



The PAST Foundation

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 19

Submitted by Dr. Annalies Corbin, CEO, PAST Foundation

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To the Ohio Senate Education Committee

Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 19, a critical piece of legislation that offers Ohio the chance to finally align educational policy with implementation science in a way that can transform both our literacy and mathematics outcomes.

I offer this testimony not only as the CEO of the PAST Foundation but also as a trained anthropologist and educator. My career has been dedicated to designing systems that support learners and educators in connecting education to meaningful, real-world opportunities - **linking learning to life**. From that lens, I must express deep concern: Ohio is marginalizing its youngest learners—particularly those from underserved communities—by failing to equip them with the foundational literacy skills needed to thrive in the workforce of the future.

The Literacy Crisis: A Moral and Economic Imperative

Despite Ohio's bold policy steps—banning three-cueing, mandating evidence-based materials, and investing \$169 million in professional development—two-thirds of students remain below grade level in reading (Corbin, 2025). This is not merely an academic issue. It is a structural barrier to equitable participation in STEM careers, healthcare, logistics, and other high demand sectors of Ohio's growing economy.

Consider the scale of this crisis:

- According to the 2025 Spring Ohio State Test Summary, fewer than 38% of third graders statewide scored at or above proficient in reading (Ohio Department of Education and Workforce [ODEW], 2025).
- Among economically disadvantaged students, the percentage falls below 30% in some districts—locking students out of high-demand, high-wage workforce pathways before age 9.
- Even though 86% of Ohio teachers have received training in the science of reading, only 70% report using state-approved curricula, and 63% still rely on supplemental materials of inconsistent quality (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Corbin, 2025).

These numbers represent not just an implementation gap, but an opportunity gap—one that disproportionately affects children who already face structural barriers to upward mobility.

From Policy to Practice: The Hard Part is the “How”

As I outlined in a recent white paper, *The Hard Part is the How: Ohio's Chance to Lead the Nation in Reading Reform*, legislation alone cannot drive classroom transformation. Even with widespread adoption of the Science of Reading, we see a breakdown in fidelity, differentiation, and support at the classroom level (Corbin, 2025).

Teachers are not failing—they are under-supported. They report knowing the theory but feeling lost when students don't respond to phonics instruction. This signals the urgent need for:



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- Job-embedded coaching modeled after best practices in North Carolina’s LETRS rollout (Kraft et al., 2018)
- Real-time data systems that inform differentiation
- Tiered intervention frameworks with trained staff and family engagement
- Quarterly implementation audits that assess delivery—not just adoption
- Technology integration that amplifies—not replaces—instruction

These recommendations are not aspirational. They are immediately actionable—and Senate Bill 19 provides the policy structure to make them happen.

The Future of Work Demands Literacy Now

As an anthropologist, I study the ways humans adapt to changing systems. In today’s rapidly evolving workforce, literacy is no longer optional—it is infrastructure. Without fluent readers, we cannot build a STEM-ready workforce. We cannot solve for supply chain innovation. We cannot prepare students for careers in advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, biotech, or AI integration.

In fact, students who fail to read on grade level by third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school—a reality that sets the trajectory for generations (Hernandez, 2012). Every child we fail to support in early literacy is a child we risk losing to long-term economic and civic disengagement.

And while technology, including AI tools, may offer support, it is human understanding—built through structured literacy—that allows us to use these tools wisely and ethically. Literacy is the foundation upon which all future learning rests. Without it, our efforts in mathematics, science, and workforce readiness collapse.

Call to Action

Senate Bill 19 gives Ohio the tools to do more than pass good policy—it allows us to enforce fidelity, support our teachers, and measure what matters. As I wrote earlier this year, “The science of reading offers a proven path forward, but only if Ohio has the wisdom to implement it with the same rigor and intensity used to develop the foundational research” (Corbin, 2025, p. 8).

The path forward is clear. But it requires courage, staying power, and a commitment to execution that matches our commitment to vision.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 19—and in doing so, declare that every Ohio child deserves not just access to literacy, but the daily opportunity to achieve it.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to making Ohio a national model of education done right.

References

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