

# Structured Literacy Success - Background & Evidence of Reading Improvement

## In Support of S.75, An act relating to screening students for dyslexia markers

Submitted by the New Hampshire International Dyslexia Association, Legislative Committee  
February 23, 2021

### Background

**95% of people can learn to read with evidence-based assessment and instruction.<sup>1</sup> S.75 requires schools to screen students for the markers dyslexia and other reading difficulties** in gr. K-3 and beyond, and to directly teach sound-letter correspondence, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Dyslexia (difficulty reading) is a neurobiological reading disability. Between **5-17% of Americans have dyslexia,<sup>2</sup>** impacting word reading and comprehension. **Learning disabilities have an adverse effect on reading for 80-90% of people.<sup>3</sup>** With structured-literacy training and coaching, Vermont's teachers can prevent these reading failures.

**Decades of scientific research across the world,** including structural and functional brain imaging and randomized control trials, **have identified the most effective instructional methods,** taught with great success abroad and in schools across the United States. Vermont schools will benefit from adopting evidence-based instruction.

**Fewer than half of Vermont students can read at grade level.** On the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress, nearly **two-thirds of 4th graders were not proficient,** despite the efforts of Vermont's caring teachers. In 8th grade, **60% cannot read on grade level.** And we are getting worse. **Vermont now has the lowest reading scores since 2005.<sup>4</sup>**

**Literacy inequity** in Vermont **especially harms** children from low-income families, children of color, and children eligible for special education. On the SBAC, the reading gap between high school students by family income is 27 percentage points, with **fewer than 40% of poor students proficient.** **Fewer than one-third of African-Americans and less than 10% of English Language Learners pass the 9th-grade state reading exam.<sup>5</sup>** Vermont received a zero from the **U.S. Dept. of Education** for the **poor academic outcomes** of students eligible for **special education.<sup>6</sup>**

**Poverty, trauma, and background do not prevent children from learning to read. The problem is inadequate instruction during critical language learning in grades K–2.** Vermont squanders the years that **permanently map the foundations of oral and written English to the brain.** Instead **students practice their errors:** confused alphabets, misspellings, and poor grammar.<sup>7</sup> **Reading remediation in gr. 3–12 is far more expensive,** and requires kids to miss other school activities. Nevertheless, **older students deserve effective reading and writing instruction. They should not be condemned to the lifelong consequences of illiteracy.**

**Students who cannot read well are 6 times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>8</sup> 85% of youth in the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate.<sup>9</sup>** They struggle with low self-esteem, emotional, and social issues,<sup>10</sup> fail to fulfill their potential, and face not only **much-reduced educational and career opportunities, but poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancy.<sup>11</sup>**

**Forty-six other states have passed dyslexia screening laws.** Only Vermont, along with Idaho, Hawaii, and South Dakota, still need a dyslexia law.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Moats, L. C. (2020). [Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do, 2020](#). American Federation of Teachers.

<sup>2</sup> Habib, M. & Giraud, K. (2013). [Dyslexia. Handbook of Clinical Neurology](#).

<sup>3</sup> The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity. (2017). [Dyslexia FAQ](#).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). [The nation's report card: 2019 reading state snapshot report](#).

<sup>5</sup> Vermont Agency of Education. (2021). [Educational Performance](#).

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Education (2020, June). [Letter to Vermont Education Secretary French](#).

<sup>7</sup> Seidenberg, M. (2017). *Reading at the speed of sight*. Basic Books.

<sup>8</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). [Early warning confirmed](#).

<sup>9</sup> Invisible Children. (2018). [75% of inmates are illiterate \(19% are completely illiterate\) Ruben Rosario](#).

<sup>10</sup> The Children's Reading Foundation. (2021). [What's the impact?](#)

<sup>11</sup> Garcia, V. (2017). [The problem with illiteracy and how it affects all of us](#).

<sup>12</sup> Dyslexic Advantage. (2020). *Dyslexia Laws 2020*. <https://www.dyslexicadvantage.org/dyslexia-laws-2018/>

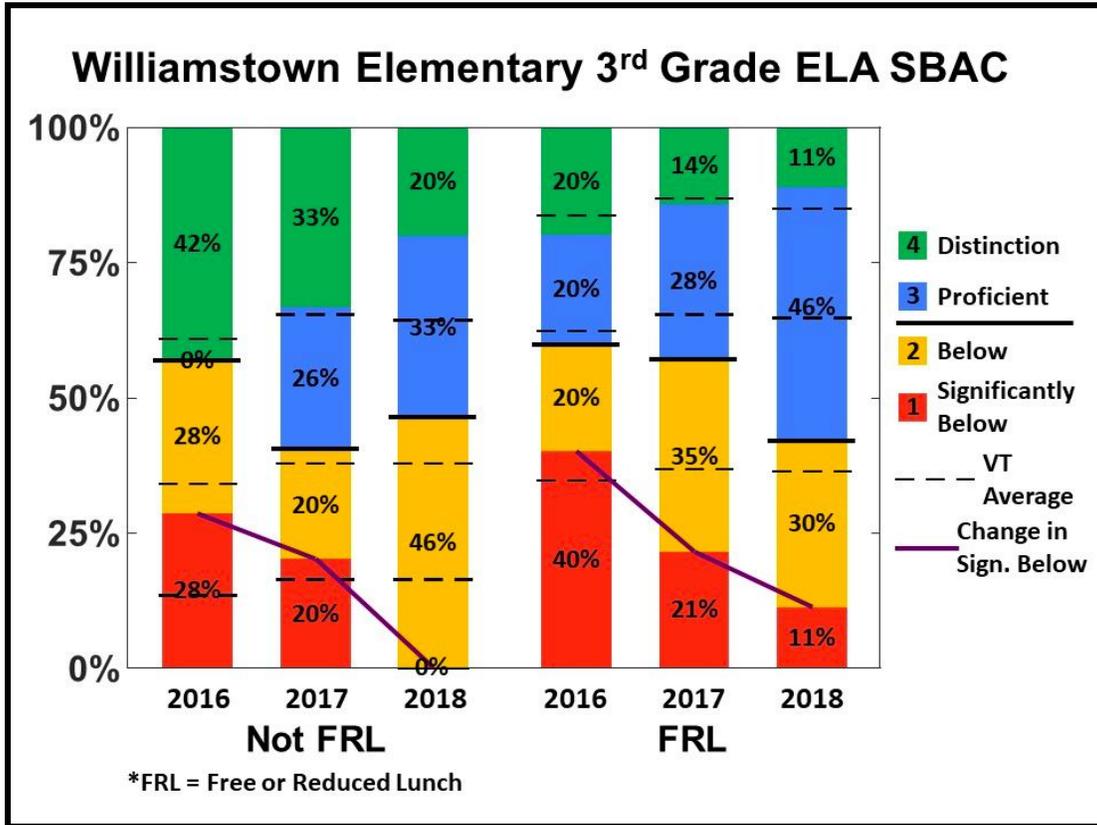
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## Evidence of Reading Improvement

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development convened a 3-year study on reading, **The National Reading Panel**, which analyzed hundreds of rigorous, scientific, peer-reviewed studies on reading development and instruction. Their meta-analysis concluded in the seminal report, *Teaching All Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*:<sup>13</sup>

effective reading instruction includes **teaching children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters that can be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they've learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading) and teaching them to apply strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension.**<sup>14</sup>

We know of two Vermont districts that train their teachers in structured literacy and conduct screenings, which has resulted in strong learning gains, especially for low-income students. At Williamstown Elementary School, "One striking indicator of this success is that there were **zero reading-related referrals for specific learning disabilities in special education ... between 2015-18**, a first for the school."<sup>15</sup> See [overview WES/ONSU's success](#).



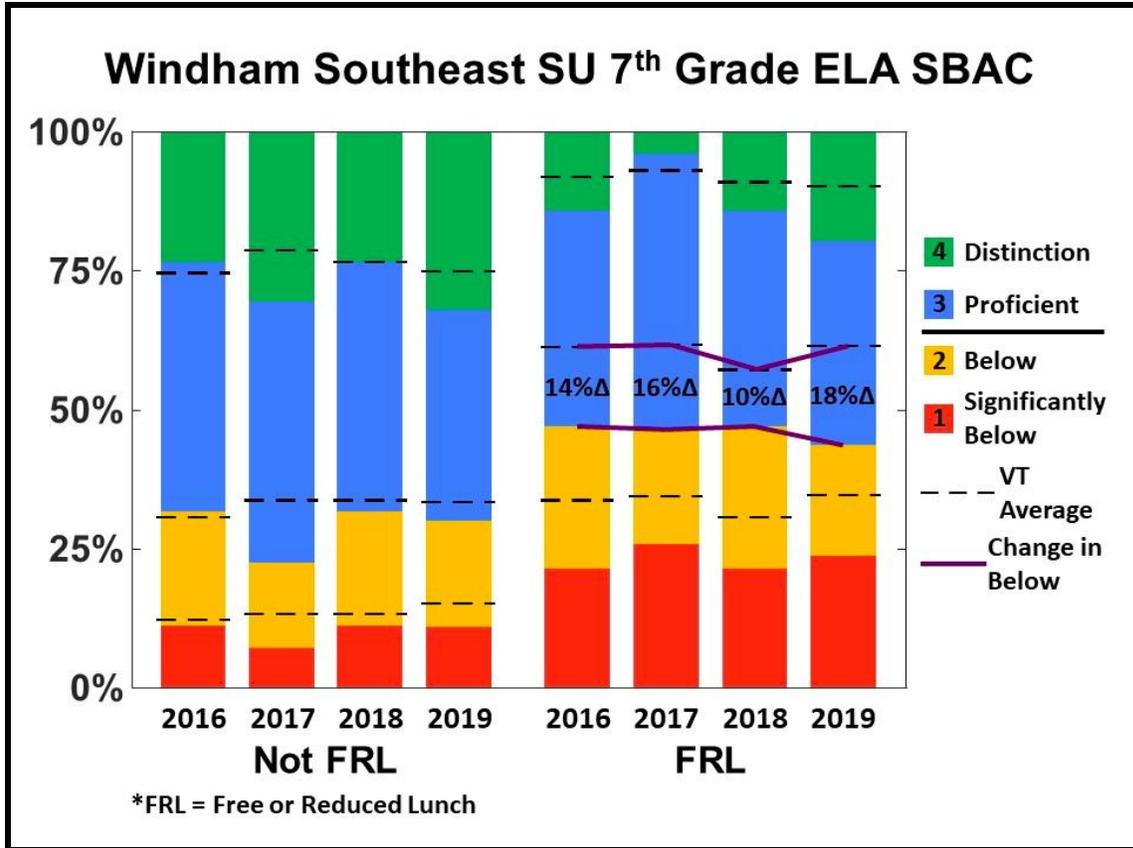
For over a decade, the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union has trained K-6 teachers to conduct screenings and teach structured literacy, improving reading for all students, as shown below. Over four years, **WSESU low-income students passed the SBAC ELA exam by an average of 11 percentage points more than the Vermont average.**

<sup>13</sup> National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). [Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching all children to read.](#)

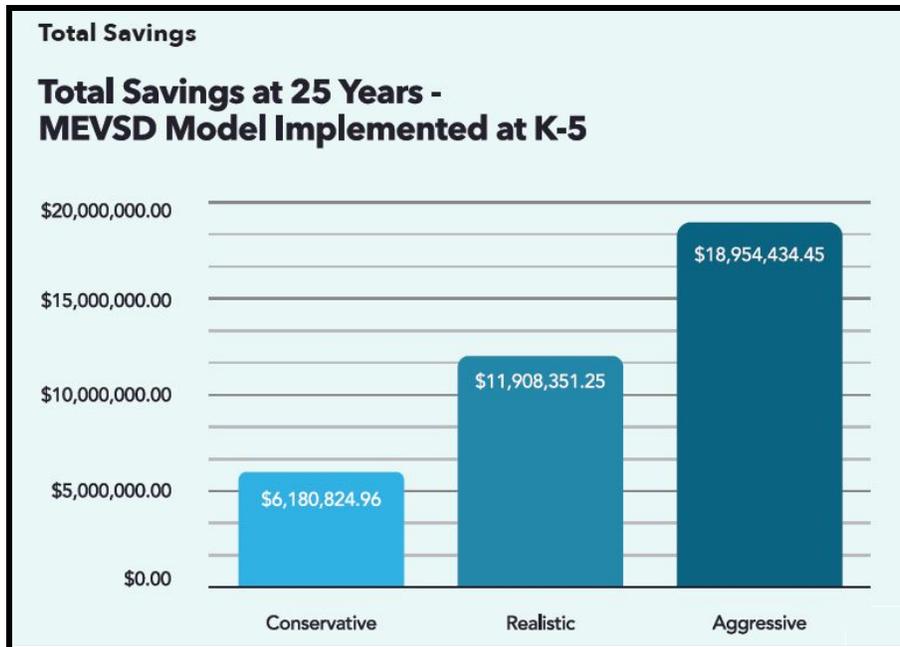
<sup>14</sup> National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). [Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching all children to read - Summary](#)

<sup>15</sup> Stern Center for Language and Learning. (2017). [Orange North Supervisory Union: A model of success.](#)

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When passing its **dyslexia law in January 2021**, the **State of Ohio** weighed the **impact of dyslexia screening and structured-literacy instruction** on the Marysville Exempted Village School District, an innovation which began in 2015. In their 5th year of implementation, their estimated **cost savings was up to \$200,00**. Moving forward, MEVSD school officials **predict huge savings**, projecting 25 years ahead:<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> International Dyslexia Association Central Ohio. (2021). [Dyslexia screening, intervention, and teacher training roadmap 1.0](https://www.ida-ohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Dyslexia-screening-intervention-and-teacher-training-roadmap-1.0.pdf).

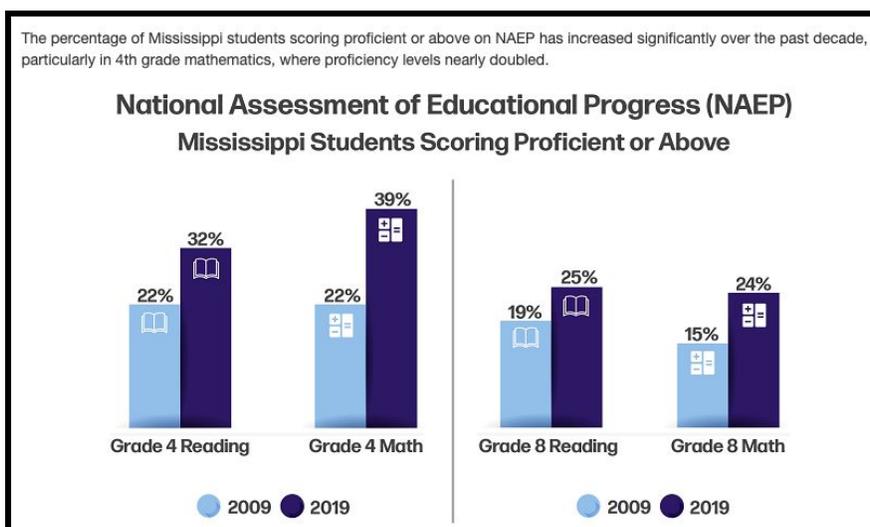
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The Marysville District also found that adopting dyslexia screening and teaching structured literacy was (1) **more about reallocating existing resources** instead of finding new ones, (2) **coaching and professional development made the real difference** in student outcomes, and (3) **training teachers and addressing dyslexia early cost significantly less than remediating students in later school years.**<sup>17</sup>

The provisions of Ohio's 2021 law, **Regards screening and intervention for children with dyslexia**, include:

- Requires the **Ohio Department of Education to establish the Ohio Dyslexia Committee** consisting of 11 members;
- Requires the Ohio Dyslexia Committee to **develop a dyslexia guidebook for screening, intervention and remediation** for children with dyslexia or displaying dyslexic characteristics and tendencies;
- Requires the Ohio Dyslexia Committee to **prescribe the number of clock hours of dyslexia-related professional development required for teachers**;
- Permits the Ohio Dyslexia Committee to make recommendations regarding ratios of students to teachers who have received certification in identifying and addressing dyslexia, the school personnel who should receive the certification and whether professional development requirements should include completing a practicum;
- Requires the **Department, in collaboration with the Ohio Dyslexia Committee, to identify screening and intervention measures that evaluate the literacy skills of students using a multi-sensory structured literacy program**;
- Requires school districts and other **public schools to administer annual dyslexia screenings** beginning in the 2022-2023 school year;
- Phases in over **three years dyslexia-related professional development requirements for public school teachers**;
- **Requires school districts and other public schools, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, to establish a multi-sensory structured literacy certification process for teachers.**

In 2013, the **State of Mississippi adopted structured literacy and screening**. By 2019, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) "results show that Mississippi students living in poverty are **outperforming their peers nationally**. **Black, white and Hispanic students from low-income homes in Mississippi achieved higher scores than the national average in all four NAEP subjects**" in both 4th and 8th grades.<sup>18</sup>



[Children's Dyslexia Centers, Inc.](#) provides **structured-literacy instruction** (Orton-Gillingham) to students free of charge throughout the northern U.S. Their 2018 report shows **significant improvement among hundreds of students** learning in their centers, all of whom have been evaluated and found to have the markers of dyslexia. **Most have special-education plans and are among the most struggling readers, yet these students made great gains.** The [CDC's brief report](#) provides data on student progress in the foundations of reading on evidence-based assessments.

<sup>17</sup> International Dyslexia Association Central Ohio. (2021). [Dyslexia screening, intervention, and teacher training roadmap 1.0](#).

<sup>18</sup> Mississippi Department of Education. (2019). [Mississippi Ranks No. 1 in Nation for Score Gains on National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#).