

HB 1306 Dyslexia Voucher

Rep Michelle Strinden

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For the record my name is Michelle Strinden, and I represent the people of South Fargo's District 41. I have the pleasure to introduce to you HB 1306 on behalf of thousands of students and parents who are affected by Dyslexia across our state.

The teaching of reading should not be left to chance. Unfortunately, statistics show that the majority of school districts across the United States are taking a mixed bag approach to the way they teach and assess reading. This is also the reality for most school districts across North Dakota. Our North Dakota Department of Public Instruction dashboard at [Insights.nd.gov](https://insights.nd.gov) shows that only 44% of our students are reading proficiently.

Dyslexia affects 20% of the population and is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent recognition of words, poor spelling and decoding abilities independent of an individual's general level of intelligence. In 2021-2022, there were 4,728 North Dakota students with a Specified Learning Disability (SLD). The International Dyslexia association has determined that approximately 85 % of those with a SLD have a reading or language processing disorder. However, these students are invariably being treated for another disability and rarely for dyslexia. Most students with dyslexia aren't properly identified or even eligible for IEP's. In addition, students that have characteristics of dyslexia have limited access to trained specialists who can properly identify and remediate with structured literacy instruction based in the Science of Reading (SoR).

Our family has been personally touched as one of our children has dyslexia. We, like so many parents across our state and country, have had to go to private tutors and specialists outside of our brick and mortar school buildings to access Orton-Gillingham structured literacy programs. It is difficult to adequately describe how frustrating, heartbreaking and financially challenging it is for parents with dyslexic children to have to leave school to find qualified help for their children to learn to read. Our family spent well over \$30,000 on private therapy over the course of many years, in addition to the added costs of homeschooling materials. Homeschooling became unavoidable because our 7 year old child would have had to miss at least 2 hours of school a day for intensive reading therapy at a location 20 minutes away from his school. As challenging as this was....we felt we had no choice but to help our son overcome this potentially devastating situation. My husband and I were incredibly thankful that we had the financial means to pay for private tutoring and for me to stay at home to homeschool. Soon after that difficult decision was made, a once terrifying situation became a true blessing and wonderful experience to see our son flourish and love to learn once again.

There are a number of excellent private dyslexia therapy centers in North Dakota, but remediation is expensive for families and cost prohibitive for many. The current therapy rates range from \$60 to \$72 an hour. Students are seen for varying amounts of time each week depending on the severity of their dyslexia. Haley's Hope in Fargo screenings and assessments cost between \$175 to \$275 with a full evaluation priced between \$525 to \$775. Inspiring Minds Center for Dyslexia and Literacy in Bismarck provides many families with virtual therapy all throughout North Dakota at the same cost as in person therapy. Virtual therapy is critical for students who live in rural areas and have no real access to dyslexia tutoring.

HB 1306 would require the ND DPI to develop a voucher program to help provide dyslexic students and their parents with the costs of instructional support. The Dyslexia Voucher could be modeled after the current ND Autism Voucher program. It would provide general education support for assistive technology, computer and reading generating devices, training and educational materials for parents, and tutors trained in structured literacy interventions. All North Dakota parents and students with struggling readers deserve access to quality structured literacy curriculum and tutoring for the teaching of reading. I respectfully ask for passage of HB 1306. Thank you, Chair Heinert and Education committee members and I stand for any questions you may have.