

# Pittsburg State University

CENTER FOR RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND  
AWARENESS OF DYSLEXIA

209 Whitesitt Hall • 1701 South Broadway  
Pittsburg, KS 66762-7551  
620-235-4593 fax: 620-235-6102  
READing@pittstate.edu  
www.pittstate.edu/READing

March 10, 2018

Senate Education Committee

Public Hearing

House Bill 2602

Dear Education Committee Members:

I am pleased that legislation concerning the appropriate screening of students with dyslexia and providing them with appropriate science-based interventions is being considered (HB 2602). As you are well aware, the percentage of children who are failing to read at the proficient level is staggering. Consistent with the latest data nationally, 32% of fourth-grade students in Kansas are reading below Basic, and 64% are reading below Proficient. To be considered a proficient reader in fourth grade, the student must "...be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations" (NCES). Reading at the proficient level indicates that a student has the ability to read challenging material. Sixty-six percent of fourth-grade students and 65% of eighth-grade students in Kansas are reading below this level.

Academic success is highly dependent upon appropriate reading skills. Unfortunately, there is a crisis with regard to our nation's reading skills. Even more unfortunately, this situation has not changed in 25 years. Approximately the same percentage of students are not reading at the Basic and Proficient Levels as was the case in 1992. This is shocking given the enormous amount of data that indicates that reading failure can be prevented. This is not just the case for children with dyslexia, but for all children who struggle to learn to read.

For nearly 20% (1 in 5) of students in Kansas who have dyslexia, the most widely studied and common learning difference, reading acquisition is painfully difficult. In addition to the academic problems associated with dyslexia and poor reading skills, individuals with dyslexia may also suffer from poor self-esteem, depression, suicide, substance abuse, parental abuse, and school dropout. They are more likely to be adjudicated as juveniles or later as adults, and they are more likely to live in poverty. Although there are many individuals with dyslexia who are very successful in their lives and careers, most continue to have serious difficulties concerning reading, writing, and spelling. These individuals also carry emotional scars from their experiences as students, and as recent research has discovered, many adults with dyslexia experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) triggered by their experiences in school as a function of not being identified nor provided appropriate science-based instruction in reading.

At this point, it is quite safe to state that there is adequate knowledge, with regard to the Science of Reading, to either prevent reading failure or to provide appropriate intervention techniques to students who are struggling readers. The Science of Reading provides extraordinary insight and informs practitioners regarding how to teach reading and how to intervene on their behalf. Studies utilizing techniques that allow the examination of brain functioning (fMRI) during reading tasks have demonstrated that appropriate interventions actually improve the way the brain processes information in specific areas that are known to be involved with reading. Research has demonstrated the requisite insight into accurate identification of students who are at risk for reading failure and how to provide appropriate interventions for them. It is not a matter of how to resolve the issue of reading failure as the Science of Reading has provided an abundance of evidence concerning this issue, it is a matter of disseminating that information to those who will be the practitioners involved in teaching those children. Not surprisingly, pre-service and in-service teachers desperately desire this information as they aspire to be highly trained, professional educators who will use this information to help their students to become competent readers.

HB 2602 does exactly what is necessary. It requires that children be screened to identify those who have dyslexia and those who are likely to become struggling readers and then to provide them with science-based interventions that have been found to be successful with students with dyslexia and related disorders.

There are those who point out that other mechanisms are in place to provide the types of assistance that is necessary to assist students with dyslexia and related difficulties. The problem is those mechanisms are not working. Children with dyslexia go unidentified for years. As a result, the proper remediation processes are not deployed. Many adults who have been through our educational systems only discover that they have dyslexia when they try to find resources for their struggling children. As children, they either believed, inaccurately, that they were “stupid” or their teachers thought that they were incapable of learning to read. In reality, they were intelligent individuals with dyslexia, a neurological condition that drastically hampers their ability to learn to read. Some never learn to read. The good news is that we have the knowledge, skills and abilities to help all students to become competent readers, even students with dyslexia and reading difficulties.

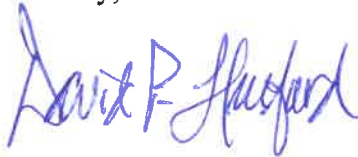
There will obviously be a cost to implementing HB 2602; however, failing to implement HB 2602 could potentially be far more expensive, not only ethically and morally, but also financially. As mentioned above, the potential for a disastrous outcome for struggling readers is immense; lack of appropriate education, school dropout, poor economic potential, psychological and emotional difficulties and potential of PTSD. Why would we not try to identify these students and assist them with appropriate interventions? Parents currently spend thousands of dollars per year seeking help to assist their children to become competent readers. Parents know how vitally important reading is for their children’s education and later careers and will seek ways to help their children at a great cost to their financial resources. Some of these avenues are not effective in addressing dyslexia or reading failure, but parents do not have the knowledge to differentiate effective science-based interventions from those that are bogus. IDEA guarantees a free and appropriate public education, but we are not providing FAPE to all of our children, particularly students with dyslexia.

The Supreme Court ruled in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, that a student who has an IEP must make adequate progress that exceeds “*de minimis*.” Although Endrew’s disability is autism, it is likely that the *Endrew F. v. Douglas County* ruling will be applied to dyslexia before too long. It is critical that schools engage in early identification and then appropriate interventions. There is no reason not to provide the type of services that science dictates and children need. Not only is it ethically correct, it is economically sound. According to IDEA, schools are accountable for a free appropriate public education, and not providing it will cost the student an education, parents their financial welfare and schools will be liable for their continued failure to provide it. The states surrounding Kansas have recent laws dealing with dyslexia. The gist of most of these laws require early identification and interventions for students with dyslexia.

At the Center for Research, Evaluation and Awareness of Dyslexia, we provide approximately 150 evaluations per year and have a 30-student waiting list for our interventions. We mostly provide services for families who live in Southeast Kansas, but have had families visit from other areas of Kansas, different states and countries. These families seek our services because identification and intervention strategies are not currently being appropriately provided by their school systems.

The issues relevant to reading, reading failure and its identification and remediation have been borne out by science. An enormous amount of information has been documented with regard to these issues. The next, and necessary, step is to utilize this knowledge to assist all students to become competent readers. Failure to do so will result in continued and unnecessary reading failure on the part of thousands of students in Kansas. The percentage of students who experience reading failure could be tremendously reduced by moving HB 2602 forward. Since all of the individuals who have given testimony to the Education Committee are committed to providing appropriate services to all of our students, I strongly believe that a cooperative effort on behalf of the State of Kansas’ children is possible. I look forward to assisting in this effort.

Sincerely,



David P. Hurford, Ph.D.  
Director