

Dear Senate Committee-

I am the mother of three children that attend a private school. Private education was not in our family plan initially. Our oldest child started in more of a public setting and when the teacher suggested him retaking a year over again, I begin the search for his needs.

I placed him in a private preschool, and he immediately begin to flourish for several reasons. A part of it was due to the care and concern from the teachers and the ability to have small classes to really personalize children's needs because they are NOT all the same. I was so intrigued by his love for the religious aspect of the education which was just a bonus as our placement was more aligned with the small class, structure and the classic model of education. As his education began to unfold, we discovered that he was dyslexic. I am sure you are aware just based on the current discussion under legislation that dyslexic kids are very underserved in any school in North Dakota. If you ask most teachers if they can identify a dyslexic the great majority of them, say "no." This is true even of teachers with special reading certificates. It is complex, because these children do not have a lack of intelligence they are just wired very differently. Because my son was in a small school, that was willing to do whatever it took to get him to where he needed to be, the conversation for "something just isn't adding up" continued to occur between myself, the teacher, and the administration. We tried some traditional interventions without success and then I sought out a screening specific for dyslexics after reading about a similar story in a magazine. This was thru a private organization—Haley's Hope in Fargo ND. Again, self-paid. Initially we had some in person training that needed to happen (which was a time and financial commitment being it was in Fargo ND—4 hours from our home) before he could have success with the online tutoring portion of the program. The online program is 2, 1 hour tutoring times per week. (It had to be in the school hours due to the high demand of this program and the availability of the trained tutors.) This started in second grade. He is in 5th grade and while he has made great strides the program is no where near completion. But I am happy to report many aspects of his education is to grade level. Had he had been in a public school setting the execution on his timed tutoring would not have been as successful just from the sheer volume of kids that have higher needs and their needs are so much more apparent. In addition, the teachers probably couldn't have implemented a few of his modifications for success as well with a larger class.

As I mentioned, this tutoring program is a self-paid program and so we are paying for his private setting along with his self-paid intervention. His progress is astounding—within 8 months of starting the program his reading vocabulary had improved by 50%. These are documented statistics available thru Haley's Hope. Today, with some accommodations he is getting an A in spelling which is a huge accomplishment for a dyslexic child. His teacher will call me about trends that she sees in tests, grades, or how he approaches assignments and with a simple change he can go from missing most or all to getting all of them right. Again, a benefit of a small class size. One example was a crossword puzzle. He could answer all the questions correctly but when it came time to fill the answer in in the boxes it took him hours. It is how his brain maps letters and sequences. So he answers all of the questions and then he has help filling in the boxes.

I have friends that have dyslexic children in the public setting and while many say that is the best place for a child to be with learning disorders that isn't completely true. They are going to

be put into interventions for children with “learning disabilities.” They are not going to be given specific tools that address Dyslexia. There is only a few programs designed for children with dyslexia that have success. The “Barton System” is one of them and if you asked most special education teachers, they have no idea what the “Barton System.” They have been given no formal training on what dyslexia is, never mind how to help a kid that has dyslexia. These kids are just put thru the same process any kid with learning disabilities are.

The school my child attends does not have a dyslexia program...I want to be clear on that but what they do have is the commitment to ensure he gets online for his tutoring each week. They also have the care and concern to apply the techniques recommended by his intervention. They have the ability to do this because of their structure, their classical educational model and their small class sizes. They can catch things due to the interaction and class size. This would not happen in a public setting because there would be that many more students, agendas, educational approaches etc. Just the fact that his school still teaches cursive is a huge benefit to him because a dyslexic struggles less reading cursive than print. Most public school do not even teach cursive. Many public schools do not even have spelling test which is another tool to gauge/diagnose a dyslexic student. Many schools for-go handwriting and use computers, handwriting is yet another diagnostic tool for a dyslexic. The classical way of teaching math in a repetitive approach is also to a dyslexic child’s advantage.

These are our families’ experiences. Many educators can try to tell you that the basic special education techniques will work for a dyslexic. They do not, it is just the sheer intelligence that a dyslexic mind must try to cope under the circumstances. They may reach the minimum standards but never overcome the problem or excel as a reader.

As I stated, we have had to find a way to pay for both tuition and tutoring to have our son excel. In addition, we have chosen to enroll his siblings to provide family unity which we believe is important. These are all our choices. If we received a tax credit it would make a very positive impact on us as a family but because we value our education, we just find a way.

Unfortunately, visiting with other families with this same issue they are not able to execute all of this. Their child just gets to the minimum standards and that is where it is left. Until North Dakota can better serve these children this has been our solution. Our son’s tutoring is around \$8,400 a year, in addition to his private education at around \$5,000 a year. You can see where a tax benefit would be a great help in our situation. We could talk more and more about the benefits of private education in today’s world of hot politics, but I kept this to the facts of my sons needs. I hope this information provides insight into the importance of choice but also in giving families some tax incentive... we are just trying to meet our children’s needs for a bright future.

Sincerely,

Marian Sorum
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