

Date: February 29, 2016

To: Education Committee

Fr: Kit Savage

Re: Testimony on Senate Bill #317: An Act Concerning Dyslexia

I thank the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kit Savage, I am the parent of two children with dyslexia and I live in Darien, Connecticut.

I support that an amended Senate Bill No. 317, An Act Concerning Dyslexia should be passed. As written, this Bill is insufficient and unacceptable. The Bill must be amended to include teacher training in scientifically based reading programs. The state data on reading progress demonstrates that dyslexic children are failing to learn to read each and every year.

This gap in teacher training within higher education sets up an inevitable failure of the PPT process for families whose children have Dyslexia.

Administrators tell Parents that the District's certified teachers are capable of remediating reading in special education. When in reality, Connecticut's certified special ed teachers are unprepared.

The net result is to effectively deny dyslexic students access to scientifically based programs. Which is the only intervention that has been proven to close the achievement gap. And parents enter the public education system unaware of this conflict of interest.

Time passes, Parents request progress monitoring on their child's decoding skills. Data is rarely if ever provided. This triggers the shift in the PPT process towards an Administrator taking over the discussions in our PPTs.

I have seen many special education teachers sit silently when the discussion turns to what specific skills are being remediated and how exactly is progress monitoring being collected?

If parents persist as they should to get an effective IEP. Administration relies upon state department certification as protection from being held accountable for educational progress.

This is the root of the problem. Teaching degree programs are inadequately training future educators in how to teach reading. It ends up leaving dyslexic children languishing in Connecticut's public schools.

This is tragic because it is entirely preventable. Candidates in Special Education teaching programs want to learn how to teach reading to dyslexic students. And dyslexic students desperately want to be successful readers.

The State Department of Education knows the science of reading and the IDA recommendations for teacher training.

Parents are getting smarter and recognizing how the State Department of Education is complicit in the lack of accountability for educating our children.

I did the math to calculate the number of hours it took to fail to remediate dyslexia in my kids. We had the right program on paper in the IEP. An hour a day plus after school. I calculated approximately 300 hours a year over three years to fail to close the literacy gap. One of our kids left public at the end of third grade a non reader. After approximately 900 hours of "interventions".

Each child wasted years failing in District while the Administration insisted there was a remedial reading program because it had been delivered by a certified special educator.

Each child started private tutoring after school at age 7 in first grade. No tutors in school, so summer had to be devoted to weeks intensive 1:1 tutoring for decoding. Bandaid #1.

By 2nd grade, each child needed a paraprofessional to read curriculum in general education. Costly and paraprofessionals are not trained to support remedial reading. More Bandaids.

Each summer we added 1:1 decoding tutoring for 2 hours a day to undo confusion, provide a consistent program and attempt to regain lost progress. More Bandaids....

Three years of failure to make appropriate progress. Every combination of teacher and tutor except what was best for the child.

My child now attends The Windward School. The Windward School uses the science of reading to provide 120 minutes a day of language arts daily to their Dyslexic students. They need every minute of instruction. The Windward School has intensively trained teachers and they close the achievement gap. Each year their students make more than one year's progress in one year's time.

This was the goal of special education - to actually close the achievement gap between dyslexic students and typical peers in general education.

Research supports that it takes about 250- 300 hours a year over a span of 2 to 5 years to remediate reading for dyslexic students. Does this Bill support our Teachers to meet that rigorous standard?

IDA recommendations are based on scientific facts proven to close the achievement gap. Using science has the added benefit of being cost effective over time for local school districts to invest in properly trained remedial reading teachers.

We know the Department of Education could have mandated doing the right thing all along. They didn't. The CSDE consistently fails to act to meaningfully enforce accountability upon districts who fail to improve educational outcomes for their special education students.

The State Department is good at wasting time in multi-year studies and task forces chock full of Union reps to legislate yet another free pass for failing our kids. We depend upon our legislators to represent their constituent families and act to protect their children's education.

Taxpayers do pay long term costs when illiterate children become illiterate adults. They pay short term costs when OOD placements to schools for dyslexic children increasingly become the norm.

The State Department of Education refuses to enforce that teachers are not properly trained to teach remedial reading. I urge each of you to take action to support an amended SB Bill #317 that adds explicit teacher training in remedial reading.

Thank you.

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