

My name is Cathie Smollon, and I am a resident of Ridgefield, Connecticut and a public school teacher of 30 years, 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.

Dyslexic children cannot receive a Free and Appropriate Education without a program that provides evidence-based instruction. How can this occur unless Special Education Teachers receive the proper training? Science has made great strides to unveil the wonders of the human mind, but if we ignore the knowledge that is gained, are we any better off than if the research was never done? When we know what is right to do and do not act, this is not a sin of omission, this is equal to committing a crime. All children have the right to an appropriate education, and for children with dyslexia this means evidence-based structured literacy interventions. I will share the brief history of what our family endured.

My son Tristan Taranto has dyslexia. His special education services were delayed by the RtI Model's use of Tiers 1, 2 and 3. In 2nd grade he was finally classified LD and received daily special education services, but continued to show little to no growth in reading. His services were ineffective. Due to the lack of progress, I decided to have him privately tested. I was informed that not only was he dyslexic, but he had a superior IQ. I broke down crying, because I had waited so long and he had been so under serviced for four critical years. The damage done was substantial.

The window for early and appropriate evidence-based instruction had been lost, I still grieve the damage done by the lack of evidence based instruction. He received daily reading instruction, but it DIDN'T work, because it was not the appropriate instruction. Teachers need to use programs that show results. They need proper training to appropriately use the programs. Who cares if a child is identified and a box checked if the appropriate instruction is not given?

Do I think Tristan's teachers did not want to help him? Absolutely not. They were as in the dark as I was as to what he needed. Unfortunately, for my son a tremendous amount of emotional and psychological suffering occurred. He was a popular and loving child, but as students enter fourth and fifth grade in a competitive district, they become aware of other children's differences and abilities or lack thereof. He spirally quickly down to a place where he decided that if this was the type of world he had to live in, that he did not want to live anymore. Tristan attended Ridgefield Public Schools, from kindergarten until 5th grade, when he refused to go to school any longer. I believe that if Tristan had special educators who were properly trained to teach dyslexic students with evidence based education, he would have had a much more positive elementary school experience. He could have been spared years of suffering and thinking that there was something terribly wrong with him, when he is actually very bright and insanely artistic.

I have had him privately tutored, costing my family tens of thousands of unreimbursed dollars, and I took him to the district in which I teach in Westchester, NY. Many dyslexic families sacrifice much of their family wealth to support their child. We deferred building up our retirement accounts, limited our vacations, outings and activities, and picked up extra work to pay for our son's Orton-Gillingham tutoring. We were able to save my son, both academically and emotionally with years of tutoring and therapy. This all could have been avoided if the right methods had been employed. TRAIN OUR TEACHERS. They deserve and the students with dyslexia deserve it.

