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Testimony for 2019 Assembly Bill 194 – Licensure as a special education teacher

I would like to thank Chairman Thiesfeldt and all of the committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 194 today. Also, I would like to thank Senator Marklein for his willingness to work with me on this legislation and be the lead senate sponsor.

Wisconsin schools are currently facing challenges with the recruitment and retention of special education teachers.

Whereas all other teachers can have a license with stipulations for three years and can have this license renewed every year by the school, special education teachers can have a license with stipulations for only three years. Then due to federal law guiding special education need to become fully licensed in their state. In Wisconsin this means having to pass the required Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), which can be costly, time consuming, and has a limited correlation with transfer of knowledge to children in the classroom.

This legislation creates an additional option to the FORT exam that enables special education teachers to earn their license. It does not in any way change or eliminate the FORT exam, it simply creates another option for educators and school districts to utilize.

The bill was crafted after my office received feedback from CESA officials, who conveyed that some candidates for a teaching license would rather receive meaningful instruction, coaching, and feedback through rigorous coursework than memorize terms and study guides to pass a standardized test.

It is no secret that not everyone learns in the same way, and this legislation creates a second option under which some teaching license candidates may flourish. In addition, there is compelling data which states that receiving feedback from a professor or coach directly transfers to students in the classroom, while testing does not necessarily do the same.

I have constituents, some of whom you will hear from later today, who have been negatively impacted by the requirements of the FORT exam. I believe that this second option will help not only our rural districts, but districts throughout the state, keep qualified teachers who work well with children in the classroom, and the rigorous training will give teachers skills that directly transfer to the classroom and positively impact our children.

Your support for Assembly bill 194 would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

May 30, 2019

Assembly Committee on Education Testimony on Assembly Bill 194

Good morning!

Thank you Chair Thiesfeldt and committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 194 (AB 194), which creates an alternate path for licensure as a Special Education Teacher to an individual who successfully completes a course in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. This option could be pursued in lieu of the requirement for passing the Foundations of Reading test.

Rep. Tranel and I drafted this bill in response to feedback received by Wisconsin's CESA districts and the DPI stating that candidates for the professional teaching license would rather receive meaningful instruction, coaching, and feedback through rigorous coursework than memorize terms and study guides to pass a standardized test. In addition, there is compelling data which states that receiving feedback from a professor or coach directly transfers to students in the classroom, while testing does not.

The reading and reading comprehension course must meet all of the following criteria:

1. The course provides rigorous instruction in the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.
2. A student in the course receives feedback and coaching from an individual who holds either a masters degree in reading or a reading specialist license issued by DPI.
3. A student in the course demonstrates competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency by providing a portfolio of work.

All other teachers are eligible for a license with stipulations for three years and can have this license renewed every year. However, the federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), requires that any individual hired by a district receiving federal funds be fully licensed within 3 years. Fully license is defined by each state. An individual with a Special Education teaching license that has not passed the FORT exam in three years cannot receive an extension.

This is an additional pathway to become fully licensed for the individual, they still have the option to take the FORT exam if that is their preference.

Thank you again for hearing AB 194, and your timely action on the bill.



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'HOME OF THE BULLDOGS'



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Thank you for the time to share my views. I am Julie Prouty, the Superintendent and Pupil Services Director at Ithaca School District.

Special education teachers are required to do everything that all other teachers do. We write curriculum, teach classes, complete lesson plans, give grades, and maintain classroom discipline. But along with all of that, there are more specific skills needed, ones that are learned over time, knowledge of accommodations, how to write an IEP, discipline and de-escalation, scheduling, parenting students with very high needs and in turn, working with the parents. I was hired with an emergency license, but earned my special education certification in four years while teaching. In operating as the entire high school special education department, I had the students for four years. I was able to learn the curriculum taught in all the classes, and assist general education teachers in how to accommodate a student's specific needs. I was able to develop a trusted relationship with the family and communicate their needs to teachers. I did not have to worry about passing a test, how I was going to be able to take time out of my day to take the test, nor worry about how I was going to pay for it.

A special education teacher is more than a content area teacher- placing a child in the special education classroom is not a fix, equity and research show that students with disabilities need to be in the general education classroom to learn; it is important to be with their non-disabled peers. There are many more duties in special education. It is required that all student goals, created specifically for each child, be reported on at least as many times as the other students. All Individual Education Planning goals (or IEP goals) are monitored and reported on, typically this is after each quarter. This means that when a child has a goal of reading at a specific level, the special education teacher has to show measurable progress. No other teachers are required to demonstrate this.

Only special education teachers have to measure each goal, and some students have one to two goals, but many have more. If, when reported, a child has not made progress, it is required that the IEP team be reconvened to discuss why, and how we are going to fix it. You see, general education teachers are not required to tell the parents that their child is not learning, only special education teachers. This skill, and believe me it is a skill to defend your teaching is not taught in college, it is learned on the job. Yet another reason to retain special education teachers.

When you and I attended high school, teaching was not about building skills for students, it was about passing classes. The talents of a good special education teacher are about what a child needs and when they need it, being an advocate for students, and working with the parents. Not being able to pass a test is punishing qualified teaching candidates, and completing all of the regulations in three years is unfair.

As a director of special education, it is my job to ensure paperwork is completed correctly, that all the forms have all the correct boxes checked. The ability to complete Individual Education program forms is not what I look for in a new hire, nor is the ability to pass tests. The ability to learn from mistakes and be honest about them, the strength to create a positive learning environment and the fervor to defend what a student needs is more important than passing a test. Thank you.

Testimony on AB 194: Relating to Requirements for Initial Licensure as a Special Education Teacher.

I am Connie Valenza, Superintendent of the Platteville School District. I am speaking with you today to ask for your assistance and support in ensuring all students have qualified teachers, especially for those students who are the most vulnerable. Last year, in CESA 3 alone, 50 provisional licenses were issued for Special Education, English as a Second Language, or Reading. This means districts are more and more often relying on emergency licenses to fill positions that are key to addressing the academic achievement gap. It is true that they may be initially licensed for three years; however, if a teacher does not pass the FORT, that teacher who may have done an excellent job and has developed relationships with students and families, must be non-renewed and then replaced potentially by another provisionally certified teacher or a brand new, inexperienced teacher. This revolving door is especially hard on our urban and rural districts that struggle to attract teachers.

Please understand that we are not asking the state to lower standards. Far from it. We are asking for flexibility to ensure that our teachers have the crucial skills required to

teach our most vulnerable students reading, while increasing access to the profession for our non-traditional teachers. We consistently talk about equity for our students, yet according to the American Institutes for Research, Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, we have a “Significant Educator Equity Gap” where some students are significantly more likely to have access to teachers who reflect their own background, namely white middle class teachers who did well in school.

You cannot help but see the irony that, in a profession that is all about developing modifications and accommodations for learners, the only way to achieve licensure is through a computer-based test with 100 multiple-choice questions and 2 written assignments, virtually shutting the door on many outstanding future teachers that uniquely understand the very struggles the students they teach, face. With our present shortages, our duty to our students requires that we increase access, not set up barriers and believe that this change does not lower expectations. Rather, it requires the person seeking licensure to demonstrate that they have mastered the concepts and acquired the skills necessary to successfully teach reading, by taking a rigorous course taught by experienced professionals.

I know that time is short and there are others who have important things to say, but without going too deep into the research weeds, John Hattie’s meta-analysis of educational

research ranked the most common influences based on their effect on student achievement. Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching...something that would be impossible to achieve by cramming for a test using a manual. We believe that a rigorous course requirement on the teaching of reading is perhaps even more impactful, than taking a test that can only measure academic knowledge.

Please help support our students by improving their access to quality teachers. Thank you.

Assembly Committee on Education
May 30, 2019

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Information on 2019 Assembly Bill 194**

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide information on Assembly Bill 194 (AB 194). AB 194 provides an option to the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), currently required for a provisional license, to address the need for teachers to possess the knowledge and skills to teach reading as they serve special education students.

Analysis of Assembly Bill 194:

This bill allows the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to issue an initial license as a special education teacher to an individual who successfully completes a course in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension, provided the individual satisfies all other requirements for licensure by DPI. Specifically, the course must satisfy all of the following:

1. The course provides rigorous instruction in the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.
2. A student in the course receives feedback and coaching from an individual who holds either a master's degree in reading or a reading specialist license issued by DPI.
3. A student in the course demonstrates competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency by providing a portfolio of work.

Current law provides no alternative to the FORT requirement for a provisional license, except for those teachers who complete an online only preparation program under s. 118.197.

Background

The FORT is a test that was initially created by Pearson for Massachusetts. Effective January 31, 2014 it was required in Wisconsin statutes for teachers to teach grades K-5, special education, and reading under s. 118.19(14)(a). Cut scores in Wisconsin are required by law to be set at a level no lower than that recommended by Pearson based on Wisconsin state standards.

Since passage, the FORT has prevented prospective teachers, especially teachers of color, from receiving a provisional license. This has resulted in concerns from teacher

candidates as well as school administrators who are trying to hire otherwise eligible applicants.

Passage rates in Wisconsin have been close to 66 percent for first-time test takers who took the FORT. Passage rates, however, vary by race and ethnicity. During the 2014-2015 testing period, candidates that identified as White had a first-time pass rate of 68 percent compared to 55 percent for Asian-identified candidates, 50 percent for Native American-identified candidates, 41 percent for Black-identified candidates, and 36 percent for Hispanic-identified candidates. Of the 298 candidates that did not identify as white, only half achieved a passing score the first time they took the FORT. Race-ethnic gaps in FORT performance are not limited to Wisconsin. Massachusetts reports annual pass rates by race-ethnicity for all test takers (combining first time and repeat takers). Table 1 shows a similar pattern of race-ethnic gaps in pass rates for the 2014-15 reporting period.

| Table 1: Total FORT pass rates for the 2014-15 reporting period | | | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| | Wisconsin | | Massachusetts | |
| | Total Pass Rate | Gap w.r.t. White | Total Pass Rate | Gap w.r.t. White |
| White | 81% | | 68% | |
| Black | 60% | 21 points | 47% | 21 points |
| Hispanic | 64% | 17 points | 55% | 13 points |
| Native American | 48% | 33 points | 25% | 43 points |
| Asian | 60% | 21 points | 76% | -8 points |

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/2015ResultsByCategory.pdf> and <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/tepd/pd/2016-EPP-Annual-Report.pdf>

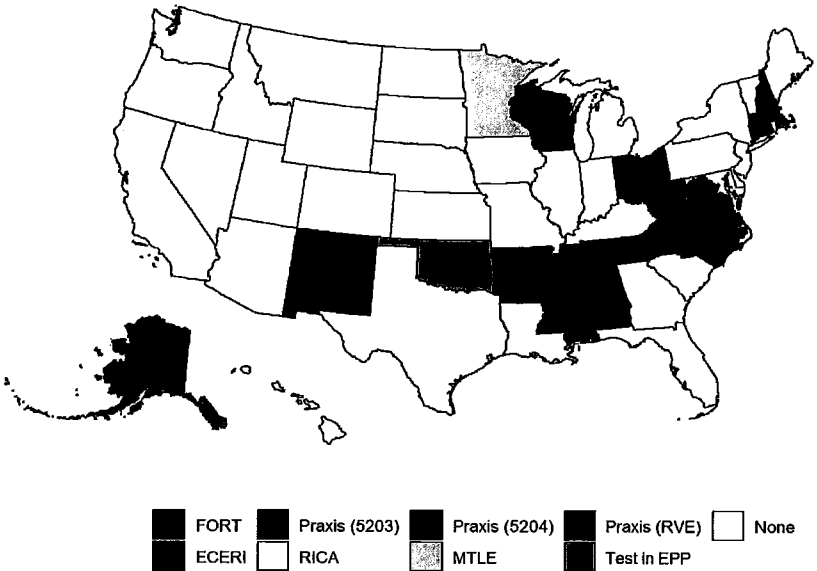
Policy In Other States

Based on an initial review by DPI of teacher certification requirements specific to exams about reading instruction in other states, it appears there are currently eight states, including Wisconsin, that require the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT). An additional nine states require a different exam. Thirty-three states do not appear to require any additional, literacy-specific exam. Table 2 lists the states in the order they adopted the FORT requirement.

| Table 2: Timeline of State FORT Adoption | |
|--|--|
| Year | States |
| 2002 | Massachusetts |
| 2009 | Connecticut |
| 2014 | Wisconsin, New Hampshire, North Carolina |
| 2016 | Mississippi |
| 2017 | Ohio, Arkansas |

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of states that require the FORT, Praxis, or other additional exams about teaching reading skills as of the end of 2018. In addition to the 8 states using the FORT, another five use a related Praxis exam and another four use some other exam.

Figure 1: Additional reading/literacy instruction exams for teacher certification.



Summary of Special Education Licensing in Southwest Wisconsin

Overview: Ten years ago, Southwest Wisconsin was blessed with a diversified teaching market that provided school districts with candidates who possessed the strengths required for quality teaching teams. The best candidate in one district might have been different than the best fit in another district depending on the background and experiences. In short, just because a candidate had a degree and appropriate certification did not necessarily mean he or she was the best fit. By having many candidates, the district had an opportunity to find the right fit for the students in a particular district. Over the past couple of years, districts who once enjoyed dozens of applicants by posting a position on a website are now having to recruit and think outside the box. In an effort to recruit with a stronger likelihood of retention many rural districts are engaging in "Grow Your Own Programs" and many other recruitment tools that were not required in the past. This shortage and these strategies have been well-documented; however, it is possible to recruit professionals and train them with the skills required to be effective in the classroom.

A few years ago, Wisconsin legislators recognized this issue and heard from their districts regarding the teacher shortage. Laws were created that allowed for flexibility. Those laws have allowed districts to solve problems in most areas except special education. One of the issues that has been an issue is because of the Foundations of Reading Test in the area of special education. This has created a barrier for some who want to display competency through a course where application can be demonstrated. There are other unique issues with special education licensure that will be outlined.

Issues:

The federal law guiding special education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), requires that any individual hired by a district receiving federal funds be fully licensed within 3 years. Fully licensed is defined by *each state*. As a result, if an individual has not passed the FORT exam in three years, he or she cannot receive an extension. In all other license areas, teachers can continue to get one-year extensions, but cannot in special education.

Although it might seem straight-forward to study and pass an exam, it is more complex than that. There is a misconception by many that once a student is identified as having a special need that he or she is pulled from general education and taught every subject by one teacher who is an expert in every subject. That is not the case. In fact, it is the duty of those in charge of the IEP team to ensure students are taught subject matter by the experts in the least restrictive environment with their non-disabled peers. The goal is for the district to ensure that efforts have been made so ALL students are taught in the classroom by the teacher with the content expertise. It is the role of the special education teacher to determine modifications and accommodations so students can overcome the barriers to learning. Special education teachers rely on the content teachers to provide the content and the content teachers rely on them to determine the barriers. When they are required to teach *any* content in a pull-out setting, most are required to use a scientific based program. Scientific based programs have been subjected to scientific methodology and data collection to determine delivery method and assessment while also being peer reviewed. These programs, when followed with fidelity, have a greater likelihood

of increased results. Each of these programs require unique training from the publishing companies to ensure the methods are replicated correctly, regardless of the teachers' backgrounds. Finally, the special education teacher must communicate with multiple IEP team members in regard to each student on their caseloads. They must also spend time knowing each of their student's personalized needs.

There are many barriers to learning that require a special education teacher to respond to needs. Some students may have intellectual disabilities that require scaffolded lessons. Some students may be identified as being on the autism spectrum and experience sensory issues that requires the teacher to determine adjustments to environmental factors. Some students require a meeting with the teacher prior to specific classes, so the students have been able to visualize what will take place. Some students who are do not instinctively understand how to respond in social context are required to engage in social stories in an effort to fully grasp empathy. Special education teachers may need to serve students with significant developmental delays or physical disabilities that require significant medical attention. Some students may be non-verbal and require augmentative communication devices in order to express themselves. Some students make gains and then require extended school year services in the summer by their special education teacher, so they do not regress. Other students may experience significant emotional and behavior disabilities that require the teacher to gain expertise in de-escalation strategies. As students get older, special education teacher must know all the laws about providing students with appropriate opportunities to transition from high school to post-secondary employment, which requires coordination with other government agencies. In short, when we meet one student with a disability, we have met one student with a disability. There are many more examples if you spent a day with teachers who serve students with disabilities. The most effective teachers are compassionate, understand how to leverage teaching experts, can develop relationships and trust with parents, are willing to serve students in ways that are not appealing to many, and understand how to problem-solve. With these few examples alone, one can understand why it is not as straight-forward as it would seem. They cannot ignore these issues or choose not to respond.

Many new special education teachers will learn how to resolve these challenges in compliant manners in addition to cramming for the FORT exam. In reality, the law is forcing them to buy practice test guides and hiring tutors. They take the FORT exam and receive no feedback about items answered incorrectly. They find themselves being able to write about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (The Essential Five). They understand reading instruction with the Essential Five items, but struggle with the exam. The majority are very effective at their job serving students with special needs but cannot figure out why there is simply not a course where they can demonstrate their skills. Many have commented they are not any better with reading instruction by finally gaining the few points they needed.

The Intention of the Law: The intention of the FORT exam is to ensure teaching candidates are classroom ready when it comes to reading. Unfortunately, there are so many more skills required for special education teachers. There is a need for teachers to understand the Essential Five as laid out by the research from the University of Oregon. In short, there is agreement that teachers must demonstrate competency in the area of Reading Instruction. The purpose of this legislation was to drive changes at the university level; however, the focus has been passing the exam rather than on instruction.

Another Way to Demonstrate Competency: Over the past 20 years there has been a growing emphasis on testing as a method to demonstrate competency. School leaders will share that all teaching candidates with similar educational experiences are not equal. Especially when it comes to special education teachers. A number on an exam does not guarantee the teacher is effective. Every public school district in the state require some sort of mentoring program for first-year teachers. That is because we know there is support needed. The most effective programs, according to research, utilize strategic coaching and feedback. In fact, John Hattie's work considered thousands of achievement studies. His work is driving positive results in districts. He summarized thousands of studies in a ground breaking study called Visible Learning. He ranked the most common influences based on their effect on "What works best in education?" His study found the biggest impact on the transferal of teacher training to student achievement is when all these components are in place: Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching. In fact, information by itself had no "Transfer of Training." In the table below to measure effect, here is a guide:

Effective Little Effect <.4 Medium effect .4-.8 Large effect .8+

The Impact of Practice, Feedback and Coaching on Adult Learning

| Table 1.1 Effect sizes for training outcomes by training components | Knowledge | Skill | Transfer of training |
|---|-----------|-------|----------------------|
| Information | .63 | .35 | .00 |
| Presentation of theory | .15 | .50 | .00 |
| Demonstration | 1.65 | .26 | .00 |
| Theory + demonstration | .66 | .86 | .00 |
| Theory + demonstration + practice | 1.15 | .72 | .00 |
| Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback | 1.31 | 1.18 | .39 |
| Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching | 2.71 | 1.25 | 1.68 |

Source: Joyce & Showers, 1986, p. 112.

Based on the research, requiring a person to engage in Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching would have a positive impact on student learning. In this particular application special education teachers would be required to either pass the FORT or demonstrate competency by engaging in a course that teaches the components of the five essential components of reading (theory), but requires them to apply (demonstration), actually practice teaching with observation from a person who has a Master's Degree in Reading to provide (feedback and coaching). This would be much more rigorous than cramming for a test. Statistically, it provides the greatest level of impact in the classroom. In the end it also requires exactly what it is the FORT was intended to do: Provides a course with systematic approaches to reading instruction utilizing the Essential Five. This option does not remove the FORT but offers a solution that ultimately gets to the same place. It provides another way to demonstrate competency and removes one of the barriers keeping people with the multiple skills and traits to consider special education.

Summary:

Special education is unique because of the IDEA requirements allows for states to define *fully licensed* in three years.

Special education teachers should not be considered content teachers in all areas, but experts in modifications and accommodations. Pull-out programs are not best practice.

Continuity is very important to parents of students with special needs.

Students with IEPs have diverse needs which require training in a variety of areas.

Teacher candidates are not receiving feedback from the FORT exam and they spend hundreds of dollars on study guides and tutors. As a result of these experiences many teachers are choosing not to enter the field of special education.

In closing, this is not a means to undermine the efforts to increase knowledge in the area of reading instruction. Instead, it is meant to provide another practical method for individuals with the personal traits to demonstrate competency in a rigorous more in-depth manner, where research has indicated a stronger likelihood of theory into practice. Ultimately, it outlines and defines the specific course content and requires a demonstration of knowledge for special education teachers.

Special Education License regarding the Foundation of Reading Test

- I. Legislators recognized the need for flexibility and directed DPI for different pathways to licensure. This became an issue in the area of special education.
 - A. Federal law requires all special education teachers to be fully licensed within three years.
 - B. Fully- Licensed is defined by each state.
 - C. Special Education is the only license that cannot get a one-year extension if all requirements are not met because of the connection between federal and state law.
- II. The FORT exam has created a barrier to retaining and recruiting special education teachers.
- III. Many teachers want a course that will provide training and want an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in the field with coaching and immediate feedback from experts in the field.
- IV. The teachers who fail the FORT exam spend hundreds of dollars on tutors and practice materials. Many feel they are not a better reading teacher whether they passed by one point versus failing by 5 points.
- V. There is a misconception that once a student qualifies for special education that he or she will receive instruction in a classroom away from non-disabled peers.
 - A) Best practice is when students learn by the content expert and the special education teacher provides direction with accommodations and modifications.
 - B) Special education teachers understand that when they have met one student with a disability, they have met one student with a disability as all students' needs are unique.
 - C) Special education teachers are required to gain many skills in the first three years. Examples include:
 1. De-Escalation Strategies for students with emotional/behavior disabilities.
 2. Transition Requirements for students in high school.
 3. Knowing how to develop sensory diets for students on the autism spectrum.
 4. Scaffolding Activities for students with intellectual disabilities.
 5. Medical Procedures for students with physical disabilities.
 6. and many more.
 - D) Parent Relationships are keys.
- VI. Research of theory vs. combining with coaching and feedback.
 - A) Research has indicated that knowledge of theory in isolation does not have a strong correlation to a transfer of skills to student achievement.
 - B) Theory and practice does not have a strong correlation to a transfer of skill to student achievement according to research.
 - C) Theory, Practice, Evaluation, Coaching and Immediate Feedback have the biggest effect on transferring new skill to student achievement.

VII Another way to demonstrate competency.

- A) This bill still requires teachers to demonstrate competency.
 - 1. Special Education Teachers still have the option of passing the FORT.
 - 2. Special education teachers could successfully meet requirements of a rigorous coursework that includes demonstration, coaching and feedback.
- B) Course Option
 - 1. Taught by a person with a master's degree in Reading.
 - 2. The course would require the teacher to demonstrate knowledge in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Committee on Education,

I, Reverend TyLacey Hines, am in favor of Assembly Bill 194. By providing a class as an option rather than taking the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), my husband, Josh Hines, could be licensed to teach Special Education.

I am an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and currently serve churches in Montfort, Cobb and Livingston, which is where our family lives. Livingston is fifteen miles north of Platteville. Our eight year old son, Isaiah, goes to Iowa Grant School District. We also have a 9 month old son, Zion. Josh currently teaches Special Education in Boscobel, a job he feels strongly called to do. We live and work within Travis Tranel's District 49.

Josh didn't pass the FORT test this school year by one point. He received a 239 and needed a 240. We contacted DPI to see if there was a process in place to appeal the score, but there isn't. The DPI staff person told us to contact our State Representative, so I contacted Travis Tranel's office, after learning about Bill 194.

One might say to just take the FORT exam again, which Josh will, but this test costs \$155 each time he needs to take it. He has already taken it 7 times, which is \$1085.00. In addition to the financial cost, it is emotionally draining to prepare, take the test and then wait for the results, especially when you have taken the test several times and your career is determined by the results.

Since he did not pass the FORT exam, he is losing his job as a Special Education Teacher at Boscobel. He received an emergency license to teach this year, and when he missed passing the FORT exam by one point, he had to resign at the end of this 18-19 school year. He is applying for other Special Education teaching positions currently.

The ironic part of all this is that he is currently working on his Master Degree in Special Education. He has taken two classes so far, resulting in an A and B grades, respectively. He does so well in the classroom setting.

I fully believe that if given this opportunity to take a class that covers the FORT exam material, he would be able to pass the class with no problem. I know that he is not the only one that has been affected negatively by this exam. He is still fighting for his license, but there are many who have just given up and gone on to different careers. I have to wonder how many good teachers have been lost due to this exam.

Josh and I have been married for 10 years. We have two kids. He is not the traditional person trying to pass this exam. He has a family to care for, and Bill 194 would allow him to receive his initial teaching license to teach Special Education. I urge you to strongly consider Bill 194 and know that by passing Bill 194 it will change our lives.

~~With Much Gratitude,~~

Rev. TyLacey Hines

Reverend TyLacey Hines

Pastor at Livingston, Montfort and Cobb United Methodist Churches

To the Committee on Education,

My name is Joshua Hines, and I am in favor of Assembly Bill 194. The passing of this bill would afford me the opportunity to get pass this hurdle that is the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), and finally become a licensed teacher in the state of Wisconsin.

I have always wanted to be a teacher. I love to work with children, and be a part of their educational journey. My pursuit of this dream has always been an uphill battle, yet I have always been able to overcome any obstacle and keep moving forward. The FORT is the final obstacle, but I have been unable to overcome it in five years. I struggle with test anxiety, so asking me to sit down and take a four hour long test is not going to accurately display what I actually know. I would have had a better chance of passing if I had a class that taught the information beforehand, but since I was already student teaching by the time this test was instituted no such class was offered to me. I have tried seven times to pass this test, and even scored a 239 this last time. However, according to this test, I have to get at least a 240 to be considered a good teacher. That one point cost me my teaching job this year, and now instead of preping and getting things ready for next year I am filling out applications again and praying another school will give me a chance to do the thing I was meant to do.

I work at the Boscobel School District in Boscobel, WI, because they applied for an emergency license in order for me to teach there this year. I was so excited for the opportunity! I worked hard at doing well in my masters classes for special education, studying for the test, and doing my brand new job as a special education teacher. I did everything I could do to pass the FORT and I came up ONE POINT SHORT. This test does not prove what I know, nor does that singular point make me a better teacher. I have worked in multiple different school districts in the last five years as a sub, as a long term sub, as a full time regular education classroom teacher, and now as a special education teacher. I have been passed up on so many potential opportunities as a result of not having the FORT passed, and I even thought my career as a teacher was done at the end of the last school year. This test is responsible for so many potentially fantastic teachers not fulfilling their dreams of becoming teachers as well.

My situation is not unique. I have had many conversations with my colleagues over the last five years about people they know that have given up because they couldn't pass the FORT. Wisconsin is losing its teachers, and we are experiencing a teacher shortage all because Pearson says that this test makes someone a better teacher. I would like to see the proof that this test makes someone a better teacher. I would argue that the 316 classes, and the classes that have specifically been created to help students with the FORT are the reason a teacher might be better. The test proves who has a great memory, or who is a great guesser, but it does not prove who will make the best teacher. Please vote to pass Bill 194, and let potentially great teachers like me have a fighting chance at making a difference in the lives of our youth.

Sincerely,
Mr. Joshua Hines



Kickapoo Area School District

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To: Assembly Committee on Education
Re: Assembly Bill 194

I provide this testimony as a career educator, 19 years as a School Psychologist and Special Education Coordinator, 10 years as a District Administrator, and as a parent of special needs children. Southwest Wisconsin has many small school systems where the search for qualified teaching candidates has seemingly become the single most important task for administrators. Special education presents a unique challenge to administrators based on the statewide demand for this position, and the lack of interest of regular educators to add a licensure and teach in this very demanding field. The lack of applicants can be exacerbated by the Foundations of Reading Test, which can become a gateway test to licensure for those interested in pursuing special education licensure.

There are many stories from our region that can demonstrate the dire nature of finding people who both want to do the work, and can be credentialed to do the work. Here are a few recent examples of the shortage from my region:


- In 2016 a district had by all accounts a fantastic special education teacher who could not pass the FoRT test. After being unable to continue to get a license, the district had to nonrenew the teacher; the support for the students has not been the same since. The district then hired 2 special educators in 2017, both left at the end of one year. In 2018 they rehired, one a relocating teacher from Colorado, and one who was a nontraditional teacher wanting to try the field of special education and enrolled in a teaching certification program. The latter lasted one semester. In 2019 they have successfully hired a candidate away from another district midyear, which creates the same dilemma for the other district.
- Another District Administrator told me that in the last 5 years they have had 5 different special education teachers; this high turnover was due to both nonrenewal and teachers moving on to other districts. One of the teachers in this district took the FoRT 5 times before passing, each time failing by just a few standard score points, but never receiving the necessary feedback to improve his testing. The FoRT feedback report is not conducive to giving the necessary feedback to improve performance. The feedback report is given to the examinee in the form of a standard score. This score does not indicate how many of the multiple choice items were answered correctly in each area of the test, nor does it give the feedback to improve writing responses. Feedback is critical to the learning process, "Assessment theories and academics alike espouse the importance of feedback on performance assessment tasks for supporting improvement and progress in student learning achievement."
- In my district we have almost exclusively relied upon growing our own from our teaching staff in anticipation of retirements because the applicant pool is so shallow. We have a current first year special education teacher in an alternative licensing program, who took the FoRT for the first time this week. He was recruited because of his temperament, experience working with special needs students, student management skills, knowledge of de-escalation techniques, and his desire to be a special needs teacher.
- Over the last seven years the De Soto district has hired 8 special education teachers on emergency licenses or licenses with stipulations, and another who had the necessary qualifications. We have to continue to be more creative with filling the positions with the right people and not just someone who has a special education licensure, many have been non-renewed or unable to teach their own lesson they prepared coming into an interview here. All our Wisconsin students deserve more than this in their public educational experiences. The FoRT test is a very rigorous assessment but doesn't mean a teacher can teach reading/ ELA. We have had at least 3 special education teachers and reading specialists unable to pass the assessment on their first, second and/or third try. Our district has provided time out of the classroom to study for the assessment, materials to study as well as time out of the district to take the test. Regardless of passing the test or not, our local district has provided experienced teachers, administrators and reading experts to mentor/ coach our new hires to ensure our students are receiving the best instruction.



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In summary, we need to do more to make Special Education Teaching a viable career choice. Allowing an alternative pathway to licensure, that is consistent with the spirit of the law, is not somehow watering down the credentials needed to be an effective teacher. The alternative pathway being suggested is actually more consistent with what research indicates is effective. There are many challenges to finding quality special educators and we should all be searching for effective and efficient solutions to encourage people to pursue this career. As of this morning there were 289 special education teaching jobs posted on WECAN. Through WECAN I can look at all licensed Cross Categorical special education teachers interested in working in CESA 3; my search returned 0 applicants. As an employer, but most importantly as a parent, I implore you to support this common sense change to the special education licensing law..


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