

Chair Wagner and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Monicah McGee, and I am a parent of school-aged children in Lake Oswego, OR.

When I learned that we were coming here today, I debated about what to talk about — whether to list the statistics that link our dyslexia community to high dropout rates, mental health issues including suicide, underachievement, and lost earnings — or to describe my battle just last week with school personnel over basic accommodations for my child, who is working so hard to achieve.

Frankly, I'm battle weary, after spending thousands of dollars in outside testing and tutoring and hundreds of hours advocating for my child and others like him, with little meaningful systemic change in my school district. This is the version of a free and appropriate public education for students with learning disabilities. It is substandard, certainly not free, and requires a warrior.

I can't quit thinking about those kids who may not have someone who can wage war against a system currently designed to produce a half-literate populace.

My story, and that of so many others, is one of inequity and institutional betrayal. I trusted teachers to know how to teach my child to read. When my child struggled, I turned to my school for help. It was a rude awakening to learn that school-based help wasn't coming. It was a startling revelation to learn that administrators were aware that a portion of kids weren't learning to read, and no one was working overtime to address that disparity. It was devastating to learn that teachers who did want to help, didn't know how.

So, I paid for tutors and psychologists and doctors, and I worried about and advocated for the families who couldn't pay — for the kids whose life options were shrinking before they even hit third grade.

If I have learned anything throughout this advocacy, it is this: Teachers want training, and school administrators pay attention to legal requirements. My experience is that ODE best practices and guidelines are seen as mere suggestions and mostly ignored. I cannot point to a single exemplar school district within the state.

Affecting literacy rates in Oregon requires your advocacy, your legal muscle, and your support for teacher training. I hope that you, as a committee, will take on our literacy crisis in a meaningful way, as it is a civil rights and equity issue that affects us all.

Thank you.