

My name is Jane Ross. I live in Westport, CT. I am writing to let you know that 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.

This is my written testimony. I will not be testifying at the hearing.

I am the parent of a son with dyslexia, and the founder and Executive Director of Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing information and support to parents of children with learning disabilities -- including over 2,000 here in Connecticut, who attend our educational programs and receive our free e-newsletter. Governor Malloy is an honorary member of our Board of Directors, and served as the MC of our 2010 annual gala.

In addition to representing many parents, as well as professionals, I am pleased to write you concerning the critical importance of evidence-based structured literacy in preparing my son, Benjamin Brennan to become a successful student and today, a successful adult.

An evaluation by an outside evaluator in the spring of his 4th-grade year at Kings Highway School in Westport revealed that despite his considerable intelligence and strengths, at the age of 10 he still could not read: He is dyslexic. After a series of PPT meetings, he was provided with multi-sensory structured language instruction, the research-proven key to teaching children with dyslexia, starting in 5th grade, when he was 10. He continued to struggle to master reading, as well as other subjects throughout middle school in Westport and high school, at St. Luke's School in New Canaan.

After finally taking a full load of subjects for the first time as a senior at St. Luke's, he went on to attend Bowdoin College, from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 2008. After working for two years, he took a Masters Degree in Architecture at the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture and currently works as an architect at a leading U.S. firm.

The appropriate support he finally received starting in 5th grade, along with his intelligence, his talents and very hard work have enabled him to become a very productive and successful professional, rather than experiencing the very grim outcomes of many students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities who do not receive such support.

It is critically important for Special Education teachers to receive a program of study in how to address the many students with dyslexia — the highest proportion of all students identified for Special Education — in order for them to provide the interventions that will make it possible for these bright, often very talented students to succeed in school, as well as in life.

These are our most vulnerable students. Ensuring we have teachers who have received training in providing evidence-based support will enable them to become some of our most productive adults, rather than facing a future that for many, results in under- or unemployment, time in correctional institutions, and a missed opportunity to realize their great potential.

Thank you for your dedication to our students, and for the opportunity to support this tremendously important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Ross