

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 96

Senate Education Committee

May 14, 2025

Robert E. Paponetti, President & CEO, The Literacy Cooperative

Chair Andrew O. Brenner, Vice Chair Louis W. Blessing, III, and members of the Education Committee of the Ohio Senate:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Robert Paponetti and I am the President & CEO of The Literacy Cooperative in Cuyahoga County. I am here to ask for your support of The Literacy Cooperative's Emergent Literacy Coaching program proposal in HB 96.

As you likely know, there is a kindergarten readiness crisis in our state with only 1 in 3 Ohio children ready for kindergarten upon entry. ***Cleveland's situation is more dire with four out of five children entering kindergarten not fully prepared.*** This leads to students not reading proficiently in third grade, a predictor of later educational success.

All families want the best for their children, but not all have access to helpful tools and information that could optimize their children's development in the first 3-4 years of life, the critical window of opportunity in a child's brain development.

Young children learn most effectively through high quality interactions with real objects and people, guided or supervised by responsive caregivers. Young children require engaging, meaningful, hands-on learning experiences and many opportunities for quality play and exploration to master concepts and skills, absorb information, and thereby strengthen the wiring in the brain. In addition, research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy in the early years, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading later.

Our proposal to address the kindergarten readiness challenge is a series of small group, emergent literacy coaching workshops, one series developed for families with infants through age 2 and another for 3- and 4-year-old children, to share effective techniques to foster the love of learning in young children, informed by the science of reading and Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards. We plan to host 24 series and serve 288-360 families.

The proposed in-person sessions will offer learning materials and allow for additional enrichment and a hands-on demonstration of how families can incorporate learning *that will address Ohio's early learning standards* into their everyday routines and build the educational foundational skills before a child enters kindergarten. Caregivers will leave the sessions more enthused, better informed, affirmed, and equipped to support their child's learning and healthy development.

The Literacy Cooperative is the local partner for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Cuyahoga County. We will leverage our connection to enroll families in the program targeting enrollment in the higher poverty areas of the county.

In our 2020 report, *The Economic Case for Literacy*, we outline the costs that accrue when children fall behind and the benefits and savings that accrue when children have the chance at a strong start in life. We're confident our programs will yield dividends for our future workforce and economy.