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In Support of <u>H.B. No. 6620: 'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools.'</u>

Before the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
Public Hearing | March 17, 2021

Co-Chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, Vice-Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Barry, and members of the Education Committee, my name is, Charles E, Hewes and I live in Glastonbury, CT. I am a proud parent of two children, and an educator who has served as a teacher, school and district administrator, and adjunct professor in our great state of Connecticut.

I want to express my **strong support for <u>H.B. No. 6620</u>**: <u>'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools,'</u> and urge you to vote in favor of this important legislation.

Most adults know the value of being literate. Countless times we've heard that being able to read by grade three sets students on the trajectory towards positive life outcomes. Most adults also understand that a literate society is important to the health of that society and its economy. I will not belabor what is already known. What is not as widely known, even by many of our expert teachers, is how to teach reading based upon what we've learned from the research. Moreover, most Connecticut school districts do not have the capacity or expertise necessary to provide the professional development and resources to their teachers to support the teaching of research-based reading instruction.

A large majority of our teachers have not learned how to teach reading using strategies derived from the research; rather, they have been taught general approaches to reading instruction that focus on providing students with a high exposure to reading. Most students who are taught under this generalized approach will miss developing critical reading skills, and other students will fail to learn to read altogether. Using a structured approach to teaching reading will insure the greatest number of our students learn to read in the least amount of time. To use a sports metaphor, if I were teaching 5 and 6-year-old athletes the game of basketball, my players would develop the capacity to play the game much faster (and arguably better) if I explicitly taught, and had them master, each of the foundational basketball skills (i.e., dribbling, passing, shooting). Can you even imagine what learning the game might look like if I simply rolled a basketball onto the court and said, "go play"?

Connecticut school districts need the support from the State to assist teachers make this shift to research-based reading instruction. Training experienced faculty, and on-boarding new faculty, requires a significant amount of time, resource, and effort to insure a systemic and enduring change. Leaving this effort to districts to do alone will not insure that all of Connecticut's students have access to high quality reading instruction. On countless occasions I have hired fantastic teachers who simply do not have the training to effectively teach reading. Annually, we have to support the training of those faculty while still supporting existing staff. This bill will provide the opportunity for a more centralized support network upon which districts can rely in order to support their teachers.

This bill also has the potential to address the concern that some Connecticut districts may not be using resources that have been developed based upon the science of reading. Connecticut districts have the authority to make curricular decisions, but they may not have the capacity to make good decisions when it comes to the selection of a research-based K-3 reading curricula. Again, this is not the fault of our well-intentioned, talented school leaders or teachers, but rather a lack of widespread knowledge associated with the science of reading. If districts had support in the selection and implementation of research-based reading curricula, there is a greater chance more Connecticut students would be able to read. We've seen what can happen when the opposite occurs. For example, in many Connecticut districts the Teachers' College Readers and Writers Project (TCRWP) was adopted as a reading program nearly a decade ago. The TCRWP was seemingly well organized, followed an instructional method that was familiar to teachers, and included a comprehensive support system provided by the Project's instructional coaches. What many districts did not realize was that the TCRWP's approach to reading instruction was not based upon the science of reading. Recently, a group of the foremost experts in reading research composed a scathing review of the TCRWP program that drew attention to the fact that the instructional approaches in the program were counter to the research when it came to phonics instruction for students in grades K-3. Knowing which curricula follow the research, and supporting teachers to implement a research-based curriculum requires a significant amount of expertise, time, and resource. Districts would be better prepared to engage in this process if they were provided support from the State.

This bill will help provide school leaders and teachers with advancing a proven, comprehensive approach to effective and equitable literacy instruction for every student in Connecticut.

This legislation, if passed, promises to build on the success of Connecticut's homegrown, research-based model for reading instruction **–** formerly known as the Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK3LI) and now called the Connecticut Literacy Model – which utilizes the *science of reading.* Specifically, this legislation would: 1) Provide effective and equitable reading instruction in every classroom, 2) Address systemic racial injustice by closing the literacy opportunity gap and 3) Enhance CT's workforce development efforts, ensuring our students and state emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

My own children, the students and teachers whom I serve, as well as every student in Connecticut stands to benefit greatly from this legislation. For these reasons, I ask that you vote in favor of H.B. No. 6620.

Thank you for your time and consideration.