

**Testimony to the Oregon Senate Committee on Education
SB 1003
March 30, 2017**

I am the mother of an 8-year-old son who was recently diagnosed with dyslexia. I am writing to support SB 1003 and to urge you to include the proposed amendments to that bill.

It is essential that Oregon schools use effective methods to identify students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities. For many districts, that will also mean a sea change in how they think about struggling readers, and how they communicate with these kids' families. Without the proper buy-in from district leaders, principals, and teaching staff, testing will not be taken seriously, and families without access to advocacy resources will not have the tools to help their children. That means we need to get the testing and information pieces right from the beginning.

The most frustrating part of our family's experience has been convincing our son's school to work with us to identify his dyslexia, rather than making excuses and putting endless roadblocks in our way.

I'll give some examples. Our son attends a high-performing public school in Portland. Great teachers, very active parent support, and high test scores. Yet, here is what the school told us:

In kindergarten, they told us our son wasn't working at grade level, and needed glasses.

In first grade, they told us our son wasn't making any progress, but that they preferred to wait until third grade to do testing -- because, and I quote, "then the gap is easier to measure." Let's pause and think about that for a moment: The school wanted our child to fall further behind because it would be easier for them to measure his failure.

This year, in second grade, they told us our son was so far behind the kids in the remedial reading class that the remedial reading teacher refused to work with him. They told us some kids are just bad readers. They said, "Okay, fine, we'll test him, but no one here knows how to teach dyslexic kids." And, amazingly, they said, "You might have more luck at a Title I school because they are used to providing services."

These are statements from a high-performing school. It makes me wonder what the parents at struggling schools are hearing.

My concern with SB 1003 is that, without amendments, it gives school districts too much latitude in the selection and design of their screening tests. Schools are so strapped for cash these days that, without proper safeguards, the effectiveness of the test will take a back seat to the cost. As introduced, SB 1003 states that the screening test "may" take into account four identified factors. Unless the tests used take into account ALL of these factors, many children with reading disabilities will slip through the cracks.

For instance, the test that our school currently uses to determine IEP eligibility measures phonological awareness and rapid automatic naming. Okay so far. But then the test blends those scores together to create a final score. My son is the rare dyslexic child who does well in phonological awareness but struggles enormously with rapid naming. The school's test actually caught his disability but the scoring method hid it again, and he was denied an IEP. We had to spend several thousand dollars out of pocket to get a private evaluation showing that the school didn't know how to read their own badly-designed

test.

Accurately identifying kids' learning disabilities is an equity issue. If the tests schools use are not carefully designed to catch dyslexia, parents (like us) will have to pay for private evaluations. Most health insurance doesn't pay for private testing because dyslexia is considered an educational issue. Districts provide reimbursement for private testing, but in my experience that information and reimbursement process was neither clear nor accessible. Even if I had been able to decipher the school district's cryptic instructions about how to get reimbursed, the reimbursable amount was significantly less than the fee for the private testing. So we ate that cost, and we continue to pay thousands of dollars per year for private tutoring.

My husband and I can afford to fight for our child. Thousands of families throughout the state don't have that luxury, and the school districts are not making it any easier for them. Our kids' self-esteem suffers enormously. On top of the thousands that we are paying for outside tutoring, we are now also paying for private counseling to help my son cope with the high levels of anxiety and stress that he experiences every day at school. Dyslexic children who are not identified will face even worse issues, and many of them do not graduate.

Dyslexia affects up to 20% of the population -- 20 percent. If you want to pass a bill that will have a measurable effect on Oregon's miserable graduation rate, please clarify the language of SB 1003 by requiring schools to use tests that take into account all of the four factors, and ensure that parents with dyslexic children receive accurate and clear information about their child's reading disability -- using the word "dyslexia" -- at whatever point the child's disability is identified.

Thank you.

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