



From: Senator Kathy Bernier
To: Senate Committee on Education
Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 454
Relating to: Reading Readiness Assessments & Granting Rule-Making Authority
Date: October 6, 2021

Thank you Chairwoman Darling and committee members for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 454 today.

In Wisconsin, 64% of fourth graders are not proficient readers, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, with 34% failing to meet even the test's basic standard. Nationally, Wisconsin ranks dead last in reading achievement among black students, falling 31 places since 1992. In the same timeframe, reading achievement for Wisconsin white students has fallen from 6th to 27th, and Hispanic students from 1st to 28th. Wisconsin has a dire reading problem.

Reading is critical to future success. Children who don't learn to read by the end of third grade are likely to fall behind in other subjects and remain poor readers for the rest of their lives. Poor readers are more likely to drop out of high school, live in poverty, and end up in the criminal justice system. Of those who fail to gain a high school diploma, almost 90 percent experienced trouble reading in the third grade and seven in 10 prison inmates cannot read above a fourth-grade level.

Although Wisconsin was once a leader in literacy, our students now lag behind states where evidence-based approaches to early literacy have been adopted. Thankfully, over the past two decades, neuroscience – including groundbreaking research at UW-Madison - has allowed us to move beyond theory and guesswork, to identify exactly how children become skilled readers AND what effective literacy interventions look like for a child struggling to read. SB 454 aligns Wisconsin law with this growing body of research by strengthening state literacy screening standards, providing more transparency and ensuring teachers have the framework and tools needed to help every child become a proficient reader.

Under current law, Wisconsin schools are required to select and administer an annual literacy assessment to students in four-year-old kindergarten through 2nd grade. Screening assessments are typically only a few minutes in length, and consist of a teacher or volunteer using a flipchart or tablet to guide a child through a handful of exercises. Costs of these assessments are reimbursed by the state. Senate Bill 454 strengthens these existing state screening standards and provides the framework and tools to help every child learn to read in five major ways:

- **Broadens Screening Components to Reflect Evidence-Based Best Practices:** Dozens of literacy screeners are available to schools, but not all assess what research

shows are the most critical components for reading. This bill expands the required screening components from two to five components to ensure schools are using high quality, evidence-based screeners. This helps teachers more easily identify reading difficulties AND select effective intervention strategies to help children overcome reading difficulties as early as possible.

- **Increases Assessment Frequency** from annually to three times per year to better evaluate student progress, build a baseline for each student, and catch reading difficulties earlier.
- **Keeps Parents Involved and Informed:** Too many parents do not find out their child is struggling to read until third grade (!) when they receive their child's Forward Exam results. SB 454 requires schools to notify parents of screener results within 15 days, including plain language about the child's score, percentile rank and if the child is identified as "at-risk". The bill also requires schools to inform parents if a child begins a reading intervention plan, and detail the interventions that will be used.
- **Creates Clear Direction to Get Kids Back on Track:** There are currently no requirements for when schools must provide additional literacy screening, and there are minimal requirements regarding reading interventions for students. This bill requires students who score below the 25th percentile on a literacy screener be given a more comprehensive screener to inform targeted, evidence-aligned interventions.
- **Increases Transparency and Accountability:** Under the bill, schools must annually report the number of students identified as at-risk at each assessment level and the number of students provided with literacy interventions. Statewide consistency across screening components, testing frequency and reporting will give districts, DPI and the legislature critical information to help us all make better informed policy decisions.

The bottom line is that research shows that the earlier we catch reading difficulties and begin simple interventions, the more successful those interventions will be. Strengthening our existing literacy screening laws will ensure that every struggling reader gets the help they need before they've fallen behind, lost self-esteem, and disengage from school and learning.

Lastly, it's important for me to note that Senate Bill 454 isn't speculative, wishful thinking about what might work. In SB 454 we have drawn together the best of evidence-based screening practices from around the country that are being employed today to close achievement gaps and raise the bar for literacy achievement across the board. Diverse states like Mississippi are using high quality screeners and simple interventions as the foundation for going from nearly last in the nation in reading achievement to outperforming Wisconsin students in each and every demographic group. But you don't have to just take my word for it. We've brought with us today change makers from around the country and across our state who will speak to Wisconsin's dire literacy situation and the immense opportunity that this bill represents for our kids.

Thank you again for hearing this bill and I would be happy to take any questions.

Wisconsin vs. Mississippi:

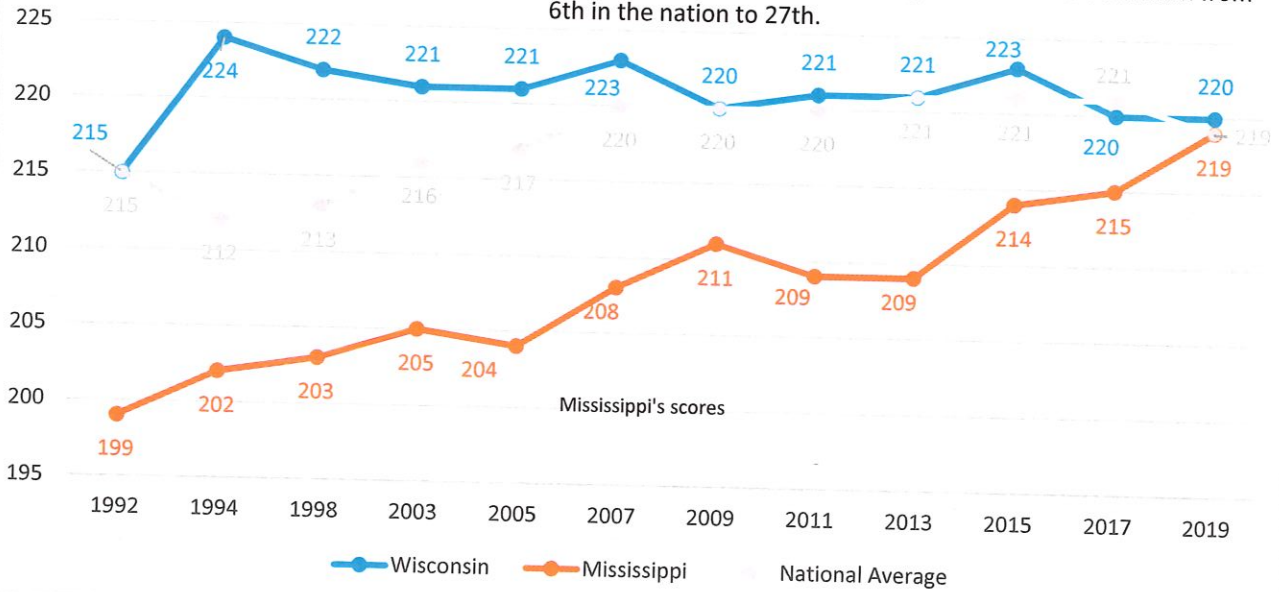
4th Grade Reading Scores-The National Assessment of Educational Progress

Rankings include all 50 states plus The District of Columbia and DoDEA. Not all states have data available for each demographic.

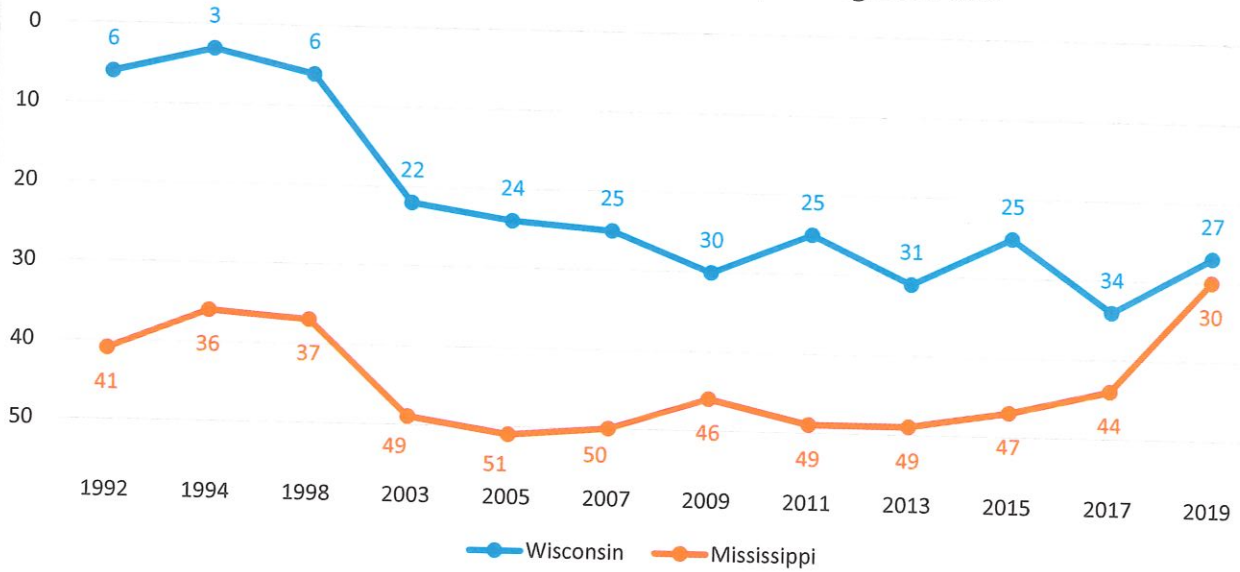
	Wisconsin 1992 NAEP Reading Scores State Rank	Mississippi 1992 NAEP Reading Scores State Rank		Wisconsin 2019 NAEP Reading Scores State Rank	Mississippi 2019 NAEP Reading Scores State Rank
All Students	6 th (42 reporting)	41 st (42 reporting)	All Students	27 th (52 reporting)	30 th (52 reporting)
White	8 th (42 reporting)	37 th (42 reporting)	White	34 th (52 reporting)	20 th (52 reporting)
Black	11 th (35 reporting)	32 nd (35 reporting)	Black	42 nd (42 reporting)	8 th (42 reporting)
Hispanic	1 st (21 reporting)	N/A	Hispanic	28 th (49 reporting)	3 rd (49 reporting)

All Students Scale Score

Wisconsin's scale score is trending downward - we've fallen from 6th in the nation to 27th.

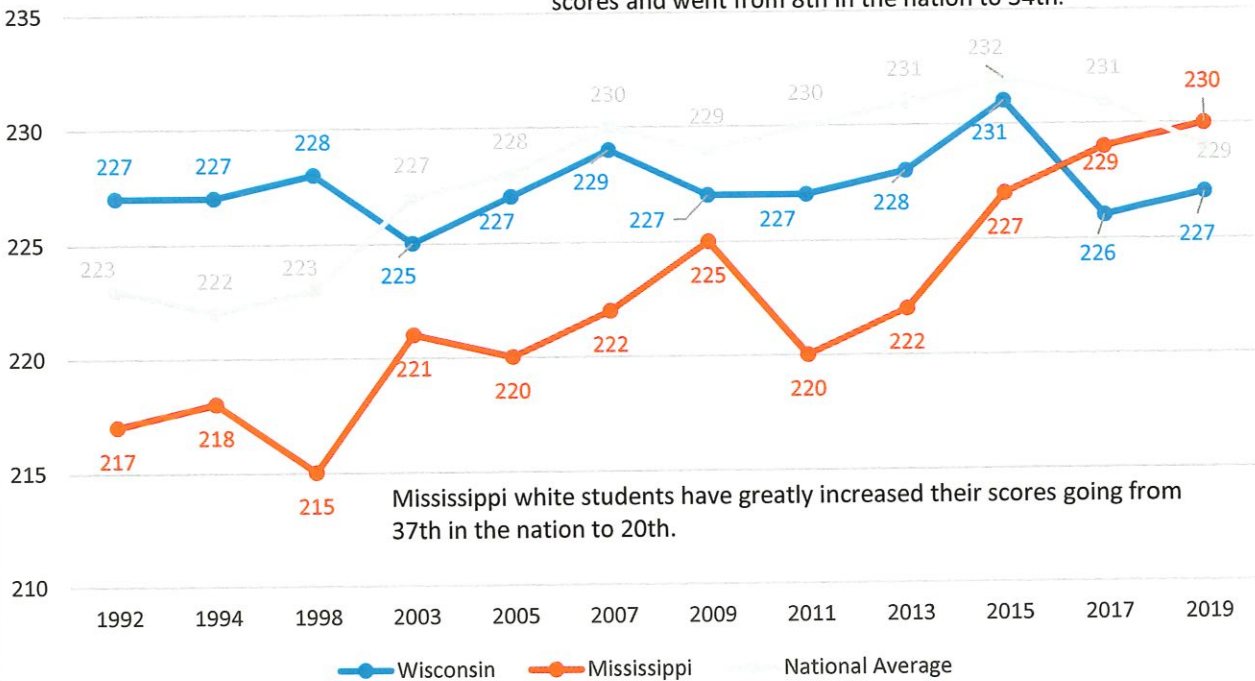


All Students Rank out of 52 Reporting Districts

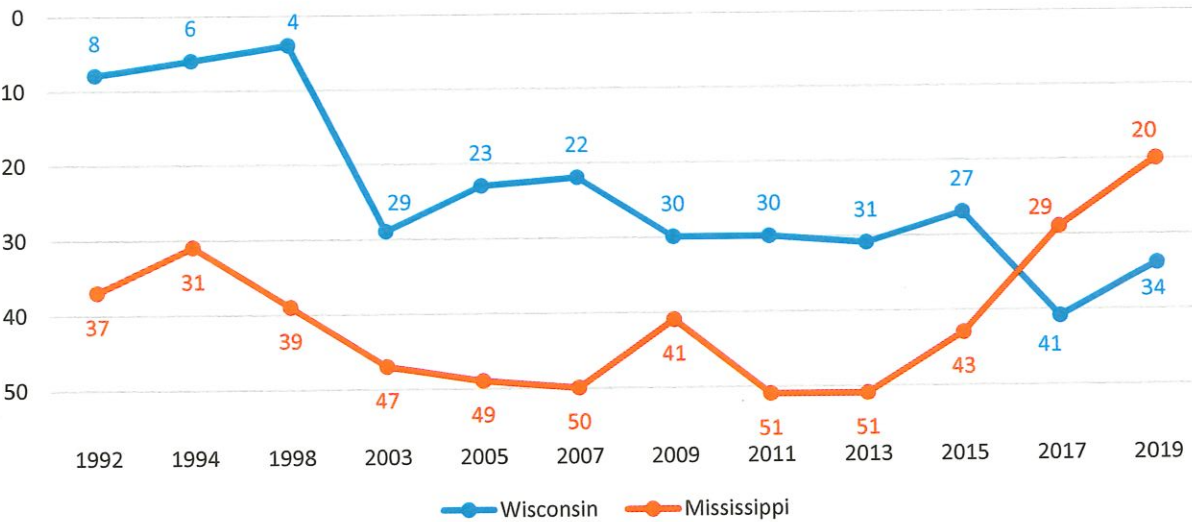


White Students Scale Score

Wisconsin white students overall have not increased their scores and went from 8th in the nation to 34th.

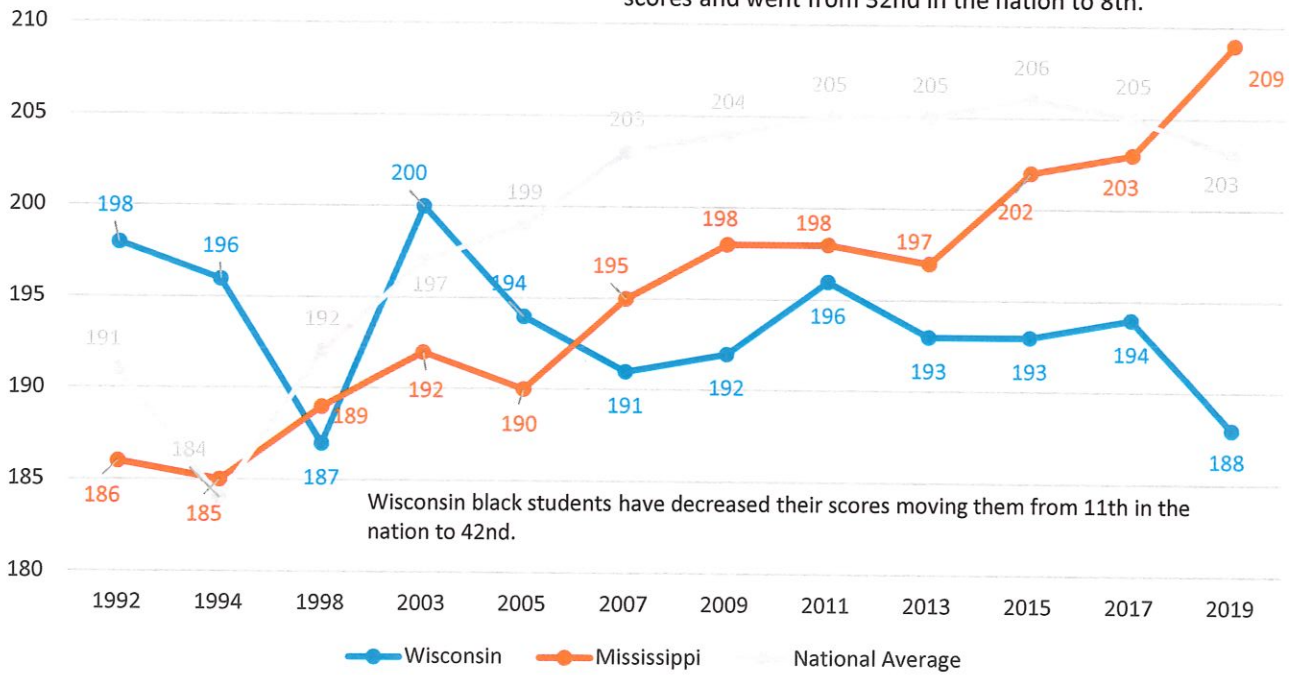


White Students Rank out of 52 Reporting Districts

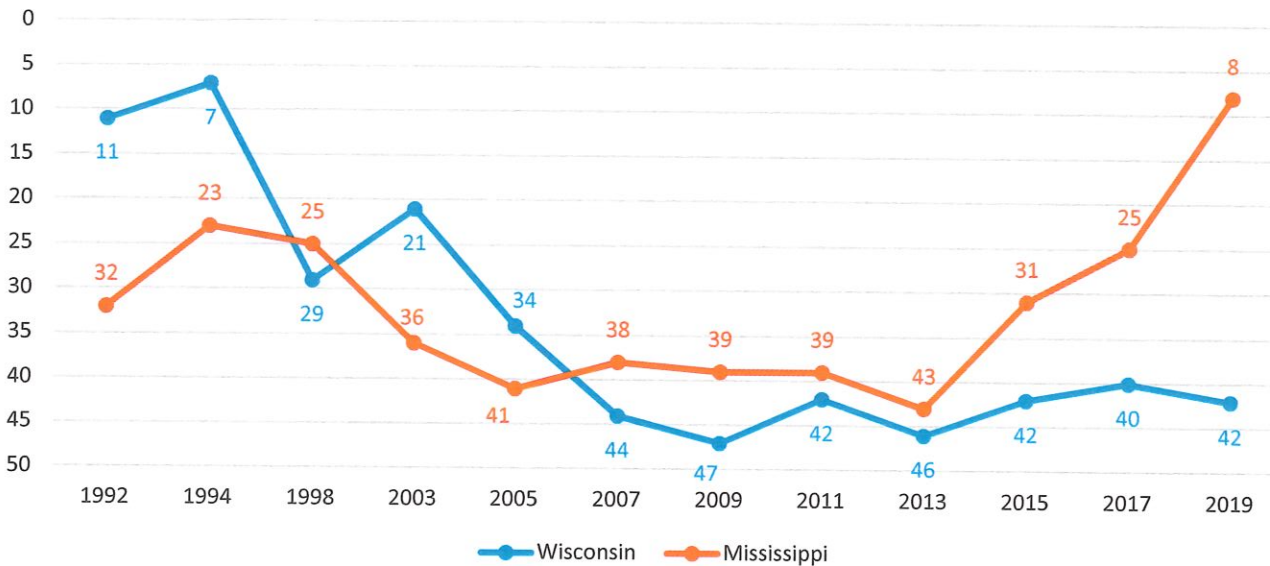


Black Students Scale Score

Mississippi black students have greatly increased their scores and went from 32nd in the nation to 8th.

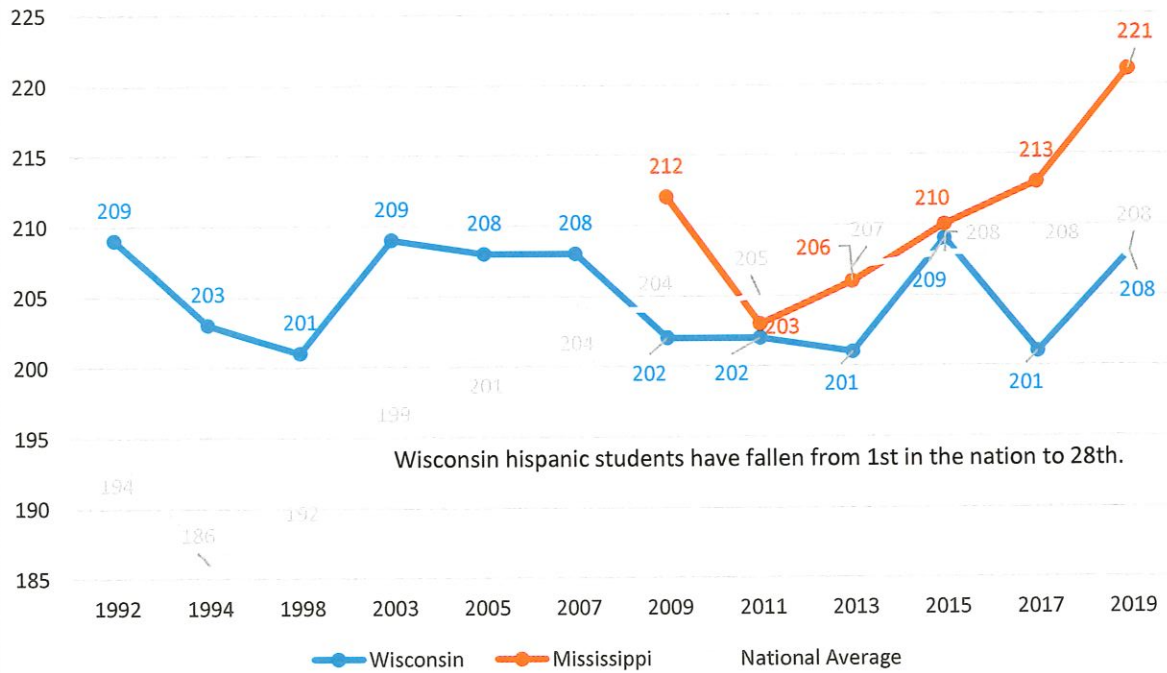


Black Students Rank out of 52 Reporting Districts

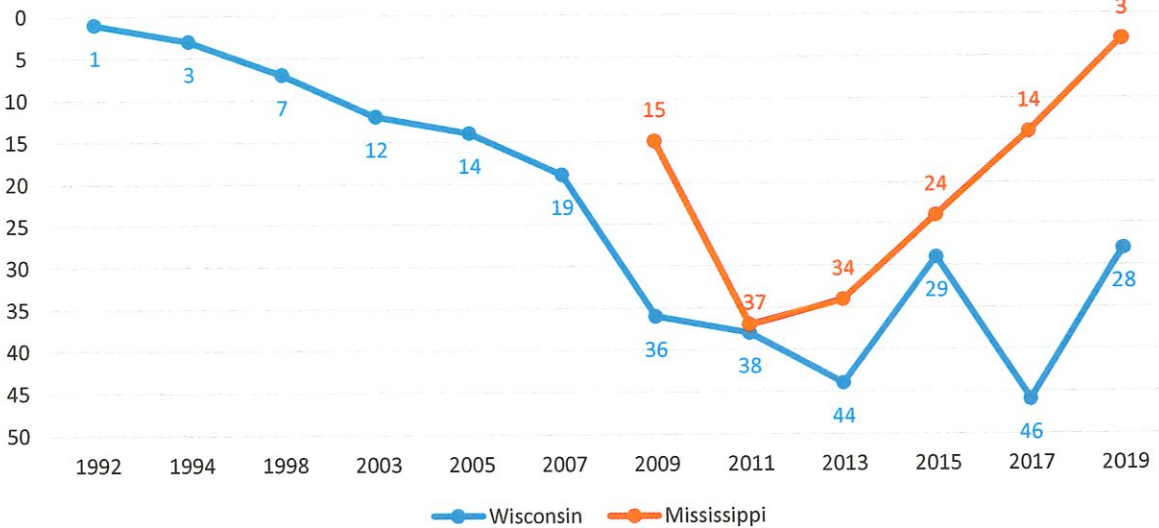


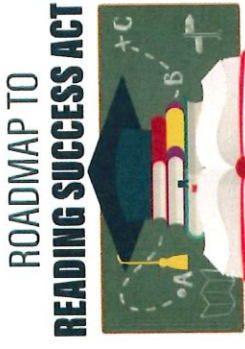
Hispanic Students Scale Score

Mississippi hispanic students have increased their overall scores and went from 15th in the nation to 3rd.



Hispanic Students Rank out of 52 Reporting Districts





ROADMAP TO

READING SUCCESS ACT

High Quality Assessments • Parent Involvement
Clear Direction • Transparency & Accountability

Current Law vs. Roadmap to Reading Success Act Early Literacy Screening Assessments, Intervention, Parental Notification and Reporting

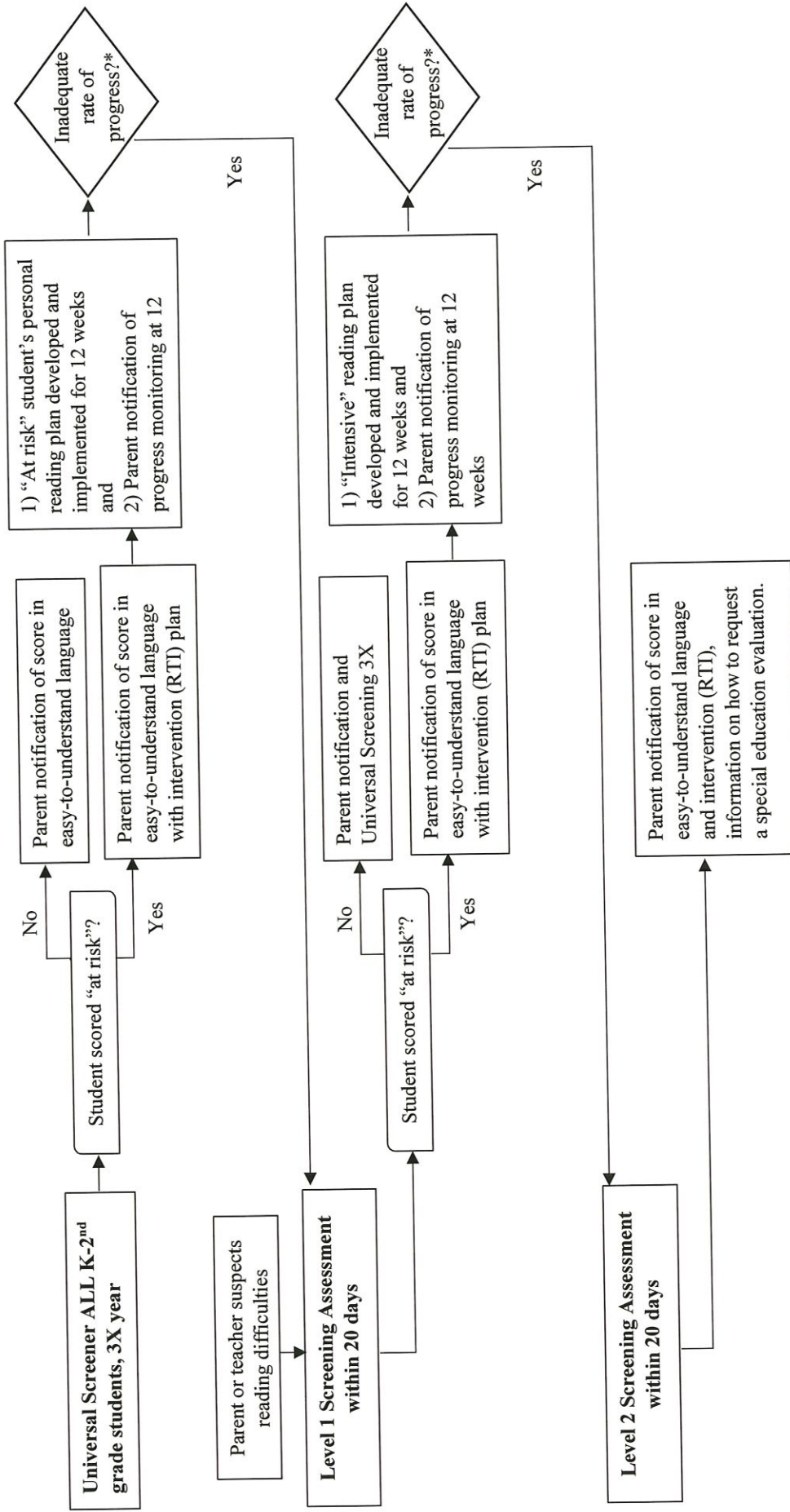
	<u>Current Law</u> Grades 4K-2	<u>Universal Screener</u>	<u>Level 1 Screener</u>	<u>Level 2 Screener</u>	<u>Fundamental Skills</u> Screening (4K)
Screening Components:	The screening must include: 1. Phonemic awareness 2. Letter sound knowledge	The screening must include: 1. Phonemic awareness 2. Letter sound knowledge (real and nonsense words) 3. Decoding (real and nonsense words) 4. Alphabet knowledge 5. Rapid Naming	The screening must include: 1. Phonemic awareness 2. Sound symbol recognition 3. Alphabet knowledge 4. Decoding skills 5. Rapid naming skills 6. Phonological awareness 7. Encoding 8. Family history survey	The screener must include: Standardized and norm referenced assessments 1. Phonemic awareness 2. Letter sound knowledge 3. Decoding 4. Rapid Naming 5. Alphabet knowledge 6. Phonological awareness 7. Word Recognition 8. Fluency 9. Spelling 10. Reading Comprehension 11. Listening comprehension 12. Family history survey	The screening must include: 1. Phonemic awareness 2. Letter sound knowledge
Other states with same screening requirements:	11 states: AR, IN, ME, MS, MO, NV, OR, PA, SC, RI, TN	9 states: AR, IN, ME, MS, MO, NV, OR, SC, TN	9 states: AR, IN, ME, MS, MO, NV, OR, SC, TN	AR, IN, MS (components may vary by state for level 3)	Most states do not screen in 4K
Parent/Guardian Notification:	Parent notification Wis. Stats. 118.016	Parent notification to all parents within 15 days including percentile if available.	Parent notification to all parents within 15 days including percentile if available.	Parent notification to all parents within 15 days including percentile if available.	Parent notification to all parents within 15 days including percentile.

	<u>Current Law</u> <u>Grades 4K-2</u>	<u>Universal Screener</u>	<u>Level 1 Screener</u>	<u>Level 2 Screener</u>	<u>Fundamental Skills</u> <u>Screening (4K)</u>
Other States with Parental Notification		IN, MS, AR, TN, CO	AR, IN, MS	AR, IN, MS	
Intervention requirements: Ms. Stats. 121.02(1)(c)	WI state statute requires intervention when determined to be "at risk". "At risk" is not defined.	At risk defined with parent notification. When a student is at risk: 1) Intervention 2) Personal Reading Plan	At risk defined with parent notification. When a student is at risk: 1) Intervention 2) Personal Reading Plan		
Other states:	IN, MS, CO	MS, CO	MS	MS	
Personal Reading Plan	Not required	<p>Details: Must include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific early literacy deficiencies • Interventions used • How progress will be monitored • Strategies the parents are encouraged to use to help achieve grade level skills <p>District must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the interventions in the plan • Monitor the progress at least weekly • Provide a copy of plan to parent • Parent progress notification After 12 weeks 	<p>Details: Must include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific early literacy deficiencies in the level 1 screener • Interventions used • How progress will be monitored • Strategies the parents are encouraged to use to help achieve grade level skills <p>District must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide "intensive intervention" based on literacy deficiencies identified in the level 1 • Provide the interventions in the plan • Monitor the progress at least weekly • Provide a copy of plan to parent • Parent progress notification After 12 weeks 	Not required	

	<u>Current Law Grades 4K-2</u>	<u>Universal Screener</u>	<u>Level 1 Screener</u>	<u>Level 2 Screener</u>	<u>Fundamental Skills Screening (4K)</u>
Other states with Reading Plans:		MS, CO (CO only has a universal screener with no levels)	MS	MS	
Move to next screener level:	N/A	Level 1 given if the student has an inadequate rate of progress after 12 weeks of intervention.	Level 2 given if the student's teacher or parent suspects characteristics of dyslexia or inadequate rate of progress after 12 weeks of intervention.	Level 3 given if the student's teacher or parent suspects characteristics of dyslexia or inadequate rate of progress after 12 weeks of intervention.	N/A
Possible screening assessments:	WI frequently used: PALS, MAP, Star Early Literacy, iReady, District choice	DIBELS, Acadience, FastBridge, Lexercise, Star Early Literacy	Other states: AIMSweb, CBM, DIBELS, Fast, Lexercise, & Star Early Literacy	TILLS, WJ 4, GORT, CTOPP, WIAT 4, TOWRE (schools will have access to different comparable assessments/tests)	PALS, MAP, Star Early Literacy, iReady, District choice
Reporting to WI DPI/ legislature	Not required	Each School Board must annually report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students identified at risk Number of students by grade who received interventions Total number of students who received interventions Name of assessments used for screening 	Each School Board must annually report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students identified at risk Number of students by grade who received interventions Total number of students who received interventions Name of assessments used for screening 	Each School Board must annually report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students identified at risk Number of students by grade who received interventions Total number of students who received interventions Name of assessments used for screening 	Must annually report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students identified at risk
Screening Reimbursement	WI Schools were reimbursed \$1.7 million of \$2 million allocated in 2018.	Reimbursement when the district uses an approved screener and reporting requirements are met.			Reimbursement when the district uses an approved screener and reporting requirements are met.

Roadmap to Reading Success Flow Chart

Kindergarten – 2nd Grade



*If students demonstrate an adequate rate of progress, parents are notified of scores and students resume the regular universal screening schedule.

Note: 4K students take a fundamental skills screener twice a year. Parents are notified in plain language of pupil's score, score by assessment category, percentile rank, and description of skills assessed.

Annual report submitted to WIDPI and WI Legislature:

- Number of at-risk students
- Number of students undergoing intervention
- The assessment used for screening



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Education Senate Bill 454 Wednesday, Oct. 6, 2021

Thank you Chairman Darling and committee members, for holding a public hearing and allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 454. This bill strengthens state reading screening standards, provides parents with more transparency and ensures that teachers have the framework and tools needed to help every student learn to read proficiently.

I would like to start off by saying that, when people ask me what my biggest concern is for Wisconsin, it is our achievement gap between white and black students, which is the worst in the country, and the increase in generational poverty we are seeing where far too many families are becoming dependent on the government.

This is being caused by a multitude of factors, and while it would be too overly simplistic to only blame schools for this, educating our children is the only chance we have in breaking this cycle of generational poverty for many of our families.

We know that far and away the largest determinant of a child receiving a good education and succeeding later in life is learning to read well in their early years. Know that, this is where we should be putting the majority of our resources.

I still strongly believe the United States is the land of opportunity and that we provide more possibilities than any other country in the world, but if we don't teach our kids how to read well and get an acceptable education, that American dream is locked off to them.

It goes without saying, but right now we are facing a crisis here in Wisconsin, and what that means for the future of our state should scare everyone.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, close to 65 percent of fourth graders in Wisconsin are not proficient readers, with 34 percent failing to meet even basic standards.

Of the 42 states that report separate reading scores for African American students, Wisconsin ranks dead last in reading achievement, falling 31 places since 1992. During that same timeframe, reading achievement for white students has dropped from 6th to 27th and Hispanic students from 1st to 28th.

Research has shown that children who cannot read at grade level in fourth grade will struggle to graduate from high school and are far less likely to lead productive lives. About 85 percent of juvenile offenders are functionally illiterate, as are 70 percent of prison inmates. More than 75 percent of those on welfare have difficulties in reading the simplest texts.

It is sad to say this, but I am not optimistic that this is going to get any better if we keep going with the failed status quo. In fact, it is going to get much worse. There is no time to waste and we have to get aggressive and bold if we want to bring about change. Simply put, this must be our top priority.

SB 454 is the first step of many that will help get us there. It will do that by strengthening screening standards, which will allow teachers to intervene earlier in situations where a student has difficulties in reading.

More specifically, the legislation includes the following provisions:

- Expanding required reading screening components from two to five
- Increasing literacy assessment frequency from annually to three times per year
- Requiring schools to notify parents of screener results within 15 days, including their score, percentile rank and if the child is identified as "at-risk," as well as if they have begun a reading intervention plan
- Mandating that schools provide additional screening for students scoring below the 25th percentile or if a parent or teacher suspects the child has difficulty reading
- Increasing transparency and accountability by requiring schools to report the number of students identified as at-risk at each assessment level as well as the number of pupils provided with literacy interventions

One of the complaints I have heard about this bill is that some think this will result in an unfunded mandate. The state will be paying for all testing, but eventually we will need our teachers to receive training so they can better understand and implement the components of the legislation.

It is also important to point out that, if we reach our struggling readers earlier, we will end up saving more money in the long run by keeping them out of special education, which is much more expensive.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony and I hope that you will consider supporting SB 454. I would also like to thank all of my co-authors for all the hard work they put into drafting this legislation. I can now answer any questions if you have them.

Bill SB 454 – Testimony from Chad Hedquist registering in support of this Bill.

My name is Chad Hedquist and I am the father of Matthew Hedquist, and I have dyslexia.

I attended school in the 1970's and 80's and at that time there was no help or testing or even diagnosis for dyslexia. I struggled terribly through my school years.

Watching my son struggle to read and write is very painful to watch, struggling with the same things I did as a child. I would hope that in 50 years, improvements had been made in testing and screening in those early school years to help individuals with dyslexia and reading disabilities become good readers. I'm sad to see it has not.

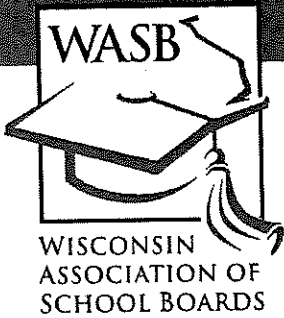
I know well from experience the problems that having dyslexia can cause. It meant I was teased at school, it took hours and hours to complete homework, it prevented me from joining the military, playing games and even from reading to my son.

It affects me every day in my job. Dyslexia is not something you grow out of, recover from or are cured of. It is debilitating and has affected every part of my life. I have tried to hide it, avoiding reading or writing situations whenever possible, and I am deeply embarrassed and ashamed at not being able to read well. I have never read a book for fun.

Reading aloud is terrifying, and I am sure you have no idea how hard it is for a dyslexic to read this in person. But, I hope that you will make the changes needed to stop the cycle of poor reading in schools and detect at risk students early, by supporting this Bill.

Thank you

Chad Hedquist
4635 County Rd A
Oregon WI 53575



122 W. WASHINGTON AVENUE, MADISON, WI 53703
PHONE: 608-257-2622 • TOLL-FREE: 877-705-4422
FAX: 608-257-8386 • WEBSITE: WWW.WASB.ORG

JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director
DATE: September 14, 2021
RE: Opposition to Assembly Bill 446

We want to begin by being clear that the WASB believes that: a) this bill is a well-intentioned effort to improve reading instruction in our schools and b) improvements are, in fact, needed. We also want to be clear that WASB members have adopted no resolutions addressing specific strategies for reading instruction or how best to address reading difficulties other than supporting the creation of a dyslexia guidebook.

Our concerns with Assembly Bill 446 are based in large part on local control arguments, including our members' directive to oppose unfunded state mandates and their preference for local control and flexibility. This bill is a massive overhaul of the reading readiness program, including a laundry list of stringent and prescriptive new state mandates relating to screening, assessments, interventions, parental notifications and reporting requirements. These new mandates are not only likely to be costly but are very specific, even dictating what companies and products must be approved for use. No funding is provided to address the additional testing, staffing and notice requirements imposed by the bill. Of equal concern, no funding is provided to address professional development, instructional coaching or curricular/instructional materials that are needed to really move the needle on reading performance.

We thank Sen. Bernier and her staff for allowing us the opportunity to meet with a representative from Excellence in Education National, Inc. out of Tallahassee, FL and hear arguments for supporting this approach. One of the primary arguments was that this approach was adopted in Mississippi and their reading test scores have improved significantly.

The problem with comparing states in the K-12 realm is that everything else is not equal. States fund K-12 education differently, have different demographics, and different approaches to students failure to perform at grade level, etc. As an example, Mississippi retains (holds back) kids in third grade if they do not score sufficiently on a reading exit exam and, in fact, holds back more students than any other state according to the Fordham Institute. Would Wisconsin have to do the same to see similar improvement?

Another key takeaway from our meeting was that for these initiatives to be successful, the education community down to the teachers in the classroom must buy into the approach being adopted. We couldn't agree more but fail to see how a legislative mandate lacking bipartisan support would accomplish this. It is our understanding that the strategies mandated in this proposal are not currently supported by all reading experts, specialists, and associations in the state. Given that reality, and despite the moral imperative to improve reading proficiency in Wisconsin, it is hard to see how this proposal, in its current form, will achieve the kind of buy-in needed for this initiative to succeed.

Wisconsin has adopted two major reading proposals in the recent past that came out of the bipartisan Read to Lead task force led by former Gov. Scott Walker and current Gov. Tony Evers (as state superintendent). Reading readiness assessments were mandated by legislation in 2011 along with a requirement, starting in 2014, that aspiring teachers pass the Fundamentals of Reading Test (FoRT) as a way to demonstrate they know how to teach reading before they get a teaching license. At that time, the state we were trying to emulate with those requirements was Massachusetts. Regrettably, neither of these mandates has had the impact that was hoped for, or we wouldn't be here today. It leads us to question if we would want to "triple-down" on this approach.

Wis. Stats., section 118.016, currently requires each pupil enrolled in 4-year-old kindergarten to 2nd grade in a school district or in a charter school to be annually assessed for reading readiness utilizing a screener selected locally that must evaluate whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge.

Since the reading readiness assessments were mandated on school districts, the statutes that were originally written to direct schools to a certain provider's assessment have changed several times. First, the statutory requirements were worded to require districts to use the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment. Then, they were expanded to allow more flexibility to use other assessments in addition to PALS. Last session, opinion shifted to yet another assessment, Predictive Assessment of Reading (PAR) and legislation was introduced to require that screener. This bill again would change the definition for an approved screener as well as adding two new screeners (level 1 & 2) with different definitions. The bill also mandates that certain testing products be approved by the DPI for use in schools.

We are concerned with the staff time required to administer up to triple the number of assessments and the disruptive nature of continually changing assessments. We are interested in knowing whether and to what extent schools would be able to continue using their current assessments. If schools have to scrap their current reading readiness assessments, valuable longitudinal data could be lost, making it harder for schools to evaluate their reading curriculum and instructional practices.

More testing equates to less time spent on instructing students. Current reading assessments already identify which students are struggling readers and teachers know who these students are. These students need more time from teachers on direct reading interventions, and teachers need the time to create intervening strategies, personalized, for different students. More time devoted to test administration has the unintended consequence of adversely impacting instruction in reading and other content areas for *all* students, as teachers simply have less time to prepare for, and to deliver, instruction when more time is committed to testing.

We note that there is growing skepticism about the value or worth of the FoRT exam as an indicator of actual teacher performance in teaching reading and little credible evidence that passing the FoRT exam, by itself, improves teacher performance or produces any positive impact on students' literacy skills or reading achievement. There is also recognition that the FoRT exam is likely culturally biased and creates a barrier to teachers of color entering the profession. This unintended consequence is in direct conflict with one of the key strategies for addressing our racial achievement gap.

Attesting to skepticism about the effectiveness of the FoRT exam, there have been bipartisan bills passed and introduced to eliminate the FoRT test requirement in certain circumstances. Last session, 2019 Act 44 created an alternative to the requirement for special education teachers and this session, 2021 SB 114 would waive the requirement during a public health emergency.

We bring up these examples only to illustrate that “cherry picking” certain requirements from other states that have shown improvement in their reading scores will not necessarily translate to success in Wisconsin. More than additional testing is needed.

It is important to note that that local school districts have not just been sitting on their hands, they've been reevaluating their curricula and instruction and trying new strategies to improve reading. They are doing their best to equip teachers to address the problems via professional development, instructional coaches, evaluating what is working (or isn't working) with particular children and adjusting accordingly.

We do applaud the legislative authors of the proposal for their desire to improve literacy among students in Wisconsin's schools. We also empathize with the desire to do *something* via legislation. That being said, there are no magic wands or easy answers, or we would have done it already.

We encourage further conversations about what we can do in our schools to improve reading readiness. Realistically, those conversations need to address targeting resources and developing strategic interventions beyond simply mandating additional testing. We agree that something needs to be done but we also need to do the hard work getting buy-in to approaches that have shown promise with a broad array of stakeholders including teachers, reading specialists, administrators and school board members, and parents. So far, that consensus has eluded us in Wisconsin, yet we need to continue to try to find common ground and be willing to compromise to find a plan for change that we can all get behind.



Wisconsin State Reading Association

WSRA... providing leadership, advocacy, and expertise

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Debra Zarling and I am the current president of the Wisconsin State Reading Association, a professional organization representing literacy educators throughout the state. WSRA believes that assessment and instruction should be informed by a wide and substantive research base. While we truly appreciate that policymakers are making reading and literacy a higher policy priority, the Wisconsin State Reading Association and many reading/literacy professionals have concerns with Assembly Bill 446 and Senate Bill 454. **This bill, as currently written, lacks the research/evidence/science that implementing these provisions will improve reading scores in Wisconsin and close the opportunity/achievement gap.** In fact, there is reason to believe it will not result in the desired outcomes.

WSRA supports screening in early grades and as needed in other grades to identify those students who might need additional literacy support.

- WSRA does not support the proposed list of criteria to determine which screeners a district is allowed to use. There are no studies that show causation between using this list of criteria and their subsequent screeners, and increased reading scores on state tests and/or the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the test used nationally to compare state reading outcomes.
- In addition to increasing the amount of testing, this bill misdirects the type of testing that is needed. Further, focusing exclusively on screening is likely to result in large numbers of false positives and false negatives. *Research shows that the error rate for screeners can range from 50-60%*, meaning that this process will miss students who need additional support and identify others as needing support when they do not. VandDerHeyden and Burns, in a 2017 piece written for the National Association of School Psychologists, indicate that "one of the ways to improve screening accuracy is to screen only those students who cannot be ruled out based on other information. Use what is known about the risk of students to filter students into the "screening" and "no screening" groups. Somehow, decision makers must begin to understand the real harm that arises from screening children who have no signs of having dyslexia or a learning disability in reading. Giving a child a screening that the child does not need either confirms what we already knew (i.e., child is not at risk) or gives us bad information (i.e., as in the case of a false-positive error). Children who have shown no risk for reading failure should not be screened. Children who carry

- external risk factors (e.g., recently moving into a district, receiving special education services under any label, failing the preceding year's year-end test) should be screened. Furthermore, if a child's risk of reading failure remains high (even if they pass the screening), the child should be provided with intervention."
- Reading First, a federal \$6 billion dollar grant program provided under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000, allocated funding for scripted programs, teacher training, and narrowly focused assessments. Significant conflict of interests controlled the types of programs, assessments, and professional development allowed. Despite the strict controls and the focus on foundational skills as outlined in the National Reading Panel report, the results were underwhelming. The Final Report of the Reading First Impact Study found that despite more time allocated for the five essential components of reading instruction: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics, 3) vocabulary, 4) fluency, and 5) comprehension, the increased knowledge for teachers in these areas, and more support for struggling readers, "Reading First did not produce a statistically significant impact on student reading comprehension test scores in grades one, two or three."

This bill inappropriately uses screeners to identify students as needing further support.

- Screeners are intended to do no more than alert educators to those students who MIGHT need additional testing and support, not identify students. What is needed for those students scoring lower on a screener, is diagnostic testing, conducted by a knowledgeable, expert teacher, to verify whether students need support and what that support should encompass.

This bill raises significant issues of equity by treating normal differences in student learning patterns as something abnormal. It ignores the multidimensional and networked nature of literacy development by focusing exclusively on a narrow set of foundational skills while ignoring other significant factors.

- For example, screeners do not identify or acknowledge the "language and literacy assets, strengths, skills, dispositions, mind-sets, and practices" that Black students already possess and bring into a classroom. This is also true for students from other diverse backgrounds. While these foundational skills are critical and all students need to learn to read, the idea that there is a specific path that includes only the identified foundational skills that all students will follow without deviation is simply untrue. As with any other issue of human development, individuals vary.

Proponents of Assembly Bill 446 stated in the recent hearing that they are modeling this legislation on Mississippi. Mississippi is ranked one of the worst,

46th, in the U.S. on 8th Grade literacy testing scores. Wisconsin, on the other hand, is ranked 8th.

- *While Mississippi has increased its 4th grade testing scores, a major influencer of Mississippi's ranking is their manipulation of the data by implementing a mandatory 3rd grade retention law in 2013. If students do not score high enough on the state reading test, they are retained. Mississippi retains a significant number of students beginning in Kindergarten and continuing through 3rd grade. In fact, Mississippi has "a retention rate higher than any other state. In 2018–19, according to state department of education reports, 8 percent of all Mississippi K–3 students were held back (up from 6.6 percent the prior year). This implies that over the four grades, as many as 32 percent of all Mississippi students are held back; a more reasonable estimate is closer to 20 to 25 percent, allowing for some to be held back twice. (Mississippi's Department of Education does not report how many students are retained more than once.)"*
- **Despite Mississippi's retention laws, Wisconsin's 4th graders still rank higher.**
- **Retaining students at the end of the 3rd grade year who do not score well in a reading test has documented negative effects on students, particularly as they increase in age, particularly by 9th grade.** This practice ignores the recommendations of research organizations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), who caution against the use of one single assessment in making high stakes decisions for students. The reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act states that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) not use a single measure and that any instruments used "assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors".
- As Mississippi's deplorable 8th grade literacy test results show, when a state manipulates the data and games the rankings by holding back K-3 students so overall 4th grade testing scores automatically improve, in the long-run this does not work.

This bill creates an additional financial burden on schools by increasing the amount of testing required for ALL students regardless of need.

- While the bill accounts for the cost of one type of screener at each grade level, the Fundamental skills screening assessment at four-year old kindergarten and Universal screening assessments for kindergarten, grade one, and grade two, it does not seem to cover all of the required screeners, including Level 1 screening assessments and Level 2 screening assessments.
- Those working in schools understand that this bill will also result in increased costs for staffing and additional training in administering, scoring, and analyzing multiple screeners; costs which are not covered in this bill. The criteria for

screening in this bill is highly prescriptive and unnecessary for the selection of universal screening tools.

- Legislatively prescribing specific timelines, screeners/assessments, and other specific processes is not responsive to the needs of the child, and is ignoring the power and responsibility specifically intended to be carried out by a multidisciplinary team who has direct knowledge of the child and their needs. *Additionally, when the amount of required testing increases, the amount of time available for instruction is decreased.*

These are just a few of the many reasons that the Wisconsin State Reading Association does not support this bill.

To improve literacy learning for Wisconsin students, our association suggests increasing equitable instructional opportunities for all of our Wisconsin students instead of increasing testing.

- This can be accomplished by providing adequate funding for school districts to hire enough district reading specialists to support students, teachers, and administrators and providing adequate numbers of reading teachers in schools to work with our neediest students.
- District reading specialists are mandated under current law, but the spirit of the law is not necessarily followed. Often, school districts identify a reading specialist, but that specialist may not be given the time to implement the duties of their position.
- In addition, to be equitable, more support is needed for our lowest socio-economic districts and schools who lack the resources to hire enough reading teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students.
- We also suggest that current state literacy laws should be posted on every school district's website so that all stakeholders are aware of the requirements already in place in our state.
- Fourth grade NAEP scores in reading are not predictors of how well students do in 8th grade. While we are always looking to improve at all grade levels, it is critical that we look at our literacy achievement as a system. WSRRA suggests that instead of looking to other states who may not achieve as well as a system, we look to those districts and schools in our own state who are doing well across grade levels and with diverse student populations.

We ask that Legislators make sure to look at the data, the peer reviewed evidence, and involve educators in the process, before completely overhauling Wisconsin's reading and literacy education system.

Thank you.

Debra A. Zarling
President, Wisconsin State Reading Association

October 6, 2021

Collins, T. (2019). *Mississippi rising? A partial explanation for its NAEP improvement is that it holds students back*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
<https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/mississippi-rising-partial-explanation-its-naep-improvement-it-holds-students>

Milner, H. R. (2020). *Disrupting Racism and Whiteness in Researching a Science of Reading*. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55 (S1), S249-S253.

VanDerHeyden, A. M., & Burns, M. K. (2017). *Four Dyslexia screening myths that cause more harm than good in preventing reading failure and what you can do instead*. *National Association of School Psychologists, Communique*, 45.

SENATE HEARING

MADISON, WI

October 6, 2021

Thank you committee members for hearing about this bill. My name is Angela Hanlin and I am the superintendent of the School District of Thorp. I am here today to testify for **informational purposes only** about the absolute transformation that this type of work had on an extremely troubled school, the students that attended school there and the teachers that worked there. I know that you've probably heard a lot of information about the Science of Reading from researchers and important leaders in that community. I won't be speaking about that today, instead I am going to speak about what happens when that research is implemented by educators. Today I will share with you the what, who, the how and the why. I will focus on one particular group of students and one specific teacher.

Six years ago I became the principal of a struggling school in rural southeast Missouri. Their data was dismal. On the previous spring state assessment score, they had a building average of 13.7% of students scoring Proficient with 0% of students scoring advanced and the majority of students scoring Below Basic. With three years of declining scores and the subgroup of special education students being trapped in the Below Basic category, the school was identified by the state department as a turnaround school because they were in the lowest 15% of schools in the state of Missouri. Their EOY Benchmark scores showed that less than 20% of the school was reading at grade level. They were struggling with chronic absenteeism, high rates of discipline referrals, low teacher morale and over a fourth of the school population had an IEP. The teachers were defeated and two veteran teachers were ready to leave education because they felt they were ineffective and were not making a difference in the lives of their students. The good news is, they did not stay there.

What did we do? **How** did we make changes? First and foremost we accepted the data and owned it! We also changed our mindset. Then we implemented systems and structures and used research based strategies to promote the Science of Reading in our classrooms. We implemented a Data System where we gave a benchmark assessment three times a year: the beginning, middle and end of the year. Every single student below the 50th percentile was progress monitored to see if our instruction was making a difference. We used that data to plan differentiated instruction for every student in the building and targeted, specific interventions for every student below the 50th percentile. We implemented a system of data review and collaboration where teachers met consistently as a team to review data and use it to plan instruction and interventions. We did not focus on percentages but on specific students. We took the focus off of teaching and put it on learning. Were our students responding to the instruction they were receiving? If they were not, then what were we going to do about it?

What happened in response to those changes? 1) We exited school turnaround status in less than three years. 2) We became the number one school in the state for growth. 3) Our third grade

students reached 95% Proficiency on the end of year state exam. That's the particular group of students that I want to focus on. 4) Our teachers became empowered and developed what is called collective team efficacy. 5) We went from a building average of 13.7% of students scoring proficient to a building average of 84% of students scoring proficient/advanced with the majority being Advanced. 6) Discipline issues became nonexistent. 7) Attendance rates soared. 8) Our percentage of students with an IEP dropped from over 26% to below 11%. 9) We had zero students score in the Below Basic category.

The group of students that scored 95% proficiency in third grade did not take a state exam in 2020 due to a Covid shutdown. The majority of their 2020-2021 school year was spent on a blended schedule. In the spring of 2021, 100% of those students were proficient or advanced on the state test with 80% scoring advanced.

Who were these students? At the time our school was 100% free lunch but prior to that we had about 85% or higher free/reduced lunch rates. Our students lived in extreme poverty in a rural area, they lived traumatic lives with a large percentage being either an open children's division case or living in a foster home, they did not enter our school prepared to learn, they were from broken homes, and drugs were prevalent in our area with the majority of our students having at least one parent on drugs or incarcerated due to drugs. They came from families with a history of academic failure. There were students with dyslexia and learning disabilities yet 100% scored proficient or advanced in reading and 90% were proficient or advanced in math. They had every reason why they should not have performed but they did. They break the myths that are prevalent in education today. And 100% of these students scored above the 50th percentile on the end of year benchmark assessment.

Why did we get these results? As a group of educators, we collectively came together and decided to own our data and change our mindset to believe that ALL really does mean ALL! All students are capable of learning to read! They just need to be taught using research based instructional practices and they have to receive targeted, specific interventions that are based on data.

What happened to that discouraged teacher I mentioned earlier that wanted to leave education? Instead of 10% of her students scoring proficient/advanced on a state test, which had happened, 100% of her students scored proficient/advanced on the state assessment. She did end up leaving the classroom though. She is now the principal of that elementary school because I moved to Wisconsin to become the superintendent at the School District of Thorp.

Thorp is currently on this journey and our story is far from over. We have just implemented a data system where we will administer three benchmark assessments a year, progress monitor in between those testing periods, use data to plan instruction and interventions and will meet weekly to collaborate, reflect on what is working and change what is not working. I had the privilege of helping this district begin this system & structures work four years ago as a literacy consultant and now I have moved here to lead them to the next level in this work. Their staff members have changed their mindset and firmly believe that ALL really means ALL! I believe that every single student in Missouri, in Wisconsin, and our country can achieve the results that I

have talked about today. I also believe that it is our moral obligation as educators and administrators to ensure this happens. I hope that you feel the same. I appreciate having the opportunity to speak to you today.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Test

Building Averages for Matthews Elementary

MAP TEST	2014	2015* Identified as a Focus School	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021
ELA Building average	13.7%	26.8%	54.5%	40%	55%	80%	84%
MATH Building average	25.5%	5.4%	14.5%	30%	42%	71.3%	81%
Building Ave. of ELA & MATH	19.6%	16.1%	34.5%	35%	48.5%	75.6%	83%

Spring 2019 Scores

ELA

3rd Grade: 95% Prof/Adv with 57% being Advanced

4th Grade: 54% Prof/Adv with 17% Advanced

5th Grade: 90% Prof/Adv with 81% being Advanced

Math

3rd Grade: 80.9% Prof/Adv with 52% being Advanced

4th Grade: 38% Prof/Adv with 17% Advanced

5th Grade: 95% Prof/Adv with 90% being Advanced & 5% being Prof.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Test

	2017	2018	2018 State Average	2019	2021
ELA					
3 rd grade	40.7	61.9*	48.6	95	76% (77% Adv)
4 th grade	44.4	57.7*	50.2	54	77% (53% Adv)
5 th grade	53.6	45.5	48	90	100% (80% Adv)
MATH					
3 rd grade	44.4	47.6*	46.9	80.9	88%
4 th grade	38.9	42.3	45.9	38	64%
5 th grade	35.7	36.4	41	95	90%

*We beat the state average for 2018.

2021 Scores: 0% of students were Below Basic, NOT one special education student was Below Basic



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: John Forester, Executive Director
DATE: October 6, 2021
RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 454

Chairperson Darling and members of the Senate Committee on Education, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. My name is John Forester. I'm the Executive Director of the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance (SAA). In that capacity, I represent the combined memberships of five professional associations of public school administrators: the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO), the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA), the Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators (WASPA), and the Wisconsin Council for Administrators of Special Services (WCASS). The SAA also represents the 10,000 members of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (WREA).

The SAA, and WREA, opposes Senate Bill 454, relating to reading readiness assessments. Please consider the following in support of our position:

- Our members throughout Wisconsin share the concerns expressed by the authors of SB 454 regarding Wisconsin's disappointing reading outcomes. However, districts have not been waiting for legislation to address this issue. In the past few years, school leaders have been identifying and evaluating best practices in literacy instruction throughout the country and implementing promising new initiatives. Many of our members have expressed concern that the requirements of SB 454 would draw the focus away from the work they are doing to improve reading outcomes in their districts, draining time and resources away from critical interventions and support for students.
- I would like to thank Senator Bernier for the opportunity to meet with her staff and with Dr. Kymyona Burk via Zoom for more than an hour on September 9th. We especially appreciated the opportunity to learn from Dr. Burk about the development of Mississippi's comprehensive early literacy program. Our main takeaways from Dr. Burk included three points that are simply not addressed in SB 454: 1) the importance of focusing first on professional development in the science of reading for teachers and administrators; 2) the necessity of gaining "buy-in" from school leaders and teachers in the field; and 3) state investment to support school districts in their efforts to improve reading outcomes is absolutely critical.
- How will this bill, with its focus on additional testing, affect reading outcomes? Comprehensive early literacy programs include multiple components in addition to assessment, including interventions, staff pre-service, supports for students and school districts, and professional development for teaching staff. Wisconsin school leaders see enormous needs for professional development in the science of reading for teachers and administrators. It is our understanding that

Mississippi saw a similar need and addressed professional development first on their journey to a comprehensive early literacy program. Why are we focusing first on assessment?

- With respect to importance of “buy-in,” SB 454 appears to be a very prescriptive top-down mandate developed with very little input from school leaders in the field. Our members support development of a comprehensive early literacy program in consultation with school leaders, teachers and other education experts, as opposed to a disjointed, piecemeal approach developed with limited input from educators in the field.
- The bill is silent on the importance of state investment to improve reading outcomes in Wisconsin. Simply put, this bill is an unfunded mandate. Our members believe this bill will increase costs for school districts due to increased staff time and resources necessary to administer an increased number and frequency of required assessments, development of remediation plans and compliance with new reporting and parental notification requirements. School districts that already collectively transfer \$1.15 billion from their district general funds to cover the funding gap between required special education costs and current state funding will be forced to make difficult cuts in program areas outside of early literacy to comply with this legislation. Finally, it is our understanding that the majority of federal funds cannot be used to pay for the provisions of this legislation. Therefore, the cost of this mandate would likely be covered by district state and local funds.
- Many of our members find it disturbing and inappropriate that the legislation would advantage certain private companies by specifically naming certain assessments. Is this best practice in legislative drafting or state policy development? We don’t really know what will happen to those preferred companies and their assessments in the future, and yet, they could be specifically named in statute.
- There is evidence that Wisconsin is making progress with Multi-level System of Support (MLSS). According to the 2019-20 Wisconsin RtI Annual Report, students performing in the lowest 5 percent on the Forward English Language Arts (ELA) exam show statistically significant improvements in outcomes after they have attended a high-implementing school for 3 or more years. We raised this issue in our meeting with Dr. Burk and she expressed strong support for the MLSS. If adopted, what impact will SB 454 have on Wisconsin’s MLSS?
- Finally, I will offer a brief answer to the question, “Well, if you don’t support SB 454, what do you support?” We support a two-pronged approach to the development of a comprehensive early literacy program in Wisconsin. First, we should develop legislation yet this session offering financial support for districts to provide professional development in the science of reading for teachers and administrators. Secondly, we would like to see an effort to bring relevant stakeholders to the table to develop the other components of the early literacy program including assessment, staff pre-service, interventions, supports, and other elements. This second part, in our estimation, would begin to address the challenge of creating the “buy-in” from the field that Dr. Burk believes is critically important to successful implementation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you should have any questions regarding our thoughts on SB 454, please call me at 608-242-1370.

October 6, 2021

Re: Support of SB454

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler,
Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

Thank you for allowing my son AJ and I to testify today. My name is Kimberlee Coronado. I am a 7th generation descendant of Chief Joseph Osaugie, daughter of two alcoholic parents, one who was a Native American Army Veteran who had learning and mental health challenges. Next month, I'll be married for 25 years to my highschool sweetheart who was labeled LD in school. Together, we have four beautiful children whom I have given my whole life to fight for their social, emotional, spiritual, physical wellbeing and educational needs to be met by a very broken, reactive child serving system.

As a Mom, I knew my children had different abilities. My oldest son, Alexzander I knew at birth, yet he was not identified until 6th grade, where sadly his education stopped due to behavioral issues which exccellated - his trauma responses were just too much for untrained teachers to handle. Never was identified as SLD, He was not given an opportunity.

Our oldest daughter, Adrianna I knew she was struggling to read and I took her for summer tutoring at Marquette University and during the 3rd summer, She finally began to read. She was not identified as a child with a disability until she was 8 years old which is after third grade. Since then Adrianna has flourished into an insatiable reader with an IQ to match. I am Alexzander and Adrianna's full time caregiver and legal guardian.

Our youngest son AJ is who I am here to testify with and to advocate strongly in favor of SB 454, Reading Roadmap to Success! I have advocated for him since 4k and in kindergarten the school said Dyslexia is a medical diagnosis; not an educational issue. I wish I had known then what I know now because my gut was correct. The dyslexia diagnosis was confirmed in kindergarten by outside evaluation. Inside school it took 6 written requests to receive the first special education evaluation which was denied in First grade. I guess he wasn't FAR ENOUGH behind yet. Third grade I made another written special education evaluation request and he was found eligible for OHI/ Educational Autism. However it wasn't until 5th grade my son qualified for SLD. I remember the school psych stating "he had the lowest score for written expression she had ever tested". In 7th grade, despite having two full academic years of intervention my son still tested k-1 grade skill level. The emergency alarm for my son's education did not go off at school until I hired two lawyers, a special education lawyer and a criminal defence lawyer on the same day for my child. My son had 2 Manifestations of Disability Hearings in which he was criminally charged. I remember the SAME

school psych, who denied his eligibility for Spe. Ed., and said he had the worst written expression she had ever tested a student for", asking me "Where did these behaviors come from?" It took EVERY fiber of my collective being to keep my emotions in check at that moment. I have NEVER felt so unheard in my entire life. How many years had the school failed? My son was in 7th grade and couldn't write his name, he couldn't make a simple grocery list like eggs, milk, bread or cereal.

So to bring this to a close, I was never provided any PALS assessments, I was not notified of any of my children's reading readiness scores in grade 4k-2, I have no idea how long my children were getting intervention before I was informed. I cannot even begin to add up all of the money we have spent on (outside testing, tutoring, therapies, hospitalizations and medications) ensuring our children receive a FREE and APPROPRIATE Public Education.

If we had SB454 15 years ago, my children might not be on long term care as adults. Both of my son's could have been spared being criminally charged for their disabilities. Hopefully we can learn from what my family has endured and the next generation of students will not have to have to deal with school refusal, suicidal ideation, and the trauma that school has caused my children.

I wish I had known that the school would require my child to fail so miserably before they would provide the services they are required to by Federal law. I wish I did have to spend half of my husband's salary on legal services. If we had the items like Universal reading screening, Dyslexia definition, Definition of "at risk" for reading failure, Personal Reading Plan for "at risk" students, Parent notification of scores and personal reading plan, Reading Remediation plan posted by school boards, Dyslexia information for parents, Annual data reporting to the WI DPI and WI Legislature; maybe we could have had a better outcome.

I wish I had known that No One cared about educating my children when I sat at the IEP table. I wish I had known that it was such an overwhelming and exhausting fight just to get any feedback from school that showed quantifiable data to substantiate his lack of progress.

Looking back, I cannot express enough how parent notification within 15 days, required personal reading plan, dyslexia definition, expanded screening components, greater transparency with school board early literacy remediation plan, characteristics of dyslexia information or data reporting would have positively and dramatically transformed my children's education and saved the trauma our family has faced.

Please support and vote YES on SB 454.

Kimberlee Coronado
200 Tenny Ave
Waukesha, WI 53186

Dear Senators,

My name is AJ Coronado. I am in 9th grade and I went to Waukesha STEM Academy until 7th grade. My mom fought to get me a better school so they can teach me.

I remember when I was six. I had trouble reading and writing. What was it like when you were six years old? Were you succeeding? Were you the top of your class with reading and writing? I wasn't. I remember going to a doctor's office for testing. I couldn't do it. It was so bad that I vividly remember putting my head down and saying to the doctor. That "That this was Chinese" My dyslexia was so bad that I thought that English, the language that I am speaking in right now was Chinese.

Once in third grade, I had to ask my friend how to spell the word "it." I had to ask how to spell a two letter word, I couldn't spell the word "it" that's how bad it was.

Sometimes when I try to spell a word, any word it just is impossible to spell it with out help.

Whenever I am texting my friends and I have something to add to the conversation I would start typing. But by the time I was done the conversation had moved on.

Please support SB 454 so that other students like me can learn to read and write and do math.

Thank you,

AJ Coronado
200 Tenny Ave
Waukesha, WI 53186



WE ARE:
GRACE.

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Kimberly Desotell, President, Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) and
Leadership Team Members of GRACE
Date: October 4, 2021
Re: Support for Senate Bill 454 related to Reading Achievement and Assessment

Dear Members of the Committee,

We are contacting you as professionals with the Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) School System, the second largest private school system in the State of Wisconsin. We are committed to education in our fine state and felt the need to advocate for support of Senate Bill 454 related to Reading Achievement and Assessment. Thank you for taking the time to read our testimony as we have a vested interest in education throughout our state. We need strong public and strong private schools in our state!

Preparing young students for tomorrow is of great urgency - this begins with reading development! Senate Bill 454 merely outlines practices of good teaching and principles of strong learning pedagogy that should be present in each and every school throughout our state.

The Bill outlines the need for:


- 1) Tighter guidelines and parameters on measuring reading readiness, fluency and growth
- 2) Educational practices that require communication and partnership with parents and
- 3) Time bound progress monitoring and reports to ensure learning gaps are closed in our youngest readers


All of these practices have been common components of private education for decades and beyond. They are not asking for procedures that require extraneous work, tasks or even funding. Private schools, such as our Catholic schools, lean heavily on parental partnership and engagement, regular progress monitoring and the utilization of strong assessment tools to direct and alter instruction as we work toward learning mastery for each and every child. These are all practices and principles of good, solid teaching - it's that simple!


Bill 454 merely supports good practices that are currently happening in the best classrooms across our state. When you review progress in high performing schools and dynamic classrooms involving our best and brightest teachers, these practices are already being conducted regularly.


GRACE Schools firmly support Bill 454 because of the potential impact it can have on raising the tide for each and every young reader in every public and charter school in Wisconsin. Please join us by supporting this Bill to ensure good, quality education is occurring consistently and with fidelity in every classroom.

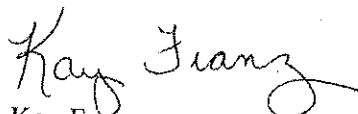
Thank you for consideration of our testimony.


Kimberly A. Desotell
President, GRACE


Crystal Blahnik
Principal, GRACE St. Bernard Catholic School


Laura Blicharz
Curriculum Coordinator, GRACE


James Cullen
Director of Student Services, GRACE


Kay Franz
Director of Teaching & Learning, GRACE
Principal, GRACE Father Allouez Catholic School

ABOUT GRACE

GRACE stands for Green Bay Area Catholic Education and is a nine-school system that provides excellence in preschool through eighth-grade education and serves the 23 Catholic parishes within the Greater Green Bay community. GRACE schools range in offerings and locations, and each has its own distinct history, focus and parish connections. GRACE is among the largest Catholic school systems in the state of Wisconsin. To learn more, visit www.gracesystem.org.



WE ARE:
GRACE:

October 4, 2021
RE: Support of AB 446

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler and Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

My name is Starla Dixen and I am a resident of Roberts, Wisconsin. My family resides within the River Falls School District. I am a teacher and have a son who was identified as Dyslexic at the end of his eighth grade year. My son is currently in his senior year of high school and yet we are still dealing with the struggles of getting help for him and breaking down barriers of being a person with dyslexia. He came before your committee back in August of 2018 to share his perspective as a student dealing with dyslexia and the need for more help.

Back when Dane was in first grade, his teacher noticed that he was struggling with reading and spelling. She suggested he be tested and while he qualified for Title One, he was quickly dismissed by third grade despite minor improvements. We never received his scores but because I was teaching in that school, I was privy to why he was being dismissed. There were other kids lower than him. He was now in the gray area; too high for help and yet low to get frustrated and have his self-esteem tank and his learning come to a standstill.

We transferred to a smaller school in hopes that with a smaller class size he would be able to be helped more by the teacher. I pursued training in the Orton-Gillingham method of reading. The training I received is what made a huge difference. What was interesting is that I chose to use it with all of my students regardless of test scores and my students were becoming more confident readers because of it.

I continued to ask about options for Dane to be tested for a reading disability or dyslexia and because he wasn't low enough, he wasn't considered an emergency to get help. Weeks turned into months and while I didn't know what the cut off was, I chose to go to an outside resource for testing for dyslexia. He was identified to be mild-moderately dyslexic and when I brought the results to the school, I was told he would have to go through their tests in order to maybe qualify for an IEP or 504. According to the school, they felt his percentage was still too high for help and I was specifically told his dyslexia wasn't affecting his daily life so he wasn't eligible for a 504. Really? Were they at our home when he came home upset and calling himself dumb because he couldn't read what was on the board or take the notes fast enough? Where they around when his homework took up to four additional hours after school? What was the cut off at our school? Did we need to play the game and throw a test in order to get help?

There needs to be more help and there needs to be more training for all at the school level (administration, teachers, paras) about dyslexia and how to better help our students read. As a parent, we are told to wait for data to be collected. We are told our fears are unfounded by IEP team members. The directors of Special Education Services in our area believes that some students will never learn to read. It makes me sick to hear that because there are other options that could be pursued but the district won't due to lack of money or worse due to lack of interest and knowledge.

This bill, SB 454, is a continued effort to rectifying a broken program in Wisconsin. Parents and teachers need more information on where to go for help albeit assessment for identifying a learning issue, where to get scores interpreted, how to screen for dyslexia/reading issues and there needs to be better accountability for getting help. My child is graduating out of the system and yet, I will not stop advocating for other families and their children to get the learning help they need and deserve.

Sincerely,
Starla Dixen
428 County Rd. SS
Roberts, WI 54023

October 6, 2021

RE: SB454 - Relating to: reading readiness assessments and granting rule-making authority.

Senate Education Committee Members,

I have experienced Wisconsin's reading crisis from multiple stakeholder perspectives. I was born, raised, and educated in WI. I am a Wisconsin trained teacher who worked in WI public schools for 20 years and a former WI school board member. I am a parent of three children, two of whom are dyslexic. I am also severely dyslexic myself and was only properly assessed and identified at the age of 43, while seeking workplace accommodations.

While working in WI K-12 schools for over 20 years as a teacher, library media specialist, technology integration coach, instructional coach, and curriculum specialist, my role always involved using building and individual assessment data to align and improve programs and results. I regularly observed learners, teachers, administrators and parents who are overwhelmed, frustrated, concerned, and confused about how to improve learning, address student behavior, and alleviate youth mental health struggles. At the center of all of these struggles -- from the lens of all stakeholders -- is reading. The gaps in reading achievement and the secondary learning, behavior and health challenges are felt system-wide, but begin in Kindergarten.

I began to more closely examine the disconnect and divide between my training as a WI educator and the impact I had on student learning when my child's optometrist confirmed that their eyesight was not contributing to their reading difficulties and shared information about dyslexia.

Dyslexia was only briefly mentioned in one of my courses while obtaining my bachelor's degree in elementary education. I assumed that more experienced teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, school psychologists, and school leaders must have more knowledge of the foundational reading skills my child was struggling with than I did and that we would learn together. I was wrong, we spent years attempting to navigate multi-tiered systems of support which continually either did not assess, or disregarded assessments of phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, word recognition, reading fluency, spelling, and family history in favor of reading comprehension scores. As a result, either no reading intervention or mismatched inadequate intervention was provided.

As our oldest and youngest children's interest in learning decreased and their frustration and anxiety about school grew, we were left with no choice but to seek a private evaluation. With confirmation of their dyslexia and an insider's understanding of reading assessment and interventions used in regional schools, we explored all options to find an equitable appropriate learning environment for our children, including moving to Minnesota which has significantly more legislation regarding foundational reading skills and dyslexia. In the end, I chose to retire from an instructional coaching and curriculum job that I loved in order to learn the assessments and interventions, or reading plans, outlined in SB454 to teach my own children at home.

I learned more about teaching reading in a few months of webinars than I did while earning my bachelor's degree, master's degree, principal, and director of curriculum & instruction licensure from WI institutions.

While learning about dyslexia I learned about how all learners - regardless of age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or language - learn to read.

Last fall, in 5th grade, my youngest child was identified for reading intervention for the first time. His school district started using FastBridge, one of the approved reading assessments mentioned in SB454. With less than 10 hours of a phonics-based reading intervention with his online teacher and only 20 hours of instruction with a complete structured literacy intervention at home -- that included phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension -- my son attained the highest level of growth in his entire grade on the school's Fastbridge reading assessment. Most importantly, his engagement and confidence grew.

Let me say this again, one of the assessments in SB454 opened the door to aligned instruction. Just 30 hours of instruction, in total, in a couple of months, that aligned to these assessments resulted in a student growing from the 33rd percentile to the 74th percentile on a nationally normed assessment and achieving the highest amount of growth in a cohort of over 200 students. The brief 3 month intervention launched continued growth within classroom instruction to the 91st percentile in May.

Can you imagine what would happen if the system of assessment in SB454 opened the door to this level of growth for 1 student in every Kindergarten, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade classroom in WI?

Our state's current reading achievement scores reflect the knowledge, training, experience, local problem-solving and potential implicit bias and privilege of leaders within WI colleges of education, the Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin School Reading Association. All of whom have historically ignored, dismissed, and downplayed the importance of foundational word-level reading skills for all learners and the neurobiological brain difference of dyslexia causes more significant difficulty with these skills for 20 % of all learners.

While educational institutions in WI have begun to accept, apply, and promote scientific findings and evidence based practices from other various fields of study including cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience, application is frequently limited to external factors such as poverty, trauma, and mental health. There continues to be deep institutional denial of scientific findings and guidance from the same fields of study about the one area schools have the largest most immediate influence on and responsibility for -- reading. It is much easier to change practices to address a state wide problem you did not create. Taking individual and institutional responsibility for the large reading failure of WI schools is much harder. The reading readiness assessments outlined in SB454 are based on a large body of evidence from various fields of study about how all children, dyslexic or not, learn to read and mirror what is being done in other states that are improving reading achievement for all learners.

Despite good intentions, WI's current reading readiness laws, guidance and practices are not working for a majority of WI students or teachers and are actually harmful to all WI learners and teachers. Teachers working to improve reading achievement without consistent, valid, and reliable assessment data about all of the components of reading are not empowered to make informed strategic decisions with system resources for any students including skilled readers. For example, the inefficiencies have caused schools to increase time allocated to reading while decreasing time for other subjects like science and social studies. Even students who easily

become skilled readers in Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade are missing opportunities to systematically improve vocabulary and reading comprehension because of system misalignment and inefficiency caused by the lack of or disregard for reading assessment data.

During State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly's 2021 State of Education Address, she described the "opportunity gaps" learners in WI are experiencing and called for "*game changing solutions that level the playing field and provide all kids with opportunities that will set them up for a lifetime of success.*" I hope she and Governor Evers are able re-examine their WI training and experience compared to current evidence about reading assessment and see the "opportunity" that SB446 represents to apply scientific findings and guidance to create a consistent equitable multi-tiered systems of support in K-2 classrooms across the state of WI and the ripple effect it would have for all students in all of their learning throughout their life.

Without further guidance and accountability regarding the assessment and progress monitoring of foundational early literacy skills, school systems will not evolve their practices to appropriately and equitably address all the components of reading for all students, including students with dyslexia.

The beliefs and outdated practices are so deeply ingrained in the culture of Wisconsin schools, thoughtful guidance must be legislated. Experiencing success is the most powerful tool for changing beliefs and behavior. As schools work to implement the system of assessment in SB454 and collaborate with colleagues and parents to develop plans to respond to their assessment results, student's reading skills will improve. Educational leaders and teachers will evolve based on results.

Opponents describe SB454 as anti-education or anti-teacher. SB454 creates a minimum floor for local selection of evidence based assessments to guide development, re-alignment, and improvement in the K-2 reading multi-tiered system of support that could function as intended, addressing most of the needs of struggling readers in the classroom and reducing the number of special education students. It will also address the unhealthy dynamic that is created when schools are not accessing and applying the scientific evidence and national guidance most people, including parents, have access to online. SB454 is actually pro-education, pro-teacher, pro-student, and pro-parent. Implementation is necessary and urgent to relieve the increasing overwhelm and frustration of all stakeholders and contribute to addressing learning loss and improving student achievement in all grades and all subjects.

I support SB454 as an educator, parent, taxpayer, and previous school board member. I suggest school leaders use the draft legislation to review their MTSS systems. I ask Republican and Democrat legislators to vote in favor of this bill. I will ask Governor Evers to sign it. I ask Dr. Underly, the DPI, the new Literacy Task Force being created, and the WSRA, and other WI associations of educational professionals to shift their approach and choose to champion it.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nancy Dressel
985 198th Ave
Somerset, WI 54025

ncdressel@gmail.com



October 6, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Darling and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this vitally important issue.

I am currently the National Director at The Reading League. The Reading League is a nonprofit organization with the mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction. We are over 30,000 members strong, nationally and internationally, with 17 state chapters, including Wisconsin. In addition to my work at The Reading League, I personally have over 30 years of experience in the field of education, serving as a teacher, administrator, college instructor, organizational leader, and professional development provider throughout the country, including working with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction during the Reading First years. The through line of all my work is early literacy.

The Reading League has become a well-respected and prominent organization promoting the evidence around effective reading instruction, known as the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of *scientifically-based research* about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties.

In my own work personally and in our collective work at The Reading League, we find that teachers are hungry to know what works in teaching reading and are eager to learn about these scientific principles and practices. Educators primarily want to answer these questions: How do children learn to read? How can instruction most effectively match that process? Why do some children struggle? What can be done about it?

Our focus at The Reading League is to provide that all-important link from research-to-practice, to ensure that early first instruction is maximized so that reading difficulties are prevented; this is critically important. It is also critically important that reading difficulties are identified early on before the downward trajectory of development leaves children further and further behind, requiring intervention beyond the primary grades, when the gap between their achievement

and that of their normally progressing peers is nearly insurmountable. There are countless stories of children who are not identified early and therefore do not receive intensive instruction in those crucially important early years, and are essentially caught up in a “wait to fail” model. While some of those children may be diagnosed as dyslexic, the issues are the same for all struggling readers: How do we identify those children early on so that we can provide the most effective instruction at the most opportune time?

We work with educators nationwide so we have a pulse on the day-to-day needs and wants of teachers. In addition to the knowledge of the science of reading and effective instructional practices, teachers’ greatest identified needs are around effective and useful tools for screening and diagnosing children’s reading: How do I assess children? What do I do with the data? How can this data inform my instruction? Teachers and educational leaders want valid and reliable early benchmark screeners, “check engine lights,” if you will, to inform them if a child is at risk. They want valid and reliable diagnostic tools to help them “drill down” to determine gaps in skill areas and to subsequently pinpoint instruction. Not all tools are created equal; it is essential that teachers are provided with the best proven instruments for assessing children. In addition to these tools, teachers want parents to be integral partners in the process and they want leaders and stakeholders to support them in these efforts.

If we can identify children early on with valid and reliable measures, and teach effectively based on those identifications, we can prevent children from becoming enmeshed in that downward spiral of reading failure, and we can prevent unmanageable numbers of children from needing special services when our personnel and instructional resources are stretched thin. Imagine a world where a multi-tiered system of support model is effective for ALL children; where Tier 1 instruction, first instruction delivered to all, teaches at least 85% of our children to read, and those who need additional intensive support are identified early and can receive the services they need. Imagine a world where at least 95% of Wisconsin’s children learn to read and can thrive as literate citizens of the 21st century. It can be done and it is being done elsewhere. I actually worked very closely with the principal from MO that you mentioned. It is possible.

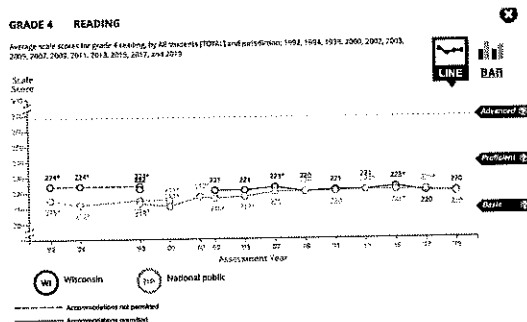
Whether it is through legislation, policy, advocacy, or leadership, we are all stakeholders in our children’s right to be taught to read. Make no mistake, this is a civil rights issue and a social justice issue. All of our children deserve the best instruction and all teachers deserve our support. ALL means ALL. We know what needs to be done. We can empower teachers with the knowledge and tools they need and want.

Thank you.

Laura Stewart
National Director, The Reading League

Wisconsin AB 446 – Reading Roadmap to Success Act Testimony by Dr. Danielle ‘Neill’ Thompson, CCC-SLP

- 1992 – Wisconsin state reading scores are above national average
- 1998 – Early Infant Newborn Hearing Screening, one of the most common congenital conditions
 - o 23 years later, 98.3% of over four million children in the United States are screened with valid and reliable measures and the data is reported.
- 2021 – Many variables, yet still, a steady decline in reading scores over 29 years - 64% of 4th grade students are reading below proficient skill levels and 61% of 8th graders.



GRADE 4 READING 2019 At or above Proficient



The percentage of students in Wisconsin who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 36 percent in 2019. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2017 (35 percent) and in 1998 (34 percent).

- Up to 92% - The number of students who can be normalized when found through early screening. This means when we find risk early (PreK-1), we can normalize reading trajectories.
- October 2021 - Current reality in a Wisconsin school district – *we are...*
 - o Using funds already allocated to purchase a valid and reliable early assessment tool
 - o Building teacher knowledge and practice around how to use data to change lives and reading outcomes
 - o Building a stronger multi-level system of support (MLSS) to provide for the intensified targeted instruction early screening data implores us to do
- 1949 – Man Gulch – Re-think
- What is our identity as community members and policy makers watching this happen when we have the literal opportunity to save lives? Will we be the ones that light the backfire and stop the rising numbers of students failing to meet reading proficiency expectations?
- This work starts as early as birth but no later than second grade if we want to find risk and change what happens to an alarming number of Wisconsin students.
- It may not be perfect, but this policy will lay the foundation for a brighter future and as one school district in Wisconsin is already demonstrating, re-thinking early screening, systems and instruction is possible and with just a few inputs. This is something all children deserve, not just a few.

Thank you.

Testimony before the Wisconsin Senate Education Committee
6 October 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee on the important topic of reading in our schools and the implications for equity posed by Senate Bill 454. Many states are calling for change and much of the uproar is coming primarily from two places: parents and legislatures. As an awareness about the flatline in our nation's report card relative to 4th grade reading continues to be newsworthy, more and more citizens are calling for an examination of how reading is being taught in our schools. Front and center in this chorus are champions of equity.

So I applaud you for taking steps to do what so many other states have now done: pass legislation that requires the application of science to reading assessment and instruction.

Some states require that the job be done by the end of third grade. The reason for this is so students can make good use of the remaining years of schooling to build knowledge for post-secondary access, technical trades, and the life ahead. Integral to reaching all of those goals is knowing early enough *where* kids stand so instruction can be tailored to meet their

needs. We call it “universal” screening for a reason. And, therein lies the promise of equity.

Predicting who is at risk of failure early on is critical to meeting the benchmarks to follow. It is a good first step and will require additional supports to ensure that students are getting the right instruction throughout the early years.

The Barksdale Reading Institute has been at this for more than 20 years. And we have worked at every segment of the education pipeline to build a better system for delivering effective reading instruction, including how we train teachers in the first place. It’s been a heavy lift for sure, but here’s one lesson I would offer you: You can spend a lot of time trying to change hearts and minds about when to assess and how to teach reading. But when you provide hardworking educators with the right tools and the right training based on the convergence of science their students’ will learn to read. *It is then* that hearts and minds will change; and they will thank you. Unlike so much in education, this good work will have staying power, and you can move on to conquer the next big challenge.

My state of Mississippi made these changes more than eight years ago. This early detection, coupled with evidence-based instruction and

coaching statewide produced our rise in NAEP. Mississippi was the only jurisdiction to show growth the last time NAEP was administered. If Mississippi can break the flatline, so can Wisconsin.

The proposal you have before you will be good for Wisconsin kids and their path to learning to read. It will support learning to read WELL, more efficiently, and on time. I know one of the concerns is that rigorous screening will take too much time and only result in overidentification of students for special education. This has not been our experience. Mississippi's universal approach and intensity resulted in Mississippi's national rank as 4th for poor kids and 7th for kids of color when controlling for demographics. This growth meant fewer kids in special education, not more.

Accurate and regular screening in specific, targeted skills that predict reading outcomes early enough *saves time and prevents overidentification*. Here's how: **First**, it is more accurate by catching preventable deficits early and providing clear protocols for remediating them, thus maximizing the critical period of K-2 instruction when learning how to read is the focus. **Second**, it systematically monitors progress so instruction can be adapted at the right time and prevent unnecessary failure—think of this as guard rails that prevent unwarranted special education placement. And **third**,

initiating the screening process can be a useful onramp for introducing teachers and school leaders to some of the fundamental frameworks based on the cognitive science that helps explain how reading works and informs instruction.

I've tested thousands of students across all grades during my tenure at the Reading Institute and it is heartbreaking to discover middle and high school students who have lingering deficits in something as basic as phonemic awareness. These unremedied deficits impede decoding unfamiliar words, seriously compromise writing, and hijack the development of vocabulary and background knowledge. Good screeners predict who is at-risk of failure in reading. This prediction is critical at the beginning of schooling to set kids on the right path. But Barksdale and our colleagues at the State Department of Education are so convinced of its value in keeping kids on track that we are now proposing a 4th through 8th grade pathway for literacy that includes appropriate screeners as an important thread. It's teachers who are calling for this support because they have witnessed the favorable impact on their colleagues in PK through 3rd.

As for naming specific screeners, it appears that some good homework has been done relative to identifying reliable instruments that have been

scrutinized and validated. There is no need for every district or every school to replicate this vetting process. That's just inefficient. And, while I get that local control has been a cornerstone of public education in making decisions...the biggest lesson from Mississippi I can leave with you is that lifting reading scores for a whole state requires some wholesale approaches. That means doing what works and doing it everywhere. We did it in Mississippi through a public/private partnership with our state education agency leading the way.

It is to Wisconsin's advantage to use these nationally recognized instruments and use them uniformly because they are aligned to the specific skills that predict reading performance in the future.

Furthermore, having such a clear and prescribed framework for all K-3 students can provide some welcome stability and structure as schools continue to adapt in the pandemic environment. These data will serve you well as teachers wrestle with the issue of promotions in uncertain times.

Yes, the voices of teachers matter and many aspects of teaching *should* be left to the individual educator in his or her own classroom, but when it comes to reading assessment, instruction, and intervention, the preponderance of science should be the driver. We know too much now.

And pay attention to this: the bedrock of this science is being generated right here in Wisconsin!

Substantial gold-standard cross-disciplinary research has gone into the development and validation of the screeners that have been named. So, save the debate for other issues. Check any knee-jerk reactions you may have to a mandate, especially if it is the best way to ensure equity. Mississippi followed the science and required all adults to change what they were doing....and that yielded different outcomes for their students....especially poor kids and kids of color.

Finally, no one is more eloquent or credible about this science than Wisconsin's own Mark Seidenberg. I know his *name* is becoming familiar to you through these hearings. You should also become familiar with his *phenomenal research* that is having an impact among educators. Our Reading Institute brought Mark to Mississippi to spend two days addressing our state literacy coaches, our higher education faculty, and our legislative education committees. Why? Because he has deep knowledge about the brain and how it processes language for reading. He is Wisconsin's gem! Other states who are showing progress readily seek and heed his advice. Wisconsin should be one of them.

The proposal you are entertaining to replace the current reading readiness assessment program with a three-tiered early literacy screening process is based on sound science. There are plenty of other states who have already done this. That may not be a reason to do it, but I'm from one of them and it's made all the difference. I can't find a single downside to what is being proposed, unless you kick this can down the road and let other states like Mississippi surpass your kids in reading.

Thanks for your attention.



Testimony: SB 454 / AB 446
Andrew Davis, Director for Government Affairs
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
October 6, 2021

Madam Chairwoman and members, thank you for the opportunity to voice MMAC's support for this legislation. It is important that we share with you the value our membership and the business community places on early childhood education and the role it plays in our mission.

The MMAC is a regional chamber serving nearly 2,000 member companies that employ 300,000 people in the metro-Milwaukee area. It is our mission to invest capital, grow business and create jobs. K-12 education has always been a top priority for our organization. We have always been an active participant with an aggressive agenda to increase educational attainment and improve career development to help feed the talent pipeline for our members and employers in the region.

Businesses are a major funding source for K-12 education. School property taxes on commercial, industrial, and personal property accounts for 42% of the levied total. Corporate income and payroll taxes contribute to the \$7.7B in state funds that supports all publicly funded educational options. Nearly 40% of the metro-Milwaukee region's K-12 student output comes from the city. As consumers of a demographic of richly diverse talent, businesses have a substantial stake in K-12 education.

The workforce age population is projected to grow by just 1% through 2040, this puts a premium on improving high-school graduation and college matriculation rates for the region's youth. The lack of access to quality early childhood education further complicates positive progression. Falling behind early impacts the opportunity provided through K-12 education and carries forward in overall educational attainment.

A child spends the first years of their life up until 3rd grade "learning to read" and spends the rest of their life "reading to learn." A student who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time. When factoring in poverty, a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time than his or her proficient peer. There are incredible educational gaps to overcome in Milwaukee. A sentiment captured by the fact that just 8% of all Milwaukee students earn both a high-school diploma and a college degree. From an employer's perspective this greatly narrows the talent pipeline that draw from. Quality early childhood education and access to it is the biggest help to overcome some of the barriers.

The MMAC supports this legislation because it can help close educational gaps by providing additional support to students by addressing literacy as early as we can. I thank you again for hearing testimony on these pieces of legislation. I urge your favorable consideration of SB 454 to send a clear message to students that need our help the most.

###



October 6, 2021

Good morning. My name is Peggy Wirtz-Olsen. I am the President of the Wisconsin Education Association Council representing public school educators across the state.

Learning to read is one of the most important skills in modern society. Not only does reading serve as the major foundational skill for school-based learning, but reading ability is strongly correlated to opportunities for academic and vocational success. For young learners, a critical transition takes place during elementary school; until the end of third grade, most students are 'learning to read.' Beginning in fourth grade, however, students begin 'reading to learn.' I recognize that students who are not reading at grade level by third grade will begin having difficulty comprehending the written material that is a central part of the educational process in the grades that follow and, ultimately, to success in life. Meeting increased educational demands becomes more difficult for students who struggle to read.

Recognizing the importance of high-quality assessments and maximizing instructional time, the Wisconsin Education Association Council opposes Senate Bill 454 for two fundamental reasons:

- 1) The screener definition as outlined in the bill is highly limited in nature and does not address all aspects of reading skill acquisition.
- 2) The increased amount of time spent on assessment decreases instructional time.

Senate Bill 454 defines a universal screening assessment as an assessment that evaluates a pupil's skill in phonemic awareness, decoding skills, rapid naming skills, alphabet knowledge, and letter sound knowledge. Such a screening assessment is highly prescriptive and yet incomplete, focusing on a narrow set of skills. For example, it does not include important aspects of reading development such as orientation to text, reasoning, working memory, vocabulary development, disposition to literacy, or comprehension. Reading is much more than sounding out words. The proposed screener also fails to recognize the important connections between reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Secondly, increasing the amount of time spent on assessment decreases student instructional time. Imagine Mrs. Keating's 4-year-old kindergarten classroom. She has been assigned 32 students with a part-time paraprofessional. Senate Bill 454 will further legislate the operation of her classroom and her students' daily schedule by tripling the amount of time she spends

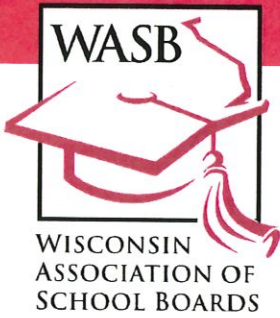
Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President
Bob Baxter, Executive Director

administering reading readiness screeners. Let me explain how this works for her now. After spending hours of her prep time to be trained in the screening assessment, Mrs. Keating takes one student at a time into the hallway for approximately 40 minutes to administer the screener. Picture a school hallway with students, educators, parents, and entire classrooms constantly walking by creating distraction during her administration of this screener. This leaves 31 of her students to work independently. If the assistant happens to be scheduled in her classroom at the time, Mrs. Keating's students are supervised by a para educator. Some school districts provide substitute teachers for this purpose, but not all do. Mrs. Keating's does not. Then she spends a minimum of 30 minutes per student scoring the screener and performing data entry of the results. As the President of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, I represent the professionals working with students every day. I can assure you that leaving 31 young learners to work independently while Mrs. Keating administers screeners to her students one at a time is not best instructional practice. More time assessing students means less time instructing students. This bill proposes to triple what Mrs. Keating is now expected to do in relation to reading screeners.

There is an urgency of ensuring that children develop proficient reading skills by the end of third grade, especially those living in poverty or in impoverished communities, or whose first language is not English. Increasing the number of screeners in 4- and 5-year-old kindergarten is not the answer nor is implementing more paperwork by developing individualized learning plans for students identified as at-risk. We need to take a wholistic approach to early childhood instruction by instituting universal pre-K. We need to create high-quality, well-funded learning experiences for young children and provide wrap-around supports to our students who need them. We need to honor and recognize the social, emotional, executive function, and cognitive competencies children bring with them to school, and we need to encourage and systemize constructive play in the early years.

Finally, I urge this committee to look seriously and to look closely at the testimony provided in writing and in person by key stakeholder organizations such as the Wisconsin State Reading Association, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. You have a trove of expertise at your disposal. This includes the tens of thousands of members I represent. It would be to the benefit of Wisconsin's public-school students to fully and genuinely engage educational partners in conversations around reading instruction and other issues facing Wisconsin's Public Schools.

Thank you.



122 W. WASHINGTON AVENUE, MADISON, WI 53703
PHONE: 608-257-2622 • TOLL-FREE: 877-705-4422
FAX: 608-257-8386 • WEBSITE: WWW.WASB.ORG

JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director
DATE: October 6, 2021
RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 454, relating to reading readiness assessments

We want to begin by being clear that the WASB believes that: a) this bill is a well-intentioned effort to improve reading instruction in our schools and b) improvements are, in fact, needed. We also want to be clear from the outset that WASB members are not specialists in reading and have adopted no resolutions addressing specific strategies for reading instruction or how best to address reading difficulties other than to adopt a resolution supporting the creation of a dyslexia guidebook.

Senate Bill 454 is a massive overhaul of the reading readiness program, including a laundry list of highly prescriptive new state mandates relating to screening, assessments, interventions, parental notifications and reporting requirements.

In essence, the bill would fundamentally change the nature of classroom interactions around reading in the early grade level, requiring the implementation of differentiated instruction on a scale never before seen in Wisconsin schools. Some may argue this is overdue and necessary. We can understand their point. No skill is as fundamental to student achievement as the ability to read. However, the bill before you addresses only a portion of what is needed to move the needle on improving reading proficiency in this state. By focusing on screeners and assessments but ignoring the need for systematic improvements in teacher training, and investments in professional development and instructional coaches, the bill falls short of offering what is needed.

But don't just take our word for it. At the Assembly hearing on the companion bill to Senate Bill 454, Dr. Kymyona Burk, a nationally recognized expert, described the steps the state of Mississippi took to implement its milestone reading improvement legislation. The first step (or "Bucket 1"), she stressed, was to provide support for teachers. This included the state providing funding for professional development for teachers in the science of reading, as well as for placing state-funded instructional coaches in the lowest performing schools to further instruct teachers on effective strategies. She described how Mississippi placed support for teachers ahead of universal screeners with diagnostic assessments, which were placed in "Bucket 2." Resources to assist parents were placed in "Bucket 3." We agree that teachers need more effective literacy instruction during both pre-service and in-service training and greater access to proven intervention strategies when students are struggling.

Many of our concerns with Senate Bill 454 are based on local control arguments, including our members' directive to oppose unfunded state mandates and their preference for flexibility.

The testing mandates themselves are very specific, even dictating what companies and products must be approved for use. No funding is provided to address the additional testing, staffing and notice requirements imposed by the bill. Of equal concern, no funding is provided to address professional development, instructional coaching or curricular/instructional materials that are needed to really move the needle on reading performance. The cost of equipping teachers with the training, curriculum and instructional materials needed to put the data generated by the testing called for by this bill are likely to dwarf the costs of the testing itself.

We thank Sen. Bernier and her staff for allowing us the opportunity to meet with Dr. Burk in her capacity as a representative from Excellence in Education National, Inc. out of Tallahassee, FL and to hear arguments for supporting this approach. One of the primary arguments was that this approach was adopted in Mississippi and their reading test scores have improved significantly.

The problem with comparing states in the K-12 realm is that everything else is not equal. States fund K-12 education differently, have different demographics, and different approaches to students' failure to perform at grade level, etc. As an example, Mississippi retains (holds back) kids in third grade if they do not score sufficiently on a reading exit exam and, in fact, holds back more students than any other state [according to the Fordham Institute](#). This leads us to ask: Would Wisconsin have to do the same to see similar improvement among its subgroups of students?

Another key takeaway from our meeting was that for these initiatives to be successful, the education community from administrators down to the teachers in the classroom must buy into the approach being adopted. Indeed, Dr. Burk described how the Mississippi effort began with involvement of both the Governor and the state Department of Education, noting that the Education Department participated in drafting the Mississippi legislation. We fail to see how a legislative mandate lacking bipartisan support would accomplish this, especially with no explicit provisions outlining any outreach efforts. It is our understanding that the strategies mandated in this proposal are not currently supported by all reading experts, specialists, and associations in the state. Given that reality, and despite the moral imperative to improve reading proficiency in Wisconsin, it is hard to see how this proposal, in its current form, will achieve the kind of buy-in needed for this initiative to succeed. We urge further efforts at consensus building.

Wisconsin has adopted two major reading proposals in the recent past. Both came out of the bipartisan Read to Lead task force led by former Gov. Scott Walker and current Gov. Tony Evers (as state superintendent). Reading readiness assessments were mandated by legislation in 2011 along with a requirement, starting in 2014, that aspiring teachers pass the Fundamentals of Reading Test (FoRT) as a way to demonstrate they know how to teach reading before they get a teaching license. At that time, the state Wisconsin was trying to emulate with those requirements was Massachusetts. Regrettably, neither of these mandates has had the impact that was hoped for. If they had, we wouldn't be here today. It leads us to question if we as a state should want to "triple-down" on the approach of more screeners without first adopting some of the recommendations of the Read to Lead task force that have fallen by the wayside, including a revamping of teacher preparation program requirements to strengthen aspiring teachers' content knowledge in reading instruction to help bring research into practice.

Wis. Stats., [section 118.016](#), currently requires each pupil enrolled in 4-year-old kindergarten to 2nd grade in a school district or in a charter school to be annually assessed for reading readiness utilizing a screener selected locally that must evaluate whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge.

Since the reading readiness assessments were mandated on school districts, the statutes that were originally written to direct schools to a certain provider's screener assessment have changed several times. First, the statutory requirements were worded to require districts to use the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment. Then, they were expanded to allow more flexibility to use other assessments in addition to PALS. Last session, opinion shifted to yet another assessment, Predictive Assessment of Reading (PAR) and legislation was introduced to require that screener. This bill would once again change the definition for an approved screener as well as adding two new screeners (level 1 & 2) with different definitions. The bill also mandates that certain testing products be approved by the DPI for use in schools.

We are concerned with the staff time required to administer up to triple the number of assessments in kindergarten through second grade, by adding requirements that all students be screened—including those who are far above grade level expectations—and the disruptive nature of continually changing assessments. We are interested in knowing whether and to what extent schools would be able to continue using their current assessments. If schools have to scrap their current reading readiness assessments, valuable longitudinal data could be lost, making it harder for schools to evaluate their reading curriculum and instructional practices.

In all probability, more testing equates to less time spent on instructing students. It also means that while the classroom teachers administer these assessments to individual students or small groups of students, another adult (e.g., a substitute teacher or paraprofessional) is supervising the remaining students in the class, presumably less effectively than would the regular classroom teacher. Current reading assessments already identify which students are struggling readers and teachers know who these students are. These students need more time from teachers on direct reading interventions, and teachers need the time to create intervening strategies, personalized, for different students. More time devoted to test administration has the unintended consequence of adversely impacting instruction in reading and other content areas for *all* students, as teachers simply have less time to prepare for, and to deliver, instruction when more time is committed to testing. Because time spent with a particular student on reading interventions is time the student is not engaged in the same subject content as other students in the classroom, it is imperative that teachers receive adequate training and have an adequate understanding of how to effectively implement those interventions. Otherwise, the danger is a student may fall behind in other subject matter/content areas, without progressing adequately in reading.

We note that there is growing skepticism about the value or worth of passing the FoRT exam as an indicator of actual teacher performance in teaching reading and little credible evidence that passing the FoRT exam, by itself, improves teacher performance or produces any positive impact on students' literacy skills or reading achievement. There is also recognition that the FoRT exam is likely culturally biased and creates a barrier to teachers of color entering the profession. This unintended consequence is in direct conflict with one of the key strategies for addressing our racial achievement gaps.

Attesting to skepticism about the effectiveness of the FoRT exam, there have been bipartisan bills passed and introduced to eliminate the FoRT test requirement in certain circumstances. Last session, 2019 Act 44 created an alternative to the requirement for special education teachers and this session, 2021 SB 114 would waive the requirement during a public health emergency.

We bring up these examples only to illustrate that “cherry picking” only certain requirements from other states that have shown improvement in their reading scores will not necessarily translate to success in Wisconsin. More than additional testing is needed.

It is important to note that that local school districts have not just been sitting on their hands, they've been reevaluating their curricula and instruction and trying new strategies to improve reading. They are doing their best to equip teachers to address the problems via professional development, instructional coaches, evaluating what is working (or isn't working) with particular children and adjusting accordingly. That work needs to continue and needs to be better resourced. Testimony at the hearing on the Assembly companion bill indicated that Mississippi provided \$9.5 million in the first year its reading law was in effect (2013-14) and has been funded ever since at \$15 million per year. (The funding in Mississippi supports summer reading programs or summer reading camps, additional professional development and the purchase of high-quality curriculum and instructional materials.) Tennessee lawmakers recently approved a reading readiness initiative and devoted \$100 million to that effort.

We **do** applaud the legislative authors of the proposal for their desire to improve literacy among students in Wisconsin's schools. We also empathize with the desire to do *something* via legislation. That being said, there are no magic wands or easy answers, or we would have done it already.

We encourage further conversations about what we can do in our schools to improve reading readiness. Realistically, those conversations need to address targeting resources and developing strategic interventions beyond simply mandating additional testing. We agree that something needs to be done but we also need to do the hard work getting buy-in to approaches that have shown promise with a broad array of stakeholders including teachers, reading specialists, administrators and school board members, and parents. So far, that consensus has eluded us in Wisconsin, yet we need to continue to try to find common ground and be willing to compromise to find a plan for change that we can all get behind.

SB 454 – 6 October 2022

My name is Laura Houser. I am a mother of a 10 year-old girl with Dyslexia. I am also a pediatrician here in Madison.

My daughter starting having trouble with reading in kindergarten. She struggled to sound out words, even the same words over and over again within a book. Her school uses a whole language approach. Her teachers, as wonderful as they were, told us to be patient, or reassured us that she wasn't behind, even as her peers soared ahead.

My daughter qualified for intervention during the second half of 2nd grade because she had troubles with fluency and was progressing more slowly in her reading levels. She made some slow progress with her 2 semesters of intervention, eking out enough progress to "pass" the intervention but not enough to catch up with her peers. She became very self-conscious about her slow reading and it began impacting her in other school subjects, such as with trouble solving word problems in math.

My physician-mother radar was alarming by this time – I knew a little about dyslexia from my training, but I didn't have any personal experience with reading problems and neither did my husband. We asked her pediatrician to refer us for neuropsychological testing. After a 6 month wait, she was tested at the beginning of 3rd grade and diagnosed with dyslexia. Her intelligence is above average, but trouble with decoding, phonics, and phonological processing.

Getting the dyslexia diagnosis was such a relief. It helped my husband and me not feel guilty that we were doing something "wrong" in raising her or in choosing public school. It helped her feel better to know that her brain is just different; she isn't dumb or lazy, she is similar to other amazing people like Albert Einstein, George Washington, and Steve Jobs. We found a private tutor who uses a structured literacy approach and she had making great gains in the past two years.

The early intervention and screening in this bill would have helped my daughter's learning disability be recognized sooner so that her intervention could have started sooner. Even more importantly, students who aren't the children of pediatricians will be identified and can be provided with appropriate supports through the schools, as it should be.

October 5, 2021

Senate Education Committee Members

Dear Senate Members,

My name is Misty Powers and I live in Green Bay Wisconsin, located in Brown County. I am a mother of 4 children. My youngest child, Brooke, has been struggling academically since the 2nd grade. Brooke is now in the 7th grade. For years I've had conferences with the teachers to try and figure out why reading and writing are so difficult for my daughter. Never once was dyslexia mentioned to me by any staff from our school district. I have provided some of Brooke's writing journals from 2nd grade. Starting in the beginning of 5th grade Brooke could not complete any of her homework. So when I started googling her symptoms, dyslexia came up. None of this would have had to happen if a universal reading screening was available or if parents had dyslexia information. Maybe we could have avoided all the mental health damage and anxiety.

I found an organization that would do a screening for dyslexia. It was very pricey but worth trying to figure out why she was not achieving her full potential academically. Brooke's screening demonstrated signs of dyslexia in her reading and writing. Brooke has below average phonemic decoding skills in the 16th percentile (about 84% of her peers decoding at a higher level than she is). I feel if Brooke would have had an assessment to evaluate reading readiness 5 years ago the current gap wouldn't be as wide now. This is why I fully support SB454 universal reading screening, dyslexia definition, parent notification and support.

Brooke is not receiving the proper help in our school district. I have reached out to our school district reading specialist. The reading specialist stated no one has a dyslexia certification. There is no help in our district for dyslexia. I will remind you that I live in Green Bay where 20,000 children go to school, not one dyslexia

specialist. 1 in 5 children have dyslexia .This is why SB454 would have been so beneficial to my daughter's success in education. I support SB454!

We have been tutoring for 2 years using a scientific evidence based program (Barton Reading) which is costing my family over \$600.00 a month. We have spent \$14,400 in tutoring cost so far. I've had to get a 2nd job to help support the cost. Please move these bills forward to help bring our youngest learners to a higher level of achievement and help guide our public schools in the appropriate direction.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Misty Powers
1712 Valorane BLVD
Green Bay, WI

mistypowers4@yahoo.com



I WINT TO THE
2 FOR AND I WINT
TO GET MET.

500 Best omro
500 Best omro

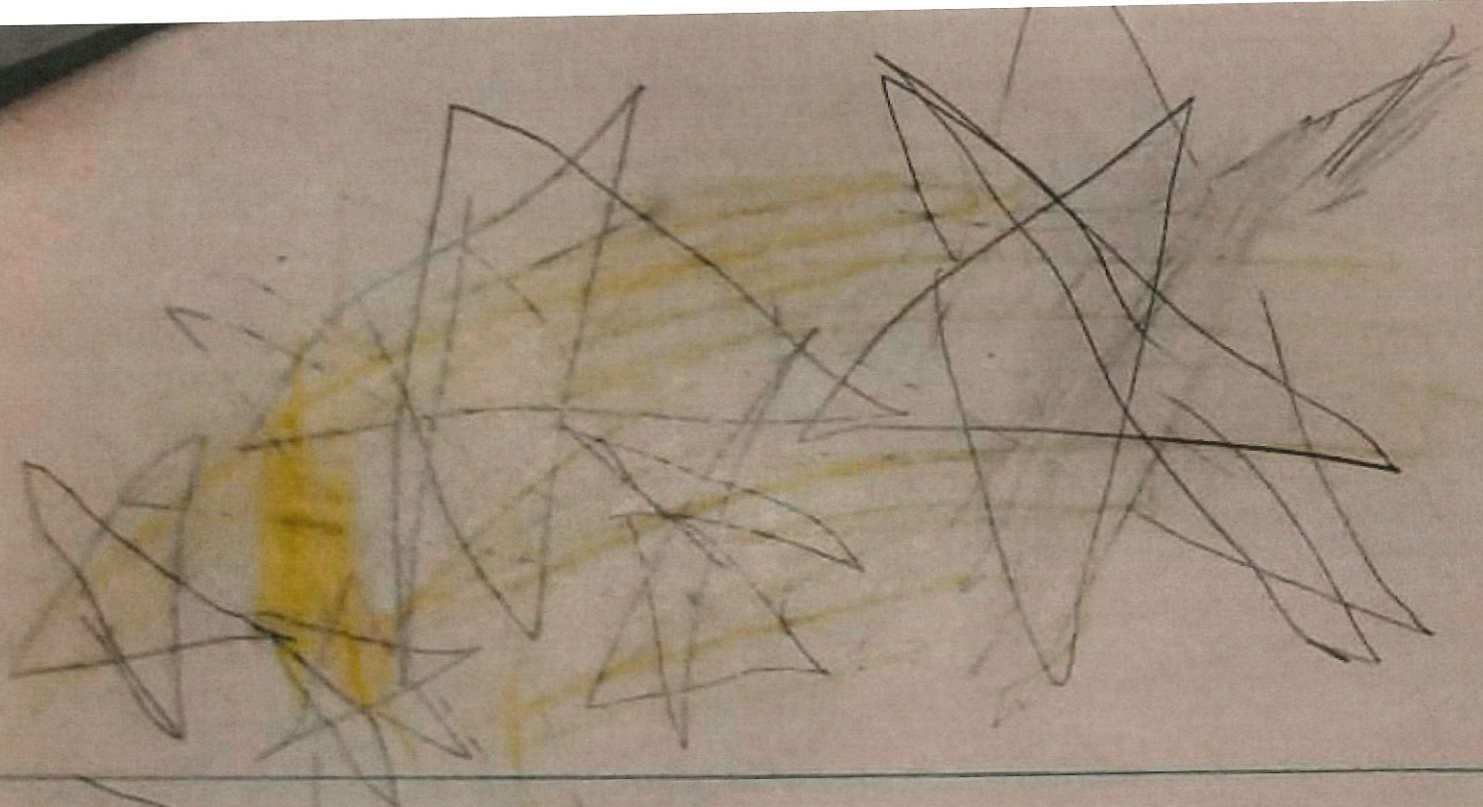
1400 OV Ffe ANP

610 hf ANV STANP

Be sld W

AND GID hr GDP PIES

omirco



I LOVE STIG
SO MOTH IT IS
SO BEOTFL.



Decoding Dyslexia WI

<https://www.decodingdyslexiawi.org/>
decodingdyslexiawi@gmail.com

Date: October 5, 2021

Re: Support of SB 454 An Act to amend 115.38 (1) (a) and 121.02 (1) (c) 3.; to repeal and recreate 118.016; and to create 119.44 (2) (bm) of the statutes; Relating to: reading readiness assessments and granting rule-making authority. (FE)

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler, Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

Decoding Dyslexia WI is a grassroots, volunteer organization dedicated to supporting families with dyslexia. We have over 1,000 members across WI working to help students who struggle to learn to read. Parents are often told to wait and trust the school because all the students in that class are struggling. It is difficult to spot the students with dyslexia and a possible reading disability in the general classroom because overall literacy skills including reading, writing and spelling are so poor. We often have parents reach out to us concerned about dyslexia when their student is struggling to read, but not all of these students have dyslexia. Some have just not been taught literacy in an effective, direct and explicit way.

The fact is that students who are identified as at risk for reading failure early and receive quality intervention are more likely to make substantial gains and stay out of special education. This bill is not a special education bill. This bill is to get students help as quickly as possible to build reading skills and keep them from a reading disability. We aim to stop the continued cycle of schools collecting data through the reading readiness screening and failing to act. Failing to notify parents in a timely manner. Failing to give parents scores in a way they can understand. Failing to provide the proper intervention, as required by WI law. Failing to provide parents intervention data.

As an organization, we still have parents who don't know about the required reporting of the reading readiness data or who cannot access their student's data. As an example, our daughter was screened using the PALS in 2013. I have attached samples of her writing and PALS scores showing she never reached benchmark. This is after she had gone through 4k with all the added help the teacher had time to give her, summer reading program between 4K and Kindergarten and months of "extra help" or intervention after the

initial screening fall of Kindergarten. We were told she was "fine" and there wasn't anything extra we could do at home to help. We were unaware of the PALS screening scores until 8 years after the assessments when I requested ALL of my daughter's records. We would have taken stronger action if we had seen these scores immediately instead of being told she was "fine and getting extra help". Does that writing sample look like this student is "fine" January of Kindergarten year?

We are asking for 1) transparency through parent involvement and notification at every level, 2) consistency through data collection and consistent quality literacy screenings and 3) accountability through data reporting to the WI DPI and WI legislature. The schools who are doing well are already doing the things laid out in this bill. Don't ALL Wisconsin students deserve the same chance to read?

Please vote YES on SB 454 to get ALL students on the road to reading.

Sincerely,

Katie Kasubaski, Decoding Dyslexia WI State Lead/Legislative Coordinator
decodingdyslexiawi@gmail.com

Section I
Part A: Group Rhyme Awareness

1. fan	door	pan	shoe	+/-
2. cake	rake	swim	ball	-
3. soap	cat	leaf	rope	+
4. gum	watch	drum	house	-
5. dog	run	pie	log	-
6. bell	well	deer	gas	+
7. hat	nose	mat	cup	+
8. rock	mouse	clock	bee	-
9. kite	night	bus	wall	-
10. wig	seal	tree	pig	+
Benchmark: 5				Score: 4 /10

STOP If student scores below the benchmark:
Administer Individual Rhyme Awareness and include only the
Individual score in Summed Score.
Record both scores on Class Summary Sheet.

Section I
Part B: Group Beginning Sound Awareness















1. bed	saw	bug	fab	+/-
2. road	rug	swim	pie	-
3. sail	five	run	sock	-
4. can	fish	cow	doll	+
5. house	girl	hand	bee	+
6. five	car	house	foot	-
7. door	duck	nose	well	-
8. shirt	ball	hay	shark	-
9. wall	mouse	wig	hat	+
10. pig	pot	run	shoe	-
Benchmark: 5				Score: 3 /10

STOP If student scores below the benchmark:
Administer Individual Beginning Sound Awareness and include
the Individual score in Summed Score.

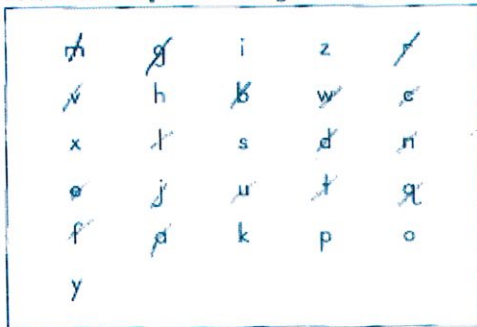
Part C: Individual Rhyme Awareness

1. bell	deer	gas	well	+/-
2. clock	rock	mouse	rain	-
3. dog	run	log	pie	-
4. mat	nose	cup	hat	-
5. drum	watch	gum	house	+
6. fan	shoe	door	pan	-
7. night	bus	wall	kite	-
8. cake	swim	rake	ball	-
9. pig	wig	seal	tree	-
10. rope	cat	soap	leaf	+
Benchmark: 5				Score: 3 /10

Section I
Part D: Individual Beginning Sound Awareness

				
				
				
				
Benchmark: 5				Score: 2 /10

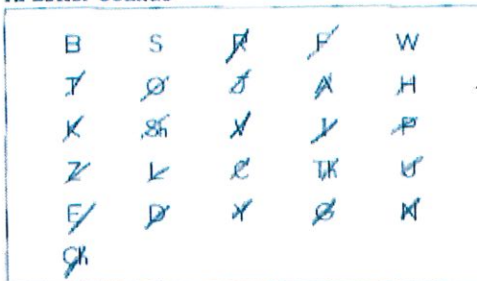
► **Section II: Alphabet Knowledge**
Lower-Case Alphabet Recognition



Benchmark: 12

Score: 9/26

► **Section III: Letter-Sound Knowledge**
A: Letter Sounds



Benchmark: 4

Score: 3/26

► **Section III: Letter-Sound Knowledge**
B: Spelling

1. sad	s	a	d	<input type="radio"/>	Bonus Point
	c	e	t	# Checked	
2. hug	h	u	g	<input type="radio"/>	Bonus Point
		o	k	# Checked	
3. lip	l	i	p	<input type="radio"/>	Bonus Point
		e	b	# Checked	
4. net	n	e	t	<input type="radio"/>	Bonus Point
		a	d	# Checked	
5. job	j	o	b	<input type="radio"/>	Bonus Point
	h	i	p	# Checked	
	g	u			
	ch				

Benchmark: 2 Score: 0/20

©2008-2012 by The Director and The Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

► **Section IV: Concept of Word**

	Pointing	Word ID	COW Word List
There was a little turtle.	<input type="radio"/> (1)	<input type="radio"/> (2)	in
He lived in a box.	<input type="radio"/> (1)	<input type="radio"/> (2)	turtle
He swam in a puddle.	<input type="radio"/> (1)	<input type="radio"/> (2)	box
He climbed on the rocks.	<input type="radio"/> (1)	<input type="radio"/> (2)	puddle
Score:	<input type="radio"/> /4	<input type="radio"/> /8	he
Pointing	<input type="radio"/>	+	little
Word ID	<input type="radio"/>	+	was
COW Word List	<input type="radio"/>	=	climbed
COW Total Score	<input type="radio"/>		swam
Pointing Benchmark: 2			rocks
Word ID Benchmark: 2			<input type="radio"/> /10
COW Word List Benchmark: 0			

► **Section V: Word Recognition in Isolation (optional)**

Preprimer	Primer	First Grade
and	away	happy
see	blue	share
to	mother	began
like	stop	hot
the	jump	then
for	little	cheeks
my	play	pony
go	find	came
is	take	running
red	very	smile
not	around	black
did	may	hand
me	ride	birthday
get	work	feeding
with	fish	ball
in	after	steps
big	help	baby
do	bird	dark
he	new	girl
can	duck	heat
Score: ___/20	Score: ___/20	Score: ___/20
Summed Score		
Phoneme Awareness + Beginning Sound Awareness + Alphabet Recognition + Letter Sounds + Spelling + COW Word List		

2

tiAs

TASI SPTO OPR to

toI MX 221

October 4, 2021

RE: Support of SB 454 Reading Readiness

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler and Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

My name is Starla Dixen and I am a resident of Roberts, Wisconsin. My family resides within the River Falls School District. I am a teacher and have a son who was identified as Dyslexic at the end of his eighth grade year. My son is currently in his senior year of high school and yet we are still dealing with the struggles of getting help for him and breaking down barriers of being a person with dyslexia. He came before your committee back in August of 2018 to share his perspective as a student dealing with dyslexia and the need for more help.

Back when Dane was in first grade, his teacher noticed that he was struggling with reading and spelling. She suggested he be tested and while he qualified for Title One, he was quickly dismissed by third grade despite minor improvements. We never received his scores but because I was teaching in that school, I was privy to why he was being dismissed. There were other kids lower than him. He was now in the gray area; too high for help and yet low to get frustrated and have his self-esteem tank and his learning come to a standstill.

We transferred to a smaller school in hopes that with a smaller class size he would be able to be helped more by the teacher. I pursued training in the Orton-Gillingham method of reading. The training I received is what made a huge difference. What was interesting is that I chose to use it with all of my students regardless of test scores and my students were becoming more confident readers because of it.

I continued to ask about options for Dane to be tested for a reading disability or dyslexia and because he wasn't low enough, he wasn't considered an emergency to get help. Weeks turned into months and while I didn't know what the cut off was, I chose to go to an outside resource for testing for dyslexia. He was identified to be mild-moderately dyslexic and when I brought the results to the school, I was told he would have to go through their tests in order to maybe qualify for an IEP or 504. According to the school, they felt his percentage was still too high for help and I was specifically told his dyslexia wasn't affecting his daily life so he wasn't eligible for a 504. Really? Were they at our home when he came home upset and calling himself dumb because he couldn't read what was on the board or take the notes fast enough? Where they around when his homework took up to four additional hours after school? What was the cut off at our school? Did we need to play the game and throw a test in order to get help?

There needs to be more help and there needs to be more training for all at the school level (administration, teachers, paras) about dyslexia and how to better help our students read. As a parent, we are told to wait for data to be collected. We are told our fears are unfounded by IEP team members. The directors of Special Education Services in our area believes that some students will never learn to read. It makes me sick to hear that because there are other options that could be pursued but the district won't due to lack of money or worse due to lack of interest and knowledge.

This bill, SB 454, is a continued effort to rectifying a broken program in Wisconsin. Parents and teachers need more information on where to go for help albeit assessment for identifying a learning issue, where to get scores interpreted, how to screen for dyslexia/reading issues and there needs to be better accountability for getting help. My child is graduating out of the system and yet, I will not stop advocating for other families and their children to get the learning help they need and deserve.

Sincerely,
Starla Dixen
428 County Rd. SS
Roberts, WI 54023

Date: October 6, 2021

Re: Support of SB 454

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler,
Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

My name is Heather Haigler and I have 2 children with disabilities that impact reading. Including, but not limited to, dyslexia. Not long after my first was diagnosed with dyslexia I went to a bookstore in the mall in Janesville on a hunt for decodable books. I asked the cashier if they carried them or any books marketed for children with dyslexia. She told me that her dad has dyslexia. I was new to everything and curious what the future might look like and I asked how he was doing. She told me he was good now because he's finally eligible for disability after having both of his feet amputated. He had never been able to hold a job because he couldn't read. I tried to appear neutral while panicking on the inside. Surely, it is better now, right? Yet, it is 2021 and here we are.

My son started intervention in kindergarten. I signed a consent form and was made aware before he started. We were constantly told to do more at home. It had gotten to a point where my son had a 2nd school day on top of his first. It was starting to affect his mental health. I mentioned my concerns at conferences and the reading specialist alluded to me being a liar. At a later conference I brought this up and she said it was an easy place to go because bad parenting is the most common cause of reading failure. Despite the fact that nothing we did was enough, we were still told he was progressing. He fell apart every

single day of 1st grade at pick-up. It started with negative self talk and escalated to stating he should be dead because he was too stupid. He was only 6 years old. We verbally requested testing at February conferences. I didn't know it had to be in writing. They started intensive intervention that Monday. A few weeks later his teacher requested I attend a status meeting. The time didn't work for my husband and I was told he didn't need to attend. It was just a status meeting and not a big deal. The meeting turned out to be the principal, teacher, and 2 specialists trying to convince me to have my son repeat 1st grade for "maturity" reasons and the bonus of no longer needing math intervention. They gave me a timeline for his IEP testing to be completed around Christmas the following school year. Thanks to members of Decoding Dyslexia, I was informed to submit a written referral for testing which forced them to complete it by the end of the school year.

We didn't have any concerns about our daughter. Reading appeared to "click" in kindergarten. She moved through the reading levels rapidly in 1st grade ending the year at about a 3rd grade reading level. She started having problems in 2nd grade with comprehension. At this point, we were pretty sure our son had dyslexia and what our daughter was experiencing didn't look like that. We had no idea what we were dealing with or where to start and were hitting roadblock after roadblock for private testing. She started 3rd in a new district at a new school and was considered low grade-level. We explained the situation to her teachers and expressed our wishes to intervene privately before she started experiencing failure. We did not want the school to intervene and just needed information. They agreed, but didn't follow through. I was being told she was fine while they had her start working with a reading specialist without our knowledge or consent. Her teacher used her own child's struggle to show that reading failure is normal. She started experiencing difficulty due to reading and writing in her areas of strength and her standardized test

scores dropped to the point of triggering intensive intervention. Exactly what we had hoped to prevent. We were finally able to schedule her for a psych-ed where she was diagnosed with dyslexia and referred to an audiologist for more testing.

This bill would require:

- Data collection. There is no reason for a child to be in intervention for over a year with no data. There is no excuse for a child to make it to 3rd grade without knowing there are missing foundational skills.
- Transparency. We couldn't even get information for private intervention.
- Personal reading plan. Kids would not be receiving intervention for years that doesn't meet their needs. It is a waste of time and resources.
- Increase accountability. They were telling us whatever they wanted while also blaming us when things didn't work. There will always be outside factors or hardship when working with children. There will always be someone or something else to blame. It is the reason literacy is so important, not a way to justify reading failure.

Please vote YES on SB 454.

Heather Haigler
1119 Cottonwood St.
Delavan, WI
haiglerh1@yahoo.com

10/05/2021

RE: Support of SB 454

To: Senate Education Committee

Dear Senators:

My name is Sarah Berger. My son Dylan is 10 years old and diagnosed with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and an auditory processing disorder. He was diagnosed when he was 9. To be clear, I knew there were issues early on and relayed these to his teachers year after year—his speech was delayed, reading was a struggle from the start, he started melting down after school and during homework, and then his progress seemed to be less and less during school reports. Through many conversations with the school, they always reassured me his work was fine, even though it was behind benchmarks. There was always an excuse why a class test or the MAP testing that school performs were low—and it was always to do with effort and behavior. There were never any indication that he was truly struggling from the school's perspective. My husband and I decided to get our own evaluation since school just kept saying my son was fine. Clearly he wasn't and it was now up to us to figure out what was going on. The school never notified my husband or myself when interventions were started. What we were told, was that he was in a reading group for kids who struggled with reading, but it was all within the classroom with his teacher so I thought nothing of this. I did not know this was part of the tiered interventions. But he bounced back and forth in and out of those groups as long as I can remember. If we would have gotten full data and scores, understood what it meant, and that he needed specific intervention—it would have been life changing. Instead we were told despite the scores, he was fine. He had a lot of catching up to do when we started outside tutoring in 3rd grade. His diagnosis from an outside evaluator was given the summer going into 4th grade. We have spent approximately \$10,000+ on evaluations, tutoring, and counseling for my son. Finding out he was dyslexic was a feeling of relief, but also of sadness, knowing the difficulties that lie ahead. But, armed with the diagnosis, I knew school would be more than happy to know what was causing his difficulties and be happy to help us on this endeavor. I couldn't have been more wrong. He did not qualify for an IEP under SLD. After multiple meetings, lengthy discussions with the school and having our outside tutors and evaluator advocate on his behalf, the school finally agreed to accept him into special education under OHI for executive functioning. This was a hard fought win for us, against a school that seemed steadfast to prevent our son from receiving FAPE—a free appropriate public education.

All the school sees and cares to see is a student that shuts down quickly, has a negative attitude towards school, and needs a lot of adult supervision and attention during independent activities. His IEP has one goal regarding executive functioning, accommodations listed, but NOWHERE does it state that he is dyslexic. They see the behaviors, but refuse to acknowledge the root cause. In fact, I spoke with this middle school case manager at the beginning of the year. I had a few questions and mentioned his dyslexia—she didn't have anything in his profile indicating he was dyslexic. How is that possible? I then handed her over our independent evaluation and independent re-evaluation that was performed a year after testing to ensure he was progressing—the school no longer had my trust.

I have a strong family history of dyslexia—my dad and brother. I know what dyslexia looks like, I grew up with it in my household—and I MISSED IT. I trusted our school and believed that as the experts they would have my son’s best interest. That they would alert me if he was behind. He is my oldest and I trusted the system. I won’t make that mistake again. I will advocate for my son until he can advocate for himself.

I believe his life could have looked very different. He is such a bright, energetic, full of life individual—and he now struggles with self-doubt, frustration whenever he can’t figure out what something says to the point of shutting down, anger, and low self-esteem. He has seen a counselor and may again in the future. It is heartbreaking to watch the joy and love of life and learning slowly leave your child’s eyes. This was avoidable. Had he been diagnosed earlier, given the interventions he so desperately needed his life would have been changed.

This is bigger than my son—he is privileged to have 2 parents who have the means, understanding, and education necessary to obtain a diagnosis, navigate this extremely complicated educational system, and support his interventions. There are too many kids whose families do not have the same resources.

That is unacceptable. In the state of Wisconsin, in 2021, it is unacceptable that a decent education comes down to resources. Please, from the bottom of my heart, I am pleading with you—support and vote YES on SB 454. As a parent, as a mother, I implore you to consider the years of evidenced-based research and to read it, understand it, and USE IT. Now is the time for change. Our kids can’t wait any longer.

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Berger RN, BSN, and most importantly Mother

nsberger08@gmail.com

October 5, 2021

Re: Support of SB 454

To: Members, Senate Committee on Education

Dear Senators,

Did you know that 1 in 5 students struggle with reading despite having average to superior intelligence? Thanks to twenty years of research conducted by scientists and reading experts, there is a body of evidence on how we learn to read. This evidence debunks older methods of reading instruction that those in opposition to SB 454 endorse. I stumbled upon this in my pursuit to understand why my inquisitive daughter avoided reading at all costs. Similar to the stories of many struggling readers, she underwent a costly private evaluation halfway through third grade. The evaluation results finally helped me make sense of her aversion to reading. My daughter is 1 in 5.

I've listened to the concerns of those who oppose SB 454. Admittedly, I do not have a background in education or public administration like many in opposition do. Instead, my background is in healthcare. I am a Registered Nurse with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I value the importance of research. I understand that the implementation of evidence-based practice is what leads to improved patient outcomes. In healthcare, we don't waste years evaluating data before we implement change. We allow science to guide our practice, and we implement changes accordingly. What would literacy outcomes look like in Wisconsin if the Department of Public Instruction employed experts capable of following the science? What if districts had guidance and support in implementing evidence-based practice in reading? Would we even be here discussing SB 454?

Those in opposition to SB 454 argue that it imposes an unfunded mandate. Why aren't currently available funds being utilized on evidence-based literacy assessments? The opposition argues that additional assessments take time away from instruction. Why does my district administer an hour-long computer-based MAP reading assessment three times a year to kindergarten students, yet my daughter was never assessed in rapid naming? She tested in the 5th percentile, and had it been assessed in kindergarten, we could have avoided years of frustration. The opposition argues SB 454 ignores comprehension. If a student cannot decode words well enough to read, what is the purpose of assessing comprehension? Finally, the opposition believes screening is unnecessary for students who are not at risk. How do you know if a student is not at risk if you don't screen them? Would you prefer a doctor who routinely screens you for high cholesterol or a doctor who allows high cholesterol to build up in your coronary arteries until you show up in the emergency room with chest pain?

When I told my daughter about SB 454, she said it's a "no-brainer" and she doesn't understand why people are letting kids struggle when we know what works. My daughter is awaiting an answer from the opposition. Thank you to those who choose to support SB 454.

Sincerely,

Moriah Quackenbush
W71N986 Harrison Ave Cedarburg, WI 53012
MoriahRN@uwalumni.com

October 5, 2021

Re: Support of SB454 The Roadmap to Reading Success Act

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler,
Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

My name is Nancy Corrigan. My husband, Don Lebar, and I live in Representative Lisa Subeck's Assembly District 78, and Kelda Roys State Senate, 26th District. We have experience with dyslexia with our grandchildren. We were able to locate two professionals who identified dyslexia in 2016 - 2017. A few years ago, as you recall, you couldn't even "say dyslexia". The cost for one of the assessments was \$2000 and we presented the 20- page document to the school IEP team. We asked that it be included in the parental input statement of the IEP because we felt it contained very critical information for the teachers to have in order to understand our grandchild's needs. We applied for tutoring through the Children's Dyslexia Center in Madison, and because we submitted the dyslexia assessment and other privately obtained info, our younger grandson was accepted for tutoring, which was free. Over a period of three years, he received approximately 140 hours of tutoring through the Center. The tutors he had were excellent and well trained and our grandson is now reading on grade level.

Please support this bill so that children in the state of Wisconsin may have the opportunity to be successful readers. This is a basic need and should be top priority. Please support this bill so that teachers will have the opportunity to receive training from our colleges and universities in Wisconsin in addition from their own school districts. We must ensure that students have access to universal reading screening now that we know dyslexia affects 1 out of 5 students. We must determine who is at risk for reading failure and provide personal reading plans for those students. Many of our families in Wisconsin can't afford the expense of obtaining personal assessments for dyslexia, so screening should be done by the schools.

We have personally experienced how hard it is for children who have not been identified early to lose confidence in themselves because they stop making progress in reading.

Please support and vote YES on SB 454

Thank you,

Nancy Corrigan

1005 Middleton Street

Madison, WI 53717

nancycorrigan01@gmail.com

Dear Senate Education members-

My daughter's journey began when she was 4 years old and I noticed that while she was a smart and happy kid, she was learning very differently than her twin sister was. I noticed that she struggled to come up with words to colors and numbers on her own. She would sometimes struggle to tell me a story because she would struggle to come up with the words she was looking for to tell me that story. Although she clearly knew so much she was struggling with something called word retrieval. It is a very classic symptom of dyslexia and an early flag of a struggling reader. But of course I did not know this at the time. I just knew something wasn't right. I had her evaluated and she began working with a speech and language pathologist in 4k. 4K was the start of my many conversations with teachers about my concern for my daughter's learning. I can't tell you how often I was told, " just keep reading to her. She'll get it. " "All kids learn at a different pace. She'll get there" I would go to parent conferences and leave in tears wondering what I was doing wrong. We were reading nightly. We practiced sight words. I was literally begging teachers to tell me what to do. I spent my own money and took her to a neuropsychologist at Children's Hospital in kindergarten looking for answers since they were not coming from the school. \$2,000 later Children's told me she was too young to diagnose anything but to come back if she was still struggling after second grade. Second grade was still two years away. I didn't want to watch her get even further behind. She needed help now. In first grade I asked the school to evaluate her and it came back that she scored too high to receive special education services. And yet the teachers and

myself were concerned with her lack of progress. Finally, in 2nd grade I took her to ACE Academy, more of my own money, to be evaluated by a private neuropsychologist and we got our diagnosis. Dyslexia. When I brought this diagnosis to the school I was told they do not help with dyslexia. I began paying for a private Barton tutor, more of my own money. Using this program we finally began to see progress in her reading.

So as of right now, in 4th grade, she has an IEP for speech and language due to her word retrieval issues, but is not getting reading help in her IEP. Even though she has a dyslexia diagnosis. She is still behind in reading. Last year she received reading intervention using the Wilson reading program. This is a program that has been proven to be successful for dyslexic children. I was very excited that she was being offered this program. However the teacher at the school is not fully trained in the Wilson program and tells me she has no plans of becoming fully trained/certified. My daughter has no teachers in the school educated on what dyslexia is or how to help a child that has it. This legislation would help get teachers trained in these programs to help our kids.

Six weeks into this school year and I have not received any information on if she qualifies for reading intervention for this year. As of right now, this year, she has received no extra reading help and I don't know if she'll get any this school year. If she does qualify, as a parent I do not receive any real reading goals for my daughter that they are working towards in intervention. I believe the only goal is simply to make progress. I do not receive any data on how exactly she is

making progress. Of course I want my child to make progress but I would like something a bit more concrete than simply to make progress. I want a plan that defines what data is being measured and how often it will be measured, analyzed and acted upon. This legislation would require schools to mediate all kids falling 25% or below on their reading tests. It would have clear goals with data reporting to prove goals are being met as well as parental involvement. It would have clear information for the parent. I have attached last year's end of year progress report for intervention to show you exactly what current intervention goals looks like. It simply tells me if she has made progress or not. As of right now, there is no real data given to the parent's.

It should not be this hard to get reading help for my daughter. One in every five children are believed to have dyslexic tendencies. Why is it so difficult in WI to find anyone in the schools that know anything about dyslexia. Why are we not screening these kids to get them the help they need before it's too late? I wasted 4 years, 4k-2nd. grade knowing something wasn't right. Begging for someone to help me. Teachers agreeing something is not right. But no answers. It was 4 years wasted for my daughter that I cannot get back for her. The fact that WI is only graduating 39% of its students capable of reading proficiently at grade level should be a real wake up to all parents. To everyone in this room. We are failing kids in WI. This is not an issue of just parents with dyslexic children. Or ones that happen to know their child is dyslexic because they are fortunate enough to have the financial resources to figure it out. This is an issue of any parent with a child in WI. Only 39% at grade level?! We

cannot just continue doing what we have been doing for the past 30 years here in Wi and expect different results. It's not working. It's time for a change. Our kids deserve better. With the passing of SB 454 I believe I would have been able to get my daughter help much sooner. I would have avoided those 4 wasted years begging for help and not knowing where to turn.

Thank you for your time today and your commitment to helping our state achieve higher reading scores for our kids.

Sincerely,

Rachel Koefel

Rachel_629@hotmail.c

Date: October 6, 2021

Re: Support of SB 454 An Act to amend 115.38 (1) (a) and 121.02 (1) (c) 3.; to repeal and recreate 118.016; and to create 119.44 (2) (bm) of the statutes; Relating to: reading readiness assessments and granting rule-making authority. (FE)

To: Chair Sen. Darling, Sen. Bernier, Sen. Nass, Sen. Larson, Sen. Smith, Sen. Jagler, Sen. Johnson

Dear Senators:

Today I am here to testify in support of SB454. My son's journey may have been different if he was given a chance earlier in his reading readiness instruction. This bill would have been a chance for him to be identified as a struggling reader and would have given me an opportunity to know the struggles he had early on. I began as a mom that was excited to send my son to a school in which I believed to be filled with opportunities that many schools don't have, as we reside in a high property taxed school district with money. I knew at the time when my son started Kindergarten that he was behind his peers, but I did not know the true extent. While he was in school, I was given the normal parent teacher conferences that stated he was struggling but he would just need time and we would watch and see. I thought to myself good they got this. Little did I know they didn't have his needs in check. I was never shown any standardized testing results, only teacher comments that they were watching him. I was informed he had behavioral issues especially during core instruction time, it was suggested he be tested for ADHD and maybe medical intervention would benefit. Fast forward to Grade 2, my child was diagnosed and put on medication and his behavior changed for the better, but his academic level fell farther behind. He was given an IEP for behavioral purposes, and I was told reading and math goals could not be provided at this time. Fast forward to Grade 4, I as his parent grew concerned at his reading and math level and paid to have an outside provider test him. I was completely shocked with the results; my son was not even reading at pre-kindergarten level and was going into the 4th grade. The school was informing me he was making slow progress, but this was not correct. I knew I had no choice and began to search for outside support because my son was now emotionally giving up and became depressed with himself. I could not find anything that didn't already have a waitlist of more than a year. I was desperate, so I found a program in IL that was willing to open a summer clinic in Door County, the catch was it would cost \$26,000 for 8 weeks. I had no other choice, so I did a community-based fundraiser with my son's story and our journey. We were able to raise the money and in 8 weeks my son's ability to read grew one and half grade levels because the instruction was exactly what he needed. It was science of reading based. We were sold and decided to pull from our district and go to IL for 18 more weeks; but this meant more expense and our family had to separate. My husband and my younger son stay in Door County and myself and my oldest son drove to IL every Sunday, stayed in an apartment, and drove back to Door County every Friday for 18 weeks. Again, at a huge expense and loss of work for myself. The total cost was \$56,000. What we gained was more than just reading levels, my son gained confidence and joy of life again. Medication didn't fix that, a reading program that was tailored to my son did! The last week we were in IL we were at a red light, and he read the road sign all by himself and said to me "mom, now that I can read, I might be able to get my license." To which I said, son you can do anything. I feel this bill would have prevented that

time in my son's life if I as a parent would have known the true extent of his struggles. Wisconsin is failing so many kids and my son's story is only one of many. Please help our youngest children and give them and their parents a chance to fight a fair fight and advocate for what is best for their children.

Kari Baumann

2231 County Road Q

Bailey's Harbor, WI 54202



Kimberly Feller-Janus
5808 Auburn Drive Fitchburg, WI 53711
fellerschool@gmail.com

Good morning! My name is Kim Feller-Janus and I am the founder of a grassroots nonprofit (in the near future) K-5 school, which will be located in Dane County, Wisconsin. I would like to thank you for providing this opportunity for me to speak on behalf of **all** children who are struggling to learn to read, children who we know are at-risk for learning to read, and for those children who have been diagnosed with dyslexia.

So, thank you.

****As the hearing progresses, I plan to take some of this information out to shorten my presentation and then include information that has not been shared by others who are testifying. Thank you for your understanding and flexibility.

....

Just a little background about myself...I'm a Wisconsin native and attended Verona Public Schools as a child...I attended UW-Madison to earn a teaching degree and within days of college graduation, I was hired as a Kindergarten Teacher in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. This was a big deal for me - to move away from home and land my dream job! I remember spending days upon days setting up my classroom so that the learning environment in the Fall would be welcoming, cheerful, and developmentally appropriate for my incoming kindergarteners. The very first thing that I did was label the room. I labeled **everything**...from the pencil sharpener to the clock on the wall. This was what I was taught to do...if you surround children with words, they will memorize them. I remember putting a name tag strung with yarn around each child's neck on the first day of school. This was to help me remember their names, but also to teach them to learn to read the names of their classmates. If they see the name tags often enough, they will learn to read the names of their classmates. Afterall, the theory of the whole language approach is to teach whole words.

....

I continued to use this approach as a First Grade Teacher in Virginia and Michigan alike. I labeled everything in my classrooms and surrounded my students with lots of

books, because if you immerse students with good literature they will learn to read...at least, in theory they will all learn to read. So, I did what I was taught and read aloud to my students every day and I spent a good portion of my "balanced literacy block" teaching reading strategies. I taught them to use visual clues, semantic clues, and context clues. When a child would come to a tricky word I would say, "Look at the pictures. Does that help?" or "What would make sense to you?" or "What do you think would sound right?" Then, as a last resort I would say, "Let's look at the first letter." For many of the hundreds of children that I taught over the years, I believed that I was a really good teacher because the majority of my students were memorizing their sight words and reading at or above grade level by the end of first grade.

....

However, it always bothered me that there were consistently 3-4 students who just couldn't catch on to the whole reading thing. And, this would happen in every first grade classroom, year after year. And, year after year I would attend RtI (Response to Intervention) meetings to try to get these children additional reading support. Of course, in order to begin the RtI process I would have to spend most of the school year collecting data, as I needed to **prove** that a child was not making progress, and I needed to **prove** that I tried different ways to instruct the child over a given period of time. After a couple years of this frustration, I got clever and began collecting data on Day One of First Grade for any child that I thought was going to struggle. I was tired of the wasted time and the angst it caused for me, but most importantly I was angry that my students had to show failure before they would even be considered a candidate for reading intervention. My heart broke for these children, and I wasn't alone, other teachers experienced the same thing.

....

In 2006, I decided that having a Master of Education degree, along with more than 15 years of teaching experience, was not enough to help my struggling readers. I needed to learn more about these children because they were all very bright children with exceptionally creative minds.

....

So, I began taking courses on weekends to earn 19 grad credits for a Wisconsin State Reading Teacher certification. Unfortunately, I learned more of the same....how to use trade books in my instruction, how to include a variety of genres to motivate my readers, how to use running records as a means to help teachers find a student's independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels, and the list goes on. Well, before I even finished my first credit to receive this certification, I was hired as a Reading Interventionist in a Wisconsin Public School with the contingency that I would continue my education while teaching. No problem. I set up my office space immediately and began visiting classrooms. I was hired to coach elementary school teachers on managing the classroom while teaching small guided reading groups. As the year

progressed, I would be assigned to teach small groups of children in First and Second Grade who were at Tier II of the Rtl process. I would attend IEP meetings for those children who had more than just a problem with learning to read, as these children were labeled with an **SLD (Specific Learning Disability) which could include *dyslexia***. **The IEP team would never say dyslexia aloud as nobody on the team had ever diagnosed dyslexia and nobody on the team knew much about it. In fact, the majority of educators, including myself, didn't believe that it was really a disability - mainly because many of these students were very successful in other subject areas, so why a student couldn't read had to be because of something that was out of our control and not because of our teaching practices. Wrong.**

....

Being a Reading Teacher and Literacy Coach was often very rewarding, as I received excellent feedback from parents and administration alike. But, after seven years I decided to resign. I needed time to reflect and time to figure out why there was a regular small group of very bright children who continued to struggle to learn to read even after months and months of intervention. In addition, **why** was there an even greater number of students in the third grade classrooms who began to plateau as readers. Progress seemed to stop at the third grade.

....

So, I chose to tutor out of my home and spend time learning more about the children who struggle to learn to read. I became fascinated with the brain research and the work that had been done with children who have dyslexia. Our brains are not wired to learn to read. Our brains are wired to learn to speak, but not read. We need to be taught. We need to be taught explicitly and systematically if we want to be strong readers. This is especially important for those children who are at-risk for reading problems and/or diagnosed with dyslexia. And the prime time to teach these students is when they are young, years before they reach the third grade.

....

As an educator for over 30 years I have changed the way that I teach young children to read and it is the way that our brains are intended to learn. Now I know that children need to master the skills of phonemic awareness and systematic phonics before we can expect them to be good readers. I can confidently say that by learning the facts about dyslexia and learning the science behind effective reading instruction, and receiving excellent training by experts in the field, it has helped me to become a far better reading teacher than ever before. I am finally equipped to teach all young children to read - with or without dyslexia.

....

By sharing my experiences as an educator, I know firsthand that there is **absolutely** a lack of knowledge about dyslexia among educators and families. And, that there

absolutely needs to be a guidebook available to educators and families to help them understand the facts about dyslexia. There are many other states who have already published dyslexia guidebooks and Wisconsin needs to do the same so that everyone can have a chance to be informed as well. Bill 110 will save other teachers and families tons of time, and it will help to improve the quality of reading instruction in our schools.

It needs to happen on behalf of all those who are learning to read. Thank you.

October 6, 2021

SB 454

My name is Cheryl Ward, I would like to add my strong support for the passage of the Reading Readiness bill SB454 as a critical first step of many, to begin improving reading instruction and outcomes for students in WI schools. I want to share with you some of my personal story; a story that has much in common to so many others, and why passage of this bill must happen quickly and needs to lead to other initiatives to improve foundational reading instruction and teacher effectiveness.

I am a certified dyslexia tutor in private practice north of Milwaukee and a supervisor and coach for teachers enrolled at Carroll University's dyslexia certificate program. I am a past president of the WI branch of the International Dyslexia Association, currently on the advisory board of the WI chapter of the Reading League and a founding member of the Wisconsin Reading Coalition. In the past, I have served on my local K-8 school board and have been a substitute teacher. More importantly, I am the parent of an adult son and grandmother of an 8-year-old third-grade grandson, both with dyslexia.

In addition to advocating for my son and grandson, I have been advocating for those with reading disabilities since BEFORE the turn of the century. Helping those with dyslexia learn to read, along with training and mentoring teachers in effective reading instruction is my second career (my first was in healthcare). Advocating for literacy over the years I have met with leaders and staff at the DPI and with many members of the legislature, some still here, leading to little progress when measured by student reading outcomes.

In 1939 E. W. Dolch, the psychologist famous for the frequently used Dolch Word List, still used today, wrote "Failure in reading is likely to lead to a general sense of inferiority that will cripple the individual's whole life." p. 3 *A manual for remedial reading. Champaign, IL: Garrard Press.*

I teach primarily children but have taught adults to read. A properly trained teacher can teach anyone to read commensurate with their ability to think using the right instruction and the gift of time. Truly one of the greatest rewards I experience in doing remedial reading instruction is seeing the transformation in a child's confidence and happiness.

I began to be concerned about my son when he was 2 years and not beginning to talk, one of the red flags for dyslexia. At three he qualified for Wisconsin's early childhood program, receiving continuous, monitored, special education services from our local school district. At the time, I **assumed** that because I was in what was considered by many a leading school district, my son would have access to teachers who had the knowledge, resources, and experience to do what was necessary to teach him.

Even with all this, his diagnosis of suspected dyslexia was not shared until the **end of 3rd grade** by his SPED teacher who shared with me her own limitations in teaching what she believed to be a profoundly dyslexic student. She scared the life out of me when she said no one in any school would be able to help and I would be the only constant that could advocate for him. Some of you in this room are

blessed with a brain that easily identifies the sounds of letters and spelling patterns, making it hard to know the depth of pain that a struggling reader experiences.

I knew immediately that I needed to become educated about dyslexia. I began to read about dyslexia and attended as many meetings as I could, locally, regionally, and nationally. I felt like a lone warrior, slowly sifting through information, learning the hard reality that my son was in a public-school system that did not have trained professionals that could teach him to read.

A child's behavior is the communication of something, good-bad, desirable, or undesirable. The ability to manage emotions while learning academic skill such as learning to read can be impossible for children who are not having their instructional needs met. Like me son, struggling readers will misbehave in all sorts of ways, sometimes just being placed in the school's front office doing nothing, including learning.

When my son transitioned into middle school it was a far less nurturing environment. Like what parents experience now, school personnel are inconsistent in their approaches and understanding of what a struggling reader needs, with so many continuing to struggle and demonstrate escalating behavioral problems.

When I attended my first annual International Dyslexia Association (IDA) meeting in Chicago I was surrounded by researchers and practitioners with the knowledge and methods to teach these kids. I will never forget the keynote address given by Dr. Reid Lyon from the National Institute for Children's Health. He said that if a child does not receive appropriate remediation by the age of eleven (my son would turn 11 the following February) the gap in learning, may narrow with effective instruction, but is likely never to fully close, even with remediation, as so much time has been lost and cannot easily be regained. Research then and continues to confirm that this is true. Among a sea of teachers and researchers, I sat in the back of the room feeling so alone, trying to hide my tears. He needed more intensive intervention, by tutors who knew the strategies and methods for him to learn to read. I had lost valuable instructional time!

In 6th grade, I finally got the evaluation and diagnosis of dyslexia from a private neuropsychologist, now my practice colleague. My son was an "emergent" reader. Though I had been paying tutors, reading with and to him every night, and helping with his homework. My public schools would never provide the appropriate reading instruction and support he needed and who by then was more than 5 years behind his reading peers.

For the next 6 years, for as many as 8 weeks at a time, over summers and holiday breaks, my son traveled Monday thru Friday to Chicago to receive 4-6 hours/day of instruction, to learn to read. He was so tired of doing things that yielded nothing. He had long convinced himself that he was dumb and different. His older brother had trouble understanding why he couldn't read too and was embarrassed of him, causing other issues in the family. Getting him to go required a bribe of a laptop, quite novel at the time. My life was increasingly getting more and more difficult-working full-time as a single mom, trying to do what I could to help my child. Now, I see these same things with the students and the families I tutor and advocate for.

In high school his IEP continued as did additional tutoring outside of school hours, -more money would be spent. I advocated for college-bound classes and continued to help him at night with the reading responsibilities. My son was blessed, so many kids go into high schools as poor readers and scores of them do not have an advocate.

After high school my son attended an out of state college for students with learning disabilities. There he received intensive reading instruction; and bolstered his fractured sense of self. From there he went onto MIAD, here in Milwaukee and is a successful graphic designer.

It took tens of thousands of dollars, hundreds of hours of advocacy, tears, worry, and feeling alone; exacting a toll on our family and my career. But I would do it again to not waste his potential or his self-esteem. I was lucky. I could afford to do these things for my son. Many, many other families cannot. Is this equity? With the right instruction this should NOT happen to other children.

I remember when this all started, with my science background, I was looking in our schools for any reading teacher with the MD or Good Housekeeping seal of approval. I incorrectly assumed that a special educator would have the most knowledge of how to teach reading- wow was I wrong. I remember the reality of this hit me like a ton of bricks. How could that be true? Most kids identified and receiving SPED services are struggling readers.

My grandson's story is different. I know what the school can and cannot do for him in helping him become a masterful reader. When he began to fall behind his peers in first grade, we aggressively intervened with the support of the school. We were lucky that COVID struck. This allowed us to call the shots. Immediately taking matters into our own hands. They learned I had raised a son with dyslexia, attained the knowledge needed to provide effective instruction and made it happen. Like me, and whether they admit it or not, school personnel know that RTI has been poorly implemented and understood; it is merely a sentence to waste time with largely inadequate and ineffective instruction for many students. We decided that my grandson would begin intense intervention for the remainder of first grade and through the summer. It took time, but we did get him qualified for an IEP, allowing him some federal protections. Outside interventions, at our expense, continued in second and now third grade. His parents and I have done what must be done for my grandson; but this does not happen for so many others.

In WI we are leaving behind anywhere from 90,000 to a staggering 300,000 + students by not teaching them using the SOR. --For more that 20 years, researchers have been using Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or fMRI to peer into the cognitive functions of the brain reading. Humans all over the world who struggle learning to read have brain structure with neuropathways, to varying degrees, that activate areas in the brain that are inefficient for easily learning to read. Reading, like anything we learn, depends on the interconnectivity among cognition, emotion (attention, problem solving, support relationships), memory, and physiology. Understanding these complexities allow for the knowledge that cognitive performance will suffer when there is excessive stress and fear in learning to read.

Has the time come in WI to recognize that for many of our children and adults around us who struggle to read, their potential is unrealized, and their levels of anxiety, depression, and stress are increased?

Will we choose to build up the self-esteem of our kids by giving them effective reading instruction by teachers who have the knowledge, tools and support they need so that the students they teach will attain reading mastery?

Will we recognize that teachers want, have a hunger for, and are beginning to seek out the science of reading, and that we must help them?

For too long teachers see that securing foundational reading skills is ethereal for many students. They have been asked to overfocus on comprehension instruction as the answer, when for most students who struggle, their weaknesses are language and sound based. For years we trusted, but now realize we were hearing rhetoric, philosophies, and beliefs, not backed up by science and evidence. We have known how to effectively teach struggling readers for decades. We must acknowledge that teacher candidates have not received effective reading instruction from our schools of education in how to teach reading effectively to all students nor are our teachers supported by ongoing professional development and mentorship in our schools. Thus, there are precious few within the teaching ranks and leaders in our schools, Districts, DPI, or WSRA who have the expertise to effectively teach our most vulnerable students reading.

Educational leaders at all levels MUST educate themselves and aggressively find individuals who have the knowledge in the SOR. We are the adults; our agendas are not the priority; a child's poor reading ability is not the fault of the child. We have failed the child- for we are the teachers and policymakers.

Shouldn't we be teaching all children using the science of how the brain learns to read? Pediatrician, Educator and Speech Pathologist, Dr. Sylvia Richardson, said about the SOR
"If a technique is good enough to use remedially, it is good enough to begin with."

Is this the time, the right moment in WI when we stop leaving struggling readers behind?

This is what teachers want and deserve, it is what parents want and deserve-for their children to be successful and engaged citizens. I pray the time is finally here to begin the steps we MUST take if we are to respect a child's potential. If not, history will surely judge us harshly.

Dr. Tracy Weeden, CEO and President of the Neuhaus Education Center
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/612361/8887781-s4-02-ensuring-literacy-success-for-all-dr-tracy-weeden>

Cheryl Ward MSM, ICALP, CSLDI
133 W. Ellsworth Lane
Bayside, WI 53217
414-235-0816

North Shore Center, LLC
www.northshorecenterllc.com
Reading League – WI Chapter
<https://wi.thereadingleague.org>

Wisconsin Reading Coalition (WRC)
Founding Member
www.wisconsinreadingcoalition.org
cacward@yahoo.com



Senate Committee on Education

October 6, 2021

Department of Public Instruction

Statement in Opposition to Senate Bill 454

Background

The last decade has brought a number of significant changes to how districts operationalize reading instruction and intervention. A large component of that reform comes by way of a required reading readiness assessment, which has also seen significant change over the years.

In 2011, Governor Walker's Read to Lead Task Force recommended legislation that became Wisconsin Act 166. That law required each school board and the governing body of each independent charter school to administer an appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment of literacy fundamentals. The act required the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to select an assessment to screen the reading readiness of kindergartners beginning in the 2012-13 school year. Furthermore, the assessment was required to measure whether a pupil possessed phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. Results of the assessment were required to be shared with parents.

Using this assessment, if a student was found to be at risk of reading difficulty they were required to be provided with interventions or remedial reading services. Wisconsin Statute 121.02 (1)(c) requires that the interventions or services provided shall be scientifically based and shall address all areas in which the pupil is deficient in a manner consistent with the state standards in reading and language arts. The parent must agree that the assessment score is accurate for the student to be engaged in interventions or remedial reading services. No funding is provided related to this statute.

DPI was appropriated \$800,000 for the 2013-14 school year to cover the costs of the reading assessment. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) was chosen as the statewide assessment. PALS was chosen as a research-based screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tool. Wisconsin teachers used PALS to identify students at risk of developing reading difficulties, diagnose students' knowledge of literacy fundamentals, monitor progress, and plan instruction that targeted students' needs. Student data collected from PALS provided a direct means of matching literacy instruction to specific literacy needs.

The 2013 biennial budget provided additional funding for the assessment and expanded the reading readiness assessment chosen by the DPI to grades 4K - 1 in the 2013-14 school year and 4K - 2 in the 2014-15 school year. The three main PALS assessments used are described below.

- PALS-PreK - Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschool measured:
 - name writing,
 - alphabet knowledge,
 - beginning sound awareness,
 - print and word awareness, and
 - rhyme awareness.
- PALS-K (for 5K students) - Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Kindergarten measured:
 - phonological awareness,
 - alphabet knowledge,
 - knowledge of letter sounds,
 - spelling,
 - concept of word, and
 - word recognition in isolation.
- PALS 1-3 (for grades 1 and 2) - Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for first through third grades measured:
 - spelling,
 - word knowledge,
 - letter sounds,
 - oral reading in context,
 - alphabet knowledge, and
 - phonemic awareness.

The 2015 biennial budget moved the state away from a single statewide screener and funding for the Read to Lead Council was removed from the state budget. It changed the reading readiness assessment requirement so school districts and independent charter schools could choose their own reading screener to annually assess the reading readiness of students in grades 4K - 2. Whichever assessment is chosen, students must still be evaluated for phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge, and the assessment must be valid and reliable. The budget further required DPI to reimburse school districts for the assessment chosen and prorate payments if costs exceeded the funds available.

Last year, school districts and independent charter schools received reimbursement for \$1,609,176. The most frequently used assessments were PALS, MAP, STAR, Aimsweb, and Fastbridge. PALS, MAP, and STAR are the most common assessments.

Senate Bill 454

DPI welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Legislature around the best resources and support we can provide to our school districts so they can further advance the literacy success of all students in the state. Strengthening the instruction all students are engaged in -- particularly reading foundational skills instruction including phonemic awareness and phonics -- is an important first step. Developing educator expertise, particularly in teaching reading foundational skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics, allows educators to respond to students' unique needs, including students with characteristics of dyslexia. In addition, schools can utilize universal screening to understand which students might need additional supports. Further, schools can

build a system of interventions to ensure that interventions are available that match student needs. Strong universal instruction and intervention depend upon professional knowledge and can be supported by literacy coaches.

It is important that we recognize the frustrations some students and parents feel when looking at appropriate solutions and supports to accelerate reading progress. Along with our partners at CESAs and the Wisconsin RtI Center, DPI continues to support schools/districts in continually improving their equitable multi-level systems of support to best utilize screening, universal instruction, intervention, formative assessment, and communication with families to meet the needs of every student. One of those recent supports is a tool and accompanying webinar series that classroom teachers can use to self-assess and improve their reading foundational skills instruction. There were over 100 regular attendees at each episode in the webinar series and then each CESA used the tool and webinar series to provide professional learning on reading foundational skills instruction in their regions.

In addition, in 2020, DPI worked with educators and sought public comment about revising our standards for ELA, including the standards for reading foundation skills. Wisconsin educators have revised standards which include phonemic awareness, encoding, and fluency and corresponding professional learning from DPI. In 2022, Wisconsin's Standards for Early Learning will be revised; for reading, these standards apply from birth to 5K. Finally, in compliance with Wisconsin 2019 Act 86, DPI worked with an advisory committee and public comment to create an informational guidebook on dyslexia and related conditions. This guidebook includes information about screening, universal instruction, intervention, and resources specific to individuals with characteristics of dyslexia.

While DPI looks forward to engaging in conversations to advance literacy, it does not agree with the pathway forward provided in SB 454 due to concerns which include:

- SB 454, like the existing statute, requires intervention for students who are not yet meeting expectations on the reading screening (those scoring below the 25th percentile). No funding is provided for this intervention; arguably, schools/districts would have to use existing local funds to pay for certified reading teachers to teach reading intervention. Many of the federal funds schools receive could not be used to comply with this state statute and other one-time federal funds would not provide sustainable funding.
- SB 454 has very specific requirements about the qualities of screening tools. There are a limited number of screening tools that meet the requirements in SB 454 which could greatly limit schools'/districts' options. When the original requirement for an assessment of reading readiness began, schools/districts all used the assessment selected by DPI (PALS). The statute was revised by the legislature to allow for school/district choice in assessment, in part because schools/districts asked for choice.
- SB 454 provides a specific definition of intensive intervention (1)(i)1-4 that limits educators' ability to select and deliver an evidence-based intervention that is a match to a student's strengths and needs. First, recent research (Stevens, et al., 2021 in Exceptional Children) questions the efficacy of multisensory instruction (referenced in item 3). Second, item 4 provides the school board or operator of an independent charter school to make decisions about interventions for children. While the school board should understand



what interventions are used and why, the responsibility for matching a student to an intervention should lie with the educators supporting that student. Finally, SB 454 does not clearly require the intervention to be evidence-based. (5)(1)(f) states that the personal reading plan must include “The evidence-based reading instructional programming that the pupil’s teacher will use to provide reading instruction. . .”; however, evidence-based is not defined or mentioned elsewhere in SB 454 (such as in the definition of intensive intervention).

- For students engaged in intensive intervention, SB 454 requires weekly monitoring of progress. While monitoring of progress supports families and educators in understanding the extent to which an intervention is working, DPI questions whether weekly progress monitoring is appropriate. For some targeted skills and/or interventions, progress may not happen weekly. Decisions about the frequency of progress monitoring can be made based on the sensitivity of the tool, what research shows about rate of growth for the selected intervention, and the likely rate of development of the targeted skill.
- Screening is a specific type of assessment used to quickly determine which students might be lacking skills predictive of later success. SB 454 increases the amount of screening our youngest students will experience. Currently, at a minimum, students are screened annually. Under SB 454, students in 4K are screened twice per year, and students in 5K through grade 2 are screened three times per year. This applies to all students - even those far above grade level expectations.

It is time to engage all our stakeholders on this issue; caregivers, students, educators, districts, educator preparation programs, early childhood providers, policy makers, and state and national leaders in reading if we as a state want to commit to creating a statewide plan to advance literacy. Again, we thank the committee for the opportunity to share these concerns with you today.

10/05/2021

RE: Support of SB454

To: Senate Education Committee

Dear Senators:

My name is Sarah Berger. My son Dylan is 10 years old and diagnosed with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and an auditory processing disorder. He was diagnosed when he was 9. To be clear, I knew there were issues early on and relayed these to his teachers year after year—his speech was delayed, reading was a struggle from the start, he started melting down after school and during homework, and then his progress seemed to be less and less during school reports. Through many conversations with the school, they always reassured me his work was fine, even though it was behind benchmarks. There was always an excuse why a class test or the MAP testing that school performs were low—and it was always to do with effort and behavior. There were never any indication that he was truly struggling from the school's perspective. My husband and I decided to get our own evaluation since school just kept saying my son was fine. Clearly he wasn't and it was now up to us to figure out what was going on.

The school never notified my husband or myself when interventions were started. What we were told, was that he was in a reading group for kids who struggled with reading, but it was all within the classroom with his teacher so I thought nothing of this. I did not know this was part of the tiered interventions. But he bounced back and forth in and out of those groups as long as I can remember. If we would have gotten full data and scores, understood what it meant, and that he needed specific intervention—it would have been life changing. Instead we were told despite the scores, he was fine. He had a lot of catching up to do when we started outside tutoring in 3rd grade. His diagnosis from an outside evaluator was given the summer going into 4th grade. We have spent approximately \$10,000+ on evaluations, tutoring, and counseling for my son. Finding out he was dyslexic was a feeling of relief, but also of sadness, knowing the difficulties that lie ahead. But, armed with the diagnosis, I knew school would be more than happy to know what was causing his difficulties and be happy to help us on this endeavor. I couldn't have been more wrong. He did not qualify for an IEP under SLD. After multiple meetings, lengthy discussions with the school and having our outside tutors and evaluator advocate on his behalf, the school finally agreed to accept him into special education under OHI for executive functioning. This was a hard fought win for us, against a school that seemed steadfast to prevent our son from receiving FAPE—a free appropriate public education.

All the school sees and cares to see is a student that shuts down quickly, has a negative attitude towards school, and needs a lot of adult supervision and attention during independent activities. His IEP has one goal regarding executive functioning, accommodations listed, but NOWHERE does it state that he is dyslexic. They see the behaviors, but refuse to acknowledge the root cause. In fact, I spoke with this middle school case manager at the beginning of the year. I had a few questions and mentioned his dyslexia—she didn't have anything in his profile indicating he was dyslexic. How is that possible? I then handed her over our independent evaluation and independent re-evaluation that was performed a year after testing to ensure he was progressing—the school no longer had my trust.

I have a strong family history of dyslexia—my dad and brother. I know what dyslexia looks like, I grew up with it in my household—and I MISSED IT. I trusted our school and believed that as the experts they would have my son's best interest. That they would alert me if he was behind. He is my oldest and I

trusted the system. I won't make that mistake again. I will advocate for my son until he can advocate for himself.

I believe his life could have looked very different. He is such a bright, energetic, full of life individual—and he now struggles with self-doubt, frustration whenever he can't figure out what something says to the point of shutting down, anger, and low self-esteem. He has seen a counselor and may again in the future. It is heartbreaking to watch the joy and love of life and learning slowly leave your child's eyes. This was avoidable. Had he been diagnosed earlier, given the interventions he so desperately needed his life would have been changed.

This is bigger than my son—he is privileged to have 2 parents who have the means, understanding, and education necessary to obtain a diagnosis, navigate this extremely complicated educational system, and support his interventions. There are too many kids whose families do not have the same resources. That is unacceptable. In the state of Wisconsin, in 2021, it is unacceptable that a decent education comes down to resources. Please, from the bottom of my heart, I am pleading with you—support and vote YES on SB454. As a parent, as a mother, I implore you to consider the years of evidenced-based research and to read it, understand it, and USE IT. Now is the time for change. Our kids can't wait any longer.

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Berger RN, BSN, and most importantly Mother

John Humphries Testimony on SB454, Roadmap to Reading Success
October 6, 2021

My name is John Humphries. I am a licensed School Psychologist, Director of Special Education, and Superintendent. I have served in each of those roles in Wisconsin and was president of the WI School Psychologists Association for two years. I had the great honor of being the DPI School Psychologist from 2004-2011, when I was a lead author of the rule to identify learning disabilities using a system called Response to Intervention. I am here to testify in favor of SB454, a long-awaited and much-needed improvement to reading instruction in our state. The data I cite today are from the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP, mainly for 4th grade students, as well as some from the WI Forward Exam.

I want to make it clear that I have a simple premise today: reading is the most important skill we teach in schools. If you can't read well, you will always struggle to learn. **Please let that sink in--there is NOTHING more important for schools than teaching children to read.**

I am appearing today in my individual capacity. However, I would like to note that I work for a company that offers teacher training and leadership coaching for schools that seek to improve their reading outcomes. Our work would be completely unnecessary if DPI, the Wisconsin RtI Center and statewide leadership organizations had been doing their jobs for the last decade or more. If this bill causes them to begin training and advocating for improved instruction, that would be great. **This is one reason why it's time for the legislature to intervene--there is no leadership organization focused on improving reading instruction in our state.**

Opponents of this bill state that it is an "unfunded mandate." I have one simple response: If state funding for schools isn't intended to be used to improve reading instruction, then why do schools need to be funded at all? Our reading outcomes are dismal, and schools should stop wasting taxpayer funds on ineffective, outdated models and programs. Our black and brown students read among the worst in the NATION! Children from low income homes also do very poorly. Other speakers today will share a good deal of data, but the one thing many people don't discuss is the fact that our MOST privileged students, white children with NO disability and who are NOT low from income homes rank 42nd in the nation with about 50% reading proficiency. That's right, only about half of our most advantaged readers are proficient. Our BEST elementary schools have about one in four children who do not read at grade level. This has been going on for DECADES! **This is another reason why it's time for the legislature to intervene--DPI allowed the opportunity for systemic change in the last decade to pass by.** In 2013, they issued guidance saying that schools should not abandon old practices simply because they "didn't meet the standard set by the SLD rule." They also wrote, "...districts do not need to have a(n) RtI process for all students. A comprehensive/school-wide RtI system is not required in Wisconsin." This bill would establish these systems, a necessary step because DPI failed to use the opportunity to do so in the past.

Opponents state that the bill is too prescriptive. I find that ironic in light of the outcomes I just mentioned. It's also ironic in light of the fact that these same organizations supported former

Wisconsin State Senator Luther Olson's big push five years ago for the National Conference of State Legislatures' "No Time to Lose: How to Build a World-Class Education System State by State." There was much fanfare. They wrote, "To realize our vision of preparing all students to be college and career-ready, it is imperative that we continue to raise the academic bar for all students and close gaps for lower-performing groups. Wisconsin's educators can and will meet this imperative, but only if the state's policymakers **commit to evidence-based policies that are proven to drive whole-system improvement** at the classroom, school, district, and state levels." Well that's exactly what this bill is--an evidence-based approach to improving reading. It has worked in other states and in research studies across the nation. It's prescriptive in part because that lack of clear guidance in the law has led to DPI providing inadequate guidance that is aligned with those same outdated, ineffective models of reading programming.

It's also important to note that the requirements in the bill are already being met by numerous districts in Wisconsin. My former district is a good example--we regularly screened students for their reading skill development and notified parents all along the way. I have with me a statement from Dr. Paul Schley, Superintendent in the Cornell, WI School District, stating his support for this bill. I would like to share that with you now.

If SB454 is passed AND implemented, it holds great promise for improving outcomes across the state. Importantly, it puts parents on notice about their children's reading. It legislates what should be happening anyway--reading development should be monitored closely, parents should be informed, and effective interventions should be used. Where implemented, these practices have raised achievement for all students and closed achievement gaps.

I also want to encourage you to consider a timeline for implementation of the bill that will allow districts time to begin making the significant changes that will be necessary for them to be successful. I know from experience and from research that this type of change can take 3-5 years to implement. You accomplished a great deal in this last biennial budget and I appreciate the political pressure many of you were under to hold down education spending in light of the federal funds that were available. However, the changes proposed in this bill will take time as well as money. I was Superintendent in a low revenue, high aid and moderately low income district. I did everything I could to build the type of system envisioned in AB446 and it worked, but I had to be very creative in my fiscal problem-solving.

Please recognize that most school administrators want to do the right thing and many are embarrassed at the terrible reading outcomes in their schools. I want to encourage you to take more steps like the ones you already have: you provide funds for early literacy assessments and the recent Joint Finance Motion 57 was a great down payment on getting this work started. It will take more and I encourage you to get the ball rolling now for the next budget cycle. I know that many districts got a great deal of federal funds, but not all of them did, and there are many schools serving high income populations that got smaller amounts of federal funds. They need help too. In summary, AB446 is a great step. The rulemaking process will probably be very difficult and there will be a need for funding and support. **It's time for the legislature to intervene where others have not. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.**

Bill SB 454 – Testimony from Andrea Hedquist in support of this Bill.

Dear Senate members,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Bill SB 454.

My son Matthew spent K-3 in our home district of Oregon struggling to read and write and received extra help in the form of reading intervention and speech therapy for articulation issues. However, we were not aware this extra help was an intervention plan until the beginning of 2nd grade.

In 3rd grade, we were told Matthew was reading at grade level and needed no further intervention other than speech services. We strongly disagreed, as Matthew was reversing words, letters and numbers and was unable to decode words. His writing consisted of no more than 3 letter words, and sentences of 3 words or less. He detested reading and writing and would try to avoid it at all cost, often with emotional outbursts.

Suspecting Dyslexia, knowing early detection is key, we opted to test at WI Institute for Learning Disabilities & Dyslexia (WILDD). Matthew was diagnosed with Dyslexia, working memory deficiency and processing speed disorder. An IEP was recommended and reading remediation, and Matthew began private WILDD tutoring immediately. Testing and tutoring have cost us \$10,000 so far, and we anticipate spending \$10,000 more to complete the course.

At the same time, and the start of remote learning as the Pandemic hit, Matthew struggled and cried daily and was unable to complete many of the online assignments.

We were forced to leave Oregon district and open enroll in Evansville for 4th grade to obtain Matthew the in-person learning he needs. He was evaluated immediately, and they advised he was 12-18 months behind grade level in reading, contrary to Oregon's findings. He is currently in 5th grade at Evansville.

We were told the current K-2 screening is not sensitive enough or designed to detect dyslexia. We saw no test scores until I requested his complete academic file to facilitate the move out of District, which they were very reluctant to send and took a month and several requests to get. I was shocked at the results. Had we been given scores and open dialogue I would have raised questions much earlier in his schooling. At the very least I would have expected his teachers to alert us to the fact that Matthew was struggling to learn sounds and words.

Reading intervention consisted of re-reading, more at-home reading and little else which in my opinion failed to help Matthew learn to read. The intervention plan was never discussed, how the plan was designed to help or how they were measuring success and improvement, or indeed further failure. If we had known sooner, we would have tested sooner. This type of reading intervention is not effective for dyslexia and addresses the symptom and not the root cause.

Although Matthew is improving, every day is a struggle and his confidence and mental state have suffered severely as a result of non-detection in those early years. It cost us valuable years getting him the help he needs, which the school system fails to offer.

By 5th grade, the curriculum no longer focusses on learning to read or spelling, and consists of story writing, narratives and book reviews, as well as much reading in other subjects. Any child who is unable to learn the skills of reading, writing and spelling by this age, will fall further and further behind through the grade levels and beyond, without access to phonics training.

In actuality, the focus shifts from learning to reach and moves to reading to learn.

My hope is that this bill will help all families many of whom are unaware of dyslexia and it's symptoms and/or do not have access to testing or tutoring, or the finances to help their child succeed. I feel reading is the foundation of the majority of learning systems throughout life, and by ignoring and not providing the necessary testing and learning methods for these children, (roughly 1 in every 5) you deny them of the ability to fulfil their true potential. These individuals often end up un employed, underemployed or incarcerated.

Although too late for Matthew, I hope my testimony will convince you to support Bill SB 454 and force necessary and overdue changes within the WI education system for K-2 reading screening which will help future learners get the early detection they need to become successful readers.

Thank you.

Andrea Hedquist
4635 County Rd
Oregon WI 53575

andreahedquist@gmail.com

608.609.1488

Student Information

Student First Name: Mathew
DOB: 2010-12-23
School: Brooklyn Elementary

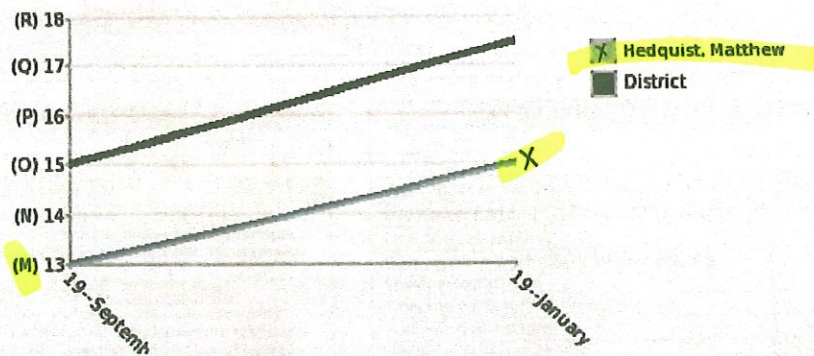
Student Last Name: Hedquist
Gender: M
Grade: 4th

Literacy

*Tested
3rd Grade
fall 2019*

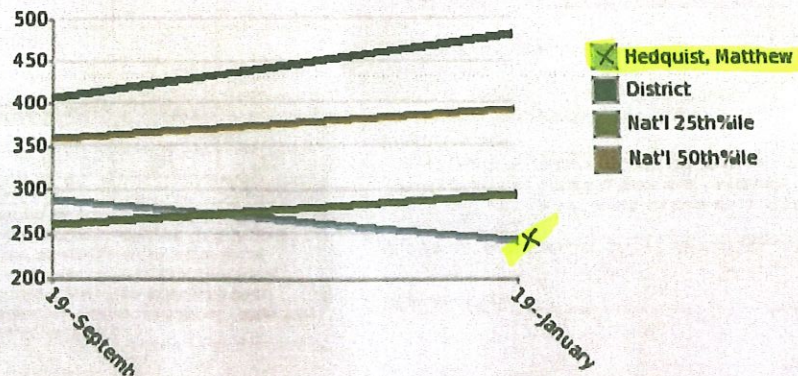
Fountas and Pinnell Fountas and Pinnell Reading

Fountas and Pinnell Reading
Winter
O
Meets Expectations



STAR STAR Reading

STAR Reading
Winter
242.000
11-25%ile
Percentile Rank (14)



Math

Matthew Hedquist

Tested Jan 2020

3rd
Grade

non-reading
based

Applied Problems	115	84	High Average
Spelling	72	3	Low
Passage Comprehension	92	31	Average
Calculation	92	29	Average
Writing Samples	92	29	Average
Word Attack	79	8	Low
Oral Reading	71	3	Low
Sentence Reading Fluency	87	20	Low Average
Math Facts Fluency	83	13	Low Average
Sentence Writing Fluency	78	7	Low
Number Matrices	40	<1	Very Low
Editing	79	8	Low
Word Reading Fluency	83	14	Low Average
Spelling of Sounds	58	<1	Very Low
Reading Vocabulary	84	15	Low Average

Reading: The Reading cluster is a general measure of reading achievement. Matthew earned a score of 82, placing him at the 12th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Broad Reading: The Broad Reading cluster measures decoding skills, reading fluency, and comprehension of short passages. Matthew earned a score of 85 placing him at the 17th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Basic Reading: The Basic Reading Skills cluster measures skills in sight words, phonics, and structural analysis. Matthew earned a score of 78, placing him at the 7th percentile and within the Low range of functioning for an individual his age.

Reading Comprehension: The Reading Comprehension cluster represents a child's ability to understand and remember what they have read, as well as their reasoning abilities with what they have read. Matthew earned a score of 91, placing him at the 27th percentile and within the Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Reading Fluency: The Reading Fluency cluster measures skills in reading automaticity and accuracy. Matthew earned a score of 80, placing him at the 9th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Reading Rate: The Reading Rate cluster measures the rate of reading. Matthew's performance earned a score of 85, placing him at the 16th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Academic Applications: The Academic Applications cluster provides a measure of how well students are able to apply what they have learned to novel problems. Matthew earned a score of 98, placing him at the 44th percentile and within the Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Phoneme-Grapheme Knowledge: The Phoneme-Grapheme Knowledge cluster provides an understanding of how well individuals are able to apply their phoneme-grapheme awareness to novel words. Matthew earned a score of 68, placing him at the 2nd percentile and within the Very Low range of functioning for an individual his age.

Brief Achievement: The Brief Achievement cluster screens an individual's abilities in reading, writing, and math. Matthew earned a score of 85, placing him at the 15th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Broad Achievement: The Broad Achievement cluster provides a broader screening of an individual's abilities in reading, writing, and math. Matthew earned a score of 84, placing him at the 15th percentile and within the Low Average range of functioning for an individual his age.

Matthew's subtest scores range from the Very Low to High Average range, with most achievement areas having a Low rating. Based on his performance on the WJ IV ACH, Matthew has difficulties in the areas of reading and writing compared to other students his same age; overall, he has the math skills necessary to be a successful student in this area for his age.

Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing – 2nd Edition

Given the concern about Matthew's phonological analysis skills, his ability to sound out words correctly, and his reading fluency the *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing – 2nd Edition* (CTOPP-2) was administered to further investigate the specific skills at which Matthew may excel or find difficult related to phonological processing. The CTOPP-2 assesses phonological processing in three broad composite areas. For the purpose of this assessment, Matthew was only evaluated on the subtests comprising the Phonological Awareness Composite (Elision, Blending Words, Phoneme Isolation). Phonological Awareness is the awareness of and ability to access the phonological structure of oral language.

A standard score for the Phonological Awareness Composite is provided. A standard score has an average of 100 and standard deviation of 15, thus, an average score generally falls between 85 and 115. The composite score for the Phonological Awareness Composite and its accompanying percentile rank is provided below. Scaled scores with a mean of 10 and standard deviation of 3 are provided for each individual subtest. An average scaled score falls between 7 and 13.

CTOPP-2	Composite Score	Percentile Rank	Qualitative Descriptor
---------	-----------------	-----------------	------------------------

by the testing are likely the result of true academic difficulties and not only low working memory. If Matthew's academic difficulties were solely the result of working memory difficulties, there would likely have been more global academic deficits as well as difficulty completing activities of daily living, following routines, and adhering to instructions. Matthew's constellation of difficulties in reading and writing are consistent with the previous DSM IV – TR diagnosis of Dyslexia. Matthew score on the Math Problem Solving cluster of the WJ IV ACH was also within the range of concern. However, his performance on the subtests that loaded onto this composite were significantly different. The examiner noted that Matthew performed very well on the Applied Problems subtest but had significant difficulty understanding how to complete the Number Matrices subtest, resulting in a very low score that negatively impacted his overall Math Problem Solving score. Therefore, at this time, a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Mathematics, Accurate Math Reasoning is not warranted at this time. Mrs. Hedquist described that Matthew has a history of receiving formal readings interventions at school in past academic years but has not qualified for additional services in the current academic year. Despite past efforts to target reading and reading related skills, Matthew continues to maintain only minimal progress.

DIAGNOSIS:

Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Reading

Word Reading Accuracy

Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression

Spelling Accuracy

Clarity or Organization of Written Expression

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. I recommend sharing the results of this report with Matthew's school and educators. I am glad to hear that he has received reading interventions in the past and I would encourage that these services be reinitiated. Matthew is clearly struggling with reading and aspects of writing. He may benefit from special education programming and consideration for an IEP given his poor school performance. Otherwise if he does not meet criteria for an IEP, a 504 plan may be useful to provide Matthew with academic accommodations.
2. Given that Matthew experiences difficulty in reading and writing, it is important that Matthew receive a targeted, intensive, evidence-based, intervention in the areas of reading and writing. Intervention should be delivered by someone trained specifically in providing reading and writing services to individuals with learning disabilities. Intervention should start by building Matthew's foundational reading skills, including aspects of phonological skills which he is lacking at this time (Elision, Blending Words, Phoneme Isolation). It will be important for Matthew to receive these supports from



Cornell School District

111 S. 4th Street P.O. Box 517
Cornell, Wisconsin 54732
(715) 239-6463 Fax: (715) 239-6587
Cornell Elementary – A National Blue Ribbon School



Statement of Support for AB446 by Dr. Paul M. Schley, Superintendent of the Cornell School District

As superintendent of a small, rural, poverty stricken school district that has provided professional development for only 1 ½ years to the staff on the systematic implementation of the Science of Reading; I can say we have already seen positive results! The teachers and leadership team have been getting trained and have made major revisions to the ways we teach reading. We now provide a good deal of structured phonics lessons, no longer teach students to guess at words they don't know, offer rigorous interventions, and keep parents informed of their children's progress every step of the way. Parents have been very pleased to see these changes, and our teachers are thrilled to be teaching using a much more direct, clear approach. The two most common statement I hear from the teachers are that "I wish we would have learned this when we were in college!" and "I feel bad that my past students weren't taught this way!" Our students are making much better progress to reading proficiency than they had in the past. This includes students from very low-income homes, whom we had struggled to reach in the past. AB446 is an attempt to realize these same gains for children across the state, including students of color. The bill puts into place systems and structures that are necessary for improvements in literacy outcomes. Our district has already begun this process and we believe many more districts like ours exist across the state. This bill will encourage districts that are already engaged in the process to keep going, and all districts to get started on a path to reading improvement. I support AB446.

Thanks for your consideration.

Testimony against SB 454 for Senate Education Committee Hearing

Good morning. My name is Deborah Cromer. I have been a teacher for over forty years, most of them as a reading specialist/reading teacher. I am also Past President of the Wisconsin State Reading Association. After retiring two years ago, I have been a volunteer reading tutor in several contexts, most recently at an elementary school working with at risk readers, and this experience, as well as my previous experience working in schools and as a district reading specialist, has demonstrated that effective literacy instruction for all students will not be accomplished through more screening. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in opposition to SB 454 because I am deeply concerned about what passage of this bill would mean for Wisconsin students and their teachers.

Recommendations by professional organizations, including the American Educational Research Association (AERA) together with the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), caution against the use of one single assessment in making high stakes decisions for students. The reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act states that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) not use a single measure and that any instruments used "assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors".

SB 454 would directly counter effective, appropriate literacy assessment, instruction, and learning as well as the federal IDEA guidelines by doing the following:

- Requiring that the results of a single screener be used to identify students at risk of reading difficulty
- Limiting the information on which to base instructional decisions to a narrow range of skills

- Privileging standardized assessments over continuous observation, monitoring, and instructional decision-making to meet the current needs of individual students
- Increasing testing time which will decrease instructional time; research does not support more testing to increase student achievement but does support instruction by expert teachers of literacy
- Mandating the inappropriate use of screeners to guide instructional decisions, a requirement which is not consistent with the design of many screeners
- Interfering with the ability of expert teachers to be able to provide what students need, when they need it, in ways that benefit each individual student
- Treating normal human differences in literacy development as abnormal
- Focusing on student deficits without acknowledging and identifying student language and literacy assets
- Using a special education lens, which focuses on student deficits rather than student strengths in a universal education context

I agree with the statement made by the National Association of School Psychologists that “All of the focus on selecting a new screener . . . distracts us from the real work of making sure every child has stable access to effective early reading instruction and more intensive intervention when they are struggling to learn to read.” My years as a literacy educator, as a parent, as a member and officer in WSRA, and as a volunteer reading tutor have shown me that there **are** actions that can be taken to improve literacy teaching and learning rather than mandating one-size-fits-all solutions that will have harmful side effects on Wisconsin students.

These are the actions I would suggest instead of bills like SB 454:

- Providing time and resources for professional learning opportunities for administrators and teachers to develop literacy

expertise for comprehensive, responsive instruction for ALL students

- Ensuring that districts and schools have enough reading specialists and reading teachers to meet the needs of ALL students when they need extra support and expert teaching to become proficient readers, writers, and learners
- Examining the comprehensive body of evidence for effective literacy practices that actually make a difference in students' lives rather than restricting what counts as science to a narrow range of skills
- Taking a critical look at states which are touted as models by examining test scores in relation to socioeconomic status in districts and schools, the complete range of test scores rather than just 4th grade, retention and drop-out rates, and practices in districts at either extreme
- Making it possible for expert teachers of literacy to exercise professional judgement to select assessments, instructional materials, instructional approaches and practices that meet the needs of the students they serve by providing what each and every student needs when he/she needs it
- Creating an educational system in Wisconsin that ensures that ALL students read, write, and learn so that they can survive and thrive

The prescriptive nature of SB454 will do nothing to ensure that students with reading difficulties get the help they need when they need it. For these reasons, I oppose SB 454.

Deborah Cromer

Nichole McLaughlin
Waunakee, WI
weinfuna@gmail.com
10/6/21: SB 454

- In kindergarten at Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), my son had trouble learning to read, but teachers didn't think it was a problem: "He'll pick it up." I felt like something was wrong, but he was in the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program, too, and the principal and teachers set the expectation that many kids fall behind for a few years, but catch up by 6th grade.
- 1st grade in MMSD - He was still not reading. I started thinking about my sister, who was diagnosed with dyslexia at age 17, after many years of struggling with school. I was terrified of that happening to my son.
- I reported suspected dyslexia and family history, and was told by the principal and the reading specialist at the school that we'd have to wait until he was behind grade level to do anything. School said they could not diagnose or even assess for dyslexia. We pulled him out of DLI into an English-only classroom, which helped his reading immediately.
- Researched a dyslexia diagnosis - Would cost around \$2,000 through medical channels and there was at least a one-year wait for tutoring through the Children's Dyslexia Center of Madison.
- Decided to learn to do it myself. With structured intervention (Foundation in Sounds + Barton Level 1 + Reading Simplified tutoring) he got up to grade level in a few months.
- In the meantime we researched area schools. We saw that Waunakee / Middleton got good reading scores on state report card.
- A Waunakee mom recommended the schools there because her child with dyslexia was recognized early and had good intervention. We sold our house and moved for better reading instruction.
- Disappointment: Waunakee was **not** using structured literacy. In the new classroom I saw the same balanced literacy, leveled readers, and lack of structured phonics instruction as MMSD.
- There are three elementary schools in Waunakee. It seems to depend on which teacher you get; not all of them are trained to recognize dyslexia and offer interventions. My son's teacher didn't know the fundamentals of structured literacy.
- COVID lockdowns hit, and I learned to tutor using Tattum Reading, a program founded in California and now used in Detroit High Schools (through a group called Beyond Basics) to help older kids read. I'm Tattum certified and have tutored local kids who attend MMSD, Waunakee, and Sun Prairie.
- We left the Waunakee schools and enrolled in Bridges Virtual Academy out of Merrill for 2nd grade because they support structured literacy curricula (Logic of English and All About Reading, et al.).
- My son (now in 3rd grade) reads at 195 words correct per minute at a 3rd grade level. The expectation is 110 wpm by the end of 3rd grade, and the strategies I used to help him are known to work for all kids.
- This bill is a great first step toward identifying kiddos who are failing to read in K-2. Waiting for them to fall behind by a grade level is way too late. My son likely would have followed the pattern of many others and gotten further behind over time.
- Thank you to the legislature for already funding a study of how Wisconsin schools of higher education train teachers. Without training in the science of the reading, our teachers don't have the tools they need to help our kids learn to read.

My daughter's journey began when she was 4 years old and I noticed that while she was a smart and happy kid, she was learning very differently than her twin sister was. I noticed that she struggled to come up with words to colors and numbers on her own. She would sometimes struggle to tell me a story because she would struggle to come up with the words she was looking for to tell me that story. Although she clearly knew so much she was struggling with something called word retrieval. It is a very classic symptom of dyslexia and an early flag of a struggling reader. But of course I did not know this at the time. I just knew something wasn't right. I had her evaluated and she began working with a speech and language pathologist in 4k. 4K was the start of my many conversations with teachers about my concern for my daughter's learning. I can't tell you how often I was told, "just keep reading to her. She'll get it." "All kids learn at a different pace. She'll get there" I would go to parent conferences and leave in tears wondering what I was doing wrong. We were reading nightly. We practiced sight words. I was literally begging teachers to tell me what to do. I spent my own money and took her to a neuropsychologist at Children's Hospital in kindergarten looking for answers since they were not coming from the school. \$2,000 later Children's told me she was too young to diagnose anything but to come back if she was still struggling after second grade. Second grade was still two years away. I didn't want to watch her get even further behind. She needed help now. In first grade I asked the school to evaluate her and it came back that she scored too high to receive special education services. And yet the teachers and myself were concerned with her lack of progress. Finally, in 2nd grade I took her to ACE Academy, more of my own money, to be evaluated by a private neuropsychologist and we got our diagnosis. Dyslexia. When I brought this diagnosis to the school I was told they do not help with dyslexia. I began paying for a private Barton tutor, more of my own money. Using this program we finally began to see progress in her reading.

So as of right now, in 4th grade, she has an IEP for speech and language due to her word retrieval issues, but is not getting reading help in her IEP. Even though she has a dyslexia diagnosis. She is still behind in reading. Last year she received reading intervention using the Wilson reading program. This is a program that has been proven to be successful for dyslexic children. I was very excited that she was being offered this program. However the teacher at the school is not fully trained in the Wilson program and tells me she has no plans of becoming fully trained/certified. My daughter has no teachers in the school educated on what dyslexia is or how to help a child that has it. This legislation would help get teachers trained in these programs to help our kids.

Six weeks into this school year and I have not received any information on if she qualifies for reading intervention for this year. As of right now, this year, she has received no extra reading help and I don't know if she'll get any this school year. If she does qualify, as a parent I do not receive any real reading goals for my daughter that they are working towards in intervention. I believe the only goal is simply to make progress. I do not receive any data on how exactly she is making progress. Of course I want my child to make progress but I would like something a bit more concrete than simply to make progress. I want a plan that defines what data is being measured and how often it will be measured, analyzed and acted upon. This legislation would require schools to mediate all kids falling 25% or below on their reading tests. It would have clear goals with data reporting to prove goals are being met as well as parental involvement. It would have clear information for the parent. I have attached last year's end of year progress report for intervention to show you exactly what current intervention goals looks like. It simply tells me if she has made progress or not. As of right now, there is no real data given to the parent's.

It should not be this hard to get reading help for my daughter. One in every five children are believed to have dyslexic tendencies. Why is it so difficult in WI to find anyone in the schools that know anything about dyslexia. Why are we not screening these kids to get them the help they need before it's too late? I wasted 4 years, 4k-2nd, grade knowing something wasn't right. Begging for someone to help me. Teachers agreeing something is not right. But no answers. It was 4 years wasted for my daughter that I cannot get back for her. The fact that WI is only graduating 39% of its students capable of reading proficiently at grade level should be a real wake up to all parents. To everyone in this room. We are failing kids in WI. This is not an issue of just parents with dyslexic children. Or ones that happen to know their child is dyslexic because they are fortunate enough to have the financial resources to figure it out. This is an issue of any parent with a child in WI. Only 39% at grade level?! We cannot just continue doing what we have been doing for the past 30 years here in WI and expect different results. It's not working. It's time for a change. Our kids deserve better. With the passing of SB 454 I believe I would have been able to get my daughter help much sooner. I would have avoided those 4 wasted years begging for help and not knowing where to turn.

Thank you for your time today and your commitment to helping our state achieve higher reading scores for our kids.

Sincerely,

Rachel Koefel

Mother of a 9 year old girl that needs your help

Rachel_629@hotmail.com



Intervention Progress Notification

Date: 4-7-2021

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of: Remiah Koerfel

Your student was receiving additional intervention in reading. During this intervention period, your child has been receiving small group, systematic intervention specific to their area of need. Your child has had his/her progress monitored using assessments that are specific to the intervention being used. We use multiple data points, nationally normed assessments, and class performance to evaluate how your student is progressing in the intervention.

Based on our review of multiple data points, evidence indicates your child is:

	Making sufficient progress and has met his/her goal.
	Making significant progress but hasn't quite met his/her goal.
X	Making moderate progress but isn't yet reaching his/her goal.
	Making minimal or insufficient progress . Further assessment and/or a parent meeting may be necessary.

Additional information specific to the area indicated above is:

Remiah is doing a great job with her decoding skills. She is working on breaking words into syllables and using that to help her read and write words. She has been very successful using this strategy and will continue to learn others. Remiah is working on slowing down and checking her work, fixing it when needed. You can support her at home by continuing to have her read nightly.

We are pleased to have this opportunity to provide your child with this needed assistance. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact your child's teacher.

Respectfully,

Interventionist

Classroom Teacher

454
~~LRB 1294/3781~~
9F

I am here in support of bill ~~LRB 1294/3781~~ Reading Roadmap to Success.

My name is Julie Flikke and I am from Hudson WI and I am a mother of a child who has been failed by an education system without early identification and an outdated wait and fail whole-language for everyone intervention process that resulted in more of what doesn't work in Special Education.

My child has dyslexia and she showed signs in kindergarten that would have been detected with the screeners suggested in this bill. We had several conversations with the kindergarten teacher that something was 'off' when she couldn't remember her site words. I started to mention Dyslexia and the teacher – who was just out of college with a master's degree in special education said that she did NOT know anything about dyslexia other than it was a "under the umbrella of a learning disability."

The summer after kindergarten we had an Orton Gilligan tutor do interventions three hours a week. For those of you who don't know, Orton Gillingham is a methodology based purely on the Science of Reading. As a result of intensive SOR over the summer, when she went into First Grade, she was reading at the bottom of first grade level- right where she needed to be – my Husband and I were thrilled, and we hoped that we were "out of the woods" and off to a good start.

As First grade progressed, she stayed bottom of first grade for reading and the teacher started to pull her aside in-class for interventions, after no improvement she eventually started tear 2 interventions at the end of 1st grade. We did not do tutoring over the summer as our OG tutor had moved away and we decided to trust the schools and their progress monitoring and their interventions. We saw the stress starting to affect our daughter and we wanted our daughter to have the summer to just 'be a kid.'

Tear 2 continued into 2nd grade the following year until they qualified her for Special Education in Spring. She had two long years of no reading progression because the method they used for reading interventions didn't work for her. Three years of public education wasted and the only progression made was with a tutor for the summer after kindergarten. We did everything the school asked us to do and all the slithery snake and fishy lips book markers everywhere and leveled readers every night. My husband and I have over 16 years combined of post-secondary education, and we take education very seriously.

We went through the IEP process, and we discovered that Special Education had NO more understanding of Dyslexia outside of the standard script "under the umbrella of Learning Disabilities." Even though we learned that our child had an IQ higher than the average person and we had an Independent Eval with a diagnosis of dyslexia, we were offered the same McGraw reading program that was based on the same whole language that didn't already work for her and was

offered to all children in Special Ed. More of the same methodology that got her twos behind grade level in reading in the first place. We knew that the Science of Reading worked, worked well, and worked quickly for her based on her growth and our tutoring experience before 1st grade. We committed to not losing anymore years doing more of what already didn't work. It was time to take things into our own hands.

Had this bill been in place five year ago, my daughter would have been screened and avoided a three-year wait and fail process that the school was obligated to go through. Knowing what I know now – she would have been flagged by these screeners and would have been given the correct interventions sooner. Instead, after two years of failed interventions and she was over two years behind grade level, and then she was offered more of what we already didn't work. We would have avoided being put in a situation where she had to gain three years in one to stay on track, we would have avoided the mental and emotional trauma of being pulled out and extra testing and made to feel like something was wrong with her. I would be in another industry that quite frankly would have a higher taxable income than this one. We have spent thousands of dollars on my education to bring the best school that we could to her. You see our lives would be very different if this bill was in place five years ago. I am not here to advocate for her, I am here at my own expense and trouble to advocate for families who can't do what we did.

Instead, she was burnout from school and depressed at the ripe age of 8 and even if we were lucky enough to find an OG tutor we would have to do more school after her regular school. As the financial expenses would pile up, so would the emotional cost. She would not have the same opportunities that other kids her age had. After school she would have tutoring. After tutoring and drive to the from, she would have to work hours on homework. No Dance, no gymnastics, no piano, no paytime, – there was not time or money left over for that. Because of everything she had been through with school, her mental health was declining, and she was experiencing night terrors and panic attacks and literally kicking and screaming when I would drop her off at school every morning. Not only did the school think that she wasn't teachable, but she was also now her spirit was breaking. My husband and I felt that we had no choice and for her safety and mental health we decided but to pull her from the public school system before more damage was done.

After a lot of research and my own quantitative conclusions, my husband and I had had enough. We could have chosen to invest our money in lawyer fees and fight the school and come to an agreement for the SOR interventions that she desperately needed, but based on my research that would probably be compromised by administrative limitations and restraints and probably result in a gag order, and I wouldn't be able to be here to advocate for kids like her. At the end of the day a lot of money would have been spent for too little, too late, and not good enough interventions that would have left our family

even more stressed and resentful and a child who was still struggling to read and we would risk further declining of her mental health.

Ultimately, I sidelined my own career and went back to school to become an OG IMSLEC (International, Multisensory, Structured Language, Education Council) nationally certified reading interventionist. We pulled her from school and I enrolled in Orton Gillingham of Minnesota (OGMN) in classes also offered through Hamline University for graduate course work and I did the classes and the practicums while we homeschooled our daughter. We did what I wish the school could have done for her. She received the intervention she needed as part of her regular school's daily classes from a trained and certified reading specialist - ME. My first level training taught me how to teach reading for K-3 with pure SOR methodology. Because I have no training in Whole Language or administrative restrictions, I didn't dabble. I did the first assessment with my daughter the day after my last class in June and she scored at the exact same level that first OG tutor left off at – bottom of 1st grade. She had three years of public school and two years of whole language interventions and she had just finished 2rd grade and she didn't even know all of the sounds in the alphabet.

After the first year with this intervention, I needed to go back to school for the next level because she met the 3rd grade goals. She gained three years of reading skills with one long year with PURE SOR interventions. She was also 1 year behind in math, and within one year she was grade level in math. The night terrors stopped almost

immediately after we withdrew from school, and she started to see herself learning for the first time. We started the journey of repairing the mental and emotional damage that was done from not identifying early and remediating with the right interventions sooner. Her confidence grew with her reading ability, and she is now a very happy and healthy young lady enjoying middle school with a heavy course load.

When I read this bill for the first time, I had to take breaks to cry, because this would have made all the difference for our family. It would have given us productive talking points and a plan in place and an obvious objective we could all get behind.

In conclusion I am in support of bill LRB 1294/3781 Reading Roadmap to Success, and I am asking you to support this bill also.

Julie Flikke

Hudson, WI

612-296-1657

julieflikke@gmail.com

Ginger Zoldak 5th grader Randall Elementary Senate Bill 454

In 1st grade, I couldn't read or write very well, and I thought I was dumb. In 4th grade I was finally diagnosed with dyslexia. I wish I was diagnosed earlier so I could have gotten a better start. With Senate Bill 454, my dyslexia would have been diagnosed much sooner.

My mom and dad asked my teachers about dyslexia, but they didn't know much about it. They said 'give it time,' but dyslexia doesn't go away. It was really rough not getting the help I needed, I felt like a fish in a tree, which is also a great book about dyslexia.

Now I have a tutor and she's helped me a lot, and I know I'm not dumb. I just think differently.

But now I want to tell you about why you should approve senate bill 454.

Up to 1/5 people have dyslexia, so for the 33 seats in the Wisconsin Senate, maybe 6 of you have dyslexia. Who in this room have dyslexia?

People who have dyslexia are usually very bright, creative thinkers and they thrive outside of the classroom. Some people who are smarter than smart AND have dyslexia include Albert Einstein, Muhammad Ali, Leonardo da Vinci, Walt Disney and my dad, Andy Zoldak.

In my family, me, my dad, and probably my grandpa have dyslexia. It runs in families, and once you know what to look for, it's easy to catch. Me and my mom read through the bill together and I support Senate Bill 454. I hope that you do too, because I'm not a state senator, yet!

FLYPAPER

Mississippi rising? A partial explanation for its NAEP improvement is that it holds students back

Todd Collins

12.4.2019



Getty Images/frédéric Michel

One of the bright spots in an otherwise dreary 2019 NAEP report is Mississippi. A long-time cellar dweller in the NAEP rankings, Mississippi students have risen faster than anyone since 2013, particularly for fourth graders. In fourth grade reading results,

Mississippi boosted its ranking from forty-ninth in 2013 to twenty-ninth in 2019; in math, they zoomed from fiftieth to twenty-third. Adjusted for demographics, Mississippi now ranks near the top in fourth grade reading and math according to the Urban Institute's America's Gradebook report.

So how have they done it? Education commentators have pointed to several possible causes: roll-out of early literacy programs and professional development (Cowen & Forte), faithful implementation of Common Core standards (Petrilli), and focus on the "science of reading" (State Superintendent Carey Wright).

But one key part of Mississippi's formula has gotten less coverage: holding back low-performing students. In response to the legislature's 2013 Literacy Based Promotion Act (LBPA), Mississippi schools retain a higher percentage of K–3 students than any other state. (Mississippi-based Bracey Harris of The Hechinger Report is one education writer who has reported on this topic.)

The LBPA created a "third grade gate," making success on the reading exit exam a requirement for fourth grade promotion. This isn't a new idea of course. Florida is widely credited with starting the trend in 2003, and now sixteen states plus the District of Columbia have a reading proficiency requirement to pass into fourth grade.

But Mississippi has taken the concept further than others, with a retention rate higher than any other state. In 2018–19, according to state department of education reports, 8 percent of all Mississippi K–3 students were held back (up from 6.6 percent the prior year). This implies that over the four grades, as many as 32 percent of all Mississippi students are held back; a more reasonable estimate is closer to 20 to 25 percent, allowing for some to be held back twice. (Mississippi's Department of Education does not report how many students are retained more than once.)

Table 1: Student retention rate for early grades, selected states

State (Year)	K	1	2	3	Average
Mississippi ('18-'19)	8.7%	7.9%	5.0%	9.6%	7.8%
Mississippi ('17-'18)	8.9%	7.9%	5.5%	4.2%	6.6%
Florida ('17-'18)	3.2%	3.5%	2.3%	8.0%	4.3%
California ('13-'14)	0.4%	0.8%	1.6%	2.0%	1.2%

Sources: State reports, U.S. Department of Education CRDC reports

These retention levels are much higher than other states. The closest are Oklahoma at 6 percent and Alabama at 5 percent. Florida, probably the most well-known example, today holds back 4 percent of its K–3 students, including 8 percent of third graders. When it first enacted its retention policy in 2003–04, Florida’s third grade retention rose as high as 14 percent before steadily declining; it has risen again in recent years. The average for all states is about 3 percent; many states have retention rates of 2 percent or less.

Among the flurry of literacy initiatives in Mississippi, how important is retention to its NAEP results? It’s hard to know for sure, especially without student-level data, but simple modeling suggests it may be a significant factor. Retained students are by definition the lowest performing readers, scoring in the bottom category of Mississippi’s third grade exam. As part of the LBPA, after being held back, they receive a variety of supports, including “intensive reading intervention” and being assigned to a high-performing teacher. Assuming that those policies improve their achievement, they should certainly score better once reaching fourth grade than they otherwise would have.

So is Mississippi’s lesson for educators that they should increase student retention? The traditional view of retaining students is strongly negative. In 2004, school psychology researcher Shane Jimerson famously labeled it “educational malpractice.” According to Stanford researcher Linda Darling-Hammond (now President of the California State Board of Education), “The findings are about as consistent as any findings are in

education research: the use of [retention based on] testing is counterproductive, it does not improve achievement over the long run, but it does dramatically increase dropout rates.”

More recently, Martin West and others, looking at the results from Florida’s 2003 retention policy, have taken a more positive view of the impact of early-grade retention, like that practiced by Mississippi. They report that third-grade retention increases high school grade point average and leads to fewer remedial courses, though it does not increase graduation rates (or lower them). With the first Florida cohorts now in early adulthood, we may get a better view of retention’s long-term impact. While some have criticized Florida’s past NAEP score gains as “dubious” and “highly misleading” due to its retention policy, others claim they represent “genuine progress.”

In the meantime, Mississippi isn’t waiting. Buoyed by the perceived success of the 2013 standards, last year the legislature raised the third-grade exit bar even higher, leading to 14 percent of the state’s third-graders failing the test, and 10 percent being ultimately retained (in some counties, up to 45 percent failed and 40 percent were retained). While the long-term effects are uncertain, a very likely outcome will be continued growth in the NAEP fourth grade results, as the lowest performing students get an added year of instruction before the test.

POLICY PRIORITY: HIGH EXPECTATIONS

TOPICS: ACCOUNTABILITY & TESTING GOVERNANCE TEACHERS & SCHOOL LEADERS
