

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 1131
Sixty-seventh Legislative Assembly of North Dakota
Submitted By: Alysia Budd

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I regret that I am not able to be present this morning, but thank you for taking the time to read my written testimony. My name is Alysia Budd and I am in favor of House Bill 1131. I am providing a double testimony and am testifying both professionally and personally.

My professional background is that I am a pediatric occupational therapist with a graduate certificate in Dyslexia and Language-Based Learning Disabilities. I am a certified handwriting specialist, a certified Barton tutor, a dyslexia screener, and I currently have over 120 hours of formal Orton-Gillingham training and additional practicums with the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators. I have over 20 years of experience working with, and evaluating children with various developmental and learning concerns. I am also the founder and director of Inspiring Minds, Center for Dyslexia and Literacy, a non-profit center for dyslexia in Bismarck where we offer specialized assessment and tutoring for dyslexia and literacy concerns for individuals ranging in age from preschool through adulthood.

We are also a training center, providing a wide variety of workshops and trainings for educators, schools, universities, parents, and other professionals. We offer full Orton-Gillingham training for those seeking certification in OG, as well as several workshops ranging in time from 1 hour introductory sessions to full days. We customize trainings based on a school's or an organization's goals and budget.

Most importantly, I am an incredibly proud mother of three sons with dyslexia and a wife of a husband who also has dyslexia.

I want to begin by thanking everyone involved with dyslexia legislation last session. Your support for the 1 in 5 has made a difference. Over the past two years, I have seen a significant decrease in families being told dyslexia is not real by their schools. I have also had an increase of collaboration from educators and other professionals in our local districts with our shared students. This is all so wonderful! The dyslexia community is thankful for the role legislation has played.

Although we are beginning to see some progress, there is still a long way to go. HB 1131 is another step in the right direction for our North Dakota students, families, and educators. It is vitally necessary for schools to have access to training and resources for dyslexia that are available right here in North Dakota, and for specialists highly trained in dyslexia to be available to schools to provide support not only to students, but to classroom teachers and parents. Dyslexia is **not** isolated to a special education issue. *Dyslexia is a general education issue.* Many students with dyslexia stump their teachers and specialists and; therefore, do not receive adequate accommodations and/or support.

The number one concern we hear day in and day out at the center is parents being told their child is doing too well to receive accommodations. Keep in mind, most students with dyslexia are average to above average in intelligence, some have gifted IQ's. So they are often incredibly bright and teachers mistake this for them doing just fine and not needing any accommodations, services, or support.

The trouble is, students with dyslexia often experience anxiety and exhaustion from working so hard. To deny correct and appropriate accommodations in a classroom setting based on a perception that a student is doing "just fine" is not acceptable. They deserve us as adults ensuring they are successful in all of their learning environments.

The anxiety and exhaustion then overflows into the home when the school day is done. The teachers may never see the full effect it is having, because these students hide it all day long, but they then collapse when in a safe place. It is devastating. I am having to homeschool my youngest this year due to these very reasons. It is unnecessary that families are still going through this emotional turmoil simply because of a lack of an understanding of what dyslexia really is, how to identify and support it in the classroom, and how dyslexia affects more than just reading.

There is an entire science to learning, including reading. A dyslexia specialist would be able to help reinforce this knowledge within the school setting. Scientific research using functional MRI's has proven just how difficult it is for those with dyslexia to activate the areas in the brain needed for proficiency in reading and spelling. Dr. Sally Shaywitz, from the Yale Center of Dyslexia and Creativity, has shown that there are differences in which areas of the brain activate in a dyslexic brain during reading versus a non-dyslexic brain during reading. This research has shown that areas in the left hemisphere needed for reading are not properly activating in a dyslexic brain. Research has also shown that with intensive, explicit, systematic, and multisensory instruction (also known as the Orton-Gillingham/Structured Literacy approach), these areas do begin to activate over time allowing for increased reading proficiency (Shaywitz, 2020). Dyslexia is not a vision problem. Individuals with dyslexia do not see things backward as many of us were told throughout the years. Although vision issues can co-exist with dyslexia, those issues are separate. Dyslexia exists along a spectrum as other neurological differences often do. We see students with a wide variety of symptoms and severity at our center, but all with the common underlying features of difficulties in the foundations of phonemic and phonological awareness ultimately resulting in difficulties with reading, spelling, and written expression. The good news is this - we know what dyslexia is, we know what to do about it, and it can be identified early.

I would also like to touch on the fact that dyslexia is one of the reasons why some of our students are experiencing social-emotional difficulties, yet in most cases, dyslexia isn't even being recognized, especially when they are compensating for their deficits, going unidentified. If we don't identify why a student is acting out, depressed, experiencing anxiety, or exhibiting symptoms of ADHD which may be wrongly diagnosed, our efforts with social-emotional programming are futile. The emotional damage that results when dyslexia is not identified, supported, and correctly remediated is staggering.

- 1 in 6 children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third grade reading skills (Hernandez, 2011)
- Approximately 80% of prison inmates are functionally illiterate, 48% of them being dyslexic (Moody, et.al., 2000)
- U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy included a provision for screening inmates for dyslexia in the First Step Act (S.3649)
- According to Dr. Nadine Gaab, PhD, a "late diagnosis of dyslexia often leads to low self-esteem, depression, and antisocial behavior" (Fliesler, 2017).

It is a myth that dyslexia can't be identified early, as it is possible to identify early warning signs as young as ages 3-4, particularly when there is a family history of language-based learning disabilities. Dr. Nadine Gaab, PhD of Boston Children's, along with her colleagues, studied the brains of infants with and without a family history of dyslexia. They discovered the following:

- "Atypical brain development associated with Developmental Dyslexia is already present within the first 18 months of life" (Gaab, et. al, 2015)
- Dyslexia is genetic, and those brain differences are present in infancy.
- Children are entering Kindergarten with a brain "less optimized to learn to read" (Gaab, 2017).
- A wait-to-fail approach results in "considerable psychological damage and stigma" (Fliesler, 2017)

With regards to the credentialing of dyslexia specialists, it will be vital to define the qualifications carefully in order to ensure proper training and expertise are both achieved, and that schools are given time to develop these resources as it is not a quick process.

It was previously discussed that all that is needed for our schools are reading specialists, that we don't need dyslexia specialists. Reading specialists are an essential part of the team, but their caseloads are huge, and there is *so* much more to dyslexia than solely the reading piece. We need a team approach in our ND schools, with schools having access to specifically trained dyslexia specialists in order to help coordinate student intervention and accommodations, support teachers, and support parents.

Being a reading specialist, or having a masters in education, does not mean that there is specific training and education regarding dyslexia. My boys worked with reading specialists, yet not one of them identified dyslexia in them. Their teachers were trained in whole language and balanced literacy approaches that are *not* the same thing as the Orton-Gillingham/Structured Literacy approach that is *essential* for dyslexia. So as much as they did all they could to help my boys, it was ineffective instruction that did not remediate their difficulties. A specialist in the area of dyslexia would have been able to help coordinate services more effectively not only with services being provided individually, but also to help ensure carryover within the classroom.

To effectively address dyslexia in our North Dakota schools, we should aim to have a multidisciplinary team approach. Dyslexia specialists come from a variety of professional backgrounds which enhances the overall approach, and increases collaboration amongst varied professionals. Those who are certified and trained to remediate dyslexia are also from varied professional backgrounds.

It is also important that as a community, we realize that the responsibility of full remediation of dyslexia does not fall solely on our schools who are also educating hundreds of students with various learning and emotional difficulties. What is the responsibility of the schools is to acknowledge dyslexia, provide a learning environment, emotional support, and curriculum that is effective for all learners, to learn the science of reading, and to be knowledgeable of all of the areas impacted by dyslexia for up to 20% of their student population.

We have read the science, we have seen the incredible effectiveness of correct instruction, the turn around in students' self-efficacy and self-esteem for the better when correct accommodations and support are provided, and we can continue to work do better.

North Dakota has an opportunity to what is right for our students with dyslexia, and I ask that you vote yes on House Bill 1131. Vote yes and "Say Dyslexia" for the 1 in 5. Thank you for your time and your consideration on HB 1131.

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