesota's failure systemically to adopt the techniques recognized by the 2000 National Reading Panel, has had dire consequences on those students who need instruction in decoding techniques.

- **Way too many students who have adequate or above average intellectual capabilities are nonetheless not learning to read.** These students -many of whom have dyslexia -- have been wrongly categorized as lazy, or intellectually compromised, to justify their lack of progress. Some of them grow to hate school; some become discipline problems; and others become seriously depressed. Tutors trained in appropriate decoding strategies report that proper identification and instruction radically turns their attitudes around. Too many districts have no curriculum, no identification policies, no trained staff and no systemic plan to address the needs of these children.
- **Still too many districts are utilizing outdated discredited materials** to address struggling readers that have long ago been proven ineffective, and some major school districts have actively resisted adopting curricula that embody techniques of proven value.
- **Many teachers and administrators were trained to use approaches that are provably ineffective.** Even when old approaches are not succeeding, transitioning to new approaches can be a daunting task. In St. Cloud, we were blessed with leadership at the superintendent and executive level that placed the needs of our students above tradition, inertia, and comfort. However, in many districts, district leadership has refused to implement necessary changes. The Read Act will provide a desperately needed lifeline to these students.
- **Teachers who utilize the new reading-science based approaches report a marked improvement in their teaching of reading.** In our district, and in other districts that have begun the integration of reading-science into their curriculum, teachers often report that for the first time in their careers they have learned how to teach the students who struggle. Many report a deep sense of regret that they didn't learn these techniques earlier, that their districts didn't support them with adequate materials, and that their degree programs ignored reading-science.

I would like to make the following further points:

- **Parents Forced to Hire Private Tutors.** Because far too many school districts refuse to provide reading-science based instruction to the 15-20 percent of students with dyslexia, parents with resources are too often required to hire private tutors to provide the reading science-based instruction that many school districts refuse to provide. There is nothing more frustrating to parents than to be told that they must spend thousands of dollars of their own money to teach basic reading skills. Surely, there is a constitutional right to learn to read: parents should not have to pay private tutors to deliver that right to their children.
- **Connection to the Achievement Gap.** Refusal of school districts to provide decoding instruction is directly connected to the achievement gap. Across the state of Minnesota, parents with resources are paying tutors for the reading instruction, while children whose families lack those resources often languish in school lacking basic literacy skills. A significant percentage of students who are assessed as not-proficient are students with unaddressed or unidentified dyslexia. *If the legislature is committed to assuring that all students can read, then it is time to take bold and decisive action to assure that these students benefit from proven strategies.* In the appendix to this letter, we have listed a series of reports describing two decades of failure to address Minnesota's achievement gap. Addressing struggling readers is an important aspect of this issue. If Minnesota is serious about addressing the gap in reading, it is time to take bold action.
- **Widespread Benefits.** Integrating reading science into the curriculum has multiple benefits. Instruction based on decoding is essential for students with dyslexia. However, embedding decoding instruction into the regular curriculum for all students can reduce the number of students who need more intensive instruction later and provide those students with a head start towards individualized special decoding instruction.
- **Resources to Support Planning, Development and Implementation.** Effective planning for and implementation of reading science, as well a program to screen, identify, provide appropriate instruction requires significant resources. The Read Act appropriate incentivizes implementation with targeted revenues.
- **Recognition by More Districts of the Need to Adopt New Practices.** In the last several years, more Minnesota districts are recognizing the need to introduce reading science in their reading programs, as well as the need to systemically identify students with dyslexia. If the state adopts the Reading Act requirements,

it will support these districts to make necessary changes. Moreover, it will force recalcitrant publishers to issue full-throated faithful implementations of reading science in their publications.

The St. Cloud District still has many challenges. But the district is now identifying students early and intervening. The district is building, systematically, a reading-science based program, training teachers and administrators, and building the instructional infrastructure eventually to attack reading challenges at all grades. The Read Act supports districts making this necessary systemic change.

About Local Control

I would like to say a few words about the theory that imposing the requirement that school districts actually teach all students to read somehow violates the concept of local control. On the contrary, the Minnesota constitution states that it the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools: a review of the history of the constitution will disclose that literacy for all was a central goal of the constitutional education clause. There is no local control exemption in the constitution that allows school districts to accept public money, but then fail to teach children to read. If, for example, a district like Minneapolis were using the discredited Fountas and Pinnell series to teach struggling readers with great success, that would be an argument for approving those materials as successful. However, it is now 20 years since the Reading Panel's recommendations, and overwhelming evidence demonstrates that this approach fails struggling readers. .

The Minnesota Department of Education's Strategic Plan² (January 2021) recognizes that public education is a fundamental right for all students, and that educational access and equity are the foundational principles upon which education must be built. The Strategic Plan recognizes that public education is "...the passport to human development that opens doors and expands opportunities and freedoms." Surely it is not too much to ask that for students who are struggling readers, district begin to use curriculum materials of proven value.

Thank you so much for considering my testimony.
Sincerely,

/s/ Gerald W. Von Korff
Gerald W. Von Korff

² See also https://www.senate.mn/confirmations/2021-2022/2021-2022_required_docs/Mueller_Heather.pdf

Appendix

Reports on Minnesota's Persistent Failure to Close the Achievement Gap

- **Investing in Our Future**: Seeking a fair, understandable and accountable, twenty-first century education finance system for Minnesota (Acknowledging that “Minnesota has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation ”)(Governor’s Task Force July 2004 P11)
- **Funding Education for the Future**, (MDE May 2011) (“There are wide gaps in reading and math proficiency by race and by economic status. Little progress was made in closing these achievement gaps between 2006 and 2010.”) Education Finance Working Group Recommendations and Report p 5 (Nov 2012)
- **80-20-10 Bringing Equity to Minnesota’s School Finance System** (School Finance Working Group, November 2020) (Over the past 20 years, educational outcomes measured by state accountability tests have stagnated with a large, persistent achievement gap while the percentage of children of color has more than doubled from 16% to 34%)
- **Office of Legislative Auditor A Minnesota Department of Education’s Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap** (2022) p 3 (“Minnesota has had long-standing academic achievement gaps, despite efforts by MDE, school districts, and charter schools to implement policies designed to close them.)
- **Wilder Foundation “Tackling the achievement gap head-on” (2006)** (A wide gulf divides public school classrooms throughout the Twin Cities region. It closely follows the lines of family income and of race and ethnicity. This achievement gap persists throughout the school years, from grade-school test scores through high school graduation rates.)
- **Minnesota’s Educational Achievement Gaps: A Statewide Crisis**. (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2019 (Minnesota’s education achievement gaps have persisted for decades despite implementing policies designed to close them.)
- **Educational Outcomes and Minnesota’s Economy, Minnesota Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2022** (“Data show that Minnesota’s public schools consistently underserve students from low-income families, Indigenous students, and students of color”.)



February 13, 2023

Dear Chair Pryor and Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HF 629 - the READ Act championed by Rep. Edelson.

The Minnesota Business Partnership represents the senior leaders of Minnesota's largest employers. One of Minnesota's greatest advantages is the strength of our workforce, and we believe it is imperative that our education system equips every student with the skills and abilities necessary to thrive.

Ensuring every child can read well at every grade level is critical for future success. Reading is an education issue and an economic issue - literacy opens doors for students in academics and life. However, reading proficiency disparities are startling – according to the Nation's Report Card, only one-third of current fourth-graders are currently reading at grade level. Results are trending in the wrong direction, with reading scores having fallen more than a grade level (12 points) from 2013 to 2022.

These disparities necessitate immediate action, which is why the READ Act is so important. Minnesota needs to go all-in to transform how we teach students to read, and the READ Act includes several important tools demonstrated in other states to improve how reading instruction is delivered:

- Professional development and literacy training grounded in the science of reading
- Literacy specialists to assist classroom teachers strengthen reading instruction
- Screening tools to determine student needs and progress
- Resources to adopt evidence-based reading curriculum
- Robust use of data to support students and teachers

Minnesota is fortunate to have a sizeable state budget surplus, and it is imperative that the state invests in tools like those in the READ ACT to improve and intensify reading instruction strategies.

Implementing the READ Act is one of the best steps the legislature can take this year to ensure every Minnesota student reads well at every grade level. Thank you for supporting this important set of tools to strengthen reading and ensure our students' future success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy Walstien'.

Amy Walstien

Senior Policy Director

Minnesota Business Partnership

February 14, 2023

Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in regard to HF629. The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) is responsible for establishing the state standards required to be a licensed teacher in Minnesota and for overseeing the state's teacher licensure programs. One of PELSB's legislative priorities this session is to support policy measures that will increase student achievement in reading, including changes and support to professional development for teachers and funding for teachers and schools to implement needed policy changes.

All of Minnesota's students deserve well-trained teachers who have the knowledge and skills needed to support all readers. HF629 would ensure Minnesota's elementary school teachers receive professional development aligned to the science of reading. Additionally, HF629 provides the necessary funding to ensure all districts can provide their elementary teachers with high-quality, meaningful training in the science of reading.

HF629 would complement PELSB's work in ensuring Minnesota's future educators are prepared to teach Minnesota's students. PELSB is currently implementing a new audit cycle of all approved licensure programs in Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, Reading, and Special Education. This audit verifies that teacher preparation programs in the aforementioned areas include robust instruction on the science of reading, therefore ensuring each future teacher is prepared to implement scientific reading instruction to support Minnesota's students.

In closing, we would like to reiterate the Board's support for HF629 and encourage committee members to vote in support of it as well.

Sincerely,

Yelena Bailey, Ph.D.

PELSB, Interim Executive Director

Angela Osuji, Ph.D.

PELSB, Chair



February 14, 2023

Re: HF 629

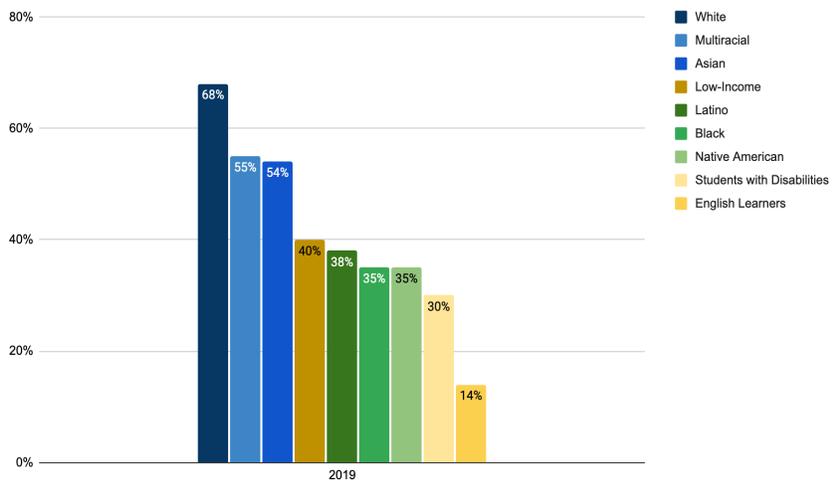
Dear Chair Pryor and members of the committee,

Reading proficiency is critical for success in college, career, and life. Research has found that students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.¹ Despite this, being able to teach reading was one of the most common things over 50 educators told us that they didn't learn, but wished that they had, in teacher preparation.² This need is not unique to Minnesota. Despite a large body of research supporting scientifically-based methods of early reading instruction,³ the majority of Minnesota teacher education programs struggle to equip teacher candidates with the requisite knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities to use an evidence-based approach to teach children to read⁴. Only 22% of teacher education professors say they center their philosophy around explicit, systematic phonics,⁵ the method which most effectively supports early readers.

This is why we support HF 629, which hold schools accountable to developing a literacy plan aligned with evidence, establish uses for literacy incentive aid, empower literacy experts at the Department of education to provide clear guidance on high quality curricular materials, and would allocate \$100 million to provide training and support for educators to learn about and implement excellent early literacy instruction. Our youngest Minnesotans—particularly those who have traditionally underserved—do not have time to wait and deserve educators with expertise in literacy instruction. Minnesota educators also deserve the opportunity to be trained in evidence-based literacy so they can have the essential tools and knowledge to better serve their students. For an individual teacher, the cost of these training programs can be prohibitive, which is one of many reasons HF 629 a smart investment in early literacy and will build off the years of work that have gone toward ensuring all children have access to literacy. We are grateful for Rep. Edelson's leadership in crafting a policy that will do right by educators and students.

Sincerely,
Matt Shaver
Policy Director
mshaver@edalliesmn.org

Reading Proficiency, MCA 2019



¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). "Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters." http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf

² Kaput, K. (February 2020). "10 Things All Teacher Candidates Should Learn in Teacher Prep." EdAllies. https://edalliesmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Teacher-Prep-Brief_Final_Digital.pdf

³ Schwartz, S. & Sparks, S. (October 2, 2019). "How Do Kids Learn to Read? What the Science Says." Education Week.

⁴ Payeur, A. (November, 2022). "A Content and Thematic Analysis of Foundational Reading Courses in Minnesota's Teacher Preparation Programs." Dissertation.

⁵ Will, M. (January 22, 2020). "Preservice Teachers Are Getting Mixed Messages on How to Teach Reading." Education Week.

February 13th 2023

Rep. Laurie Pryor, Chair rep.laurie.pryor@house.mn.gov

House Education Policy Committee

% Wilson Lee Wilson.Lee@house.mn.gov

Re: HF 629, Read Act

Chair Laurie Prior and Education Policy Committee Members:

Please accept and distribute the following written testimony on behalf of the Read Act. HF 629.

I am writing as a parent advocate who founded, with Sara Spafford Freeman and Khulia Pringle, Minneapolis Academics Advocacy group to create a public forum for parents and educators in Minneapolis to discuss and advocate for better literacy instruction, tools and training for our educators and to support the urgent needs of our children.

Prior to this advocacy group I have served on our district's World's Best Workforce Committee as well on the site councils of my children's schools in Minneapolis.

Over the last two years our group has had countless meetings and conversations with families, educators, district staff, and literacy advocates across the district.

Parents with students who are struggling to read are frustrated that they need to hire expensive tutors or leave their Minneapolis school to find a school that can support their child.

Educators are frustrated with the lack of training they received in their college education programs and how our current curriculum is missing foundational components needed to teach children to read.

These frustrations are not unique to Minneapolis and have been going on for decades.

In 1998, The American Federation of Teachers drafted a resolution on "Beginning Reading Instruction" which has clear asks for our legislators, school boards and curriculum providers to help improve literacy instruction. I would encourage legislators to read the entire resolution as the Read Act provides support to these two critical asks.

"Standing in the way of this goal are two great obstacles: First, most instructional staff in elementary schools have never been provided with sufficient preparation in how to teach reading in a way that reflects what is now preponderant research evidence. And second, few materials and programs, based on this research, have been developed or field tested for effectiveness."

Complete resolution here:

<https://www.aft.org/resolution/beginning-reading-instruction>

Randi Weingarten, President of AFT, dedicated the Summer 2020 American Educator Magazine to how we need to improve literacy instruction and support our educators. The feature article was by Dr. Louisa Moats, creator of LETRS professional development.

“Unfortunately, much of this research is not yet included in teacher preparation programs, widely used curricula, or professional development, so it should come as no surprise that typical classroom practices often deviate substantially from what is recommended by our most credible sources. As a result, reading achievement is not as strong as it should be for most students, and the consequences are particularly dire for students from the least advantaged families and communities.”

[Summer 2020 | American Federation of Teachers \(aft.org\)](#)

The state constitution requires our state to provide students with an adequate education. We are seeing a growing number of [states](#) and [districts](#) losing basic literacy lawsuits for failure to provide this fundamental right to the children of their state.

The State of Colorado, passed their own Read Act, frustrated by the slow pace of school districts response to implementing evidence-based curriculum. The [curriculum MPS](#) uses is now prohibited for use in Colorado based on its inadequate foundational materials, concern many of our teachers have shared with us.

Questions legislators should be asking that the Read Act should support:

What are the qualifications of the over 500 traditional districts and charter schools in selecting evidence-based literacy curriculum. How is the state monitoring this process and the curriculum and interventions used?

What compliance powers does the Minnesota Department of Education have to ensure that districts and charter schools are meeting the requirements to provide students with adequate literacy skills?

How are our current state assessments providing or not providing actionable information to our state legislators to make sure they are meeting the constitutional duty to provide our students with basic literacy skills?

How can we improve assessments so we know what we are doing is working and our assessments aren't driving poor instruction?

Ideas here:

<https://www.academicsadvocacy.org/post/state-assessment-s-are-driving-our-schools-off-the-track-time-to-hop-on-another-train>

<https://www.aft.org/resolution/equity-through-culturally-responsive-balanced-assessment-systems>

Change is difficult, fortunately we have [a large number of states](#) and districts who have been leading the way where we can learn from their experiences.

Tennessee's Read 360 has been a statewide literacy effort:

"3 years after a challenging shift to high-quality curriculum, students are more confident — and competent — than ever before

Students were no longer sitting in desks that were arranged into neat arrays for independent work. I saw students actively learning through the implementation of 21st century skills as they demonstrate collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication.

And equally important, I no longer saw apprehensive teachers filled with doubt about curriculum implementation. I saw confident practitioners who understand the science of reading and actively support students in building strong reading foundations through quality phonics instruction. The overarching theme that I see and feel at Battle Academy each day is one of joy — both in teaching and learning. "

https://www.the74million.org/article/new-curriculum-adoption-helps-tennessee-district-achieve-joy-in-classrooms/?fbclid=IwAR2QIJ6G-Qw-abOIP1oB_9Sla1kPMYzuWqssIF_RbvAHOxGuJvJiweeMkcU

Delaware:

"By targeting decoding skills, we can get to fluency much faster," says Kristen Cook, Brandywine School District's reading specialist...

"One of the parts that I love is hearing kids walking around talking about books," fifth-grade teacher Brian Horne told us. "I have been teaching for over 20 years and I never remember [that]."

And it's not just the students. Kindergarten teacher Meredith Allen said that she, herself, gets excited by every book she reads with her students. It might sound to some ears like an oxymoron: that a very structured curriculum is actually driving a much greater love of reading. But that's our truth.

"It's been an amazing transformation," fourth-grade teacher Jodi Engleman told our school tour visitors.

[Curriculum Case Study: From 'Focus' to 'Exceptional,' How a Delaware School Transformed Student Literacy in Just 3 Years – The 74 \(the74million.org\)](#)

And what does it look like when evidenced-based literacy instruction is only available to those who can afford it?

The [First Step Act](#) was a bipartisan bill that recognized the role low literacy levels play in behavior and incarceration and requires dyslexia screening for federal incarcerated individuals. The [first study based on the new law](#) found that almost half of the incarcerated had dyslexia.

"Both dyslexic prisoners and nondyslexic prisoners reported academic and behavioral problems in school that led to decreased years in school and decreased high school graduation rates, with 87% reporting dropping out of school with many inmates dropping out in middle school (mean age of completion of 9.6 years of school), 97% reporting having been in special education or received accommodations, and 59% having failed to receive a high school diploma or equivalency."

Our daughter is now in college, when she was in first grade our teacher told us our daughter wasn't reading. We went out and bought our own foundational literacy kit and taught her at home. It was hard work, but it paid off. We thought our daughter was an outlier, but as we started talking to parents realized her experience was not unique as this paper outlines:

[External evaluations for dyslexia: do the data support parent concerns?](#)

“This point gets at the heart of a barrier standing in the way of parent advocates and the research community establishing common ground. Collectively, we must acknowledge that the most fundamental problem we face is not dyslexia. The most fundamental problem is one that we all share—the majority of children in the U.S. are not proficient readers, and the vast majority of these children struggle with basic reading skills (Wang et al., 2019). Addressing the needs of the many through efforts to elevate the quality of reading instruction provided in the early grades to all children will create an educational context in which struggling to read and spell words will be the exception and not the norm.”

The State of Minnesota has been able to rely on parents and educators not recognizing the scope of the problem. [Emily Hanford's podcasts](#) brought these decades long issues into the mainstream.

Parents and educators are looking for leadership, many have turned to a [Human Rights Commission](#) or the [courts](#). The Read Act is a way for our legislators to lead, get in front of this long time concern and support our schools, educators and students with the tools they need to be successful. I would hope this committee supports this bill and takes leadership to move this forward.

Sincerely,

David Weingartner

MPS Academics Advocacy

For more information on Academic Advocacy in Minneapolis:

Blog: [Literacy | MPS Academics Advocacy Group](#)

YouTube: [Academics Advocacy - YouTube](#)

Facebook: [MPS Academics Advocacy Group | Facebook](#)

Twitter: [@MNAcademicAdv](#)

I am writing to express my support of the Read Act (HF629) and improved literacy instruction in Minnesota. Literacy skills are essential to success and as the data shows, too many students in Minnesota are not proficient in these skills. The Read Act provides funding for teacher professional development and resources to help ensure that every student in our state has access to effective, evidence-based literacy instruction. This bill is an important step towards promoting equity in education and closing the achievement gap.

I urge you to support the Read Act and its efforts to promote equity in literacy instruction in Minnesota. By providing all students with access to effective literacy instruction, you will be making a difference in lives of students and communities throughout Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Jessica Thueringer