

Kelly Butler Wisconsin AB446 Testimony

[00:00:00] **Kelly Butler:** It would be Kelly Butler, who is representing the Barksdale reading Institute is the CEO. And she is speaking in favor and I believe Barksdale reading Institute was one of the organizations vital to Mississippi's, uh, reading progress. So, uh, Kelly, can you hear from me? I can hear you and I'm glad to be with you all today.

[00:00:22] I hope my wifi remains stable for the next few minutes. Anyway, we've been having some issues here. Um, I've been taking a lot of notes through this, um, conversation, and I want to applaud Wisconsin for tackling this. Um, I have written testimony, but I'm going to depart from it a little bit because I want to not duplicate what others have said.

[00:00:44] And I really want to try to address some of the questions that have been raised and some of the concerns that I'm aware of. Um, first thing I want to do is give you a little context about me and who I am. I'm with the, the Barstow reading Institute, which was for. [00:01:00] In 2000, which was the same year, the national reading panel, uh, produced its report and codified, essentially five components of reading.

[00:01:10] Jim Marcell gave a hundred million dollar commitment, uh, to the state to create the Institute with a singular purpose of improving early literacy. And so we hit the ground running with the science of reading. Introduce that parlance early on. This was early in the days of reading for. Uh, where there was a big push to try to introduce science into how we delivered instruction.

[00:01:36] Um, through the course of 20 years, we have, uh, worked at every level of the system in Mississippi and including teacher preparation, which has been, um, another, um, initiative that we've gotten some national interest in. And, um, I guess what I want to say about that. By the time the state passed Lucy vegetal motion act [00:02:00] in 2013, Barcel had been trying and testing a lot of avenues for how to teach early literacy.

[00:02:08] Given that that was our singular focus and that we were well-schooled in the science of breathing. We brought in all the experts along the way, including art Seidenberg to help us understand how the brain processes language. So we have been working shoulder to shoulder with the state department. We loan two of our senior staff and the literacy based promotion act was passed.

[00:02:31] And essentially the rollout of the literacy that she's supposed to promotion act took the bar sale model to scale. Um, what our model included was high quality professional service. High quality materials, early screening, affective, tier one instruction, effective interventions, regular progress, monitoring, parent engagement, and supporting with coaches.

[00:02:55] We involve school leaders in the work that we did. Um, [00:03:00] and some of the time that the act came into being, we were really ready to go. What we had was a strong leader and a team, a leader who put together a strong team at the state department of education in the form of Carrie Wright who joined us just as we were about to roll out.

[00:03:21] Um, she put an emphasis on prevention, not retention, and together we created and with strong leadership and talent from Kenyatta, Burke, uh, I hope you all. Put her on your speed dial because she can be an enormous resource for what you are about to undertake. Um, we were able to work shoulder to shoulder and, um, and really, uh, provide some leadership to a state that was floundering.

[00:03:52] Um, one of the things that I want to say, and I can say it from the privilege of the sidelines to a certain extent, even though I'm really in the [00:04:00] trench. Um, but I'm not part of the state system. Um, is that what this is about is changing adult behavior and you've opened the Pandora's thoughts. You cannot close it now.

[00:04:15] And what you are witnessing and living through is a seismic shift in education and the role of sincere systemic change that begins with adult behavior. Um, and, and I think that while. It's nice. And we want to change hearts and minds. We want to, we want to persuade those who are not in agreement on whatever side of the issue is that fundamentally what this is, the valve is changing, how we're delivering it, reading instruction, and that means changing adult behavior.

[00:04:49] And one of the things that the literacy dice promotion act did was it essentially said. It, first of all, I think really made educators set up and say at school [00:05:00] leaders in particular, maybe we don't know how to teach reading because we've had this abysmal results for so long. Um, and so the problem hold up, their sleeves, a big dose of the science of reading, and we required that they change what they were doing wholesale.

[00:05:18] We likened it to stay with this professional development and we blinded the state was kind of. That were in there working shoulder to shoulder with teachers. And as soon as we began to change those reading instruction, behaviors, kids began to learn to read. And so while I know there's been some conversation today about the differences, is this your science or my science science that we're talking about is cognitive research that is based on the medical models and on gold standard research.

[00:05:50] Um, which is indisputable. And while research changes over time, as we continue to do more and learn from, from more, [00:06:00] um, we need to be following what the science is telling us now. And it's pretty clear. One of the gifts you have in Wisconsin is mark Seidenberg. And I understand it's not able to join me to do.

[00:06:12] Um, but mark has really helped teachers all across this country, understand how the brain processes language in order to learn to read, um, and his,

his conceptual models, the round that. Have extremely informed lots of teachers on how to deliver more effective reading instruction and the role that screeners play in being able to determine what those deficit skills are early on and why even that those are the skills that predict future reading performance.

[00:06:50] Um, so I guess I want to really, um, leave you with this sense that. Um, [00:07:00] that, that this is a hard thing. The good news is we know how to teach every child to read. That's the good news. It's not like we're still floundering around trying to figure that out. We know that what we have to do is get it into every classroom.

[00:07:13] Um, I want to say a little bit about the, the, the focus of this, of this initiative, which is the screener. And there's been a lot of conversation already, and I won't go over that. The benefits of. But I do want to speak to a couple of things. One is there's a, there were some concerns expressed about will it over-identify for special education while this while screeners grew out of the Ida Addie, a law, um, it quickly morphed into regular education because it was seen as a, as a terrific way, not to direct kids for special education, but to screen them early enough to keep them out of special education.

[00:07:55] And let me tell you, say one thing about special education. It's a myth that it's the [00:08:00] solution kids end up. It's a cul-de-sac kids end up being directed to special education and they never get out. Uh, and it doesn't always do the job it's intended to do for the very same reasons that general ed is failing.

[00:08:15] Special ed is also failing kids in many cases, just because of the adults need to know how to deliver effective reading instruction. So we've got a lot of learning to do, and I'm not, I'm not bashing teachers. I'm just saying it's time for us as a profession to stand up and say, there's a lot of science here that we need to be paying attention to.

[00:08:35] Um, if we're gonna change the way we, we assess and deliver. Instruction. I also want to speak to the issue of time. It's already been noted that the screeners don't take very long, but let me tell you that, that it will say kind of in the long run, not only is it not a time to consent consuming effort, and it's important to do it three, at least three times a year and the progress monitoring in between.

[00:08:59] But [00:09:00] ultimately it's going to say kids time because it's going to catch those deficits. Remediate them. So kids can go on and make use of the rest of their education. Imagine you're at the bras they're reading Institute. I have tested thousands of kids, including middle and high school kids who are still struggling with anemic awareness.

[00:09:22] And by that time it's never too late to teach somebody to read. But by the time you finally find that deficit in a middle or high school, They have already missed a whole lot of other reading development in terms of vocabulary and background

knowledge that then compromises further learning and especially their ability to write, which is a critical thing that they're going to need for college.

[00:09:47] So I want to turn that time issue on its head and says, save time in the long run by devoting this important time now. And the other thing I would like to say is that. [00:10:00] What this initiative can do is serve as an on-ramp for introducing teachers and school leaders, to some of the fundamental frameworks based on the cognitive science that help explain the reading process and inform instruction.

[00:10:14] It's a way to introduce and help folks get acclimated to what we're talking about. When we say the science of reading, it is not all that mysterious. But it's really important and it's become pretty clear. So from my point of view, this is a matter of changing adult behavior and an openness to what we don't know.

[00:10:38] Um, I would offer up carry, right? I take the Liberty of offering her up to the state department and your department of public instruction about the role that a strong, uh, state department can play in this initiative. If you're going to lift a state off the box, Well, local control is central to public education.

[00:10:59] You [00:11:00] cannot do it school by school. You cannot let everybody decide how they're going to do it. If there's a way to do it, do it that way and do it every four year. Um, it's this is not a piecemeal thing. Um, Mississippi did it in about 15 months to get everybody up onto the same page and then immersed, and then you'll see our trajectory of.

[00:11:25] Within a five-year span, it went straight up and it's because we blanketed the state with signs, reading, I'll say one more thing. And then I'll take your questions. And that is, we are in a pandemic and there's concern that this is one more thing we're adding to an already a frustrating and somewhat debilitating situation.

[00:11:48] And now I would say that in terms of this screener, it could perhaps provide a clear frame. For all your K three students that might in fact provide some welcome stability [00:12:00] and structure in the midst of the pandemic instead of viewing it as a distraction. Um,

[00:12:09] so let me take a breath there. I was hoping to tee up mark Seidenberg, but, um, I do hope you'll take advantage of them. And I'm just saying you also have some testimony from Steve. Uh, we have worked closely with both of these gentlemen who are giants in the reading field. Uh, and, and we brought them to Mississippi.

[00:12:30] We brought, uh, mark Steinberg to Mississippi, spent a day talking to the literacy coaches, a higher ed faculty. That's a whole nother conversation and our legislative education committees. Why don't we do that? Because he has deep knowledge about the brain, how it processes language for reading educators don't need to be neuropsych.

[00:12:50] But they do need to understand how human beings process language, a sex, especially the young ones who need to be explicitly taught how to extract that [00:13:00] language from the printed page. Um, I'll leave you with this last thought you were what you were entertaining to replace the current reading readiness assessment program with the three-tiered early literacy screening process is based on south side.

[00:13:18] There are plenty of states who have already done. Yes. This may not be a reason to do it, but I'm from one of them that did do it and it made all the difference. Thank you. All right. Thank you for your testimony. And, um, before I go on to questions, I want to announce who's going to be up, uh, as soon as we're done with, with Kelly questions to Kelly, um, Ben Niehaus will be up next as Ben.

[00:13:44] There he is. Okay. So you can start making your way up there and get yourself set. All right. Uh, then, uh, you mentioned a couple individuals here. I just want to make sure that committee members are aware who this is. Mark Seidenberg is in Madison, at least around Madison. Anyway, [00:14:00] he is a professor at university, Wisconsin.

[00:14:02] I believe he's a neurologist by trade. Is that accurate? Looking at the audience members who might know that better than I'm seeing nodding? Correct. Uh, and. Uh, there was another person mentioned. Now the name has slipped my mind. Um, oh, Steven Dykstra, uh, was mentioned and he has submitted testimony here today at I wouldn't encourage you to read that.

[00:14:24] All right. Are there questions from committee members for our video guest? I'm not seeing any, um, so I, I just have one quick question and it's just really just a small little piece of what you said. You mentioned phonemic awareness, um, and. Quizzing myself here. That's basically the relationship between letters and sounds correct.

[00:14:52] Phonemic awareness is the, is the ability to, um, identify and distinguished between the sounds [00:15:00] and spoken and in speech. Uh, so it's the smallest unit of sound. And when we read, we map those sounds to the, to the letters, uh, which is the. Fundamental basis of reading, which is why understanding and being able to break the code is important.

[00:15:18] Okay. Just want to make sure committee members has an opportunity to, to know what that meant since you had mentioned it and he questions. Well, let me just say that all of you who are reading testimony are reading it at the felony level. If you're, whether you're out, your brain is quite practiced now. So you recognize those words in.

[00:15:37] But when you learn to read, when you're ranked again, to process that line, that you did it at the felony level, and that's one of the things the screener will help do is to determine whether or not kids have that phonemic awareness. All right. Thank you. We appreciate you.