

Testimony on SB 317

AN ACT CONCERNING DYSLEXIA

Education Committee March 2, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Merrill Gay and I am a member of the New Britain Board of Education. I would like to offer this testimony on SB 317 an act concerning dyslexia.

This bill is well intentioned but wholly inadequate to meet the needs of students with dyslexia. It proposes requiring that teachers applying for a remedial reading, remedial language arts or reading consultant endorsement take a course in the diagnosis and remediation of reading and language arts that includes instruction in the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with dyslexia. That would be a wonderful course to require of all candidates for an elementary education certification, but it is not nearly enough to equip the people charged with actually teaching students with dyslexia how to read.

Our district in New Britain has spent thousands and thousands of dollars getting teachers trained by Wilson. Unfortunately, we rank 158th in per pupil spending in the state, so we don't have any money in our operating budget for this. It's only possible pay for teachers to get Wilson training when we can find grants to pay for it. With 10,000 students in 14 schools we currently have 4 teachers who are Wilson certified. There are 9 more working on it, but they still have a ways to go. Two thirds of our students are not proficient in reading. The vast majority of them are not dyslexic. They are poor, live in homes where there aren't any books, started kindergarten with very small vocabularies and many are learning English at school. Interspersed among those 6,600 children who aren't proficient are some students with dyslexia. We are required by IDEA to provide an education appropriate to their disability, but as you can imagine our reading interventionists are pretty overwhelmed and most are not trained in an evidence based to teach reading to students with dyslexia.

We desperately need higher education to step up its game. We need teachers coming out of our colleges who are equipped with the latest knowledge and methods for teaching students with dyslexia. I urge you to find ways to strengthen this bill.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.