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Dr. Carrie Rowe
Acting Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
607 South Drive
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Dr. Rowe,

I am writing to express my deep disappointment with the Pennsylvania Department of Education's recently released reading lists pursuant to Act 135 of 2024. As the sponsor of this law and as a long-time advocate for structured literacy and early reading success, I am concerned the materials posted on the Department's website do not reflect the intent, rigor or review standards that were envisioned when the law was enacted. In addition, they do not reflect your statements both in public and private about the importance of structured literacy in our schools.

It appears the Department hastily assembled a collection of existing lists from other states and organizations – such as The Reading League, EdReports, and the departments of education in Colorado and Ohio – without conducting a comprehensive review of vendors, curricula or program effectiveness through a Pennsylvania-specific lens. While those external sources can offer a starting point, they were never intended to be the sole basis for our state's implementation strategy. The law requires the development of a curated, evidence-based list of resources aligned with the science of reading and Pennsylvania's academic standards – not a patchwork of recycled material from other jurisdictions.

More troubling is the presence of inaccurate information on the list. For example, for Benchmark Education and its current product (Benchmark Advance 2022), PDE's review document states the company "declined review" by The Reading League. This is not correct as the materials have been submitted for review. This level of inaccuracy calls into question the reliability of the entire list and the vetting process used to compile it. When schools are making purchasing decisions based on this information, accuracy is not optional. It is essential.

Act 135 was passed with the goal of equipping educators with trusted, research-backed tools to teach children how to read. The current approach not only fails to meet that goal but undermines the credibility of the Department's implementation. A meaningful review process would have included Pennsylvania educators, literacy experts and school leaders to ensure quality, consistency and alignment with real-world classroom needs.

Accordingly, I respectfully request the Department take the following steps immediately:

1. **Withdraw the current lists** until a full review can be conducted.
2. **Establish a Pennsylvania-based evaluation panel** of teachers, reading specialists and curriculum experts to vet all submitted materials.
3. **Correct all factual inaccuracies**, including those concerning Benchmark and other vendors.
4. **Ensure transparency** by publishing the evaluation criteria and review process used to determine each program's inclusion or exclusion.

You told me privately – and have said publicly – aside from a student's safety and well-being, structured literacy is the most important issue facing our education system. This report, unfortunately, does not reflect that priority. Pennsylvania students and teachers deserve better than a cut-and-paste solution. We passed Act 135 to raise the bar, not to check a box. I urge the Department to course correct swiftly and commit to a process that lives up to both the spirit and the letter of the law and restore confidence in the Department's commitment to getting this right.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Ortity". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rep. Jason Ortity
46th Legislative District
Pennsylvania House of Representatives