



Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

Teacher Support

SF2872/HF3300

February 15th, 2022

To the Members of the House and Senate Education Committees,

I am writing to you as both a constituent and an English language development teacher to urge you to support SF2872 / HF3300. I'm sure you are aware of the reading crisis in Minnesota. We all know the statistics: in 2019, 45% of Minnesota's 3rd grade students were not reading proficiently as measured by the MCAs. But this crisis is not affecting all children equally. **Only 9.1% of our state's English language learners were met or exceeded standards on the 2021 MCA.** Access to scientifically based reading instruction is truly a civil rights issue for my students and their families.

SF2872 / HF3300 allows Minnesota teachers an opportunity to receive professional development in reading through LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). LETRS is not a curriculum. It provides teachers with in-depth knowledge based on the most current research of both foundational and higher-level literacy skills. Teachers learn how to deliver effective instruction to meet all their students' needs. LETRS is an investment in our teachers, giving them the tools to address the root cause of Minnesota's reading crisis.

LETRS training would be helpful for all teachers, but it's vital for those who work with English learners (ELs). Many ELs have home languages whose sound systems (phonology) differ greatly from English phonology. For example, Spanish has only five vowel sounds, and it has a "shallow" orthography (writing system). This means that the "a" sound in Spanish (like in the word "gato") is usually spelled only one way. In English, however, we have between 16-20 vowel phonemes (sounds), depending on who is counting. Additionally, there are many, many ways to spell those sounds. The English "ay" sound (as in way) can be spelled as an a, a + consonant + e (as in late), ai, ay, or even as an "ea" like in "great." This means that English has a "deep" orthography; there is not a simple, one-to-one correspondence between spoken sounds (phonemes) and the way we write those sounds (graphemes). We need to explicitly teach this to our English learners, many of whom speak languages at home with phonologies and orthographies that differ greatly from the language they speak at school.

Though English is difficult, it is not random. It is a complicated system, yes, but it *is* a system, and it can be explicitly and systematically taught. That is why LETRS training is so essential. Our current system of teacher preparation does not explicitly and systematically instruct teachers in the building blocks of English. If teachers don't understand how the system of English phonology and orthography work, they can't teach that system to students. If they can't teach that knowledge to students, the lesson that students learn is that reading is opaque, inexplicable, and random. They guess at words and rely on context clues instead of learning to accurately decode. Because ELs need this explicit instruction even more than other students, missing out on this type of teaching leads them to fall further and further behind.

Minnesota is not doing right by its multilingual families. I urge the committee to support SF2872 / HF3300. The bill will not rectify this inequality by itself. However, it will be a step forward, especially for multilingual learners and families who need it most. As your constituent and as an English language teacher, I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

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