

SB 102 Proponent testimony submitted by Dr. Jack Fette, Chief Academic Officer, Olentangy Schools.

Thank you for contacting us for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dr. Jack Fette. I am the Chief Academic Officer of Olentangy Schools and an advocate for students with dyslexia.

As you are probably aware, Olentangy is a large district and growing larger. Each year we enroll roughly 1,500 third grade students. Since the inception of the Third Grade Guarantee, my district has never been required to retain a student for who we are accountable per the State Report Card because of the Guarantee. Yes, we have many two-income households and a supportive local community, but those factors mean nothing to a student who is dyslexic. What matters to students with dyslexia is phonics and multisensory reading instruction.

Olentangy is the only public school district in the state – in the county – in the world – that is an accredited Academy of Orton-Gillingham training site. I am very proud of that fact because it emphasizes our commitment to students with dyslexia and would not be possible if we didn't demonstrate local expertise when helping students learn to read. A critical component of our success with aiding students with dyslexia is early identification through screening.

Olentangy successfully implemented screening and appropriate services while under strict budgetary constraints. We did so without waiting for a mandate from the state. Literacy is the "core business" in education and we are morally and ethically responsible to help ALL children read. We use the AIMSweb Plus screener and those with risks are then further screened using the CTOPP.

My district supports a screening bill that allows for local control but insists that schools make an effort to identify every student with dyslexia in the early grades.

Screening should not be an optional. Schools must first know which children are dyslexic in order to best serve those students. In our opinion, screening is only a first step. Colleges of education have historically taught future educators very little about dyslexia so it is not realistic to expect teachers to inherently know how to identify and help these students. At Olentangy, our Director of Pupil Services serves on the Board of IDA Central Ohio and we work within the IDA recommendations and guidelines. All of which helps us better understand how we are able to aid our teachers in this area. We greatly appreciate the legislative group working with IDA to help Ohio students.

I have outlined an example of what a large district can accomplish. But all kids deserve this benefit, not just the students in Olentangy. Mandated screening will provide meaningful data to drive instruction and intervention, allowing all students children the opportunity to be successful readers.

I am proud to say that Olentangy has a structured literacy curriculum K-5, has implemented a screener, has added a family history question to our student registration paperwork, and currently services over 750 students through Orton Gillingham instruction. I have no doubt that these efforts are directly correlated with our success on the Third Grade Guarantee. If Olentangy, a district of 22,000 students can address dyslexia comprehensively, I have no doubt it is possible for other districts.

Ohio adopted the legal definition of Dyslexia and declared October Dyslexia Awareness Month. Thank you, Senator Brenner, for sponsoring those bills and being such a great advocate for students with dyslexia and quite frankly, all students. Thank you, as well, Senator Brenner, for reaching out to Olentangy regarding this bill. The time is now to catch up to other states and screen our students. Time is of the essence and kids in Ohio can't wait any longer. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of identifying these students so they can go on to be successful students and contributing members of our society. This is a problem we can fix, but it starts with identification.

Thank you for your time today and your service to the students and teachers of our great state.