

I am submitting testimony today in support of RHB5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education. It is imperative that SLD-Dyslexia be recognized in the state of CT public school system. We can only expect our children to be properly identified and receive subsequent interventions once there is a recognition of the SLD-Dyslexia. However, in order to identify, intervene and recognize Dyslexia as a learning disability we must first start with education of our educators. No more should a parent walk into an IEP and be told: "...if your child were truly dyslexic." Or "...s/he is so intelligent if we just do resource pull out and give the child additional work I am SURE they can do this work!" or "...if s/he would just focus in class s/he would do fine. S/He is very intelligent- look at the test scores...many are above average..Your child is VERY intelligent." No more. RHB5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education is the first step on the path to understanding. The bill is not perfect, there is room for change- enhancements- additions. Please read on to see how a district that Defines Dyslexia- Identifies Dyslexia- Tests for Dyslexia- and Provides the Students with the tools needed to WIN with Dyslexia CAN make a difference!!

Dyslexia does not mean a child is incapable. Dyslexia does not mean a child cannot achieve. There are many myths about dyslexia and what a child with dyslexia looks like, acts like, writes like, talks like, or reads like. Only education can change the understanding about what is Dyslexia. As a new resident of the state of CT I have had the pleasure of beginning my child's education in another state, Texas. It was in a town in Texas that I had the fortune to run into a school district that was so far advanced in Dyslexia/Dysgraphia Identification and interventions that it is hard to accept anything less. Let me tell you how I too was once uneducated on the issue of Dyslexia and how that all changed when the discussion of Dyslexia came into our home.

When the school approached me to say they wanted to test my child for Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Irlen's syndrome I was appalled! A flood of emotions ran through my veins- most of which were not pleasant. No! (my head screamed) He is not Dyslexic! He is so smart, how could this be, how could he have a learning disability??? I could not wrap my mind around the two opposite images racing through my brain- the smart, engaging, always curious child who could do basic programming to create a computer server and the child who would throw a book down in frustration or beg me to read it to him because he just couldn't no matter how much he wanted to do so! My understanding of what Dyslexia was and what the diagnosis meant was so based on misinformation that I was lost and very confused but I knew I wanted to simply end the hurt, pain and frustration I saw in my child each and every day, as it related to learning! What I did not know, at the time, was that the classroom teacher who was 'brave' enough to bring this to my attention and to the attention of the Dyslexic expert on staff at his school was going to be the teacher I would be forever grateful to for opening my eyes and opening up my son's world!!

Dyslexia as a diagnosis does not mean a child is unable. In point of fact a child is more than capable to achieve all that is asked of him/her. A diagnosis of Dyslexia, simply put, means a child will process the information presented differently from others and therefore will require a different approach to learning in order to master the same material as his/her peers.

Early intervention, in General Ed, is key to providing the tools our children need to be highly successful, confident members of their schools. In our experience this was done in the classroom as early as Spring of Grade 1! Yes Grade 1! The district¹ we were in had trained not just the Dyslexia staff but also the teachers- yes ALL the teachers- to look for and recognize key components that may indicate a possible diagnosis of Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and/or Irlens syndrome. With these teachers involved on the front lines day in and day out with the students they would bring concerns to the attention of the Dyslexia professional and the parents. From this point a discussion would be had about possibility of screening and a full explanation was given as to what that screening would look like, who would be involved, and what options would be available based on results. The screening was extensive and took place over many weeks and included everything from class room work and class room teachers' evaluation to parent questionnaires and IQ testing. Once the results were compiled all involved parties would meet and a plan of action would be put in place if it was warranted and if all parties were in agreement.

The approach used in our district, with remarkable success, was the Margaret Taylor Smith Multi Sensory Teaching Approach (known as MTA²). This was a hands on, small group (6-8 students) 45 min per day/ 5 day a week KIT based instruction plan that worked on decoding the language. The tools used in this classroom would then be applied by the students in the gen ed classroom. The primary goal being to teach the child to process and decode what the world gives him/her and use the tools to make it all make sense and turn unusable words on a page into functional useable information! And IT WORKED! What I saw was an environment at school filled with teachers and administrators focused on my child, and others like him, that simply processed information differently. These folks worked tirelessly to provide the children with the tools they would need now and in the future to make sense of our world! These same folks cried when the kids cried and celebrated when they had great successes. The program was so amazing I watched my son blossom from a child who would avoid all schoolwork, reading and spelling at any cost to a child who would run home, get it done, and then go on to score well on written tests, reading comprehension and even state mandated tests!! The turn around in 7 months was jaw dropping! From below level reading ability in November of 3rd grade (reading at 2nd grade level) to June of 3rd grade reading 4.8-5.2 LEVEL!! The icing on the cake was receiving Commended status on the Reading portion of the TAKS exam (Texas state mandatory testing). These were all measurable wins, yes, But the biggest WIN of all was my son's enjoyment of learning!!

As a new resident in the state of Connecticut my experience with regard to working to teach decoding to dyslexic children has been less than positive. Starting with an attempt to simply place my son in Special Ed, we fought and got him back in General Ed. Then an attempt to say oh he just needs reading intervention, we are still fighting this. The CT school district does not understand MTA and Dyslexia and wants to refer to the child's needs as intervention in nature rather than provide a teaching program. This is not acceptable. The definition of Dyslexia as a Learning Disability and what that affords our young students with regard to accommodations, alternate learning and such is not clear in CT. It is also not at all consistent with the definition and experiences in other states. This difference and lack of clarity is causing great frustration on the part of all parties: School officials, Parents and Students. The effect of this on my son and my family is sadly that we are back to square one- overwhelmed by work- having to struggle through 2-3 hours a night of homework and crying and screaming because it just does not make sense, it is not achievable but it must be done. The measures in place with common core are not set up to take into account the dyslexic and challenges he/she may face and therefore the effect across ALL subjects has the potential to be catastrophic, as is the case right now in my family. My child is growing to DISLIKE learning again - because he can't catch a WIN!

Sincerely,

Dawn L McNary
Parent of 4th grader
East Haddam CT
860-575-5001

¹District mentioned is located in North Texas- The Forney Independent School District

²Margaret Taylor Smith MTS Publications http://mtspublications.com/?page_id=10