



DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20TH DISTRICT

Testimony on AB 1017

February 1, 2024

Thank you Chairman Kitchens for a hearing and for your ongoing collaboration on the literacy issue this session. AB 1017 is a bill to create two new appropriation lines relating to early literacy. 2023 Act 20 made a number of changes to the law surrounding early child literacy, including setting up a grant program for local school districts to defray costs for new curriculum and professional development.

When the Joint Finance Committee took action on K-12 education on June 13th of last year, it set aside \$50 million for early literacy purposes. There were no new appropriation lines, however, as negotiations over what would become Act 20 had yet to be completed. I look forward to deploying this \$50 million toward the transition toward the science of reading. I anticipate a 13.10 request from DPI sometime in February.

Unfortunately, there is not a good and germane appropriation line item in current statute for the Legislature to deploy these funds. AB 1017 would create two new appropriation lines. The first is a continuing appropriation for the Office of Literacy, which would cover both administration and the literacy coaches program. The second is a biennial appropriation for aid to schools in implementing Act 20.

This is as technical of a bill as I can recall authoring, but it is important that the appropriation mechanisms the Legislature uses are properly adapted to our policy goals. Act 20, as well as the budget agreement on the \$50 million, were a good example of bipartisan governance. I hope this technical, implementation legislation can follow in those footsteps. Thank you.



February 1, 2024

Assembly Committee on Education

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2023 Assembly Bill 1017**

Representative Kitchens, Chair, and Assembly Committee on Education members, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 1017 (AB 1017). The Department of Public Instruction is offering this testimony for information only.

The DPI appreciates the collaborative efforts to date with state legislators to pass and begin implementation of Wisconsin 2023 Act 20. This statute is complex and represents a comprehensive approach to address early reading instruction in Wisconsin. It contains meaningful policy that establishes both a clear vision for early reading instruction and supports for those schools and districts that will need increased support to alter the early reading instruction they provide.

The DPI is on track to meet the ambitious deadlines outlined in Wisconsin 2023 Act 20. At the same time, we have heard from significant numbers of districts that while they are committed to changing their approach to early literacy instruction and meeting the requirements outlined in this statute, that they need additional time and flexibility to meet some of these requirements. Specifically, administration of the early reading readiness screener and the reading training requirement.

Due to state procurement rules, the DPI anticipates that Wisconsin will not obtain the new single, statewide reading readiness screener until summer 2024. This screener is an important piece of the statute since other critical elements, such as personal reading plans and local intervention plans, are dependent upon it. To allow for time to provide training on administration and use of the screener, including how to use results to create personal reading plans and local intervention plans, the DPI is requesting a change in the statute that allows for a single, initial administration of this screener in winter 2025 with full implementation and data collection to begin with school year 2025-2026.

Currently, Act 20 states that educators must participate in a training that appears on the Center for Effective Reading Instruction's list of accredited teacher trainings. This list is limited, and the majority of the training options carry a significant cost. Due to federal rules, districts are unable to use any federal dollars to pay for these trainings, meaning that they will need to use local dollars. While Act 20 provides for partial reimbursement grants for new early literacy curricula, districts will also need to use local dollars to supplement those grants to pay for any new early literacy curricula. This puts districts in the position of making a decision between new early literacy curricula or meeting the reading training requirement. Both items are necessary for a successful change in early literacy instruction. Therefore, DPI is requesting a change in the statute to expand

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the eligible reading training options for teachers to reading trainings provided by CESAs that meet the Act 20 criteria outlined in the reading training for administrators. Our CESAs are able to provide more cost-effective options to districts than the trainings that appear on the Center for Effective Reading Instruction's list, and many CESAs are able to meet the criteria having previously used Motion 57 grant funds for this same purpose.

Thank you for your ongoing collaboration and support in making meaningful changes to early literacy instruction in Wisconsin.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison, at kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov or (608) 264-6716.



February 1, 2024

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education

From: Faith M. VanderHorst, Executive Director, Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA)

Re: Testimony in support of AB1017 with amendment

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Faith VanderHorst. I am the Executive Director for the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA). The **Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance** (SWSA) provides school leaders with objective, non-partisan information and training they need to be strong advocates for educational excellence. SWSA serves 27 urban and suburban public school districts with a combined enrollment of more than 200,000 students (approximately 25% of Wisconsin's public school students).

We appreciate the work and collaboration it took to enact 2023 ACT 20. And, we are grateful for the State funding the screener. I am here today to respectfully request a technical amendment to Assembly Bill 1017 to provide for a longer runway for implementation of Act 20. This will allow districts time to acquire and train staff on the new screener. It will allow districts to implement the statewide universal screener with fidelity and accuracy and provide a strong foundation for a positive impact on literacy outcomes for every child.

We ask that the technical amendment allow all districts to begin use of the screener during the third screening cycle (approximately February 2025). This provides districts the opportunity to utilize the screener once and establish a baseline for each student and then follow with full implementation effective for the 2025-2026 school year.

In support of this request I would like to share the following letter written by SWSA, SAA, WASB and WIRSA, representing all districts and school boards in Wisconsin. The desire to implement the new screener with fidelity and accuracy is so critical to our districts that we felt a joint letter was necessary. We addressed this letter to Dr. Underly, Superintendent, DPI, and shared copies with Rep. Kitchens, ACT 20 author and Education Committee Chair; Sen. Duey Stroebel, ACT 20 author; Sen. John Jagler, Senate Education Committee Chair and Governor Evers:

(see page 2)



January 26, 2024

Honorable Dr. Jill Underly
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7841

Dear Dr. Underly,

We write to you today after hearing from many of our members. Together we, SWSA (Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance), SAA (School Administrators Alliance), WASB (Wisconsin Association of School Boards) and WIRSA (Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance) represent the interests of all 421 public school districts in Wisconsin.

As a collective group of public education leaders we understand the importance of 2023 Act 20, and the importance of ensuring that all students, across the state of Wisconsin, are reading at grade level by the time they reach third grade. Act 20 provides a clear definition of the components of strong, evidence-based reading instruction. The work all school districts in the state will be engaging in over the course of the next several years, as the result of ACT 20, has the potential to result in deep, lasting transformational change in every school district which will positively impact literacy outcomes for every child.

There is, however, a deep concern with the specified timelines in the law and what can be realistically implemented in schools and districts. There is a significant need to introduce a trailer bill to adjust the implementation timelines of the requirements of Act 20. Without this trailer bill, school districts across the state will be scrambling to comply with the unrealistic timelines currently outlined, which will result in surface-level implementation, wasting precious resources of time, talent, and budget money, and limit the opportunities for critically important training and professional learning around evidence-based literacy instruction.

By December 1, 2023, the Literacy Council was to provide a list of recommended early literacy curricula to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. It is currently January 22, 2024 and the Literacy Council is still reviewing the submitted curricula. It is likely that the Council will not have this work completed until after the first of February, at which time they will submit their list to the Department. This timeline puts school districts in a difficult position. The delay of recommended curricula provides school districts with very little time to vet and pilot curriculum resources off of the recommended list for potential adoption for the 2024-25 school year. Many school districts are waiting to see if their current literacy resources will be on the recommended list or not and that list will then guide and inform their next steps with an early literacy curriculum. While the work of the Literacy Council is behind schedule, we are not advocating for them to rush through the process. The reviewing of primary curriculum resources is a critically important first step and needs to be completed in a thorough and vigilant manner. It would make sense for a trailer bill to identify a realistic and practical timeline to ensure all submitted curriculum materials have been thoroughly vetted to guarantee alignment with the state's definition of evidence-based early literacy instruction.

Secondly, school districts are significantly concerned about the timeline regarding the statewide universal early literacy screener. The law states that all school districts must utilize the statewide literacy screener beginning with the 2024-25 school year. Currently, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is working on finalizing the Request for Bid for the statewide literacy screener and putting it out for bid. When information regarding the statewide screener was initially

shared with districts, it was shared that districts would know what the screener would be by March of 2024. Over the last few weeks, districts have now been informed that August of 2024 is a more realistic timeline. To expect school districts across the state to set-up and integrate a new screening tool within their existing technology, ensure that it works efficiently and effectively, provide training and professional learning for their administrators and professional educators, as well as successfully launch a new school year is completely unrealistic. By this time in the current school year, the vast majority of school districts have already solidified their plans for 2024-25 initiatives and the necessary, aligned professional learning. Adding the implementation of a universal screener and the associated training and professional learning in August with no ability for districts to plan and adjust prior to that date puts meaningful implementation of Act 20 in jeopardy across the state.

Due to the fact that school districts are already required to have a universal screening tool for literacy, and they likely also use that tool for screening in mathematics as well, an August announcement date for the statewide screener does not provide school districts the opportunity to break their contracts with their current providers for the 2024-25 school year. This reality will not only result in a duplication of efforts as districts will potentially have two screening tools for 2024-25, but it is also a significant waste of time, money, and human resources as it doesn't provide the time or the ability to shift those resources to other key initiatives in the district.

Finally, research indicates that the most influential school-based factor on student success is the professional educator in the classroom. The current timeline for implementation and the reality of when teachers will have the tools they need for the implementation of Act 20 will not only put them at a disadvantage to start the 2024-25 school year, but it will also create a situation where teachers will see this as "one more thing to do" with little additional resources and support. Successful implementation of Act 20 in school districts across the state requires teacher ownership in improving student literacy outcomes and this can only be accomplished by supporting their learning, providing time to collaborate with their peers, and to ask meaningful questions. Due to the significant impact teachers have on their students, the mindset of teachers has to be at the forefront of all we do. Without a reasonable implementation timeline for Act 20, we run the risk of it negatively impacting school culture and teacher morale to start the new school year. The mindset of our professional educators has to be the number one priority if we desire positive outcomes for students.

Our request is simple trailer legislation to require districts, during the 2024-25 school year, to begin to transition away from their current screener to the statewide required screener, with the expectation of full implementation of the statewide screener to begin the 2025-26 school year. This is a timeline that positions school districts to purposefully and confidently implement the requirements of 2023 Act 20.

We appreciate the work and collaboration it took to enact 2023 ACT 20. And, we are grateful for the State funding the screener. We respectfully request that a trailer Bill be enacted to extend the implementation time for 2023 ACT 20 to September 2025. This will allow districts time to acquire and train staff on the new screener. It will also allow districts to pilot and acquire new curriculum after the late spring 2024 Curriculum List announcement.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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cc: The Honorable Governor Tony Evers
The Honorable Senator Duey Stroebel
The Honorable Representative Joel Kitchens
The Honorable Senator John Jagler

End of January 26, 2024 letter

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. We do appreciate your deep concern for Literacy, the funding provided for the screener and pro rata funding for the new curriculum. We respectfully request adding a technical amendment to AB1017 to provide an extension to February 2025 as the initial implementation date of the statewide universal screener. This will establish a baseline for each student which will be followed with full implementation effective for the 2025-2026 school year.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Faith M. VanderHorst
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from the desk of

MIKE CADY, PHD

Superintendent of Schools

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February 1, 2024

Re: Assembly Bill 1017

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Mike Cady. I proudly serve as the Superintendent of the Pewaukee School District located in Waukesha County where we have the privilege of working with approximately 3,000 students each day. In the Pewaukee School District we pride ourselves on providing high quality educational experiences for our students. The outstanding work of our exceptional staff in partnership with our amazing students and parents show in our results as we achieved a rating of Significantly Exceeds Expectation on our state report card scoring 7th among all districts in Wisconsin.

I am here today to request a technical amendment to Assembly Bill 1017 to provide for a more appropriate timeline for implementation of Act 20, the state's new law on literacy curriculum and instruction. The current timeline and requirements present significant challenges for our district, and we believe that additional time and flexibility are necessary to ensure a successful transition. In this testimony, I would like to highlight the key concerns and issues we have encountered.

Lack of Information on Universal Screener/Diagnostic Assessments

The lack of information regarding the universal screener/diagnostic assessments and the extremely late timeline from the Department of Public Instruction's plan for deployment is a significant concern if the intention of the screener is to provide something that is useful to support teaching and learning. The absence of clear guidance and timelines leaves little time for districts to train staff and develop assessment plans for the upcoming school year. We have been informed that the assessment selection may not be finalized until the fall, and the criteria for selection may prioritize cost over quality. This uncertainty hampers our ability to adequately prepare and implement effective assessment practices.

from the desk of

MIKE CADY, PHD

Superintendent of Schools

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Ensuring Necessary Technology Infrastructure

I would also like to emphasize the importance of promptly establishing the necessary technology infrastructure. This includes not only hardware requirements but also the creation and merging of rosters for testing. Without a clear understanding of what this process will entail, we are left uncertain about the steps we need to take to ensure a smooth transition. Timely guidance and support in this area are crucial for our district's success.

Potential Delays in Professional Development

Similarly, the high demand for the new resource has also resulted in potential delays in staff receiving professional development from vendors. With numerous districts across the state vying for the same resource, it is becoming increasingly difficult to schedule and coordinate training sessions. This delay in professional development puts our teachers at a disadvantage and hampers their ability to effectively implement the new curriculum.

Limited Time for Teacher Familiarization and Training

The last issue I would like to bring to your attention is the limited time allocated for teachers and interventionists to receive training and become familiar with new resources and the screening assessment, combined with the state-required reading plans is a significant concern. Teachers and interventionists need sufficient time to understand and implement these plans effectively. Without adequate time for training, the quality of instruction and support for struggling readers may be compromised.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we respectfully request extended time and flexibility with the implementation of Act 20. The inadequate timeline, potential delays in receiving curriculum and professional development, limited time for teacher familiarization, lack of information on assessments, and uncertainty regarding technology infrastructure all pose significant challenges to our district. By

PEWAUKEE SCHOOL DISTRICT

from the desk of

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granting additional time and flexibility, we can ensure a more thoughtful and successful implementation of the new law. Thank you for your attention to this matter and the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

Sincerely,

Mike Cady, PhD

Superintendent

Pewaukee School District

