

Rep. Nedweski: Governor Evers' signs historic reading bill

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Madison – On Wednesday, Governor Evers signed the Right to Read Act into law, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 20. This statewide early literacy education initiative will be transformational for students, educators, and for our economy moving forward. Using universal assessments and diagnostics, combined with personalized interventions throughout grades K-3, the bill supports a system that identifies and addresses gaps in learning before they grow too wide to overcome.

“Coming into the Legislature this year, attacking the academic achievement gap was, and remains, a top priority for me” said Rep. Amanda Nedweski (R – Pleasant Prairie). “Nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin students cannot read at grade level, and we are the worst state in the country for educating Black students. This is absolutely unacceptable. Upgrading reading instruction is a step in the right direction for the future of our students, our workforce, and our economy. My work as a co-author of this bill reflects significant input from local educators, administrators, students, and parents. Collaboration with DPI was a key component to gain the Governor’s support for the Right to Read Act. I am grateful to Rep. Joel Kitchens (R – Sturgeon Bay) for the opportunity to be a contributor in this effort, and to colleagues on both sides of the aisle who supported this bill and have chosen to put students first in Wisconsin.”

With a \$50 million investment in the 2023-25 biennial budget dedicated to this plan, school districts will be aided by reading coaches throughout the state. This money will also be used to help fund the purchase of new curriculum and materials, as well as teacher training. Additionally, the bill puts safeguards in place so that students are not pushed into advanced learning before they have the ability to read proficiently. The adoption of the Right to Read Act will also spur changes in teacher education programs so that new teachers will be more adequately prepared moving

forward.

Over 30 states have recently passed similar legislation for schools to adopt science-based literacy instruction, and many have already experienced significant improvements in outcomes. Often referred to as the “science of reading”, this approach includes an emphasis on phonics and phonemic awareness. The bill prohibits the use of the “three-cueing,” method, which has contributed to a steep decline in reading outcomes for Wisconsin over the past several decades. Wisconsin school districts that have already taken action to move to science-based literacy instruction are seeing positive results for students, teachers, and families.

“The ability to read and comprehend proficiently directly impacts survival. High rates of illiteracy impact education and employment performance, social relationships, crime, dependence on government aids, and quality physical and mental health. Data shows that the way reading is currently being taught in Wisconsin is failing more students than it is helping. It’s time to try something different, with proven evidence-based results. The Right to Read Act empowers teachers, students, and families to make the necessary changes needed to move toward success.”