

February 5, 2018

Christina Middleton,
8617 Greenwood Lane,
Lenexa, KS 66215

RE: Written testimony in support of HB 2602

My name is Christina Middleton. I am a parent of a dyslexic child in Lenexa, KS.

When I explain Dyslexia to my friends, I have them picture two file systems full of information. While one file system is organized and the information is easily accessible, the other file system is crammed full of papers and time has to be taken to access the correct information. Dyslexics have all the same information as non-dyslexics, but because of their lack of decoding abilities, they have to learn how everything works together to access the information in the brain and that takes extra time.

Dyslexia is very common. I guarantee someone you know has dyslexia. Dyslexia is hereditary. It affects 20% of the population. It is the most common of all learning disabilities and yet it is virtually unknown in the school setting.

Students are extremely intelligent and so their difficulties in the classroom often lead to them being labeled as lazy, that they aren't trying hard enough. Where actually, the opposite is true, they are trying the hardest of them all.

Teachers are undertrained on dyslexia, the most common of all learning disabilities. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), there are only 25 University Programs accredited by IDA. Which for a parent is confusing, because you would believe them to be the expert on teaching kids to read, write and spell and they probably have not been through Dyslexia training in preparation to become a teacher.

With the lack of training and understanding at the school level, parents inevitably learn that they have to become the Dyslexia expert. In a recent poll of the Dyslexia Johnson County Support group, only 10% of parents had their child's learning needs brought to their attention by school staff. 90% of concerned parents had to figure it out all on their own. Keep in mind that parents are not supposed to be the experts in identifying a child with needs, it's the school's legal responsibility to find children with exceptionalities.

Unfortunately, even though the schools are untrained on Dyslexia, they still act like they are the experts on all things education. A well-researched parent like me soon learns they have no idea and it soon becomes a battle of wills. The will of the school that acts like they know everything and the battle of the Mama, who puts their heart and soul into finding the answers to their child's stress, struggles, and worry. Parents become frustrated with the "red tape, politics, the system." Ultimately, doubt and a lack of trust for the school administration is forged.

Parents learn through their research, that a Dyslexic student needs a very structured, systematic, cumulative, multi-sensory approach to literacy, building on all 5 fundamentals of reading at the same time, weaving writing and spelling instruction into the intervention. However, when the parent asks how the school will remediate their child, the school tells them they have several programs that will work.

You research the school's proposed interventions and learn that none of them address all 5 fundamentals at the same time while building a foundation of skills. You suggest a list of research-proven programs from the International Dyslexia Association and they find a reason to deny each one.

Finally, a parent realizes the only way their child will succeed at school is by taking control of everything and tutoring the child outside of school hours. The cost to our family was well over \$10,000. We scrimped and cut out the extra fun things like soccer and family activities to be able to afford for my son's tutoring, so he could learn to read, write and spell.

Not only is there the financial cost, but when I asked my 8th-grade son what it cost him, he said, "time." It cost him three hours a week after school for three years. While most kids were playing with friends or going to soccer practice, my son was learning how to read, write and spell outside of school because, after seven different reading interventions, I was done trusting their interventions.

Through all these frustrations and failures by the schools and the laws, I am grateful for one thing it has taught us...Advocacy, my son has learned how to be an excellent advocate for himself.

He would carry around his IEP and anytime a teacher told him to do something that didn't align with his IEP, he would pull it out and inform them of his rights. At an IEP meeting in 7th grade, he brought his IEP with proposed changes marked up on it, the IEP team said that they had never had a student do that before. When he brought home his High School enrollment paperwork, he came home completely frustrated because on the health form it had checkboxes for all the health concerns and dyslexia was not on the list, but ADHD was. He knows that ADHD affects only 11% of the population, but dyslexia affects 20%, so why wouldn't dyslexia be in that form?

Statistically, one in five students is dyslexic! These kids need you to be their advocate! They need your support!

Please support House Bill 2602 to ensure that schools are doing their federally mandated responsibility of finding children with exceptionalities, so they can be identified early enough to avoid years of struggles and frustrations!

Thank you,

Christina Middleton