



# Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

## Constituent comments on current literacy climate

### HF3300/SF2872

- Deeply concerning there aren't accountability and oversight measures in place. Each school is implementing reading instruction based on the knowledge and expertise of the curriculum director and support staff. This varies greatly from school to school. Thus the inconsistencies in instruction and poor results for our State with an ever-increasing achievement gap.
- We need to have experts trained in the Science of Reading instruction to provide a list of vetted curriculums, PD, and resources that ensure they meet the criteria listed in Statute.
- When schools are not able to demonstrate they have selected an approved reading curriculum and are not demonstrating progress, they need specific support from experts on how to do so.
- Oversight and accountability measures need to be in place for reading instruction that meets the standards we have put in place. Or we will continue to have schools that are not able to meet the needs of students and their basic right to Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). This creates inequity and perpetuates discrimination practices in our State.
- I work in a school district. Screening is a nice thought, but NOTHING has changed for students with dyslexia. Schools are simply not able to identify or provide the support needed. Parents aren't notified if the child fails or is flagged in the screening.
- Screening should have been done decades ago. It should be as routine as kindergarten screening. Just one more burden placed on parents to fix at private cost.
- Child Find is the school's responsibility. Why are they not skilled to do so? Why are parents overburdened with it?
- I work in the district my son attends and had to fight tooth and nail for the identification, evaluations, and mediocre accommodations. All because he didn't fit the criteria to be screened—was categorized as EBD.
- The law and the "locally determined manner" are highly vague. I can see that it gives too much room to effectively carry out the intention of the law.



# Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

## Teacher Support

### HF3300/SF2872

February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022

To the Members of the House Education Committee

Danielle “Dae” Selcer

3104 37<sup>th</sup> Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55406

I am writing to you as both a constituent and an English language development teacher to urge you to support SF2872 / HF3300. I’m sure you are aware of the reading crisis in Minnesota. We all know the statistics: in 2019, 45% of Minnesota’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students were not reading proficiently as measured by the MCAs. But this crisis is not affecting all children equally. **Only 9.1% of our state’s English language learners were met or exceeded standards on the 2021 MCA.** Access to scientifically based reading instruction is truly a civil rights issue for my students and their families.

**SF2872 / HF3300** allows Minnesota teachers an opportunity to receive professional development in reading through LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). LETRS is not a curriculum. It provides teachers with in-depth knowledge based on the most current research of both foundational and higher-level literacy skills. Teachers learn how to deliver effective instruction to meet all their students’ needs. LETRS is an investment in our teachers, giving them the tools to address the root cause of Minnesota’s reading crisis.

LETRS training would be helpful for all teachers, but it’s vital for those who work with English learners (ELs). Many ELs have home languages whose sound systems (phonology) differ greatly from English phonology. For example, Spanish has only five vowel sounds, and it has a “shallow” orthography (writing system). This means that the “a” sound in Spanish (like in the word “gato”) is usually spelled only one way. In English, however, we have between 16-20 vowel phonemes (sounds), depending on who is counting. Additionally, there are many, many ways to spell those sounds. The English “ay” sound (as in way) can be spelled as an a, a + consonant + e (as in late), ai, ay, or even as an “ea” like in “great.” This means that English has a “deep” orthography; there is not a simple, one-to-one correspondence between spoken sounds (phonemes) and the way we write those sounds (graphemes). We need to explicitly teach this to our English learners, many of whom speak languages at home with phonologies and orthographies that differ greatly from the language they speak at school.

Though English is difficult, it is not random. It is a complicated system, yes, but it *is* a system, and it can be explicitly and systematically taught. That is why LETRS training is so essential. Our current system of teacher preparation does not explicitly and systematically instruct teachers in the building blocks of English. If teachers don’t understand how the system of English phonology and orthography work, they can’t teach that system to students. If they can’t teach that knowledge to students, the lesson that students learn is that reading is opaque, inexplicable, and random. They guess at words and rely on context clues instead of learning to accurately decode. Because ELs need this explicit instruction even more than other students, missing out on this type of teaching leads them to fall further and further behind.

Minnesota is not doing right by its multilingual families. I urge the committee to support SF2872 / HF3300. The bill will not rectify this inequality by itself. However, it will be a step forward, especially for multilingual learners and families who need it most. As your constituent and as an English language teacher, I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Danielle “Dae” Selcer



# Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

## Educational Advocate

### HF3300/SF2872

My name is Khulia Pringle, with the National Parents Union. I spent over a year speaking with parents, students, and teachers to gain on the ground knowledge about what is happening in Minneapolis Public Schools around Literacy (Science of Reading, curriculum used or not used, such as Groves programming in Title 1 schools, and professional development for teachers). We have toured schools that use Groves programming. We saw 1st hand how programming that white affluent parents are able to buy was implemented in classrooms with children of color and low-income children.

As I spoke with families, I found that parents of struggling readers do not find support at their child's schools. Many parents just know something is not right. Many parents worry about their child being criminalized for behavior problems and labeled with a Special Education title, and black children are labeled EBD because they cannot fully participate in classroom activities. Parents of means also have struggling readers in districts where curriculum is not rooted in the science of reading, but are able to buy themselves out of an illiterate problem by paying for private tutoring.

As education advocates, we fight for so many things, but they all boil down to one thing; ensuring the educational system works for all kids. That means schools must produce measurable outcomes in teaching and learning. Right now, in Minneapolis, that's not what we're getting.

MPS has the nation's 4th-worse racial disparities in academic outcomes for students of color. Three out of 4 Black and Native American students read below grade level, and 2 of 3 English Learners and 2 of 3 students with an IEP read below grade level. These disparities are not the result of the deficits of children; these disparities reflect an educational debt owed to kids of color statewide. The following are things that need to change in the educational system:

1. Reducing the educational debt owed to MN students by making true investments in the students most impacted.
2. Addressing the SPED and EL cross-subsidies.
3. Expansion of the LETRS bill to provide access to all elementary educators.
4. State incentives for the use of evidence-based curricula and teacher training, rooted in the science of reading and reflective of the cultures and experiences of all students. MPS is one of many districts using balanced literacy curriculum that legislatures in a growing number of states have said don't meet these important standards.

As a former Secondary Urban Educator, I remember when I started teaching and ran into kids that didn't know some of the words on the assignment, and didn't know how to decode them. I came across children that could read the words but had no idea what they just read. I started to reflect on my knowledge of how to teach to read. I remember there was a literacy component in lesson plans that I would have to have in pre-service, but it had nothing to do with how kids learn to read and how I would instruct. If it wasn't for the fact I was a reading tutor and had learned about phonics, and other reading foundational skills, my kids would have been left out.

I hope every future and present teacher gets the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills needed to provide reading instruction rooted in the science of reading. Thank you



February 23, 2022

Chair Davnie  
443 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Re: Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling Grants

Dear Chair Davnie and members of the committee,

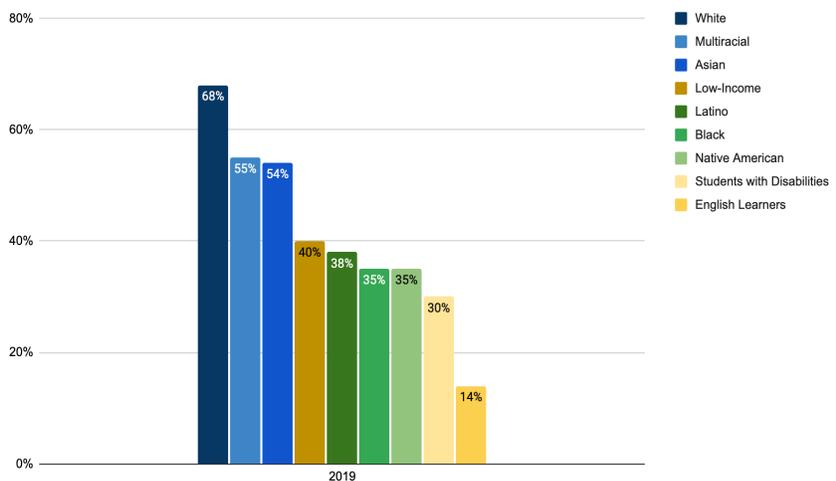
Reading proficiency is critical for success in college, career, and life. Research has found that students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, being able to teach reading was one of the most common things over 50 educators told us that they didn't learn, but wished that they had, in teacher preparation.<sup>2</sup> This need is not unique to Minnesota. Despite a large body of research supporting scientifically-based methods of early reading instruction,<sup>3</sup> the vast majority of teacher education programs do not teach it.<sup>4</sup> Only 22% of teacher education professors say they center their philosophy around explicit, systematic phonics,<sup>5</sup> the method which most effectively supports early readers.

This is why we support HF 3300, which would allocate \$33 million to provide Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling Grants training for all K-5 teachers in the state to have access to this training. Our youngest Minnesotans—particularly those who have traditionally underserved—do not have time to wait and deserve educators with expertise in literacy instruction. Minnesota educators also deserve the opportunity to be trained in the science of reading so they can have the essential tools and knowledge to better serve their students. For an individual teacher, the cost of LETRS training can be prohibitive which makes HF 3300 a smart investment in early literacy and will build off the success currently being achieved by last session's appropriation.

Sincerely,

Matt Shaver  
Policy Director  
mshaver@edalliesmn.org

Reading Proficiency, MCA 2019



<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). "Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters." [http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early\\_Warning\\_Full\\_Report-2010.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Kaput, K. (February 2020). "10 Things All Teacher Candidates Should Learn in Teacher Prep." EdAllies. [https://edalliesmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Teacher-Prep-Brief\\_Final\\_Digital.pdf](https://edalliesmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Teacher-Prep-Brief_Final_Digital.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, S. & Sparks, S. (October 2, 2019). "How Do Kids Learn to Read? What the Science Says." Education Week.

<sup>4</sup> Lubell, S. (February 2017). "The Science of Teaching Reading." National Council on Teacher Quality. 2018. "A Closer Look at Early Reading: Graduate and Alternative Route Elementary Programs." National Council on Teacher Quality.

<sup>5</sup> Will, M. (January 22, 2020). "Preservice Teachers Are Getting Mixed Messages on How to Teach Reading." Education Week.

Date of Hearing & Bill Number: February 23, 2022; HF 3300

To: Members of the Education Finance Committee

From: Melissa Long

Affiliation (ex. student, parent, advocacy organization): Parent and literacy advocate

City of Residence: Minneapolis

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Chair Davnie and Members of the Education Finance Committee:

**I am writing today in support of HF3300 to appropriate money for Language Essentials for Teacher of Reading and Spelling grants.**

As a former teacher, school leader, and a current parent and literacy advocate, I strongly believe that every student deserves grade-appropriate curriculum and teachers that are equipped to deliver strong instruction. When students have access to these crucial resources, they can rise to any challenge.

A literacy needs assessment administered to 17 schools in 2021 in the Twin Cities revealed that while teachers receive professional development on literacy curricula, they are not receiving training on effective literacy practices and research (Great MN Schools, 2021, p.10). Teachers also expressed the need and desire for more learning on how kids learn to read and write.

Making quality training such as LETRS available to more Minnesota teachers provides them with in-depth knowledge based on the most current research of both foundational and higher-level literacy skills. Through LETRS training, teachers learn how to deliver effective instruction beneficial to all students. Also important to note: LETRS training is particularly vital for students with learning differences.

In my daily work with school leaders and teachers, I am constantly looking for ways to support them. Unsurprisingly, the most common sentiment right now is one of feeling overwhelmed and concerned for their students who are falling farther and farther behind as the repercussions of the pandemic continue.

While teachers are exhausted, they indicate that they are willing to do what it takes to accelerate instructional recovery. With so much on their plates right now – navigating shifts to-and-from virtual learning, staffing shortages, and ensuring the safety of students – teachers and leaders have not had the time to research the various trainings. **We owe it to our educators to value their time and provide them with what we already know are proven high-quality, effective learning opportunities to help them better serve their students. We must make LETRS training available to more teachers across our state.**

Thank you for your time and continued dedication to our youngest generation of Minnesotans.

Sincerely,



Melissa Long