

March 7th, 2015

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Paul Hallahan and I am the father of a 15 year old, 9th grade student who is Dyslexic. I am in support of Senate Bill 1054 as a step in the right direction. Early identification and intervention for children with Dyslexia is critical in providing the education all of these students deserve.

My son, Alex, was not tested in any way by the schools until we had him tested privately on our own at the end of 7th grade. One of the first things Alex told the private testing coordinator was "I hope you can help me." The private testing results clearly defined him as being Dyslexic. By the time we had PPTs and the school testing we were well into the 8th grade. Can you image the stress, frustration, lack of confidence, and fear that a child has when he is in 8th grade and is told he has a 3rd grade reading level. The first questions he asked himself were "why am I so dumb" and "what is wrong with me".

Alex went from a loving, funny, outgoing, well liked, superior athlete with hopes of playing hockey, lacrosse or rugby in college (& beyond) to somebody who was withdrawn, difficult, frustrated, defiant, depressed, and hated school. The change was so fast and we had no idea why. We would work with him on his homework, he had outside tutors, he went in early to teachers for help or stayed late. It was always a struggle that he learned to manage or fake his way through, but in Middle School it was impacting more than just his school work, it was impacting his confidence, social life and home life. This was after years in Elementary School of asking teachers if he was on track or needed any help. We tried to be his advocates, but were constantly told he was doing fine and on track.

In 7th grade we had a circumstance of Alex failing a test in a class. We came to learn that he was given a passing grade after the teacher gave him the same test verbally and Alex knew the answers. The issue was that Alex could not read the test well, was up against a time limit, and could not process the answer in his head to the pencil in his hand. This was the final straw and one of the main reasons we got him tested ourselves.

The Education Committee needs to work with Bill 1054 to make sure it is comprehensive enough to provide the needed supports. The intent should be to have testing done as early as possible and set a game plan in motion. School systems should be trained and be able to help identify, as well as properly test for Dyslexia. They also have to have the services the kids need to learn the way they need to. So many children are mis-diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, when they could be dyslexic and just need to learn differently.

Dyslexia is not a disease, it is a Learning Disability. I, like most, don't like to call it a disability, it should be called a Learning Difference. Those with Dyslexia can learn and thrive, they just need to do it differently than others because of the way they processes things. Just ask people

like Steven Spielberg, Vince Vaughn, Anderson Cooper, Kiera Knightly, Whoopi Goldberg, Steve Jobs, or John Lennon. All are Dyslexic.

It is really hard to convey the strong feelings I have for this Bill by way of a written testimony. I wish I could have been there for an oral testimony, but even 3 minutes could not convey my story. The past two years have been a financial and emotional hardship on our family. Financially because of all the private testing, consulting with lawyers and our decision to take Alex out of the public school system to go to Forman School, who specializes in education for Dyslexics. Emotionally because of all the changes in Alex and helping him get through it all. He & I spent an enormous amount of time together with travel sports, but the kid I knew is really different now and not just because he is a teenager. His whole outlook on himself and life is different. This breaks my heart and I really want my boy back!!

Please work on continued Legislation to make comprehensive so that the school systems can properly identify and work with students with Dyslexia. I have heard the battles and frustration of many to get the help for our students that could be helped by their very own school system with the proper training and education. Early identification and intervention is the key!!

Thanks for your time.

Paul Hallahan

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