

March 14, 2018
Holly Palacio
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Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2606

We live in one of the largest, fastest growing and highly respected school district in the state. Schools are consistently awarded Blue Ribbon status and the neighborhoods are strong, growing communities. We, as parents, had done what we needed, to provide an excellent foundation for his future. But, we were blindsided by his struggles and our school district's response to them.

Our son, Daniel, is a bright, articulate, personable child. He is engaging and funny, easy to be around. He is very smart and creative. So, when he struggled to learn his letters in preschool and Kindergarten, we believed his teachers when they told us 'he'd catch up, don't worry, something to work on...' Then, in 1st grade we trusted that the pull out services for spelling and reading were all that was needed to 'catch him up' and were actually reassured by his teacher's admonition that 'even if he was diagnosed, there wasn't anything else she could do for him.' All that was necessary was being done.

By 5th grade, he was angry, depressed, always telling us he was stupid and too dumb to understand. He was in crisis and we needed help. We knew we had to move and we pulled him out of public school for private. It worked. They worked with him, helped him in his weak areas and celebrated his strengths. And, suggested we get testing for learning disorders.

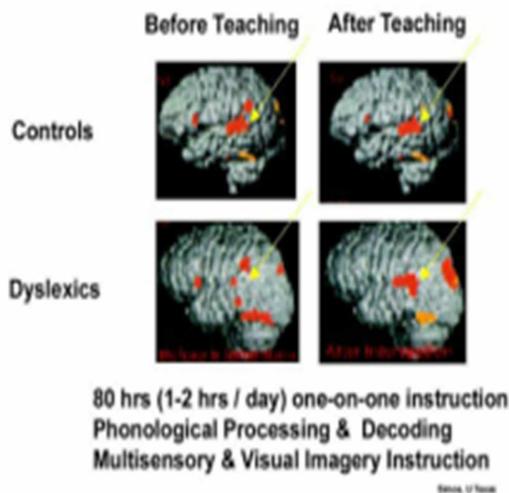
Now, we had a name, Dyslexia. Of course, it all made sense. The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity says reading is complex. It requires our brains to connect letters to sounds, put those sounds in the right order, and pull the words together into sentences and paragraphs we can read and comprehend.

People with dyslexia have trouble matching the letters they see on the page with the sounds those letters and combinations of letters make. And when they have trouble with that step, all the other steps are harder.

Dyslexic children and adults struggle to read fluently, spell words correctly and learn a second language, among other challenges. But these difficulties have no connection to their overall intelligence. In fact, dyslexia is **an unexpected difficulty in reading in an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader**. While people with dyslexia are slow readers, they often, paradoxically, are very fast and creative thinkers with strong reasoning abilities.

Dyslexia is also very common, affecting 20 percent of the population and representing 80–90 percent of all those with learning disabilities. Scientific research shows differences in brain connectivity between dyslexic and typical reading children, providing a neurological basis for why reading fluently is a struggle for those with dyslexia.

We wrongfully assumed that our award-winning school district was a subject matter expert in reading disorders to include the most common type, dyslexia. Not only were they not subject matter experts, they viewed dyslexia as 'a medical disorder that we accommodate but do not treat.' What were we missing? We have another son with a myriad of medical diagnoses, to include a rare genetic disorder, autism, epilepsy and a neurological syndrome associated with his genetic condition. We'd never been denied speech, assistance, curriculum or OT services based on those medical diagnosis.



There isn't a medical prescription for Dyslexia, no magic pill, no procedure or therapy. The treatment for Dyslexia is entirely educational. Neuroscience and educational researchers have provided clear indications of what the content for dyslexic students looks like, as well as the method of instruction that suits the dyslexic learner. Finding the right content and the methods that will work for all students requires that teachers and parents understand not only what to teach but the sequence and method needed specifically to build the pathways and brain activity of each step in the reading process. Building these pathways adapts the human brain to the printed word in such a way that a person can read text automatically, fluently and with comprehension.

Though all learners need to build these pathways, research shows that dyslexic learners only develop these pathways using structured literacy, a prescribed sequence of the content, and the methods of explicit multi-sensory instruction provided with frequency and with ample opportunities to practice each step to mastery before advancing to the next process.

When we then looked at what accommodations could be implemented under 504 status, we grew to learn that the lack of district staff and teacher training in dyslexia was our biggest hurdle. Each meeting became a power struggle. The administration and the teachers with the least understanding sought to tell us why this or that accommodation was not needed or wouldn't help him. Then we'd respond with our continued advocacy and attempts to educate them on what dyslexia looks like, how it affects more than just backward letters and how it is best supported in a classroom. Trust was soon broken as accommodations were inconsistently applied and Daniel was caught between teacher and parent. Teachers are taught how to implement curriculum they are not how to teach. They have not been provided the appropriate training or education to prepare them for their students' needs.

We want you to know two things about our children, first, these kids are the hardest working kids in our school systems. They have to fight for every word and work twice as hard to learn what comes easily to others. Second, they deserve to be screened early and then taught in the way they need to be taught. These are bright, eager, curious, creative kids. They want to learn. They want to know. They also want to be with their friends, in the same community and with the same opportunities as their peers. This can only happen if the public-school system can teach them.

Please support HB 2602. It is the first step to creating the education system that Kansas children deserve. It will open doors that are closed. It will provide a plan for teachers to receive the training they need in order to meet the needs of all their students. Thank you for your time.