

**Date: March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**To: Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Education Committee**

**From: Rachel Parks, HS Student from Ashland**

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One of the biggest challenges I have faced is overcoming my dyslexia. My first few years of school were tremendously difficult. I started my education at a public elementary school. As all of my other classmates began reading I was left behind. I was not able to sound out words, recognize sight words, or track lines on the page. I tried as hard as I could but it didn't matter; I still wasn't learning to read or write. In order to help me, the school sent me and a few other kids in my class to the special education room. Unfortunately, it didn't help me and only made me miserable and self-conscious. Because my school was not well educated about dyslexia, they were unequipped to help me. They did not even acknowledge that my dyslexia existed and lumped me with other children who had serious emotional and intellectual disabilities. This left me dreading school every morning.

At this point my mom transferred me to the Siskiyou School, a private Waldorf school. I started off in 4th grade year there and also began working with a tutor who specialized in dyslexia. Although I was still behind in reading, writing and math, I was learning so many new things in a creative, hands-on way that I no longer hated school. At the same time, things began to click with my reading and writing. I always wanted to excel, so I worked diligently in all my subjects. I got all A's through middle school but did not realize how much I had improved until I moved to Ashland high school. Although I may have to work twice as hard as other people for twice as long, I have continued to get mostly A's throughout high school and have been on the honor roll every semester. I might still get my B's and D's mixed up and neither my spelling nor standardized tests reflect my intelligence and commitment, but I've learned to use tools such as assistive technology, I continue to work on my reading and writing, and most importantly I've learned to advocate for myself.

I am also confident that I have many of the strengths that are associated with dyslexia. I am a talented artist, I have a strong ability to read people and situations and understand the bigger picture, and I am also skillful at analyzing and interpreting information, which is beneficial for both my interest in science and my relationships with people. In the process of dealing with my dyslexia I have learned that dyslexia does not determine intelligence and that I can succeed at whatever I put my mind to.

I was fortunate enough that my family was able to send me to private school and hire a private tutor. However, if they weren't, I would be in a very different position today. I am a senior in high school and will be graduating in about two months. After that I plan on attending the University of Idaho's Honors Program.

I strongly support Senate Bill 612 because it is the first step to help dyslexic students thrive and get the help they need and deserve so they too can fulfill their potential.