

Education Committee Members:

I am writing in support of SB 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia and am hoping additional supports can be added to this bill. I am providing this testimony as an advocate for my sons, one identified with dyslexia, one in the process of being identified. I wanted to be able to share some personal insight into what it is like for these children who are bright but struggle with written words. As a parent, once my oldest child was identified, I did everything I could to become educated about dyslexia. I read many books and searched the internet for what seemed like years. One of the most impactful things that I came across was in a book by dyslexia advocate Ben Foss: a study was quoted which indicated that the level of shame associated with learning disabilities “often matches in intensity the shame experienced over incest”. As a mother reading this, it devastated me and it still does. I can tell you that I have seen this first hand. Many of these children feel shame because they struggle with reading written words. Shame because they learn differently. Shame because they learn early that reading comes easier for their friends, and their friends are often rewarded very publicly for their reading success. Shame because it appears to them that society seems to equate ability to read easily with intelligence and success. Early identification is necessary to help prevent this shame from occurring. Children start to compare themselves to their peers in the 3rd and 4th grade, and we want them to have the tools and strategies they need to persevere in the classroom, before they start comparing themselves to their peers, so the impact of their reading differences are minimized. Waiting until later in elementary school, or worse middle school, to identify students not only makes it harder for them to catch up with their peers but also has a significant impact on their self-esteem. I am writing this testimony, in the hopes that Connecticut can pass a bill that supports early identification (kindergarten) and teacher training and can keep these bright children from feeling that shame.

Although my oldest son was identified relatively early (I had him evaluated privately), it took several years before he received evidence based, multisensory instruction in his public school setting. During this time he struggled with self-esteem and self-doubt as he noticed his peers reading different books than he did or his peers wondered why he took longer to complete tasks or even worse, when he had to explain to these peers, that were in his work group, why it took him a bit longer to read or write that passage they needed to get through for a group project. He is currently in 6th grade and while he has made significant gains in his reading, he still struggles. Unfortunately I could not spare him from that shame.

My school district has made solid efforts to address students with dyslexia in our school. As mentioned, my oldest son has made significant progress now that my school district has a teacher who is Associate Level certified in the Orton-Gillingham approach, as well as another who is Wilson certified. In addition, the school has undertaken efforts for early

identification, which is what lead to concerns with reading for my 2nd grader. This is still not enough. We need to do more. We need to insist that schools start early identification efforts in Kindergarten and provide real evidence based instruction for all students, as this not only benefits the struggling reader but all children that are learning to read. We need to insist that early elementary teachers are taught how to spot the warning signs, and that there are appropriately trained and **certified** staff to perform not only early assessments, but the actual implementation of evidenced based, multisensory reading approaches. We need to make people understand that just because one learns to read differently it does not make them any less valuable as a human being or any less able to do whatever they can dream of in life. We owe it to ourselves to educate children so that they can become productive citizens of our state, but most importantly, we owe it to them so that they can realize their dreams.

Respectfully submitted,

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