

To whom it may concern,

My name is Erin Holden and I am currently a UConn student in my junior year, pursuing Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Elementary Education through the Integrated Bachelor's/Master's program. I am also Vice-President of UConn Future Educators, a branch of the CT Education Association Student Program. I wanted to write to you today concerning HRB No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education. I wholeheartedly support this bill, but respectfully request changes and/or additions.

Being a current education major, I have seen firsthand the limited amount of exposure that pre-service teachers receive about dyslexia. I am currently taking a course called "Exceptionality" (the only special education class I will take in a total of three years in the school of education) which primarily discusses students with disabilities and teaching strategies for these students. We spent two weeks on learning disabilities. Dyslexia was mentioned once.

The UConn Neag School of Education is the #1 public graduate school of education in the Northeast and the East Coast, and the #17 best public graduate school of education in the US. However, if general education majors are only taking one class on learning disabilities, how is that right? And in that class, how is dyslexia only mentioned once?

If the education community is moving towards the integration of students with disabilities into the general education classroom (inclusion), how can we as future teachers possibly help all of our students, especially those with dyslexia, if we receive no training on it? In addition, I have heard current teachers at the schools I intern at complain that their professional development does not cover enough (or at all) topics concerning learning disabilities, and specifically dyslexia. Not only do future teachers not know how to work with students with dyslexia, but current teachers are just as much in the dark.

My personal philosophy is that all students, regardless of their ability, should have access to the same educational opportunities. How can this happen if teachers are not trained in, and do not fully understand dyslexia?

This idea of not understanding dyslexia brings about another, broader question. What is dyslexia? There is no universal definition, states and even districts within the same state have differing descriptions, which inevitably leads to varying interventions and resources. In fact, that one time my professor mentioned dyslexia in my "Exceptionality" class was to say that there is no universal definition. That was it. Instead of throwing out the term "dyslexia" as some professionals are arguing in *The Dyslexia Debate*, since they say it has turned into too much of an umbrella term, fix it!

Narrow the definition and agree upon difficulties common to a dyslexic. This way, only students who actually have dyslexia are receiving the interventions they need for their specific difficulties; anyone who was misdiagnosed under a non-universal definition will then be able to get the help they actually need. By establishing a common definition, parents, students, teachers and professionals can understand what the disability is and therefore, increase the rapidness of appropriate interventions.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, fifteen to twenty percent of the population has a language-based learning disability and dyslexia is the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties associated with this type of disability. Dyslexia does not discriminate between males and females or among different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. This is a huge portion of our population, our students, who are not receiving the help they need due to a lack of agreed upon characteristics and teacher professional development, both for pre-service and current teachers.

This has to change and we can make that happen.

By approving HRB No. 5562, we can do a world of wonder for students with dyslexia. We can develop that universal definition, establish more professional development opportunities for both current teachers and pre-service teachers and therefore increase the number of interventions and resources for students with dyslexia. And more importantly, by supporting and strengthening dyslexia awareness, we increase the knowledge and understanding of dyslexia thereby helping more students to be identified.

We have a chance to make a difference here. Please support HRB No. 5562.

Thank you,

Erin Holden  
Durham, CT