

My comments address HRB No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

Dyslexia – a Teacher’s Perspective

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to address an issue that has been the focus of my professional and volunteer career for over 35 years.

In today’s world, print literacy is a must. Dyslexia is a neurological condition affecting a person’s ability to fluently and efficiently translate the sounds of language into graphic representations. What seems natural to many of us is a nightmare for some.

After one year teaching a self-contained class of 9 to 12 year olds, I was painfully aware that I didn’t know how to teach reading. I used the assigned basal readers and teachers’ manuals, but some of my students simply could not read the words. However, they understood orally read stories and content material. I was baffled.

That summer I took a 2 week intensive course in the Orton-Gillingham approach to teaching dyslexics how to decode and encode (read and spell). I learned the neurology of dyslexia, the history and structure of the English language, and the confluence of phonology and phonics and orthography. I was armed with the knowledge and words to talk to my students about their language learning disability, how to categorize and sort the jumble of sounds in their heads. I had strategies and techniques for them to practice their emerging skills.

What I didn’t have was the school structure and administrative support required to provide the direct, intensive, instructional time needed to create and crystallize the new neural pathways being developed.

Teachers are dedicated professionals who want to see their students learn. Too many teachers are frustrated because their students are failing, and they don’t know how to help them succeed.

What do we need?

- A better understanding of what dyslexia is and is not
- An awareness of the early signs of dyslexia
- Assessments to confirm our suspicions
- Appropriate instructional interventions to improve student performance

Unfortunately, HRB No. 5562 will not make an appreciable difference for the 5-10% of the school population with dyslexia. The bill does not provide a definition of dyslexia. It does not promote the identification of early symptoms of dyslexia. Nor does it provide for teacher training and the professional development required to improve educational outcomes for children with dyslexia. These children suffer shame and discouragement which negatively impact the rest of their school careers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

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