

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1131  
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**January 13, 2021**

**By: Lea Kugel, Special Education Regional Coordinator  
Office of Special Education**

**701-328-4561**

**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction**

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Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lea Kugel, and I am a Special Education Regional Coordinator with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to speak on behalf of the ND Department of Public Instruction in favor of HB 1131 regarding amending and reenacting the North Dakota Century Code to include credentials for specialists trained in dyslexia.

In 2019, legislators passed HB 1461 pertaining to reading screenings and a dyslexia screening pilot program. Section one of the bill states each district shall include phonetic awareness, decoding, and spelling in their reading screening program and must offer to screen students whenever parents, legal guardians or teachers request it. A specialist trained in dyslexia would be beneficial to school districts as they conduct screenings and review assessment results.

Section two of the bill created a dyslexia screening pilot program which includes a definition of dyslexia that reads “Dyslexia means a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate

or fluent recognition of words and poor spelling and decoding abilities, independent of the individual's general intelligence level.” The bill goes on to say a "Specialist trained in dyslexia" means an individual who: (1) Has expertise providing training in phonological and phonemic awareness, sound and symbol relationships, alphabet knowledge, rapid naming skills, and encoding and decoding skills; (2) Is fluent in the dyslexia intervention process; and (3) Has training in identifying dyslexia.

The ND Department of Public Instruction has had ongoing communication with the dyslexia pilot sites and has been overseeing dyslexia pilot program implementation. Three dyslexia pilot sites were established. Universal screening procedures were identified and conducted with all students under the age of seven to flag students with possible dyslexia characteristics. Cut scores were determined to assist in deciding which students would be screened with a dyslexia secondary screener in order to identify more specific skills that correlate with dyslexic deficits.

After students were identified through the universal and secondary screening process, various dyslexia interventions were put in place at each of the sites and tools were selected to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention. All three sites experienced some delays in providing intervention to students and monitoring progress due to COVID-19 restrictions, so data collection and reporting is slightly behind schedule.

Students identified with dyslexia would be better equipped to make sufficient gains in reading with interventions provided by a dyslexia specialist who has expertise in dyslexia screening, identification and dyslexia specific instruction. In addition, school staff would benefit by having a dyslexia specialist on staff who could offer professional development to all teachers in the areas of phonological and phonemic awareness, sound and symbol relationships, alphabet knowledge, rapid naming skills, and encoding and decoding skills.

An area that has caused some difficulties with the dyslexia pilot sites and for some districts across the state has been hiring or training specialists in dyslexia. One of the dyslexia pilot sites continues to explore different avenues for training dyslexia specialists which include looking at dyslexia specific curriculum from other states or taking on-line classes designed with evidence-based research from the Dyslexia Training Institute. The creation of a dyslexia credential to add to the teachers' license would help encourage the creation of in-state university programs and motivate teachers to pursue the specialized training required to best serve our students. NDDPI stands ready to administer the necessary process to provide this opportunity to our teachers for our students.

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony, and I will stand for any questions that you may have.