

March 10, 2015

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education
of the Connecticut General Assembly
Public Hearing March 11, 2015

Support for:

Raised Senate Bill #1054 An Act Concerning Students With Dyslexia

Raised Senate Bill #1055 An Act Concerning Gifted And Talented Students

From:

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To:

The Honorable Andrew M. Fleischmann, Co-Chair, The Honorable Gayle S. Slossberg, Co-Chair, The Honorable Robert Sanchez, Vice-Chair, The Honorable Gary A. Winfield, Vice-Chair, The Honorable Gail Lavielle, Ranking Member, The Honorable Toni Boucher, Ranking Member, and The Honorable Members of the Education Committee

I write to you in support both of Raised Bill 1054 and of Raised Bill 1055. I am a board member of the Connecticut PTA and also a board member of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted, but I am submitting this testimony as a parent of three teenage boys. The oldest is a sophomore at Yale University, the next is a senior at Greenwich High School, and the youngest is finishing middle school this year. All three have benefited from the exemplary Advanced Learning Program for gifted and talented students in the Greenwich Public Schools. My middle school son also receives Special Education services for dyslexia and related learning disabilities.

I cannot thank the special education teachers of Greenwich enough for taking a child who could not talk at age two and could not read in second grade and turning him into a student who gets A+'s in his gifted language arts class and is a member of the debate team. I must also give credit to the Connecticut Association for the Gifted which educated me as a parent to the possibility that a person could be both gifted and learning disabled, and to the organization Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities for teaching me what dyslexia looks like. My son is fortunate that he has a parent with the time and resources to seek out this information, and further fortunate to be in a school district with well-qualified professionals. He has heard so many inspiring stories about successful dyslexic adults, like Governor Malloy, that I think he is rather proud of the disability. I urge you to support SB 1054 so that all Connecticut school children who struggle with dyslexia can turn it into a badge of honor and so their parents too will realize the potential hidden within.

I know that my son needed his IEP to achieve what he has, but he also needed classwork to nurture his strengths. He and his older brothers flourished in settings designed for gifted students and floundered in regular-paced classrooms. Once again I see **my** children's needs being met, for the most part; no program is perfect and there is room for improvement even in Greenwich. But across much of our state students with unique abilities are left to fend for themselves. It makes no sense that we would not do our utmost to develop their talents. We have created a system where those districts with the funding and inclination ensure that the highly-capable are well served, whereas those without provide minimal or no support. We would not accept this if the special need under consideration were a disability so why is it appropriate when the need is for a greater level of challenge?

What is the point of mandating the identification of gifted individuals only to ignore them? In fact, how can we know that they are even being identified? Many children, particularly those without support at home, must have qualified instruction to develop their nascent talents, otherwise what might have started as giftedness will disappear. What a boon it would be to our economy if every high-potential preschooler grew into a well-adjusted brilliantly-educated adult. This can only happen if the proper services are provided. And it need not be a cost burden to the state or to the school districts, if we did have a qualified Department of Education employee to take responsibility and a suitable study were to be undertaken.

Both of these bills will protect children by providing them with an appropriate education, an education that currently is available only to a privileged few. Having a teacher who knows how to meet the needs of a student should not be a matter of luck, or of being born in the right part of the state. It should be the right of every Connecticut public school child.

Thank you for your consideration of both SB 1054 and SB 1055.

Sincerely,

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