

March 16, 2015

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My 10-year old son, David, was finally diagnosed as having dyslexia in late 2013. As early as preschool we saw that he seemed unable to remember his letters and was significantly behind his peers in recognizing simple words and hearing letter sounds correctly. When he entered kindergarten, he was tested for language difficulties as he had previously qualified for services through ECSD. At that time, PPS determined he had no needs and would not receive services in kindergarten.

By mid first grade his teacher knew that something was causing delays in David's ability to read and he ended up qualifying for and IEP, but only because he is also ADHD. At great personal expense to our family, we enrolled David in 9 months of daily, intensive reading tutoring. Through that he made some gains, but while the tutors stressed that there must be continuity at school, his SPED teacher had no interest in learning about the strategies and programs that worked for David privately.

At our expense, we had him privately evaluated at mid-3rd grade, which resulted in a dyslexia diagnosis, and I thought I'd been given the magic key to suddenly get David the services he needed. Instead, nothing changed. His SPED teacher had one reading program, and even though it clearly didn't work for David, she was committed to it. I never had any sense that she knew how to work with him or was trying to find ways that might be more successful. She had lots of kids to work with and I don't think she had the time. By the end of 3rd grade David was only reading at a mid-1st grade level, and he STILL wouldn't have received any services for his learning delays were it not for his ADHD.

We ended up changing schools this year. David has an amazing SPED teacher who has helped him make significant progress in reading; she has many years of experience working with dyslexic kids and it shows. This is great, but it is consistently clear to us each year that the Gen Ed classroom teachers are ill-equipped to deal with kids with dyslexia. David is of normal intelligence, but because he can't read and write at grade level, he gets treated as if he's not capable. As parents it is frustrating to watch our bright, creative boy unable to share his ideas and knowledge because the teacher has no training in working with kids with dyslexia. His teacher wants to help, but he clearly doesn't know where to start.

The school district spends so much money each year on students with severe disabilities, those whose life options are severely limited, while kids like my child, who are perfectly capable of going on to successful careers (and passing state tests, for Pete's sake) cannot get basic services without another qualifier and lots of effort on the part of parents and supportive teachers.

Giving teachers training to know what dyslexia is and how to recognize it, an ODE specialist who can answer questions for districts, and district screening at an early age, would be a good first step to helping kids like my child. If his dyslexia could have been identified in 1st grade, perhaps his services could have been more targeted and he wouldn't have been nearly three years behind grade level.

Please support SB612.

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Lake Oswego/Portland Public Schools