

Testimony For Senate Bill No. 317/oral testimony and written submittal

My name is Nicole Bacile, I am a parent, homeschool educator and advocate for my 9 year old son Luca Bacile. I live in Enfield, CT. I am providing testimony concerning Senate Bill No. 317, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Professional Development and In-Service Training Requirements for Educators. I respectfully request you amend this bill to include licensure and teacher preparation requirements, which align with the IDA Knowledge & Practice Standards, so we may meet the literacy needs of ALL students, including those with Dyslexia.

Our family's story begins as every other parent with a child of dyslexia. Luca wasn't writing his letters, memorizing his alphabet, couldn't remember his birth date, and he was complaining his hands weren't made for writing as early as age four. Luca was a mentor in a town sponsored Preschool that integrated children with disabilities. His teacher had a master's in special education. He was chosen to be a mentor for other students. Not once during that year of education was there a conversation as to why he wasn't meeting grade level expectations in area's of writing, drawing or alphabet memorization (I laughed when I got his report card- unable to draw like other kids his age or writing his name at age 4). Because of his positive contributions and participation in class he went unnoticed. He was promoted onto Kindergarten.

I knew in my gut there was something off. So I choose to keep him home from age 5 to 6. He entered Kindergarten at age 6. Still unable to memorize the alphabet, write his letters (never up to grade standards written on each report card) or numbers. My joyful son entered Kindergarten with all the innocence of a child. By December, he was crying he didn't want to return after Christmas break. I found out that seats were rotated and the girl sitting next to him wrote his numbers for him. Now that she moved seats he did not know how to write his numbers 1-10. He complained his hands weren't made for writing. He sobbed and sobbed and did want to go back. Little did I know this would be the beginning of the end of my son's innocent childhood. He would begin to compensate for disability by being the best helper in class and learning to memorize the answers.

When I asked the teacher for a consult for Luca's handwriting she offered exercises for his hands and a special pencil grip." He was just a boy and they take longer to mature" was the advice given (yet Luca was six years old moving onto seven while her other students were four years moving onto five year olds).

First grade was when Luca first spoke up. Luca told me that he could not read the words in the books assigned to him at book nook time. He could only look at the pictures. I immediately spoke with his teacher and she said that was the beginning stages of a reader. One of the steps to learn. So from September to November 10, he sat quietly in his nook looking at pictures. During his first parent teacher conference the teacher began as the rest of his had done, "what pleasure to have in class," "always the first to help with jobs," "he is a leader and role model," but he is only reading at a kindergarten level. " Nothing to worry about he is on our radar."

My seven year old first grader could not read? He had told me he couldn't read. So I jumped into action, requesting special help. I was told they were working on a grant to have a helper come in with literacy into the class but they were unsure when. After advocating, we ended up getting Luca help with a reading specialist for an hour a day in the school. This was equivalent to corporal punishment for him. The last hour of the school day practicing words. February hit and he had not made any progress in his reading level according to the specialist. I requested further testing. Again another parent initiative. His progress did not improve with these hour long sessions. In April Luca's test results indicated he had a decoding disability. When I asked if that was Dyslexia I was told they don't use that word. His pediatrician would be able to test him. When I went to the pediatrician he said the school was responsible for the testing.

In addition to an hour of working with a reading specialist he now worked with a special education teacher to help him complete his class work and begin the basics of phonics. Needless to say, Luca began crying before school everyday and evening, getting migraines, and started hitting himself because he couldn't read. No longer was he a leader in class, he was the one who couldn't read a chapter book. Luca's self esteem was gone. A therapist was needed. Upon completion of first grade I was handed an envelope from a educator in his reading resource room with a book in it Overcoming Dyslexia by Dr. Sally Shaywitz.

I researched our family history and on my father's side his brother and son both had Dyslexia. The son went to the Curtis Blake School in Springfield, Ma. My 3 brothers were all diagnosed with ADHD (both hyperactive and inattentive) in their school system at their time. My niece a freshman in high school was diagnosed with ADHD (medicated) and recently tested at a sixth grade reading level.

During Luca's second grade year I requested through a PPT meeting further testing from a Neuropsychologist Evaluation to determine dyslexia. In the meantime, my son is still at a Kindergarten reading level in second grade. I was told by his teacher two things that resonate. First at open house in October, "let me be the teacher and you be the mother." Second was at a parent conference in November, "at least he is not the lowest reader in class."

Testing was delayed and dragged on with the winter snow storms and Luca continued to struggle in second grade with migraines. He now had special education for half hour a day working in a program where the teacher was not certified, yet she was qualified as a special education teacher. This program specified one on one teaching for 90 minutes a session for three times per week. Luca had a half hour session per day with six other kids that were not in his program. By April testing concluded, Luca was diagnosed with ADHD (inattentive), Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Executive Functioning and Working Memory.

With this diagnosis from the Neuropsychologist at the PPT meeting in June, we were faced with opposition. The most help we were going to receive was an hour of special education (not one on one) with a qualified teacher who had no training or education teaching students with dyslexia. When I asked for a tutor certified in the Wilson program I was told the teachers were qualified.

Needless to say the story does not end there.... although I wish it had. Per Luca's IEP we received tutoring from his second grade special education teacher over the summer for a recommended 12 hours in July. Luca through therapy was able to seek outlets for his anxiety and swimming was one of them. In July he had just won state championships in his division for 8 and under backstroke. The next day he collapsed and cried like an infant when I asked him to read a selection of books from his teacher's summer reading list so we could participate in a library bingo program. Almost age 9 (in August) his reading list was Jam Berry, The Cat in the Hat, Fox in Sox. He wasn't crying because they were from his six year old sisters bookshelf, he cried because he couldn't read them. That was the end of tutoring. He went to a few more sessions and cried through them and asked me to sit with him. Luca begged me to stop the tutoring and his therapist agreed it was back pedaling our progress. We decided to homeschool. .

Looking back on all of Luca's report cards all the red flags were there. In conclusion, has our district trained their staff (professional development) on how to evaluate, identify (early), educate and accommodate students with Dyslexia as Higher Education (teacher preparation) we would not of failed Luca. Our school has no type of training concerning Dyslexia. Comprehensive training within Higher Education (teacher preparation) concerning Structured Literacy, via a masters or 6th year degree, Before educators reach the classroom will provide educators with the tools to support students with Dyslexia instead of receiving training via professional development/ in-service.

It is crucial to emphasize the importance of Higher Education and Teacher Knowledge regarding Dyslexia As evidenced by CT reading scores, and our personal stories, Institutions of Higher Education are not adequately preparing our teachers to teach reading to students with Dyslexia? Districts currently bear the burden and cost of educating teachers when Higher Education has failed to do so? Additionally, many Districts, when unable to provide an appropriate education, bear the cost of outplacement of the student. We as parents have also taken a financial hit with costs for tutors, testing, and outplacements. We MUST see teacher candidates within CT Institutes of Higher Education trained to meet the literacy needs of ALL students, including those with Dyslexia! This education comes not from a few days of training but from in depth content curriculum in structured literacy.

As noted in Luca's experience a qualified teacher is not a certified teacher. Teacher knowledge to provide Evidence - Based Intervention is key. Students with Dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach/structured literacy. Did your child receive evidence-based interventions that were implemented with fidelity by a highly qualified practitioner wherein your child has made progress; or have you had to obtain outside tutoring, outplacement or are you advocating for appropriate interventions.

IDA knowledge and practice standards are being implemented Nationwide. Connecticut needs to move to a structured literacy model/approach in reading in order to meet the literacy needs of ALL students, including students with Dyslexia.

Sincerely,
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