

Kansas Senate members,

I am the mother of 3 dyslexic children. A regular, college graduate, mom who thought she knew how to parent and raise happy, successful children. My oldest child attended 2 years of pre-school which seemed pretty normal to me at the time. His first day of Kindergarten he went to the principal's office and I was horrified! He did not have a smooth K year, but he was a young energetic boy, and the teacher did not seem to have any concerns. He did have an IEP for speech services. (I blamed my parents for my not so great grades. They never checked if I had homework and I never learned how to properly complete my homework, but I worked hard). So I was the overly concerned mom. My son and I sat down every day and looked through his backpack. I remember his first homework in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. He had a book to read. He was to read it 3 times and the person he read it to signed the back. I was so excited and took him to the living room to read. He didn't read to me. He had no idea what the words said. So I thought, they must not have gone over it in class, I will read to him then he will read back to me. No luck! Same blank look! So I suggested he sound out the words. First page we struggled through. On the second page, I thought, same words different order. However, he acted like he had never seen the words before in his life. I asked him to sound out the words like we had practiced. By the third time through the book I was frustrated beyond belief. I remember that day like it just happened. I picked him up off my lap put him in the chair and said I must not be able to teach you. I immediately went to the school the next day and expressed my concerns. The teacher said no worries all children learn at different rates. He is fine. I did not argue with the teacher. She knew her profession, so I thought. The year never got better. Spelling was atrocious! Hours spent on spelling words he never learned. We prayed for a C on the Friday test, but then by the following Monday he wouldn't be able to spell any of the words. The amount of time wasted on his education could have all been prevented. I asked every teacher, parent, and friend I knew what I was doing wrong. He even went to the school reading specialist during his reading time. Nobody could answer my questions or concerns.

My daughter is 2 years younger than my son. Same issues only she was quiet and never let on how bad it really was. It took her hours to complete assignments.

Then my youngest started school. He is 6 years younger than my oldest. I knew immediately we had major issues. Back to asking everyone and questioning everything including a screening at Sylvan learning center who could not or did not answer any of my questions. He had new fresh out of college, teachers as the older teachers were retiring in the school district. I thought, new ideas, but still no answers. They were supportive but his education was lacking. They were excited to start MTSS, what a failure! On to second grade he went even though he still did not know his alphabet!

My oldest in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at this point wanted to quit music. I was heartbroken! He was a great trumpet player and I didn't understand why. He said, "Mom I can't read the music and get yelled at all the time". He would watch another player finger the music and had a good enough ear he could play all the music asked of him but he did not do as the teacher said. He couldn't! He would not play the first 4 to 6 times they went over the music. He would watch and listen then he would play what he had seen and heard. I finally gave in and let him quit because he was

tired of getting yelled at and humiliated in class. I visited with an old classmate who was a music teacher about the problem. He told me he had heard of a center that may have information. He said I have never dealt with them but it wouldn't hurt to call. Finally answers and lifesaving information!

I called and not only did they answer my questions they explained why my children were having trouble. Everything came together. I took two teachers down to Wichita to visit the center to get ideas on what we could do together to help children like mine. Unfortunately, they did not see the resource I did. They did not change their ways of teaching even though they knew these students were not learning. Frustrated, I took my vacation time from work and attended classes on my own. I started immediately implementing this teaching strategy with my youngest. The next year I quit my job so I could tutor my children in reading. It changed their lives! My sweet boy had changed into an angry frustrated little boy in only three years of school. I continue to tutor him daily. He also continues in public education because I feel being around his peers is important. However, every day I wonder if school is doing more harm than good, because of the negativity that surrounds a struggling reader. He is now in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He is not reading at grade level, because of the bad habits he had picked up, but he is making progress. I was told at the beginning of the school year "he went up 14 points in his reading that is unheard of". This should prove my training is working but there is still no change in the school's curriculum.

You cannot even imagine how upset I got when I found out this strategy has been known for decades. My oldest son is a senior this year. He is graduating and cannot spell the word hen correctly. He always spells it "hin". He spells phonetically which is embarrassing for an 18 year old. He is incredibly bright and gifted in so many ways but feels he is never good enough because of his lack of reading and spelling abilities. All which could have been avoided if teachers knew and implemented Orton-Gillingham approach to reading and spelling.

Our prisons are filled with non-readers. There is a direct link. I have read to my children from the time they were born and I still get so upset when people say you need to read to your children studies show they will be better readers. NOPE! Not all the time is this true. Reading to them is important but not all children learn to read by being read to. My youngest would drag me book after book and couldn't read A he would interchange "the" and "A". He had memorized them backwards! I did not know this was possible! These kids need sound to symbol teaching. They are educable. They are bright loving children who deserve a change. At the very least teachers should be able to communicate with parents when they suspect the student is dyslexic so the parent has a chance to research and help their children. After I had the kids diagnosed the reading specialist at the school admitted she thought they were dyslexic but had never said anything. My older two children are moderately dyslexic and my youngest is severely dyslexic.

These children need your help. Teachers need to be trained with an Orton-Gillingham approach to reading. Kansas will not improve their test scores until we change our teaching practices.

Thank you for your support and help!

A Dyslexic Family