



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

Senate Committee on Education Proponent Testimony on SB 532

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Member, Kansas Board of Regents

Good afternoon, Chair Baumgardner, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to testify in favor of SB 532.

SB 532 will prove to be one of the most important bills this Legislature will consider in 2024. Our students' ability to read is fundamental to their life's success – in their academic career and in their life beyond school. As we now recognize our teaching methods have not met every child's needs, we must change course – not only in how we teach reading at the elementary level but in how our institutions prepare our teachers.

This legislation before you today will create the Kansas Blueprint for Literacy. While my testimony details the important functions and new activities surrounding improved children's reading skills, the most important takeaway for you is that the Blueprint is not just a new government program. It is a clearly marked path with practical steps to which we will commit in postsecondary education to ensure our in-service teachers and pre-service teachers have the tools they need for success in the classroom.

Background

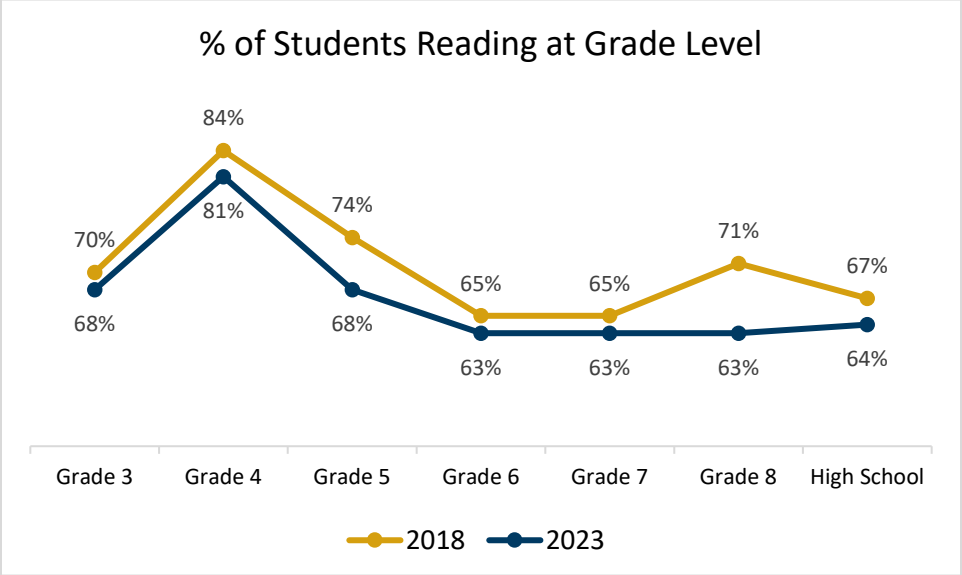
Kansas is experiencing unprecedented economic growth. By the year 2030, Kansas is projected to add 54,000 new jobs, 80% of which will require a bachelor's degree or higher, according to a recent analysis completed by the Institute for Policy and Social Research (University of Kansas, 2023). At the same time, we are at a critical moment when many Kansans are questioning whether our education systems are preparing students with the knowledge and skills to benefit from these new opportunities.

The reality is we have more and more jobs requiring high-skilled workers, while performance on national assessments reveal fewer Kansas students are meeting basic levels in literacy. In Kansas, 67% of students are reading at the Basic Level according to

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the 2023 Kansas Assessment, and 60% of fourth graders are reading at the basic level according to the 2022 National Assessment of Education Progress. Making literacy a priority is without a doubt one of the most important and impactful investments we can make to help families, support businesses, and continue to advance economic prosperity for all Kansans.

The graph below displays the percentage of Kansas students who were reading at the basic level or above for each grade level tested on the Kansas Assessment in both 2018 and in 2023. In 2023, 81% of Kansas 4th graders were performing at grade level, while in all other grades, only 63% to 68% of students were reading at grade level. Reading scores have dropped at all grade levels since 2018.



Kansas is not alone in this challenge. Across the nation governors in states such as Mississippi, New Mexico, and New York are recognizing literacy as the number one workforce and economic imperative. In comparison to those states, Kansas has some structural advantages, including a reputation for providing a high-quality education. We have talented educators, nationally ranked Colleges of Education, and nationally recognized literacy researchers. It is imperative we leverage our strengths and ensure we lead the nation in producing the highly literate talent to lead our communities and state forward.

The Kansas Board of Regents' strategic plan "Building a Future" is focused on helping families, supporting businesses, and advancing economic prosperity. Furthering the knowledge and skills of the educator workforce is essential to building the workforce of today and tomorrow. Beginning in 2022, the Board established a task force charged with developing recommendations to meet the educator workforce needs in our state. The task

force developed several recommendations and provided priority actions to address the urgent and future educator workforce needs.

Two goals were elevated by the Board as priorities for immediate action:

- 1) Support implementation of the Universal Elementary Education Licensure Degree Transfer Program in partnership with A.A. degrees in elementary education; and
- 2) Develop and implement a Comprehensive Literacy Plan based on the science of reading (phonetic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) to encompass:
 - a) Research-based practices supporting students with dyslexia, to enhance literacy preparation for new and continuing teachers; and
 - b) Development of future licensure expectations and university programming in support of those expectations.

The Board charged the Education Deans from our public universities and collaborative partners to expedite execution on those two goals:

- The Universal Elementary Education Licensure Degree Transfer program was completed within three months and has been fully implemented across the System of postsecondary institutions.
- The Comprehensive Literacy Plan, based on the science of reading and structured literacy, is in the final development stages and is moving toward full implementation during the 2024 calendar year.

Delivering Results

SB 532 establishes a Literacy Advisory Committee and requires the Board of Regents to appoint a Director of Literacy Education. The Literacy Advisory Committee, composed of fifteen members, would have representation from relevant parties - the Governor, House and Senate leadership, Kansas National Education Association, public universities, community colleges, independent/not-for-profit colleges, Kansas Board of Education, Kansas Board of Regents, and United School Administrators of Kansas.

With the new Director of Literacy Education serving as the chair of the Committee, they will monitor progress and designate best practices for literacy training for pre-service and in-service teachers, make recommendations regarding literacy, and submit a plan to the Board of Regents on the establishment for six Centers of Excellence in Reading.

Science of Reading Training and Micro-Credential Attainment

Working with our Deans of Education at the public universities, the Board set a priority on developing and implementing a comprehensive literacy plan based on the science of

reading, along with research-based practices supporting students with dyslexia, to enhance literacy preparation for new and continuing teachers.

As prescribed in the bill, the Board of Regents and State Board of Education will collaborate to approve a micro-credential or certification requirements for teachers in the science of reading and structured literacy. A clear structure will be developed; however, we envision the micro-credential could be attained in different ways for pre-service and in-service teachers.

- Pre-service teachers will take the required courses and assessment as part of their academic program. In academic year 2023, there were over 2,500 students enrolled in elementary education programs at our public universities.
- In-service teachers may obtain the micro-credential through different paths, such as: LETRS training, postsecondary coursework, assessment, etc. Approximately 27,000 teachers in Kansas need additional literacy training.

Teacher Assessment Tools

The Board of Regents, in collaboration with postsecondary educational institutions and reading experts, will establish a comprehensive reading assessment system to be used by teachers as part of their literacy instruction in university pre-service programs. This assessment system is fundamental in helping teachers to determine what to teach and how to teach it. The Board of Regents shall make recommendations to the State Board of Education that such an assessment system be made available to school districts. The comprehensive reading and literacy assessment system will include the following:

- Universal screening measures;
- Diagnostic assessment to determine how much does the student already know;
- Formative assessment, which can be a frequent quick check-in on how the student is learning; and
- Summative assessment to determine how effective was the instruction.

Centers of Excellence in Reading

The bill also requires the Literacy Advisory Committee to develop a plan to establish six regional Centers of Excellence in Reading. In collaboration with Colleges of Education, the Center for Reading at Pittsburg State University, and community-based literacy organizations, the additional centers will provide further literacy support for Kansas through:

- Working directly with students through evaluation and diagnosis, strategy and coursework recommendations;
- Working directly with teachers by recommending strategies for development and delivery of training and education;

- Working directly with building administration and school boards;
- Conducting research on literacy education; and
- Managing simulation labs, which will allow for applied learning to occur for explicit structured literacy teaching environment.

We anticipate these centers will not be adequate to meet the demand and will need to work with additional literacy partners.

Suggested Bill Amendments

We suggest three amendments to the current language in SB 532.

1. Implementation of the bill will require extensive work that will carry associated costs for the Board Office; therefore, we do suggest amending the bill to add language that enactment of the bill will be subject to appropriation. We suggest language be added as follows:

“Section 1. (a) Sections 1 through 7, and amendments thereto, shall be known and may be cited as the Kansas blueprint for literacy. **All provisions of Sections 1 through 7, and amendments thereto, that require the expenditure of funds shall be subject to legislative appropriations therefor.**”

2. The bill focuses on a goal for reading improvement and increased literacy attainment, so a broader look at reading assessments to elementary students beyond the fourth grade seems important. We suggest the language on page 3, lines 31-35 be amended as follows:

“(3) be responsible for the attainment of the transformational goal to have 100% of the Kansas elementary teacher workforce achieve a micro-credential in the science of reading and structured literacy by 2030, leading to 85% of Kansas fourth **third through eighth** graders achieving level 2 or above on the English language arts state assessment by 2033.”

3. Section 4 on page five of the bill refers to actions to be taken by our universities. We therefore suggest line 26 on page five be amended as follows:

“...be used ~~by each school district~~ **in teacher preparation programs** in the state. Such assessment system shall...”

This comprehensive approach to literacy education through partnerships in literacy training on the science of reading, the creation of literacy screening and assessment tools, and further evaluation and research will improve reading outcomes in Kansas.

We look forward to returning in the future with reports that detail our accomplishments on our commitment to improved student outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this legislation.