

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6517

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE  
TO ANALYZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAWS GOVERNING DYSLEXIA

**Title:** INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING.

**Vote Date:** 3/18/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/2/2021

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

THE TASK FORCE TO ANALYZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAWS GOVERNING  
DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING

### REASONS FOR BILL:

To establish dyslexia education standards for teacher prep programs.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

- Secs. 1 & 2: shifts oversight of teacher prep programs and teacher certificate applicants from SDE as a whole to a new Office of Training Compliance within SDE
- Sec. 3: all new (see above)
- Removes the requirement that out-of-state teacher certificate applicants complete instruction in dyslexia detection and interventions (formerly Sec. 3)
- Removes the requirement that SDE establish a dyslexia in-service training program advisory council (formerly Sec. 4)
- Sec. 6: requires the new office to train institutions on how to select qualified supervisors of practicum hours, rather than require supervisors to present evidence of their qualifications to SDE
- Sec. 7: revises some measurements methods that SDE must incorporate into reading assessments; removes the requirement that SDE make family history questionnaires to pre-screen students for reading proficiency (reassigns to boards of education in Sec. 8); requires the data center, if established, to track student information only by disaggregated categories that keep student information nonidentifiable
- Sec. 8: assigns family history questionnaire design to boards of education; makes the survey voluntary and removes limitation to kindergarten

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

### [Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut State Department of Education \(CSDE\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in opposition. CSDE opposes the following sections for the reasons listed.

- Section 1
  - CSDE lacks the resources and expertise to implement its provisions. They also lack the capacity and expertise to audit each Educator Preparation Program (EPP) and course syllabi.
- Sections 2&3
  - The language "will create barriers of entry to educators who served outside of CT looking to obtain a CT certification."
- Section 4
  - CSDE "does not have the capacity to collect and evaluate training materials from all local education agencies (LEAs). This will also be an added burden for districts, that would be required to submit all in-house training materials to the Department for our review and evaluation."
- Section 5
  - The language "will prevent the Department from allowing currently certified educators with said endorsements, who hold an initial or provisional license, to advance their license to the next level unless the EPP program they completed at time of certification met the proposed bill requirements (which were not yet in place)."
- Section 6
  - "The Department does not authorize university or practicum supervisors; this is done at the EPP level. The requirements of this bill will significantly limit the number of individuals who will be considered qualified to serve as university supervisors; creating additional barriers of entry to the profession as potential candidates will outpace qualified supervisors."
- Section 7
  - CSDE "cannot support all elements of this section with current staff capacity and budget constraints." They list five additional components of reading which they believe should be administered as a second tier and included in more comprehensive exams of at-risk students.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

### [Allison M. Quirion, Co-Chair of The Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training, Founder of Decoding Dyslexia-CT:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Quirion explains what the Task Force did and provides a summary of its recommendations. She says, "The findings of the Task Force are clear: The dyslexia legislation has not been fully implemented due to the lack of guardrails being established and accountability measures not being put in place." She explains in detail what we need in order to change teacher preparation and professional development and why this legislation is needed. Ms. Quirion addresses specific concerns with the bill by section and highlights substitute language for sections 1(e) and 7.

**Jule McCombes-Tolis, Ph.D., Co-Chair of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training, Director of Reading and Language Development at Fairfield University:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Dr. McCombes-Tolis explains Connecticut's Framework for Response to Intervention and the potential impact of state-wide implementation. Dr. McCombes-Tolis also explains that current regulations are 23 years out of date and are in many regards counter-productive to state goals. She asks, "that we remain mindful of several equity and access issues that must be addressed simultaneously." Today there are only 422 remedial reading specialists in our public schools, "despite *ample* in-state public and private educator preparation programs," and this is a 12% decline over the last 3 years. Further, schools like Hartford have "no educators" for remedial reading while Greenwich has 18.

**Amy Geary, Director of Literacy Supports, ISAAC School, New London:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Geary was a member of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. She lists her extensive special education training and shares her experiences with dyslexic students. Yet despite her training, she says, "my special ed. and remedial reading degrees had not prepared me to teach someone how to read." She continues:

"Many special education teachers and reading specialists are dedicated professionals who do not have the tools needed to teach students with dyslexia. While they have spent years obtaining a degree from a reputable CT university, they graduate with an understanding to teach comprehension strategies or ill-equipped decoding strategies, such as guessing. Then these same teachers are held accountable when their students score low on state tests. The system of teaching and learning is failing both students and teachers. Unfortunately, special education teachers and reading specialists/consultants enter into their new careers without this knowledge."

She says, "early identification is key," but additional education costs both time and money. Therefore, she urges you to support the bill.

**Judith Rosenfield, M.A., CCC-SLP, King's Speech & Learning Center**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Rosenfield is a speech language pathologist, reading interventionist, and former member of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. She says that the incidence rate of dyslexia among children is one in five and that the state could make a huge difference by graduating students at age appropriate reading levels.

**Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services, Stonington Public Schools:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Van Etten served as Chair of the Higher Education Subcommittee on the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. She explains that 15-20% of students display symptoms of dyslexia and that teachers are not receiving the appropriate training in structured literacy. In her own district, ensuring teachers have the training to help dyslexic students has drained all professional development funds for the last five years. Further, private sector consultants were required because the Connecticut State Department of Education lacked in-service training models. Ms. Van Etten emphasizes the need for state-

wide in-service training, since not all districts can afford the training like hers could, and teachers are not adequately prepared by their undergraduate programming.

#### Laura Carl:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Carl was a member of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. Two of her five children are dyslexic and require instruction at The Kildonan School an hour away from their home because services were unavailable from the district.

#### Alissa Heizler-Mendoza

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Heizler-Mendoza was a member of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training and served as the chair of the K-3 screening subcommittee. She says, "Although legislation is in place, we still lack implementation and accountability in CT, resulting in our kids with dyslexia still not learning to read." Current CSDE screenings, she continues, do not meet the requirements in statute and do not reflect current research. Ms. Heizler-Mendoza says that less than 1% of students are identified as dyslexic when we should expect 10-20%. She says, "This data begs the question: how many students who are not meeting minimum reading achievement thresholds today are undiagnosed?"

#### Fumiko Hoeft, M.D., Ph.D., Professor of Neurophysiology (UCONN), Director of the Brain Imaging Research Center and Laboratory for Learning Engineering & Neural Systems (UCONN), Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry (UCSF), Co-Founder of Haskins Global Literacy Hub:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Dr. Hoeft was a member of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. She explains the universal screening process, the Assessment-Sub Committee's findings and recommendations, and offers substitute language for Section 7 as follows:

- Line 201-202 (1) measure phonics through ~~DELETE nonword and sight word reading,~~ **REPLACE WITH "real and pseudo word reading"**
- Line 218-219 students in kindergarten **ADD or at the time of entry into the school system**
- Line 219-220 ~~delete identifying students who are below proficiency in reading.~~ **REPLACE WITH "identifying students who are at-risk for becoming a poor reader."**

#### Rachael Gabriel, PhD, Associate Professor of Literacy Education, UCONN:

Submitted written testimony in support. Dr. Gabriel was appointed by the governor to serve on the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. She says, "there may be significant unintended consequences related to recent dyslexia legislation," resulting in disproportionate impacts to under-resourced districts and their students, and that an empirical evaluation is required to determine if legislation had the intended impact. "Though all districts have been required to contract with one of three vendors for universal screening tools," she continues, "our task force found that none of these products offers a comprehensive approach to dyslexia screening." Dr. Gabriel explains teacher preparation programs and personal development courses, lack evidence of efficacy. "Therefore, teacher preparation programs and districts have made significant investments of multiple resources without clear evidence that these investments serve the best interests of students with dyslexia or their peers. This is especially troubling when considering districts

whose resources are already stretched thin and whose achievement and equity require the most rigorous support."

**Steven Hernández, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO), Right to Read CT:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Hernández says, "every student has a right to read, and we know that there's a right way to teach them." He explains that failure to address this need has large negative impacts, "nearly half of Connecticut's public school students aren't meeting grade-level expectations in reading by third grade," and the state's data shows wide gaps in literacy by race, "reflecting an ongoing civil rights injustice." Since reading is the foundation of our education system, he says, students are likely to struggle across all subjects, and denied opportunities, if they are unable to read. He says:

"To that end, our coalition aims to solve this problem by systemizing professional development for in-service educators, sharing knowledge about evidence-based, structured literacy instruction and interventions for students with reading difficulties, including those with dyslexia. At the same time, however, Connecticut must also require teacher preparation programs to include pre-service training for future educators that is aligned with the science of reading. That's precisely what H.B. 6517 seeks to do. It would also require measures to screen for dyslexia, another concept we support because comprehensive assessments that identify literacy difficulties help educators to intervene once they are appropriately trained on the research of structured literacy."

**Kristin Allen:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Allen is a former special education teacher and current literacy specialist and trainer. She has seen first-hand how the system is failing many students due to a lack of understanding literacy education. She provides an example of a student who did not receive proper diagnosis or education for dyslexia and how it affected her school performance and outlook. Ms. Allen says, "the good news is, we have the ability to put a solution in place to resolve this issue..."

**Luca Bacile**

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Bacile is 14 years old and has dyslexia. He says, "In my experience, teachers don't know what dyslexia is. They don't understand how it affects your learning. Educating teachers will help identify younger kids who are dyslexic, helping them early will make their lives a lot less stressful and easier and put the students on a path to success"

**Nicole Bacile:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Bacile says, "Early identification is critical in the learning of students with dyslexia." While her son, Luca, struggled with literacy from an early age, she thought his skills would develop with time, and his teachers continued to promote him to the next grade level. By 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, Luca tested at a kindergarten reading level, was skipping certain classes to avoid embarrassment, shame, and anxiety related to required reading, and there was no structured literacy program to meet his needs.

**Robin Beauchemin:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Mrs. Beauchemin's son, Riley, is 14, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and he is dyslexic. Throughout his academic career, he has been misdiagnosed, doctors and

school professional said he would outgrow his struggles with school, and any problems were just a result of ADHD. By fifth grade, he was only able to do half days, disrupted the classroom, and hated everything about school. His struggles continued into 8<sup>th</sup> grade and at-home learning due to the Pandemic. Tired of poor results from the school, the Beauchemins "arranged for childcare for [their] other two children, made a payment of \$4,300.00 and drove to Ipswich, MA to have Riley formally evaluated." The psychologist confirmed that Riley was dyslexic and dysgraphic.

"I will never in my life forget the feeling when the doctor sat us down to tell us that our son did in fact have dyslexia and dysgraphia. I was heartbroken. How could I have missed this? How could the school have missed this? Furthermore, she explained how the delay in diagnosis is the root cause of his anxiety and depression. It became clear to me that all of this time we had been focusing on his adhd and the reason we never had success in treating it is because that wasn't the problem. The problem was that our 8<sup>th</sup> grade son was learning at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. And yet somehow the school says he is on grade level and that his reading level is where it should be.

"This is wrong. This has ruined my son's childhood, something he can never get back. His memories of Elementary School are of having no friends, always getting yelled at for not being good enough, always being the "bad kid". When in reality, he was doing all he could to avoid the work because he didn't understand it. Instead of trying to find the problem, he was given a band aid over and over again. All of my concerns were swept under the rug by the school and we were never offered a PPT."

She says if they didn't have the resources for an independent exam, her child would still be struggling to learn in a failing system.

#### **Siobhan Brearley:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Brearley says she is "a 'fully' trained educator," got good grades, and was not prepared by her education to teach structured literacy. She has seen both her students and her own children struggle with dyslexia. Her family's struggle involved costly outside evaluations, missed school and work time, and "countless hours" researching and talking to experts, all while being denied interventions and evaluations from the public system. "I am grateful to those outside evaluators and people that helped along the way," she says, "but precious time was wasted when my children needed help from their school." She asks for support on HB 6517 "so that you can help all teachers get the training that they need and deserve..."

#### **Laura Consiglio:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Consiglio says, "parents send their children to school expecting that the teachers they encounter will be the experts in all things educational." She says, when it comes to dyslexia, that is not the norm, and shares her son's struggles with learning. For years he received specialized services, was separated from his peers, and was made to feel stupid. The Consiglios made the decision to switch to a private school that offered a language learning program. Her child "who was floundering and hated school is currently a high school junior achieving high honors." She says, "Structured literacy is beneficial for all students but imperative for students with dyslexia... Districts must be required to implement these programs with fidelity, remain compliant, and be held accountable for failing to do so with swift consequences imposed by the State DOE. These

programs are not something that can be taught in a brief teacher in-service but must be imbedded in the educator preparation programs while ensuring that out-of-state applicants are also held to the same rigorous standards."

### Melissa Harrington:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Harrington is a Connecticut certified teacher and mother of a child with dyslexia. She says, "I received my BS in Elementary Education from the NEAG School of Education at UConn in 2007, as well as my Masters in Education in 2008. **At no point during my educational experience did I have any training or experience with dyslexia, or structured literacy.** My niece graduated in 2019 from the University of Bridgeport with her master's in Education. Over 10 years later, and her only experience with dyslexia and structured literacy was a one class period introduction. **This is NOT acceptable and NOT adequate to provide for the students in Connecticut, of whom 1 in 5 may have dyslexia. We NEED to do better.**" She shares the story of her own son's struggles with dyslexia, how the school's ignorance compounded problems, and how this has negatively impacted her 3<sup>rd</sup> grader. She says there are thousands more kids like her own, suffering "due to our state's lack of training and interventions for these children."

### Glen Kapostas

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Kapostas shares his story of being a smart kid in the 60s with dyslexia. He was regularly bullied and "got in fights and beat up almost daily." He eventually gave up and accepted that he was stupid, "for that is what everyone around me told me I was." After high school, he joined the Marine Corps. The Corps identified him as a high performance, high IQ recruit, and wanted to send him to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. "I could not take their offer," he says, "since they were talking about four hours of reading a night and I think all of you can translate that for a dyslexic." He has reinvented himself many times since as technology changed everything. He attributes his ability to keep up to the privilege his high IQ and aptitude for the arts, but says he truly feels for the dyslexics out there without his privileges. "If that was I," he says, "I would be homeless. God bless them." At 63 years of age, he was gifted a NOW program course to help with his literacy. He says he was reading at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level in 2019 and is now at a 12<sup>th</sup> grade level reading a book a week. Mr. Kapostas says that 50% of the prison population is dyslexic, and that teaching dyslexics to read early would be money well spent.

### Jeanne Morgan, M.S., Ed.S., W.C.T., W.D.T., President, Dyslexia Society of CT:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Morgan has worked in the Waterford school district for 30 years and is responsible for teaching structured literacy to teachers. She says, "the net must be cast wider to reach and teach more children who may not be 'advantaged enough' to live in a district such as mine or afford private services for tutoring." Ms. Morgan says it is common for "graduate students to share that they did not learn much of the content and practices," despite, "mountains of research to support that reading is not something we are wired to do, but that we have to be directly and explicitly taught by knowledgeable and experienced teachers." She says that learning to read is a fundamental necessity and all students will benefit from improved training for teachers.

### Matthew Narducci

Submitted written testimony in support. Matthew is a high school student with dyslexia. He says that he had a hard time in middle school because teachers were mean to him. He hid his inability to read behind misbehavior. He says, "I think I had 50 detentions and at least 5

suspensions." Eventually he was tested and sent to a boarding school for kids with ADHD and dyslexia. He says, "It was very hard on me and on my parents, but there were no schools locally that had what I needed, because I was so far behind in reading." Matthew says:

"Teachers really need to learn how to figure out if a kid has dyslexia. It is not fair to us and it is not fair to them. All the teachers I was bad for did not know I learned differently. All the teachers who were nice and tried to get to know me saw I was a good kid, but they still did not know I had dyslexia. They did make me feel better though. All the teachers who knew how to teach kids with dyslexia how to read made a huge difference. I think all teachers should know how to do this. Maybe kids would be better in school and be more successful."

### **Paul Narducci**

Submitted written testimony in support. Two of Mr. Narducci's three children are dyslexic. His wife advocated for years to get both of them the testing and accommodations they deserved. His eldest daughter received help prior to 6<sup>th</sup> grade and is now a senior at UCONN's business school. "Despite S.'s accomplishments," he says, "she still has difficulty reading a restaurant menu." He says the pattern repeated with his youngest child. His son was also diagnosed with ADHD and his struggles were dismissed as behavioral. He says:

"It was not until the end of his 8th grade year that the school system acknowledged his learning disorders, but the damage had already been done. Because Stonington was not equipped to address these disorders at this late stage, we were required to send M. to a boarding school in Massachusetts that specialized in dyslexia and other learning processing disorders. Moreover, the indirect consequences of the system's failure to address my son's situation – low self-esteem, lack of confidence and being the object of bullying – exacerbated an already intolerable situation. The bullying not only came from fellow students, but also from some of his teachers who did not recognize or understand his profound frustrations that resulted from his difficulties in learning. Rather than being able to express what he did not know, he would mask his problems, and his teachers would dismiss and even mock him, which compounded his feelings of inadequacy. To this day, M. hates school and all that is associated with it."

Mr. Narducci believes that had the system been better informed and prepared, "many of the difficulties suffered by both S. and M. could have been avoided or at least been reduced." He recognizes that this legislation cannot help his children but hopes it will prevent other kids from suffering as his have.

### **Additional Testimony:**

Parents, teachers, students, adults, and professionals submitted written testimony in support discussing high costs of diagnosis and treatment, requests for better training, struggles with school, and opportunities to improve.

### **Jaime Aulet**

### **Joe Baker**

### **Margaret Balboni**

### **Lawrence Berliner**

[Carina Borgia and Eric Drake](#)

[Shaleighne Fahey Cantner](#)

[Cindy Davis](#)

[Bonnie Dombrowski](#)

[Jennifer Farrell](#)

[Alison Foito](#)

[Marjorie Fuller-Supple](#)

[Beth Gardner](#)

[Lisa Gianni](#)

[Lynn Griffiths](#)

[Sue Haynie](#)

[Laura Heneghan](#)

[Elisabeth Herdic](#)

[Harvey Hubbell](#)

[Marilina Imperati](#)

[Christine Johnson](#)

[Dana Kery](#)

[Stacy Koehler](#)

[Catherine Krenicky](#)

[Amanda Lewis](#)

[Brynn Lipstreu](#)

[Ashley Loto](#)

[Gina Maroney](#)

[Kathleen Maror](#)

[Amy McCready](#)

[Sarah Millman](#)

[Christina Morris](#)

[Jill Palma](#)

[Sarah Payne](#)

[Shelley F. Pelletier, PH.D., NCSP, ABPP](#)

[Jack Quirion](#)

[Amanda Royce](#)

[Maureen Ruby, Ph.D.](#)

[Patricia K. Sanieski](#)

[Special Education Equity for Kids \(SEEK\)](#)

[Christina Servellon Lagace](#)

[Robin Slane](#)

[Erica Sommerer](#)

[Jennifer Spirito](#)

[Kristen Stam](#)

[Pamela Stone-Shaw](#)

[William T. Supple](#)

[Alison Swierz](#)

[Megan Szczesny](#)

[Celeste Tini](#)

[Chris Toth](#)

[Sarah Tyszka](#)

[Elizabeth Van Sickle](#)

[Diane Willcutts](#)

[Erin Wood](#)

[Jennifer Zabetakis](#)

[Kim Zolvik](#)

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Stephen J. Hegedus, Ph.D., President, AACTE - CT Chapter, Dean, College of Education, Southern Connecticut State University \(SCSU\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in opposition with substitute language. Dr. Hegedus says AACTE-CT, "is always seeking ways to improve our programs ... However, we do have several concerns with this bill which are outlined below." AACTE-CT is concerned that Sections 1(a)(2) and 1(b) attempt to implement standards that are not practical "in the context of an already highly regulated undergraduate education program." The association believes these requirements are better suited for the graduate level. Regarding section 6, Dr. Hegedus says the bill imposes standards that would limit the number of qualified people entering the profession. However, at certain schools, like SCSU, Dr. Hegedus says, "the instructors and supervisors currently meet and/or exceed the proposed requirements in this bill," and faculty serving on state committees are national leaders in structured literacy. Dr. Hegedus says, "For these reasons, we believe that the qualifications of university supervisors should continue under the purview of the EPPs."

**Reported by: Jeremy Salyer**

**Date: 03/30/2021**