

Written Testimony IN SUPPORT of Senate Bills 567 & 568
"How could it be that I didn't learn this in college?!"

In 1979 I graduated from a Big Ten university in Elementary Education and finished a Masters degree with coursework on teaching learning disabled students. I can still remember sitting in meetings with parents telling them I would do everything I could to help their child learn to read. The truth was, the knowledge and instructional strategies I had were inadequate.

Spin forward to 1998. My school district allowed me five professional days to obtain training of my choice. I had heard about this thing called "dyslexia" so I signed up for training at the Michigan Dyslexia Institute (MDI). That training TOTALLY changed the trajectory of my practice.

I remember at the end of the first day of training, I was stunned. Although I had taken reading methods classes in college, the training I was receiving at MDI in structured literacy was helping me to understand how one learns to read starting at the very simplest concept of a speech sound matched up with a letter. I remember asking myself, *"How could it be that I didn't learn this in college?!"*

This is a common story for thousands of teachers across Michigan and the United States, even today. The disconnect between what cognitive science knows about how humans learn to read and the teaching strategies educators are taught to use in classrooms is huge. Science has told us for years that a structured approach that is explicit, sequential, and systematic is the most effective approach to teaching reading. Once known as "phonics" this systematic approach has been found to be the best way to teach the foundations of reading to ALL kids. For the 60% that are more challenged, especially those with dyslexia, the approach is crucial for student success.

I've spent almost 30 years using the structured literacy approach with students from kindergarten to adults and have seen my students flourish. A fifth grader who had given up on learning to read, moved two grade levels in one year once he figured out how the 'code' worked. A 40 year old student at Lansing Community College who was reading at a third grade reading level, moved 2 grade levels in a semester after he was taught how to unlock the code of our language that had confused him for so many years. Even today as a retired teacher, I work as a private tutor to help children learn to read,

although there are so many families I must turn away because I don't have openings for them.

The need for change is urgent. It's time for you to be bold! Make sure screening assessments find the kids that need support. Make sure that rather than thinking this can be solved with the band-aid approach of sending more money to ISD's to train literacy coaches, that we are making sure EVERY teacher in EVERY classroom that teaches reading is empowered with the knowledge to know how to teach reading. Make sure that no matter where a child lives they are guaranteed their instruction is evidence-based and proven to be effective. Make sure teachers know how to support children with the characteristics of dyslexia. And make sure our teacher preparation programs are required to give future teachers the knowledge to be effective.

I witnessed the need at the university level more than ever several months ago as a guest presenter in a college classroom with mostly seniors that were soon to be working with learning disabled students. I was explaining to them about the legislation and started asking them about their knowledge of structured literacy, how the reading brain works, and dyslexia. Students knew very little and expressed their lack of training in teaching reading based on what science teaches us. One student, a sophomore, did raise her hand and said she had taken a class where she learned about dyslexia and we briefly discussed all she had learned. Others in the class were shocked and aggravated. They expressed their frustration that they would soon be hired and in a classroom and had not been given much guidance in actually teaching reading. They were desperate to find out where they could get this training.

SB 567 & 568 will finally give clarity and teeth to the Third Grade Reading Law so real change will happen across Michigan so that all children will actually be taught to read based on the science.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for working for the children and educators of Michigan.

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