

Hello. I would like to thank you for allowing me to come today to speak on the importance of early identification of kids with dyslexia within our elementary schools. My name is Kirsten Drummond and I am the special education academic coach in Westerville City Schools. I am a Certified Academic Language Practitioner through the Academic Language Therapy Association and I am also a supervisor at the Children's Dyslexia Center in Dublin, Ohio.

Early identification should be at the forefront of all minds of educators and policymakers. The purpose of early identification is to determine which children have developmental problems that may be obstacles to learning or that place children at risk. It is not in the child's best interest to "wait and see" or hope that the child will "grow out of" his or her problems, which is the current policy for the majority of Ohio schools. One of the most compelling findings from recent reading research is that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up. As several studies have now documented, the poor first-grade reader almost always continues to be a poor reader.

And the consequences of a slow start in reading become monumental as they accumulate exponentially over time. Stanovich, a well known reading researcher, pointed out in his well-known paper on the "Matthew effects" (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer) that students who fail to acquire early word reading skills, suffer the consequences of poor reading that range from negative attitudes, reduced opportunities for vocabulary growth, to missed opportunities for development of reading comprehension strategies, to less actual practice in reading than other children receive.

It is a tragedy of the first order that while we know clearly the costs of waiting too long, few school districts have in place a mechanism to identify and help children before failure takes hold. Indeed, in the majority of cases, **there is no systematic identification until third grade, by which time successful remediation is more difficult and more costly.**

Once children fall behind in the growth of critical word reading skills, it will require very intensive interventions to bring them back up to adequate levels of reading accuracy, and reading fluency will be even more difficult to restore because of the large

amounts of reading practice that is lost by children each month and year that they remain, poor readers.

Westerville City Schools is the 7th largest school district in Ohio. We are dedicated to reaching the youngest of our students. We are determined to not let our kids wait to fail in order for them to receive the help they need. This year, Westerville purchased phonological processing assessments to screen all incoming Kindergarteners for dyslexia. We know that students who have weak phonological awareness skills are more prone to be dyslexic and have other reading issues. We also supplied all our Kindergarten, first-grade teachers, and reading coaches with a research-based phonological awareness curriculum and a phonics-based curriculum. We are putting in place professional development sessions on using the data from our screeners to effectively remediate our children with dyslexia and other reading problems.

Westerville is committed to the academic growth of all its students. We offer several multisensory reading training throughout the school year and are equipping our teachers with the knowledge and scientifically based techniques and materials needed to teach our dyslexic students. Our hope is that we can avoid the heartbreak and emotional trauma that comes with reading failure.

Dyslexic students will not “grow out of it”. They will not just catch up on their own. Retention will not solve their so-called problem. Early identification is the key, but we can’t stop there. Our districts, our colleges, must start training teachers the skills necessary to teach students with dyslexia and we must start seriously looking at the research and start putting it into practice. If we are going to fix the reading crisis in Ohio, we must start screening our youngest kids so we can start teaching kids those foundational skills necessary for reading development. The kids in Ohio deserve this and we can make this happen.

Thank you.

