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Dear Senator Herman Baertschiger Jr.,

My heart goes out to all who struggle with reading and writing in our schools today. As a high school teacher and a dyslexic myself, I struggled and struggled through my own education and clearly recognize how most of my colleagues are significantly unprepared to help and serve students with forms of dyslexia.

Being recognized early as having problems with traditional curriculum as early as preschool, I was tested in the schools dozens of times during the early 1980's. I was continuously identified/diagnosed with an above average IQ but also with all sorts of reading, writing, and sometimes math issues. I was diagnosed by a school psychologist in primary school that I was cross dominant and that I had all sorts of issues surrounding phonemic awareness and ability to work with text, but at that time there were no resources in rural Oregon to properly diagnose or help students with what would I would eventually get identified in college as dyslexia.

Through the help of caring teachers and supportive parents, I floated through the K-12 school system getting the equivalent of "C" grades because of my "effort" to express my thoughts through the spoken word and visual and performance arts. Report card after report cards would remark as to my high intelligence and cognitive abilities but my inability to report my ideas on paper through writing. I had issues with spelling, grammar, sentence structure, syntax, and just about every other skill associated with symbolic representation. But I have found success because of a lot of hard work, support from family, and a personal perseverance to achieve.

This is where I get very frustrated with the current school system that the State of Oregon has today. Very little has changed. My daughters also have issues with dyslexia and the school system has not garnered any more ability to serve the children of dyslexia than they had twenty-five years ago. The schools have in reality become more hostile to a student with dyslexia because of the "one size fits all" approach to standardized testing and the lack of professional training of teachers to teach students that are dyslexic. In this high stakes world, I would not have survived public school. The most upsetting part of this is that twenty percent of all students have some form of dyslexia and this large group of children are going to struggle and potentially feel inferior, incompetent, and a failure because they will lack the ability to show their knowledge and skills because of a different cognitive system of understanding how to write and read.

I believe that the State of Oregon needs to require schools of education to improve the training that new teachers are being prepared with as they enter the classroom. Dyslexia affects a large and diverse group of students in our schools and teachers need to be prepared to reach out and understand the difficulties that these students have with basic and foundational educational skills such as reading and writing. Passing Senate Bill 612 is a good first step to assisting students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities in the classroom by preparing future educators with tools to reach out and respond to a student's lack of progress in the educational setting. Many schools use the Response to Intervention (RTI) model to address when something is not working for a child in the classroom to learn. I believe that the State of Oregon Legislature needs to respond by taking the first step to implement important training for all teachers who go through an Oregon approved school for teacher training.

Sincerely,

Chris Demianew, M.Ed