

Michelle L Strinden

ND House of Representatives

Testimony on HB 1131

Wednesday, January 13th 2021

Good morning Madam Chair Schreiber-Beck and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Strinden and I represent the people of South Fargo's District 41. I have the privilege to introduce HB 1131 on behalf of the thousands of students and families affected by Dyslexia and reading differences across our state. Dyslexia affects 15 to 20 percent of students and I have personal experience as one of my children was diagnosed in the 2nd grade. In the 2019 session, I sponsored and our legislature passed HB 1461 as a Dyslexia Pilot program that I am very pleased to report is currently being implemented in 3 pilots in ND. Last session, our House Education Committee heard almost 4 hours of compelling testimony from ND students and their parents who have been affected negatively by the lack of proper core reading instruction. The Dyslexia Specialist Credential was amended out of the original bill in the 2019 session, largely due to a lack of identified training opportunities for educators and specialists. The position of Dyslexia Specialist has already been filled in Grand Forks as a result of the Dyslexia Pilot Program.

North Dakota has a severe shortage of professionals trained at a high level in the science of reading. The science of reading is a term that refers to research that reading experts and cognitive scientists have done that now show how the human brain learns to read. Decades of evidence based research (especially in the last twenty years) has shown that reading does not come naturally and that it must be taught systematically and explicitly. The human brain is hardwired to naturally learn how to speak. It is, however, not hardwired to learn how to read. Most children need to be explicitly taught how to connect letters and words, including but not limited to dyslexic children.

Currently, in North Dakota, less than half of our students are reading proficiently. I believe this is because our students are not given reading instruction that enables them to decode language and learn how to read. Early education is the time when dyslexic children and others with more mild difficulties need to be systematically and explicitly taught how their spoken language is represented in written language. This bill aims to develop a workforce that is trained and prepared to have a higher level of expertise based in the science of reading. This shift in training and teaching will help ALL

students learn to become better and stronger skilled readers-not just dyslexic students. Dyslexic students often need more of this type of reading instruction than the average student learning how to read.

Higher education in North Dakota is just beginning to fill this gap between research and practice. At the University of North Dakota, Dr. Sarah Robinson has recently developed a three-part course offering a Dyslexia certificate in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. There are also training and professional development opportunities offered at private tutoring centers in Bismarck and Fargo. Additionally, now more than ever there are many remote and virtual training and tutoring options available.

The Dyslexia Specialist Credential is a necessary next step that will help address the challenges our educators face in meeting the needs of students with reading difficulty. Additionally, it will assist in building awareness, help to better serve our students and families in underserved areas, and work to improve our overall reading proficiency. In addition, it will encourage more North Dakota institutions of higher education to develop course work and training for our educators and reading professionals in this area. I urge your support of HB 1131 and thank you for your consideration. I will stand for any questions you may have.