

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1306
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

January 23, 2023

By: Brenda Ehrmantraut, Assistant Director of Academic Support

701-328-1809

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brenda Ehrmantraut, and I am the Assistant Director of Academic Support with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). I represent the Office of Academic Support in the co-administration of the ND Dyslexia Pilot program along with Lea Kugel representing the Office of Specially Designed Services. I am here to provide information on House Bill 1306 regarding a dyslexia voucher program.

The International Dyslexia Association states that 15–20% of the student population may exhibit some symptoms of dyslexia, including slow or inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words. Dyslexia is a spectrum disorder. The unique manifestation of reading challenges could mean that a learner struggles to decode words on the page, struggles to understand the meaning of the text read, or experiences both decoding and comprehension difficulties. Early identification and intervention provide the best support for all students with reading challenges, but longer-term, more intensive support may be required for students with profound dyslexia. Many students with dyslexia

characteristics are not eligible for IEP's and a large portion aren't even identified. This is far beyond a special education issue. This is a general ed issue.

Schools in North Dakota currently have two processes in place which support students with dyslexic characteristics within the general education classroom. First, schools are required to have reading screening processes available and provided if requested by any teacher or parent (NDCC 15.1-32-25). Second, all K-3 educators are required to be trained in systematic, direct instruction and intervention of literacy, an approach known to benefit students with dyslexia as well as students struggling with other literacy challenges (NDCC 15.1-21-12.1). The ND Dyslexia Pilot Program districts have provided information that demonstrates supporting students with dyslexia is a complex process managed through a systemic approach that allows for addressing individual needs with aligned, evidence-based approaches. Educator awareness of dyslexia, high-quality core instructional materials and approaches, school screening processes, and specialists trained in intervention approaches are all part of this complex system. Even though local school systems provide intervention and instruction aligned with best practices known to support students with dyslexia, not all school systems are equipped to the same degree to provide extensive supports and some families and students may prefer alternate approaches, resources, or supports to address the

unique needs stemming from the complexity of their learner's dyslexia traits or diagnosis.

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee, that concludes my prepared testimony, and I will stand for any questions that you may have.