

June 4, 2024

Name: Guy Suter
Support for SB 567 & 568

Hello Committee Members,

My name is Guy Suter. I'm speaking to you in support of bills 567 and 568.

This issue is personal for me. My father, myself, and both of my children had difficulties learning to read.

In 1997, I went off to college, without the right reading foundation. In 2021, twenty four years later, I finally graduated from Penn State Harrisburg. It took a while because for the longest time, I didn't think school was my thing.

When I was a kid in school, I didn't receive screening or intervention for my reading challenges. Instead, I was left to just compare myself to others. It was clear to me many of them could read better than I could, maybe learn faster. Perhaps they're just smarter. That sort of thinking is wrong and it has a big impact on kids.

When I saw my own children, Asher and Zoe, facing the same sort of challenges in elementary school, I expected our schools would be better by now. They are not. In fact, the methods they received made learning how to read harder. They were told to use pictures as a clue on how to guess at sounding out words instead of learning phonic and letter patterns. When they did get extra reading support, it was to concentrate on a few books to quickly get them up to the minimum level required. So, again instead of learning to read, they just memorized the books.

Asher had a terrific first grade teacher. She was among the best teachers either of my children have had. Unfortunately, she was not trained to recognize reading challenges and initiate screening. She was also not trained in the knowledge and skills required to teach structured literacy, which can be used to help ALL children be the best reader they can be. That's right, these evidence-based methods are proven to improve the reading aptitude of ALL children, not just those with characteristics of dyslexia. This is critical training our teachers need to teach students how to read at their best.

After he completed 1st grade, we were told to consider finding Asher a summer tutor. Later on, and despite them each receiving a clinical diagnosis, the interventions my children needed would not be provided at school. Instead, we found them privately for both kids outside of school. I encourage you to go listen to Asher's testimony to the Senate committee from 2021. He was brave enough, at age 12, to share with you how all the extra work outside of school gave him near daily migraines.

Since then, I have met so many parents who are concerned about their children's reading challenges. The story is always the same. Our schools are not equipped to teach them. For families who don't have the financial resources to provide appropriate intervention themselves, it's a tragedy.

My kids are the lucky ones. They are lucky because our family could provide what they needed outside of school. **Kids in Michigan should not have to be lucky to learn how to read.**

Our public schools in Michigan are not providing appropriate screening or intervention for students who need support. We know there is a narrow window between 1st and 3rd grades to provide the most effective reading intervention to a student. Today, Zoe is now in the same grade that Asher was back when he testified on this issue. Please, do not let any more years go by. Do not let any more kids go by. The time to act is now.

Please pass these bills to help ALL Michigan students learn how to read at their best.

Thank you