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Testimony for 2019 SB 183/AB 194 – licensure as a special education teacher

I would like to thank Chairman Olsen and all of the committee members for hearing Senate Bill 183 today. Also, I would like to thank Senator Marklein for his willingness to work with me on this legislation and be the lead senate sponsor.

Wisconsin schools are currently facing challenges with the recruitment and retention of special education teachers.

Whereas all other teachers can have a license with stipulations for three years and can have this license renewed every year by the school, special education teachers can have a license with stipulations for only three years. Then due to federal law guiding special education, they need to become fully licensed in their state. In Wisconsin this means having to pass the required Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), which can be costly, time consuming, and has a limited correlation with transfer of knowledge to children in the classroom.

This legislation creates an additional option to the FORT exam that enables special education teachers to earn their license. It does not in any way change or eliminate the FORT exam, it simply creates another option for educators and school districts to utilize.

The bill was crafted after my office received feedback from CESA officials, who conveyed that some candidates for a teaching license would rather receive meaningful instruction, coaching, and feedback through rigorous coursework than memorize terms and study guides to pass a standardized test.

It is no secret that not everyone learns in the same way, and this legislation creates a second option under which some teaching license candidates may flourish. In addition, there is compelling data which states that receiving feedback from a professor or coach directly transfers to students in the classroom, while testing does not necessarily do the same.

I have constituents, some of whom you will hear from later today, who have been negatively impacted by the requirements of the FORT exam. I believe that this second option will help not only our rural districts, but districts throughout the state, keep qualified teachers who work well with children in the classroom, and the rigorous training will give teachers skills that directly transfer to the classroom and positively impact our children.

Your support for Senate Bill 183 would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

September 17, 2019

Senate Committee on Education Testimony on Senate Bill 183

Good morning!

Thank you Chair Olsen and committee members for hearing Senate Bill 183 (SB 183), which creates an alternate path for licensure as a Special Education Teacher. It allows an individual to successfully complete a course of study in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension in lieu of the requirement for passing the Foundations of Reading test (FORT).

Rep. Travis Tranel and I drafted this bill in response to feedback from our local Cooperative Education Service Agency (CESA). We were told that there are several school districts in our communities that have found very talented, dedicated people who want to teach Special Education, but that they are struggling to meet Wisconsin's requirements to be considered "fully licensed" within the timeframe required by Federal law that only applies to Special Education teachers.

Federal law requires Special Education teachers to be "fully licensed" within three years. However, the definition of "fully licensed" applied under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is defined by the state of Wisconsin, not the Federal government. Wisconsin law requires Special Education teachers to pass the FORT in order to be considered "fully licensed." If they do not pass the FORT in three years, they cannot receive an extension.

This bill creates an additional pathway for a Special Education teacher to become "fully licensed" by successfully completing a course of study in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. However, teachers will continue to have the option to take the FORT if they prefer.

A recent DPI survey of teaching applicants told us that they would rather receive meaningful instruction, coaching, and feedback through rigorous coursework than memorize terms and study guides to pass a standardized test. In addition, there is compelling data that tells us that receiving feedback from a professor or coach directly transfers to students in the classroom, while testing does not.

The Assembly companion was amended and the criteria for the alternate pathway was modified:

1. The course of study provides rigorous instruction in the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.
2. A student in the course of study receives feedback and coaching from an individual who is an expert of reading instruction.
3. A student in the course demonstrates competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency by providing a portfolio of work.

Thank you again for hearing SB 183, and your timely action on the bill.

Senate Committee on Education
September 17, 2019

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Information on 2019 Senate Bill 183**

Thank you Chairman Olsen and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide information on Senate Bill 183 (SB 183). SB 183 provides an option to the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), currently required for a provisional license, to address the need for teachers to possess the knowledge and skills to teach reading as they serve special education students.

Analysis of Senate Bill 183:

This bill allows the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to issue an initial license as a special education teacher to an individual who successfully completes a course in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension, provided the individual satisfies all other requirements for licensure by DPI. Specifically, the course must satisfy all of the following:

1. The course provides rigorous instruction in the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.
2. A student in the course receives feedback and coaching from an individual who holds either a master's degree in reading or a reading specialist license issued by DPI.
3. A student in the course demonstrates competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency by providing a portfolio of work.

Current law provides no alternative to the FORT requirement for a provisional license, except for those teachers who complete an online only preparation program under s. 118.197.

Background

The FORT is a test that was initially created by Pearson, an education company, for Massachusetts. Effective January 31, 2014, Wisconsin statutes required passage of the FORT to teach grades K-5, special education, and reading under s. 118.19(14)(a). Cut scores in Wisconsin are required by law to be set at a level no lower than that recommended by Pearson based on Wisconsin state standards.

Since passage, the FORT has prevented prospective teachers, especially teachers of color, from receiving a provisional license. This has resulted in concerns from teacher

candidates as well as school administrators who are trying to hire otherwise eligible applicants.

Passage rates in Wisconsin have been close to 66 percent for first-time test takers who took the FORT. Passage rates, however, vary by race and ethnicity. During the 2014-2015 testing period, candidates that identified as White had a first-time pass rate of 68 percent compared to 55 percent for Asian-identified candidates, 50 percent for Native American-identified candidates, 41 percent for Black-identified candidates, and 36 percent for Hispanic-identified candidates. Of the 298 candidates that did not identify as white, only half achieved a passing score the first time they took the FORT. Race-ethnic gaps in FORT performance are not limited to Wisconsin. Massachusetts reports annual pass rates by race-ethnicity for all test takers (combining first time and repeat takers). Table 1 shows a similar pattern of race-ethnic gaps in pass rates for the 2014-15 reporting period.

Table 1: Total FORT pass rates for the 2014-15 reporting period				
	Wisconsin		Massachusetts	
	Total Pass Rate	Gap w.r.t. White	Total Pass Rate	Gap w.r.t. White
White	81%		68%	
Black	60%	21 points	47%	21 points
Hispanic	64%	17 points	55%	13 points
Native American	48%	33 points	25%	43 points
Asian	60%	21 points	76%	-8 points

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/2015ResultsByCategory.pdf> and <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/tepd/pd/2016-EPP-Annual-Report.pdf>

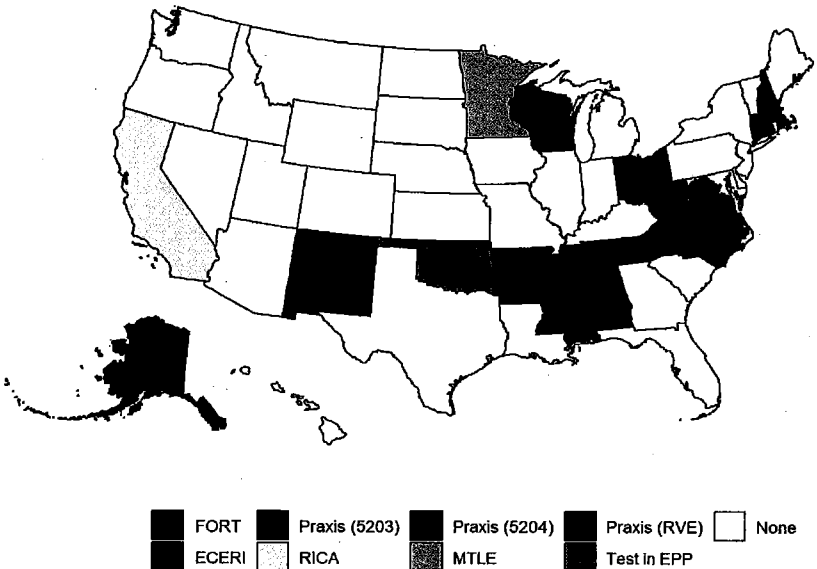
Policy In Other States

Based on an initial review by DPI of teacher certification requirements specific to exams about reading instruction in other states, it appears there are currently eight states, including Wisconsin, that require the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT). An additional nine states require a different exam. Thirty-three states do not appear to require any additional, literacy-specific exam. Table 2 lists the states in the order they adopted the FORT requirement.

Table 2: Timeline of State FORT Adoption	
Year	States
2002	Massachusetts
2009	Connecticut
2014	Wisconsin, New Hampshire, North Carolina
2016	Mississippi
2017	Ohio, Arkansas

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of states that require the FORT, Praxis, or other additional exams about teaching reading skills as of the end of 2018. In addition to the 8 states using the FORT, another five use a related Praxis exam and another four use some other exam.

Figure 1: Additional reading/literacy instruction exams for teacher certification.



Good morning! My name is Sydney Salmon and I am currently in my final semester at Edgewood College majoring in Early Childhood: Regular & Special Ed with a minor in ESL. I am here today to express my concerns with the Foundations of Reading Test that the State of WI requires for my licensure.

I would like to start with my personal background with standardized testing. My first standardized test was in third grade. Until that test, I was looked at as a good student with good marks in the gradebook. After the results of that test came back, my teacher thought otherwise. My scores were low and my teacher recommended I be tested within our district to see if extra "help" was necessary. I was tested by a district reading specialist who determined I did not need extra help.

Fast forward to fifth grade. Again, my grades were strong and my teacher was surprised when this next round of standardized testing again resulted in low scores. Although nothing else indicated a problem, she recommended that my parents have me tested for a learning disability. My parents had me tested through the learning system at Mercy Health Systems and

nothing was indicated as a disability...but my learning style was identified as "auditory". When we learned of this auditory learning style, it was a great learning experience for not only my parents and teachers, but also for myself. I finally understood that a standardized test did not define the student I was (and does not define the student I am still today). The only thing positive that I have experienced through standardized testing is that it gave me my voice. With the support of my parents and some very supportive teachers, I became an advocate for my own education. From fifth grade on, I began every school year by letting each of my teachers know that I am a good student and that would continue to show through my grades.

I stand before you today with 12 years of elementary and secondary education and 4 years of a college education. I have maintained good grades and a strong GPA throughout, maintained a full time job throughout college, was named to the Honors list at Edgewood College during several of my semesters there, and scored very high on my evaluations during student teaching and practicum placements (which I have here for you to review). I stand before you today only to be blocked by another standardized test trying to show me something that is not true. I am a good student. I should not be

defined by this test...a test that isn't even written by educators in WI but rather a testing center that doesn't know the strong student I am, or what I will be able to bring to my future students. The fact that my future as a teacher could be determined by a standardized test is heart-breaking to me. The only good that has come to my life from standardized testing is that those tests are the reason I wanted to teach. I want my students to know that they should not be defined by those results, that they are more than that score, and that they can do anything they set their minds to.

To date, I have taken the FORT 6 times. I have spent countless hours studying, taken 6 days off of school & work (without pay), hired a tutor, spent \$834 just on testing alone (this does not include study materials which puts me well over the \$1000 mark), and worried continuously that my dreams of being an educator will be put on hold until I finally pass this test. Going into my 6th test last month, I needed to raise my score 5 points in order to pass. I will know my results this month.

Throughout this process, thankfully, I have had several of my college professors, my employers at the daycare center, my cooperating teachers, even my tutor tell me this test sheds no light on the teacher I will be. They all have seen my grades, my work ethic, my skills in working

with students, and know that I will be an asset in the classroom. I ask you all to seriously consider eliminating this test from the licensing requirements for this degree. The State of WI is currently letting good teachers slip through the cracks just like we're letting students slip through the cracks with standardized testing. Something has to change!



Kickapoo Area School District
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September 16, 2019

I provide this testimony as a career educator, 19 years as a School Psychologist and Special Education Coordinator, 10 years as a District Administrator, and as a parent of special needs children. Southwest Wisconsin has many small school systems where the search for qualified teaching candidates has seemingly become the single most important task for administrators. Special education presents a unique challenge to administrators based on the statewide demand for this position, and the lack of interest of regular educators to add a licensure and teach in this very demanding field. The lack of applicants can be exacerbated by the Foundations of Reading Test, which can become a gateway test to licensure for those interested in pursuing special education licensure.

There are many stories from our region, which can demonstrate the dire nature of finding people who both want to do the work, and can be credentialed to do the work. Here are a few recent examples of the shortage from my region:

- In 2016, a district had by all accounts a fantastic special education teacher who could not pass the FoRT test. After being unable to continue to get a license, the district had to nonrenew the teacher, the support for the students has not been the same since. The district then hired 2 special educators in 2017, both left at the end of one year. In 2018 they rehired, one a relocating teacher from Colorado, and one who was a nontraditional teacher wanting to try the field of special education and enrolled in a teaching certification program. The latter lasted one semester. In 2019 they have successfully hired a candidate away from another district midyear, which creates the same dilemma for the other district.
- Another District Administrator told me that in the last 5 years they have had 5 different special education teachers, this high turnover was due to both nonrenewal and teachers moving on to other districts. One of the teachers in this district took the FoRT 5 times before passing, each time failing by just a few standard score points, but never receiving the necessary feedback to improve his testing. The FoRT feedback report is not conducive to giving the necessary feedback to improve performance. The feedback report is given to the examinee in the form of a standard score. This score does not indicate how many of the multiple choice items you answered correctly in each area of the test, nor give you the feedback to improve your writing responses. Feedback is critical to the learning process, "Assessment theories and academics alike espouse the importance of feedback on performance assessment tasks for supporting improvement and progress in student learning achievement."
- In my district we have almost exclusively relied upon growing our own from our teaching staff in anticipation of retirements because the applicant pool is so shallow. We have a current first year special education teacher in an alternative licensing program, who took the FoRT for the first time this week. He was recruited because of his temperament, experience working with special needs students, student management skills, knowledge of de-escalation techniques, and his desire to be a special needs teacher.
- Over the last seven years the De Soto district has hired 8 special education teachers on emergency licenses or licenses with stipulations, and another who had the necessary qualifications. We have to continue to be more creative with filling the positions with the right people and not just someone who has a special education licensure, many have been non-renewed or unable to teach their own lesson

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they prepared coming into an interview here. All our Wisconsin students deserve more than this in their public educational experiences. The FORT test is a very rigorous assessment but doesn't mean a

teacher can teach reading/ ELA. We have had at least 3 special education teachers and reading specialists unable to pass the assessment on their first, second and/or third try. Our district has provided time out of the classroom to study for the assessment, materials to study as well as time out of the district to take the test. Regardless of passing the test or not, our local district has provided experienced teachers, administrators and reading experts to mentor/ coach our new hires to ensure our students are receiving the best instruction.

In summary, we need to do more to make Special Education Teaching a viable career choice. Allowing an alternative pathway to licensure, that is consistent with the spirit of the law, is not somehow watering down the credentials needed to be an effective teacher. The alternative pathway being suggested is actually more consistent with what research indicates is effective. There are many challenges to finding quality special educators and we should all be searching for effective and efficient solutions to encourage people to pursue this career. As of this morning there were 289 special education teaching jobs posted on WECAN. Through WECAN, I can look at all licensed Cross Categorical special education teachers interested in working in CESA 3, my search returned 0 applicants. As an employer, but most importantly as a parent, I implore you to support this common sense change to the special education licensing law.

Thank you Senator Olsen and the Committee on Education for your time today.

The subject of teacher shortages in the area of special education continues to become a bigger issue each year. During the 2016-17 school year there were 652 emergency licenses requested in the area of cross categorical certification. In 2017-18, there were 705 requests. During the 2018-19 school year there were 904 requests. The trend continues to grow each year. Although this impacts Southwest Wisconsin, based on the numbers it is an issue state-wide.

Clearly in my role as a CESA Administrator, this issue impacts me professionally. What drives my passion for this issue is deeply personal. Due to complex circumstances in my life, I was raised by my grandparents. That circumstance provided the opportunity for me to be raised in the same household as my Aunt Susan. Susan was born in the early 1960s when there were no prenatal imagery devices to see that her umbilical cord was wrapped around her neck causing her deprived for 5 minutes of oxygen at birth, which was the source of her Cerebral Palsy diagnosis. As she grew older, my grandparents were told that she would need early intervention and probably would never walk or talk. Prior to federal IDEA laws, my grandparents would need to arrange housing during the week and send her to a private school specializing in working with people who needed to help her in multiple motor areas.

As she entered her teens, the federal government passed a law requiring that our local school district provide her with access to a free and appropriate education. They did so with open arms. They hired fantastic people who developed relationships with my grandparents and my aunt. They worked through issues from how to navigate steps to dealing with bullying. Not only did she learn to walk and talk, she graduated from high school and was living independently prior by the time she was 20 years old. She began to advocate for others with disabilities and wrote poetry to express her feelings. Eventually, she was appointed to the Governor's Board for People with Disabilities by Governor Tommy Thompson and reappointed by Governors Scott McCaullum, James Doyle, and Scott Walker. After her sudden passing of a cardiac arrest, an advocacy award was established in her name.

I cannot imagine how our family would have navigated through these issues if the same trends of today were happening then. If our family would have been required to make a connection with a new person every 2-3 years, the challenges would have been insurmountable.

Let's fast-forward to the issues we are seeing today. According to the latest numbers the biggest challenge school districts face is meeting the needs of students with autism. In fact, 1 in 59 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). 31% of children with an ASD also have an intellectual disability and 25% are in the borderline intellectual disability category. The vast majority of people on the autism spectrum have difficulty managing their sensory input. This means they over- or under-react to visual, tactile, and/or aural input; sometimes to the point where they are unable to participate in typical life activities. Each student's needs are unique. It requires collaboration with paraprofessionals, therapists, parents, the classroom teachers to help each understand the needs. The goal for every student is to learn in the least restrictive environment with his or her non-disabled peers. On the contrary the goal is not to pull a child who has a disability into an isolated classroom to learn. For this to occur, we need continuity. We need to recruit professionals who have the skills to collaborate with content experts to reduce the barriers hindering learning and then retain them.

These skills are not measured on the Foundation of Reading Test (FORT) but are critical in ensuring the success for students with disabilities. This proposal recognizes that special education teachers require a great deal of technical and interpersonal skills in order to become a special educator. Leaders

in many areas of Wisconsin are required to recruit individuals and engage are engaging them in *grow your own* models. As they engage in the recruiting process, the FORT is one more barrier.

The issue with the FORT is not necessarily the passing of the test itself. The issue is with the trend that passing the FORT requires individuals to buy study guides and then take the test enough times to pass. All of these come at added costs. Since there are multiple legal requirements for special educators, much of their time is spent learning the laws to ensure the rights of individuals are met. They must make decisions about where and by whom the students on their caseload is taught. They must understand modifications and accommodations required whether it is in the students' reading and math classrooms or the shop during their technical education class. They must understand the practices to ensure students can transition from high school to post-secondary, so the students they serve are college and career ready. They must understand how to safely de-escalate a student with significant emotional or behavior disabilities without the use of seclusion or restraint. They must advocate for an individual when the lighting in their general classroom is too bright because it creates a barrier to learning. These are just to name a few. There is one license that covers our youngest learners to our oldest learners with an array of disabilities. Let's keep in mind that many of our special education candidates with emergency licenses have a degree in areas outside education. They have not had clinicals, internships, or student-teaching. There are many people who have the ability to learn from study materials and pass an exam without ever being in a classroom. This does not mean they have been prepared to teach reading.

If you ever have a conversation with a special educator, you would hear them say that they wish they could have coursework to help them with the teaching of reading. From everything I have heard or read, the purpose of the FORT was to drive changes at the university level. If that is the purpose why would we not explicitly refer to coursework in the law. There is nothing in the current law requiring change. The burden is ultimately placed on the student. As the data suggests, the issue is getting worse. There are *so* many skills required for special educators. We need to recruit and retain our teachers to develop them. Additionally, the research is clear about the impact of evaluating, coaching, and feedback (Figure 1). In order to impact change, we must provide our teachers with the skill, observe them practicing, and then give them the coaching and feedback needed. In addition to providing the teacher with no feedback about strengths or weaknesses, the FORT has been stated by many as a barrier. Why would we not provide another option to demonstrate competency in a manner that is supported by research? I'm sure there are candidates who would simply rather take the exam than to go through coursework, but there are many who would want to engage in coursework and be provided coaching and feedback as they apply the skill.

Finally, I want to be clear about this testimony. The goal is to create a newly designed courses that are rigorous and provides an opportunity for special education teachers to gain the skills to recognize struggling readers and respond to them appropriately while being evaluated, given clear feedback, and coaching for improvement. Let's provide a pathway for prospective teachers that provides knowledge required while providing them with the guidance they need in this curricular area as they learn all the professional aspects of a special educator. Simply passing an exam does not make one a better teacher or measure an ability to make the necessary connections required to be an effective special education teacher.

Respectfully,

Jamie Nutter

Figure 1

Effective Little Effect <.4 Medium effect .4-.8 Large effect .8+

The Impact of Practice, Feedback and Coaching on Adult Learning

Table 1.1 Effect sizes for training outcomes by training components	Knowledge	Skill	Transfer of training
Information	.63	.35	.00
Presentation of theory	.15	.50	.00
Demonstration	1.65	.26	.00
Theory + demonstration	.66	.86	.00
Theory + demonstration + practice	1.15	.72	.00
Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback	1.31	1.18	.39
Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching	2.71	1.25	1.68

Source: Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 112.

Based on the research, requiring a person to engage in Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching would have a positive impact on student learning. In this particular application special education teachers would be required to either pass the FORT or demonstrate competency by engaging in a course that teaches the components of the five essential components of reading (theory), but requires them to apply (demonstration), actually practice teaching with observation from a person who is an expert in Reading instruction to provide (feedback and coaching).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	Emergency License (License with Stipulations) by Year													
2	Year/Subject	CESA 1	CESA 2	CESA 3	CESA 4	CESA 5	CESA 6	CESA 7	CESA 8	CESA 9	CESA 10	CESA 11	CESA 12	Totals
3	2018-2019													
4	Cross Categorical Special Ed	325	163	30	40	49	68	69	30	33	16	61	20	904
5	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	5	4	4	4		1	6			1	1	6	32
6	Early Childhood Special Ed	44	10	4	6	5	3		4	6	9	7	5	103
7	Emotional Behavioral Disability		1		1	7	17	2		1			13	42
8	Intellectual Disability		2			2					2	3		9
9	Montessori	4			2									6
10	Reading Specialist		2	1	1			2	2	1			1	10
11	Reading Teacher	5	15	6	10	4	3	6	6	3	5	5	2	70
12	Regular Education*	202	99	4	12	10	17	20	9	10	8	17	9	417
13	Specific Learning Disability			1	1		2			1			1	6
14	Visual Impairment				14		1	18	8					41
15	Totals	585	296	50	91	77	112	123	59	55	41	94	57	1640
16	<i>*includes Early Childhood, Elementary, and Bilingual/Bicultural</i>													
17														
18														
19	2017-2018													
20	Cross Categorical Special Ed	238	122	35	33	50	53	59	25	23	13	39	15	705
21	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	4	2		4			3		1		1	6	21
22	Early Childhood Special Ed	31	9	3	3	8	5	3	7	3	8	1	4	85
23	Emotional Behavioral Disability		1			6	6					1	1	15
24	Intellectual Disability	1				2		6				1	1	11
25	Montessori													0
26	Reading Specialist	3				1					1			5
27	Reading Teacher	20	15	5	11	8	13	10	9	9	2	10	1	113
28	Regular Education*	119	121	5	12	13	18	20	6	14	9	10	8	355
29	Specific Learning Disability		1	1		1	1	1	1	1			1	8
30	Visual Impairment	1			11				1					13
31	Totals	179	149	14	41	39	43	43	24	28	20	24	22	1331
32	<i>*includes Early Childhood, Elementary, and Bilingual/Bicultural</i>													
33														
34														
35	2016-2017													
36	Cross Categorical Special Ed	265	109	34	29	30	43	45	26	15	12	34	10	652
37	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	4	1		2			5	1	2		1	2	18
38	Early Childhood Special Ed	33	5	5	6	3	2	6	4	3	6	3	1	77
39	Emotional Behavioral Disability		2			2	2	1		2	1	3		13
40	Intellectual Disability	2	1			2	1	1						7
41	Montessori													0
42	Reading Specialist	1	1			1	3	3	1	3	1			14
43	Reading Teacher	17	23	9	15	9	12	19	9	8	6	9	1	137
44	Regular Education*	151	97	7	16	13	23	22	7	10	7	16	10	379
45	Specific Learning Disability		1	4			3	2	1		1			12
46	Visual Impairment	2			2		1			1		1	1	8
47	Totals	475	240	59	70	60	90	104	49	44	34	67	25	1317
48	<i>*includes Early Childhood, Elementary, and Bilingual/Bicultural</i>													



Teacher Education Center
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Date: September 17, 2019

To: Senate Education Committee

From: Kimber Wilkerson, Ph.D.
Professor and Director of Teacher Education
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Re: SB 183

I am here today to provide information relevant to SB 183.

As a former special educator and the Director of Teacher Education at UW-Madison, I fully support the preparation of special educators and elementary school teachers who have a commanding knowledge of the foundations of reading—as well as an understanding of how to apply that knowledge to authentic instructional environments in the service of learners in schools.

I do not think that special educators have less need for knowledge of early reading instructional practice; in fact, I think they need a better grasp of this content than their peers in general education.

However, as was stated by drafters of this bill, there are more ways to demonstrate mastery of this content besides a score on a standardized test. While many teacher candidates can easily pass the WFORT on their first attempt, some do struggle to pass. This may be due in part to test anxiety or a lack of familiarity with terminology that is unique to the WFORT. For these teacher candidates, the need to retake the exam and spend time preparing for a test retake (rather than preparing to teach students) can be the barrier that turns them away from teaching or prompts them to obtain a license in a neighboring state. The loss of these would-be teachers is especially hard in the field of special education, which continues to be a high-need, hard-to-staff discipline year after year.

At UW-Madison, I direct the office that provides tutoring to students who need to retake the exam. While the first-time pass rate for students at UW-Madison has ranged from 86-96%, each year we have students who need to retake the exam. Some of these students have documented anxiety disorders that hinder their performance in high-stakes, timed, standardized tests. For these students, their anxiety is heightened after a failed attempt. In 2017, one of my own master's advisees, a career-changer, was one of these examples. This man had a documented anxiety disorder that manifested itself acutely during high-stakes, timed testing situations. He had a 4.0 GPA in his master's program at UW-Madison and stellar reviews from cooperating teachers and supervisors in all four of his field placements. In fact, he was offered a rare early contract by a local school district to work with adolescents with significant disabilities before he even finished his program. His initial WFORT score was 224, 16 points below the passing score. Because all the other students in his master's cohort had passed

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on their first attempt, he was left studying to re-take the exam a second time on his own. Additionally, because the test company provides very little feedback, he was also left to study with very little guidance about what areas he needed to improve upon. He took the test a second time, and got the exact same score, 224.

On his third attempt, he received a score of 219, his score was going down, not up. He was now clearly very worried, and also had to spend time focusing on his student teaching experience and working on the edTPA, which is a high stake, performance assessment of readiness to teach. Beyond these very real immediate concerns, he was now also worried about his future. He had left his job in another field to become a special educator, a profession that can clearly use more well-prepared personnel. He was enrolled in a highly regarded preparation program, working hard and earning high praise. However, now, midstream, he started to imagine that this path might actually be closed to him.

I strongly recommended that he meet with a UW-Madison tutor, who is a former reading specialist, to spend time doing one-on-one preparation. The tutor reported to me that the young man knew the content backwards and forwards but was now almost debilitated by dread and the worry that he would never be able to pass the test. From that point forward, our "tutoring" intervention was mainly focused on test-taking strategies and anxiety reduction. \$695 and many hours later, this young man did finally pass the WFORT on his fifth attempt and was able to obtain his initial cross categorical special educator license. He is now teaching successfully in a local high school.

This young man's experience is a perfect example of the unintended harm that can be caused by having just one single, rigid pathway to demonstrate mastery of an admittedly important skill set.

Also, let me be clear that this is not an isolated incident. Eighteen percent of adults suffer from anxiety disorder. In fact, results of a 2014 National College Health Assessment showed that 21.9% of college students reported that anxiety affected their academic performance in the previous 12 months. In my time as the Director of Teacher Education at UW-Madison, I have had firsthand experience with several teacher candidates, in addition to the young man I just described, who have faced undue stress and hardship because of the WFORT requirement.

As a lifelong educator, I believe in the importance of allowing individuals to have alternative options to demonstrate mastery of skills and knowledge. For this reason, I am encouraged that Senator Marklein and his colleagues are sponsoring this bill and I see many benefits to allowing for multiple options for demonstrating competence in the foundations of reading and effective early reading instructional strategies.

September 17, 2019



**Milwaukee Teachers'
Education Association**

My name is Amy Mizialko. I am a 27 year special education teacher in Milwaukee Public Schools and I am the President of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA). I would like to express my support for Assembly Bill 194, which would address many ongoing concerns regarding the Foundations of Reading (FORT) test.

The FORT is a high stakes, expensive test that in many ways has served as a barrier to qualified individuals becoming special education teachers. Special education is a high need area nationally, across our state and in Milwaukee, significant vacancies for special education teachers persist.

This proposed legislation calls for a course that covers the foundations of reading with feedback and coaching from an individual with a Master's degree in reading or a reading specialist license issued by DPI as well as requiring a portfolio of work to demonstrate proficiency. This proposed legislation is in keeping with best practices in teaching and learning and allows special education teacher candidates to go deep in their acquisition of best practices in literacy.

As public schools in Wisconsin, including Milwaukee Public Schools, struggle greatly to attract workers to the public education field, this bill begins to address extreme shortages that harm Wisconsin students.

Amy Mizialko, Ph.D.
MTEA President

Good day. My name is Donna Hejtmanek and I am a retired reading specialist and special education teacher. I served on the Dyslexia Study Committee, the Read to Lead Council, and currently I am the Legislative Chair for the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Wisconsin. IDA-WI opposes AB 194/195 and SB183/184 for the following reasons.

We oppose these bills for the following reasons.

1. These bills undermine the original intent of the FORT to ensure teachers have the knowledge to teach reading.
2. Special education teachers are largely, **if not solely** responsible for teaching reading to their students.
3. The bill describes the course of study as rigorous and to be taught by a reading expert. What defines rigorous and reading expert?
4. Out of state teachers have an advantage over in state teachers and are exempt from the test.

IDA-WI urges you to reject these bills as written. We see these bills being fast tracked in spite of their shortfalls. If there is no stopping this train, we would want the following amendments to be added.

5. There should be a trial period of 3 years to judge whether the yet to be determined "rigorous course" is in fact teaching teachers all the content that is on the FORT. These students will take the FORT for data collection purposes to assure that the content of the course is meeting the standards of the FORT. Teachers

completing the course of study successfully will be granted a Tier II license regardless of whether they passed or failed the FORT, but the passage rates will be valuable data to determine if the course of study is effective and if the alternate path should be made permanent. The passage score will remain at the current score of 240.

6. To make this course of study rigorous, the content will be aligned with the standards of two major professional reading organizations in the United States: The International Literacy Association and the International Dyslexia Association. Presently the 10 teaching standards used in Wisconsin are not reading specific but general professional standards.

<https://dpi.wi.gov/tepd/programs/standards/teacher> .

7. The course will include a supervised experience or practicum over one year teaching struggling readers. This should include two main categories of struggling readers; those with word recognition and those with language comprehension issues.

The course will be supervised by an individual who has passed the FORT and is licensed as a WI reading teacher or reading specialist. Additionally, those certified from the Academic Language Therapy

Association (ALTA), The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) or the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators (AOGPE) will also be qualified to teach this course of study.

Finally, the Foundations of Reading Test since its implementation in 2015 has been diluted by creating broad exemptions from the WI- FOR. Senators, are any of you concerned that teachers have only a 68% first time passage rate? IDA- WI is asking that a task force be formed to examine the root causes for these low passage rates and the effect this has on Wisconsin teachers and students. We ask that a task force of teachers, school district administrators, schools of higher education and DPI come to the table to discuss WHY Wisconsin continues to fail its teachers and students.

It is time for you the legislators to stop reducing the content standards of the FORT and start looking at the schools of higher education, asking hard questions, and put reading first for the students of Wisconsin. Thank you for your attention.



**Wisconsin Reading Coalition OPPOSES new exemptions from the
Wisconsin Foundations of Reading Test (WI-FORT)
as proposed in SB 183/AB 194 and SB 184/AB 195**

When the WI-FORT requirement was passed by the legislature in 2011, it had two goals:

1. To indirectly encourage educator preparation programs to improve reading coursework to include the critical content knowledge and teaching skills tested on the WI-FORT
2. To ensure that beginning and struggling readers have a teacher with sufficient knowledge of language structure and reading acquisition to be able to successfully teach them

We have largely failed Goal 1: The first time passage rate on the WI-FORT each year has been between 66 and 68%, and many teaching candidates have taken the exam numerous times before passing, indicating that educator preparation programs have not sufficiently updated their reading coursework. DPI has not required any changes, and the public is generally unaware due to lack of compliance with the legal requirement for colleges and DPI to post WI-FORT passage rates annually.

Let's STOP failing Goal 2 - and our beginning and struggling readers - by discontinuing the expanding series of exemptions from the WI-FORT: Our schools are being flooded with unqualified teachers of reading who have not had to pass the FORT because of the loopholes listed below. ***Students are suffering.*** Reading scores have declined on both state and national tests. Forward test results released this week show 59.2% of students in Grades 3-8 are not proficient readers. Among special education students, that rises to 88.4%. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress shows 76% of Wisconsin students in special education are so low as to be classified illiterate. This is a time for raising standards, not lowering them.

Already existing loopholes to the WI-FORT:

- *Created by the legislature:* An individual who completed teacher training through the online American Board program is entitled to become fully-licensed (Tier II) without taking the WI-FORT. Wis. Stats. 118.197

- *Created by the legislature:* Out-of-state teachers with one year of experience are entitled to be fully licensed (Tier II) without taking the WI-FORT. Wis. Stats. 118.193(2)
- *Created by DPI with legislative oversight:* Any teacher may get a Tier I license and take full responsibility for students without passing the WI-FORT. For all teachers except special educators, Tier I licenses are infinitely renewable. Special education teachers currently may teach under a Tier I license for three years. This three-year restriction, which SB 183/AB 194 aims to avoid, is due to federal requirements that special education teachers be highly qualified. DPI PI 34.028

The new proposals to avoid the WI-FORT:

SB 183/AB 194 allows special education teachers – who are responsible for the most vulnerable children - to obtain a full license (Tier II) without passing the WI-FORT if they take a “rigorous” course in reading from an “expert.” As the bill is written, there are no specifics on the content of the course, how to ensure expertise of the persons teaching the course, or how to objectively evaluate the course outcomes.

This new “rigorous” course is likely to be merely a renamed version of existing college reading courses, which already claim to teach the five components of reading. Reading “experts” should at a minimum have passed the WI-FORT themselves or have extensive documented experience *successfully* teaching struggling students to be proficient readers. Something more objective than a portfolio is required to determine whether a special education teacher is highly qualified. Ironically, if the required course were truly rigorous, the graduates would have no problem passing the WI-FORT.

SB 184/AB195 allows a prospective teacher educated out-of-state to become fully licensed (Tier II) without passing the FORT, even if s/he has no teaching experience. There is no explanation as to why someone educated over the border in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, or Michigan should be treated more leniently than someone educated in Wisconsin, especially when Wisconsin has no control over what kind of reading coursework is required in those out-of-state preparation programs. Tier I licenses are already available to out-of-state teachers who cannot pass the WI-FORT, just as they are for in-state teachers.

The weak arguments made in support of SB 183 and SB 184:

- *Wisconsin has a teacher shortage that requires eliminating quality control measures in order to get more bodies in the classroom.* While true emergency shortages no doubt exist in some subject areas and some geographic locations, districts should be required to show that they searched, but found no qualified candidates. There should also be a

limit on the time that individuals can be responsible for teaching beginning and struggling readers before proving their competence by passing the WI-FORT.

- *Wisconsin's passage rates on the WI-FORT are as good as or better than those in Massachusetts, which has the highest elementary student reading scores in the nation.* Massachusetts admits they have also had difficulty encouraging institutions of higher education to improve their reading coursework. The difference is that Massachusetts does not give teaching licenses to individuals who fail their test. Thus, they are meeting Goal 2, which provides students with qualified teachers, and they are able to maintain their number one national ranking in student reading performance.
- *Some college students are not good test takers, so they shouldn't be judged on their WI-FORT scores.* Students have to pass many high stakes tests to get into college and to pass their courses. Just as on the ACT, SAT, GRE, LSAT, or MCAT, reasonable accommodations should be available for individuals who have documented learning or psychological problems that make testing difficult.
- *Studying for the WI-FORT is a waste of time because it involves rote memorization of terms that will have little meaning in the actual classroom.* The only reason that students are having to cram for the WI-FORT is that their college reading courses were not adequate. The material tested on the WI-FORT is basic, foundational knowledge about reading that is essential for successful teaching. If it is unfair to have students suffer the consequences of educator preparation program failures, thought should be given to recourse against those institutions or demands that they do better.
- *The WI-FORT does not measure qualities of a good teacher such as rapport with students, families, and colleagues, work ethic, or community involvement.* The WI-FORT is not meant to be the sole determiner of who districts hire. However, it does set a floor in the area of sufficient knowledge about reading to teach beginning and struggling readers.
- *Special education teachers are not primarily responsible for teaching reading to special education students, and therefore should not be held to a higher standard than general education teachers (a recent DPI argument).* Legally, special education teachers are responsible for implementing the IEP's of their students, whether that involves pull-out instruction, support in the general classroom, or both. They need to have deep knowledge of reading in order to teach their children and to advise classroom teachers on appropriate instructional practices and accommodations.