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Statement of LWVWI Regarding Senate Bill 329 and Assembly Bill 321 Early Literacy Instruction

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin (LWVWI) supports improvement in reading instruction. The members of the legislative committee have given careful consideration to Senate Bill 329 (AB321) and its amendment in view of our positions stated here:

“Promote educational equity and access to educational opportunities for each child through non-discriminatory policies and an equitable state aids formula while retaining substantial program and personnel responsibilities in the local district.

Support of a system of state elementary and secondary education which includes: recognition and respect for the role of the Department of Public Instruction as the education authority for teacher licensure and development and implementation of curriculum.”

LWVWI is opposed to the bill in its current amended form for the following reasons:

1. **Retention to third grade reading if a child scores in the lowest category of proficiency at the end of third grade is contradicted by research.** Research on retention of students shows evidence of negative effects, including dropping out of school in later grades. We recommend that more emphasis be placed on intensive remediation during kindergarten, grades one and two and every summer in between those years, rather than retention. There is no plan in the bill for instructing students with disabilities or special education students. At the end of third grade, attention is needed to fine tune individualized reading plans for every student.
2. **The implementation timeline is rushed and illogical.** The bill proposes a pilot study for two years beginning in the 24/25 school year. Beginning in 2024/2025, all school districts are prohibited from using any reading materials that employ

the three cueing method. However, training to teach the science of reading will be provided over the following two years to only some schools, not before the change occurs. State procurement of a screening instrument is likely to require 12 to 18 months. It appears impossible for the proposed pilot to actually occur within the two year timeframe. This proposed timeline is illogical and impossible to implement.

3. **Lack of essential stakeholder input is likely to lead to failure.** In the process of communicating innovations, it is axiomatic that inclusion of all stakeholders is necessary for successful implementation. In the public hearing on June 15, 2023, it became evident that some legislators, even those who are members of the two education committees, have been deliberately shut out of crafting the bill. This process is an insult to a large portion of Wisconsin voters. The bill also displays distrust of the valid role that the Department of Public Instruction must play. The role of the legislature is to make law; the role of a state agency is to implement the law. The bill mandates excessive oversight by the legislature in various ways, especially the appointment by legislators of six of the nine members of the Council of Early Literacy Curricula. Inclusion of more public school reading specialists in the process of revising the bill would help to ensure its success throughout the state.
4. **The language of the bill is hostile.** It bristles with repeated prohibitions of using three cueing materials, with prescriptive statements, and with a hostile tone toward the Department of Public Instruction and professional educators.

In conclusion, LWVWI wishes to be able to support a revised bill leading to successful implementation of an early literacy program focusing on the science of reading. These four areas of concern are offered in a spirit of cooperation with legislators to create a bill that all stakeholders can implement with pride.

MY SUGGESTED EDITS Julie Underwood

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin supports improvement in reading instruction. The members of the legislative committee have given careful consideration to Senate Bill 329 and Assembly Bill 321. The LWVWI is opposed to the bill in its current amended form for the following reasons:

- 1. Retention in third grade reading if a child scores in the lowest category of proficiency at the end of third grade is contradicted by research.** Research shows negative effects, including dropping out of school in later grades for students who are retained.. We recommend that more emphasis be placed on intensive remediation during kindergarten, grades one and two and every summer in between those years, rather than retention. There is no plan in the bill for instructing students with disabilities or special education students. Additional attention to individualized reading plans for every student is needed.
- 2. The implementation timeline is rushed and illogical.** The bill proposes a pilot study for two years; beginning in the 24/25 school year; training to teach the science of reading will be provided over the following two years. State procurement of a screening instrument will require 12 to 18 months before beginning the program. It appears impossible for the proposed pilot to actually occur within the two year timeframe. This proposed timeline is illogical and impossible to implement.
- 3. Lack of essential stakeholder input is likely to lead to failure.**
In the process of communicating innovations, it is axiomatic that inclusion of all stakeholders is necessary for successful implementation. The authors

of the bill are all Republicans. In the public hearing on June 15, 2023, it became evident that Democratic legislators, even those who are members of the two education committees, have been shut out of crafting the bill.

This is an insult to a large portion of Wisconsin voters.

The bill also displays distrust of the valid role that the Department of Public Instruction must play. The role of the legislature is to make law; the role of a state agency is to implement the law. This bill mandates excessive oversight by the legislature in various ways, e.g. the appointment of six of the nine members of the Council of Early Literacy Curricula.

Inclusion of more public school reading specialists in the bill's revision would help to ensure its success throughout the state.

4. The language of the bill is hostile. It bristles with repeated prohibitions of using three-cueing materials, with prescriptive statements, and with a hostile tone toward the Department of Public Instruction and professional educators.

In conclusion, LWVWI wishes to be able to support a revised bill leading to successful implementation of an early literacy program focusing on the science of reading. These four areas of concern are offered in a spirit of cooperation with legislators to create a bill that all stakeholders can implement with pride.