



June 11, 2015

Dear Legislators:

The Wisconsin State Reading Association has serious concerns regarding the recently proposed changes to the state budget contained in motion 457, Item 46 that grants alternative licensure to teach reading in middle and high schools. We are requesting that anyone who teaches reading will be held to current license requirements. The teaching of literacy requires expertise at all grade levels far beyond that of someone who has a bachelor's degree. Licensure that ensures teachers of reading are well prepared to work with students should be an expectation in all areas of the state and in all school districts. Reducing the preparation, whether employed full time or part-time, of those who teach literacy will negatively impact students and the consequences for our students should not be taken lightly.

Parents and legislators regularly monitor Wisconsin students' reading achievement on state and national literacy assessments. The results over time on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that the performance of Wisconsin 8th grade students has not significantly increased. To change these results requires more expertise not less. In addition, many students who have difficulty learning to read may end up in special education programs. Research shows that quality literacy instruction is a critical component to prevent unnecessary, and costly, referrals and identification of students with specific learning disabilities. Teachers who are not well prepared and lack the critical understanding of how students learn to read have a negative impact on students. Federal legislation and our state administrative code (Chapter PI 11.36 (6) (b) ) require that before a student is identified as having a specific learning disability, it must be documented that they have had appropriate quality instruction to meet their needs. Masking the lack of expertise with alternative licensure of individuals ill equipped to service students will exacerbate this issue and cause harm to the very students we should be protecting, in addition to being out of compliance with federal law and state administrative code. There are good reasons for this federal legislation and state administrative code. It is to protect students from harm.

Professionals in all areas have unique expertise needs. It is hard to imagine that granting alternative licensure to fill positions with ill prepared individuals is a reasonable solution to providing the required level of quality and care. For example, licensing individuals who have not completed the necessary coursework in medicine, law, accounting, and the trades would be foolhardy at best and would result in harm to the people they service. Why would we expect less for our most vulnerable citizens, the students we serve? Providing an alternative license for part-time rather than full-time positions only reduces the number of students affected, it does not eliminate the negative effects.

The Wisconsin State Reading Association urges legislators to eliminate the language that would allow alternative licensure in the field of reading and to maintain the quality of instruction that our current licensure provides to protect some of our most vulnerable citizens, our Wisconsin students. Please focus on retaining and recruiting high quality teachers for all students.

Sincerely,

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