

March 29th 2017

Senate Education Committee
RE: SB221

Thank you for the opportunity to address SB221, university training programs for teachers.

As the parent of two dyslexic children, I want to share how life changing the right teacher training is for students.

My youngest child, Phineas, was flagged as potentially dyslexic at age 5, when he was at a private school in Kindergarten. His teacher did not have any formal training in dyslexia, but she has a family history of dyslexia and a recently diagnosed dyslexic daughter. We followed up with educational testing which diagnosed him as dyslexic, and started him on an Orton-Gillingham method program just before starting first grade. He made six months of progress in reading in just six WEEKS. Phin's teacher was astounded! Now entering the last few months of 1st grade, he is reading at the 96th percentile. An avid reader, Phineas is entrenched in the Harry Potter series.

In contrast, my oldest son, Andrew, went through educational testing twice by psychologists - once at age 8, and once at age 11. Neither assessor used the term "dyslexia." We always knew that his learning was not typical, but he can read. We continued to address our concerns to every educator he has had. Their responses were a variation of "Trust us. He's doing fine." Not one teacher ever mentioned that his dysgraphia, struggles with reading aloud, writing, and spelling difficulties were red flags for dyslexia.

Andrew's gap between abilities and achievement continued to widen. After recognizing dyslexia in Phineas, we had a third psychologist interpret previous testing and finally gave us a dyslexia diagnosis for Andrew when he was 12 years old. But this was too late to help Andrew improve his dysgraphia. It was also well after he decided he "hates" writing, and that he is "no good" at math. Overall he dislikes school, has anxiety-related stomach pain, and doesn't feel successful.

Now in seventh grade, Andrew is responding well to dyslexia remediation. He has high marks in reading, and his spelling is improving. However, he struggles with reading comprehension, writing, and analyzing texts. His self-esteem is low, and trying to work with him has affected our family life negatively. It is hard not to feel negatively about public education. Not a single educator recognized the signs of dyslexia in Andrew, much less provided an appropriate education.

Science tells us that 80% of all reading difficulties are due to dyslexia. In our school district, students that are not reading at grade level by 8th grade are on track for a modified diploma. Students with learning disabilities have double the national high school drop out rate. The rate of dyslexia in prisons is twice the general population. It is impossible to understate the importance of training educators, whom parents trust as experts, to recognize and provide an appropriate education for dyslexic learners. Otherwise we risk the 20% of all students who are dyslexic never finding success.

Thank you,
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