

Dear Legislators,

My name is Jessica Theisen from Milford, CT and I write today in support of HB7254. HB7254, an Act Requiring Special Education Teachers to Complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Interventions for Students with Dyslexia is long overdue.

I have an 11 year old daughter, Isabelle, who is severely dyslexic. We placed her in the town preschool assuming she would get early interventions as we knew something was not quite right. As Isabelle was entering 2nd grade she could not read, write or do math and we were told by the school that she was age appropriate. Once we retained an attorney, our age appropriate child was now offered 15 hours of service. In 2nd grade she had a special education teacher who was a couple of years out of college and who was ill equipped to help Isabelle. She wanted very much to help her read, but felt it was beyond her ability to help. We assume she was told if she liked her job in the district, she would have to teach Isabelle to read. Though her heart was big and she wanted to help, she actually made it worse by placing the wrong pronunciations on letters. If you do not have the proper education and training regarding dyslexia, something as simple as an "uh" noise on the pronunciation of a letter (ex. D sounded as duh), can make it quite worse for an early reader to read. Isabelle had to spend her summer between 2nd and 3rd grade unlearning what was learned over the past school year because of these pronunciations, while at the same time showing pre-k level of reading.

All research reflects that 1 in 5 children have dyslexia, but we are not preparing our special education teachers in college to deal with these kids. They graduate from colleges and are ill equipped to identify let alone remediate these kids. Not only are you doing these children a disservice but you are doing the special education teachers a disservice as well. In our case, the special education teacher wanted to help but she was not equipped to do so. With higher education charging students exorbitant tuition fees and then not preparing them for what their job is going to be is just plain wrong. A child with dyslexia will most likely, at some point, be under the supervision of a special education teacher.

Isabelle was completely traumatized by the public schools and my husband and I shudder to think what would have become of her, had we not pulled her out of the public schools in 3rd grade. She was a shell of her former self. Our family has sacrificed greatly to put her in a private school capable of dealing with her dyslexia and it has impacted everyone in our house. Please support this bill and see the common sense in it. With the fiscal crisis Connecticut is facing it seems even more prudent that higher education be responsible for the appropriate training of these teachers, and not the financially strapped districts or the kids in them. Institutions of higher education might not be a fan of this legislation, but they are being paid for a service and anyone graduating college should be prepared to deal with the many facets of any job. Thank you.

Jessica Theisen