

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Robinson and I am a clinical associate professor of speech-language pathology at the University of North Dakota. Prior to earning my Ph.D., I worked as a speech-language pathologist in the public school system for 9 years.

Unfortunately reading achievement, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has not changed in North Dakota since the last time I testified before you. According to the 2019 data, only 34% of 4th grade students and 32% of 8th grade students are reading at or above “proficient” levels, falling behind 28 states. Thus, the need for continued attention to this topic.

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile?chort=1&sub=RED&sj=AL&sfj=NP&st=AP&year=2019R3>

I will keep my testimony to two main points.

1. All educators need training in dyslexia. Neuroscience has repeatedly shown that with appropriate early instruction, we can change the learning trajectory for a child with reading difficulties. We cannot cure dyslexia, but we can eliminate or reduce the amount of special education a child may need to learn to read. This begins with teaching current, evidence-based methods based on the science of reading in all ND classrooms. An individual trained in dyslexia could lead professional learning communities within the schools.

- Some in ND have already embarked on educating other educators in current evidence-based methods. Kerri Whipple and Erica Kindem, of SSEC, are leading 57 educators in LETRS training. Other states have made significant gains on the NAEP following this training.
- A dyslexia certificate, consisting of a series of three courses, will be offered at UND beginning in the fall 2021. All courses will be offered online. The first course focuses on the science of reading and language-based reading disorders. This course is appropriate for all educators. The second course is focused on the assessment of dyslexia and language-based reading disorders and the third teaches evidence-based intervention methods.

2. We do not need more funding to improve reading scores; we need to quit funding programs that have not proven successful.

- Screening for dyslexia is not expensive. Most districts are already screening pre-literacy and literacy skills. I have worked with school districts to interpret their screening data in a more meaningful way. There is also an increasing number of free or inexpensive screening tools.
- Labor intensive programs with weak evidence should be replaced. Programs, such as Reading Recovery, were not designed for students with dyslexia and are not appropriate for teaching students with dyslexia. Instructional programs based on the science of reading have been shown to help ALL readers, including those with dyslexia.

This final link is meant to provide a point of reference to see where other states are with dyslexia education. It might be useful to those pursuing this issue in our state.

<https://coh.dyslexiaida.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2020/11/Dyslexia-Roadmap-Guide-for-School-Districts-single-page-copy.pdf>

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee, I thank you for your time. I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

Sarah Robinson