

# Michele Berg, Ph.D.

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## **Support of Substitution for House Bill No. 2602**

**Michele Berg, Ph.D.**

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**Director, Center for Learning Disorders, Family Service & Guidance, Topeka**

**Currently retired and in private practice**

When I began my teaching career, I was very excited about the prospect of teaching children to read. I had a Master's degree in Learning Disabilities and had completed many hours of supervised student teaching. Much to my dismay, I soon discovered that I was ill-equipped to improve reading in even very bright and motivated children from stable homes. I started looking for solutions. I heard about a teacher who was getting good results even with children who had such serious reading problems that they were essentially non-readers after years of special education. I pestered her until she agreed to let me observe her. I was impressed by what I observed. Her students were not only learning, they remembered and could apply new skills even days after a new skill was introduced.

I wanted to know what this teacher knew. She told me about the Orton Dyslexia Society. All I knew about dyslexia was what I had been taught in graduate school: it was a meaningless diagnosis and that Orton was a cult of kooks. Nevertheless, I started attending the annual Orton Conferences. I was surprised by the caliber of the speakers, most of whom were researchers from top universities. I began to understand the reading process and the treatment of reading disorders on a level I didn't think was possible. I had previously attended the annual conferences of the Learning Disabilities Association of America, but hadn't found what I needed in terms of reading.

I became very involved in what is now the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). I started a summer school Teacher Training Institute on the Menninger campus. The Institute introduced teachers to Orton-Gillingham-based multisensory teaching of reading, spelling, and connected writing, now established by decades of research to be the most effective instruction for students with dyslexia. Teachers often exclaimed, "Why aren't we being taught this in our reading course work?? This method works!"

I have served as a consultant to many private and public schools in Kansas and across the United States. I was a consultant to a Reading First grant and the head of professional development for two Early Reading First grants. I have witnessed first-hand the commitment of classroom teachers to the students in their care. I have witnessed the frustration and despair when teachers are not able to improve a student's poor reading skills. I have also witnessed the joy and relief teachers experience once they understand dyslexia, are able to distinguish dyslexia from other reading disorders, and know how to deliver targeted instruction appropriate to specific reading disorders.

I support the formation of a legislative task force on dyslexia. Kansas can do better for students with dyslexia and for the teachers who are trying to help these students.

Thank you,

Michele Berg, Ph.D.

Advisory Board Member and Founding Member Kansas/Western Missouri Branch of IDA