

Written Testimony for the Public Hearing on Literacy

To: Senator Pennycuick, Senator Argall, and Members of the Committee

From: Candace L. Hall, Board Member, Pennsylvania Branch – International Dyslexia Association

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I. Introduction and Purpose

Good morning, Senators Pennycuick and Argall, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Candace Hall, and I am here today representing the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association (PB-IDA). I also come before you shaped by three important roles in Pennsylvania's education landscape: as a former student who struggled to learn to read in our public schools, as an educator who has supported students and teachers firsthand, and as an advocate committed to ensuring that research-based literacy practices reach every child, not just in theory, but in daily classroom practice.

Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has invested in understanding how children learn to read. Thanks to the leadership of this Committee and many dedicated stakeholders, we no longer need to debate what the research shows: explicit, systematic, evidence-based literacy instruction improves outcomes for nearly all students. In fact, research says, 95% of all students can learn to read with the right instruction.

But knowing what works is only the beginning. Today, I hope we can focus on something even more challenging, the "how." Research is essential and foundational, but without a coordinated, sustained plan for implementation, the promise of that research never fully reaches classrooms, teachers, or children.

II. From Research to Implementation: The Challenge of "How"

Many colleagues today have explained the science of reading, the urgency of literacy failure, and the power of evidence-based instruction. I agree wholeheartedly. But research alone does not transform systems.

The critical question before us now is not only what works, but how we make it work statewide.

How do we ensure every student, in every zip code, receives high-quality instruction every day?

How do we ensure teachers are prepared, supported, and confident?

How do we ensure systems, from PDE to local classrooms, are aligned around implementation that lasts?

The truth is, this work is often neglected, not because it is unimportant, but because it is difficult. It requires coordination. It requires persistence. And it requires leadership.

It is possible to know what to do and still fail at doing it.

III. Lessons from Other States: Mississippi's Example

States across the country have looked to Mississippi as an example of sustained literacy improvement. What some call the “Mississippi Miracle” was not luck; it was the product of intentional, long-term implementation. Beginning in 2013, Mississippi implemented a coordinated strategy that aligned legislation, training, literacy coaching, screening, accountability, and supports.

Mississippi did not succeed simply because it knew the research. It succeeded because it built systems to implement the research—investing in teachers, leaders, schools, and the infrastructure required to sustain change.

Pennsylvania can learn from this: **implementation is not optional, and alignment is essential!**

IV. Pennsylvania's Progress and Remaining Gaps

Pennsylvania has made meaningful strides. Act 135 of 2024 expanded access to Structured Literacy and established essential structures, including the Reading Leadership Council, vetted materials lists, screening requirements, and professional development guidance.

Lists alone do not create change. Purchasing materials does not guarantee effective instruction. One-time professional development does not lead to lasting changes in classroom practice.

For Act 135 to fulfill its intent, Pennsylvania must articulate how implementation will occur, how schools will receive training, coaching, leadership support, and sustainable professional learning that is embedded into practice.

V. What “How” Must Look Like in Pennsylvania

Meaningful change requires intentional implementation of infrastructure. Pennsylvania has the entities; it simply needs to align them.

We do not need to place the burden of implementation solely on 500+ districts.

We can design a coordinated approach where each organization has a clear and powerful role:

- **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE):**
 - Serve as the overseer and accountability partner. PDE must also receive deep training on evidence-based practices to ensure guidance and monitoring are aligned with the science.
- **PaTTAN:**
 - Shift from primarily reactive support to proactive state leadership in literacy.
 - PaTTAN must also receive deep training on evidence-based practices to ensure guidance and monitoring are aligned with the sciences and become a driver of training, technical assistance, and modeling.
- **Intermediate Units:**
 - IU's must also receive deep training on evidence-based practices to ensure guidance and monitoring are aligned with the sciences.
 - Provide regional capacity. IUs can deliver coaching, professional development, technical support, and ongoing sustainability resources.
- **School and District Leadership:**
 - Leaders need strong preparation to guide the shift to evidence-based practice.

- They must understand the change process, how to monitor instruction, and how to build supportive cultures.
- **Teachers:**
 - Educators must also receive deep training on evidence-based practices to ensure guidance and monitoring are aligned with the sciences.
 - Teachers deserve high-quality professional learning, job-embedded coaching, collaboration time, and ongoing development—not just initial training.
- **Higher Education:**
 - Professors must also receive deep training on evidence-based practices to ensure guidance and monitoring are aligned with the sciences.
 - Preparation programs must align with evidence-based literacy practices so our newest teachers enter classrooms ready.
- **Families and Communities:**
 - Families need clear communication, resources, and transparency on progress.

When these systems work together, we establish a shared understanding, language, and expectations, resulting in improved outcomes for students.

VI. Implementation: Not Just Technical Work — Human Work

Implementation is not simply a technical process; it is deeply human. It requires belief, trust, coaching, and support. We would never accept a physician ignoring current research to treat a patient. Education deserves that same urgency and respect for science.

To honor the research is to honor the children who depend on us to make it real.

VII. Recommendations and Next Steps

To move Pennsylvania from awareness to action, I respectfully recommend:

1. Develop a Statewide Implementation Plan with clear roles, shared language, timelines, and accountability.
2. Provide sustained, job-embedded professional learning for every educators, including coaching supported by Intermediate Units and PaTTAN.
3. Ensure leadership training for principals, district leaders, PDE, and PaTTAN itself on leading evidence-based literacy reform.
4. Center equity and consistency, ensuring access regardless of district wealth or location.
5. Establish guardrails, accountability measures, and public transparency so that Pennsylvanians understand where we are and where we are going.
6. Commit to long-term investment, recognizing that sustainable implementation takes years, not months.

VIII. Conclusion: A Call to Lead Together

Pennsylvania is at a pivotal moment. We know the research. Now we must do the work to implement it.

Our students deserve more than acknowledgments and awareness.

They deserve a system that works.

They deserve teachers who are supported.

They deserve leaders who are prepared.

They deserve a Commonwealth that refuses to let reading outcomes depend on luck, zip code, or circumstance.

If we align our organizations, invest in implementation, and commit to sustained partnership, Pennsylvania can be a national leader in literacy. We can ensure every child not only learns to read, but has the confidence, opportunity, and future that strong literacy makes possible.

Thank you for your leadership, your attention, and your commitment to Pennsylvania's children.

Sincerely,

Candace L. Hall