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Dyslexia Help KC LLC
Special Education Advocate

Kansas House Legislative Committee
RE: HB 2602

Dear Members of the Committee,

My journey as a Special Education Advocate began with my daughter's dyslexia diagnosis. As a licensed Kansas educator, I felt that I was prepared to teach to a variety of learning styles. I felt that I had an advantage over other parents in that I knew the learning accomplishments for each stage of development. I knew how to adjust my teaching, reteach, and check for understanding. However, at no time in my formal educational training did I learn how to screen or teach a child with dyslexia. As an educator, I felt as though I had failed. Why was I unable to teach my own daughter how to read using the techniques and theories I had been taught? As a parent, my concerns about her reading, writing and spelling development were dismissed by the school. Teachers and school administrators told me that she would grow out of it and not to worry because they were offering reading supports for her at school. My options were to continue to watch her fail while the school tried more interventions or, try to find a solution on my own. At no time, did the school inform me of my options for special education. I didn't know that I could have requested a special education evaluation. I realized that as an educator, I was at a loss and as a parent, I was without direction. My experience mirrors those of every parent I meet. Parents often come to me confused, betrayed, angry, and exhausted as a result of fighting with school districts to recognize their child's disability.

The Kansas Department of Education website hosts all of the information needed to direct a parent's understanding of the special education system. As an educator, I knew to begin my search for information there. The problem is, that most parents aren't aware that the website exists, let alone how to navigate or interpret it. Therefore, parents that are new to a dyslexia diagnosis or suspect dyslexia are often unaware of the resources available to them. A copy of Parental Rights are not required to be provided by the school until a formal MTSS meeting which often doesn't occur unless the parent knows they can request a meeting. Without knowing their parental educational rights, parents are left stranded by the school districts and frustrated by their child's lack of progress.

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Currently, many Kansas school districts offer few or no instructional programs that are appropriate for teaching children with dyslexia. Schools aren't given the funding necessary to train staff to teach these programs. As a Special Education Advocate, my mission is to educate parents and staff so that all of the needs of the child are met. I often offer literature and resources to parents and school staff. I have gone back to school to study research-based teaching methods for dyslexia, IDEA laws, and the Kansas Special Education Handbook to be a resource for my community.

The more I share my dyslexia journey with others, the more I learn about the need for dyslexia screening and education. As parents, we assume that schools will recognize the problems our students are having and guide us to solutions. This isn't happening. There are rules in the special education game that aren't being shared with parents by school districts. Parent concerns are being dismissed in favor of "waiting it out". Many times, I will encounter administrative staff that is misinformed of the eligibility indicators for Specific Learning Disabilities. Often, district evaluators don't have or use appropriate tests for identifying dyslexia and therefore determine the student to be ineligible. I don't blame the teachers. They aren't trained to identify dyslexia through in-services or classes. I don't blame the principals. They are working on limited budgets with overloaded special education staff. So where do we place the blame?

Kansas has failed our dyslexic students by not providing the funding and programs required to properly meet the needs of these students. Today's proposed legislation is a start in the right direction but, screening for dyslexia is only the first step. One in five students struggle with dyslexia and are failing under the current instructional curriculum. There must be a plan in place that involves district, teacher, and parent training. There needs to be funding available to purchase appropriate educational programs for children with dyslexia and training for the teachers who will be teaching it. Kansas parents need to be able to trust that their students will have an equal opportunity to learn and grow in their public schools. It shouldn't have to be such a fight to make sure that our students receive a fair and appropriate education.

Sincerely,
Jennifer A. Knight, M.Ed.
Dyslexia Help KC LLC