

Testimony for SB 1054 An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia

Testimony From:

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I support the SB 1054 An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia. However, more needs to be done to strengthen this Bill to make it more effective.

I hope you will consider the following suggestions:

1. The SDE needs to enforce **mandatory** professional development in evidence based interventions also termed research based reading instruction programming for all untrained SPED teachers *currently* teaching reading. They should be trained to instruct students in at least one research based program. Preferably more than one (because one size does not fit all) or ideally have different teachers in district trained in different programs. This is a huge challenge with Unions and teachers already in the system. Many are not trained and they resist new training maybe because they are often overwhelmed or other reasons. I think you would be surprised how many SPED teachers there are charged with teaching reading that have no or little training to do so.
2. The type of “in-service” training noted in this Bill for Dyslexia I read as being “voluntary” and is for “the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with dyslexia, as defined in section 1 of this Act.” This is type of training is problematic for several reasons: it is voluntary not mandatory, it doesn’t state specifically that they will receive training in how to actually instruct/ deliver to students evidence-based research reading intervention programming but just how to detect and recognize evidence-based research interventions. There is a big difference between recognizing what is needed and actually being trained to deliver appropriate programming. Maybe I am reading this wrong if not language needs to be clarified. It should also be noted that typical “in-service” training is minimal usually one or two days and that is really not enough to provide the average teacher with the knowledge and skills needed to remediate reading for a student with Dyslexia.
3. It’s awesome that this Bill will require “*any* new programs of teacher preparation leading to certification to include literacy skills, processes of current research and best practices”. I read this as all college or university students will get this training no matter what discipline they may teach and that is one and a half credits. This will go a long way in helping the regular education teachers better understand what current best practices are in evidence based teaching methodologies but also may aide in the use of differential teaching i.e. helping to assist the SPED teacher modify the curriculum and provide accommodations.
4. Included in this course work should be the use of Assistive Technology for students with Dyslexia. Assistive Technology can be many things but for the Dyslexic years behind in reading but having average intelligence AT mainly means a computer reader that reads the text for them. This is a lifeline in

many cases as it allows the Dyslexic to access the curriculum content more independently once read for them they can focus on comprehension. Students with Dyslexia can learn to read but for many that are behind AT allows them independence and to keep up in class.

5. College and university programs certifying Special Education teachers who will teach reading will need many more credits /study hours to become competent in teaching reading using evidence-based reading instructional programming. Ideally they should come out of college fully prepared to teach reading able to use at least one research based reading program. Too many districts have demonstrated a failure to train teachers in evidence-based interventions to teach literacy in SPED. Institutional change begins at the college/ university level. Thank you committee for recognizing that fact.
6. I would like to see the SDE employee responsible for providing “information and assistance” also monitor districts for compliance that **mandatory** in-service research based training/professional development has been implemented in districts.
7. That a data collection system be created to track and monitor the following data: that professional development has occurred, the type(s) of research based reading program instruction /professional development that occurred and its efficacy with students over time. District takes data on standardized tests and routinely SPED students and others estimates up to 40% of 4th graders are testing below proficient levels in reading. NCLB waivers have allowed failing districts to continue failing students without consequences. There is no accountability. The reality of the number of parents that take a case to due process is less than one third of one percent of the entire SPED population in the state on average each year. Mediations bleed both parents and the district of funds unnecessarily.
8. That the SDE create policy/ guidelines for LEA’s that define specific systems, steps, benchmarks i.e. required screening and assessment tools used to assist in early identification and are tied to a specific timeline. This can be tricky with Dyslexia. However, when a student is behind or falls behind a year or less that’s a red flag and immediate additional intervention beyond the regular education literacy programming such as SRBI tiered models should be implemented. If further SRBI does not help the student progress than a referral to SPED be made. This continuum of literacy support is supposed to be in place but it is not always implemented in many districts. Students fall through the cracks into the gap. I see Bill No. 6974 created to help close the achievement gap does a lot to strengthen literacy instruction in the early grades in regular education this will benefit Dyslexics. Regular education teachers are on the front lines and will be the ones who implement general education evidence based literacy instruction, followed by SRBI tiered additional reading intervention given in regular Ed and if necessary followed by a referral to SPED. It is along that continuum of intervention models that early identification of those with Dyslexia will likely occur. Dyslexic students are not easily identified they often have had many interventions tried without success before it can be determined they are Dyslexic and the right fit program is implemented and works.
9. I wish the Dyslexia Bill was a cleaner Bill solely focused on these students with great challenges learning to read. With all the other things required of teachers to teach in this Bill it’s not surprising how challenging it is to find the time to teach reading. Literacy is the most important skill the schools will ever teach. It should be the number one priority of our educational system in Connecticut and in this country. Being illiterate severely diminishes a student’s long term success in school and in life. Students with Dyslexia are some of the most creative brightest students in school misunderstood because they learn differently.

My motivation in testifying is to help illustrate the need for a more comprehensive Dyslexia Bill so no child has to suffer the way mine has to get the appropriate help needed in school to learn to read. Navigating the

educational system and securing research-based reading remediation for my child has been ongoing battle, a dozen years and counting. Appropriate early intervention did not happen and was a costly mistake for all; child, parents and the school district. Despite my educational background, intimate understanding of the educational system and comprehensive knowledge of the Special Education Laws under IDEA and full time efforts as his advocate my child has experienced a long brutal journey in school struggling to learn to read because of the lack of in house research based instruction by trained teachers.

The personal pain my child has had to endure because of his Dyslexia in school is disturbing to think about or express. Isolation, humiliation, bullying, seclusion and worse were part of his journey. It's an expensive and fatiguing battle that students' and their parents have to go through, thousands and thousands of dollars spent on Attorney fees, evaluation reports, and state complaints, countless meetings to fight for what should be in place and not require legislation. Clearly a student's right to learn to read and get a research based reading program delivered in district requires strong laws to make it happen and even then there is no guarantee because there are little consequences to the school district that does not deliver.

A big thanks to the Education Committee for their work on ALL the education Bills for review this legislative session. Thoughtful work was done to target and address student's needs and key issues challenging Connecticut's educational system today. It's not easy creating laws that address complex educational issues especially if you do not have a background in education. Obviously, the Education Committee is committed to improving education in our state and your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Good Luck in your continued efforts on behalf of the students with Dyslexia!

Sincerely, Joanna Cooper