

Sandra Chittenden: VT Special Education Advocate

sandra.chittenden@gmail.com

Essex Junction, VT 05452

Date: February 22, 2021

Testimony on House Bill: H.101 “An Act relating to the implementation of 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 by providing grant funding to build systems- driven, sustainable literacy support for all students.”

Testimony To: House Education Committee

Respectfully Submitted By: Sandra Lee Chittenden

I want to start by recognizing the committee for all of your hard work and dedication you have put into literacy the last two sessions. While we are in the middle of a global pandemic, you all have showed up, asked hard questions, and devoted your time in ensuring that all students in Vermont have equal, equitable right to learn how to read and become literate functioning adults who are career & college ready.

I know many people have different definitions for what career and collage means. As a parent of a junior in Highschool, this hits close to home for me. To me career and collage ready means being able to read on at least a 12th grade level once graduating w/o relying on assistive technology to read and write for them. While Vermont seems to have a high graduation rate, I can affirm you, many of those kids on IEPs for specific learning disability, or emotional disturbance aren't anywhere near grade level. My son is one of them, and is struggling in public Highschool. The trauma and emotional toll of not appropriately meeting his needs, has caused significant mental health issues. A lot of young adults who graduate are not going onto collage or career fields, because they haven't been given the appropriate interventions and curriculum starting from K. They are beaten down, and end up giving up, because they don't feel like they can be successful in these environments.

My daughter started receiving appropriate intervention starting in 4th grade, and year after she was finally found eligible for an IEP. Although I knew she had dyslexia in K, she wasn't found eligible until 3rd grade for math, she then received related services for reading. The school district decided to allow her to receive services online through Lindamoodbell in MA. She had these services in 4th & 5th grade, and we just had her 3-year reevaluation, and I'm happy to report with scientifically evident based, sequential, explicit, multi-sensory instruction she is now reading at grade level. This is not the norm, had my son not failed miserably, I would not have gotten this appropriate reading intervention for my daughter. When Covid hit, her reading services wear essentially seamless, because she had already been receiving her reading intervention online. As a parent I shouldn't have had to become an “Expert” in all things related to assessments, curriculum, and special education. I'm currently receiving formal Special Education Advocacy training through the Council of parents, Attorneys, and advocate. (COPAA)

I have reviewed draft 3.1 of H. 101: There are many parts of this bill that I like and that I'm in agreement with. I'd like to see the following changes.

- Define what "Highly Skilled Teacher means"
- I'd like to see H.101 aligned in its entirety with 20 USC 6368 (6) §6368 Definitions in IDEA:

(1) Eligible local educational agency

The term "eligible local educational agency" means a local educational agency that—

(A) is among the local educational agencies in the State with the highest numbers or percentages of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most currently available data; and

(B) has—

(i) jurisdiction over a geographic area that includes an area designated as an empowerment zone, or an enterprise community, under part I of subchapter U of chapter 1 of title 26;

(ii) jurisdiction over a significant number or percentage of schools that are identified for school improvement under section 6316(b) of this title; or

(iii) the highest numbers or percentages of children who are counted under section 6333(c) of this title, in comparison to other local educational agencies in the State.

(2) Eligible professional development provider

The term "eligible professional development provider" means a provider of professional development in reading instruction to teachers, including special education teachers, that is based on scientifically based reading research.

(3) Essential components of reading instruction

The term "essential components of reading instruction" means explicit and systematic instruction in—

(A) phonemic awareness;

(B) phonics;

(C) vocabulary development;

(D) reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and

(E) reading comprehension strategies.

(4) Instructional staff

The term "instructional staff"—

(A) means individuals who have responsibility for teaching children to read; and

(B) includes principals, teachers, supervisors of instruction, librarians, library school media specialists, teachers of academic subjects other than reading, and other individuals who have responsibility for assisting children to learn to read.

(5) Reading

The term "reading" means a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:

(A) The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print.

- (B) The ability to decode unfamiliar words.
- (C) The ability to read fluently.
- (D) Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension.
- (E) The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print.
- (F) The development and maintenance of a motivation to read.

(6) Scientifically based reading research

The term "scientifically based reading research" means research that—

- (A) applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties; and
- (B) includes research that—
 - (i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
 - (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
 - (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
 - (iv) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

(7) Screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments

(A) In general

The term "screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments" means—

- (i) screening reading assessments;
- (ii) diagnostic reading assessments; and
- (iii) classroom-based instructional reading assessments.

(B) Screening reading assessment

The term "screening reading assessment" means an assessment that is—

- (i) valid, reliable, and based on scientifically based reading research; and
- (ii) a brief procedure designed as a first step in identifying children who may be at high risk for delayed development or academic failure and in need of further diagnosis of their need for special services or additional reading instruction.

(C) Diagnostic reading assessment

The term "diagnostic reading assessment" means an assessment that is—

- (i) valid, reliable, and based on scientifically based reading research; and
- (ii) used for the purpose of—
 - (I) identifying a child's specific areas of strengths and weaknesses so that the child has learned to read by the end of grade 3;

- (II) determining any difficulties that a child may have in learning to read and the potential cause of such difficulties; and
- (III) helping to determine possible reading intervention strategies and related special needs.

(D) Classroom-based instructional reading assessment

The term "classroom-based instructional reading assessment" means an assessment that—

- (i) evaluates children's learning based on systematic observations by teachers of children performing academic tasks that are part of their daily classroom experience; and
- (ii) is used to improve instruction in reading, including classroom instruction.”

- Align H.101 with ESSA criteria, because States need to have a specific comprehensive literacy plan.
- Create a Literacy Task force with the AOE that includes parents who have knowledge in literacy, and children who struggle to read: Dyslexia, other reading disabilities.
- Have a universal Dyslexia screener. We provided a state-by-state guide to how other states are addressing Dyslexia and literacy in their states.
- I’ve attach the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) Report (June 2020) that would be useful as we evaluate our State’s literacy programs.

The Tools for Assessments and Recommended Instructional Materials section starts on p. 7.

Specific literacy screeners are recommended on p. 4. I noted that several programs our District is currently using are **not recommended** (see bottom of p. 6):

A number of tools do not align with the principles of the science of reading. The tools in this list, while popular in many schools, rely on the three-cuing system of reading words, a method that is not supported by consensus research. Most notable of these are Running Records, Fountas and Pinnell, Benchmark Assessment System (BAS), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

Thank you for your work on improving literacy. Hopefully Vermont can move towards using consensus-based research (supported by the majority opinion of the National Reading Panel) soon. I appreciate you allowing me to testify, and I look forward to continuing to being engage in the Literacy conversations in Vermont.

Sincerely,
Sandra Chittenden

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2014-title20/html/USCODE-2014-title20-chap70-subchapI-partB-subpart1-sec6368.htm>

