

Date of Hearing & Bill Number: February 23, 2021 & HF288 (Edelson) LETRS grant
To: Members of the Education Finance Committee
From: Cindy Russell, Executive Director and Sarah Carlson-Wallrath, Development Director
Affiliation (ex. student, parent, advocacy organization): The Reading Center / Dyslexia Institute of Minnesota
City of Residence: The Reading Center is located in Rochester. Ms. Russell resides in Bloomington, Ms. Carlson-Wallrath resides in Minnetonka.

Please record your written testimony here and return this to sarah.burt@hosue.mn as an OCR compliant .pdf (optical character recognition)

Please Support Bill to Help Struggling Readers

HF 288 (Edelson) Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling grant funding provided, and money appropriated. *This has a companion bill in the Senate (SF651 – Chamberlain).*

By way of background, **The Reading Center was founded in 1951 – 70 years ago this year, by two women who were light years ahead of anyone else in this part of the country in recognizing dyslexia and in using effective methods of instruction to teach struggling students to read.**

The depth in understanding the science behind how the brain learns to read has grown since that time, but the fundamentals of what The Reading Center was doing 70 years ago is consistent with the science known today. **We believe all students have the potential to read when they are given explicit instruction in the five pillars of reading.**

In our history, **The Reading Center has trained more than 2,000 educators to teach reading using structured, phonemic, phonetic multi-sensory methods. We have taught more than 10,000 students to read – not including the thousands of students who were taught to read by the educators we trained over the years.**

Our reach is growing – we continue to train and hire more tutors, and we can offer tutoring online. But last year, our **1:1 tutoring program reached 218 students.** That fact was life-changing for those students and their families, but this is a small fraction of the thousands of Minnesota students who are not reading at grade level.

When schools fail to teach the basic skill of reading to students, many parents search elsewhere for providers who can help their student make strides. The out of pocket costs that parents incur when schools do not use instructional methods in line with the science of reading are profound.

A one-hour tutoring session at The Reading Center is \$53 for elementary students and \$56 for middle and high school students. That is \$106/week, \$424/month or \$5,088/year if a student works with their tutor 2x/week, year-round as we recommend. And while this is an extensive investment for all our families, it is low compared to the fees charged by tutors around the state, especially in the Twin Cities.

Last year, we worked hard to raise funds to keep these prices as low as they are, and additionally to provide more than \$85,000 in scholarships to lower income students who cannot afford tutoring. But it's not enough.

Adults who take our Orton-Gillingham training course make investments as well. Many of the 50-60 adults we train each year are educators who have already invested in a bachelor or master's degree in education. **They commit to spending 135 hours of their time to learn best practices in reading instruction in our training as well as paying the tuition of \$2,995.** They did not learn this in their teacher preparation courses, or even their master's level courses in literacy.

We continue to work hard to train as many teachers as we can and to teach as many students as we can because we know what we are doing works.

Once per year, we provide our students with skills rechecks to gauge their progress in our program. Every student starts at a different place; however, re-testing data shows that **95% of our students make reading gains within that year.** Almost **70% of our students make more than one grade level of progress** in one year and more than **10% of our students make more than 3 years of growth** in one year.

The Reading Center takes on students who are languishing in intervention programs within the schools. Our student data collected over a period of six years showed that **60% of our students started with standardized reading scores in the bottom 10%.** Post intervention testing show that **the number of students in the bottom 10% was reduced by half after one year of appropriate intervention.**

Schools can see this type of growth in their students as well if teachers are trained in instructional methods in line with the science of reading. We believe in these students – they can learn to read, but we need to give them the right intervention before their self-esteem is irreparably harmed and we lose them to drop out or worse.

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Questions? Contact us at www.TheReadingCenter.org or at 507-288-5271



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

February 22, 2021

Rep, Heather Edelson
549 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Edelson,

Thank you for sponsoring HF 288, legislation appropriating funding to provide grants to teachers to complete the Language Essential for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) program. Many of our member school districts have found that the LETRS program provides strong professional development for their teachers.

AMSD is committed to ensuring that each and every student receives an equitable and excellent education and reading proficiency is a foundational element to achieving that goal. It is well documented that students who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are much more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

Thank you again for your support and please let me know if we can be helpful in advancing HF 288.

Sincerely,

Scott Croonquist
Executive Director



February 22, 2021

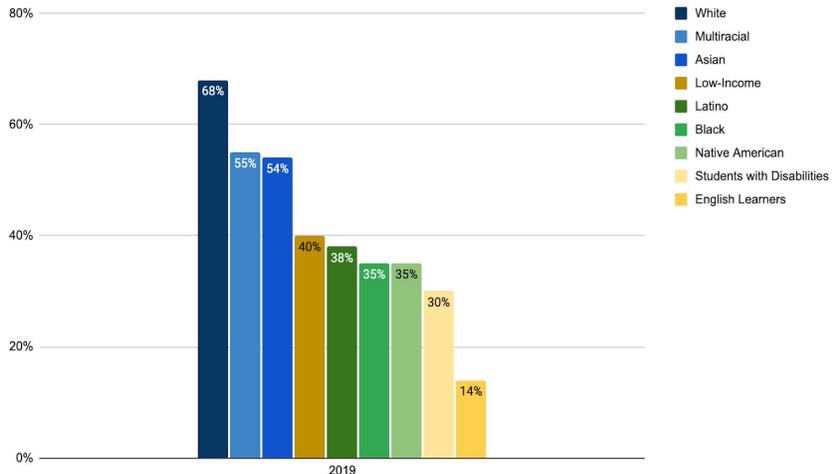
Chair Davnie
463 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55103
Re: Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling Grants

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.¹ 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.² This need is not unique to Minnesota. Despite a large body of research supporting scientifically-based methods of early reading instruction,³ the vast majority of teacher education programs do not teach it.⁴ Only 22% of teacher education professors say they center their philosophy around explicit, systematic phonics,⁵ the method which most effectively supports early readers.

This is why we support HF 288, which would allocate \$2 million to provide Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling Grants training for more than 1,200 teachers. 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 288 a smart investment in early literacy.

Reading Proficiency, MCA 2019



Sincerely,

Matt Shaver
Policy Director
mshaver@edalliesmn.org

¹ 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

² 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

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

⁴ 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.

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



Minnesota LETRS Pilot Year 2 Progress Report: February 21, 2021

Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) is a rigorous professional development program appropriate for teachers at all tiers of instruction. LETRS trains teachers to provide explicit, systematic and sequential instruction in both foundational reading skills and higher-level literacy skills. Teachers also learn to assess student needs and interpret assessment data.

LETRS Participants

A total of 359 Minnesota educators have participated in Units 1-4; 158 educators in year 1 and 201 in year 2. A total of 68 educators from year 1 have continued their training after the pandemic delayed completion. Currently, 269 educators are actively engaged in LETRS Units 1-4. A cadre of 20 school-based Minnesota LETRS Facilitators is currently leading training and implementation efforts across 28 sites with MDE guidance. In addition, 51 teachers completed Units 1-4 and are continuing their training with Units 5-8.

LETRS Facilitators:

- 4 MDE cross divisional staff are LETRS Facilitators
- Last summer, MN trained 25 LETRS Facilitators, including 5 professors

LETRS Participants:

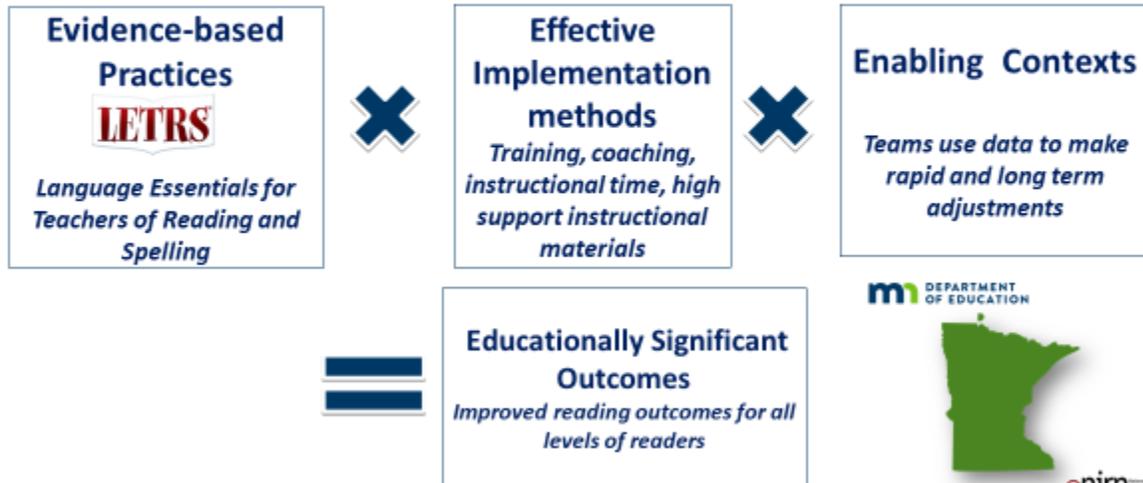
- 13 Pre-service Instructors from 4 Universities
- 28 sites: 26 public and charter schools and 2 Special Education Cooperatives
- 340 participants (Units 1-4) and 51 participants (Units 5-8) including general education teachers, reading specialists, literacy coaches, EL, ADSIS, Title 1 and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, dyslexia specialists, curriculum directors, and principals.

LETRS Content Mastery

Participants are demonstrating significant growth. Average pre-test scores are 62% for Units 1-4 and 78% for Units 5-8. Average post-test scores are 90% for Units 1-4 in year 1. Mastery of the content is considered to be a score 88% or higher and this score qualifies participants to become LETRS facilitators.

School Year	LETRS Units 1-4	LETRS Units 5-8
2018-2019	MDE	
2019-2020	158	MDE
2020-2021	201	51
Average Pre-Test Score	62%	78%
Average Post-Test Score	90%	TBD

Formula for Success: Making It Happen



Capacity Building and Scaling Efforts:

What is each site's capacity to sustain training and implementation until it has a positive impact on student outcomes? Teachers are completing LETRS training, but in order to transform their training into daily instruction and improved student outcomes, teachers also need coaching, adequate instructional time, appropriate materials and student data. The examples below describe systems changes resulting from LETRS training. These examples show that training is essential, but not enough.

Leadership teams are developing **hiring protocols** to make better decisions on hiring and training teachers in literacy positions.

- Position descriptions include expectations for reading instruction following the science of reading.

Literacy coaches are **coaching teachers** to collect student data, select appropriate instructional materials, implement the knowledge gained from LETRS in their daily instruction and monitor student outcomes.

- Coaches are coaching teachers to transfer what they are learning into daily practice.
 - "We are thinking of redesigning how to staff special education instruction." Given what we have learned we need special education staff to specialize and just teach reading. Kids need more experts teaching them.
 - As the language specialist, I am able to see where my colleagues stop teaching and where I pick up. We have a better sense of how our work is supposed to support each other. With the common language we have from LETRS we can better communicate and problem solve. We can all be more explicit with instruction.

Policies around allocation of **instructional time**, use of data, intervention, and grouping are being adjusted to enable teachers to implement what they learned in training and provide instruction consistent with the science of reading.

- Instructional time is being used differently based on student data and the science of reading. Time has been reallocated to phonemic awareness and phonics in K-2 and for students missing these skills in higher grades.
- A common concern shared by teachers across sites noted that they did not have sufficient time to deliver the core features of phonics instruction on a daily basis. Two schools have already readjusted their instructional times in grades K-2 to meet the minimum time requirements to deliver a full phonological awareness and phonics lesson.
- Secondary teachers began pilot testing high support phonemic awareness materials and saw immediate engagement by students. Students were initially skeptical, but soon deeply engaged with the phonological skills practice after seeing the difference it made in their reading and spelling. Behavior problems decreased and attendance increased.
- Schools are learning that MTSS in reading is not about a specific curriculum or program, it's about how to identify student needs and provide targeted instruction and sufficient practice for students to reach mastery.
 - "With the training I know what to keep teaching and how to intensify or adjust it. I'm not tied to a specific program anymore."

Teachers are focused on identifying students' needs and providing **instruction based on data**.

- Middle and high school teachers are learning to identify what skills are missing for students who aren't making progress. They administered phonological screeners and found almost all students were lacking sufficient phonological skills. They began adding this instruction to their daily lessons and are engaging more middle school and high school staff in training.
- A team of special education and intervention teachers applied the screening and diagnostic tools from LETRS and immediately changed what they were teaching to meet student needs based on the data.
- Teachers are using phonemic awareness assessments and teaching phonemic awareness skills. The report increased attendance, decreases in problem behavior, increased skills and engagement in learning, most importantly.... Students are sounding out and spelling words.
 - "I have a student who guessed at everything last year. He has been a bully and a difficult student for years. Now that I am teaching him what we are learning from LETRS, he is sounding out words. My challenge now is how to get a paraprofessional to carry on what I'm learning."

Participant Quotes and Feedback:

Kindergarten Teacher: “LETRS has completely changed how I think of teaching reading. It has given me the tools to use with my student along with research and science to help me understand why and how a code-based system to reading works.”

Literacy Coach: “I just got my reading license and I didn’t learn any of this during all of that coursework. LETRS is teaching me the practical things that I really need to know to make a difference with my students. How could I be a coach and not know this?!”

First Grade Teacher: “The science of reading is a step by step process that yields results and gives teachers the tools to teach reading.”

Professor of Literacy: “The knowledge I gained from the LETRS training has greatly enriched my communication arts methods, K-6 course for elementary education majors at my institution. I use the resources and knowledge to meet the new dyslexia standards as well as numerous other standards addressed by the course.”

Literacy Coach: “I have been singing the praises of LETRS. LETRS should be for all elementary teachers and interventionists!”

First Grade Teacher: “LETRS gave me a research-based scope and sequence to help students be successful with their reading! The huge take away that I have gotten from the program was the in-depth knowledge, strategies, and instruction of phonological awareness. After implementing the phonological awareness strategies and interventions, my students began to bloom.”

Special Education Teacher: “I saw a first grader who started out as lowest in the grade make the most growth in all of first grade. I am amazed at how much more confident and happy she is. It brings tears to my eyes.”

Literacy Coach: “This year, our teachers initially wanted to focus their professional development on distance learning skills. When offering them LETRS training, I explained, “We need to know how to teach to the best of our ability, so we can do it through distance learning, which is a challenge.” Curricular materials are not designed for distance learning, so teachers have to teach based on their own know how. To make sure students could learn in any environment and that teachers could teach effectively in any environment, we have focused on LETRS training this year for our pre-K to second grade teachers. I believe it is doing teachers a disservice by not providing this training because teachers want to meet the needs of their students, but they are floundering without this training and knowledge. With LETRS training and coaching, our pre-K through second grade students have not experienced any learning loss from fall to winter. In fact, our students are progressing! LETRS is not just good for teachers, it’s also great for students.”

Special Education Teacher: “Through LETRS training, I am able to explain to my students what we are learning, why we are learning it and if students get stuck, I know how to figure out what part of the puzzle they are missing and fill it in. Seeing a student’s eyes light up when they finally understand how words work is one of the most rewarding things about being a teacher.”