



March 1, 2016

Benjamin Powers
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214 Main Street
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Re: SB 317

To the Members of the Education Committee:

I am providing written testimony in support of SB 317, An Act Concerning Dyslexia but respectfully request that an amendment be made that candidates seeking a remedial reading endorsement complete a graduate level program aligned with evidence-based practices and the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. I provide this testimony on the basis of sixteen years of experience, both in public and independent schools, working with students with dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities.

As a resident of Fairfield, CT, I submit my testimony from four different perspectives: as a student who struggled in elementary school with reading, as an educator who has worked with dyslexic children for the past sixteen years, as a parent of a kindergartner and a second grader enrolled in a Connecticut public school, and as a doctoral candidate, who is looking at the self-efficacy perceptions of students with dyslexia.

I applaud the Committee for taking the important step of providing more concrete curriculum for teacher training programs to have enhanced requirements for providing educators with the information to help in the detection, recognition, and remediation of individuals with dyslexia using research and evidenced-based instruction. While I fully support this bill, I wish to submit to the committee that it does not go far enough in providing the necessary supports to help educators achieve the best outcomes with their students. Training in evidenced-based reading programs, like those based on the Orton-Gillingham approach, takes considerable time and effort, and that instruction alone would fill more time than a single course would allow. Likewise, there is the critically important component of providing practicum hours, so educators have experience putting into practice what they've learned under the guidance of those with experience. In addition, teachers need the wealth of resources, awareness, and training in global best practices for students with dyslexia as outlined by the IDA, which demands much more than a single course experience. In essence, a course, while a step forward, does not alone address the substantial training needs for educators to be equipped to help students with dyslexia.

Research continues to support the large percentage of students with dyslexia in our schools, both those identified and those who go unidentified, as well as the significant body of research on how we can effectively reach and teach those students. In addition to that substantial percentage of students, however, is the understanding that those same best-practices for the dyslexic community would help all students, regardless of whether they are dyslexic individuals or not. In reviewing the testing outcomes for reading in many of the school districts in Connecticut, it is clear that our current standards for reading instruction are not benefiting enough children, and the standards identified by the IDA would be beneficial in helping all students learn to read. I have two children enrolled in Connecticut public schools, and my wife and I, who are both Orton-Gillingham trained, see that there is a strong demand for significantly better teacher training in evidence-based programs for reading instruction, which would likely impact reading success positively for all learners.

At our school, we have a keen awareness of the amount of time and training it takes to prepare our educators to work with students with dyslexia, in spite of their graduate-level education in CT approved programs and/or former teaching experiences prior to arriving here. We provide a minimum of 30-70 hours of active instruction before educators in our building can work with our dyslexic students, and even with that depth of training, they are working under the guidance of experienced and thoroughly trained mentors and receive ongoing professional development and support.

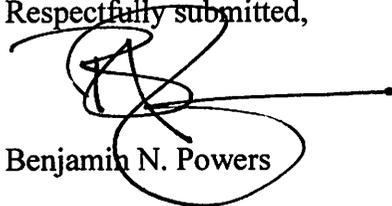
There is a preponderance of evidence that shows the results of the negative experiences dyslexic children currently have in schools. Dr. Sally Shaywitz of Yale University estimates that 15% of the US population has dyslexia or a similar language-based learning disability; more strikingly, it is estimated that 41% of the US prison population has dyslexia or a similar language-based learning disability. The proper identification of and remediation for students with dyslexia is straightforward, effective, and inexpensive. With proper intervention strategies, 70% of students with dyslexia can be reading at grade level within three years of the implementation of evidenced-based instruction in approaches like Orton-Gillingham.

As someone who has taught students with dyslexia and runs a specialized school for that same population, I have witnessed the significant results that the right type of training and evidence-based approaches have on the success of students learning to read. We enroll many students who have failed at reading in public schools, and, for many of them, within a short period of time, we are able to help them achieve significant gains in reading, often getting them back on or above grade level. There is no secret recipe to our work: we use evidence-based approaches validated by the research community, and we train our teachers properly. It would behoove the committee to consider enacting those same standards, i.e., implementing evidence-based training and a substantial amount of it, so that public schools could affect the

same outcome we see in our independent school model. Let the state of Connecticut be a leader in best-practices for the dyslexic community as well as for literacy instruction.

It is with a great sense of urgency that I respectfully request that you pass SB 317, and I strongly urge the committee to add an addendum that candidates must complete a graduate level program aligned with evidence-based practices and the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. It is only through the use of the evidence-based approaches coupled with the right training that we will see change in our schools.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Benjamin N. Powers", written over the typed name. The signature is stylized with loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Benjamin N. Powers