

March 4, 2019

Good Afternoon Chairman Wagner and Members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for allowing us to share our experiences today. My name is Tara Jewell-Mixon and I am a wife and mother to dyslexics.

It was in this very committee thirty plus years ago I fell in love with education policy by watching my Mother testify. I went on to become a policy advisor, educator and eventually a parent. Nothing in my professional life could prepare me for the level of advocacy required of parent with a child with dyslexia.

My children go to a Title 1 school in the Portland Public Schools system. We moved home to Oregon once the legislation was passed. We had great hopes of the teacher trainings and screening process.

My youngest is in kindergarten. With two siblings and a parent who is dyslexic, there is a strong likelihood they will be too. Their kindergarten teacher and I have spoke often about this. We spoke of the screening process at length. The school has chosen not to inform parents about the screening process or DIBELS testing. As of now students who have been screened will get a letter home at the end of the year. The teacher will not have the results of the screening but will be notified if their students are identified by the screening. Parents are not allowed to have the results of the DIBELS test. Our kindergarten teacher has asked for dyslexia training repeatedly and been denied. A child's parents will be notified at the end of the year and want answers and help and there will be no one informed to give them. There will be no interventions done this whole year. Recently the teacher received a list of students identified by the screening as possibly being dyslexic. Her whole class was on the list and there was nothing she could do with the information. The teacher feels powerless and unable to truly help her students.

My other child is a 4th grader. They were diagnosed as dyslexic in kindergarten privately. We chose to homeschool for two and a half years after the schools would not accept the diagnosis. We requested an evaluation by Portland Public Schools this fall. They identified as dyslexic in December. The school has provided interventions since this fall that aren't dyslexic specific. As of now we still do not have a signed IEP. The school refuses to provide research based dyslexic specific reading interventions. They claim to use a combination approach where the progress is only monitored by the special education teacher. My child has made little to no progress in reading this year.

Portland Public Schools has adopted Lucy Calkins Whole Language program, which does not address the needs of dyslexics. Even with the new additions of phonics to the program, decoding is a small part that they believe children will catch on to. Decoding is a dyslexics greatness weakness. Neuroscience research shows that all students benefit from a structured literacy approach that is decoding specific. As of now 40 percent of students benefit from the Whole Language program. None of them are dyslexic.

My child has suffered emotionally and academically due to Portland Public Schools refusal to provide research based dyslexic specific interventions. Despite the many supports they have in place such as assistive technology, they are missing the one component that teaches dyslexics to read.

As the children being identified by the screening are notified they will face the same circumstances of a system that will fail them without informed teachers and dyslexic specific interventions.

The dyslexic legislation was ground breaking and so important to all of us. We must now build on this foundation a system where all dyslexic children get the proper structured literacy interventions they need, where all Oregon teachers are trained in dyslexia, and a screening system that informs parents and teachers from the beginning and offers interventions along the way.

Thank you.

Tara Jewell-Mixon
Parent