

APRIL 5, 2021

Good morning Chair Taylor and members of the CSBE

I am Dr. Ann Marie Mulready, and I represent the Connecticut Association of Reading Research (CARR). I am here to draw your attention to an issue with H.B. 6620, *An Act Concerning the Right to Read and Addressing Certain Opportunity Gaps*. The Bill defines reading as, “evidence-based instruction that focuses on competency in the five areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and fluency, including oral skills and reading comprehension.” This definition is seriously problematic in that it subordinates comprehension to fluency. Furthermore, fluency is used twice in the definition which suggests it is the paramount objective of reading instruction. As literacy teachers, consultants, professors, and administrators, we know the overarching goal of reading is the deep comprehension of text.

Ironically, this definition moves away from the work of the National Reading Panel Report of 2000, and Connecticut Public Act 12-116. In those iterations, comprehension was at least equivalent to the instructional areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. But most importantly, defining reading in this way ignores the 2020 publication of the National Academy of Education (NAEd), *Reaping the Rewards of Reading for Understanding*. This analysis was substantially funded by grants from US Department of Education Institute of Educational Science. Thus, at this point in time, any prescriptive or proscriptive curriculum directives that are developed without substantial knowledge of this decade long study of comprehension is based on a very incomplete knowledge base.

Again, the State is creating a scenario whereby districts will be flooded by vendors with costly materials and formative testing that purport alignment with a mandated literacy standard, but show no evidence of the actual impact on student outcomes. As with previous mandates, the skills easiest to test and teach are at the forefront. H.B.6620 relies on conceptions that are now decades old and that engendered a cadre of practices and assessments— including teacher certification requirements in literacy—that were highly touted, a decade ago, as the answer to closing the achievement gap. While some progress has been made, growth toward that goal has been agonizingly slow and this year’s loss of school

time is now adding to the burden of accelerating academic progress in our neediest students.

We have included the reference to the NAEEd analysis and, as with all government research, it can be downloaded for free. CARR urges that anyone in charge of children's literacy growth becomes knowledgeable regarding this important work. And we urge the CSDE to communicate the grave weakness of this Bill to the Education Committee of the General Assembly.

Pearson, P. D., Palincsar, A. S., Biancarosa, G., & Berman, A. I. (Eds.). (2020). *Reaping the Rewards of the Reading for Understanding Initiative*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Education