

Testimony for HB2602 - Proponent

Good Afternoon, Madam Chair Baumgardner and Committee members, my name is Katie Mitchell and I am the proud parent of Canann Mitchell and Nora Mitchell. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of HB2602.

Why is dyslexia a word I know so much about? Each day our family listens to my smart, kind-hearted, creative, hard-working ten year old son struggle to read a simple passage in a book. Why, because each day he asks me if I think he is dumb. I am here to advocate for Dyslexia. I am here to advocate for my son. I am here to advocate for 1 in 5 children.

Let me describe the journey that my son Canann and I have been on over the last 5 years. I cannot tell you the amount of tear of sadness and frustration both my son and me cried during his first few years in grade school. In Kindergarten he could not learn his sight words. I still remember yelling at him “why can’t you get the word “the”. There was something missing.

1st grade, Canann would come home and not be able to read simple words. I knew in my gut that something wasn’t right but kept hearing the all too familiar “it’s developmental”, “he’s doing great and he’s reading at grade level” – while I kept pointing out what appeared to be weak phonemic awareness and little understanding of how words are formed.

2nd grade his teacher recognized that he may have Dyslexia. He was diagnosed at the end of 2nd grade. During the testing process we relied on the school district to know what Canann needed; however, we realized that they knew very little about Dyslexia. They had already tried two different reading curriculums and he tested below grade level. During the summer we sent Canann to a Dyslexia tutor where he learned specific phonemic strategies in order for him to decode words and showed improvement.

3rd grade year he continued with Special Ed however he was still reading at a 2nd grade level at the end of the school year. He continued to ask me if I thought he was dumb. We again sent him to a private tutor during the summer and again he improved his decoding. The beginning of 4th grade, I visited with the administrators and they decided to implement a different reading curriculum. They have assured me that this one has worked with other Dyslexic kids. He is making progress but we again will have him work this summer with his private tutor since he continues to read at below grade level.

In the famous words of Jonathan Mooney, author of Learning Between the Lines and The Short Bus, graduate of Brown University, and severely dyslexic, “I never suffered from dyslexia, but I always suffered from dysteachia.” He did succeed. Not because his school quickly identified him and provided him the appropriate supports, but because his mother did not accept the answers the school was giving them about why Jonathan was struggling. She fought long and she fought hard for him. But, why should we have to fight at all? Why wasn’t the school helping him? No, he did not go to a Kansas school, but the sad truth is that I am that parent and every day in the Kansas school system another parent is trying to figure out why their child is struggling, they are so frustrated with trying to work with the school to help their child they don’t know what to else to do, they are literally breaking down into tears because their bright child hates school and they are watching their child’s self-esteem being taken away more and more every day they spend in school.

Dyslexia is not a disease and, therefore, there is no cure. Significant number of students with dyslexia go undiagnosed and their symptoms unaddressed with tragic results due largely to lack of awareness and knowledge about this common learning difference. With proper diagnosis, appropriate and timely instruction, hard work, and support from family, teachers, friends, individuals who have dyslexia can succeed in school and later as adults. Individuals with dyslexia do not have a lower level of intelligence.

It is crucial to be able to recognize the signs of symptoms of dyslexia. The earlier a child is evaluated, the sooner he or she can obtain the appropriate instruction and accommodations he or she needs to succeed in school. Parents are not finding the answers they need when they are turning to the school system to help their struggling child. Parents of these students have the right to believe the school system is going to provide the appropriate education for their child to be successful in school. Unfortunately parents don’t know that the school staff are ill prepared to help their child and that their child will most likely not get the type of remediation that is supported by evidenced-based research to help kids with dyslexia learn to read and write. And, make no doubt about it, these kids can learn to read and write with our support. I appreciate you taking the time to listen to us and we appreciate your support.