

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

September 27, 2023

Re: Improving early literacy in a Special Legislative Session

Dear Governor Abbott,

The 16 organizations undersigned respectfully request that if you call an additional special session that you include provisions to improve early literacy outcomes similar to those in House Bill 2162 (88R), authored by Representative Dutton and championed by his late Chief of Staff, Tamoria Jones, as well as sponsored by Senator Middleton.

The data makes it very clear that few things matter more to a child's future than their ability to read. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, students who learn to read by 3rd grade are four times more likely to graduate high school, an important statistic which you have acknowledged in your policy announcements and speeches. Under your leadership, House Bill 3 (86R) put Texas on the right track by introducing the Early Education Allotment, reconstituting Reading Academies, and requiring local school boards to adopt goals to improve students' 3rd grade reading proficiency. As a result of these policies and the hard work of Texas' educators, grade-level proficiency on the STAAR 3rd Grade Reading assessment rebounded post-pandemic and surpassed 2019 rates for all student groups, rising from 43% to 48% in 2023. Based on the National Assessment of Education Progress, or NAEP, Texas now ranks 33rd in the nation in 4th Grade Reading, up from 42nd in 2019 and 45th in 2017.

But Texas can do better. More must be done to equip the other 52% of young learners with the foundational early literacy skills that put them on a path to success in life. Historical data from TEA shows that only 5% of students who don't perform satisfactorily on STAAR in 3rd Grade Reading catch up to grade level by 5th grade, making increased focus on effective instruction and early intervention essential.

With your support, House Bill 1605 passed this session, ensuring more students will access rigorous, on-grade-level instructional materials that align with the Science of Reading, giving parents more tools to take an active role in their student's learning and reinforce key concepts at home, and prohibiting the disproven method of "three-cueing" in educator preparation and phonics instruction.

House Bill 2162 complemented these policies and its provisions echo the recommendations in the report issued by the House Select Committee on Educational Opportunity and Enrichment to ensure every Texas student gets the early literacy supports they need and Texas parents are informed of their students' progress. Key provisions of HB 2162 include:

- Ensuring schools utilize screening instruments to **monitor student's development of foundational literacy skills** in Kindergarten through 3rd grade;
- **Empowering parents** with reliable information about their child's reading progress and high-quality resources that can be used at home;
- Requiring schools to **provide targeted reading intervention**, including high-quality tutoring for students who still require intervention after two consecutive years;

- Providing **greater public transparency** and data to know how well our schools are implementing the Science of Teaching Reading.

Should you reconvene the Texas Legislature for a special session, it is our hope that your proclamation will include policies to improve early reading like the ones listed above. Doing so would greatly accelerate the progress Texas has made in recent years and bolster your record as a champion for early reading.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

