

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1231

Justine Gibbon, Kindred Elementary Title 1 Reading Teacher

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chair Schreiber-Beck, and Members of the Committee, my name is Justine Gibbon, and I am a Title 1 Reading Specialist at Kindred Elementary in Kindred, North Dakota. Our district is part of the Southeast Consortium Dyslexia pilot program. The Southeast Consortium is made up of five districts: Northern Cass, Kindred, Enderlin, Lisbon, and Richland. For the past four years, I have had the opportunity to be part of this consortium as we research, develop, and implement dyslexia screening and intervention procedures for our districts. I am testifying today in support of House Bill 1231, which will enable educators to screen for dyslexic characteristics and quickly place these students into an intervention that targets dyslexic-specific deficits, such as phonemic awareness.

Thanks to many people in this room, North Dakota has made large strides in educating educators about the science of reading. Some educators may be wary that SoR is just the new fad. But it's not a new concept. The instruction that has been used for years with dyslexic learners is the science of reading come to life. However, teachers need to be trained on how to help students who struggle with reading AND students need to be screened for dyslexia. It's not one or the other. We need both.

When a parent brings a child into the walk-in clinic with a fever, the pediatrician would not prescribe amoxicillin without first investigating further into the problem. We can easily apply the same methodology to our schools. North Dakota schools need a process for investigating beyond universal screenings in order understand why a student does not reach benchmark and how to help these learners. Our piloted dyslexia screening process provided diagnostic information needed to place students into the right intervention. This is why screening for dyslexia is critical for our school systems.

All students who have been identified with dyslexic characteristics benefited from the intensive systematic instruction that our intervention provided. The intervention we chose for students identified with dyslexic characteristics is an Orton-Gillingham based intervention called SPIRE and is systematic, explicit, and multi-sensory. Orton-Gillingham programs such as SPIRE are beneficial to all students, harmful to none, and essential for dyslexic learners.

The phrase ‘dyslexia screening’ is necessary to the success of this program and is not equivalent to the term ‘reading screening.’ The word dyslexia should not be viewed as intimidating or too specific. Dyslexia is a spectrum disorder. Students with dyslexia can be mildly dyslexic or profoundly dyslexic or somewhere in the middle. Students on the more profound side may be students who qualify for special education services. Dyslexia is a very common reading deficit and is not dependent on intelligence, gender, race, or social economic status. This is why learning about dyslexia is so important for North Dakota educators. A student with dyslexia can fall anywhere on the spectrum and therefore anywhere in the school system; meaning they can be in need of intervention, at grade-level, or gifted and talented. Learning more about the word

dyslexia helps schools "prescribe" the right intervention. By using the word dyslexia, we know more about the student and how to help them.

In our consortium we are actively screening and identifying students for dyslexia intervention, but our consortium consists of five small districts in the vast state of North Dakota.

Unfortunately, there are hundreds of rural school districts without resources or the knowledge to help their dyslexic learners, nor do these districts have nearby dyslexia tutoring centers for children with dyslexia. For all the reasons I listed above, I support HB 1231 and recommend applying this screening process statewide. Because all children deserve the right to learn to read. When we know better, we do better and I'm here to tell you that the "better" is possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1231.