

March 11, 2015

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

My name is Alicia Roberts Frank, and I am the Special Education Program Director at Lewis and Clark College. I am also an active member of Decoding Dyslexia Oregon, a board member of the Oregon Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, and a member of the leadership team of the Oregon Council for Exceptional Children. I am writing in support of SB 612 because all children deserve to be taught to read and write.

I began teaching students with dyslexia when I began teaching at a private elementary school for children with dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities in California. For that position, I was trained in Slingerland, a classroom adaptation of the Orton-Gillingham approach for teaching students with dyslexia. The knowledge and skills I gained that summer, as well as in the subsequent trainings, courses and workshops I attended, have helped me reach students with varied exceptionalities, as well as those who merely needed to have aspects of our language explicitly taught to them. I have taught pre-service and in-service teachers who knew very little about the basic building blocks of English and whose eyes were opened by the small pieces of knowledge that can be overwhelmingly empowering to students learning to read.

Since arriving in Oregon over a year and a half ago, I have been approached by general-education teachers, special-education teachers, reading specialists, and speech pathologists who want to learn more. They recognize that they lack the tools to meet the needs of their students who do not know how to read and write and need an explicit approach. The teachers themselves have never been taught syllable types, syllable division rules, or the influence of history and meaning on spelling. I have met countless parents who have undergone tremendous financial and relational hardships in order to either prevent their children from failing school or to repair the educational and emotional damage done by well-meaning educators who either did not believe that there was a problem with the children's learning or were ineffective in the remediation. Parents have mortgaged homes, moved, and lived separately from family members in order to pay for private tutoring, private schools, or home-school. While I am frustrated for these parents and the lengths to which these parents have had to go to ensure their children learn to read and write, I am more frustrated by the thought of the number of parents who cannot afford to do so.

The number of students below reading level, in every grade level, is staggering. The number of incarcerated individuals who cannot read or write is even more so. Literacy is a social equity issue, but one that we can effectively address. Neurological science and decades of successful experiences have provided the keys to unlocking literacy for everyone. Those keys now need to be copied and disseminated to all literacy teachers – those who work in general-education classrooms as well as those who remediate in reading centers and special-education programs. SB 612 can help ensure that all teachers learn to teach all children to read and write and that all students receive instruction that they need.

Thank you for your support,

Alicia Roberts Frank, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Education and Special Education Program Director