

March 1, 2018

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF CREATION OF DYSLEXIA TASKFORCE: BILL NUMBER: HB2602

Dear Senators,

My name is Rouzana Komesidou and I am a doctoral candidate in Speech-Language Pathology at the University of Kansas. I am also the lab manager and research project coordinator of the Word and Sound Learning Lab. My research centers around reading and spelling development in school-age children with dyslexia.

Dyslexia is considered as the most common type of learning disability, affecting approximately 20% of school-age children, and it is characterized by difficulties in reading, writing, and spelling. Due to their difficulties in the acquisition of reading and writing, children with dyslexia are at higher risk of school dropout, low academic achievement, and unemployment. Dyslexia occurs in males and females from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

I am currently working with 15 families that have a child with dyslexia, as part of my dissertation research. It has been an eye-opening experience, and I would like to share with you some of my personal observations.

1. Most schools in Kansas do not use the term 'dyslexia' and therefore, deny a complete evaluation to students. The use of the term 'dyslexia' will help define the problems a student faces, allay fears of concerned family members, and ensure that a school is legally required to provide an appropriate educational support at no expense to the family. Due to considerable costs, only few families have managed to seek external diagnostic and treatment services.
2. Research stresses the importance of early identification and intervention for children with dyslexia. Reading and writing difficulties are apparent early in development, and the appropriate screening test can identify those children who are at-risk for dyslexia. Considering the increasing complexity of Common Core Standards, students who do not receive early reading intervention fall further behind and their reading difficulties persist into adulthood.
3. Many schools continue to embrace ineffective reading programs and the overall outcomes for students with dyslexia tend to be low. We have extensive research showing that students with dyslexia have good prospects for success, if they receive evidence-based reading instruction. From my experience, students enrolled in private tutoring, that provide evidence-based reading instruction, have made considerable progress in their reading and some of them have even achieved grade-level reading. In

contrast, students who receive some type of remediation in school have made little progress.

4. Despite their qualifications, abilities, and commitment, many teachers, reading specialists, and speech-language pathologists are not trained to recognize the signs of dyslexia and implement effective reading instruction. How will a child with dyslexia learn to read if teachers, reading specialists, and speech-language pathologists have no direct experience with evidence-based practices?
5. Some of my research participants revealed that they often feel anxious, embarrassed, and stupid when unable to meet expectations in class. Unfortunately, such feelings are not uncommon among children with dyslexia. Schools are obligated to meet their students' needs and alleviate the detrimental effects of reading difficulties on their confidence and self-esteem.

Please support the creation of a dyslexia task force that will address issues in early identification, evidence-based practices in reading instruction, and continuous professional development. Children with dyslexia must be given the right opportunity to excel.

I am dedicating this testimony to all my research participants who face their difficulties with courage and continue to dream big.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rouzana Komesidou', written in a cursive style.

Rouzana Komesidou, M.S.