

06-10-19 Testimony by Meg Hagan, parent of dyslexic student

Good afternoon Chair Wagner and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for making time to hear my testimony today. I come to encourage you to take brave steps to ensure that the teachers in our state have access to the training they need to understand how to teach any child to read.

My dad, brother, nephew, and husband all have dyslexia and I am the proud mother of a 15-year-old son who was diagnosed with dyslexia during 3rd grade. After 18 months of special education services he'd made no progress because his teacher didn't have the proper curriculum or knowledge to advance his skills. Over the years I've watched my son struggle with writing assignments, cry over homework, develop anxiety, and most recently become clinically depressed. After years on an IEP and outside tutoring, my son still reads slowly and note taking is a painful process. Due to the groundbreaking research by Dr. Sally Shaywitz, we know that had he been identified in K-1 and provided with the proper curriculum before age 10, his neuropathways could have been rewired and reading and writing could have been made easier for him.

Senate Bill 1003 mandates a Universal Screening process in Oregon Kindergarten classrooms and for some Grade 1 students. In "Best Practices for Screening Students for Risk Factors of Dyslexia and Providing Instructional Support," created by the Oregon Department of Education in September, 2018, it is noted that screening should exist across the grade levels, even into high school. I believe the work of the legislature is not done. We now must expand Universal Screening and make sure our teachers, reading specialists, and school districts know what to do when a child has been identified as "At Risk" and they must have access only to evidence-based curriculum.

How do we help the kids most at risk for reading failure? Research cited in the "Best Practices" guide previously mentioned tells us that providing a systematic, explicit program of instruction that includes the 5 components of reading AND training teachers on structured literacy will turn the tide on illiteracy. There is a huge disconnect in our state between what ODE recommends and what Oregon schools practice. Our school districts have been far too cavalier and frankly, irresponsible, when choosing literacy curriculum. The Oregon Literacy Framework, adopted in 2009 has largely been ignored yet it contains the answers our students and teachers need.

In an ODE survey of the teachers who received dyslexia training in the past year, over 72% of them said the information received was VERY USEFUL, 100% of them recommended that other staff in their building complete the training, and 82% reported that the training made an impact on their students.

Here's a quote from one teacher who attended dyslexia trainings:

“I believe that dyslexia has not become more prevalent, but that our teaching methods have gone so far in the wrong direction that we are no longer reaching all students, but only a select few.”

I'd like to see our Oregon universities teach to an exam on the foundations of reading required to be taken by all who teach K-5 in our state.

Our teachers want to learn. Our students have a right to learn. Our future depends on an educated populace. Please help connect the science of reading to the classroom.