

**Written Testimony for Senate Bills 567 and 568  
June 11, 2024**

Thank you. My name is Dr. Stephen Keskes, Ed.D. My role is the Director of Grants and Academic innovation at the Stockbridge Community Schools. I have been working with teachers and districts to implement structured literacy programming over the past 10 years in multiple contexts and have seen first hand its impact on children and adults. Over the past 25 years, I have served as a Middle School and High School English Teacher, Building Administrator, and Central Office Administrator. I am here today to share my experience in solving problems with reading in schools from a District perspective.

When I was the Asst. Superintendent in the Clio Area Schools for 8 years, we implemented several Balanced Literacy approaches in an attempt to improve reading outcomes. We implemented Reading Recovery, Levelled Literacy and other whole word or whole language approaches in an attempt to increase our students' reading abilities. We made some gains with some students, however we were not successful with many students. I said to my middle school Title I teacher, we must do something different. This is not working. We landed on Orton Gillingham training, because it was vastly different from what we had been doing for years in the district. After that training she was on fire with excitement about the new information and its possibilities. She implemented this strategy with children in a Title I setting and these children made gains that they hadn't made in a very long time. Some of these students had RR when they were in 1st grade, which affirmed the research surrounding Reading Recovery's short term success. We then implemented the training at our elementary schools with paraprofessionals as part of our MTSS system. Children made gains again and teachers were curious as to what we were doing differently. We then expanded training to teaching staff at the elementary level. Training was optional for staff, but when teachers saw initial results, more teachers wanted training, too. Training gave teachers a feeling of empowerment and efficacy. Our results included a decrease in spec. ed. number and improvements in student reading abilities. Funding came from Children's Choice initiative and 31a at risk money.

In my last district as Asst. Supt. of H.R., I saw the district shifting to structured literacy (training with 35d money O-G), LETRS training. Last year was the first year of implementation and they were seeing improvements. Theirs is not my story to tell, but they have recently presented their results to Ingham County Coaches and what was shared was more than impressive.

Currently, as the Director of Grants and Academic Innovation in Stockbridge, we've trained several teachers in O-G and LETRS. The challenge has been they want another colleague with the same training so they can collaborate together. Change is hard on your own. Thank God for 35j funds. Our intent next year is to train teachers district-wide PK-5; implement Orton-Gillingham through the Institute for Multisensory Education, learn how to best scope and sequence in our learning community, and selectively abandon some of our large textbook company reading resources that don't align with our new Science of Reading best practices. We will fine-tune the following year and begin the new curriculum adoption process using our structured literacy approach as the backbone of how we approach

teaching children how to read. I share this because I want you to know that this work is possible.

Last week I heard some of our representatives' concerns about the notions of being overly prescriptive, the roles of colleges and universities, teacher scarcity, and who might deliver the support to teachers and schools. The LETRS training that everyone has supported has a course called LETRS for Administrators. Within that course, the authors talk about the role of building and district administrators supporting Science of Reading practices to ensure sustainability. Part of that implementation science-driven research focuses on every teacher and stakeholder being trained in SOR to create a common language, and materials, and improve collaboration. When we implement new programming, it takes time and commitment from not only teachers but also district decision-makers to ensure resources are dedicated to supporting our teachers. So, the prescriptive nature of some of this training is intentional to ensure sustainability and reliability.

I agree that the roles of colleges and universities ensuring structured literacy is very important. Often teachers come out of the college/student teaching setting learning several best practices and once they land a teaching job, they find out that the district context may use different practices from what they were told. It is hard to change a K-12 environment and my professor friends tell me it's even more difficult at the university level.

Everyone is experiencing teacher scarcity. This is why it is important to direct some resources to Districts directly to support this work. With so many educators in alternative pathway programs, it is incumbent upon the local districts to support our newest teachers with everything we can to improve their capacity quickly for our children.

This challenge is so complex. We all need to be in this work together. The Department of Education, universities, ISD's, local Districts, and families. In Ingham County, our ISD has been extremely supportive of this work by opening spaces for experts like MDI and others to provide training and support to the local districts, and they also provide coaching support that aligns with the SOR best practices. We know that this work takes time to implement well and with fidelity. We know that many of our ISD's haven't yet developed the capacity or expertise in this area which will take more time. Learning takes time for adults and children alike. We simply can't just direct resources to one organization and expect to get high levels of implementation and sustainability. I feel a sense of urgency because our children don't have the luxury of time. I don't want any child to feel less than because their brains need to be taught how to read differently, let alone one in five. Structured literacy doesn't harm the other 80% and may improve their reading abilities in later years as well.

The reason I support these bills is based upon my experience in the field in multiple contexts. Research tells us that up to 20% of our population has some form of dyslexia. As a District administrator, I cannot tell you which children or how many have these tendencies because diagnosis takes a psychologist or a medical professional. Once diagnosed, there isn't a medical cure or treatment. The treatment is a structured literacy approach to learning how to read. Most of the communities I've served have large numbers of free and reduced lunches and high numbers of English Learners. These children and their families don't have the resources to navigate medical and educational systems. My current district doesn't have a Doctor's office or even a grocery store for over 14 miles in any direction. The ability to

screen for dyslexia at the school level is vitally important. We need to be using screening assessments that are valid and reliable, so we find kids early who need intervention and ensure our curricular materials support what the science teaches us works. I don't want to diagnose my students, but I do want to give them a fighting chance and my teachers to feel confident and competent that they are and have the answers to this challenge.

**One of the biggest takeaways from my experience is seeing my teachers who were never taught what scientific research has learned about how the brain learns to read, but once teachers have this training and instructional methods to make it come alive, teacher efficacy increases and it is such an amazing morale booster! Every teacher I know comes to work every day wanting to make a difference for their students. Empowering them with the tools to ensure ALL children are successful readers has strengthened their resolve and improved student outcomes. It even improved retention for a couple of staff members who were teetering on retirement, but decided to stay after the training because they were reenergized and wanted to implement what they had learned.**

Thank you for your time and support of Michigan teachers and children.

