

18.42 Improving Literacy and Educational Outcomes

Resolution passed 2021

Whereas, a student’s ability to read is the foundation of all learning and is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success, affording the best opportunity for students to thrive, fully contribute to society, and meet their potential; and

Whereas, Washington state law regarding basic education declares that school districts “shall provide opportunities for every student to develop the knowledge and skills essential to read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences”; and

Whereas, low literacy rates are correlated with low graduation rates, high juvenile incarceration rates, underemployment, and lifelong disadvantage, creating profound financial, cultural, and social implications; and

Whereas, on average, over two out of three students who fail to reach the “proficient” reading level by third-grade dropout or finish high school unprepared for college or the workplace; as a result, they are significantly more dependent on taxpayer funded healthcare, public safety, and welfare than their successful peers; and

Whereas, the 2019 National Association of Education Progress data for Washington reveals no growth in reading for over 20 years with Washington state only at the national average, and currently sitting at our low point; and

Whereas, Washington state data from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) indicates 40% of students, many of whom face systemic barriers, test below standard on English language assessments; and

Whereas, comprehensive literacy instruction includes five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, as defined by the National Reading Panel over 20 years ago), and this instruction should be “age-appropriate, explicit, systematic and intentional” as defined by the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); yet these essential components are not included in all classroom literacy curricula in Washington state; and

Whereas, students are more successful when families and caregivers are informed of their child’s strengths and needs and are given the information, data, and tools to understand how best to address those needs (at home and school) and are aware of the school and district plan to capitalize on strengths and address needs; and

Whereas, the science of reading (an extensive body of cognitive and educational research collected for decades) has determined the most effective way to teach and assess early literacy skills with evidence-based practices, but data reveal that educator preparation programs in Washington state do not adequately prepare pre-service teachers with this essential knowledge; and

Whereas, in January 2021, the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction declared literacy a priority for the state and recognized the need to “completely overhaul early literacy using proven strategies that are grounded in the science of reading.”

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils shall collaborate with educational entities, interest groups, and communities to advocate for policies, practices, and curriculum that improve literacy and educational outcomes for all students by:

- Ensuring all Washington students receive explicit, systematic, evidence-based instruction and assessments in all five essential literacy components, with attention to oral and written literacy development and sound-symbol instruction, provided by highly trained teachers
- Removing systemic barriers that delay assessment and intervention regarding literacy, language, spelling, and writing skills, with an intentional focus on early identification and intervention for students of color, indigenous populations, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities
- Supporting family engagement policies using best practices regarding literacy development to include purposeful communication about assessment, instruction, intervention, progress monitoring, and the methods, tools, and strategies families and caregivers can use to support struggling students at home
- Ensuring families and caregivers are provided the information, assistance, appropriate supports, and materials (in an accessible format and the home language or dialect) to understand and effectively address and redress literacy and oral language skill gaps
- Providing learning opportunities for school board members, families, and communities about evidence-based instruction related to foundational reading skills; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils shall advocate for curriculum, instructional policies, and pre-service and in-service educator training that ensure all teachers are highly trained and effective at using evidence-based literacy instruction, including, but not limited to:

- Requiring pre-service educators to meet minimum competency requirements that includes mastery of foundational reading skills and knowledge of instruction aligned

with the science of reading

- Requiring minimum yearly clock hours to maintain licensure, that includes foundational reading skills, teaching strategies, and instructional curricula that align with the science of reading
- Offering opportunities for educators to specialize in literacy through expanded credentialing options
- Requiring OSPI to collect and share district data regarding the type of literacy screening instruments, type of intervention, related progress data, and identification of those specific populations at most risk
- Providing educators with instructional materials that allow for the explicit teaching of foundational literacy skills
- Requiring teacher preparation programs to provide instruction for teachers-in-training regarding comprehensive literacy instruction that is aligned with ESSA and the science of reading, and includes the five foundational reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension)
- Providing opportunities for professional development for pre-K-12 educators, administrators, and educational support staff; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils shall advocate for state and federal funding to improve literacy and educational outcomes for all students, including, but not limited to, support for:

- Districts with their effort to effectively train in-service teachers in evidenced-based literacy practices
- OSPI's data collection and efforts to offer, produce, or curate in-person and web-based professional development in the science of reading, evidence-based literacy practices, and the five components of reading
- The alignment of classroom instruction with evidence-based practices and reading science
- The purchase and distribution of curriculum and reading materials that align with the science of reading.