

My name is Sonia Bannon de Penagos (Milford, CT), I am a parent and teacher and I live in Milford, CT. I am providing testimony concerning Senate Bill 317, An Act Concerning Dyslexia. 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.

My testimony begins as a teacher. In 2001 I became an elementary teacher in Milford, CT. It was an adventure into my second career and it was a true calling. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would not be prepared to teach reading to my 5th grade class. It was my belief that 5th grade students would be “reading to learn” instead of “learning to read”. Nothing could be further from the truth. About 50% of my class was struggling readers. Out of that 50%, 30% were receiving “pullout” services; which left me with 70% of the struggling readers for every subject level. I was a deer in headlights when it came to teaching these students. I recall feeling so inadequate and feeling that these students were wasting a year of their academic lives because they had me for a teacher. I soon realized I was not alone. Every teacher, and I mean every teacher, I worked with, had students that they knew they could not help. Students would get passed along to the next grade level without ever receiving the reading instruction they needed. An enormous gap would grow each year setting the student further and further behind.

It was appalling to me, as a 5th grade teacher to have to begin the “Special Education identification Process” on an 11 year old student. How did student X get to be in 5th grade without a 504 or IEP? But year after year, I would go through the process: observation- strategies-more strategies-a mountain of paper work – and finally evaluation and identification of some learning disability. Just in time for student X to go to 6th grade.

However, even with proper identification and a 504 or IEP, I was ill equipped to teach my struggling students. My school district would change the reading program frequently. Nothing was consistent when it came to teaching students how to read. We were using a “whole language” approach to teaching students how to read. However, this approach doesn’t work for students with processing issues.

In 2006, I moved to Little Rock, AR and taught for Pulaski County Special School District. I faced the exact same struggles there that I did in Milford, CT

I finally turned to technology to reach my struggling students and my grade level students and my high achieving students. From there I became a technology integrationist. And as much as I love technology in education, I realize that technology alone cannot teach a student with processing issues.

Fast forward to 2013: Our son was diagnosed with VPPD (visual perceptual processing disorder). We knew deep down in our hearts that he would eventually be diagnosed with Dyslexia. And in April 2015, he was. One can only imagine the panic I felt when he was diagnosed. Being a teacher in the public schools, I knew that teachers in our home town were not equipped or prepared to teach our son how to read. IEP or no IEP, our son needed a multisensory –simultaneously –visual-auditory/kinesthetic/tactile approach to reading and our public schools had no program, no tools, no training for their teachers.

We returned to CT in the summer of 2015. We put our son into a private school for students who have dyslexia. It was a difficult decision because of the financial burden it has put on our family. But our son is getting the instruction that he needs. He has teachers that have a program, they have the tools necessary and they have the training the need. Not to mention constant support provided by an outside consultant. This person observes teaching and student responses and achievement and is constantly guiding teachers through their instruction process. It is a dream come true for students, parent, and teachers.

I often feel guilty (even criminal) that there are so many students out there, who are like my son, that are not getting the education that he is getting. At times I compare myself to one of those people on Wall Street that had “insider trading information”. And the reality is, I did. I knew. I knew what most people do not know. I knew the signs of dyslexia and the kind of education my son needs.

We have The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity right in our own backyard. We do not need a study to tell us what is best for our students who have dyslexia. Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity has already done that for us. (Along with other reputable/credible universities). The programs are out there to help these students. They just need to make their way into the classroom and teachers need to have the tools, training and guidance to implement these programs.

Again, in regards to Senate Bill No. 174, 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.

Thank you,

Sonia Bannon de Penagos