

March 30, 2017

Subject: Testimony in support of HB 2412 (2015) and in opposition of SB 221 (2017) – Marty Stockton, dated March 29, 2017

Dear Oregon Senate Education Committee members,

My name is Marty Stockton and I am providing testimony in support of the HB 2412 that was passed unanimously in 2015 to require universities to provide training on dyslexia and to oppose the new SB 221 (2017), which is before you for consideration today. Senate Bill 221 (2017) intends to repeal this necessary change to educator preparation program coursework by removing the requirements that universities must align their coursework with standards from the International Dyslexia Association.

In late 2015, our family was just beginning our journey in understanding dyslexia and navigating a system that inadequately responds to the needs of our eldest daughter who has dyslexia. In October 2015, our daughter, Ruby, was a fourth grader at Alameda Elementary School in Northeast Portland. At the parent-teacher conference, my husband Matt and I were strongly encouraged to have our daughter privately assessed for her difficulties in reading. You see, to go through the Portland Public Schools (PPS) process of evaluations, we were advised, would take the remainder of the fourth grade. We collectively agreed that we could not afford to lose any more time to assess a fourth grader struggling with reading, writing and spelling.

In November 2015, Ruby was privately assessed and was diagnosed with dyslexia. In January 2016, Ruby began twice-a-week private tutoring using the Barton Reading & Spelling System, an Orton-Gillingham approach to reading instruction. This month, March 2017, our family is committing to three-times-a-week tutoring, at a cost of \$65 per session, now through September, in preparation for Ruby entering Beaumont Middle School in the fall. To not have received a dyslexia diagnosis, until the fourth grade, Ruby is working incredibly hard outside of school to catch up to her peers and the near-term expectations of middle school coursework.

There are three points to make in this testimony. **First, our public school was and continues to be unprepared in supporting students with dyslexia. Ruby's educators from kindergarten through third grade were unable to recognize the signs and symptoms of dyslexia in our daughter.** We were advised to have her vision examined in the first grade, which we did and the exam confirmed a 20/20 vision. In both the first and the second grades, Ruby began the year not meeting reading grade level, but managed to meet it by the fourth quarters. In the third grade, Ruby struggle in reading became more apparent and several reading interventions took place in the classroom, including use of the SMART Reading Program. In the third grade was also when, out of the blue, Ruby began spelling her name "R-U-D-Y" instead of "R-U-B-Y". We hired a private tutor for the summer between third and fourth grade.

At home, our then nine-year old, began using the phrases, "I have a bad brain" or "I'm stupid" during outbursts and tantrums. We noticed other behavioral changes related to a growing lack of confidence. The dyslexia diagnosis has been a gift in many ways, including providing a clear explanation to our

daughter on why she processes information the way she does and to begin the hard work of counteracting issues with self-confidence and anxiety.

Secondly, Schools and districts and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) should not continue to expect families to depend on privatized services to meet the educational needs of students with dyslexia. The current practice, leaves so many other families and their children in our greater Northeast Portland community and throughout Oregon without assessment and appropriate instruction by the many educators with little to no understanding of dyslexia. The burden is greater on Oregon's communities of color, low-income and immigrant and refugee families. While dyslexia is equally represented across demographics of race, ethnicity and income, etc., Oregon's public education system perpetuates these educational disparities by deliberately not addressing the needs of students with dyslexia. Oregon wins when everyone achieves their full potential – when children graduate school college- and career ready and when reading, writing and spelling is taught acknowledging that one in five students have dyslexia.

This school year, I along with two other Alameda parents have formed the Alameda Dyslexia Community, a collection of Alameda families with students with dyslexia. Our vision is to bring Alameda families together to: share information, offer family and student support through our shared experience, and empower, celebrate and create awareness of this learning difference at Alameda. This group of parents has already begun to partner with our school's administration. There was a little hesitation by the school administration at first, but we are in the process of building a school-parent relationship, identifying ways to support internal and external advocacy efforts as appropriate and most importantly keeping the lines of communication open. Collaboration between students, parents, schools and districts, Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and university education programs should be reflected at all levels of policy and practice, including efforts in drafting statewide education legislation.

Back in 2015, Oregon took two bold and long-overdue actions in the passage of HB 2414 (2015) and SB 612 (2015), the latter of which, requires screening of every kindergarten and first grade student for risk factors of dyslexia and the training of at least one staff member per building related to dyslexia. While neither of these mentioned 2015 legislation efforts will benefit our daughter during her public schooling, our family is reassured that this existing policy foundation is another step forward in improving Oregon's public education system and the educational outcomes of all future students.

Third, the current SB 221 (2017), does not take into account the lived experience of students with dyslexia, their families, nor the educators that are frustrated by their lack of knowledge and recognition of dyslexia and their current lack of preparation to provide appropriate instruction. To strike out language pertaining to dyslexia is to discount and ignore the experience and needs of students with dyslexia. It is reasonable to expect that our educators are properly prepared to meet the needs of their students, including the 15- to 20% that are dyslexic and other students experiencing reading difficulties. At this time, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition on dyslexia and the IDA standards are the best practice. Please do not repeal the language pertaining to requirements that universities must align their coursework with standards from the International Dyslexia Association.

The current SB 221 (2017) is at best a debate on word choices and semantics; or worse, it is an example of certain university faculty unwilling to be inconvenienced by those students with dyslexia and not working in collaboration with the parents, educators and districts that struggle in their support of these children. For the university education programs, an acknowledgement of dyslexia, building a knowledge

basis and standards around dyslexia may be a shift, a need to broaden efforts and/or a cause to restructure. For students with dyslexia, a diagnosis and appropriate instruction is life changing; as part of a public education, it will be both transformative and achieve greater educational equity. Oregon's legislation on education needs to reflect the experience and needs of our students and ensure that all children have the necessary support and opportunities to thrive both as individuals and as contributors to our local communities, our economy and the state as a whole.

Sincerely,

Marty Stockton