

**Senate Committee on Education
Public Hearing
March 17th, 2015**

**Testimony by Eric Schulz
Parent of Dyslexic Student in Tigard-Tualatin School District
In Support of Senate Bill 612**

To Chair Roblan, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Senators Baertschiger, Beyer, Gelser, Hass, and Kruse:

It is said that knowledge is power. Our family couldn't agree more. Our 16 year old son's journey through elementary, middle, and high school exemplifies how knowledge concerning the learning disorder called dyslexia would have had a powerful impact on our son.

Our son's learning disability went undetected through elementary and middle school. Every teacher knew that something wasn't right. Some labeled him gifted, too smart to learn like the rest of us. Others labeled him as lazy or a slacker because he could not keep up with assignments or follow written directions in class. Every teacher told us he was a smart kid, but he was not applying himself.

Once our son began high school things changed dramatically. He repeated whole classes, we got calls from teachers saying that he wasn't getting his work turned in on time, and his grades dropped by a full letter grade almost overnight. We met with his guidance counselor, his teachers, and even the school principal. We hired tutors for math, spelling, and writing. His teachers labeled him as immature, not ready for high school, and one teacher even called him squirrely. No one had an answer for us.

Out of desperation we took our son to a well-known children's psychology program in Portland. We wanted them to analyze our son. We asked, "Are there emotional problems going on? Is he being bullied at school? What about alcohol or drugs? Does he have a learning disability?" This last question turned out to be prophetic.

From the hours of assessments the psychologists conducted with our son we learned that he was a healthy teenage boy who was dyslexic. Without academic therapy of any kind, he had self-developed the reading and writing skills necessary to get him through elementary and middle school, but once he hit high school, he could not keep up.

Our son read at a 7th grade level and wrote at a 5th grade level. He could read well enough to get the general meaning of text, but he could not provide any details. He wrote well enough that he appeared to be a lazy writer, as his spelling skills were so bad that he avoided using words above elementary level. Our son was just good enough to get by until high school.

Our family was shocked and relieved. We finally had an explanation for what was going on at school. For the first time we truly knew our son. We had been empowered.

Had SB 612 been in place when our son was in kindergarten, he would have been screened for dyslexia before he finished first grade. His phonological processing and letter/sound recognition would have been found to be much lower than the other students in his class. He would have been referred for further assessment and been diagnosed as dyslexic while he was still learning to read. This would have made profound difference for our son. His teachers and parents could have created an educational plan that

would have taught him how to work with his disability early on so that his language skills would be on par with his peers into the future.

However, without a bill like SB 612, our son was left to battle his learning disability alone. He was labeled by his teachers as lazy, a slacker, and a student who didn't pay attention to details. All of these labels were incorrect. He didn't have the one label that mattered, dyslexia. We could have been empowered by the knowledge of his learning disorder, but we weren't.

We need to make a change in Oregon. It is not OK for other students to share our son's experience. No student should be labeled as a slacker when there are identifiable reasons for their struggle. It is time to require screening for dyslexia when children are learning to read. It is time to educate our educators about a learning disability that affects as many as one in five of their students. It is time to empower students, their parents, and our teachers with the knowledge to help our children.

Our family urges you to support SB 612 in its current form. We urge you to pass it out of committee so that your colleagues in the legislature can show their support too. We urge you to take up the fight of every student like our son and make the change that Oregon needs.

Knowledge is power. Our family urges you to empower the students, families, and teachers of Oregon by supporting SB 612.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric M. Schulz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eric M. Schulz