

October 29, 2019

Dear Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Dr. Hank Fien. I serve as an Associate Professor in the Special Education and Clinical Sciences department at the University of Oregon (UO) and the Director of the Center on Teaching and Learning. I am also the co-author of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) 8th Edition with my colleague Dr. Gina Biancarosa, the Ann Swindells Chair in Education and an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership in the College of Education at the UO.

We work closely with ed-tech experts, including our publishing partner Amplify, to offer DIBELS 8th Edition via a robust mobile platform and assessment suite named mCLASS DIBELS 8th Edition. Amplify was founded in 2000 and has worked on third grade reading success and digital learning since then. Together we help states create and manage early literacy programs around screening, diagnostics, and intervention. We serve approximately a combined total of **3.5 million** children across all **50** states, including nearly **64,000** students here in the State of Ohio (OH), including students from Youngstown and Dayton School Districts. Furthermore, over the past two decades, we have provided support for over **30 million** students across the country with the DIBELS assessment. In OH, we estimate that we have served over **800,000** students since 1998.

I am pleased to provide the following testimony on behalf of my fellow co-author Dr. Gina Biancarosa and our partners Amplify.

Early Literacy Creates the Roadmap to Success

Reading on grade level by the third grade is widely considered the most important predictor of high school graduation and college and career readiness. According to a 2012 study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, students who do not read at grade level by the end of the third grade are four times more likely not to graduate from high school, and that multiple increases for students living in poverty.

Only a Third of the Nation's 4th Graders Read Proficiently or Better

Sadly, too many young children are unable to read on level by the end of third grade. In OH, about **29%** of students are reading "below basic" on the 2017 [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), or NAEP. Most of these children will spend the rest of their time in the schools trying to catch up. Too many will drop out.

Starting Early Catches Dyslexia and Changes Outcomes

Reading difficulties begin well before third grade. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), it is possible to identify potential reading problems in children early, rather than "waiting for them to fail." Early identification of reading difficulties, using screening assessments, creates an opportunity to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses, then provide students with the support they need.

In 2011, the OH Legislature passed breakthrough legislation (H.B. 96) to provide early screening and support for children at risk for reading failure. The primary goal of the Dyslexia Pilot Project was to evaluate the effectiveness of early screening and reading assistance programs for children at-risk for reading failure, including those students at-risk for dyslexia. A secondary goal of the pilot initiative was to evaluate whether effective early screening and reading assistance programs could reduce future special education costs. The pilot established four objectives to meet its goals, including the selection of technically adequate standardized curriculum-based measurement assessments for the purposes of screening, intervention planning (i.e., diagnostic), and progress monitoring. To meet this objective, DIBELS Next was administered in five of the six pilot LEAs, including Indian Creek Local Schools, an Amplify client.)

According to the University of Cincinnati's [Year 3 evaluation report](#), "year 3 implementation and outcomes were positive and point to many successes in screening and serving students at-risk for reading failure."

Similarly, a cost-effective analysis of the pilot in year 3 indicates cost savings. These savings are "attributable to the pilot in light of the number and percentage of students' rates of improvement." As a result, researchers estimated an annual projected cost savings precluding the need for more intensive and costly interventions (i.e., the difference in costs between Tier II and Tier III interventions) of approximately **\$328,000** across five school districts.

According to the [Year 4 report](#), the pilot yielded a decrease in the percentage of students identified as having an educational disability among participating schools for all three years of the program. The study also revealed a reduction in the number of students entering special education eligibility. While the decrease was relatively modest, the authors note "among the participating schools, a difference between **15%** to **12%** of students with disabilities represents **105** students who will not require special education services as a result of having their literacy needs addressed through early intervention."

Finding a New Policy Pathway Forward ([S.B. 102](#))

Building upon the results of H.B. 96, the OH State Legislature introduced S.B.102 to establish a statewide dyslexia screening program. If passed, the measure would require "each school district or other public schools shall conduct early screenings and provide intervention services for children with risk factors for dyslexia, including low phonemic awareness."

We strongly support OH's efforts to build upon its existing dyslexia screening pilot law by expanding it to include a new statewide focus. While these newly introduced policy requirements (S.B. 102) create the context for academic success, additional efforts are required to drive reading outcomes at scale. To attain those outcomes, we would like to offer brief guidance on how important it is to implement a systematic approach to state universal screening practices. For example, OH may achieve its early literacy objectives by leveraging its existing K-3 screening requirements (The Third Grade Reading Guarantee, [Revised Code 3313.608](#)) in conjunction with the proposed dyslexia screening provisions included in S.B. 102.

To streamline these closely related initiatives, we strongly recommend that OH educators implement existing K-3 screening requirements coupled with proposed dyslexia screening requirements by working within their existing systems of universal screening and instructional support. Under this approach, educators could avoid creating a separate delivery system for students at-risk for dyslexia and duplication of efforts. In fact, a few states have begun to institute this model, such as the State of Oregon. For example, following the enactment of its dyslexia screening law [S.B. 612](#), OR hired a dyslexia specialist and embarked upon a six-month collaborative process with a group of experts to develop a plan aligned with the current state of scientific knowledge and most promising standards of practice in the area of preventing reading difficulties. Moreover, the plan was designed to ensure that every Kindergarten and 1st grade student receives a screening for dyslexia risk, and to provide guidance to school districts regarding notifying parents of students who are identified as being at risk for dyslexia based on the screening. I was honored to provide advice to the OR DOE as it developed its plan and roadmap for OR districts to build systems that support the early identification of students at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia and providing multiple tiers of instructional support to prevent those difficulties. OR adopted a set of 10 organizing principles based on guidance from experts in the field to lay the foundation of its plan, including the acknowledgment that it "is not wise to create a separate delivery system for students with dyslexia." It also released [additional guidance](#) reiterating the importance of a systematic program as follows: "rather than creating a separate delivery system for students with dyslexia, **the plan focuses on working within and strengthening existing systems of screening and instructional support utilized by districts.**"

It is also worth noting that others are in the process of streamlining their policies similar to Oregon, including Texas, which adopted a rule in 2018 related to updates to its dyslexia handbook, including K-1 dyslexia screening requirements (e.g., assessment administration and Commissioner's List). As a result, Texas plans on updating its Commissioner's Reading Instruments list in the 19-20 SY to include a subset of instruments that will serve as dyslexia screeners. This simple act will provide schools the flexibility to select a single state-vetted screening tool, which meets the state's closely related early literacy and dyslexia screening requirements (vs. multiple tools which can be time-consuming, costly, and

counterproductive). Such an approach is aligned with research and best practices and promotes the implementation of policies and practices that allow districts to systematically focus on improving reading instruction, intervention, and outcomes for all children.

To meet the new aforementioned expectations in states across the country, DIBELS 8th Edition has been specifically developed and validated for universal screening of reading difficulties, including dyslexia risk. This comprehensive literacy assessment system expands upon and refines features of previous DIBELS editions and may be used with all children, beginning in kindergarten, to locate those students who are "at-risk" for reading difficulty. These types of preventative measures play a pivotal role in the early identification of underperforming students and can set all children on a pathway for reading success. They can also be the crucial and scalable first step in identifying students with dyslexia.

OH Can Lead the Nation in Early Literacy and Dyslexia Policy

We are encouraged by the Legislature's leadership and unwavering commitment to boldly build upon the state's dyslexia screening pilot law (H.B. 96) with the introduction of a statewide dyslexia screening law (S.B. 102). **We strongly support the passage of S.B. 102. To meet the state's overarching goals of helping to identify struggling readers in grades K-3, including those at-risk for dyslexia as early as possible, we recommend that OH adopt a systematic approach to its early literacy policies via universal screening practices.** Such an approach dovetails with OH's adoption of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), which wisely recognizes that universal screening "[is the heart of prevention.](#)" By doing so, OH will become one of the first states in the nation to prioritize an inclusive approach to early literacy policy via universal screening practices and will continue its leadership and influence on matters of national importance. Should you wish to learn more about our policy guidance, research-based screening tools, instructional supports, and resources, do not hesitate to contact our team. We would be honored to continue to serve as a partner and a resource to OH decisionmakers, educators, students, and families.