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Dear Senator Roblan and Members of the Education Committee,

Theo loved people. That was clear to anyone who met him. He was highly social. From a young age, he had been dubbed, “the Mayor of Clackamas Street.” He eagerly stood on our porch bellowing to neighbors by name. He would independently go down the street to visit people who owned dogs. Theo was a charmer. He marched around his older brother’s school for three years greeting teachers, parents and kids alike before he began attending the same school. All that exposure made him very confident. He was competent. He knew that school and those teachers, as well as his own house. When he was three, he even asked me, “Mama what does social mean?” I thought it was funny for him to be asking about a word he so exemplified. I was so confused when my son who loved people, began protesting as I left him each morning at his preschool and when he continued to cling to me and begged me not to leave him as a kindergartner. I was dumbfounded. It was a true puzzle.

In the spring of first grade his teacher told me he was not making good progress in reading. He was behind. I dismissed this information as we were in the middle of a family crisis which had distracted me from my family obligations. After first grade finished, Theo was “invited” to summer school. I laughed it off because I knew how bright he was. He’ll catch on, I thought. I was not at all alarmed. He was sharp. That was obvious. I was determined not to be one of those hysterical mothers because her kid had not mastered reading by the age of 6. Our summer was busy with camps, swimming lessons and cross country trips. We had no time for summer school.

In second grade, I was again told by Theo’s teacher that, “He was not at grade level. Things hadn’t clicked.” Theo had begun to call himself stupid. I could see his self-esteem starting to crumble. Eventually his teacher said, “He just needs to try harder.” And something about that did not, sit well, with me. Finally, there was a huge red flag. Theo was obviously bright. Why did he need to try harder? Why was learning to read so hard? Why did he feel stupid? It wasn’t making any sense. Something was definitely wrong.

His teacher told me that to get Theo evaluated through PPS, it would take a long time and that although Theo was behind, he might not be “behind enough to qualify for services.” Because we able to afford it, we had Theo evaluated by a private, educational psychologist. After 7 hours of testing and more than \$1,500, we had our answer. Theo was dyslexic. He had slow auditory processing, profound weakness in working memory, weakness in phonological processing, rapid automatic naming, and sound symbol naming. No wonder it was hard for him to learn to read.

After the psychologist revealed Theo’s diagnosis, she said, “Call these people, Theo needs private tutoring 2-3 times a week.” I said, “What about the school?” She said, “Don’t even bother with PPS, they don’t have anything to offer Theo.” I was dumbfounded and that began my journey into dyslexia and the public schools. While we were spared the disappointment and frustration of expecting a free, public and appropriate education for Theo that so many other parents experience, it was truly unbelievable and disheartening to think about the other children in Theo’s class, in Theo’s school and Theo’s state who would not be getting appropriate instruction for their dyslexia.

And so the puzzle slowly began to make sense. I began to remember incidents I had not given a second thought. I recalled when Theo was in first grade he had stripped his bulging bookcases of all the books on his shelves and put them into boxes. “Sell these books, he commanded.” I tried to reason with him, trying to convince him that in a few years time, these books would really be of interest. He was not swayed. The books needed to go.

He took the remaining books and stuffed them in his dresser drawers. I was oblivious to the blatant symbolism. Belatedly, it began to make sense of how easily frustrated he would become over the smallest infractions, frequently lashing out at me and over reacting to the smallest slights. Ah, ha. It must have been confusing and frightening for written words to have been such an indecipherable code.

I am asking you to support Senate bill 612 to give Oregon's students with this learning profile a chance to succeed.

Thank you.

Lisa Lyon
Parent Advocate
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