

March 5, 2015

Testimony for Dyslexia

Good morning fellow parents, students, educators and legislatures. I am Elisabeth Herdic from Lebanon, CT and I am here because I support Senate Bill 1054 An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia. However, I do think additional measures do need to be added to the bill. I am also an ER nurse. I can liken this journey of identification and education for Addisyn to the medical world. If a patient comes in with an infected wound that was failing first line antibiotics it would be inappropriate to simply continue to current treatment regime. The doctor would culture the wound to further investigate what specific bacteria was causing the resistant infection. Depending on which bacteria was causing the infection would dictate the antibiotic. The reason for this is that certain bacteria are sensitive to specific antibiotics. Without the right antibiotic the wound will never heal. The patient will deteriorate. Other body systems will become affected and they will become septic.

A specific learning disability is not that different. When a student is struggling, especially a bright student it is key to find out exactly why. It is important to do the right tests to get the right diagnosis. That diagnosis should dictate the correct program of remediation. A program that is research based to be effective for the unique learning style of dyslexics.

Addisyn showed clear signs of Dyslexia in Kindergarten. She struggled with rhyming, letter sounds, numbers, route memory and writing. Her teacher recognized the issues but gave the all too common phrase that "these issues are developmentally appropriate until 3rd grade". 1st grade was a disaster. Addisyn's teacher ignored our concerns. She attributed her struggles to laziness and disinterest. She told us we were stressing her out by trying to work of academics at home and to stop. She was unable to do the reading and homework that was coming home. She was getting 40%'s on her spelling tests. Every time we met with her teacher she blew off our concerns. Our happy child who cried when Kindergarten ended because she loved it so much started to dread school. Her academic failures snowballed into social issues. Soon she hated school and dreaded going. By the end of the year we kept her home for the last two weeks because of the lack of support from our school.

We decided for 2nd grade to send her to a magnet school, hoping for more awareness and support. She received excellent intervention that was 1:1 and tailored to her individual needs. Her reading improved although her writing and spelling were not addressed. When I asked the head of the special ed dept about testing her for Dyslexia I was told "I don't know anything about testing kids for dyslexia or what to do if she is dyslexic". We were stuck in a predicament. Go back to our town school where we can push for testing and identification and lose our awesome intervention, or keep with intervention that was working for her reading but nothing else and lose the chance to get diagnosed. We chose to return to our town school. Even knowing all of Addisyn's academic issues the principal assigned her to a first year teacher despite my request for a teacher who would have a basis of knowledge and experience to work with her.

So here we are in the much awaiting 3rd grade when all of her "developmentally appropriate deficits" were going to magically disappear. Do you think they have? No, all of her issues are magnified because the content and expectation are higher and the gap has only widened. She has been placed in tier 2 intervention groups all year in groups of all boys who have behavior issues and are not interested in learning. She is working on skills that they all need in the group. Often she has not had the building block skills she has

needed to retain the goals of these tier 2 group. She went through 3 tier 2 groups without mastering the concepts before the school was willing to take another look. That was a waste of months that she could have been learning and closing the gap just to show on paper that she failed before trying something that has a better chance of working.

We have paid for hundreds of dollars in tests on our own, out of pocket just shy of a neurological evaluation, which to be honest is financially not an option. The school finally completed some testing. They told us “her tests show signs of dyslexia and dysgraphia” but they say they cannot formally diagnose her with that. We are now awaiting the neurological evaluation that the school has finally agreed that she needs. So again we are wasting weeks and months just waiting for the papers that will show what we all know already. So, when her testing comes back officially showing she is Dyslexic and Dysgraphic then what? I have already asked the school if they have any teachers certified in an Orton-Gillingham based method and they don't. They don't have the skilled professionals to teach her in a way she will learn.

We spend \$300 a month on tutoring for Addisyn. The methods used in her tutoring are truly a multisensory approach. She loves going to her tutor and retains what is taught to her. The interventionist at school tells me that she is using a multisensory approach but she doesn't do anything that the tutor does and Addy doesn't retain what is taught. Because of this there needs to be clear guideline for schools stating what intervention for dyslexic students should entail and what training the provider should have. Her tutor explains that she does a warm up with phoneme awareness. Then she introduces a new spelling pattern. They practice skywriting (this kinesthetic input is key). After that they do phoneme grapheme mapping followed by reading words in isolation and then reading phrases and decodable text. She checks her progress with sentence dictation. Without clarifying methodology school can call anything a multisensory approach and build their own method which is not research based. Please create legislature requiring specific methodology for reading, writing and spelling.

The best option for Addisyn would be for her school to appropriately educate her and understand her unique academic profile. The next best option would be for me to win the lotto and be able to afford to send her to one of few amazing Dyslexia schools that would understand and stimulate her. Is there a third option? CT has sprouted up how many magnet school with specific areas of focus. Arts, STEM, Environmental Science, even Autism Spectrum Disorders. Why not a school for Language based learning disorders? A school where these students of average or above average intelligence are challenged while their language arts needs are taught through a robust multi sensory program. How many significant people in history are dyslexic? These kids can do amazing things! My daughter is so highly motivated and smart. She listens to hours of books on tape. She not only researches endangered animals but also who is working to save them and how. She is creative and makes treasures out of anything she finds that others would have discarded. She is the most empathetic person I know, truly able to feel things from others perspective. But at the same time she cannot always write her name correctly, she can't make a birthday card for a friend, she can't spell words that my 5 year old easily rattles off. Her weakness are always focused on but never her strengths.

My 4 year old in preschool is showing some of the same patterns that Addisyn did in her early years. Again I am being told “At this point it is developmentally appropriate”. Research shows that dyslexia has a genetic component. She is high risk! Please CT don't fail her also. Advocate for her to receive early screening so she doesn't have to fail for the next 4 years before she gets appropriately identified. I have been there since Kindergarten

pleading for help for Addisyn. How many students don't have a mother who is fighting. The current system failed us even with 2 educated parental voices.

Please CT create guidelines for early identification, clear standards for diagnosis as outlined by the International Dyslexia Association, and specific methodology based upon the proven Orton-Gillingham approach delivered by highly trained teachers. In medicine you need to know the diagnosis to appropriately treat the condition. And you treat the condition with the specific medication that is proven to be effective. How is a learning disability any different? Thank you for your time.

Elisabeth Herdic