

My name is Patricia L. Scharer and I am Professor Emeritus from The Ohio State University. I have over 40 years of experience teaching first grade, Title I, Reading Recovery and university literacy courses. I am writing to share my concerns about House Bill 33 in hopes that you will thoughtfully consider the recommendations I offer during this testimony.

I regret that I cannot testify in person on May 3 but hope there may be another time I can address this group. I am also available to talk with members on the phone, by Zoom, or via email. I applaud the attention to early literacy and the funds the bill allocates. However, I have two areas of concern with the bill as written: “three-cueing approach” and “science of reading.”

Three-cueing approach

H.B. 33 defines three-cueing approach as “an instructional method.” But, the “three-cueing approach” is NOT an “instructional method.” Rather, it has been a framework for analyzing the errors students make while reading. This analysis then informs instruction and teacher decision-making specific for that reader to accelerate literacy growth.

This framework for analyzing student errors been used to inform the teaching of the lowest first graders during daily Reading Recovery lessons across the U.S. We have over 30 years of research on every struggling student taught by a Reading Recovery teacher; on average, 70% of the lowest first graders reach the class average in 12-20 weeks of individual instruction. Recent, federally-funded i3 research documented that these struggling readers learn 131% more than an average first grade student in 12-20 weeks of daily 30-minute lessons. Effect sizes were large to very large and 3 times the average effects of similar interventions ([CPRE : Consortium for Policy Research in Education - Projects](#)). Reading Recovery teachers support students to use many different sources of information, including letter-sound relationships and word patterns.

Claims that the three-cueing approach encourages students to only use phonics as a last resort or is damaging for students have been put forth by a reporter, the media, and phonics only proponents; such claims are certainly not supported by scholars like myself who have spent years not only studying and conducting research but actually teaching children who experience great difficulty learning in a classroom context.

- 1. Delete all text including a “three-cueing approach” for lack of an accurate definition and lack of any research base.**

Science of reading

I fear that the writers of this bill have been “sold a story” which is scientifically untrue. According to [Dr. David Pearson](#), a highly regarded literacy professor, “there are so many misconceptions, misrepresentations, and half-truths. The biggest is that phonics instruction is “settled science.” He encourages us to look closely at the measures used as phonics research shows a small to moderate advantage if children are tested using nonsense words but rarely shows an effect on comprehension. In fact, a study of extended professional development using

LETRS (Moats) showed a gain in knowledge for the teachers but **no effect on comprehension** which calls into question the large amount of tax payer funds currently being used for this training and the requirement that all teachers and administrators be trained in LETRS. This study appeared on the federal What Works Clearinghouse website but has recently been removed from the website. I will gladly share my copy for those interested.

The position in this bill on the “science of reading” is not supported either by comprehension research or most scholars of reading. Below are quotes from **Dr. Timothy Shanahan**, a distinguished scholar and phonics proponent.

Jeanne Chall from Harvard is well known for phonics research but “never delivered phonics in a vacuum.” Marilyn Adams “rejects the idea of either “phonics first” or “meaning first” approaches. She describes such approaches as “misguided” and “simplistic,” and documents the lack of empirical supporting either of those approaches.”

Shanahan concludes, in agreement with many literacy scholars, that phonics is essential but not sufficient for teaching children to read.

From **Reinking, Hruby & Risko** (2023): “We affirm our own, and a majority of reading professionals’ commitment to teaching phonics. However, we argue that phonics instruction is more effective when embedded in a more comprehensive program of literacy instruction that accommodates students’ individual needs and multiple approaches to teaching phonics—a view supported by substantial research.”

Consider the following quote from the National Reading Panel, a federally-funded meta-analysis of 38 quantitative studies meeting the “gold standard” for reading research: **“Phonics instruction should not (emphasis added) become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached”** (*Report of the National Reading Panel: Report of the Subgroups, p. 2-97*). Rather, the National Reading Panel concluded that, while phonics is important, it should be combined with comprehension instruction, reading quality books, and writing instruction.

Of decodable books, awkwardly written with specific spelling patterns (Dan can fan the man), the panel wrote: **“Surprisingly, very little research has attempted to determine the contribution of decodable books to the effectiveness of phonics programs”** (*National Reading Panel: Report of the Subgroups, p. 2-98*). I searched for more recent research on decodable books since 2000 and found nothing.

The panel also wrote with concern that, given the individual needs of each child, the fixed sequence of lessons found in most phonics programs does not meet those needs. In addition, phonics programs **“...are scripted in such a way that teacher judgment is largely eliminated.”** (*Report of the Subgroups, p. 2-7*).

The National Reading Panel concluded that phonics is an important part of a reading program but must not dominate and did not find any research to support the use of decodable books. I

fear that the funds in H.B. 33 will be used to purchase whole class activities with phonics workbooks and decodable texts while replacing literacy-rich activities such as reading little books at a child's level, shared reading, writing workshop, and listening to high quality children's literature.

- 2. Strike all mention to the “science of reading” throughout. This change leaves in the reference to “evidence-based instructional practices.” The term “science of reading” has been made very contentious and there is little agreement as to what it means.**

- 3. Remove the requirement that all teachers and administrators participate in an approved PD course in phonics. Instead, develop a way to assess in service teachers' knowledge about phonics. Focus on teachers in younger grades, not every teacher. This is potentially a waste of time and taxpayer money and will only result in a NY Hedge fund (Veritas) making millions from the sale of their commercial program called LETRS (which has no effect on comprehension).**

- 4. Strike the mandate that all K-5 classrooms will use curricula from the State Department approved list. This is an overreach of politicians into school district offices and schools and violates practices of local control. Instead, create a state-wide committee comprised of evaluation and literacy content experts who will review the evidence for specific curricula approaches and present a report that outlines what approaches are working well and for whom. This committee would be made up of neutral and informed evaluators, parents, and educators who have taught children to read in the state. School administrators could then make informed choices.**

References

National Reading Panel [National Reading Panel - Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction \(nih.gov\)](#)

Reinking, D., Hruby, G. G., & Risko, V. J. (2023). Legislating Phonics: Settled Science or Political Polemics? *Teachers College Record*, 125(1), 104–131.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231155688>

Thank you for reading my testimony. I am glad to further discuss the research cited.

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