

FROM THE DESK OF
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Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Affecting up to 20% of people, dyslexia is more common than any other condition children receive regular checkups for today. Surprisingly, very few teachers have the knowledge and training to identify these students and even less know how to help them. Considering the years of extensive research on the subject, and the scientifically proven methods for effectively teaching all students to read, this is shocking.

My own son has dyslexia. When he first started struggling in school, it really made no sense. He was bright, witty and had a great vocabulary for his age. Rather than hearing my son may have dyslexia, I was told he needed to try harder, pay more attention and possibly repeat 1st grade. Neither the teachers or my husband and I knew any different and the next few years for my son were filled with stress, struggle, anxiety, tears and homework wars. I helplessly watched this bright boy shrink as he began to call himself stupid, become depressed and came to hate school.

By 3rd grade, and after 3 years of making little to no progress in reading, I had to do something. I began to research on my own and as soon as I read the signs and symptoms for dyslexia, I knew it was the reason for my son's struggles. Sadly, the signs had been there all along, some of them having nothing to do with reading. Had I had access to this information, I could have prevented this 3 year detour from my son's happy childhood.

Of course, my son is one of the lucky ones. After the school told me "dyslexia doesn't exist," I took matters into my own hands. I educated myself on dyslexia and how to teach him to read. Over the next few years, I tutored him using an Orton-Gillingham based reading program and it worked. My son, and all dyslexics can learn to read if taught in the right way. How is it that his teacher didn't know that? How many other kids are struggling and don't have the support my son did? What happens to these students?

According to ODE, 40% of Oregon 3rd graders are not reading at grade level. And according to The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 74% of kids who are behind in 3rd grade will still be behind in 9th grade. Sadly, only 57% of these kids will make it to graduation. Not being able to read or hold a high school diploma dramatically reduces a person's ability to succeed in life illustrated by the fact that 48% of prison inmates are also dyslexic.

Because dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence, only a small percent of these kids qualify for special services under IDEA. For those who do, the National Institute of Health claims they make up a shocking 80% of all children receiving Special Education services. Unfortunately, being in Special Education still doesn't ensure students get properly identified for dyslexia and provided the scientifically proven interventions that are known to work. In fact, most kids who do get in, never get out essentially creating a drain on the system taking away funds and support for those who really need it. If found and treated early, kids with dyslexia rarely belong in Special Education.

Passing this bill (SB 612) would ensure teachers in college will learn about dyslexia and the signs to recognize students as early as Kindergarten. It would also ensure teachers will receive the most current training available for effectively administering research-based reading instruction, which is beneficial to all students. Kids who have dyslexia would be identified and supported early preventing years of academic and emotional struggle. Not only is this good for kids with dyslexia, but good for improving reading scores for all students.

Clearly, what we have been doing for struggling readers isn't working. Increasing the goals for reading proficiency without addressing this fact is also not working. Ignoring dyslexia as a major factor for why kids are struggling will never work. We need to make a change in our system if we really want to see progress. If we are concerned about the costs of implementing proper teacher training, early identification and effective intervention for students with dyslexia, consider the costs and long term negative effects on the education system and society if we don't.

Please vote to pass SB 612 as a measure to prevent further reading failure in our schools. The research has been done. The success rates have been proven. This is Oregon's chance to join the 17+ other states who have already passed dyslexia legislation. Not only will it result in higher reading scores, but literally improve the future for thousands of Oregon children.

Sincerely,

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