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October 8, 2015

Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members thank you for taking the time to hold a hearing on AB 338.

AB 338 provides the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project with \$1.125 million in state funding for the purpose of creating a pilot program to determine the merits of further expanding the program on a statewide basis to improve reading scores.

The Milwaukee Summer Reading Project was established in 2010 by the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University and is administered by Dr. Howard Fuller, former superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools.

Despite the voluntary nature of the program and the pool of children from which participants are drawn, nearly 60 percent of students made more than six weeks progress in a six-week period. Almost 30 percent achieved progress of more than 18 weeks, the equivalent of one semester.

The reading program focuses on children in grades 1 through 3 who have tested below their respective grade in reading ability. Most of the students are one to three years behind in reading. Intervening at an early age to improve reading scores will have a tremendous impact on the educational opportunities for many young, at-risk students.

AB338 provides \$375,000 in 2015-16 and \$750,000 in 2016-17. This will allow approximately 750 students to participate in the program over the next two summers. The bill also requires a report detailing the number of pupils participating and the results achieved through the program to be filed with DPI at the end of each summer.

Reading is the starting point for all other learning, yet only 36.6 percent of students across Wisconsin scored proficient or better in reading in 2013. This bill provides an avenue for funding that will allow us to gather results on the program, and if it continues to have the success it has had in the past, it can be expanded to other districts in the state.

Again thank you for hearing my testimony on AB 338. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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2015-2016

Thursday, October 8, 2015

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Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 16 West
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Assembly Bill 338: Creating a summer reading improvement program in the Milwaukee Public School District and making \$1.125 million appropriation.

Dear Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

The Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA), a professional literacy organization of over 3,000 members, promotes and advocates for high levels of literacy for Wisconsin students and support endeavors to make this a reality.

WSRA recognizes that achieving this goal is complex and requires a multifaceted approach. If the State Legislature is going to designate a specific reading program outside of a normal competitive request for proposal (RFP) or grant process, WSRA wants to ensure that the program meets or exceeds quality outcomes as compared to other peer programs. The following are questions that should be asked of any reading literacy program.

Implementing any program requires a thoughtful and careful consideration of a number of factors:

- i. What is the literacy achievement rate of the students in this program the following year in the schools they attend? A higher score on individual assessments in a summer school program does not always translate into overall reading achievement for students.
- ii. Attendance in a summer reading program is one critical factor. When determining the success rate of a summer reading program how has the attendance rate been factored in to the success rates of a particular program?
- iii. Has Milwaukee's district reading specialist been consulted to



- understand what the challenges are regarding summer reading programs in Milwaukee, what is currently in place in Milwaukee, and what is the best fit regarding those needs?
- iv. How is this program connected to school-year and community literacy learning already in place? Methods, language, and expectations should be consistent between summer and school-year learning to ensure maximum transfer between environments.
 - v. What are the qualifications of those providing instruction in the proposed summer reading project? Wisconsin public schools require a certain level of expertise for those providing reading instruction and intervention and therefore need to hold a valid reading teacher license.
 - vi. Have other universities or institutions been considered as sites or partners in this work? University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Cardinal Stritch, and Carroll University all certify reading teachers and specialists.
 - vii. It is important to understand both the complexities of attempts to replicate practices and to fully understand what the criteria for a successful program means. Mandating specific programs from a state level is a serious step. It would be advisable that comprehensive research conducted from an outside \ independent research institution be conducted on the program before legislative action.
 - viii. When necessary changes to a legislated summer reading program become evident or when a program that better meets the needs of a school district are identified, how does a district make necessary and responsive changes? Throughout the year, who is responsible for monitoring the success of the students throughout the year who have participated in the summer reading program to better understand its effectiveness?
 - ix. Will the state tests be used to measure the growth of these participating students from year to year?
 - x. What implications does this decision have for other Wisconsin schools and districts?
 - xi. What are other successful summer reading programs in the state, how are those success rates calculated, and how does one select what best the specific needs of a specific district? Every district has unique needs and unique populations of students that require a careful study of those needs and the population it serves.

In 2005, the bi-partisan federal legislation (No Child Left Behind) mandated testing every child every year from grades 3-8 in literacy and math. This



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federal legislation lessened Wisconsin's local control, as it superceded our state law requirements for less testing. As Wisconsin's stagnant results on NAEP show, this loss of local control did not result in improved achievement for Wisconsin's learners.

The Read to Lead Development Council was formed in 2012 as a public-private partnership to issue competitive grants to improve reading outcomes for Wisconsin students by grade 3. The Development Council did not receive an allocation in the most recent budget. The program proposed in this bill is something that would be eligible for a competitive grant awarded by the Development Council, should the council have continued funding to issue grants.

Sue Boquist
WSRA President

Kathy Champeau
WSRA Legislative Chair

Date: October 8, 2015

To: Members, Assembly Committee on Education

From: Dee Pettack, Legislative Liaison, Department of Public Instruction

RE: Statement on AB 338

Assembly Bill 338 (AB 338) requires the Milwaukee Public School District to apply for a grant to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on behalf of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University (the Institute). The purpose of this grant is to conduct a summer reading program in the summers following the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years called the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project (the Project). The bill would fund the Project with \$375,000 in FY16 and \$750,000 in FY17 for a total of \$1.125 million over the biennium.

The Project was established in 2010 by the Institute and is administered by Dr. Howard Fuller, a former superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools. The Project focuses on improving reading achievement over a six-week period during the summer and preventing summer regression.

DPI agrees that a solid foundation in reading is crucial to a child's success, and summer regression is a serious concern. Summer school programs are critical and help encourage reading outside the normal school year and may help improve reading achievement and prevent summer regression. The State Superintendent is supportive of participation in summer school and enrichment programs and providing additional funding in this area. In fact, DPI's 2015-17 budget request included a proposal aimed at increasing reading achievement through Milwaukee Succeeds.

DPI respects the work of all Wisconsin literacy experts, including Dr. Fuller and the Institute. In fact, the Institute is a past recipient of a grant through the existing statewide literacy initiative, the Read to Lead Council. There are existing funds in the Read to Lead Council budget, and we suggest that rather than making a new appropriation, those funds be considered for this use.

Further, if the legislature wishes to provide an additional appropriation, DPI suggests the existing Read to Lead Council be utilized. It was created in 2011 by Governor Walker to promote reading and literacy by providing the kind of grants proposed in this bill. Council membership consists of Governor Walker, the State Superintendent, legislators, teachers, business and philanthropic representatives, and literacy experts and is a public-private partnership. Using this Read to Lead Council and building upon an already existing relationship would streamline processes and be the most effective method to distribute the funds.

We are happy to discuss this with you further at any time.

• 2013 LETRS Testimonials

- As a reading tutor, I have found the LETRS training to be extremely helpful. The information presented has allowed me to expand and further develop my understanding of the best practices in teaching reading skills to students at all levels. The information has been presented in a practical style that has allowed me to implement the strategies and methods immediately after I have participated in a class module. The format has allowed myself and other participants to freely ask questions that clarify and individualize the information for the setting in which I am teaching. I would highly recommend this course to all educators, especially those teaching in the early grades.
- I am about half way through the LETRS course and enjoying the sessions. I find that I am learning new things that I did not learn in my undergraduate and graduate studies.

LETRS training is much more theory based than others I've taken and I was a little concerned at first that I'd get bogged down in theory explanation. But, Alicia Sparks has done a great job relating the theory to examples and also letting us practice concepts with hands-on activities.

The reading intervention program I work in is pretty much aligned with the core concepts that are being stressed in LETRS. Even though that is the case, LETRS has been beneficial for a couple reasons. First, it confirms to me that our program is well structured, but can improve. Second, even though some of the information reinforces what I already know and do, it has provided new ideas on how to do things differently and ultimately, I believe could be done better.

There is information I will take back to my classroom and also share with my peers. Such as, simple teaching strategies that make good sense in theory and in practice. And also, valuable information on how to teach vocabulary, fluency, and phonics.

Overall, the modules I've completed have been an excellent use of my time. I would recommend to any educator that they take the LETRS course should they have the opportunity.

- I received my certification to teach grades kindergarten through 6th grade in 2009. I received no training in how to teach reading with this certification. In that same year I received Wilson Training through Level 5 and I began to learn more about the process of learning to read. I then went on to receive training in the Orton-Gillingham method in 2010. This training provided me with more knowledge about how to teach reading. The LETRS training has been the best training I have had to date. It is thorough, sequential and covers everything I need to know about how a person learns to read. The lectures are very informative and well executed. Being able to read the book that goes with each module helps me digest the material presented during each class. All the experience and background knowledge I bring to each class also helps me better absorb what is being presented in each lesson. I began immediately using the information I have learned from

these sessions with my current students. Teachers everywhere would benefit from LETRS training!

- LETRS training is all about children. It is the answer to helping at risk, as well as regular education students become fully literate adults. Yes, it is an excellent educational model for teaching educators about how a “brain” learns to read, how to assess delays in reading acquisition, and finally how to sequentially teach the vital skill of reading. However, while the LETRS participants are adults, the outcome focus is always on our students.

I have been teaching struggling readers and writers for over twenty years. Some deficits have had to do with the challenge of second language acquisition, but far more students have struggled because of poor classroom instruction or dyslexia. Regardless of the cause of my students’ delays, like their respective classroom teachers before me, I was not prepared to instruct them in a manner that was rigorous or responsive to their specific needs. Nor was I skilled in diagnosing what was causing a child to struggle.

My university education focused on teaching children to love books. There was no substantive training as to how to teach reading or what to do if a child struggled with the process. I was taught that learning to read was “natural.” Unfortunately, that message was and remains dangerously erroneous. Our schools of education have not evolved. Thus, training such as LETRS is incredibly important. In fact it is imperative that it continues if there is to be any hope of children succeeding.

I can say without hesitation that the LETRS training, in which I am now involved, has surpassed all other opportunities to improve my teaching on all levels. LETRS training gives an educator far more than a basic understanding of language acquisition. In tandem, it trains educators in a way that provides a deep understanding of the science of reading, while overlaying practical and effective methods for providing instruction.

Any foundation that seeks to improve the lives of children can and should support LETRS training. Literacy is one of the great equalizers. Without literacy, our children will not live the lives we want them to have.

- I am the reading specialist for a large Wisconsin school district. My career has focused almost exclusively on the teaching of reading to at-risk students. I have my master's in Reading and my 317. In addition, I have first hand extensive experience as a trainer, consultant, and teacher, with well designed, research validated programs like Reading Mastery, Horizons, and Corrective Reading. I also have extensive first hand experience with balanced literacy and the teachings of Reading Recovery.

I share all of this because I consider myself to be knowledgeable about reading instruction, curriculum, teaching, literacy coaching, and corresponding professional development. If I have learned anything in my 18 years as an educator it is this: Never stop striving to know more. We must put to rest the debate of philosophy and instead embrace what the science of reading has revealed, then meld this science with the art of teaching.

I began LETRS training in Milwaukee in the fall of 2012. It has been a life changing experience for me. My knowledge and understanding about the reading process, the brain, how kids learn to crack the code, the definition and place for systematic and explicit instruction and so much more, are enriched with every module. Every session, I learn something I didn't know before or I receive clarity on something I've wondered about for years. Every day, in nearly every conversation I have with teachers about reading, I reference what I'm learning in LETRS. It's that powerful.

The schools of higher education do not teach the content of LETRS. The typical teacher working today has only surface knowledge of the many aspects that are covered in great detail during the modules. In order to be a proficient teacher of reading and language arts, we must have full command of the elements of linguistics and their relationship to instruction. There is a true science behind how we learn to read and this science has evolved tremendously in the last 12 years since the National Reading Panel delivered its meta-analysis. LETRS is up to date and includes a synthesis of brain research, reading research, and implications for teaching and instruction. It goes deep on the reading research details while also providing practical details that support the teaching of reading. We change our practices only when we understand the rationale for doing so.

Sadly, many, many teachers are still operating with information that is old and out of date. As a result, we are not seeing the growth our students needs and deserve. They are not prepared for the 21st century and until we change how we do the business of educating per-service teachers, and working teachers, nothing will change.

On May 15, 23 members of our school district including our director of elementary education, six principals, and several classroom, ELL, Title, and Special Education teachers listened to Dr. Louisa Moats speak about reconciling the CCSS with reading research. We were able to meet with her privately for an hour and discuss the needs of our district.

As a result of yesterday's events, our Title I director is inquiring how to bring LETRS training to us. We recognize the need for more knowledge about the science of reading. Thanks to the research that Dr. Moats summarized so very well, the research which is included with LETRS training, we see that we need to know more in order to move forward. The old ways will not move us into the 21st century.

It should not be so difficult to bring this high quality training to our state. ALL teachers need and deserve this knowledge.

2014 Testimonials

"I want to thank you for allowing me to be part of this training program. It has made a change in my practices who will spread far and wide to help students achieve in literacy."

"I thoroughly enjoyed and benefitted from the LETRS training. Thank you for provide us with a great training!"

"Thanks so much for allowing me to be part of this wonderful experience!"

"Thanks for all your hard work coordinating this training. It was fabulous!"

"I certainly feel more confident in beginning to get involved in helping classroom teachers in any way possible."

"I thought I was OK, till this class. Ignorance is bliss. Now I know I was poorly prepared." Edward Richerson

"She [LETRS instructor] was excellent, not only in her presentation, but in the scope of her knowledge and her ability to respond to questions and provide an explanation as well as cite research to support why a particular process is or is not valid, important, etc. She provided modeling to clarify her explanations or to alleviate confusion. The LETRS material is good and a great reference to go back to, but the instructor really made this a valuable experience. I do not think a self-study of this same material would be as beneficial

"My district just adopted Superkids K-2 [aligned with LETRS] – YAY! So I feel this will help us a lot." Nanci Foster

The application portion [of LETRS training] helped to flesh out the information and provided a lot of practical activities."

"I took the Foundations of Literacy exam in May. This LETRS training was very helpful in reviewing/learning the necessary material for successful completion of this exam."

"I truly believe my tutoring is better. I am incorporating more multisensory and phonemic awareness activities into my lessons and seeing the results with my students. After attending these LETRS sessions, I believe every teacher should have to experience this kind of training." Carrie Cooke

"It completely frustrates me who teachers are not taught the correct way to teach reading and spelling to their students. I am so excited to bring this information back to my district and the current regular education elementary teachers!"

2015 LETRS Testimonials

I want to thank you, as well as Dr. Fuller, for offering me the incredible opportunity to participate in the LETRS training.

As you know, in addition to the Milwaukee Succeeds program in which I worked with 2nd grade students this year, I am a tutor at Literacy Services of Wisconsin where I work with adult students. We use a structured, systematic, multi-sensory program which has helped many students for whom other programs have failed. I have already incorporated some of the information and techniques I learned in LETRS into my tutoring sessions.

In the future, I am considering other opportunities to work with young students, but I want you to know that using this type of instruction in adult education programs is exceptionally valuable, not only because it improves student outcomes, but also because, once students experience some level of success, they often encourage their children or grandchildren to pursue similar instruction.

With gratitude,

Thank you!

It was fantastic. It gives me the confidence to pursue a classroom teaching position.

ELA and Tier 2 Reading Intervention Teacher, Waukesha North High School

We would like to thank you for providing us with the opportunity to send our reading specialists to LETRS training this spring. We found the sessions informative and motivating. Alicia Sparks, our trainer, was superb – we all appreciated her wealth of knowledge and presentation style.

Thanks Again,
Wauwatosa School District Teaching and Learning Department

P.S. We brought LETRS 1 and 2 back to all teachers of reading this summer. Both sessions were valued, and staff are asking for additional modules!

This is written to thank you most sincerely for the opportunity to receive free LETRS training this spring. You have kept me on your list for a few years now, and I am so grateful that it worked out for me this year. I hope the training will enhance the work I do as a literacy coach for Superkids. Thank you for your tireless efforts to help kids learn how to read!

With gratitude,

Monday, August 17, 2015

Dearest Dr. Fuller,

I am writing this to give thanks for the opportunity that my two daughters had in the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project this summer. This summer 2015 was our first chance to experience the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project and I must say that my two girls loved the knowledge they gained!

Please allow me to share a story with you; I for some odd reason thought that there was no reading classes on Fridays, boy was I wrong. My daughter Mariyah was so upset that she almost missed out on the chance to meet a real life bee keeper. I know that my children love school and enjoy going, but the way Mariyah was so sure that I was wrong about this particular Friday made me call Ms. Cecilia to confirm. I found out there was class and the opportunity was not missed due to Mariyah's persistence. I also understand that meeting the bee keeper was an experience that tied into the Sharp Literacy Busy Bee book that my daughters read during the project.

Another detail is that my girls came home with words to share and explained their meanings. Furthermore, their attitudes about reading also changed. Here's an example, just this evening Mariyah and Carolina were sitting at our dinner table reading out loud! All I could do was sit there and smile at their eagerness to continue reading after a long day of summer camps.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I hope that we can participate again next year! My girls will be excited to meet all the teachers who share a passion to keep reading alive.

Sincerely,

Ms. Justina M. Gomez

August 6, 2015

Dear Ms. Fenceroy,

It is with great sincerity and appreciation that I am writing this letter thanking you for your generous donation to the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project. Because of your donation, Darrell Lynn Hines Academy and 4 other schools in Milwaukee have been able to help children read better and more confidently. At our school, we were able to service 35 students, who all grew in phonics and comprehension. We were able to provide our students with numerous engaging activities that helped them increase their phonics skills. Your donation allowed 6 adults to service 35 students, giving the students a chance to get small group and individualized instruction in reading. The most amazing gift was seeing our students excited about reading and using the tools we have taught them. I hope you get a chance to see how much our students were able to grow in reading this summer. I am confident that we have changed the lives of our children in just a short 6 weeks. Our plan, moving forward is to make sure that as a staff we carry over the same enthusiasm and perseverance during the school year. We also have plans to educate other teachers on the information we learned in LETRS Training and the professional development that we were given at the beginning of the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project. I have been working with the Milwaukee Summer Reading Project for 5 summers now and it has been a complete evolution for our school. Again, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving our students this opportunity. We definitely see fruits from their labor.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jaclyn Schmidt".

Jaclyn Schmidt
2nd grade teacher
DLH Academy

To Whom It May Concern:

This past summer my daughter, Imani Holloway, participated in the summer reading program at Central City Cyber school. I thought that this was a very good program for Imani for a variety of reasons. It was a good way to supplement what Imani already knows and it was a continuation of routine and learning through the summer months. Secondly, the program helped Imani build in new skills, such as looking for context clues and searching for deeper meaning through vocabulary work. Lastly, the staff was very friendly and accommodating and seemed very passionate about the work they were doing with children. Overall, I believe that this program provided a really good service for students and families alike.

Sincerely,

Wyll Holloway

Olp, Cheri

Subject:

FW: Ysabella Milwaukee Summer Reading Project

----- Forwarded message -----

From: "Marna Diaz" <marnamnm@gmail.com>

Date: Aug 7, 2015 4:08 PM

Subject: Ysabella Milwaukee Summer Reading Project

To: <cgencuski@gmail.com>

Cc:

Dear Staff of Milwaukee Summer Reading Project,

My daughter Ysabella Diaz-Miller attended the 2015 Summer Reading Project and I'm writing to thank you for working with her. I noticed an improvement in her reading within the first couple of weeks. She has always struggled with reading and she didn't have a lot of confidence in her abilities which caused her to not like reading. She is now reading signs while we are driving and she doesn't argue with me when I tell her to get a book to read. She enjoys reading and isn't afraid to sound out words; her grammar base has grown as well. She has more confidence and challenges herself when picking out books to read. While she didn't enjoy getting up early she does say that she had fun at the Reading project and is glad she attended this summer.

Sincerely,

Marna Diaz