

CHRIS LARSON

STATE SENATOR

March 17, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry
From: State Senator Chris Larson
Re: Senate Bill 114

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 114

Chairwoman Felzkowski and committee members, thank you for conducting a public hearing on Senate Bill 114 (SB 114) and for giving me the opportunity to speak in favor of this proposal today.

The Fountains of Reading Test (FoRT) was first imposed on potential Wisconsin educators in 2014 when the legislature mandated that an educator applying for their initial license to teach kindergarten through grade five must pass this exam in order to obtain an initial license.

The exam itself presents artificial barriers to teaching as a failing test to some means that the individual is unqualified to teach, or that if passed, the educator has the right skills to competently teach reading to our children. Sadly, this thought process is flawed, placing too much stock in standardized testing and too little confidence in our educators. To put it clearly, educators repeatedly demonstrate their competency throughout their educational programs and field experience as student teachers. The FoRT makes this learning moot if they are not able to use those skills in a classroom as a licensed teacher.

Most of us can agree that the result of one standardized test is not an accurate metric in determining an individual's ability or knowledge. The FoRT represents a high-stakes situation in which a new educator's entire career is tied to passing this exam. The resulting stress can exacerbate anxiety in students who already have issues with testing, leading many to fail. It is important to note that the pass rate for all first-time students was 63% in the 2017-2018 academic year. It is also important to note that the FoRT does not offer feedback on test performance, forcing students to retake the test without a clear understanding of what area of study needs improvement.

Additionally, diversity among educators is vital in addressing the educational gaps between racial and ethnic groups. As noted in the Public Policy Forum publication, "A Teacher that Looks Like Me," students who attend schools that employ teaching staff that reflect their background perform better academically, with higher rates of graduation and lower rates of disciplinary referrals. In Wisconsin, about 13% of students identify as Hispanic or Latino and 9% as Black, yet Wisconsin's teaching workforce is over 95% white. This diversity deficit is harming our students and can be linked as a contributing factor toward poor classroom results. The FoRT represents a barrier to entry for teachers of color, as demonstrated by the attached Legislative Reference Bureau memo. By contributing to the lack of diversity in the workforces, the FoRT is hindering our efforts to address the unique needs of our Wisconsin students.

Finally, The COVID-19 pandemic has placed incredible challenges on our students, families, and schools. At the onset of the pandemic, many students were not able to schedule testing, and even now, COVID-19 restrictions are making it difficult for students to access the test. Speaking with our colleges of education, they suggest students take the FoRT between 30-45 days after completing their courses. COVID-19 has made this timeline impossible, leaving many students in search of work and increasing the number of emergency licenses issued by the Department of Public Instruction. SB 114 alleviates the immediate concerns of accessibility, but further action to address the FoRT must be considered.

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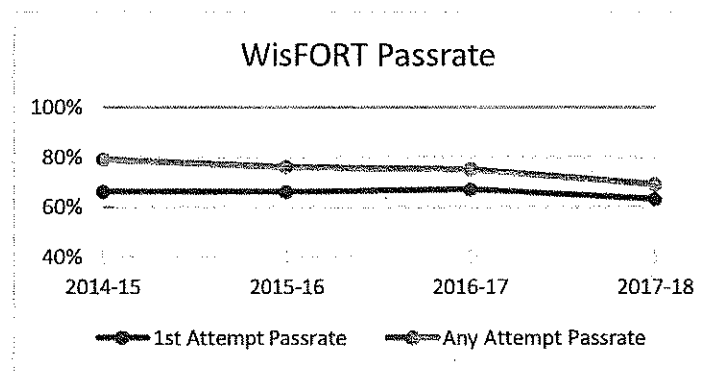
MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Chris Larson
FROM: Richard Loeza, legislative analyst
DATE: January 27, 2021
SUBJECT: Wisconsin Foundations of Reading Test Data

Per your request, this memorandum compiles data on the Wisconsin version of the Foundations of Reading Test (WisFORT). Namely, it compiles pass rates for the exam for students from Wisconsin-based educator preparation programs (EPP). This data is broken down by gender, race/ethnicity, and EPP.¹ The data also distinguishes between the pass rate of persons making their first attempt to pass the WisFORT exam, and the pass rate of all attempts at the FORT exam.

Statewide

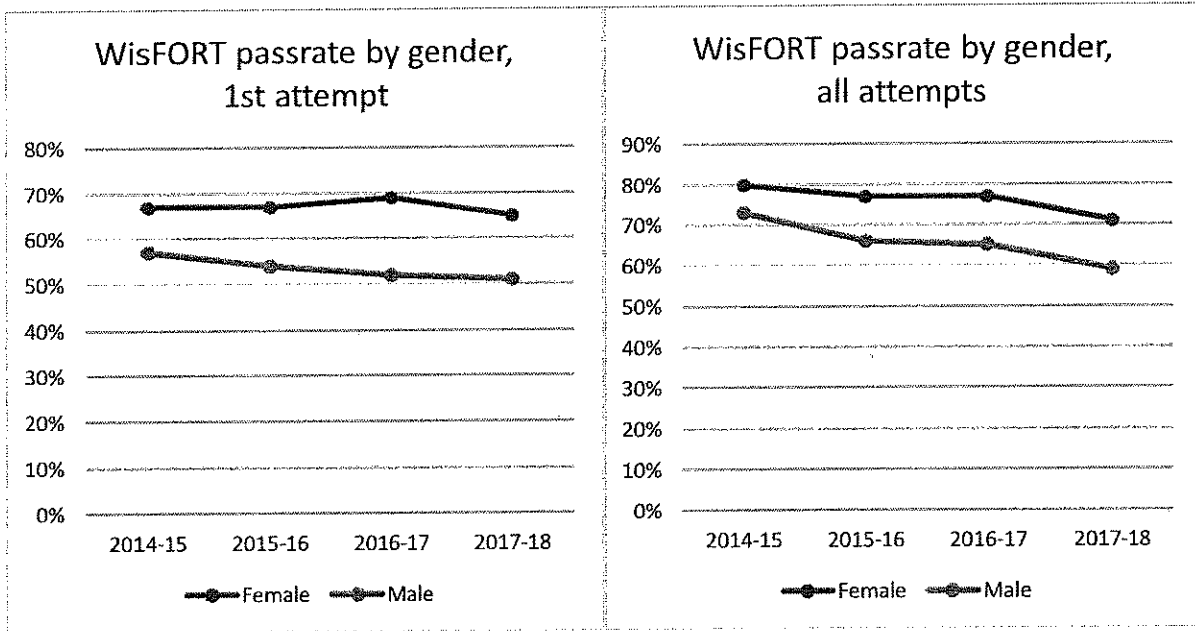
Year	1 st attempt pass rate	Any attempt pass rate
2014-15	66%	79%
2015-16	66%	76%
2016-17	67%	75%
2017-18	63%	69%



¹ Data from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [2019 Educator Preparation Programs Annual Report](#), <https://dpi.wi.gov/>, 31–34; [2018 Educator Preparation Programs Annual Report](#), 27–30; [2017 Educator Preparation Programs Annual Report](#), 26–29; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [2016 Educator Preparation Programs Annual Report](#), 30–33.

Gender

Year	WisFORT 1 st attempt pass rate		WisFORT any attempt pass rate	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
2014-15	67%	57%	80%	73%
2015-16	67%	54%	77%	66%
2016-17	69%	52%	77%	65%
2017-18	65%	51%	71%	59%



Race/Ethnicity

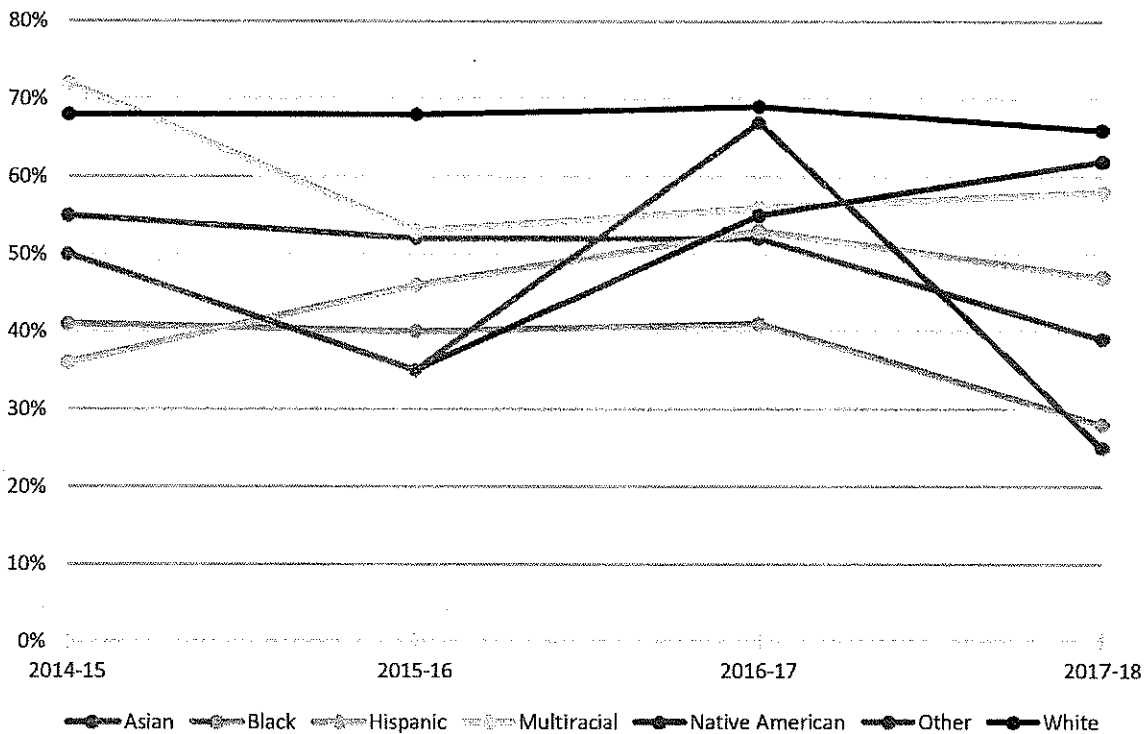
1st attempt pass rate

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American	Other	White
2014-15	55%	41%	36%	72%	50%	50%	68%
2015-16	52%	40%	46%	53%	35%	35%	68%
2016-17	52%	41%	53%	56%	55%	67%	69%
2017-18	39%	28%	47%	58%	62%	25%	66%

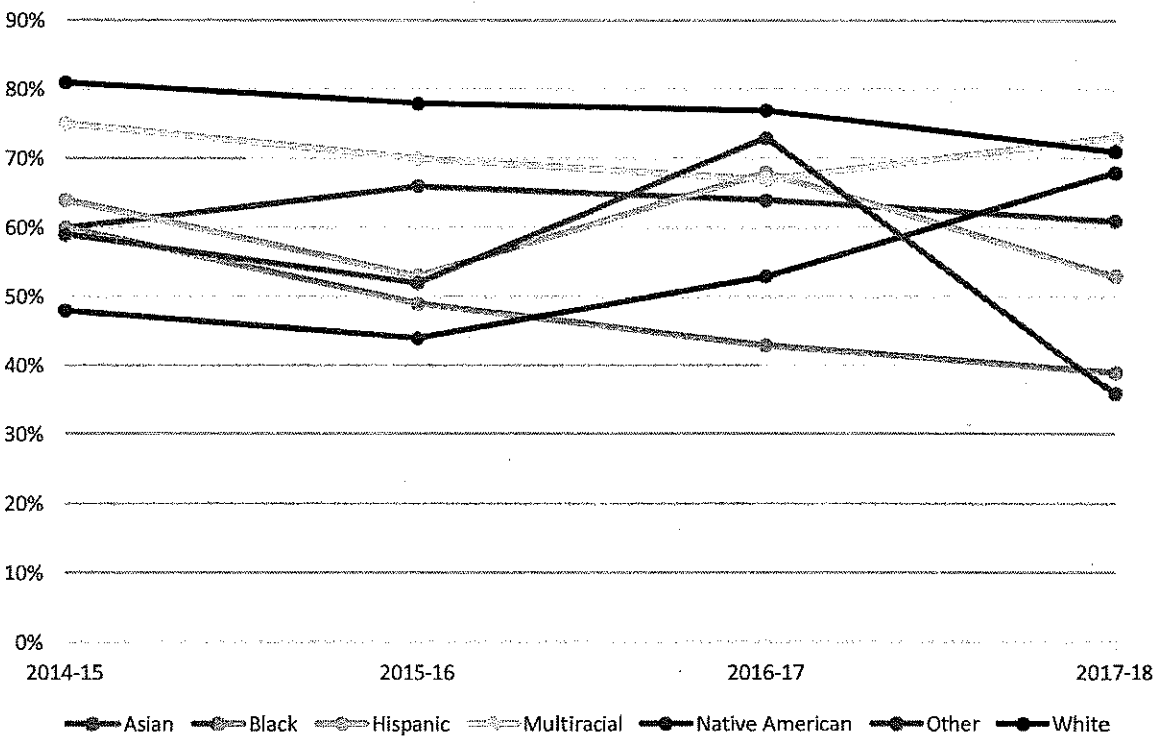
Any attempt pass rate

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American	Other	White
2014-15	60%	60%	64%	75%	48%	59%	81%
2015-16	66%	49%	53%	70%	44%	52%	78%
2016-17	64%	43%	68%	67%	53%	73%	77%
2017-18	61%	39%	53%	73%	68%	36%	71%

WisFORT pass rate by race/ethnicity, 1st attempt



WisFORT pass rate by race/ethnicity, all attempts



Educator Preparation Programs

1st attempt pass rate

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Alverno College	70%	65%	85%	59%
Beloit College	*	*	*	*
Cardinal Stritch University	78%	66%	71%	63%
Carroll University	57%	67%	62%	59%
Carthage College	49%	55%	52%	62%
CESA 1 N2W Program	*	*	*	*
CESA 1 PBL Program	58%	46%	62%	46%
CESA 6 RITE Program	58%	54%	70%	59%
CESA 7 TDC Program	*	82%	*	*
College Of Menominee Nation	*	*	*	N/A
Concordia University	66%	68%	71%	62%
Edgewood College	74%	62%	68%	70%
Lakeland College	36%	*	*	*
Maranatha Baptist University	67%	79%	100%	64%
Marian University	57%	74%	71%	52%
Marquette University	74%	68%	79%	64%
Mount Mary University	*	36%	*	*
MTEC	46%	49%	68%	60%
Norda Inc.	61%		*	*
Northland College	64%	26%	*	*
Ripon College	*	*	*	*
Silver Lake College	42%	67%	69%	40%
St. Norbert College	66%	61%	59%	66%
Urban Education Fellows Program	*	*	N/A	N/A
UW-Eau Claire	72%	77%	73%	76%
UW-Green Bay	69%	65%	58%	50%
UW-La Crosse	78%	72%	74%	73%
UW-Madison	89%	86%	78%	86%
UW-Milwaukee	55%	58%	61%	51%
UW-Oshkosh	71%	62%	64%	56%
UW-Parkside	*	*	67%	44%
UW-Platteville	60%	64%	61%	54%
UW-River Falls	76%	71%	71%	64%
UW-Stevens Point	60%	58%	50%	50%
UW-Stout	60%	66%	71%	71%
UW-Superior	64%	66%	64%	60%
UW-Whitewater	57%	64%	57%	58%
Viterbo University	80%	75%	84%	80%
Wisconsin Lutheran College	55%	61%	64%	85%
eduCATE-WI	N/A	51%	57%	50%

*Data suppressed for cells with fewer than 10 test-takers; N/A: No data reported.

Any attempt pass rate

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Alverno College	76%	79%	81%	61%
Beloit College	*	*	*	*
Cardinal Stritch University	86%	76%	79%	66%
Carroll University	75%	73%	75%	57%
Carthage College	75%	62%	70%	71%
CESA 1 N2W Program	*	*	*	*
CESA 1 PBL Program	72%	56%	47%	60%
CESA 6 RITE Program	68%	62%	76%	67%
CESA 7 TDC Program	*	69%	*	*
College Of Menominee Nation	*	*	*	N/A
Concordia University	83%	81%	75%	63%
Edgewood College	88%	79%	75%	74%
Lakeland College	71%	*	*	*
Maranatha Baptist University	67%	63%	95%	64%
Marian University	76%	78%	81%	64%
Marquette University	89%	92%	94%	79%
Mount Mary University	*	50%	*	*
MTEC	55%	64%	71%	62%
Norda Inc.	70%		*	*
Northland College	71%	30%	*	*
Ripon College	*	*	*	*
Silver Lake College	81%	71%	74%	38%
St. Norbert College	80%	72%	66%	63%
Urban Education Fellows Program	*	*	N/A	N/A
UW-Eau Claire	87%	85%	89%	89%
UW-Green Bay	80%	74%	63%	57%
UW-La Crosse	89%	84%	85%	84%
UW-Madison	92%	90%	85%	94%
UW-Milwaukee	71%	67%	65%	60%
UW-Oshkosh	82%	78%	77%	68%
UW-Parkside	*	*	71%	48%
UW-Platteville	72%	72%	73%	66%
UW-River Falls	81%	85%	84%	74%
UW-Stevens Point	73%	69%	61%	52%
UW-Stout	75%	81%	82%	74%
UW-Superior	83%	83%	78%	67%
UW-Whitewater	76%	75%	74%	64%
Viterbo University	84%	79%	86%	81%
Wisconsin Lutheran College	85%	85%	81%	82%
eduCATE-WI	N/A	63%	67%	59%

*Data suppressed for cells with fewer than 10 test-takers, N/A: No data reported.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to call me at 608-504-5890 or email me at richard.loeza@legis.wisconsin.gov.

LAKESHIA MYERS

Wisconsin State Representative • 12th Assembly District

HERE TO SERVE YOU!

Testimony in Support of SB 114: Waiving the Foundations of Reading test licensure requirement during a national health emergency declared in response to COVID-19

Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing, & Forestry

March 17, 2021

Chairwoman Felzkowski and esteemed colleagues of the Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing, and Forestry, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 114.

As we all know, COVID-19 dealt a massive blow to our way of life, and its effects have and continue to distress the economy like none other. Public and private industries alike have sought to re-vamp and make provisions for a "new normal". The field of education is no different. As you all know, we do have a national teacher shortage, and I would venture to say we are at a crisis level.

When our respective bodies met last spring to prepare the first COVID relief package for the state, we were able to suspend certain portions of PI 34. What we did not do, was take action to waive the Foundations of Reading Test requirement, which must be done by an act of the legislature, as it is education policy that is not under the direct auspice of the Department of Public Instruction. When testing centers abruptly closed, this left many teacher education candidates in limbo and unable to take the exam; which also inadvertently left them without an endorsement for licensure from their respective college/university. This meant, they could have completed student teaching, portfolios, and all other requirements to become a certified teacher, but could not be licensed by DPI because they could not take this assessment that is required by law. Thus, leaving us with a pool of fewer licensed educators. This most certainly harms our rural school districts as well as our larger urban districts.

As a licensed educator, I understand the need for our state to have highly qualified and certified educators instructing our children. I also empathize with today's teacher education candidates who have been left in a lurch because of this requirement. This is why I have remained abreast of and continued to work with my colleagues to make changes to streamline the process to become a certified teacher in the state of Wisconsin.

I would ask that this committee focus on what we are trying to accomplish with **this bill** and not be swayed by speculative discussions that may be brought up today. What we are here to discuss today is a waiver of the Foundations of Reading Test requirement through the duration

of the pandemic or December 31, 2021, whichever is first. This is not a debate on the merits of the Foundations of Reading Test, history of the test, or whether there should be a new test or a test alternative.

This is a measure to provide parity across the board for the educators impacted by the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Representative LaKeshia Myers

Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry
March 17, 2020

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Testimony for Information on Senate Bill 114**

Background:

2011 Wisconsin Act 166 prohibited the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) from issuing initial teaching licenses in grades kindergarten to five, special education, reading, and as a reading specialist, unless the applicant passed an examination identical to the Foundations of Reading test (FORT) administered in 2012 as part of the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure.

DPI was required to set the passing cut score on the examination at a level no lower than the level recommended by the developer of the test, Pearson, based on Wisconsin state standards. This provision first applied to licensure applications for received by DPI beginning on January 1, 2014.

2019 Wisconsin Act 44 directed the Department of Public Instruction to create a process that alters the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT) requirement for Special Education licensure. Under this act, the department shall waive the FORT requirement for those seeking to be licensed in special education if the applicant successfully completed a course of study that satisfies all of the following:

1. The course of study provides rigorous instruction in the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.
2. A student in the course of study receives feedback and coaching from an individual who is an expert of reading instruction.
3. A student in the course of study demonstrates competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency by providing a portfolio of work.

During the pandemic, FORT testing sites have been closed and restricted due to COVID-19. Test centers are now open at significantly reduced capacity throughout the state. Educator preparation programs and candidates themselves have reported to DPI that they have had testing appointments canceled and/or rescheduled multiple times over the past year. Pearson does not offer this test to be taken online, so candidates must take it in an approved testing center.

In late 2020, DPI was notified that Pearson will no longer be producing the 2012 version of the test, which is currently cited in Wis. Stats. 118.19 (14) (a), and is replacing it with a redeveloped test. The DPI is in ongoing conversations about this change with the Legislature.

Senate Bill 114 Analysis

The bill would remove the requirement for applicants to pass the FORT to attain an initial teaching

license through the date the national emergency declared by the U.S. president in response to COVID-19 ends or December 31, 2021, whichever is earlier.

SB 114 would also enable those who were previously unable to pass the FORT due to COVID-19 related test center closures to obtain initial licenses to teach from the department.

All individuals who obtain an initial license, referred to as a provisional license under the DPI's administrative code PI 34, under this provision could then move on through the tiered licensing structure in PI 34 to a lifetime or master educator license without passing the FORT.

If you have questions about this testimony, please contact Grant Huber, Legislative Liaison, at grant.huber@dpi.wi.gov.



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JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director
DATE: March 17, 2021
RE: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 114, relating to: waiving the Foundations of Reading test licensure requirement during a national health emergency declared in response to COVID-19.

Madame Chair and members of the committee, I am Dan Rossmiller, Government Relations Director for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), a voluntary membership association representing all 421 of Wisconsin's locally elected public school boards.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 114.

This bipartisan bill would create a nonstatutory provision *temporarily* waiving the requirement that applicants for certain initial teaching licenses pass the Foundations of Reading test (FoRT). This waiver would apply to initial license applications received by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) from the date the bill becomes law until the official termination of the national health emergency or December 31, 2021, whichever is earlier.

It is important to put this bill in context.

This bill comes at a time when Wisconsin is facing a critical teacher supply problem that predates the pandemic. The pandemic threatens to worsen this problem in several ways:

- The pandemic has disrupted teacher education and teacher preparation programs and has altered student practice teaching, which may work to discourage new graduates from entering the teaching ranks.
- The pandemic has also disrupted would-be teachers' accessibility to take the FoRT exam safely and easily. Unlike college entrance exams such as the ACT test which can be taken online, it is our understanding that the FoRT exam—a paper and pencil test—is only offered at in-person testing sites. This means test takers must gather together in an enclosed space to take this test during pandemic conditions. It is our understanding that several testing sites have been closed or limited in operation as a result of the pandemic further reducing opportunities to take the test.

This bill comes at a time when there is a growing recognition that *more* teachers will be needed to address COVID-related learning disruption that has occurred during the pandemic. Learning recovery strategies such as intensive tutoring, smaller class sizes, extended-school-day and extended-school-year approaches will all necessitate more not fewer teachers. With evidence suggesting that a greater than normal number of current teachers are contemplating retiring from teaching, it will be more important than ever to bring younger teachers into the teaching profession.

The bill comes at a time when there is growing skepticism about the value or worth of the FoRT exam as an indicator of actual teacher performance. There is a growing recognition that there is little credible evidence that passing the FoRT exam, by itself, improves teacher performance or produces any positive impact on students' literacy skills or reading achievement. It is likely that better induction practices for initial educators and instructional coaching will produce greater results than one-time passage of a paper and pencil test.

The bill also comes at a time when there is growing recognition that the FoRT exam is likely culturally biased against test takers of color and creates a barrier to teachers of color entering the profession. This problem is compounded by an arguable need to increase the number of teachers of color educating Wisconsin's changing student population.

- The nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum noted last June that long-standing racial disparities in educational outcomes have persisted in Wisconsin for decades and a growing body of research points to the benefits that a racially diverse and representative teacher workforce can bring to mitigate those disparities. Studies have linked students' access to teachers from their own race and ethnic background with a variety of beneficial outcomes – from higher rates of academic achievement, attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment, to lower rates of suspension, dropout, and discipline referrals.
- A [report released just this week](#) by the Wisconsin Policy Forum notes that while students of color have been rising as a share of Wisconsin's public K-12 student population, Wisconsin's teacher workforce has remained overwhelmingly white. *That report found gaps in the representation of teachers of color to be fueled by race-based disparities at key educational milestones required to pursue a teaching career.* The consequence has been a narrowing stream of people of color throughout the student-to-teacher pipeline. Specifically, while students of color made up 31% of K-12 students statewide in 2018, that share dropped to 24% for graduating seniors, 20% for those enrolled in college, 10% for teacher preparation program enrollees, and 6% for teachers statewide.

It is important to keep in mind that this bill is temporary and could provide researchers with a window to definitively study the effectiveness of the FoRT exam as an indicator of teacher readiness to teach reading and literacy skills.

We do want to offer a suggestion to improve the bill based on our experience. School boards often face a need to hire recent teacher preparation program graduates in the middle of the school year. Often, these are students who have graduated during the first semester of the college school year. These students should know for certain whether they will need to pass the FoRT exam or not before they apply for licensure or apply for positions or are hired.

For that reason, we suggest modifying the bill to change the end date of the nonstatutory provision to January 31, 2022. As the bill is currently written, initial teacher license applicants likely will not know for certain whether or not they need to take the test. Preparation for the test is substantial, and the national emergency could terminate shortly before the semester ends, leaving applicants unprepared for the exam. A January 31, 2022 date would encompass both the fall and winter instructional terms and provide a greater assurance to students about to enter the teaching workforce.

For the reasons identified above, the WASB **supports** Senate Bill 114. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and the above suggestion. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

From: [Chris Stanley](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Cc: [Sen.Taylor](#); [Rep.Myers](#); mmabseexecboard@groups.outlook.com
Subject: Support of SB114- Waiver of Foundations of Reading Test
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 9:29:14 PM
Attachments: [MMaABSE Letterhead.JPG](#)
[MMABSE address.JPG](#)



Dear Senator M. Felzkowski,

On behalf of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators Executive (MMABSE) Board, I am submitting this email to register our support of SB114 which addresses the need to waive the Foundations of Reading Test licensure requirement during a national health emergency declared in response to COVID-19.

MMABSE is firmly in support of this waiver because of the potential impact that it can have on classrooms in Metropolitan Milwaukee where there is a significantly large population of black and brown educator candidates and students.

Sincerely,

C. Frederick-Stanley,
MMABSE President



3.10.2021

Dear Members of Senate Insurance, Licensing and Forestry Committee,

My name is Nicole Knox. I graduated with a B.A. in Business Administration and a M.S.M. in Business Management both from Cardinal Stritch University and I am currently pursuing a M.Ed in Education from Mount Mary University. After working in non-profit for years, I decided to switch careers and pursue a career that allows me to exhibit my passion for working with children. Since switching careers, I have served as a Paraprofessional, Reading Assistant and now an elementary teacher in Milwaukee to advance initiatives to increase the representation of Black and Brown teachers in our schools.

I am writing to you today in support of SB114/AB 72 - this is the current bill on the FORT test waiver, tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am in support of this bill for the following reasons:

1. The FORT Test is a **poor proxy for teacher knowledge & skill in reading instruction** – there’s no evidence that links FORT passage rates to teacher effectiveness, either generally or with specific respect to reading outcomes for students. Teacher evaluations, portfolios and coursework have all shown to have more accurately reflect teacher effectiveness, than standardized tests.
2. The FORT Test is a **barrier to entry and advancement in the teaching profession**, one that is exacerbating the teacher shortage being experienced by schools in Milwaukee & across the state.
3. This barrier to entry **disproportionately impacts educators of color** – passage rates for Black and Hispanic test takers are significantly below that of their white peers, which in turn has negative implications on job stability, earnings, and advancement opportunities for educators of color.

Table 2: Wisconsin Educator Preparation Program Assessments

Pass rates by race/ethnicity (2017)

Group	Praxis II	FORT
All	–	75%
Asian	64%	64%
Black	42%	43%
Hispanic/Latinx	63%	58%
Native	60%	53%
Other/Multi-Racial	61%	–
Multiracial	–	67%
White	92%	77%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018 Annual Report on Educator Preparation Programs

4. A recent publication by [The Education Trust](#) on Teacher Diversity rated Wisconsin **Red - “ Does Not Meet”** on **systems for interrogating licensure policies for racial bias** and adopting licensure policies that **increase diversity while maintaining quality and rigor**.

5. **The mental health of teachers should be top priority during the pandemic, testing requirements add undue stress to teachers whose mental health is already suffering.** Last August, the National Education Association, a major teachers union, found that **28 percent of educators said the pandemic made them more likely to leave teaching.** A study [from Louisiana](#) tracked early childhood educators' mental health last spring, finding that rates of **depression almost doubled**, with **more than a third of those educators indicating depressive symptoms.** In a survey run from August to September by the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#), the vast **majority of teachers reported working longer hours**, and **only a quarter** said their school **offered adequate support for mental health.**

6. The pandemic has caused economic stress in most American homes, teachers are not immune to this phenomenon. **The FoRT test is an added financial burden on teachers**, many of whom were struggling financially prior to the pandemic, and some whose households have seen a decrease in income due to spouses, partners, and other contributors losing income due to the pandemic.

For these reasons, I support AB 72 and SB 114. As an educator, who is committed to making a difference in the life of students in Milwaukee, I ask that you pass this short-term relief bill and continue to look for long-term alternatives to the FORT to help reduce the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity in the state, and create a more equitable system for teacher licensure.

Sincerely,

Nicole Knox
Elementary Educator

From: [Podgorny, Brooklyn R](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: FoRT Legislation Meeting
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 7:48:18 PM

Hello Senator Felzkowski,

I am Brooklyn Podgorny, senior at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point. I am currently student teaching in a 1st grade classroom at Tomorrow River Elementary School in Amherst, Wisconsin. I am set to graduate on May 22, 2021.

I am writing today to discuss the topic of waiving the Foundations of Reading test for students applying for a license from now until December 31st or the end of the pandemic.

I was scheduled to take the FoRT in January, but due to waking up with COVID-19 symptoms, I was unable to take it. I scheduled that test in September and that was the soonest I could get in. I then scheduled the test again for Tuesday, March 23. I have studied very hard, but if I don't pass it is likely that I won't be able to get in to take it again before graduation.

I would greatly appreciate if the test was waived as it has been hard for me to schedule a test and will be hard for me to schedule another test if I don't pass.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this. I would appreciate if it could be read at the meeting as I will be teaching during that time.

If you have any questions, feel free to read out.

Thanks,

Brooklyn Podgorny
Early Childhood Education Major
Early Childhood Education Minor
Aspiring Educators Public Relations Coordinator

From: [bryan terry](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#); [Sen.Taylor](#)
Subject: Registration in Favor to Waive Forte Assessment
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 6:49:06 PM

Hello,

Please accept this transmission of communication that highlights my interest in favor of the movement to waive the Forte Assessment for educators in your upcoming session for a discussion on the topic.

Thanks,

Bryan S. Terry
7228 N. Beau Ave,
Milwaukee, WI 53224

3.10.2021

Dear Members of Senate Insurance, Licensing and Forestry Committee,

My name is Misty Ellen Kreider. I graduated with my B.S. in Elementary Education and my Masters Degree in Educational Leadership from Cardinal Stritch University. I have worked as an urban educator in Milwaukee Public Schools for 21 years. Throughout the duration of my career I have worked alongside very talented and dedicated bilingual elementary school teachers that serve Milwaukee's urban bilingual students. Currently I am an assistant principal of an elementary bilingual school. In addition to assisting the principal in the everyday operations of the school, I support new teachers that have recently entered the field of education or educators who are working toward earning their teacher licensure.

I am writing to you today in support of SB114/AB 72 - this is the current bill on the FORT test waiver, tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am in support of this bill for the following reasons:

1. **The mental health of teachers should be top priority during the pandemic, testing requirements add undue stress to teachers whose mental health is already suffering.** Last August, the National Education Association, a major teachers union, found that **28 percent of educators said the pandemic made them more likely to leave teaching.** A study [from Louisiana](#) tracked early childhood educators' mental health last spring, finding that rates of **depression almost doubled**, with **more than a third of those educators indicating depressive symptoms.** In a survey run from August to September by the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#), the vast **majority of teachers reported working longer hours**, and **only a quarter** said their school **offered adequate support for mental health.**
2. The pandemic has caused economic stress in most American homes, teachers are not immune to this phenomenon. **The FoRT test is an added financial burden on teachers**, many of whom were struggling financially prior to the pandemic, and some whose households have seen a decrease in income due to spouses, partners, and other contributors losing income due to the pandemic.
3. The FORT Test is a **barrier to entry and advancement in the teaching profession**, one that is exacerbating the teacher shortage being experienced by schools in Milwaukee & across the state.
4. This barrier to entry **disproportionately impacts educators of color** – passage rates for Black and Hispanic test takers are significantly below that of their white peers, which in turn has negative implications on job stability, earnings, and advancement opportunities for educators of color.

5. A recent publication by [The Education Trust](#) on Teacher Diversity rated Wisconsin Red - “Does Not Meet” on systems for interrogating licensure policies for racial bias and adopting licensure policies that increase diversity while maintaining quality and rigor.

Table 2: Wisconsin Educator Preparation Program Assessments

Pass rates by race/ethnicity (2017)

Group	Praxis II	FORT
All	–	75%
Asian	64%	64%
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Multiracial	–	67%
White	92%	77%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018 Annual Report on Educator Preparation Programs

6. The FORT Test is a **poor proxy for teacher knowledge & skill in reading instruction** – there’s no evidence that links FORT passage rates to teacher effectiveness, either generally or with specific respect to reading outcomes for students. Teacher evaluations, portfolios and coursework have all shown to have more accurately reflect teacher effectiveness, than standardized tests.

For these reasons, I support AB 72 and SB 114. As an educator, who is committed to making a difference in the life of students in Milwaukee, I ask that you pass this short-term relief bill and continue to look for long-term alternatives to the FoRT to help reduce the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity in the state, and create a more equitable system for teacher licensure.

Sincerely,

Misty Ellen Kreider
Assistant Principal Underfill

SUGGESTED RESEQUENCING OF BULLETS:

- The FORT test is a **barrier to entry and advancement in the teaching profession** -- it creates both an unnecessary obstacle to employment, and places a financial burden on educators.

The pandemic has caused economic stress in most American homes, and teachers are not immune to this phenomenon -- many educators were struggling financially prior to the pandemic, and have experienced further financial impact over the last year. In turn, these obstacles further reduce the number of educators entering or remaining in the profession, exacerbating the teacher shortages currently being experienced by schools in Milwaukee & across the state.

- The FORT test is a **poor proxy for measuring teacher knowledge and skill in reading instruction** -- there's no evidence that links FORT scores to either teacher effectiveness or improvements in student reading outcomes. Moreover, there is solid evidence that other approaches -- coursework, portfolio evaluations, or observations of teacher practice -- can more accurately reflect a teacher's level of skill in providing reading instruction to students
- The FORT test **disproportionately impacts educators of color**, thereby exacerbating racial disparities for both teachers and students.

In a recent study by the nonpartisan Education Trust, Wisconsin was rated RED in evaluating licensure policies and practices that maintain rigor and quality, while increasing diversity through reducing racial bias. And, our state's failure to address these inequitable and ineffective policies contributes to poorer outcomes for our state's educators of color -- less access to stable jobs, at lower pay, and with fewer opportunities to advance in the profession, when compared to their white peers.

We know from the research that recruiting and retaining teachers of color can help meet the needs of all students -- and significantly boost academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students of color -- while also addressing the critical need for more educators that our state faces.

3.16.2021

Dear Members of Senate Insurance, Licensing and Forestry Committee,

My name is Angel L. Roman III. I graduated with a B.A. in Criminal Justice and have served as a Bilingual Paraprofessional and currently finishing an educator certification program with MTEC. I currently serve as a Special Education Teacher at Lincoln Ave. Elementary. I am in the final stage of this program which leaves me to take the Praxis II and the FORT exam. Both exams are available in-person but are very limited at the moment due to the pandemic.

I am writing to you today in support of SB114/AB 72 - this is the current bill on the FORT test waiver, tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am in support of this bill for the following reasons:

1. The FORT Test is a **poor proxy for teacher knowledge & skill in reading instruction** – there’s no evidence that links FORT passage rates to teacher effectiveness, either generally or with specific respect to reading outcomes for students. Teacher evaluations, portfolios and coursework have all shown to have more accurately reflect teacher effectiveness, than standardized tests.
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4. A recent publication by [The Education Trust](#) on Teacher Diversity rated Wisconsin **Red - “ Does Not Meet”** on **systems for interrogating licensure policies for racial bias** and adopting licensure policies that **increase diversity while maintaining quality and rigor**.

5. **The mental health of teachers should be top priority during the pandemic, testing requirements add undue stress to teachers whose mental health is already suffering.** Last August, the National Education Association, a major teachers union, found that **28 percent of educators said the pandemic made them more likely to leave teaching.** A study [from Louisiana](#) tracked early childhood educators' mental health last spring, finding that rates of **depression almost doubled**, with **more than a third of those educators indicating depressive symptoms.** In a survey run from August to September by the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#), the vast **majority of teachers reported working longer hours**, and **only a quarter** said their school **offered adequate support for mental health.**

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For these reasons, I support AB 72 and SB 114. As an educator, who is committed to making a difference in the life of students in Milwaukee, I ask that you pass this short-term relief bill and continue to look for long-term alternatives to the FoRT to help reduce the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity in the state, and create a more equitable system for teacher licensure.

Sincerely,
Angel L. Roman III
Special Education Teacher



Office of Government Relations

Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
www.wisconsin.edu

2021-22 Legislative Session Bill Position Memo

UW System Office of Government Relations

Legislation:

SB 114/AB 72: Foundations of Reading Test (FoRT) Pandemic Waiver

Authors: Senator Chris Larson and Representative Lakeshia Myers

Legislative Summary:

The Foundations of Reading test (FoRT) is an assessment tool to analyze an educator's knowledge and skills in reading instruction. Since 2014, Wisconsin has required a passing score on the Wisconsin FoRT test to receive an initial teaching license as an elementary school teacher (K-5), special education teacher, reading teacher, or reading specialist.

SB 114/AB 72 waives this requirement for individuals applying for initial licensure starting from the date of enrollment and ending on the date the national 2019 novel coronavirus emergency declaration is ended by the U.S. president or December 31, 2021, whichever is earlier.

UW System Position:

With the COVID-19 pandemic, testing sites were required to close in March 2020, resulting in education students unable to complete this required test to receive their teachers license. Although testing sites have since reopened, access for students continues to be limited due to reduced capacity at sites following COVID-19 safety protocols. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has been providing conditional, one-year licenses with stipulations to teacher candidates so they could eventually complete the FoRT. Still, temporarily removing the FoRT test requirement for students entering the field would be a welcome relief to those who would be impacted.

As currently drafted, the legislation would create some inequities between those who were impacted prior to the enactment of this legislation and those covered by this legislation. According to the Deans of Education on our campuses, data shows students are most successful in passing the FoRT if they attempt the assessment soon after completing their literacy courses. Students who have been unable to complete the FoRT during the first year of the pandemic, yet are required to complete the test as a stipulation of their conditional license provided by DPI, are now at a disadvantage by not being included in this waiver and having a longer period of time from their schooling on this content. A suggestion by the Deans of Education would be to retroactively include students impacted from the

3.16.2021

Dear Members of Senate Insurance, Licensing and Forestry Committee,

My name is Nora O’Connell. I graduated with a B.S. in Elementary Education and a Masters of Arts in English as a Second Language and Literacy from UW-Madison. I have served as an elementary school teacher and an ESL teacher for Milwaukee Public Schools. I am writing to you today in support of SB114/AB 72 - this is the current bill on the FORT test waiver, tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am in support of this bill for the following reasons:

1. The FORT Test is a **poor proxy for teacher knowledge & skill in reading instruction** – there’s no evidence that links FORT passage rates to teacher effectiveness, either generally or with specific respect to reading outcomes for students. Teacher evaluations, portfolios and coursework have all shown to have more accurately reflect teacher effectiveness, than standardized tests.
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almost doubled, with **more than a third of those educators indicating depressive symptoms**. In a survey run from August to September by the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#), the vast **majority of teachers reported working longer hours**, and **only a quarter** said their school **offered adequate support for mental health**.

6. The pandemic has caused economic stress in most American homes, teachers are not immune to this phenomenon. **The FoRT test is an added financial burden on teachers**, many of whom were struggling financially prior to the pandemic, and some whose households have seen a decrease in income due to spouses, partners, and other contributors losing income due to the pandemic.

For these reasons, I support AB 72 and SB 114. As an educator, who is committed to making a difference in the life of students in Milwaukee, I ask that you pass this short-term relief bill and continue to look for long-term alternatives to the FoRT to help reduce the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity in the state, and create a more equitable system for teacher licensure.

Sincerely,

Nora O'Connell
ESL Teacher-Lincoln Avenue School
Milwaukee Public Schools

beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 and for individuals provided a stipulation to their conditional license. This would provide a more equal waiver to all those impacted under the constraints of the pandemic while allowing these individuals to enter the workforce.

Again, SB 114/AB 72 provides respite to some of the education students who have been impacted by the limited capacity of testing sites during the pandemic and would be welcome by these students.

Updated: March 15, 2021



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

TO: Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry
FROM: John Forester, Executive Director
DATE: March 17, 2021
RE: SB 114 – Waiving the Foundations of Reading test licensure requirement during the COVID-19 national health emergency.

Chairperson Felzkowski and members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to share some thoughts on this important legislation. My name is John Forester. I'm the Executive Director of the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance (SAA). In that capacity, I represent more than 4,600 school administrators throughout Wisconsin including school superintendents, business officials, principals and associate principals, special education directors and personnel directors.

The SAA supports Senate Bill 114, relating to waiving the Foundations of Reading test licensure requirement during a national health emergency declared in response to COVID-19. If adopted, this legislation would waive the requirement that applicants for certain initial teaching licenses pass the Foundations of Reading test (FORT) on applications for initial teaching licenses received by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) beginning on the date the bill becomes law and ending at the official termination of the national health emergency or December 31, 2021, whichever is earlier.

In anticipation of this hearing, I sought input on SB 114 from a cross-section of SAA members, primarily superintendents, personnel directors and special education directors. These members shared the following comments in support of the bill:

- The FORT is a barrier to the profession, limiting the available teaching force at a time we know there is a critical shortage in many areas and, in particular, negatively impacts our need to increase district staffing to address COVID-related learning disruption.
- An inability to fully staff district instructional programs may lead to increases in class size, program reduction or inconsistent substitute teaching assignments – all of which negatively impacts student learning at this critical time when we need to focus our resources and energy on student recovery.
- Many believe the FORT to be a culturally biased barrier to the profession for prospective teachers of color. Research shows that racial/cultural diversity in our teaching force

positively impacts student achievement, especially for many of our students most affected by the pandemic.

- There appears to be no evidence that passage of the FORT improves teaching performance or leads to enhanced student achievement.
- We understand that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several testing sites have either been closed or limited in operation which has caused teaching candidates additional difficulty in taking and passing this gateway assessment.

In addition to the comments above, several SAA members also shared anecdotes regarding the challenges that quality teachers have faced in passing the FORT, including:

- “I have a candidate for my elementary special education opening that has been trying for three years to pass the FORT. She has masters degrees in vocational rehabilitation and adult learning, but cannot get her special ed teaching license because of the FORT.”
- “One of my best special education teachers, who works with some of our students with significant behaviors, is contemplating leaving the profession at the end of this year because she has taken the FORT three times and hasn’t been able to pass it.”
- “We are at risk every year of losing a solid special education teacher due to issues around taking and passing the FORT. We have such a shortage of special education teachers.”
- “I have met some talented educators that had tremendous difficulty passing the FORT. I shudder to think how many more were unable to use their talents to teach because they were unable to pass this arbitrary and biased exam. Aspiring teachers have wasted precious time and money attempting to jump through this hoop all at the expense of our students who desperately need the presence of caring educators.”

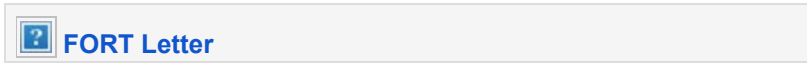
Finally, I would like to thank the authors for bringing this important legislation forward. I would also like to suggest a small modification to change the end date of the bill to January 31, 2022. This date would cover the fall and winter instructional terms and provide clarity for license applicants on whether they need to take (and prepare for) the exam or not. Without this change, it appears that the national emergency could terminate before a term ends, leaving the candidate unprepared for the exam.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you should have any questions regarding our thoughts on SB 114, please call me at 608-242-1370.

From: [Kristina Meekins](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#); [Sen.Stafsholt](#); [Sen.Roth](#); [Sen.Taylor](#); [Sen.Ringhand](#)
Subject: Re: The SB 114/AB 72 Bill
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 10:06:39 PM

Hello! Please find attached a supportive in the ask to waive the FoRT due the pandemic.

Thank you.



--

Kristina Meekins
414-399-6872

God arms me with strength, and he makes my way perfect.
Psalm 18:32 NLT

From: [Ainsley Anderson](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#); [Sen.Stafsholt](#); [Sen.Roth](#); [Sen.Taylor](#); [Sen.Ringhand](#)
Subject: Senate Bill 114
Date: Tuesday, March 02, 2021 9:37:36 AM

Dear Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing, and Forestry,

I'd like to start by thanking you for the time and dedication that you give to the people of the state of Wisconsin.

I ask you today to approve the waiver of the Foundations of Reading Test for incoming teachers because it is a test that has not adapted to the pandemic. While other states (Massachusetts, for example) have created online testing options to accommodate safe testing for their teacher candidates, Wisconsin does not have that option. Teacher candidates are required to take this 4-hour test in a room with other candidates from other cities. While masking is required, negative Covid tests are not, thus putting individuals from various communities in a room together, potentially exposing them to the virus.

In addition, this test has a high fail rate, requiring teacher candidates to take it multiple times. This is an expensive proposition for individuals who are in school working to become teachers. During the pandemic, when teacher candidates may have reduced income opportunities, paying hundreds of dollars to take an exam multiple times does not seem like a responsible way to gauge teacher efficacy.

I would encourage you, as we approach the one-year anniversary of many schools closing their doors due to the pandemic, to vote in March to waive this test for the remainder of 2021 or until the pandemic is no longer a public health emergency. Teachers in the state have stepped up to the plate to engage and educate Wisconsin's youth. Teachers are leaving the field in large numbers due to the strain on their own health during this pandemic. Please help those who are entering the field by taking this hurdle away during the pandemic.

Thank you for your time and for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Ainsley Anderson
5th Grade Teacher

From: [Emma Jeronimus](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: Concerns for Teaches in Wisconsin
Date: Wednesday, March 10, 2021 7:11:12 PM

Hello Senator,

My name is Emma Jeronimus, I am a graduate from Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin. I have graduated with Honors Bachelor of Arts Degree, focused on Elementary Education with a minor in Psychology. I have taken the FORT test six times and have yet to pass. I have studied rigorous hours with professors and spend a lot of money toward this test and study materials as well. I have passed all the Praxis test and have received a 3.8 GPA and have been in three honors societies but have not passed the FORT test. There was a bill in place to eliminate the FORT requirement. However, there has not been any action toward passing this bill (<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/proposals/reg/asm/bill/ab72>).

I was informed that Illinois Governor suspended many of the student teacher requirements, including the required test. I am asking you to help not only me but other students who are about to graduate and current teachers with 1-year license in this same situation by suspending the FORT requirement during these times.

If you could get back to me at your earliest convenience that would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Emma Jeronimus

Carthage College '20

Elementary Education Major | Psychology Minor

From: [Stebor, Lily R](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: Re: Foundations of Reading Test
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 11:03:55 AM

Hello,

My name is Lily Stebor. I recently took the Foundations of Reading Test and was off by 30 points. I personally feel like this test makes us teachers feel like we will only be a good teacher if we can pass this test. I have been really down on myself that I did not pass it as I studied for months. I did group and individually tutoring and got help throughout the months I was studying. This test tests our knowledge and tries to see what we know, which I do understand. But, how about the students who can not afford the \$139 dollars? I barely can and have to retake this test. I personally believe that this test makes us teachers feel a lot of pressure. I am not able to join tomorrow, so I wanted to send an email on how I feel. I hope it is taken into consideration that there could be an alternative that is less pressure and is not expensive.

Thank you!

Lily Stebor
Early Childhood Education Major
Special Education Minor

From: [Miller, Jacob](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: The FoRT
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 2:17:56 PM

Greetings,

My name is Jake Miller and I'm currently student teaching and need to pass the FoRT. I have lot to say regarding this test. To start on a positive note the information and knowledge that the test is all about is incredibly important. I learned a lot in the courses and tutoring that prepared me to pass this test.

However, the test is absolutely ridiculous. Like many standardized tests this is one that is set up for the test-taker to fail. I have taken this test three times and studied hard for it. Now with the covid-19 restrictions it is even more difficult to get in a time that works for me to try again. Doesn't this state value the new teachers coming into this field, especially in a pandemic year?

No matter what I'm not going to give up and I will try and pass it if it is required for me. I just believe there are better ways for me to spend my time as a new teacher. Like I said in the beginning the knowledge and concepts that the test covers are very important. I'm very happy I got these experiences for the chance to go over this important material. But the test is unfair and impractical.

There's a pandemic and there was already a teacher shortage. Get rid of this test.

Thank you for hearing me out and share this email with your colleagues if need be.

Respectfully and with thanks,
Jake Miller

From: [Draheim, Dakota W](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: FORT Test suspension
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 11:23:55 AM

Hello Senator Felzkowski,

My name is Dakota Draheim and I am sending this email in relation to the FoRT bill related to the pandemic.

In my experience, it is very hard to find time to take the FoRT as I am a first year teacher and I am teaching both on person and virtual. The rigors that come with this make it difficult to study for the FoRT, let alone find a time to get somewhere to take the test. I am currently on a 1 year license with stipulations until I can pass the FoRT.

My hope is that this suspension bill goes through so I can keep my job and keep doing what I love. I have learned more about reading this year as a teacher than I did in college when I learned about reading.

Thank you and have a great day!

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy Note20 5G, an AT&T 5G smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: [Merrill, Sydni M](#)
To: [Sen.Felzkowski](#)
Subject: FORT
Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 12:51:03 PM

Dear Senator Felzkowski,

I am emailing you about my experience trying to take the FORT exam during the pandemic. I will be teaching during the time of the hearing, so I am hoping someone can read my email I am sending in place of me speaking. It started a year ago in April. I paid to take my FORT exam and have still not been able to take the exam for many reasons which I will state below. Of course the company took the money out of my bank account immediately after signing up, but there were no spots available to reserve for the exam because of the lock downs that happened. Once I got an email saying that spots were starting to open again come fall, I went back on to try to reserve a time slot. I was unable to again. I am a student who qualifies for accommodations for the exam. Because of this it says that I need to call the company to get an exam. I have called over 5 times on several different account and have sat on hold for over an hour each time. To this day, almost a year later, I have not been able to sign up to take the fort exam, but yet the company took my money from me and I will get no refund. As an educator who graduated from UWSP this past December with three majors in education, I find it very frustrating and unfair that I have still not been able to take my exam. This is slowing down the process down for being able to apply for jobs and having to apply for a license with stipulations in the meantime so that I can be in my current long-term subbing position for special education students.

Thank you for your time and for fighting for us educators. I appreciate it more then you will know.

Thank you,

Sydni Merrill

University of Wisconsin Stevens Point

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education Majors

Intellectual Disability Minor

~Never stop learning, because life never stops teaching~ - Lin Pernille

3.16.2021

Dear Members of Senate Insurance, Licensing and Forestry Committee,

My name is **Hiram Perez**. I am an education advocate that has worked closely with many educators during my professional career. I am a Wisconsinite through and through having graduated from UW-Madison and live a reside in the city of Milwaukee. I have served as an advocate for bilingual education and initiatives to increase the representation of Black and brown teachers in our schools

I am writing to you today in **support** of SB114/AB 72 - this is the current bill on the FORT test waiver, tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am in support of this bill for the following reasons:

1. The FORT Test is a **poor proxy for teacher knowledge & skill in reading instruction** – there’s no evidence that links FORT passage rates to teacher effectiveness, either generally or with specific respect to reading outcomes for students. Teacher evaluations, portfolios and coursework have all shown to have more accurately reflect teacher effectiveness, than standardized tests.
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For these reasons, I **support** AB 72 and SB 114. As an educator, who is committed to making a difference in the life of students in Milwaukee, I ask that you pass this short-term relief bill and continue to look for long-term alternatives to the FoRT to help reduce the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity in the state, and create a more equitable system for teacher licensure.

Sincerely,

Hiram R Perez
Community Educational Advocate.



To: Senator Mary Felzkowski, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing & Forestry

From: Kathryn Champeau, WSRA Legislative Chair

Date: Thursday, March 18, 2021

Re: Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 114

First, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Chair and members of the Committee for allowing me an opportunity to testify and answer your questions at the public hearing on Senate Bill 114 on Wednesday, March 17, 2021. I feel it is important to provide the Committee written testimony in addition to what was stated at the public hearing. Please, if the authors of the bill or members of the Committee have questions or wish to discuss this issue further – feel free to contact either myself or our lobbyist, Forbes McIntosh.

On behalf of the Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA), I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 114 and I would like to be specific about why and also offer some possible solutions to current and perhaps potential problems surrounding the Foundations of Reading Test. *I would like us to view this issue through the eyes of our children.* There are 3 issues I will focus on:

1. Teacher expertise is essential to literacy learning of each child.
2. Access to highly qualified teachers is an equity issue for all of our children.
3. Licensure is a critical component to qualified teachers for our children.

WSRA believes and research supports, that teacher expertise makes a critical difference for all of our students, both in terms of their academic achievement and their overall well-being. We believe all Wisconsin children have a right to qualified teachers no matter their needs, their zip code, or the schools they attend. We realize that currently there is no way to ensure this happens with certainty; however, licensure is a valuable tool available to us.

The purpose of licensure is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the **consumer**, not the profession. Our consumer is ultimately the children we teach. Many professions are required to take written exams of basic knowledge after graduating from a degreed program, no matter the institution; for example, physicians, nurses, certified public accountants, psychologists, social

workers, speech and language pathologists, just to name a very few. Many trades require this as well such as barbers, building inspectors, cosmetologists, manicurists and many more. A written exam is often the agreed upon way to assess foundational knowledge for the profession they are entering.

In Wisconsin, this foundational knowledge is even more critical for teaching licenses particularly when literacy instruction is required. Here's why:

1. The change to expanding licensure to enable the ability to teach students from Kindergarten to ninth grade often puts unrealistic expectations upon an undergraduate teaching program when considering the knowledge necessary to teach literacy well in the primary levels, not to mention ninth graders and every grade in between. Teachers can feel underprepared simply by the volume of what they are expected to know across almost all grade levels and content areas.
2. Then, in addition, some programs that are licensed to give teaching degrees don't require a critical component of their preparation, student teaching. That leaves the onus of continuing to develop teacher expertise, which teachers need, smack dab in the laps of school districts which are already strapped for resources as budgets have shrunk and needs have grown. In many places, that professional learning is simply not going to occur. What happens to our children?
3. Imagine a physician practicing medicine not having done residency, nor taking a basic written knowledge exam, and being licensed as a pediatrician as well as an endocrinologist in a four-year medical program with no expectation for future learning? Who would feel comfortable with that physician treating you? Who will be referred to that physician? The same analogy could be applied to a degree in teaching.
4. So, I ask you which children are more likely to be served by underprepared teachers? And, would we want our children taught by underprepared teachers or, instead, would we want to do everything we can to ensure qualified teachers are educating our children?
5. While anecdotal, several professors have reported a more intense interest in the literacy content of their classes since the FoRT was required.
6. Research documents that many teachers leave the field within five years, and often within three, when they feel underprepared. Creating the conditions where teachers feel and are underprepared only exacerbates the teacher shortage that licensure changes were meant to fix, a short-term fix.
7. WSRA fully supports making sure that school districts have full time licensed reading specialists to support new teachers but not every school district employs a full-time specialist. Coaching new teachers is an effective model, but sadly many schools in our state either do not have knowledgeable literacy coaches, or not enough of them for schools with high need. Teachers are then left on their own.

8. The FoRT is administered in five states. Here are the results of the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 4th grade reading for those states. The national average score is 219. MA 231, CT 224, NH 224, NC 221, WI 220, all above the national average. Massachusetts has long administered the FoRT. They have led the nation for years in their NAEP scores.
9. WSRA supports robust, well-developed, scalable alternatives for determining preservice teachers' ability to teach literacy. Developing such a system that demonstrates validity takes time, expertise, financial support, and most likely the addition of literacy professors at higher education institutions. Many higher education literacy departments are experiencing budget cuts often resulting in reduced numbers of literacy professors.
10. WSRA is concerned that eliminating the FoRT without having a quality alternative replacement ready to go will not serve students well. Suggestions regarding more reading specialists in schools who can support and coach new teachers, along with a more robust literacy performance portfolio for preservice teachers, are not currently a viable solution for the remainder of this year.
11. Statements are made about the limitations of the FoRT. To date, WSRA is unaware of any well-designed research studies that answer the questions posed about the FoRT's potential limitations. Studies of that nature would provide important information that could be used in making policy and crafting legislation.

Recommendations for the FoRT:

1. A more targeted approach to a temporary exemption for taking the FoRT is a necessary first step instead of legislation that eliminates the need for all. By "temporary" we mean postponing rather than "emergency" which appears to mean eliminating.
2. A timely public report about which testing centers are closed, and why, is needed. This includes what the contractor and the agencies overseeing the contractor are doing to accommodate the needs of the teaching candidates in that location. A contractor for such a service is likely to have a readily available customer service department able to answer questions from the oversight agency. If not, then this might be a potential contract issue.
3. A report should include how the testing site information was made available in multiple ways to potential candidates and DPI. In addition, what are other professions doing regarding their written exams because of the COVID-19 issue? This must be a more pervasive issue and not simply a problem for the FoRT
4. In the event that an alternative testing center is not a viable solution for a few, a temporary waiver of a few months, while granting a temporary license, would be an option.

5. The legislature might consider paying for this exam: full payment of first attempt, 90% for second attempt, and a sliding scale for subsequent retakes, mitigating financial inequities.
6. Another policy to consider is whether the contractor should modify their exam so that potential candidates only have to retake the section not passed on the first attempt, modeled after the Certified Public Accountant exam.
7. In the rare instances where a highly qualified candidate cannot pass the FoRT after multiple attempts, the literacy department of that university could document the candidate's ability to teach literacy well, verify their specific qualifications with a rigorous performance-based process, including a focus on early literacy. This alternative needs to include demonstration of knowledge of how to teach the many aspects of literacy included on the FoRT exam. Knowledge of how to teach literacy at the early grades and demonstration of application of this knowledge to teaching diverse students would be a critical component.
8. As of February 2021, the state of Massachusetts has revised their FoRT exam. WSRA recommends a public report about what they revised and why, which would give all of us more information about this written knowledge exam. Massachusetts has consistently had the highest scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress.