

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1231

Rachel Richtsmeier, Northern Cass Data Performance Strategist

Chairman Elkin 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. I have been a researcher and developer for the consortium for the past four years as we have implemented screening and intervention procedures in our districts. I am writing to testify today in support of the concepts in House Bill 1231.

Prior to the pilot, even as a licensed reading teacher, I felt ill-equipped when it came to understanding reading difficulties. Hearing the word 'dyslexia' caused alarm 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 work was valuable to me as a reading specialist and as a parent when we began the process of screening learners, analyzing data, training staff members, 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 if needed and the results help us analyze specific needs of our children who have characteristics of dyslexia. The Northern Cass district uses Pearson aimswebPlus as a universal screening tool.

Districts in our pilot group made necessary changes to curriculum 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. Each district selected curriculum to meet their individual needs. 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. 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.

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 (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) 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 in the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), a dyslexia academy in Minnesota, 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 appropriate 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 funding support from the state for the assessments and training for districts, HB 1231 could have a significant impact on learners throughout North Dakota.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 1231.