TESTIMONY

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Improving the Literacy Skills of Children and Young Adults

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Chairman Kildee, Congressman Castle, Members of the Committee, good morning. Thank you for your leadership on the important issue of literacy and for the opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Larry Berger and I am the CEO and co-founder of Wireless Generation. We have been working with teachers, principals, and school superintendents on K-5 literacy instruction for the past eight years.

Today, more than 200,000 teachers are teaching 3 million children to read using new technology. We provide mobile and web software, data systems, and professional services that help teachers to use data and deliver individualized instruction. Our partner states, districts, and schools are seeing results in every state in the union – in places like Oklahoma, Montgomery County Maryland, Indiana, Washington DC, and more.

Today I would like to share with you the new model of instruction that has emerged in the classrooms with which we work. Teachers are using mobile devices like this handheld computer or this netbook to collect real-time data about their students' progress and learning needs. They use this data to customize lesson planning for each child – for instance, one small group of children might work on sounding out words while another group plays a vocabulary game. We have an algorithm that can generate custom curriculum units for ten-day "Bursts" of instruction, which adjust and adapt as teachers monitor students' progress.

We find that schools and districts using these technology tools reorganize themselves around the data. Teachers and coaches run regular grade level meetings in which they strategize around student strengths and weaknesses and share "what works" with one another. Principals and district staff engage on the teaching and learning. Professional development refocuses from "stand and deliver" presentations to active planning based on real student data. And parents find out, mid-year, whether their children are on track to read at grade level.

When teachers use this technology toolset and are able to identify and address the needs of each student, the prior debates about reading practice fall by the wayside. Children who are struggling with the foundational skills of reading get relevant lessons, along with bridges to comprehension. Children who are reading on level are appropriately challenged and accelerated.

In addition, this instructional model will likely pay for itself by preventing unnecessary referrals into special education. Instead of struggling with reading and eventually being classified with a "specific learning disability," thousands and thousands of children (a full two percent of the student population) can get back on track with the right early interventions. This is the "Response to Intervention" model, which has enormous implications for long-term student success and for cost savings in service delivery.

This instructional model depends on a high degree of confidence in the quality of the screening and diagnostic assessments used in classrooms. They must be reliable and valid, so that every stakeholder can count on the resulting information to effectively guide classroom practice. High-quality research has established the key benchmarks that we should expect assessments to meet.

When good assessment data is collected, in turn we can demand a higher standard of evidence for our instructional programs. Interventions should demonstrate that they are based on scientifically valid research – that their foundations are sound – and at the same time should be able to demonstrate valid outcomes in student learning. This virtuous cycle has already led to continuous improvement in our own toolset.

Members of the committee, literacy is the foundation for all academic success. We respect the committee's leadership on this important issue and are proud to work with thousands of schools and districts across the country, helping more children learn to read.

ABOUT WIRELESS GENERATION

Founded in 2001, Wireless Generation creates innovative tools, systems, and services that help educators teach smarter. Wireless Generation currently serves more than 200,000 educators and 3 million students.

With its mobile assessment software, the company invented a better way to give classroom assessments and make data-based instructional decisions. Wireless Generation has since broken new ground with technology that analyzes student data and produces curriculum customized to individual learning needs.

Wireless Generation also builds large-scale data systems that centralize student data, give educators and parents unprecedented visibility into learning, and foster professional communities of educators with social networking tools. As a key partner to New York City on its ARIS data system, Wireless Generation led development, including data integration, permissioning, usability and reporting, and Web 2.0 collaboration tools, and helped New York City roll out the system to more than 90,000 educators serving 1.1 million students. In spring 2009, ARIS Parent Link online walkthroughs were launched in 9 languages to give parents unprecedented ability to engage in their children's education with easy-to-understand access to their children's data. Wireless Generation is also a lead partner on New York City's School of One initiative, named by TIME Magazine as one of the Best Inventions of 2009.

The genesis of the Mobile Classroom Assessment (mCLASS) solution was Wireless Generation's realization that educators could benefit greatly from an easy-to-use technology solution for conducting observational assessments, collecting and analyzing assessment data, and linking assessment results to appropriate instructional supports and intervention strategies. Studies have shown that Wireless Generation's mCLASS system cuts assessment administration time in half and in a year returns approximately 3–5 instructional days per teacher.

With the launch and widespread adoption of mCLASS for K-6 literacy assessment and instruction, Wireless Generation committed itself to developing tools that help educators answer the critical questions that should be central when assessment data is presented – "So what?" and "Now What?" Helping educators answer these questions, the heart of the assessment-to-instruction connection, has since become the focus of Wireless Generation's efforts. mCLASS ACT and Now What Tools were Wireless Generation's first offerings to embody what we've come to term "*SoNos*," now hallmarks of every system, tool, and service we develop and bring to market.

The significance of these tools is that they make the connection between assessment and instruction seamless by placing customized instructional routines directly in the teacher's workflow. For example, upon completion of an assessment, mCLASS ACT immediately suggests a set of targeted skill-reinforcement activities based on individual student results and response patterns. The teacher is guided in implementing the activities by a scaffolded sequence of objectives, prompts, and detailed instructions on both the handheld device and the

web. The Burst curriculum products take this even further by grouping students who share similar skill needs based upon the assessment data, and producing 10-day lesson sequences that match those needs. The teacher receives the lessons, delivers them, and then assesses again to monitor students' progress. The Burst cycle then repeats. Even the best teachers can find it challenging to find the time to differentiate instruction each day. The Burst technology is their partner in this effort.

PARTNER RESULTS

Our partner districts and state are seeing tremendous results. Examples include:

Montgomery County Public Schools

Results of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Assessment Program show that the percentages of students in kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 who have achieved grade level benchmarks have reached and maintained historic highs. MCPS has worked with Wireless Generation since 2004.
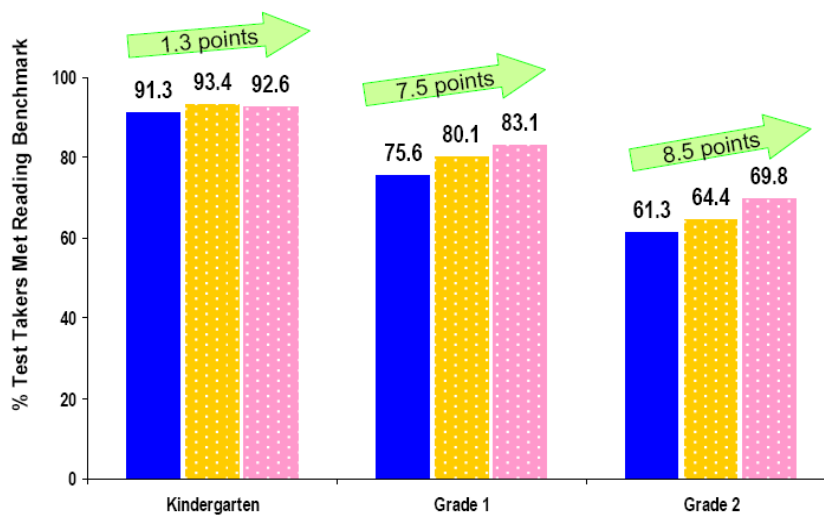

Figure 1. Percentage of MCPS AP–PR test takers who met or exceeded the end-of-year reading benchmarks in 2006 to 2008 by grade level.

District of Columbia Public Schools

DCPS selected Burst:Reading Early Literacy Intervention to assist the 37 lowest performing elementary schools in boosting student achievement. The district was undergoing major instructional reform efforts. Implementation began in February 2009 for their kindergarten and Grade 1 students. The district saw strong gains in these schools with less than one semester of

Burst:Reading ELI instruction. Burst students in Burst schools regularly outperformed students in the same instructional recommendation category as students in the better performing non-Burst schools, even though Burst students had lower initial scores.

In kindergarten and Grade 1, Burst students in schools with strong fidelity of implementation gained more than non-Burst students on PSF (phonemic awareness) and NWF (phonics) across all risk levels, despite lower initial scores. In kindergarten, Burst students in the Intensive instructional recommendation category in schools with strong fidelity of implementation gained 25 points on PSF (phonemic awareness) versus gains of 17 points for non-Burst students. In kindergarten, Burst students at Intensive instructional recommendation category in schools with strong fidelity of implementation gained 20 points on NWF (phonics) as opposed to gains of 12 points for non-Burst students. In first grade, Burst students at Intensive instructional recommendation category in schools with strong fidelity of implementation gained 19 points on PSF (phonemic awareness) while non-Burst students realized gains of only 12 points. In first grade, Burst students at Intensive instructional recommendation category in schools with strong fidelity of implementation gained 24 points on NWF (phonics) whereas non-Burst students had gains of 19 points.

Oklahoma

Most schools in the Oklahoma Department of Education's Reading First program achieved significant student growth, and while the Department of Education was pleased, it was not yet satisfied, believing that all schools could perform at high levels. The Department identified a subset of 15 schools in need of additional support, and collaborated with Wireless Generation on delivering targeted, ongoing professional development at these sites during the 2007-2008 year. Teachers, principals, and reading coaches at each school received up to six monthly visits from a Wireless Generation consultant who provided customized professional development on various topics according to each school's needs.

Results:

- Based on an analysis of student data collected during the 2007-2008 school year, the 15 schools made substantial achievement gains and produced more student movement toward benchmark (grade level) than in previous school years. By the end of the year, 61% of K-3 students in these schools were reading at proficiency, compared to these schools' first year in Reading First, when only 38% reached benchmark. By comparing beginning of year 2007-2008 formative assessment scores to end of year scores, the data reveal that the customized professional development contributed to the biggest increase in students at grade level over the past four school years, a 19% increase.
- The 15 schools receiving customized professional development made significant progress toward closing the achievement gap with high performing schools in Oklahoma. Prior to receiving customized professional development, the 15 schools ended each year with 20% fewer students at grade level than the high performing schools. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, the 15 schools finished only 13% below their peers, which represents a 35% reduction in the gap between the two groups.