



DANIEL BOONE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Written Testimony of:

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Senate Majority Policy Committee Public Hearing:

Improving Reading Outcomes in Pennsylvania

Date & Time: January 12, 2026 | 2:00 p.m.

Location: Daniel Boone Area Middle School, Douglassville, PA

Good afternoon, Chairman Argall and Members of the Majority Policy Committee,

Thank you very much for the invitation to share a district's perspective on improving reading outcomes in Pennsylvania. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss such an important topic with you and alongside colleagues from Souderton Area School District, Pottstown School District and the Montgomery and Berks County Intermediate Units. On behalf of the Daniel Boone Area School District, welcome to our Middle School and community. We appreciate the Committee's focus on this matter.

The Daniel Boone Area School District is located in Berks County, Pennsylvania, approximately 10 miles southwest of Reading and approximately 50 miles northeast of Philadelphia. We serve the communities of Amity Township, Union Township, and the Borough of Birdsboro. In total, the district encompasses approximately 39 square miles with over 21,000 community members. We serve approximately 2,800 students and their families.



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Pennsylvania has taken a major step by enacting Act 135 (2024) and Act 47 (2025). Together, these laws lay the groundwork for building statewide capacity for Structured Literacy. They will help ensure that students in the Commonwealth are taught with research-based methods, identified early if they are struggling, and supported by highly trained teachers who are using quality resources.

I joined the Daniel Boone Area School District in September 2024 as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. In this short time, I have been incredibly proud of the progress we have made in implementing Structured Literacy and optimizing our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This rapid rate of change would not have been possible without the dedication of our amazing staff and administrative team, the leadership of our Superintendent, Mr. Thomas Voelker, and the support of our community and Board of Directors. I extend my sincere gratitude to all of them. We have united around a vision: ensuring students will be proficient readers by the end of third grade. This is essential for the success of future generations. And it is what our children deserve.

Currently, the Daniel Boone Area School District is in year one of implementing an evidence-based phonics resource. Teachers have engaged in professional development focused on explicit instruction in phonological awareness, decoding, morphology, and orthography. These changes were necessary to provide students systematic instruction in the foundational skills necessary for word recognition in early grades. However, our work is not finished. We must also ensure research-based methods and resources are in place to support language comprehension. This school year, we are also evaluating resources that build students' vocabulary, understanding of language structure, verbal reasoning, and knowledge of literary elements. Once fully adopted, students will experience a coherent progression of learning, helping them become increasingly strategic, automatic, and ultimately skilled readers.

We also recognize that even with the best core curriculum and instruction in place, some students may still struggle. Therefore, this school year marks our first year of implementing an optimized Multi-Tiered System of Supports. All students participate in universal screening and those



identified as at risk of not meeting grade-level standards receive tiered interventions that increase in intensity based on individual need. Additionally, time-bound goals are established which include progress monitoring.

Education requires highly skilled professionals to deliver effective instruction. However, the essential components are not overly complicated. There are three primary ingredients: (1) a strong, coherent, evidence-based curriculum aligned to educational standards; (2) high-quality instruction; and (3) research-based resources. In order to comply with legislation such as Act 135 (2024) and Act 47 (2025), shifts need to be made in all three areas. Such efforts demand considerable time and financial investment. For smaller schools, like the Daniel Boone Area School District, this causes a strain on already significantly limited resources.

For that reason, we respectfully encourage the Committee to consider the following thoughts when working towards policy solutions. Specific to curriculum, a centralized repository of vetted curriculum documents would allow districts across the Commonwealth to benefit from each other's work. Regarding instruction, we know that sustained, job-embedded professional learning is one of the most impactful strategies to effect change. Dedicated funding for districts to hire literacy coaches, paired with funding for Intermediate Units to increase their capacity to provide training and consultation services, would be extremely beneficial. It would help small districts in their efforts to provide educators with the support necessary to strengthen content knowledge and pedagogical skills. With respect to resources, high-quality, research-based resources are expensive. Grant dollars could help offset those costs, helping to ensure the local tax base is not overburdened by expenses associated with mandated legislative changes.

Finally, improving reading outcomes in Pennsylvania requires a multi-pronged approach. Student achievement is influenced by many factors beyond curriculum and classroom instruction. We respectfully request that the Committee consider policy solutions that address barriers to learning including but not limited to expanding mental and behavioral health supports, fostering family and community engagement partnerships, as well as implementing strategies to improve attendance.



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Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective and for your commitment to this important work. I welcome any questions you may have.