

Hi,

I appreciate all the time and thought that have been put into legislation designed to address our literacy outcomes. I see broad agreement among those working so hard on Vermont literacy that changes need to happen.

I am writing with reference to the emails I received yesterday concerning H.668 version 4.1. I have reviewed the current version:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/WorkGroups/House%20Education/Bills/H.668/Drafts,%20Amendments,%20and%20Summaries/H.668~James%20DesMarais~%20Draft%204.1,%202-26-2020~2-27-2020.pdf>

I am wondering specifically what in this bill I can encourage the Ways and Means Committee to support? This exemplifies what I spoke about in my three minute testimony. The wording allows schools to continue using the Leveled/Balanced Literacy programs that are failing our children. We want the new law to improve literacy rates for Vermont children.

Specifically, how do the proposed grants among three school districts address our concerns about:

1. Effective early identification of dyslexic students (with a definition of dyslexia)?
2. Structured literacy NOT Leveled/Balanced literacy (which is already failing our children)?
3. Early assessment and intervention through increasing the use of (already required) Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)?
4. Teacher training at our Colleges and University within the State?
5. Professional development in teaching Structured literacy?
6. Remove adverse effect ("Wait to Fail") rule in special education?
7. Training and utilization of assistive technology and accommodations?

Here are my thoughts about how five of these are addressed (or not addressed) in the new version:

Re: 1. Do we have to wait until they are convicted of a Federal crime before they are screened under the new federal law: First Step Act?)

<https://www.cassidy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cassidy-urges-full-implementation-of-first-step-act-dyslexia-screening>

The bill contains the word dyslexia twice: once in the opening paragraph, and again on p. 5 line 7. There is no definition. If the House Education Committee wants a definition of dyslexia in the bill, why not put it in?

The second dyslexia reference requires "the Agency of Education, in partnership with three members selected by the Advisory Group, one of whom shall have expertise in early literacy and dyslexia for students who require additional support, one of whom shall have a specific learning disability in reading or be a parent of a child with a specific learning disability in reading."

While this acknowledges that the Agency of Education (AOE) appears to lack expertise in dyslexia, it does not ensure that the new legislation will effect any real changes. Since Mr. French seems to support a "Balanced/Leveled Literacy" approach to reading instruction, and since he leads the AOE, I suspect nothing will change from having the two folks with knowledge of early literacy and dyslexia involved in reviewing funding applications. The AOE will still be able to continue with what the National Report Card scores show has failed our children for at least 17 years.

Re: 2. Structured literacy NOT Leveled/Balanced literacy which is already failing our children. There is no definition of Structured literacy to include sequential systematic multisensory phonics instruction. The bill allows any "evidenced based" instruction method. Page 6, Section E (Line 6) leaves districts to decide how to address literacy. This will change nothing, unless a district has strong advocates who understand why our children are failing to read. Most districts will not, which is why I am looking to the Legislature to create change. There is no requirement that local district parents and taxpayers be involved in developing the grants.

Legislation that leads from the top should require choosing from a list of specific programs that have proven track records (such as those recommended by Nancy Mather-see attachment) and **specifically disqualify** any literacy program where the theoretical basis utilizes the Three Cuing Systems Model of Reading or Visual Memory as the primary basis for word recognition.

Re: 3. Early intervention through increasing the use of (already required) Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). How is any proposed literacy program going to fit within MTSS which requires monitoring and assessments of progress? What specific assessments should be used for determining the tiers? What effective programs should schools use for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?

Re: 4. Nothing in the bill addresses teacher training or directing the Board of Professional Educators to investigate improving teacher training and development.

Re: 7. While the bill includes language about "[Universal Design for Learning](#)" (UDL) which does include a component for assistive technology and accommodations, it does not include the tactile instruction included in Orton-Gillingham, Wilson and Lindamood-Bell programs for teaching phonics. Most schools interpret UDL as teaching students about multimedia. Let's teach them to read first!

The Committee has heard testimony from parents and school professionals where programs are being used in contradiction to the designers express recommendations. Here I refer to Foundations and Reading Recovery being used for older, already diagnosed Tier 3 students. I can refer anyone to the frustrated parents of those children. Vermont is not complying with FAPE for those children. This legislation should address that.

I don't feel I can support this bill as it does not address my concerns. I also think it will be a waste of taxpayers' money to fund these grants.

Please let me know your thoughts. Thank you for contacting me about this legislation.

Sincerely,

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