

I am writing to offer my support for House Bill 2602, an act creating the legislative task force on dyslexia. As an adult with dyslexia and the parent of a dyslexic child, I believe this legislation is critical to advance education in the state of Kansas.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in 1980 when I was six years old. At that time, the education system had little to offer to me. While I was placed on an IEP and pulled out of general education classrooms to receive special education services, my special education teachers had no idea how to teach me to read or spell. I was the worst speller in the classroom, never passing a weekly spelling test no matter how many hours I studied. I couldn't read my textbooks and I would fake my way through reading assignments and book reports. I went on to earn both a bachelor's degree and a masters degree and I have a successful career. This is despite the K-12 education I received not because of it. My elementary school years were the hardest of my life. I would write a Master's thesis any day over spending a week in a third grade classroom when failure was inevitable.

Thirty years later my daughter entered kindergarten. Like most of her dyslexic peers, Rose advanced happily through preschool and seemed on track for academic success. She was a good listener, understood core "preschool concepts" and enjoyed being at school. She loved to learn. But then, it all started to fall apart. Her peers (including her twin sister) all began to read. For them, sounds become words, words became sentences, sentences became paragraphs and the paragraphs became stories. For Rose, these connections were not happening. Letters were confusing and they didn't seem to add up to anything. Sometimes she would know a word in a book but when the same word appeared on the next page she was lost. She knew she was different. Her dad and I knew she was struggling, but we weren't sure how to help. Her teachers told us not to worry. We heard over and over, what we already knew, Rose was very smart. She was faking her way through first and second grade using context clues and her intellect to cover for the fact she couldn't read or spell. Rose had excellent teachers but they were not trained to identify her reading disability. We pushed. Rose participated in Title 1 reading intervention. The teacher was perplexed. Rose could had great comprehension if a story was read aloud to her. She had the ability to write sentences on grade level, but she couldn't spell any of the words. We raised our concerns about dyslexia but were told that wasn't a diagnosis made by schools. I didn't care about the word, I wanted my daughter to get help.

Rose is now a seventh grader. She is on an IEP and receives many special education services. Rose still struggles to read a menu in a restaurant and to play games with her friends which involve reading. She can't spell. Dyslexia and learning disabilities impact every aspect of her academic life. Her school has been amazing about providing her accommodations. She uses voice type and audiobooks. But at the end of the day, Rose wants to read. She wants to be able to read a playbill or a street sign. She wants to send a quick text message to a friend with confidence that it says what she thinks it says. The school has tried various reading and spelling interventions with limited success. This is frustrating for Rose. For a variety of reasons, we haven't invested the money or time in outside reading interventions. So Rose is where she is.

I would be mad if I felt like the school district and teachers didn't care about my child or were disinterested in helping her learn. But that is not the case. They are her biggest supporters who will do anything they can to help her. To help her, they need the right tools. I am not mad, I am disappointed that in 30 years our schools can't offer her more. I support creating the legislative task force on dyslexia because I want good teachers to have the tools to help Rose and other children like her.

To me, the most important part of this legislation is the mandate to look at early identification. What I didn't know seven years ago when my daughter was faking her way through first grade is that she was building a solid foundation of anxiety and self-doubt. That despite the the most nurturing of environments a parent could hope for for their child, my daughter was learning to feel stupid and different. Have I mentioned that Rose is very smart. She knew good students are rewarded for getting all the answers right, for reading the most pages, for fitting a predetermined standard. She knew her teachers were kind and well trained. I think this is what made her feel inadequate and simply not intelligent. School became a stressful place. I didn't realize this was happening. I didn't realize the impact this was having on my child. In fifth grade I asked if she wanted to join the school band. She said she thought reading music would be too hard but asked if she could take private lessons somewhere. What she said next really stuck with me "you know, school isn't really a good place for me to learn". I have mentioned that our schools are great. When I asked for a recommendation for private lessons, the band director offered to work with Rose one-on-one to go at her pace. Reading music did prove too hard for Rose, but the moral of the story is that even in the best educational environment, dyslexic students feel like a square peg in a sea of round holes. They feel like school isn't the place for them to learn.

Today, anxiety is likely one of the biggest barriers to her education. I have no idea if Rose would read better if she were identified as dyslexic in first grade, but I am certain she would have less anxiety and would feel better about herself. So as a parent, that is why I support this bill.

As a dyslexic adult and a parent of a student struggling through school, it isn't hard to understand why I support this legislation. As lawmakers and stewards of taxpayer resources in Kansas, you look at this bill through a different lens. Will this investment be a good deal for taxpayers in the state? I encourage you to look at the cost of illiteracy. In 2018, most adults who struggle with literacy have dyslexia or other another related learning disability. Please ask for data how adults who struggle with literacy fair in our society and how these challenges impact other taxpayer resources. Please weigh that against the cost of early intervention and teacher training.

I encourage you to ask school districts for data. How are their dyslexic students doing? Do they have similar gains on the reading MAP tests as their non-dyslexic peers? For students who are receiving special education services, are they meeting their IEP goals for reading? Are these goals rigorous enough to move them to reading at or near grade-level? Please ask for

data showing that the status quo is effective. Talk to dyslexic students. How do they feel about school? When a dyslexic high school student of today thinks back five years to elementary school, do they have the same horrible memories that I do?

Thank you for listening. Please consider adding your support to this bill.

Wendy Lubbe
9806 West 124th Ter
Overland Park, KS 66213