

March 17, 2015

My name is Annette Pritchard. I am a life long Oregon resident. My youngest son is now 18 and a senior at Cleveland High School in Portland. He has severe dyslexia.

In 1st grade in the Oregon City School District, testing revealed a large discrepancy between his normal IQ and his poor classroom performance. We were told repeatedly we could not use the word "dyslexia" at our IEP meetings because it is not an "eligible disability under Oregon law." We learned that, although David clearly needed a different reading instruction approach, there was no provision in the law to provide materials and instruction specific to dyslexia. We struggled on, working with teachers who tried to help, homeschooling when there were none, all the time trying to maintain David's self confidence and love of learning. By 3rd grade at Redland Elementary, David came home each day, his eyes welling with tears and again each morning waiting for the school bus. His doctor diagnosed him as clinically depressed.

I researched options: tutors, special teaching materials, alternative schools. Our insurance refused interventions, stating it was an educational issue while the schools refused because there is no law requiring it. We worked at home and took classes at a charter school and attended Ogden middle school, but the struggle to read continued.

In the summer after 8th grade, we moved to Portland. His new case manager put him on a modified diploma against our wishes! She said it was the law. It took me several weeks of investigating to find that this was not true. By the time we could meet to have this changed, David had lost a semester of regular classes. I reluctantly engaged the services of a special education attorney. Some things started falling into place; the school staff, including a new case manager, started cooperating to see that David's accommodations were met. The district technology specialist provided tools to assist him. This has been helpful, but still does not directly address his dyslexia.

A handout at a PPS budget meeting last week graphed the number of students failing to meet 3rd grade reading benchmarks at 26%. Another chart shows the high school drop out rate at 28%, pointing out the correlation. What is missing is the incidence of dyslexia in our students -- 20%. Educating teachers, screening students early and providing the proven tools to help will involve dedication of funds, but the benefit to 20% of our students will return that investment with interest.

Our family experienced the anguish and degradation students feel from teachers and peers as they struggle through a system with no provisions to **ever** help them. Depression and frustration are what these students learn the most about in Oregon schools. I was able to spend time monitoring, advocating and working with our son although we did not have the resources to provide the materials and instruction that would have helped him even more. He will graduate on time this June with a standard diploma. Passage and implementation of this bill will put a large number of talented and capable Oregon students on a firmer track to success for themselves and for the future of our state.



David Pritchard, *Willamette Runway*, 2014, charcoal, 18" x 24"
Selected for the 2014 Honoring Our Rivers Anthology and exhibit
(<http://www.honoringourriver.org/HOR%202014%20low%20res.pdf>)