

May 3, 2023

Testimony in **Support** of LD 1526: An act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

Thank you Rep. Brennan for bringing this pivotal bill to the forefront! I'm fully in support of it, even if it means I might be out of a job if it passes.

My name is Stacey Keniston, I was brought up in a middle class family in Falmouth. On the day I graduated from UMF, my mother told me my first grade teacher had said, "She's a happy-go-lucky child, but she'll never go to college." In first grade they had me in a phonics program, but I was unable to progress as quickly as the other kids, so my foundation was extremely weak. Through all the years in Falmouth schools, I only read three books and lots of Cliff Notes. I didn't understand that reading was any harder for me than other children, I thought I just didn't like to read. Miraculously I made it into college floundering in some classes and getting straight A's in classes with good lecturers. My favorite class was Anatomy and Physiology, none of my fluent reading friends could figure out why I was doing so much better than they were. I had to explain, Dr. Robinson is a lecturer, the test questions come right from his lectures. In my last year of college, my internship supervisor was the first person to say, "You have Dyslexia". He was a middle school teacher and spotted it right away. Throughout my first pregnancy I read aloud children's books and realized I could read easy books and gradually almost any book I wanted. I'm not a fast reader and it takes practice to be fluent. Audiobooks are a blessing.

I wanted to help my girls to read, so I went through Orton-Gillingham (O-G) training at The Children's Dyslexia Center (FKA The Children's Learning Center). I received my Advanced O-G Certificate in 2007.

Today I had several thoughts which I wanted to share, however I was not prepared to get up and speak. I went to support my tutee, Zachary Cronin. Both he and his mom, Nancy asked me if I wanted to get up and speak. Nancy told me I can submit a letter with in so many days.

Nancy forwarded both the 2021 and 2022 reports, but not....The Maine Plan, I am failing to remember what that is called, that's fine, it sounds like you're working towards incorporating Structured Reading and the Science of Reading. Both are relatively new terms and they reflect positive changes in the business of reading since 2000. They also follow most of the guidelines brought forth in the National Reading Report from 2000.

One omission led me to write this letter. For me the most compelling data to support structured literacy is the illiteracy rate among our prison population. The first statistic I found was from the Department of Justice website, "According to the Correctional Education Association and other statistical data, the illiteracy for adult inmates is estimated at 75 percent." I knew it was high and yet I was shocked when I read that!

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness(P/PA) are pre-reading skills and **MUST** be **MASTERED** before attempting the big four concepts....

Alphabetics

Vocabulary

Comprehension

Fluency

I have too many ideas, in regards to how these five pillars of reading instruction should be taught. Each component has impact on the others. I will say, comprehension is easier taught in groups, because they can learn an abundance from listening to other students' perspectives. Also, fluency will improve as reading hours increase, it can be remediated. I personally have not had a student who needed that. Once they begin reading more they become more automatic at reading words and their fluency increases. Like comprehension, vocabulary is also easier taught in groups, there are so many games.

I heard a lot today about specific reading curriculums. I truly believe the state would get more bang for the buck if they were to teach their teachers how to read using a structured reading program. In a nutshell they need to know:

**A. Fun activities for phonological and phonemic awareness(no letters, just sounds)**

1. what sound(s), letters and letter combinations make (along with exceptions)
2. the six syllable types
3. the three major types of syllable divisions
4. short vowel generalizations and spelling rules (both important for spelling)

Those four concepts are all part of alphabetics. I live and breathe alphabetics.

As an O-G Tutor, the outcome of each lesson dictates what will be covered in the next lesson. I know the sounds and concepts each student is struggling with, this tells me what to cover next and what needs to be reviewed. I know the Wilson program, works on the same principal for groups. The drawback is, it's a lock-step program hence mastery for all children is not a priority.

Research shows that children with good P/PA skills are better readers in fourth grade. If you remember back to Representative Brennan's opening remarks, you know those fourth graders have made the all important transition from learning to read or reading to learn. Food for thought.....If we spend more money on P/PA skills, perhaps some day we'll spend less on incarcerations!

There are two items I can recommend: 1. A workshop I took through the IDA-NNEA was all about using Latin Roots and Greek Combining Forms. Ron Yoshimoto was downright passionate about

morphemes and how to make teaching them fun. Part of our workshop fee included numerous games to take back and use with students and he played other word building games with us as a group. The curriculum he gave us was extensive, however it was not ready to print for students. That was fine for me, because I could pick and choose what I wanted to use. Perhaps today his manual has improved.

2. Scientific Spelling by Suzanne Carreker, is the best program I've seen for teaching spelling. I took it as a virtual class through Neuhaus Education Center. I did not use it as it was spelled out, because it was more conducive to groups. Which is why I brought it up.

If the passage of this legislation goes as I hope it will, I'll probably need to look for another job or retire! I greatly appreciate all of your hard work! Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if there is anything I can do for you. I'd absolutely love to give classroom teachers a crash course on alphabetics. Learning the skills and then teaching them has been my greatest achievement. I always tell students I want them to be a better reader than me. They have a head start, because I didn't read in earnest until I was twenty-nine.

Before signing off I've got to tell you about Oliver. He was twelve, and 2+ grade levels behind his peers, when I began working with him in 2012. On his 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson with me his dad said, "Tell Stacey about the conversation you had with your teacher." "She said (in a falsetto voice), Oliver what has changed? Why are you reading so well?" "I told her, I'm using the strategies Stacey taught me." In the two lessons, I taught him about the first two syllable types and we played PA games working on short vowels and nasal sounds like am and an. During the two lessons, I taught him how to tap out the sounds in words. Every student since Oliver has also benefited from tapping. It's the miracle technique! I look at it this way you can count on your fingers, why not tap out sounds?

I'm really signing off,  
I will keep y'all in my thoughts and prayers as you take on this momentous task!  
Bye for now,  
Stacey Keniston