

Dear Legislature,

Please support **SB 1054.**, an Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia but are requesting additional supports be added to the bill.

I am an educator myself and a parent of a dyslexic child and here is my husband's and my Personal Story...as well as our son Connor's. We knew it from the time he was in Preschool. In addition to the reversals, he could not recall letters from moment to moment. One day he might know one and the next day be baffled. He could not accurately identify sounds that went with letters consistently. He could not recall numbers to count or the alphabet no matter how many times we sang it. Otherwise he was very verbal, coordinated and intelligent. We noticed his eyes jumped around scanning the page. We took him to a optometrist (twice), an ophthalmologist, a neurological ophthalmologist for evaluation because we wanted to make sure he could see. No issues they told us.

When we first inquired at school in Kindergarten, we were told that his behaviors were "normal". We had another child and had not had such experiences. We told his teachers, that we had been doing some reading on different learning issues and his sounded a lot like dyslexia. His teacher told us that he didn't reverse all of his letters. We tried to tell her that that was only one dimension of the disability. We found he could not track lines on the page, he missed letter cues and sounds irregularly and seemed to randomly guess at numbers. He could not write his name. **If she had a list of attributes to look at to compare it would have been easier to discuss ways to help him at home.** Instead, we were pushed off and he struggled to learn even his letters in Kindergarten. **If there had been a screening at that time, he could have gotten assistance and may not have fallen so far behind. We had no idea the odyssey we were beginning in trying to get help.**

The same issues resurfaced in First Grade. We wanted a referral to special education testing, but the school did not want to do that. We acquiesced....foolishly believing that the educators were on the front lines of learning disabilities and we were being over reactive. We were wrong.

We asked his teacher for assistance after school in First Grade. Sound strange..we thought so too. We told her we suspected dyslexia. The teacher did not know the signs of the disability. If she had a roster of symptoms I told her, then maybe she could recognize it in our son AND OTHER students who were struggling. I read every night to hi since he was born. He loved that. What was going on??? Our son cried every night over reading. We had all manner of learning devices, such as flashcards, books, manipulative, tapes, videos, books

from the library...still he stayed far behind his peers. We paid \$4000 to Sylvan Learning Center the summer after First Grade, still he could not read a book at beginning level at all. Struggling to recognize "I" in each sentence after reading for 2 hours 3 times per week! **Something was wrong.**

The beginning of Second Grade came. We asked for a PPT in October. We got a MEETING...IN MAY!!!!!! The whole school year of his second grade went by with our son struggling with no services other than the extra math help we paid for at the school after school. They had no real understanding of how to help him learn. Worse yet, they did not seem to care such a vivacious boy hated school....really hated it. Finally at the end of the year, he had an Occupational Therapy screening, Psychology Screening, a WIATT II test and a Speech and Language Screening. **All of these evaluations were NOT NECESSARY** as each and every professional who worked and who met our son knew he did not have EMOTIONAL, MANIPULATIVE OR SPEECH issues. **He could not read!** No one at school was bothering to find out why. Not one test addressed this issue. We were adamant that he get help In June he had a DRP reading level of 18 (goal 31) and a DRA of 20 (goal 28) His math test score was 38% because he could not recall numbers either or solve problems with words in them! Additionally the school added to the report, "Connor is a hard worker." We knew that was the case, but knew also he was making no progress in the year. On top of it, the school played games and administered the tests in MAY! Even after all of the testing, they said he did not qualify for services, we were very upset and asked how that conclusion could be drawn. We pushed for more reading evaluations and low and behold...there **was IEP in place by June of his Second Grade year. Literally 2 days before the last day of school. Another wasted year.**

We were DONE WAITING for the so-called professionals to come up with a solution. He was getting extra help where he circled pictures of words. No plan of how to address his needs. We did our own inquiries on the Research Based Interventions outlined by experts in Dyslexia the Dr. Sally Shaywitz's book, [Overcoming Dyslexia](#). We searched the internet for somebody to diagnose him properly. We schooled ourselves and sought out a professional who specialized in Orton-Gillingham method of teaching. We interviewed a few and **hired a tutor and paid for her ourselves for 2 days a week for 1 hour each.** After a month of assistance Connor began to read! His tutor used research based methods to help him with recall. We also signed up for the Dyslexia Center in Waterbury, CT where we were told it was a 3 year waiting list.

The nightmare continued in the Fall of his Third Grade year. We met in October for a PPT that we called. We contacted an advocate, who came to our meeting. We also asked our tutor to come. This resulted in the school paying for an outside

evaluation. The [outside evaluation](#) was scheduled for **April of that year and would take 6 weeks to get the report.** we did the math, the **soonest he could get diagnosed would be May of that school year!** The same day as the PPT, we got a call from the **Dyslexia Center** that there was a fluke and no one wanted the Friday night open slot, would be like to bring Connor in for evaluation. WE JUMPED at the chance. He as evaluated a few weeks later and started there too in **January** of his Third grade. Connor was going for **assistance Tuesday through Friday after school in Orton-Gillingham style methods and he started making progress!**

The doctor that the school sent us to took 6 weeks to come back as predicted. We first met the doctor and told her of our concern about him suffering from dyslexia. She administered her test for 3 hours. **AFTER THE 3 hour test that she did not "BELIEVE IN" dyslexia and diagnosed him with ADHD** even though he had no symptoms of hyperactivity. The meeting where this was revealed was **ON THE LAST DAY** of his Third Grade year.

As a teacher myself, I could not have imagined that it would be so difficult to get a diagnosis for something that seemed so clear to us from the outset and I am an educator...on the inside of the process...on the outside still.

[There needs to be](#)

Definition of Dyslexia: This makes teachers aware of what to look for. Perhaps a checklist to streamline the process. It needs to be clear what it is and the symptoms.

Early Screening for Dyslexia: So that students do not get ingrained with bad habits. There needs to be a call from schools for doctors who can screen for it. If that were the case, the school system could have save a lot of money wasted on screenings and tests it did not need.

Evidence-Based Interventions: Proven methods by professionals in the field that meet the needs of the student. Digging three feet off the mark for a fence post, does not mean no work has been done, just that it is done far off the mark. This is what schools do because they are unaware of the programs that could help.

Professional Development: The superintendents need to understand that targeted intervention would move students out of special education much more quickly if staff have the knowledge and understanding of Dyslexia. Reading the book, Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level by **Sally Shaywitz M.D. Should be a must read.**

If they were they able to evaluate, identify (early), educate and accommodate the Dyslexic student, the process would be streamlined and allow teachers more time with the whole class. Professional development that is proven and effective in identifying, intervening and accommodating a student with Dyslexia be beneficial to Connecticut teachers because everybody wins!

Higher Education: Institutions of Higher Education are adequately need to prepare our teachers to teach students with Dyslexia because 20% of the population suffers from this disability. As benchmarks get higher, students need to hit the ground runner much sooner than in previous generations. The way it is now, students linger and never get addressed. Teachers want to help, that is why they teach the lower grades. There should a more focused and targeted program to teach teachers specifically to teach students with Dyslexia. It would benefit all learners in the classroom because that child who cannot read sometimes turns out to be a disruption and when that happens, everybody loses.

I really hope you do what is right for our state and make sure that the citizens we are trying to educate get a fair deal when it comes to accessing education. It does not have to be expensive, if it is done RIGHT.

Sincerely,

Kim M. Foss,

Thomaston, CT
