

**From:** Greg Kiehl, Director of Elementary Education  
**To:** Senate Education Committee Hearing on Senate Bill 801  
**RE:** Written Testimony

Good Morning. First, let me please start by thanking the Senate Education Committee for providing this opportunity for me to speak with you this morning. As I have shared with Senator Aument this past summer, I am in full and complete support of the efforts of this Committee to ensure that structured literacy practices become embedded in the public schools of Pennsylvania. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the journey that the Donegal School District has taken to implement structured literacy practices in our district.

Our drive towards the inclusion of structured literacy practices started three years ago. While our district's reading data was good, I knew from the literacy trainings I had attended that it could be better. Much better. The problem was that I didn't know where to start to begin this change process. As a leader, it was difficult and painstaking to look in the mirror and recognize that I didn't have the answers. I had to be humble enough to seek out, and ask for, help. I clearly remember going online to search for the foremost expert in literacy in the state of Pennsylvania. It was there that I found Dr. Kastner's name as the state Literacy Lead. Fortunately, I was able to connect with Dr. Kastner and she graciously partnered with us for the last three years and for this, I will be forever grateful. Dr. Kastner was able to connect me with other literacy leaders doing this work in the commonwealth such as Dr. Gierka, who was at Cumberland Valley School District at that time as well as the Assistant Superintendent at Cumberland Valley, Dr. Greg Milbrand. I was also able to connect with Dr. Ernie Ortiz at Centennial School District. Through these connections and conversations I quickly learned that the change process needed to have three prongs to be successful. First, staff needed to have regular professional development in the area of structured literacy. Change in and of itself is hard. It is even more difficult when you don't understand why you are being asked to make these changes. Second, once staff have learned about structured literacy practices, they are going to want and need resources or curricular programs that align to the structured literacy practices they've just learned. If the programs they are asked to use in the classroom do not align with the professional development they've received, the professional learning is looked at as just another training that was a waste of time and not particularly valuable. Finally, once these first two steps are well underway, it was shared with me that the third step is to build capacity to assist teachers with making changes in their literacy practices in the classroom. This means developing literacy leaders that champion for change and partner with teachers to effect change in their daily literacy instruction in the classroom.

Armed with this knowledge, we got to work. I worked with our Superintendent and our School Board to add two Act 80 days into our school calendar. These days are reserved specifically for professional development and collaboration in our structured literacy practices. Throughout the course of the next school year we worked with Dr. Kastner and a team of professionals from the Intermediate Unit 13 to provide professional development around why the Science of Reading was so important. Teachers received two days of training using the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling, commonly referred to as LETRS training. In the meantime, we began to explore literacy curriculum programs. We pulled an English Language Arts (ELA) committee together and we actively participated in vendor presentations about literacy programs that are aligned to structured literacy practices. We visited school districts that used these programs, observed the programs in action in the classroom, and spoke directly with the staff about the positives and challenges of the program. At the end of last year, the ELA Committee came to consensus on a resource program. Our School Board, in an unwavering show of support, convened a special July Board meeting to approve the curricular program so that we could have the materials available for the start of this school year. We also posted for an Elementary Literacy Coach position and began interviewing for that position this past summer. We are continuing our search for the right candidate.

I am proud of what we have accomplished over the last three years. Our elementary principals, reading specialists and teachers have worked extremely hard to get us to where we are currently. It has not been without challenges, trials and tribulations. While we believe that we have done this the right way, it has by no means been easy. It was labor intensive and expensive. Many times I have stared at documents or my computer screen and wondered how we are going to accomplish such a lofty goal. Other times I have been spurred forward by the recent success we may have had and have started to believe we are going to make this happen. This project that could impact a generation of families in the Donegal School District. This work that is our "why". This, teaching children to read, is the work we were put here to do. Thank you again to the Senate Education Committee for being willing to come alongside school districts and partner with them to provide a clear and undeniable roadmap of how to teach students to read. Together, we can ensure that every child in the state of Pennsylvania will be granted the right to learn to read. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dugan", written in a cursive style.