

Good Afternoon

My name is Blythe Wood, I am the Director of the Columbus Children's Dyslexia Center and also one of two Academic/Behavior Coaches in a local suburban school district as well as VP of the International Dyslexia Association Central Ohio. One of my main roles, in both positions, is to provide structured literacy training. Structured literacy, also known as Orton Gillingham, is direct, systematic instruction in the structure of language. It teaches the why and the how phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes work together to make meaning. I have been in the field of education for 29 years, but structured literacy has only been a part of my profession since 2008.

Thank you for bringing the topic of dyslexia to the forefront. This is an exciting step forward. When I completed my undergraduate education I was not made aware of dyslexia, the risk factors, the means for intervention, or the impact of the learning difference. In fact, I was taught that the best way to teach striving readers was to expose them to words and after they saw it so many times the words would become their own. I rarely saw progress between my first year in special education and my 16th year in special education. It was not until after I started learning about structured literacy that I began to feel like I was making an impact. I often think back to many of my former students and wonder what if? What if I knew then what I know now - would they have had the opportunity to walk different paths.

Unfortunately, many educators continue to leave college in the same situation I was in and as a result do not know anything about dyslexia. They do not know the risk factors, the interventions required or the impact of the learning difference. They need to be defined. SB102 states Ohio will look for "risk factors" for dyslexia but "risk factors" are not defined. Without clearly started "look fors" there may continue to be many individuals who fall through the cracks.

While we are glad that the screening bill is being considered SB 102 lacks many of the components that need to be addressed in order to move forward. IDA formed a committee of experts in the area of dyslexia. This committee has worked together diligently since November of 2018 to create the proper language for effective screening and professional development.

In comparing the language in SB 102 and the language created by the IDA team, which included team members from 5 central Ohio districts, many of whom are already implementing screening and/or structured literacy practices into their schools, the following deficiencies have been noted:

- SB102 states screening for dyslexia will begin before starting 1st grade - This is too late! A struggling reader needs identified as they enter school. If we continue to wait it only takes longer to make progress.
- IDA's language for screening, which was done in conjunction with public schools, has

specific metrics on what attributes to screen for and SB102 does not. Without specific guidelines and metrics it builds in failure. Schools will be able to develop their own map and trajectories. There will be no equity.

- SB102 allows K-12 students to be screened for dyslexia if you transfer school districts and have not been screened, but anyone beyond 1st grade that does not transfer does not get screened.
- SB102 allows parents to approve the reading instruction program. Parents are not necessarily qualified to approve the various types of reading instruction programs. They rely on us, the experts to know best practice. Very informed parents may know about proper instruction, especially those in the dyslexia community, but in most cases they will not.
- SB102 states students will receive reading intervention in order to measure the effectiveness of reading assistance programs. That is not why you get reading intervention. You get it to improve your reading skills not to measure the quality of reading assistance programs.
- SB102 states “appropriate reading intervention services” will be provided but it does not define exactly what that means. Guidelines need to be established to guarantee progress.
- SB102 states school districts can create partnership with libraries. Libraries are not equipped for funding nor dyslexia expertise. It also states Superintendent **may** establish an advisory committee of stakeholders and experts, including the International Dyslexia Association in Ohio, to assist with the development of guidelines and procedures. Instead of a library partnership, our proposed language states ODE will form a multi-disciplinary committee of dyslexia experts known as the Ohio Dyslexia Committee (ODC) which would be an equal combination made up of ODE and Ohio IDA members. Ohio Dyslexia Committee is a key component of our proposed language.
- ODC will maintain and update an Ohio Dyslexia Guidebook which will cover many aspects including screening, Structured Literacy, and related topics. Reading is the most researched area of education and we must stay up-to-date in the field.
- SB102 references Structured Literacy which is good, but it does not detail or provide specifics. We must have specifics on how to provide Structured Literacy professional development in evidence-based dyslexia screening and intervention practices.
- Instead of Superintendent providing recommendations for screening and legislation the

Ohio Dyslexia Committee will provide this since it will consist of dyslexia experts, and the Superintendent will be the one who ensures the legislation is executed properly.

- Instead of having ODE furnish an assessment, the Guidebook, which will be created by Ohio Dyslexia Committee will provide a list of current assessments that meet the validity and reliability criteria. Each district must administer valid, reliable screening measures of literacy skills to all students in grades K-5 based on the Guidebook.

Without specific guidelines put in place by legislation and monitored by experts in the area of literacy, there is no equity in the services being offered across the state. Districts will be left to interpret the bill in a way that “fits best” in their district rather than a way that is best practice for our future.