



**Testimony of Teach My Kid to Read  
to The Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education  
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Thank you to the Chairs of the Joint Legislative Budget Hearings, Senator Liz Krueger and Assemblymember Helene Weinstein, and the Chairs of the Education Committee, Assemblymember Michael Benedetto and Senator Shelley Mayer, for the privilege to testify before you today. We appreciate your support so all children in New York can learn to read based on the science of how we learn to read and equitable access to resources. We are also grateful to The Regents for supporting Teach My Kid to Read's work, providing education, access to resources, and literacy support, collaborating with libraries and communities as partners in literacy solutions.

I am Marion Waldman, the Executive Founder and Director of Teach My Kid to Read. My background includes decades of working in educational publishing with an unwavering belief that our education system should serve all children equally. As a parent of a struggling reader, I was determined to uncover and support literacy solutions that would empower parents and caregivers with more solutions to help their children become skilled readers. The impetus behind Teach My Kid to Read was to instigate systematic change, collaborating with libraries to provide all children with equitable access to resources essential for learning to read.

At Teach My Kid to Read, the resources we focus on are decodable books, resources aligned with the phonics skills children have been taught. Decodable books are part of systematic and explicit instruction in phonics and provide the essential reading practice that leads to fluency. Teach My Kid to Read has provided education to over 500 libraries and demonstrated the positive impact of libraries in addressing the literacy gap. **In partnership with the New York State Library, we request \$250,000 in new funding to empower libraries across New York with education and resources aligned with the science of reading.**

As we move toward embracing the science of reading, it becomes imperative for all literacy stakeholders engaging parents and caregivers to be integral to the solution. Our commitment to advancing literacy in New York is fueled by our experiences with our children and the stark reality revealed in the The 2022-2023 New York State Report Card. It indicates that in Grades 3-8, only 48% of children are reading proficiently, with an even wider achievement gap for

students with learning disabilities, Black and Hispanic students, and economically disadvantaged students. The urgency of addressing this issue is underscored by the fact that 95% of all children can become skilled readers with reading instruction based on the science of how we learn to read and access to evidence-based resources.

Governor Hochul's "Back to Basic" proposal, unveiled on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, marks a pivotal moment in prioritizing literacy through the science of reading. This proposal aligns seamlessly with our mission to provide evidence-based instruction and resources for all children, emphasizing systematic, explicit instruction in phonics and a knowledge-based curriculum.

To initiate the science of reading at a state level, we urgently request your support for the provision that the Governor included in The Education, Labor and Family Assistance Article VII (commonly known as ELFA) requiring the Commissioner of the State Education Department to issue statewide instructional best practices aligned with the science of reading for PreK through Grade 3. This bill is needed to initiate a 10 million dollar investment to train teachers in the science of reading instruction. As the Governor pointed out when she unveiled the literacy proposal, many school districts use curricula proven ineffective due to strategies such as three-cueing (prompting students to draw on context and sentence structure to identify words). We have an opportunity to improve literacy in New York by ensuring that all children learn to read based on evidence based instruction proven to help the most amount of children learn to read. Our collective goal is to ensure that this money serves as seed money to expand the training and support for all PreK-8 teachers and to include funding for ongoing support and resources.

Recognizing the need for transformative change in literacy education, we also urge you to consider the pending literacy bills that address teacher education, professional development and curricula that support the science of reading. We applaud the recent signing of The Dyslexia Task Force Act bill sponsored by Assemblyman Robert Carroll and Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal.

As we transition to the science of reading, we emphasize the critical role of decodable books in supporting systematic, explicit phonics instruction. Libraries, as community hubs, play a pivotal role in ensuring equitable access to these resources and fostering literacy in the heart of our communities.

While leveled texts and early readers contribute to building knowledge, they fall short as instructional resources aligned with the science of reading. These materials do not readily support children in the process of learning to decode. For early and struggling readers, the key lies in decodable books, which play a crucial role in building fluency until reading becomes automatic. Notably, for older struggling readers, decodable books often represent the sole category of literature they can read independently. The synergy between decodable books and systematic, explicit instruction in phonics is integral to fostering effective reading skills.

In addition to curating vital resources, libraries have the potential to serve as hubs for educational empowerment. They can organize workshops for parents and caregivers, offering guidance on utilizing library resources effectively to aid their children in learning to read. Furthermore, libraries can establish tutoring programs, leveraging the support of community volunteers who are eager to assist children facing challenges in reading.

With your support, we aspire to continue our work, creating a lasting legacy of literacy for all children in New York.

## Resources

Stanovich, K. E., 2016: "Reading through the years: Developing a mature understanding of literacy." *Psychological Science*, 27(3), 324-347.

Ehri, L. C., & Moats, L. C., 2019: "The perils of balanced literacy and reading recovery for struggling readers." *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 36(1), 3-20.

Connor, C. M., et al., 2020: "What the science of reading can tell us about effective reading remediation practices: An expert panel discussion." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(3), 206-218.