

This is my written testimony; I will not be testifying in person.

My name is Glenda O'Connell. I live in Fairfield, CT. I FULLY support HB 7254, an Act requiring Special Education Teachers to complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Interventions for students with Dyslexia.

My son, Tommy, is currently in 8th grade at Fairfield Woods Middle School. He began his education at a small parochial school but it became clear to us by the time he turned 8 years old that he would not succeed at this school, despite the 100% effort he gave to his schoolwork and homework. My husband and I switched him to our local public school. There he received reading support and also math support, after his teachers reviewed his Blue Ribbon results.

Tommy compensated for his difficulties by relying on his fantastic ability to learn and retain auditorily as he had such difficulty with decoding, spelling, writing, etc. He continued to achieve the lowest scores on his CMT's, SBAC's, and Star Testing. Yet, in school he could achieve A's and B's in all of his classes because of his ability to retain the spoken word, memorize it and regurgitate it back on a test.

This year after I requested a meeting with the staff to discuss a new round of dismal standardized test results, the Vice Principal asked if I would consent to Tommy being considered for a year-long program in which an internal Reading Specialist was being trained in the Wilson Reading System. Upon completion of her one-on-one work with Tommy, the Reading Specialist would become the school's Dyslexia specialist. After Tommy met with her for an initial assessment, Wilson approved his participation. Finally, his challenges were being addressed.

Simultaneously, we were encouraged to have him opt out of a foreign language and instead participate in a Group Reading/Writing class for those with such deficiencies. Tommy was also evaluated/assessed by the School Psychologist, Speech Pathologist, Reading Specialist, etc. In December 2016, the end result of almost 30 hours of testing determined that Tommy is of average intelligence but is dyslexic. I felt SO relieved, as it is what my maternal instinct had told me was the reason for his struggles ever since he was a small learner. Tommy now continues to participate in his Group Reading/Writing class, as well as his one-on-one Wilson class. He also is under the guidance of a Special Education teacher and paraprofessional who assist him with pre-learning concepts before they are introduced to the class, and assist him with writing.

I know there are so many children who suffer like Tommy. I am so blessed in that he has not "given up" on school, although he does articulate "I'm so bad at school." It's unfortunate that it has taken this long to get him the help he needs, and thankfully his self-esteem has not suffered throughout it. If there were not specific, targeted instruction for Tommy at this point, as the SBAC indicates, he would struggle in higher learning and in a career. Hopefully because of it he will be able to incorporate strategies to succeed. PLEASE support Bill 7254 to be sure that the Special Education teachers have the education and tools to help Dyslexics, and not give up on students like Tommy!

Respectfully,

Glenda O'Connell

Fairfield, CT