

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 1231

Rachel Richtsmeier, Northern Cass Data Performance Strategist

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chair Schreiber-Beck, and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Richtsmeier, and I am the Data Performance Strategist for the Northern Cass School District in Hunter, 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 screening and intervention procedures for our districts. I am here to testify today in support of the concepts in House Bill 1231 which will raise the level of awareness about dyslexia.

Prior to the pilot, even being a licensed reading teacher, I felt ill-equipped when it came to understanding reading difficulties. Hearing the word 'dyslexia' caused panic because there was so much that I, along with my colleagues, did not understand. Dyslexia has always been considered a medical diagnosis and is rarely addressed in a school setting. The pilot was beneficial to me as a reading specialist and as a parent when we began our work in screening learners, identifying weaknesses, and implementing curriculum that aligned with the science of reading. Staff members in the Northern Cass district quickly gained confidence and knowledge with immediate results. Our learners have been directly impacted in a positive manner.

One of the first steps our pilot group took was committing to universal screening for all students through nationally-normed screeners. Using a consistent process in universal screening gave our

district a clear picture of learner strengths and deficits in reading. As a result of the data we gather each testing period through the universal screener, we have the option to further test and the results help us analyze specific needs of our children who have characteristics of dyslexia.

Our pilot group made necessary changes to our district-chosen curriculum in order to ensure alignment to the science of reading in both regular classrooms and in intervention settings. Explicit, systematic, and multi-sensory instruction in each regular classroom and intervention setting is vital to reading success for all children. Our pilot group utilized budget-friendly, easy-to-implement curriculums that did not require extensive training. Receiving training, however, is a necessity in order to experience success. For Northern Cass specifically, we adopted Superkids as our core curriculum for all K-2 classrooms and S.P.I.R.E. as a reading intervention curriculum.

In addition to curriculum changes, our pilot group prioritized professional learning for all staff to be properly trained in the science of reading. The new curriculum coupled with LETRS training and dyslexia-specific awareness workshops has given our staff a well-rounded understanding that positively impacts reading proficiency. Our pilot group also prioritized creating a professional learning community for interventionists from each district. We reached out to experts and the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), a dyslexia academy, and a local dyslexia tutoring center to help answer questions as well as develop procedures and protocols.

One of the most impactful findings in the work of our pilot group is the correlation between well-educated staff members and high-quality curriculum. In order to provide the needed

instruction so children with dyslexia can become proficient readers, teachers need to be educated on the characteristics of dyslexia, how to analyze data, and how to support each unique need through efficient reading instruction. With proper funding from the state, HB 1231 could have a significant impact on learners throughout North Dakota. I ask for this committee to fund the assessments and training necessary to provide high-quality education for every learner.

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