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Sent: Tuesday, June 20, 2023 12:35 PM

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Subject: Vermont Secretary of Education and Structured Literacy

Dear Vermont Board of Education Members,

When our daughter was in first grade, she threw a book across the room and yelled, "I'm stupid, I can't read." Her teacher told us, "Emily is just not ready to read." That teacher did not understand how to teach structured literacy: Her answer was that Emily was "not ready to read." We had the means to find someone privately to teach Emily to read using a structured literacy approach. She went from a non-reader to reading at a third-grade level in 17 weeks. I have the data to show the gains. Emily was not dyslexic: she simply needed to be taught the code of reading in a systematic way. Emily is now an adult who majored in English and became an award-winning journalist. All Vermont children should have the instruction Emily received. Struggling readers should not have to wait until fourth or fifth grade to get "special" help. How "stupid" would you feel if you could not learn to read?

I am writing to encourage the State Board of Education to select a new Secretary of Education who is knowledgeable about the science of reading and who will implement structured literacy instruction in all Vermont elementary schools. Becoming a proficient reader by third grade is essential to success in school. Recent test scores show that Vermont is failing more than 50% of its young students. 35% of children will not learn to read proficiently unless they receive structured literacy instruction. Look to Mississippi, one of the country's poorest states, as an example: Implementing structured literacy across the state has resulted in impressive reading gains statewide.

By hiring a Vermont Secretary of Education who prioritizes structured literacy instruction, you can improve the lives of all of Vermont's children for years to come.

Sincerely,
Mary Allen Stifler
Former High School English Teacher