



Making public schools great for every child

KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

**Mark Desetti, Testimony
Senate Bill 44
Senate Education Committee
Thursday, February 7, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Mark Desetti representing the Kansas National Education Association and I come before you today in support of Senate Bill 44 and the children of Kansas who struggle with reading deficiencies and in particular, dyslexia.

This is not a new discussion you are having here today. There have been numerous dyslexia bills heard over the years, some things have passed – mostly resolutions to direct the State Board or local boards to do something. We have sometimes come before you to argue against bigger bills and encourage the resolutions.

But now we have come to the conclusion that this is the time get going on this issue. There has been time to create plans and explore options and best practices. Now we need to get about the business of better meeting the needs of these children.

Senate Bill 44 is not some kind of draconian legislation that puts enormous stresses on school districts. Quite simply, it directs that students with a legitimate diagnosis of dyslexia – we note that the bill specifies health care professionals who make an appropriate diagnosis – get the services they need.

This bill also ensures that there will be no foot dragging on the implementation of services and, in our estimation, gives the school and school district enough time to put those services in place.

We do have four suggestions that we think would improve the bill and provide more flexibility to parents and schools in determining the best services for individual children.

- **On page one in line 19**, we would suggest changing the “shall” to “may.” As written now, the bill would require that every identified child be pulled out of the classroom. For some this might be the best approach. For others, maybe not. Some parents and special education advocates have argued long and hard to get their children into the general education classroom and out of segregated programs. This should be a decision left up to the parents and school personnel to decide cooperatively.
- **On page one in lines 21 and 22**, the bill mandates that the child have access “to instructional strategies that utilize intensive multisensory phonetic methods for 90 minutes per instructional day.” Again, we would argue against such a one-size-fits-all approach. For some children intensive multisensory phonetic methods will work but for others they may not. We would suggest that the lines read, “to appropriate instructional strategies that may utilize intensive multisensory phonetic methods.” We would suggest striking the mandatory 90 minutes per instructional day. Again, these are decisions best left to be worked out between the parent and school cooperatively. And for small children, 90 minutes is an eternity. Back when I taught kindergarten we blocked time in no more than 20 minute intervals more in keeping with a small child’s attention span.
- **On page one, lines 28 and 29**, there is a new requirement that teachers “successfully complete teacher preparation courses.” We believe that teacher preparation programs should be adjusted if

necessary to include such coursework either as a separate course or embedded in existing coursework but we do not believe it is appropriate to require currently licensed teachers to take a class. This requirement would put a financial burden on currently practicing teachers as well as a significant time commitment. It would be best to allow for district professional development programs to handle any identified needs. Of course, I point out that we also support full funding of the professional development formula.

- Finally, **on page two in section three**, you give the parent a right to seek help elsewhere at the school district's expense if the school fails to implement interventions within six weeks. We do not quibble with the six weeks – that would seem to be ample time to get things going. But you must take into account the process of determining the best program. This should work much like the IEP process. We agree that the school district should not be able to drag their feet but neither should the parent. If the parents fail to attend or decline to schedule a meeting that results in decisions not being made in time to start appropriate interventions, then the school district should not be responsible for paying for outside services. It seems a better policy to us to mandate an IEP-like meeting within a set timeframe and the implementation of services no later than six weeks following that meeting.