

February 6, 2018

Re: Kansas House Bill 2602

To Whom it May Concern:

My 8-year-old son, who attends a Kansas public elementary school, was diagnosed with dyslexia less than a year ago. The journey to get him assessed, diagnosed, and help has been frustrating and difficult. I strongly believe it would not have been this difficult if schools were allowed to screen for dyslexia and had the resources to help dyslexics.

When my son was in kindergarten, I started to realize he was not reading and writing like his classmates. My son's difficulty retaining letter sounds, sounding out simple words and retaining sight words made it impossible for him to even pass "Level 1" of his kindergarten word list, while most of his classmates were passing several levels each month. By the end of his first year of kindergarten, he had barely passed "Level 1". He was put into a Title Reading program, and still he struggled. We worked very hard with him at home trying to help him read, and no matter how much time we spent on it, we made almost no progress. It was very frustrating for him. In fact, it was so difficult and frustrating, that many evenings he would break down in tears. It was heartbreaking! He worked SO HARD. He tried as hard as he could, and nothing we did at home or school was enough. I felt like I was failing him as a parent. We knew how bright and creative our son was, the school knew he was bright, but for whatever reason, he could not read and write. My son's self-esteem plummeted halfway through his first year of kindergarten. We tried to reassure him that one day it would "just click", but it never did.

We discussed the situation with his Title Reading teacher, his home room teacher, the school counselor, and the school principal. Everyone decided that he was not ready for first grade, and that first grade would only be more difficult and hurt his self-esteem further. We also knew that being held back in kindergarten may stigmatize him among his classmates, and may harm his self-esteem further. As parents, we thought maybe because he had a summer birthday and was a bit younger than his classmates, he just needed more time. The school suggested he attend summer school, and he did. But his month at summer school did very little, if anything, to help him read. So, we made the difficult decision to retain him in kindergarten for one more year. This was one of the most difficult decisions we have ever made. I had no idea what the symptoms of dyslexia were, or if he had a learning disorder. If I had any idea that he had dyslexia, I would have gotten him tested his first year of kindergarten. I naively just assumed he needed more time and it would just "click" one day.

My son's second year of kindergarten was less difficult, but still he struggled and failed to obtain the level of reading that was recommended to enter first grade. He had made some progress, so we thought he was progressing enough that he would eventually catch up. It wasn't until after the first quarter of first grade that I realized that something was seriously wrong, and that he didn't just need more time and more practice. If not for his first grade teacher's perseverance, and her communication with me regarding his progress or lack of progress, I don't know where we would be today. His teacher was instrumental in helping me come to my conclusion that what we were doing wasn't working, and something needed to be done before he got further behind.

I started "googling" my son's reading difficulties to try to find a method at home that would help reading and writing "click" for him. The term "dyslexia" repeatedly appeared in my searches. I researched dyslexia and realized my son had almost every symptom! When I asked his teacher if she thought he might have dyslexia or if he needed to be tested, I was informed that the schools are not allowed to recommend that he be tested. It was up to me to demand that the school test him for eligibility of an IEP, but that was the extent of help I could get from the school. I had my son tested at a reputable children's hospital for learning disabilities. Unfortunately, due to the demand, the hospital was not able to schedule his evaluation for several months. Once he was evaluated and diagnosed with dyslexia, I was shocked to learn that the schools do not have multi-sensory specialists to help dyslexics learn. I had to find him a specially trained multisensory tutor to teach him to read and write. I enrolled him in a dyslexia center 30 minutes from our home, because there were no openings close to us. He now goes twice a week, at \$50/per session. Our insurance does not reimburse for these sessions. He will need to attend the sessions for about 3 years! My son now has an IEP, but the IEP only provides some accommodations and allows him to attend special education a few minutes a day, which does not utilize the multisensory method. The special education teacher is not a dyslexia teacher. Because dyslexics use a different pathway in their brain when reading and writing, they need to have the multisensory method to adequately learn those skills. I am very thankful for the IEP, but it alone is not enough.

In conclusion, I believe that had my son been screened one or two years earlier, it would have saved us much frustration, money, tears, and anguish. My heart goes out to children whose families cannot afford a multisensory tutor and families who do not recognize the symptoms of dyslexia until it is almost too late and they have given up. Children with dyslexia are bright, creative, and have so much to offer the world. Please do not let them get left behind because they learn to read and write via a different method than other kids. Dyslexia is not rare. One in five kids (20%) have dyslexia. Yet, Kansas schools are not adequately meeting their needs. It would greatly benefit Kansas to invest in these kids.

Thank you for your time, Kansas Parent Sandie Kistler

