

Written Testimony Senate Bill 317

My name is Harriet Clark. I am a retired special education teacher with a 6th year in language learning disabilities, concentration in dyslexia. I live in Prospect, CT.

I am providing testimony concerning Senate Bill 317, An Act concerning Dyslexia. I respectfully suggest that his bill does not go far enough in addressing the need for thorough training of teachers in both the neurological nature of dyslexia but also the rich complexity of the English language.

After one frustrating year in the classroom as a special educator, I realized my masters degree from a Connecticut state university did not prepare me to teach my class of 14 students with learning disabilities how to read. On my own time and money, I attended an intensive course in the Orton-Gillingham approach to how to teach students with dyslexia to read – i.e. to decode and to understand their language. The OG training teaches an APPROACH; it is not a curriculum.

Human language is the most highly developed of all animals. Learning to read and write is a relatively recent phenomenon in human development While listening and speaking develop naturally, reading and writing must be learned.

Typically 3 out of 5 children learn to read intuitively because their brains are equipped to make sense of our alphabetic symbols and hear subtle differences in speech sounds. The fourth child needs a little direct instruction and practice in distinguishing letter names, forms and sounds before they can become proficient. And that fifth child? Potentially dyslexic who must receive plenty of direct instruction in the basics of phonology, phonics and English language structure.

The approach to teaching children with dyslexia is not found in a curriculum. The difference in teaching a child with dyslexia is not in WHAT is taught so much as in HOW those skills are presented, the approach.

Many of our teachers have not received training in HOW to teach children with dyslexia to read. Many special education and remedial reading teachers use a curriculum which might be appropriate – i.e. sequential, cumulative, multisensory - sometimes with no training, sometimes with a brief introduction. They receive no practicum and feedback and continuing professional development. These teachers will not succeed in teaching dyslexics to read and their students will continue to feel frustrated and inadequate.

I once heard a special education teacher who was using a typically used alternative curriculum, "Teaching phonics is SO boring!" That teacher has not fallen in love with the English language, its structure, its rules, and its rich diversity. But she was not taught to appreciate those things. She can't teach what she doesn't know.

Teacher preparation in reading must be comprehensive. Course content must be research based and align with current knowledge from the fields of educational neurological research. These standards of effective instruction have been long understood – since the 1930s. You would do a disservice to both teachers and students

by failing to require comprehensive training and practicums in evidence based reading instruction for the Remedial Reading (102) Endorsement.

One course in Dyslexia is *NOT SUFFICIENT*. After my initial OG course, I needed guidance as I implemented an unfamiliar approach with students on differing levels of skill. I continued to seek more information about dyslexia, attending conferences, taking courses, and learning about the importance of early oral language development to the acquisition of reading. I earned a 6th year degree in language learning disabilities. Since 1978, I continue to learn about the extraordinary capacity of the brain to grow and change when given the right reading instruction.

We are fortunate in Connecticut to have the resources we need to prepare teachers to be effective teachers of reading to ALL students.

- The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity started by the Doctors Shaywitz in the 1980s have conducted research in dyslexia and its neurobiology.
- Haskins Laboratories in New Haven is renowned for its research in speech, language and reading. Dr. Kenneth Pugh's fMRIs of dyslexic brains while reading before and after intensive therapy are remarkable and should be seen by teachers.
- Susan Santora, founder and clinical director of Learning House in Guilford, has been tutoring children and training teachers in the OG approach since the 1980s.
- Literacy How in North Branford, started by Margie Gillis, has been teaching teachers to partner with schools to demonstrate research based effective reading strategies and to coach teachers new to the approach.

We don't need another study. We don't need to figure out how to train teachers to be effective teachers of reading to all students, dyslexic and typical. Teachers of Kindergarten through grade three **MUST** receive comprehensive training in based reading methods, coaching and continuing professional development as quickly as possible. Certified teachers – even content area teachers – need professional development in the science of reading because ultimately all teachers teach reading.

Every child has the right to read. We know from research that 95% of children can be taught to read. We cannot afford to waste any more time further handicapping children with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Their failure to read on grade level is the failure of our educational system.

“Teachers play a variety of roles in their work—instructor, coach, advocate, and learner—but they also act as scientists in several ways. As they make the important decisions about what and how to teach, they must evaluate the claims associated with educational strategies and programs. And in the classroom, they must constantly assess and reassess the value of programs and their impact on students.”

—National Institute for Literacy (2005). *Using research and reason in education. What is scientifically based research? A guide for teachers.*