

Our names are John and Jessica Theisen and we are the parents of a 10 year old severely dyslexic child. We are writing to support Senate Bill Number 317, but feel it is not comprehensive enough to provide the needed supports to the dyslexic student. The State Department of Education's stance on early literacy is: "The importance of children's early literacy development cannot be overstated. Children's success in school and later in life is to a great extent dependent upon their ability to read and write." As of 2013, CMT test scores reflect that almost a third of CT students are not proficient in reading as of third grade. Most research reflects that if a child is not reading at grade level by third grade, they most likely will never catch up.

We placed our daughter, Isabelle, in the town preschool assuming she would get early interventions, as something just did not seem quite right. We were not sure what it was at the time but felt the professionals would be able to help. We could write a book on what ensued over the next 5 years, but quite honestly that would cause us to relive our worst nightmare. Isabelle could not read at all exiting kindergarten, but we were told she was a little delayed. In first grade she received daily 30 minute reading instruction with a reading specialist who had over 30 years experience. Six months into first grade, Isabelle still could not read and we were told she "lacked attention". Heading into second grade, her special education teacher, who only had a few years on the job confided that she did not think she was qualified to help Isabelle and was going to talk to her bosses. We assume she was told that if she liked her job, she would make it work. With a big heart and trying her best, she made a bad situation worse. If you are dyslexic, and the person teaching you how to read does not put the exact correct sound on a letter, the consequence is significant. Over the summer, we sent Isabelle to an Orton Gillingham program that had to unteach what Isabelle learned over that year, because the wrong pronunciations were placed on the letters by the special education teacher.

Third grade was even worse and we pulled Isabelle out and placed her in a school specific for children with dyslexia. We are middle class people and have sacrificed everything to put her in an expensive school, simply because the public school system does not have staff adequately trained to deal with these kids. The scary part of all of it is that how dyslexic children are taught, would benefit all children. With the amount of money spent on education and a third of children are not proficient in reading is shameful. So what do you do? You start at our institutions of higher education.

A class on dyslexia is only the tip of the iceberg. Teachers need to be prepared using evidence based curriculum and content which have been proven effective. IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading, should be aligned with the Remedial Reading (102) Endorsement. Connecticut has the Yale Center for Dyslexia, Haskins Laboratories and Literacy How in their own backyard and their resources are not utilized to the extent they could be. The assistance and expertise they could provide to the public schools and they are often shunned, because the district knows better than the experts. The State must get buy in from the school districts who seem to spend more money on attorneys to keep services away from children, then provide them with the services that are needed. It is a systemic problem and having a class on what it is will not fix it. Districts spend tons of money on reading programs and then give them to unqualified persons to implement, resulting in no fidelity.

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