

Senate Education Committee:

My first experience with dyslexia was with my younger brother. My parents thought they had parenting down with my sister and me. We loved school and were both reading with no effort in kindergarten. My brother was 3 years younger and I remember my mother begging the school to help him learn to read. The school just told her to read more with him and to wait for him to learn at his own pace. By 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade he still was really struggling and the schools response was he needed to try harder. She went to the neighboring city to have him evaluated and he was diagnosed with dyslexia. We moved to Kansas shortly after the testing was completed. In Kansas the school had no idea how to help him. We lived hours away from a large city and there was no internet available to my mother back then. My mom did everything she could to help my brother, but received no appropriate help from the school.

Recently my parents moved and I was looking through my brother's old school work and it was clear to me in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade he could have been diagnosed with dyslexia. With the report cards saying he needed to apply himself and try harder.

Thirty years later, when my son was born, I had a feeling he would be dyslexic. We have several family members on both sides of his family with dyslexia. So I worked on letters, phonics, spelling, everything I could think of to keep my son from having difficulties. We read together every night and often several times per day. I pointed out letters, words, we worked on rhyming, while on walks and in the car. Even with all of this my son showed signs of having problems. I would notice other kids would love to color, or play with pens or pencils and write on paper. My son would never want to write or color anything. When we would read a book together he would not remember a simple word from one page to the next. The more I pushed with word and letters and reading the more he pushed back, except when I would read to him at night. We both loved that.

Around age 5 I just knew he was dyslexic. We had him in the best preschools and even a Montessori 1<sup>st</sup> grade room waiting on his first year of Kindergarten. During the summers I enrolled him in a pre-reading course with local colleges.

When he started kindergarten I let the teacher know my concerns. She said he was doing fine and gave us extra things to practice at home. I had him tested for dyslexia at age 6 at the local Children's hospital. I worked there and was happy to get a discount and have my insurance pay for a lot of the testing. The report came back that he was probably dyslexic, but to bring him back in 1 year to confirm. That summer the reading specialist at the school tutored my son. I gave her the report of his possible diagnosis with the phonetic deficits and poor rapid naming. At the end of the summer his reading tutor told me she had seen dyslexic children and he was not dyslexic.

I was confused. This teacher had years of experience, was highly regarded, and had awards for teaching children to read. He was my only child so I didn't have a comparison. I told myself that I must be wrong and put off his retesting.

When my son was in the first quarter of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, I just couldn't believe he could have so much trouble with words and spelling and not be dyslexic. At 7 years old I finally set my son up for testing again. By then I was just sure I was right and the reading specialist was wrong even though he was not behind his classmates. After hundreds of dollars (with the help of insurance and my employee discount) the testing came back as definitely dyslexia and I was given a list of specialized tutors and resources. One resource was Learning Ally. I signed up immediately. Learning Ally was a program you could get on almost any electronic device to download and listen to books read by volunteer and sometimes professional readers. My son loved it! Definitely worth the \$125 per year. He listened to books for hours. In the car, in his room, at night when I was unable to read for long enough times. He could follow along with the book or just listen to the story. It was soon after he started listening to Learning Ally that he said "I feel like I am in the book". Many school districts and the whole state of Texas gives Learning Ally to all dyslexic children.

My next step was again to call the reading specialist at our school (different school). She told me the school does not have Orton-Gillingham and she herself had tutored a dyslexic child once. She said the state had recently told the teachers that they could actually start using the word dyslexia. From what I was learning 10-20 percent of the population was dyslexic so I knew I would be on my own as far as his dyslexia goes. After requesting all the books on dyslexia from the public library for me, I waded through the list of tutors finding one that was only 25 minutes away and

could work on his troubles with writing also. We met her and she worked well with my son and understand how he worked. She had started tutoring using the Barton method (based off of Orton-Gillingham) because her 2 children were dyslexic. One of my favorite pictures of my son, we are sitting in the car outside the tutor's house after a few months of lessons and he is reading a chapter book he requested from the library. That was a huge deal. Before we started with this tutor he only would read on his own if made to and did not enjoy a minute of it.

My son did well with this tutor and his MAP reading scores were well above average when he finished tutoring at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. (2 and a half years of tutoring 2 hours per week at \$45 per session). His spelling was poor, but we studied hours a week so he could pass his tests at school. We would work 10 – 15 minutes every morning and night and ask for the list early so he had more days to work on it. A friend of my son said she would just look at the list and pass every test. Every year getting more and more sure that this method of teaching him to spell was not helping (as the books said it wouldn't). Even with getting mostly A's on all tests he still came home one night and as we were talking about his day he broke down in tears remembering how stupid he felt that day when he couldn't remember how to spell the word the. We finally started asking for less spelling words each week and that helped reduce the time we spent. This year he does not have to do spelling words per his 504 started last year, but doesn't want to stand out so we work on them anyway.

Since finishing his Barton tutoring at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, even with hours of reading every week and keeping up with his work at school his reading MAP reading scores are falling. At first it was just a few points, but every test since he is losing more points than the time before and the falls are getting steeper. His organization is also an issue and he knows he has trouble with his memory. We are now starting tutoring again after school because they do not think there is a problem.

Luckily one of the books I read right after the dyslexia diagnosis was the Dyslexic Advantage. It explains that dyslexia comes with weaknesses, but also strengths. It recommended finding his passion and strength and fostering that. My son found he loved chess in kindergarten. He wanted to learn to play better. We learned together and after the first week, he would beat me easily. They started a chess club at school and he joined it. As a first grader he could beat most of the kids in his elementary school. We decided to try tournaments and he would end in the top ten nearly every time. After a year of tournaments he convinced us to allow him to have a chess tutor. He was the state scholastic champ in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. He got 2<sup>nd</sup> place in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> place this year in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He has even placed in the national tournaments. He also loves the advanced math class at school and building. He thinks he wants to be an architectural engineer like his cousin in college now.

There is no better time in history to be diagnosed with dyslexia. We have the internet and books available to help parents do research. There are apps, computer games, and kids can do speech to text and text to speech. And there is research being done that explains the brain is different in a dyslexic person and they need to learn differently, but can think outside the box when they are allowed to do so. But parents need to know.

In my profession at the hospital, I see kids for 20 minutes at a time several times per day. During this time with the work that I do with them and in speaking with the parents, I feel I can tell when the child is dyslexic within this short period of time. They almost freeze when asked to use rapid naming and are slower at written and reading tasks. They usually can't remember their birthday and have troubles when asked to turn right or left down the hall. These are all things dyslexics often have trouble with. Unfortunately after giving them the information for their child to be screened for dyslexia, often times they do not have insurance to help pay for it, they do not have an employee discount, and they do not have the personal knowledge to understand that the school's wait to fail method is not a good one. My heart aches for these kids. Even with a diagnosis they would be required to pay for a tutor outside of the school system unless they wanted to fight the school for appropriate treatment or wait for failure and get minimum and maybe not even appropriate services. Just like 30 years ago.

Orton-Gillingham method for teaching dyslexic children has been in use since the 1930's. It works for everyone, but dyslexic children need it. We have been fortunate to have wonderful teachers, but most of my son's teachers have not known much about dyslexia. Even the reading specialists. According to Susan Barton around 80% of the children in

special reading at school probably have dyslexia. In the medical profession I would not expect a parent to take care of their own child just because the child was different than 80% of the other kids.

We were lucky to have the experience to know that we needed help before it was too late and we have the ability to spend thousands of dollars on our son's education. What about the kids that don't have that? From what I understand if a child is behind in reading in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade they are less likely to graduate high school and more likely to go to prison. Third grade is also the time that if the child is failing the schools will start helping them with their reading. Therapy is much more likely to help when started in Kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade. It also my belief that when a child has a person with knowledge and resources backing them and someone who believes in them they can believe in themselves also. These are the dyslexics who go on to find their strengths outside of school and they can do great things.

Please help 20% of Kansas children read by supporting the dyslexia task force. We must have early dyslexia screening, teacher training, and dyslexia instruction early in children's education. I don't want this to be the way things are when my grandchildren go to school!

Thank you,

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