

# ROADMAP TO READING SUCCESS ACT



**TO: All Legislators**

**FROM: Senators Kathy Bernier and Alberta Darling**

**Representatives Joel Kitchens and Jeremy Thiesfeldt**

**DATE: June 4, 2021**

**RE: Co-Sponsorship of LRB-1294 & 3781, Relating to: Reading Readiness Assessments and Granting Rule-Making Authority**

**DEADLINE: Friday, June 18**

In Wisconsin, 64% of fourth graders are not proficient readers, according to the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), with 34% failing to meet even the test's basic standard. Nationally, of the 42 states that report separate reading scores for black students, Wisconsin ranks dead last in reading achievement among black students, falling 31 places since 1992. In the same timeframe, reading achievement for Wisconsin white students has fallen from 6<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, and Hispanic students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>.

[Research](#) shows how important reading is to future success. Children who don't learn to read by the end of third grade are likely to fall behind in other subjects and remain poor readers for the rest of their lives. Poor readers are more likely to drop out of high school, live in poverty, and end up in the criminal justice system. Almost 90 percent of students who fail to gain a high school diploma experienced trouble reading in the third grade and seven in 10 prison inmates cannot read above a fourth-grade level.

However, research also shows that the earlier we catch reading difficulties and begin intervention, the more successful those interventions will be. LRB-1294 builds on this research, employing best practices used by other states to strengthen current literacy screening requirements and frequency, helping identify struggling readers sooner and get them the help they need.

Literacy screening assessments are a critical first step in identifying struggling readers. Under current law, Wisconsin schools are required to select and administer an annual literacy assessment to students in four-year-old kindergarten through 2nd grade. Assessments typically take only a few minutes and are required by state law to evaluate a student's phonemic awareness (the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds) and letter-sound knowledge. Costs of these assessments are reimbursed by the state. LRB-1294 strengthens state screening standards and provides the framework and tools to help every child learn to read by:

- **Broadening Screening Components to Reflect Evidence-Based Best Practices:** Dozens of literacy screeners are available to schools, but not all assess what research shows are the most critical components for reading. LRB-1294 expands required screening components from two to five to ensure schools are using high quality, evidence-based screeners. This helps teachers more easily identify reading difficulties AND select effective intervention strategies to help children overcome reading difficulties as early as possible. Required components will include phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, decoding, alphabet knowledge and rapid naming.
- **Increasing Literacy Assessment Frequency** from annually to three times per year to better evaluate student progress and catch reading difficulties early.
- **Keeping Parents Involved and Informed:** Too many parents do not find out their child is struggling to read until third grade (!) when they receive their child's Forward Exam results. LRB-1294 requires schools to notify parents of screener results within 15 days, including the child's score, percentile rank and if the child is identified as "at-risk". The bill also requires schools to inform parents if a child begins a reading intervention plan, and detail the interventions that will be used.
- **Creating Clear Direction to Get Kids Back on Track:** There are currently no requirements for when schools must provide additional literacy screening, and there are minimal requirements regarding reading interventions for students. LRB-1294 requires schools to provide additional screening for students who score below the 25th percentile on a literacy screener, or who are suspected by a parent or teacher to have a reading difficulty. Under the bill, schools would need to provide literacy interventions or remedial services for students who score below the 25th percentile.
- **Increasing Transparency and Accountability:** Under the bill, schools must annually report the number of students identified as at-risk at each assessment level and the number of students provided with literacy interventions. Statewide consistency across screening components, testing frequency and reporting will give us more useful data on early literacy in Wisconsin. This information will be posted online and provided to the legislature.

Under the bill, students who score below the 25th percentile on a universal screening assessment or who are suspected of having a reading difficulty by a teacher or parent would undergo additional screening and begin a personalized intervention plan. Parents would be notified of the child's score(s) and the intervention plan for their student. After 12 weeks of intervention, if the student's literacy skills don't improve or a parent or teacher suspects reading difficulties, a student undergoes an additional screener and a reassessment of their intervention strategy.

Although Wisconsin was once a leader in literacy, our students now lag behind states where evidence-based approaches to early literacy have been adopted. How children learn to read is the most studied aspect of education. Over the past two decades, neuroscience – including groundbreaking research at UW-Madison - has allowed us to move beyond theory and guesswork, to identify exactly how children become successful readers AND what effective literacy interventions look like for struggling readers. LRB-1294 aligns Wisconsin law with this growing body of research by strengthening state screening standards, providing more transparency and ensuring teachers have the framework and tools needed to help every child become a proficient reader.

To be added as a co-sponsor, please reply to this email or contact Senator Bernier's Office at 6-7511 or Representative Kitchen's Office at 6-5350 by **5:00 PM on June 18th**.