

HB 1231 Dyslexia Early Screening and Intervention

Representative Michelle Strinden

Tuesday, March 7th 2023

Good Afternoon, Chair Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee,

For the record my name is Michelle Strinden, and I represent the people of South Fargo's District 41. I have the pleasure to present to you HB 1231 on behalf of thousands of students and parents who are affected by Dyslexia across our state.

Dyslexia affects 20 percent of the population and knows no socio economic, racial or ethnic boundary. It is defined as a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin 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. Research shows that a structured literacy approach that is phonetically based, multi-sensory and systematic is not only effective for students with Dyslexia, but will benefit all readers...especially all early readers!

Our family has been personally touched as our son Joseph has Dyslexia. I, like so many parents across our state and country, have a passion for literacy and urgently searched for answers to help our dyslexic child learn to read. Thankfully, our son is one of the fortunate ones. When Joseph was young there was only one person in our area who offered structured literacy tutoring and intensive therapy. The Reading Therapy Center in Moorhead, MN had just opened (2008) providing one on one Orton-Gillingham therapy based in the Science of Reading(SoR). It was an answer to fervent prayer and quite literally life changing for our son. His therapy sessions began in 2nd grade and in 3rd grade

we decided to homeschool Joseph due to the amount of therapy he needed to catch up to his peers. Homeschooling and reading therapy continued through 6th grade costing our family approximately 30,000 dollars of therapy over many years including summer months.

Joseph was eager to get back to school in 7th grade and he was ready! His school provided accommodations for his diagnosed dyslexia in a 504 plan. However, throughout middle school and high school we had to continue to actively advocate for him to receive appropriate accommodations in most classes. I can proudly say he is now in college doing very well. It is my sincere hope and dream that one day struggling readers in North Dakota will not have to leave their elementary school buildings to learn to read.

In 2019, students, parents, and teachers from all over our state filled our hearing rooms to testify for HB 1461. Now, four years since it was enacted we have the data to prove its success. The bill provided for early screening of dyslexia in K-1, structured literacy intervention and professional development for teachers and staff. Three pilots were funded in 2019, and then two pilots in 2021 as the Covid 19 pandemic delayed full implementation. Since 2019, our state has made progress in its approach to the teaching of reading, but there is still much work to be done. The Dyslexia pilot has positively impacted the elementary schools reading assessments and curriculum in significant ways. For instance, Reading Recovery, which uses an ineffective approach based in whole language called Balanced Literacy, is thankfully no longer being used in these buildings for struggling readers. The schools with pilots have also changed reading curriculum and assessments to align with the Science of Reading. Mandatory screening is CRITICAL at the beginning of 1st Grade. The state of ND has a responsibility to our citizens to reliably screen for reading difficulties by age 7 and begin appropriate interventions with clear objectives. Research

shows this will significantly impact our children identified with characteristics of dyslexia and improve ALL students reading proficiency.

In 2021, I introduced and our legislature enacted the Dyslexia Specialist credential while the University of North Dakota developed a three course offering the credential. North Dakota Century Code (HB 1388) also instructs teacher licensure competency in beginning reading instruction to be based on scientifically and researched based best practices.

Higher education must teach research based programs and properly train its students in our Colleges of Teaching and Learning. Currently, the Hunt Institute is working with the ND Department of Public Instruction and key stakeholders on “The Path Forward” which aims to develop a comprehensive action plan to incorporate the Science of Reading in teacher preparation programs and licensure. The amendment provided today additionally establishes a task force within ND DPI to make ongoing recommendations. This will inform ND educators and administrators in a timely manner of best practices helping to reduce the financial burden to school districts. Additional amendments are being offered for an appropriation for dyslexia and related literacy policy in SB 2284.

During my campaign for the ND state legislature, I stated that one of my main policy goals was to strengthen education by improving literacy for students in District 41 and across the state. Our ND DPI dashboard at [Insights.nd.gov](https://insights.nd.gov) shows that only forty-four percent of our students are reading proficiently. Early identification of dyslexia and reading instruction using the structured literacy approach for ALL of our students is essential to ensure life long success for our citizens.

Thank you, Mr Chair and Education committee members for your consideration. It is my pleasure to stand for any questions you may have.

