

Testimony in Support of House Bill No.2602

By Angie Schreiber, Executive Director, Cradle to Career Literacy Center, Emporia, KS

Before the House Education Committee, February 7, 2018

Why dyslexia screening? 15 to 20 % of the population have dyslexia. Early identification can help ease the burden of reading remediation on the state, the schools, and the parents.

From a state's perspective – There are approximately 493,000 students enrolled in public schools in Kansas according to KASB. If just 15% of the students struggle with dyslexia that is 74,000 students who struggle with slow reading, poor spelling, and poor writing. Identifying children early, helps the child as early intervention is prevention. Providing early reading skills, especially phonological awareness, to pre-schoolers in 15 minutes a day can prevent a lifetime a reading failure.

From, personal experience as a center director, nearly all the students we work with on reading remediation, do not possess this basic skill, that is phonological awareness, and research shows no one learns to read without it.

Poor readers are in our prisons. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 70% of all incarcerated adults cannot read at a 4th grade level, “meaning they lack the reading skills to navigate many everyday tasks or hold down anything but lower (paying) jobs.”

Our state needs a well-educated work force if we are to expand business opportunities in the state. The number of students who are reading well has not changed since 1998, as demonstrated by Kansas NAEP scores. The percentage of students in Kansas who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 35 percent in 2015. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2013 (38 percent) and in 1998 (34 percent).

Over twenty years ago my son, Ben, was diagnosed with dyslexia when he was in the 3rd grade. He was struggling to learn to read. In 1995 special education used the wait to fail model, students had to be two years behind before we tested and looked for a learning disability. Special education did not talk about dyslexia, it was just a learning disability.

Flash forward until today and sadly to say very little has changed in our state for our children. Even though there is an agreed upon definition, dyslexia is one of the most researched reading disabilities, dyslexia can be diagnosed with appropriate testing. The U.S. Department of Education has issued a formal letter to state departments of education and school districts indicating if it is dyslexia put it on the IEP. Parents still have to fight to get schools to recognize that their child has dyslexia.

We need to recognize a large portion of our students have dyslexia, we need to learn what it is, how to screen for it and hopefully then, learn how to teach these children to read.