



**Jones, Stephanie**

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**From:** Janet Miltenberger <janet.miltenberger@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 17, 2021 11:48 PM  
**To:** ED, State Board of Ed; pa-stateboardofed@pa.gov  
**Subject:** [External] Chapter 49

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Dear Pennsylvania State Board of Education Members:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for moving Pennsylvania teachers one step closer to a level of professional competence that will impact all of their students in a profound way. Your inclusion of structured literacy in the Chapter 49 legislation is a giant step forward for our commonwealth. I appreciate this opportunity to share my related experience in the hope that you will find it helpful in continuing to move this legislation forward.

Having earned an undergraduate degree in English and Education from a private Pennsylvania college and a graduate degree in Reading from a public Pennsylvania university, spent 25 years as a middle school English teacher and elementary reading specialist in Pennsylvania public schools, and now being a private practice reading specialist and national trainer in structured literacy, I have had a lot of interaction with teachers across the commonwealth as well as across the country. I can tell you that Pennsylvania is way behind the curve in addressing dyslexia and teaching structured literacy. This legislation is sorely needed.

Teaching children how read is a complex task, but research shows that multisensory structured literacy instruction works for all children. I have taught children to read based on the practices that I learned in my undergraduate education as well as my graduate education in reading with varied success. In 2003, I went through Orton-Gillingham training because I was searching for a way to better meet the needs of my struggling readers. This instruction changed the course of my teaching. I learned how to teach decoding and encoding in a way that I never understood before. Once I taught using this method, my students had great success. My most struggling readers grew and became proficient readers and spellers.

Over the years, I have had many, many conversations with parents who feel desperate because their children are struggling. They reach out to their child's teacher only to find that the teacher has limited to no knowledge of learning differences (especially dyslexia) and how to adjust his/her teaching practices to address them. Parents have access and are doing research to find the best practices for teaching their children. When they have conversations with educators who are not well versed in current research or practices, it does not instill confidence in the public educational system.

A vacuum currently exists between the research realm and practitioners. If educators don't learn about dyslexia and multisensory structured literacy in college, and districts are not providing professional development in it, then it is incumbent upon the teachers to educate themselves. What I have found is that this just isn't happening. Teachers have a lot on their plates, and they don't know what they don't know. The professional development in districts is dependent upon the district leadership's knowledge and agenda. When district leaders don't know about structured literacy and the way the brain processes language, bringing this understanding to their teachers is not happening. As the educational leaders for our commonwealth, you are in a position to change this. Making multisensory structured literacy instruction mandatory for pre-service teacher education programs and district professional development will ensure that our children get quality education that truly meets all of their needs.

Maya Angelou once said, "Do the best that you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Research has proven that multisensory structured literacy works. We need to ensure that Pennsylvania educators are connected to research, are skilled in the best practices in literacy education, and are providing the highest quality instruction for our children. We have a responsibility to the students in our commonwealth to do better. We need to ensure that their teachers are knowledgeable and prepared to teach them in a way that works for them. Requiring that all college education programs teach their pre-service teachers multisensory structured literacy and all districts inservice their teachers in it, will provide the children of Pennsylvania with the quality education they deserve.

You have the power to ensure that this quality education is provided consistently across Pennsylvania. Please include multisensory structured literacy in the programs that are evaluated by PDE, and make it a mandatory competency for all K-12 educators. The future success of our children depends on you.

Respectfully,  
Janet Miltenberger, MEd  
Reading Specialist