



Changing Lives
for Children with
Learning Challenges

The Shadow Project

TESTIMONY TO OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE, SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MARCH 17, 2015

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY. MY NAME IS CHRISTY SCATTARELLA. I'M THE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SHADOW PROJECT. WE ARE OREGON'S **ONLY** NONPROFIT PARTNERING WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA AND OTHER LEARNING CHALLENGES. IN THE LAST DECADE, WE'VE EMPOWERED HUNDREDS OF TEACHERS TO HELP NEARLY 8,000 STRUGGLING STUDENTS SUCCEED - IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE.

WE KNOW FROM OUR EXPERIENCE IN URBAN, RURAL AND SUBURBAN SCHOOLS THAT PASSAGE OF SENATE BILL 612 IS CRITICAL. HERE ARE THREE REASONS WHY:

ONE: IT ADDRESSES A SERIOUS GAP IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

OREGON HAS AN AMBITIOUS GOAL: 100 PERCENT OF NEXT YEAR'S FIRST GRADERS WILL GRADUATE WITH THEIR CLASS.

IN OUR WORK, WE SEE TALENTED TEACHERS, DEDICATED ADMINISTRATORS, AND REMARKABLE CHILDREN. SO...ARE WE ON TRACK?

NO, WE ARE NOT. TWO-THIRDS OF OREGON THIRD GRADERS WITH DISABILITIES LIKE DYSLEXIA DON'T MEET READING BENCHMARKS, QUADRUPLYING THEIR RISK OF SCHOOL DROPOUT. THESE CHILDREN HAVE THE LOWEST ON TIME GRADUATION RATE IN THE STATE.

THOSE ARE TROUBLING STATISTICS. BUT IMAGINE IF YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE KIDS, LIKE JOSH, A 3RD GRADER WHO STRUGGLED TO READ AND FIT IN. HE FINALLY CONFESSED TO HIS TEACHER, "I'M SO STUPID. I WISH I'D NEVER BEEN BORN."

WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, AND APPRECIATION FOR THE STRUGGLES....AND THE PROMISE.... OF CHILDREN WHO LEARN DIFFERENTLY, STUDENTS LIKE JOSH WILL CONTINUE TO BE STIGMATIZED AND FEEL SHAME, GIVING UP ON SCHOOL ... AND THEMSELVES. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY TIMES I'VE TALKED ABOUT THESE POOR OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES, AND I HEAR, "WELL, WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?" IT'S TIME TO SHATTER THE CULTURAL MYTH THAT THESE CHILDREN CAN'T LEARN.

REASON TWO WHY THIS BILL IS CRITICAL: IT PROVIDES MUCH-NEEDED TRAINING AND SUPPORT ON DYSLEXIA FOR TEACHERS.

TEACHERS ARE HUNGRY FOR THE KNOWLEDGE AND MATERIALS TO HELP CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA SUCCEED. YET, IN A 2010 SURVEY OF TEACHERS IN AN OREGON SCHOOL DISTRICT, ONLY 26 PERCENT REPORTED THEY FELT EQUIPPED TO HELP CHILDREN WITH LEARNING CHALLENGES.

RESEARCH TELLS US THAT A TEACHERS'S EFFECTIVENESS HAS MORE IMPACT ON STUDENT OUTCOMES THAN ANY OTHER FACTOR UNDER THE CONTROL OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM. IN OUR WORK WE'VE SEEN FIRST-HAND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TEACHERS ARE PROVIDED WITH EFFECTIVE TOOLS THAT ENGAGE DISCOURAGED STUDENTS.

TAKE 3RD GRADER TALIA. WHEN IT CAME TIME TO READ OR WRITE, SHE'D PICK FIGHTS AND GET SUSPENDED WITHOUT ANYONE RECOGNIZING THAT BEING SENT HOME FROM SCHOOL WAS LESS EMBARRASSING THAN NOT BEING ABLE TO WRITE HER NAME. WHEN TALIA'S ISSUES WERE FINALLY RECOGNIZED AND SHE WAS PLACED WITH A WELL-EQUIPPED TEACHER, SHE BEGAN CALLING HERSELF A STAR STUDENT AND TODAY IS

READING HER WAY THROUGH THE DIARY OF A WIMPY KID SERIES. AND SHE SIGNS HER NAME WITH A FLOURISH.

AND THE THIRD REASON SENATE BILL 612 IS CRITICAL: IT SETS THE STAGE FOR A VIBRANT ECONOMY AND STRONG WORKFORCE.

IF WE WANT ALL OUR STUDENTS TO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL; IF WE WANT YOUNG PEOPLE TO FIND LIVING WAGE JOBS AND CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY, THEN EACH CHILD MUST HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED AT SCHOOL.

TO THIS DAY, I AM INSPIRED BY A BOY WITH DYSLEXIA WHO WAS READY TO GIVE UP ON SCHOOL IN 2ND GRADE. IT WOULD TAKE HIM HALF AN HOUR TO WRITE A SENTENCE, GRIPPING THE PENCIL SO HARD THAT IT TORE THROUGH THE PAPER. TODAY THAT 'BOY' IS AN EMPLOYED, TAX-PAYING COLLEGE GRADUATE, WHO GIVES BACK TO HIS COMMUNITY. I KNOW THAT BOY BECAUSE HE IS MY SON. THANK YOU.

*Christy Scattarella is the Founder and Executive Director of The Shadow Project (www.shadow-project.org) and the author of the award-winning children's book, *The Boy Who Learned Upside Down*, based on her dyslexic son's journey from "I can't" to "I CAN!" She has been honored locally and nationally for her collaborative work with educators to empower children with learning challenges. Reach her at Christy@shadow-project.org or 503.502.7833.*