

March 11, 2015

Education Committee Members:

My name is Allison Quirion, I am the Founder of Decoding Dyslexia-CT a grassroots movement concerned with the limited identification and interventions for students with Dyslexia within our Connecticut public schools. I am in support of Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia, however, I respectfully request that you amend add language addressing early assessments and evidence-based interventions provided by highly trained and skilled practitioners.

I commend the members of this Committee and last years legislators for the legislation that was passed, P.A. 14-39, Sections 1 and 2. That legislation is the catalyst to unveiling that many Districts across the State do NOT know how to identify or provide interventions to students with Dyslexia. I took a quick poll and have attached a map of Connecticut that identifies towns wherein someone (advocate, parent, attorney) has had to advocate for a student with Dyslexia. 91 out of 169 towns! This is alarming!

In response to last years legislation the State Department of Education created a "Specific Learning Disability/Dyslexia" working group to address and discuss the concerns of families and districts. Many parents have called the State Department of Education to inquire about the changes enacted by the legislation, specifically the addition of the box for "Specific Learning Disability/Dyslexia", to the IEP Form. Parents have received comments from the Department that this is a "problem" box. I have also heard first hand these comments being made. The problem is not the box. It is the lack of knowledge and resources within the educational community surrounding the of identification and interventions needed to support students with Dyslexia.

***First: We need a Universal Dyslexia Screener.*** We need to identify these students, as early assessments will lead to early identification, which is key to a Dyslexic student's success. Connecticut already has universal screening for all students (P.A. 13-245), which contains many but not all of the components necessary to "red flag" a student with Dyslexia. An amendment to P.A. 13-245 should add assessments for Dyslexia. The addition of early assessment language to SB 1054 would not carry a fiscal note and is the critical first step for students with Dyslexia.

Early identification of dyslexia is NOT taking place in many of our Connecticut public schools even when experts in the field state, it is now possible to reliably identify students at high risk for dyslexia before they fall behind. . [http://dyslexia.yale.edu/PAR\\_EarlyIntervention.html](http://dyslexia.yale.edu/PAR_EarlyIntervention.html)

***Second: Teacher/Specialists to teach students with Dyslexia.***

Senate Bill 1054 provides for the opportunity for pre-service and in-service teachers to obtain general professional development concerning Dyslexia. This is an important step, as all of our teachers should know the signs, symptoms and academic profile of a dyslexic student. However, what Senate Bill 1054 fails to include and address is that our teachers do not have the knowledge to teach students with Dyslexia.

The crux of the problem is that Institutions of Higher Education do not currently prepare teachers with the skills needed to teach students with Dyslexia. It takes a highly trained practitioner who has learned the foundations of reading along with many hours of practicum overseen by a mentor. The current curriculum, which prepares teachers, is void of the needed requirements.

You may be alarmed to know that currently not ONE of our state Universities provides teachers with the knowledge that is required to teach students with Dyslexia (compared to 3 Universities in Massachusetts). Institutions of Higher Education are providing our teachers with, at best, a cursory overview of Dyslexia.

To be able to successfully teach teachers on evidence-based practices for students with Dyslexia we must look beyond the current higher education curriculum. We must look to specialized certificates and/or endorsements that offer master level or 6th year course work. This would enable a comprehensive understanding and would properly prepare our teachers so they in turn could support our students with Dyslexia. This type of programming could also support all students as studies show that the type of instruction that is needed for students with Dyslexia is best for all emergent readers.

In addition, it is alarming to learn that the proposed CT draft Regulations for Teacher Preparation in Connecticut do not address an endorsement or license for teachers who teach students with Dyslexia or reading disabilities. In addition, Elementary Educators, whose preparation does not address Dyslexia or Reading Disabilities can secure cross-endorsements in Special Education and gain no new training in reading or serving students with RD or Dyslexia. Also, Literacy Specialists do not necessarily have to have training in RD or Dyslexia, Dyslexia is referenced as follows in the proposed regulations for Literacy Specialists:

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| <p>(4) Has completed at least 30 semester hours of graduate credit in an approved planned program, including course work in the following areas:</p> <p>(A) Developmental reading in prekindergarten through Grade 12 and common difficulties such as word decoding, vocabulary, oral language comprehension of struggling readers, English language learners or students with disabilities, such as dyslexia, specific language impairments, autism spectrum disorders;</p> |
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The Regulations are currently under review and as such ALL issues concerning licensure/endorsements should be addressed without a fiscal cost.

## **WHY WE NEED early assessments and programming for teachers who teach students with Dyslexia.**

1. The United States Department of Education and Rehabilitation Services has determined that Connecticut **“needs assistance”** in implementing the requirements of Part B in IDEA. Under OSEP’s new accountability framework, called Results Driven Accountability (RDA), it brings into focus the outcomes for children with disabilities while balancing compliance requirements.

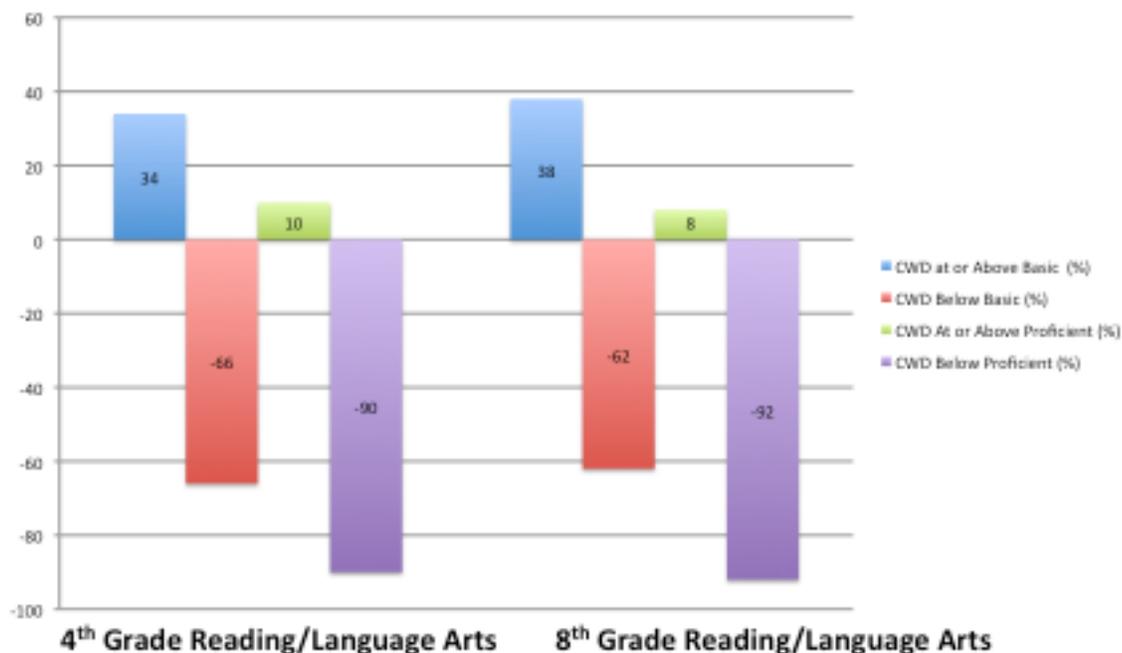
Connecticut’s State results Performance is 65%, which indicates that CT is failing to improve educational results and functional outcomes for children with disabilities. What does this mean for Connecticut? If CT is determined to “Need Assistance” in the next review, the Department must take one or more enforcement actions (among others):

- Require CT to access technical assistance
- Designate CT as a high risk grantee state
- Direct CT to set aside funds to area(s) where ct needs assistance

2013 NAEP scores for children with disabilities shows that only 10% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and only 8 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are at or above proficient in Reading and Language Arts:

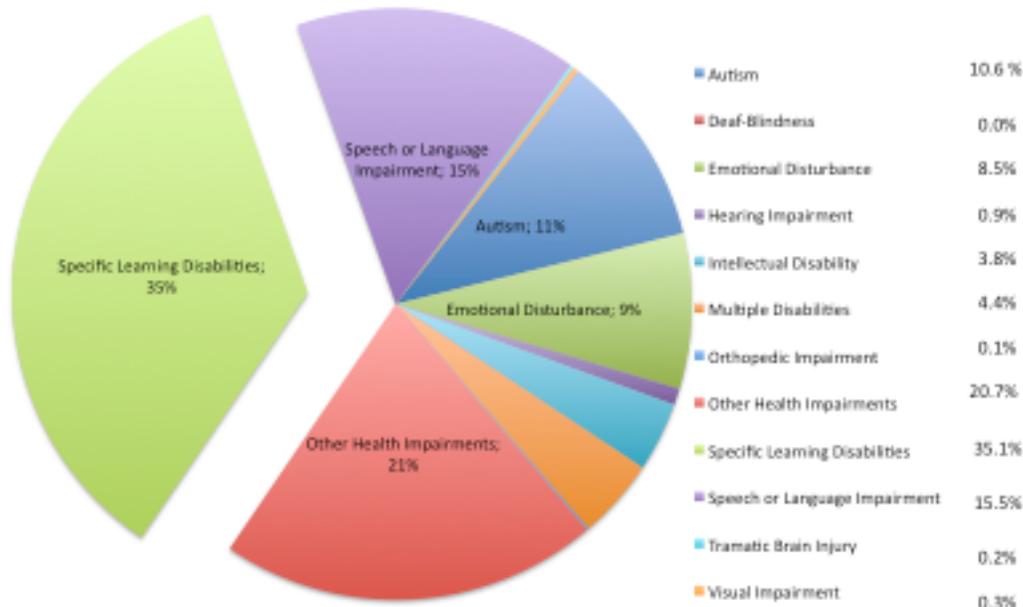
**CONNECTICUT’S PERFORMANCE ON 2013 NAEP ASSESSMENTS  
FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

### **FEW CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ARE STAYING AFOUNT IN READING/ LANGUAGE ARTS**



When looking at children with disabilities in Connecticut, Specific Learning Disabilities is the largest disability category, which makes up 30% of the total disabilities, of that 80% are Dyslexic. (Approximately 80% of people with learning disabilities have dyslexia. *Shaywitz, N. Eng. J. Med. (1988)*)

**35%** of Children Identified with a Disability in the State of CT  
 have a **Specific Learning Disability**  
 IDEA 2012 Child Count and 2011-12 CCD – Ages 6-21



Approximately 80% of people with learning disabilities, which makes it the most common learning disability – *Dr. Sally Shaywitz, N. Eng. J. Med. (1988)*

Reports and Information can be found at the following links:

- <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbspap/allyears.html#ct>
- <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbspap/2014/ct-acc-apr1tr-2014b.pdf>
- <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/sppapr.html>

## 2. MORE Commission, Recommendations for Legislative Action. 2/18/15

The MORE Commission recommended that K-3 students must receive explicit and systematic instruction in foundational language and literacy skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, sentence and text comprehension and written expression. We should implement this recommendation as this type of instruction is NOT happening in many CT School Districts.

In addition, the Commission stated that the State Department of Education (SDE) is allowed to keep a certain percentage of federal special education funds received by the state for SDE administrative functions (the rest is disbursed to school districts) . . . congress allowed each state to set aside 10% . . . often referred to as a risk pool . . . It is currently unclear how SDE spends all of the federal special education funds that it withholds for administrative purposes and the MORE Commission is recommending an

investigation. The New Jersey Legislature has directed their State Department of Education to use a portion of their withheld IDEA funds for the benefit of Students with Dyslexia. We should follow their lead.

3. Failure is expensive. Interventions are affordable. Average annual cost per CT inmate \$34,697 (Plus initial investment) vs. Average annual cost per CT pupil \$17,500.
  - a. While the prevalence of dyslexia in the general population is about 20%, the prevalence of dyslexia in prisons is more than twice that or 48%. *Scientific study conducted by Dr. K.C. Moody and colleagues at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Conjunction with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (published 2000).*
  - b. Of youth incarcerated 38.6% have a SLD. The high rates of incarceration in this population should be a wakeup call to public schools that a disproportionate number of youth with educational disabilities are in juvenile corrections. *Youth with Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections: A National Survey. By Maggie Magee Quinn, et al.*
  - c. Domus a non profit that operates 3 charter schools in CT servicing primarily students who are at risk, state many of the 20% of Domus students identified as needing special education were never considered for special education in public schools. *CT Health Investigates Team. Prisons Try to Span Learning Gap. Gail Braccidiferro MacDonald. 8/4/11*

To be able to make effective gains, we must have systemic changes. We as parents cannot continue to individually advocate for these children as it will never break the cycle.

What we are requesting on behalf of our students with Dyslexia is NOT new. These rights have been afforded to students with Dyslexia under IDEA, since 1975, when Congress included Dyslexia as a qualifying condition under the Special Education eligibility category of "Specific Learning Disability" (SLD). What we are requesting is that Connecticut provide the needed components for compliance under the law.

I thank you for supporting our students with Dyslexia and your efforts on behalf of all students in Connecticut.

Allison Quirion  
Founder, Decoding Dyslexia-CT  
Hebron, CT

# Teacher Preparation Proposed Regulations/Dyslexia: Connecticut

Presently, Public Act 14-39, which states in part that after July 1, 2015, “the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with dyslexia” must be included as part of the curriculum in teacher preparation programs leading to professional certification, does not specify semester hours or credit hours associated with preparation. As such, risk is that programs will “embed” the content into existing courses, with the option to relegate the topic to a single lecture or part of a single lecture (45-120 minutes of coverage).

- Proposed Regulations: Reference to Reading Disabilities (RD)/Dyslexia/Deficits:**

	RD	Dyslexia	Deficits
Elementary Education Teacher Initial License (K-6)	No	No	Yes
Elementary Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement (K-6)	No	No	Yes
Literacy Specialist and Coach PK-12	No	Yes, Cursory	No
Special Education Teacher Initial License PK-12	No	No	Yes
Special Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement: Mild Disability PK-12	No	Yes, Cursory	Yes
Special Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement: Moderate/Severe Disability PK-12	No	No	No
Special Education Intervention Specialist PK-12	Yes, Cursory	Yes, Cursory	No

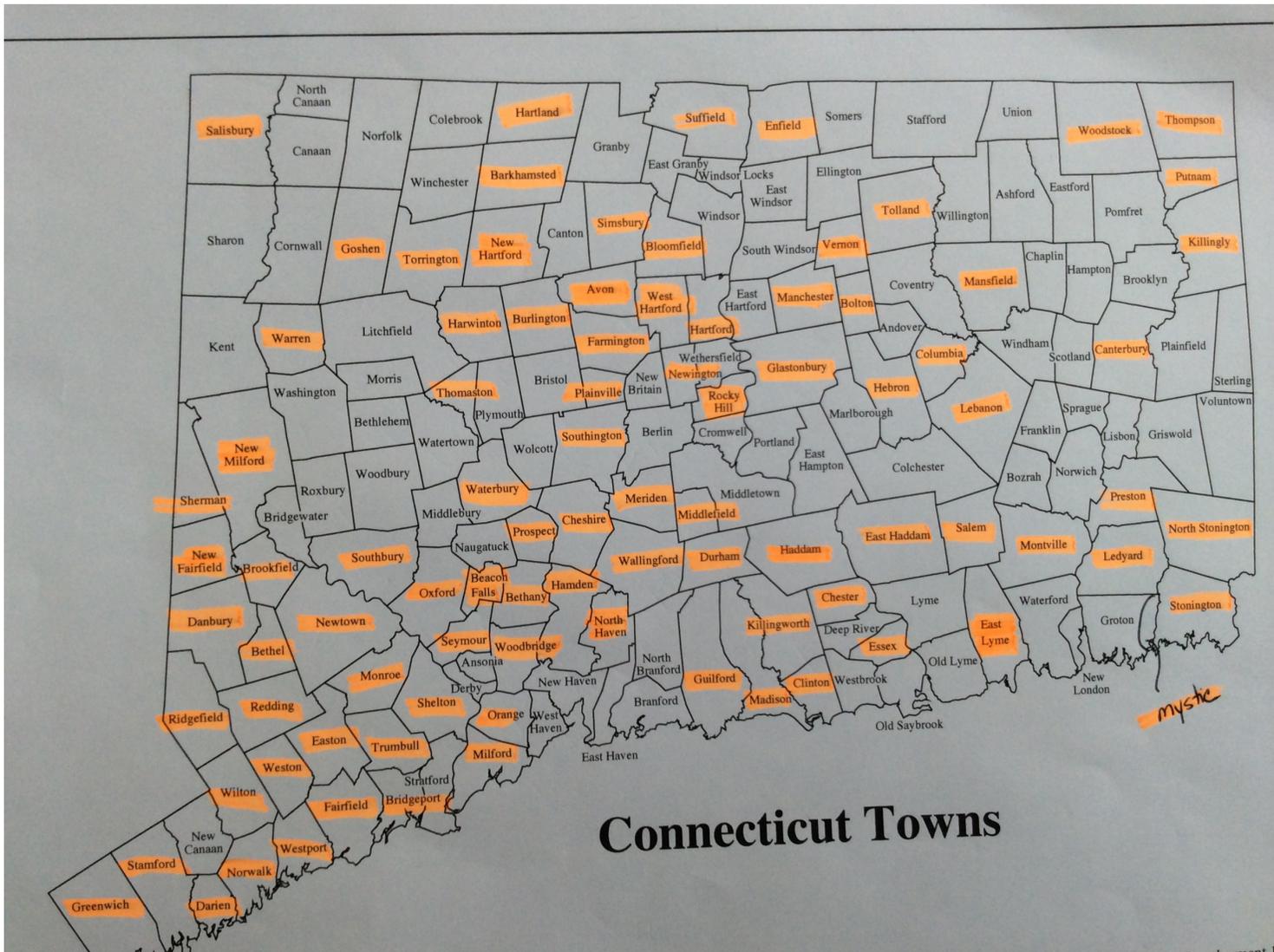
- Proposed Regulations: Minimum Number of Semester Hours of Credit in Reading/Language Arts:**

	Credits
Elementary Education Teacher Initial License (K-6)	9
Elementary Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement (K-6)	9
Literacy Specialist and Coach PK-12	30
Special Education Teacher Initial License (PK-12)	18
Special Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement: Mild Disability (PK-12)	Not Specified
Special Education Teacher Cross-Endorsement: Moderate/Severe Disability (PK-12)	None
Special Education Intervention Specialist PK-12	Not Specified

- Concerns:**

- Elementary Educators, whose preparation does not address Dyslexia or Reading Disabilities can secure cross-endorsements in Special Education and gain *no new training* in reading or serving students with RD or Dyslexia.
- Literacy Specialists *do not necessarily* have to have training in RD or Dyslexia, Dyslexia is referenced as follows in the proposed regulations for Literacy Specialists:

- (4) Has completed at least 30 semester hours of graduate credit in an approved planned program, including course work in the following areas:
- (A) Developmental reading in prekindergarten through Grade 12 and common difficulties such as word decoding, vocabulary, oral language comprehension of struggling readers, English language learners or students with disabilities, such as dyslexia, specific language impairments, autism spectrum disorders;



Towns highlighted are where someone has advocated for a student with Dyslexia.