



March 20, 2023

Dear Minnesota legislators and school leaders,

On March 10, Minnesota educators, leaders, and policymakers received a letter from Dean Michael Rodriguez from the University of Minnesota addressing our Literacy Faculty Response to “the Science of Reading” which was included among written testimony considered by the State House of Representatives in its March 1 hearing on the Read Act.

We would like to thank Dean Rodriguez and anyone else who has taken the time to read our initial response. In a truly democratic society, many voices and constituencies need to be included in the conversation for the best decisions to be made. It is in this spirit that we write again now to address key misrepresentations of our work in Dean Rodriguez’s letter. As with his response, we do not write on behalf of our college or employer but as education scholars and fellow Minnesotans.

In his response, Dean Rodriguez takes issue with our lack of focus on racial disparities in reading scores in a way that suggests to him that we would “abandon students of color to poor outcomes.” While we state directly that the opportunity gap in literacy education must be addressed, our discussion of outcomes concerned faulty claims such as those made by the Minnesota Dyslexia Institute, for instance, that “60% of Minnesota students do not read at grade level.” This claim was made about all Minnesota students taken together. Again, NAEP scores simply do not support it.

For recent research examining such claims in the push to legislate phonics, please see [Reinking et al., 2023](#). We urge state scholars and legislators to pause and scrutinize faulty claims before accepting them and repeating them as fact. Of course, it has long been deplorable that racial disparities in reading persist in our state, yet we note that it was not until a crisis narrative developed implicating [large numbers of white students](#) that the legislature recently began to act with a sense of urgency.

We wish to address two other points in Dean Rodriguez’s letter that risk spreading misconceptions about the Read Act.

First, Dean Rodriguez made the claim that “the science of reading is not a curriculum,” but this is not quite accurate when it comes to the Read Act. The proposed legislation makes it clear that only a handful of state-sanctioned materials based on the science of reading will be made available to districts as they develop their local literacy plans. This will make those plans far less “local.” We know the likely curriculums to focus on narrow sets of decontextualized practices

that limit engagement in meaning making. Also, the skills learned through these decontextualized practices do not easily transfer to authentic reading situations. Most importantly, they harm the development of inquiry and joy in reading for students over the long term.

Again, we ask who ultimately stands to gain most from this legislation. Our answer remains private interests as represented by companies like Cambium Learning.

Second, Dean Rodriguez claims that lawmakers' efforts to improve reading outcomes are not part of an exclusionary approach. This is not quite accurate when it comes to the Read Act. As currently written, this legislation will indeed disempower teachers and limit their ability to employ the research-based strategies that best meet the needs of their students. As an example, when considering language about curriculum in the draft bill that included the line "evidence-based or based on the science of reading," House Representative Mueller recently took issue, stating "you have an *or*, 'science of reading *or* evidence-based,' and I still think that is too much latitude [...] I see by adding that *or*, 'evidence-based *or* science of reading,' that that's opening up some doors that I think should be closed." Exclusionary thinking about teaching and learning is exactly what is driving the Read Act.

For many years, the Literacy Faculty at Minnesota State University, Mankato have been working hard to address the persistent racial disparities in state reading achievement. We have done this in our teaching, scholarly work, and service to the state and community. Based on findings from other states where science-of-reading policy has been implemented ([Suskin, 2022](#)), we fear the Read Act will promote the teaching of decontextualized reading skills for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students, leading to further disparate outcomes in reading achievement.

Respectfully,

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