



The Education Trust–Midwest

Testimony for the House Education Committee

June 4, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony supporting Senate Bills 567 and 568. Together, these bills make great strides toward addressing Michigan’s early literacy crisis by addressing one of the most common barriers to reading success: dyslexia. These bills make significant improvements by ensuring that young students are screened for characteristics of dyslexia, that appropriate family communication and interventions are deployed, and that educators have the training and support to recognize and meet the needs of students who have dyslexia in their classrooms.

Over the past several years, legislators on both sides of the aisle have rightly focused on Michigan’s literacy crisis. This began with the passage of Read by Grade 3, followed by significant investment in early literacy efforts. Unfortunately, these efforts have not led to the improved student outcomes that we all hope for.

According to The Education Trust Midwest’s most recent report, *Beyond the Pandemic*, Michigan’s pre-pandemic performance in early literacy on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has long trailed leading states’ performance. And before the pandemic, Michigan was one of only 18 states performing worse in early literacy than it was in the early 2000s on the NAEP, also known as the Nation’s Report Card. On the 2022 test, our students’ average scale score dropped by more than twice as much as the national average. Michigan’s reading scores are now seven points lower than they were nearly 20 years ago.

There are many factors that contribute to this crisis and today’s legislation begins to tackle a particular deficit in our current law: a lack of focus on supporting students with dyslexia – estimated to represent 15-20 percent of all students.

The current screening used for early elementary students does not adequately identify students exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia and fails to ensure those students receive support that focuses on decoding and word recognition skills. Additionally, current professional training for

teachers fails to focus appropriately on this sizable portion of the student population. Fortunately, this legislation takes critical steps to address these issues.

If passed, these bills will provide a clear definition of dyslexia, establish effective and streamlined screening of students for characteristics of dyslexia, promote parents as partners in literacy education, and ensure that educators are well-supported to meet the needs of students in their classroom. When students are struggling to read because they exhibit one or more characteristics of dyslexia, they and their teachers will have the support necessary to overcome the challenge and succeed.

Michigan students are incredibly capable and talented. Yet today, that potential remains untapped for far too many students struggling with dyslexia because they remain unidentified and under-supported.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that every student receives the support they need to become great readers.