

March 10, 2015

Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

Henry is a blue-eyed ten year old boy with a shock of brown hair and freckles on his nose. He is kind, considerate, loyal, and sincere. Soccer, swimming, and playing with his friends are his passions. His teachers tell us that he is a pleasure to teach. Henry is smart. He has the ability to see the whole picture when problem solving. He loves to build with Lego's and is currently obsessed with the online building game Minecraft.

In January, 2013, Henry was diagnosed with dyslexia. He participated in 9 hours of testing with a neuropsychologist. Henry was characterized as an extremely hard worker by the neuropsychologist, often persevering even when noticeably stressed. We chose to have Henry tested outside of the school system due to the extraordinarily long time frame that in-school testing would take and the fact that the administrator at our school pushed back quite stringently to our desire to test Henry. Henry's outside evaluation cost \$4,000. It was worth it to us to learn that though Henry has above average intelligence, he scored below the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile in academic testing areas related to reading and writing. We also learned that he has an anxiety disorder and a written language disorder called dysgraphia.

We began to seek help for Henry at school at the end of Henry's first grade year. It took 19 months of meetings with various school officials and finally an outside evaluation to finally get an IEP for Henry. After being told "You are comparing Henry to his older sister who is an accomplished reader. Henry is a boy and is just experiencing a lag. He will be fine," it finally dawned on us that people who hold masters degrees in education do not necessarily know anything about dyslexia and its symptoms.

After his diagnosis, and after much research, we realized that we had lost the most important years of interventions. When evidence based reading programs are consistently used between grades K-2, the brain function of a child with dyslexia can actually be changed to more resemble that of a natural reader. In some schools, all children are exposed to a reading program that benefits 100% of the kids. Even those with developmental dyslexia and those who come from literature poor homes, do not develop reading gaps. Once a child develops a reading gap, they often are not able to overcome it and it remains with them throughout their school career. 1 in 9 children read at grade level after being behind in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

We went into the IEP writing process hopeful that now we could begin getting help for Henry but we found that the Learning Center had little to offer. Henry was given an IEP, though the school psych wanted to make sure we knew it was "provisional," and that the word dyslexia could not be used. The school was able to help Henry with a fluency program but they could not help with the main type of interventions he needed; work that would help him read multi-syllabic words, work that would help him understand the connection between letters and sounds, work that would increase his phonetic awareness and decoding. When I told the special education teacher that we were considering Orton-Gillingham tutoring, her opinion was that Henry should not do it and that Henry should be allowed to "just be a kid" outside of school hours. Had Henry

been identified in Kindergarten or first grade and had our school been using a program like Reading Mastery perhaps that would have been a possibility for Henry.

Instead, outside of school hours, Henry receives 2-3 hours per week of Orton-Gillingham tutoring year round. For 6 months he went to speech therapy once a week to help with his significant word retrieval issues (related to dyslexia). This upcoming summer, Henry will attend a 4 week Orton-Gillingham camp in North Carolina where he'll get tutoring 5 days a week, work with assistive technologies that help students with dyslexia, learn a special keyboarding method that is easier to learn for people with dyslexia, and fortunately, he'll also have fun activities to do each day. The 4 week camp costs \$8,000 and is affordable to us only because my mother died and my siblings and I each were given \$10,000 from her annuity to use for investing. My father approved of our expenditure, telling me there's no better investment that can be made than in Henry's future. Currently we spend between \$350 and \$500 per month on Henry's services. On a side note, my father, a middle school science teacher for 35 years, is dyslexic. He recently told me that in 9<sup>th</sup> grade he took a class call "Rem Dial Spelling." It was not until years after college that he realized that the class was actually Remedial Spelling.

While we would love to just "let Henry be a kid," we know his future is at stake. 85% of juvenile delinquents have reading disabilities. 60% of prison inmates are illiterate. 1 in 4 kids who don't read at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade drop out. The 2010 graduation rate in Portland Public Schools for children receiving special education services was 32% after 5 years of high school. Our school is unable to address the main challenges of dyslexia and doesn't offer substantial interventions.

We will not allow Henry to fail. Unfortunately, many kids with issues similar to Henry, smart kids with a brain processing disorder called dyslexia, are allowed to fail.

Fifteen to twenty percent of the other kids at Henry's school are dyslexic. The teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, and school psychologists in Oregon need training in dyslexia. Universities need to educate teachers in training about dyslexia and how to identify kids who might be at risk. Identification needs to begin in Kindergarten, not 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Research shows that dyslexia affects a substantial portion of our population, with no discrimination for socio-economic status or intelligence. Good, solid, research based data has been around for 20+ years, dyslexia has been studied for over 100 years. Structured literacy can help 100% of our kids, why aren't we using it in our classrooms?

Oregon has no laws specific to dyslexia and there is no handbook. No Oregon University offers a class about dyslexia, yet, it is the most common learning disability in every classroom in our state. Now is the time to pass legislation to decrease the reading failure rates in our schools. Senate Bill 612 can provide a new literacy future for all of our children.

Thank you,

Meg Hagan