

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 1131

Sixty-seventh Legislative Assembly of North Dakota, Submitted By Pam Krueger

Thank you, Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Pam Krueger, and I am in favor of House Bill 1131.

My concern for students with dyslexia and interest in teacher training is a result of over sixteen years of training and experience. I am an instructor in the teacher education program at Dickinson State University, an Orton-Gillingham fellow in training, and I am currently completing my PhD in Teacher Education at the University of North Dakota. I have had the privilege of tutoring many amazing and talented children and adults with dyslexia for many years, and have witnessed how with proper identification and remediation, they can become fluent readers and successful students with their self-esteem intact.

I believe that a credential for specialists in dyslexia will be helpful in three ways- in training new teachers who are currently in Teacher Education Programs, in providing professional development and support for current teachers, and in directly supporting students with dyslexia.

General education teachers, reading specialists, and even Special Education teachers are not always taught about dyslexia or best practices for working with students with dyslexia, yet they are expected to help them to be successful. As others have stated, it is believed that one in five people have dyslexia; therefore, all teachers will have students with dyslexia in their classrooms. In the research for my degree, not yet published, I surveyed a random sample of elementary administrators and K-3 general education, reading/Title 1, and Special Education teachers about their knowledge of dyslexia. Their responses showed that, as in other parts of the country, knowledge about dyslexia is increasing, but there are some myths that are still holding on, even in the field of education.

- 86% of all types of teachers and 87% of administrators believed that seeing letters and words backwards is a characteristic of dyslexia

- 70% of teachers and 84% of administrators believed that eye tracking exercises would remediate difficulties for students with dyslexia
- 61% of teachers and 65% of administrators believed that colored overlays and lenses would help
- 16% of teachers and 11% of administrators scored some truth to the statement that general education teachers receive training in dyslexia
- 20% of teachers and 24% of administrators scored some truth to the statement that Special Education teachers receive training in dyslexia.
- 37% of teachers stated that they learned the most about dyslexia from “my own research and reading”, 24% said from “professional development” and 17% said from “a Teacher Education Program”.

Although these statistics show a need for changes in Teacher Education Programs, they also show a need for specialists in the area of dyslexia who can provide ongoing professional development, support for current teachers, and support for students with dyslexia.

Since the passing of HB 1461 at the last Legislative Session, there has been a movement started by teachers in the field that are part of the pilot study from that Bill. These teachers have reached out to Teacher Education Programs in North Dakota to work together to learn more about Structured Literacy (or the Orton-Gillingham Approach) which is an approach to reading and writing that is imperative for students with dyslexia. This type of instruction is direct, systematic, explicit instruction in the structure of the English language. All students benefit from this type of instruction, but for students with dyslexia it is imperative. Simply having research-based programs in schools is not enough. Explicit teaching requires explicit knowledge.

In my research, I also surveyed K-3 general education, reading/Title 1, and Special Education teachers about their knowledge of the structure of English language and reading research, and I found the following:

- Less than 60% of teachers stated that they were very good or experts at teaching the basic, foundational skills for reading, phonemic awareness, and phonics.
- The average percentage of correct answers were:
 - Phonological Knowledge was 61%
 - Phonics Knowledge was 63%
 - Morphological knowledge was 57%
 - Reading Research/Researchers knowledge was 50%.

A credential for specialists in dyslexia will allow for the training of specific teachers who understand dyslexia and best practices for teaching reading and writing to 1 in 5 of our students. They can also provide continuing professional development for general classroom teachers. And they can be that one person in the school or district that parents and students can reach out to for direction and understanding. Although we tend to blame Teacher Education Programs for the lack of strong teacher knowledge, I would suggest that teaching reading is as Louisa Moats says, “rocket science”. We do not expect students to graduate from Teacher Education Programs as experts in reading instruction and dyslexia as it takes years to become experts, but we do need to provide the additional and continuing training and support required. A credential for specialists in dyslexia is the next step in providing this training and support. I ask you to support House Bill 1131.