

**RE: Raised Senate Bill 1094: An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs**

Co-Chair Senator McCrory  
Co-Chair Representative Currey  
Ranking Member Senator Berthel  
Ranking Member Representative McCarty

March 1, 2023

Sen. McCrory, Rep. Currey, Rep. McCarty, Sen. Berthel and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Raised Bill 1094 and delaying implementation of the requirements to adopt reading models or programs.

To be transparent, I am Senator Looney's appointee to the Reading Leadership Implementation Council whose task is to consult with the Director of the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, and with informing the work of the Center. The Center was created by the "Right to Read" provisions of Public Act 21-2. My comments do not represent the Council.

As a 37 year veteran teacher, recently retired and still working in our elementary schools as a substitute teacher, I deeply understand the foundational role that reading plays in every child's future. I would not have agreed to serve on the Implementation Council if I didn't. As a matter of fact, I felt a little giddy last week when I taught third grade and the plans included a lesson on root words. I've spent many years explaining to students why they shouldn't just skip words they don't understand while reading, and guiding them to find the "little words in the big words".

During the time that the Implementation Council has been meeting, I've had the opportunity to reflect on practice, speak with education colleagues, and become more familiar with resources our CT State Department of Education (CSDE) provides. What has become very clear is that over-reliance on commercial programs - some of which gave their creators unquestioned superhero status - are not the solution to achieving reading success. Such reliance is largely responsible for the failure of school systems to adopt Science of Reading research. Not only that, but classroom teachers are hungry for change that moves away from prescriptive programs and embraces both their expertise and curriculum writing talent. As such, I respectfully suggest that a working group be created under the CSDE that is tasked with developing a plan that works toward completion of a model reading curriculum for Connecticut. School districts can adopt that curriculum, or use it to guide their own writing of curriculum tailored to their students' needs. Wouldn't this be more conducive to the Department's ongoing oversight of fidelity to implementing curriculum based on the Science of Reading?

Additionally, all school leadership and teachers should be trained in the Science of Reading so that they can craft, support, and instruct with effective reading curricula in which they are invested. Many districts across the state are already engaged in this work through The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents' master classes. State funds and local tax dollars would be better spent in this way than on costly commercial programs. As a matter of fact in Coventry, where I am the Town Council Chairwoman, the cost to adopt one of the approved commercial reading programs is over \$100,000. That doesn't include the cost to train teachers who deliver that curriculum. At the same time, the Governor's proposed budget reduces our ECS grant by over \$134,000 in FY24 and again in FY25. This isn't sustainable. Due to budget constraints, we could very well end up with shelves of lovely new shrink wrapped materials but have insufficient staff to implement the programs.

I appreciate your concern for our children and for your consideration of the comments you receive on this raised bill.

Lisa Thomas  
Coventry, CT