Written Testimony of Alvin Borromeo

S.B. 102

October 15, 2019

Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our story of our son, Antonio, and the challenges identifying his dyslexia and getting him appropriate instruction. My name is Alvin Borromeo. I live in Dublin, Ohio within the Dublin City School District (“Dublin”). I would also like to thank the Dublin Dyslexia Parent Network (“DDPN”) for asking me to provide my testimony. I am associated with DDPN, which is a part of OH-KID.

I, and on behalf of DDPN, support Senate Bill 102 if extensive modifications are made as detailed by Blythe Wood from IDA Central Ohio and Director of CDC and public school teacher.

Our story has three phases.

In phase one, there is a general recognition by Dublin that Antonio has difficulty in learning and reading, however, at no point in this phase does Dublin offer to test him for dyslexia or even acknowledge that his problems are related to dyslexia.

If there were a law at the time that required Dublin to provide early screening for dyslexia, we could have given Antonio the proper instruction that he needed, and saved him from years of frustration, tears, anxiety, low self-esteem and thinking (and saying) that he’s “stupid”.

It began in pre-Kindergarten. Antonio attended Dublin’s pre-Kindergarten class. Antonio’s teacher recommended that we hold Antonio back from Kindergarten.

In first grade, Antonio was placed in Reading Recovery. Then, in Second Grade, Antonio did not qualify for Reading Recovery. This confused us. He still had difficulty reading and spelling. My wife would volunteer in class to test kids with their spelling. All of the kids did great, but Antonio would miss most, if not all words. We asked his teacher if they thought Antonio was dyslexic. She said he just has to work harder. We asked his Principal as well. She didn’t think Antonio was dyslexic, and suggested that we go to his pediatrician to be tested for ADHD.

In Third Grade, the school called us and said Antonio failed their sample third grade guarantee test. The school hired a retired teacher to work with Antonio and other kids to help them pass the test. To pass the test; not to really teach him how to read.

Finally, in Fourth Grade, a stranger on Facebook private messaged my wife and encouraged us to begin documenting things in writing with Dublin. She told us about our rights and mentioned IEPs and ETRs and all of these things that Dublin did not counsel us on.

Again, keep in mind no one at Dublin recommended that Antonio be tested for dyslexia despite ample evidence of his difficulty in reading and despite us specifically asking whether they thought he was dyslexic.

So now we’re in phase two. After our written request, we had a pre-ETR meeting with the school. We also contacted a neuropsychologist for testing. When we mentioned this in our meeting, the school psychologist said that we didn’t need to get outside testing and that they could do the testing for us. What? Where was this offer when Antonio showed obvious signs of reading difficulty? Did they think we can now trust them to do a proper test? Thankfully, one of Antonio’s teachers was in the meeting. He said he was taking off his teaching hat and putting on his parent hat and mentioned that his daughter was tested by Dr. Steven Guy as well and highly recommend that we do.

After testing by Dr. Maria Goldman from Dr. Guy’s office, it was confirmed that Antonio has dyslexia. We got Antonio on an IEP. We thought this would help, but it really didn’t. The extra instruction was only more of the same flawed curriculum that didn’t help him in the first place. In addition, he had to lose his specials classes in order to get this additional help. That only served to negatively differentiate him from his fellow classmates.

We hired an OG tutor, but Dublin told us not to because the method is contrary to Dublin’s and would only serve to confuse him. We ignored that advice.

But when Antonio’s OG tutor moved during Antonio’s Seventh Grade, Antonio fell behind. His confidence was shot. He hated school and the anxiety manifested itself in frequent stomach pains. We trusted the process, but the process was rigged against Antonio.

And that takes us to phase three. Last year, over winter break, Antonio showed us a video of Marburn Academy. He said that he thinks it would help him and that he wanted to go there. We were floored and impressed with his self-advocacy. As a parent, how can you ignore such a request. Anyway, he’s now at Marburn and he LOVES school again. He gets 90 minutes of OG instruction a day. He comes home happy and is able to keep up with class and his homework. We are so happy for him.

But phase three is more than just getting help for Antonio. We believe that all students must get tested for dyslexia early. We believe that all students would benefit from a structured literacy curriculum. We’ve seen first-hand the effects an inadequate curriculum has on kids with dyslexia.

Marburn is great, but they only have room for 300 students. Plus, it’s not cheap. We are lucky to be able to afford tuition (with the help of the Jon Peterson scholarship). There are only three schools in Ohio that specializes in teaching kids with learning disabilities. That’s not enough to help the hundreds of thousands of kids with dyslexia. That’s why I urge you to strengthen the requirements of early testing and to require the teaching of structured literacy.

I acknowledge that this will take a little bit of the discretion away from the local schools, but in my experience, the local schools will do the bare minimum that is required by law. If they have some wiggle room, they will wiggle out of their duty. They will not fully inform parents of their options for dyslexia testing, nor will they inform parents of the benefits of one curriculum over another, the other being one that they have likely invested millions to implement. In short, I don’t trust the local school districts to do what’s right for children with dyslexia. They had my trust at one point, but that trust has long been broken.

BACKUP INFORMATION

* Our story is not unique. I’ve talked to or read accounts from other parents with similar stories. Some are mentioned in a Nextdoor post discussing, originally, why Dublin Schools received a B in the recent statewide report card. You can find the discussion at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AiR4QeT5S4-c3BK6lqq-TaSeT-dvuAx0/view?usp=sharing>
* Suggesting that kids get tested for ADHD instead of dyslexia seems to be a common tactic that Dublin Schools suggest.
* At our most recent IEP meeting, Dublin presented the fact that Antonio didn’t qualify for Extra School Year (ESY) instruction during the summer as a “good thing”. But they didn’t tell us that they’ve allocated 100 spots during the summer for OG tutoring. Since Antonio is at Marburn, we didn’t make an issue of it, but 100 spots is inadequate. If 10% of students are dyslexic, then 1,600 of Dublin’s 16,000 student population should be offered OG tutoring during the summer. Here’s the link from the Dublin City School Board meeting where they discuss the 100 spots: <https://go.boarddocs.com/oh/dublin/Board.nsf/files/BFQTUQ6DEAEF/$file/BOE082619.pdf>
* DDPN has approached Dublin Schools multiple times to work with parents to implement testing and introduce structured literacy into the curriculum. So far, the district has basically dismissed DDPN’s concerns and refuse to have meaningful discussions.