

Good Morning! Thank you for the opportunity to speak today! I work for the Olentangy Local School District as the District Dyslexia specialist and Orton-Gillingham Fellow, providing teacher training and practicum in Structured Literacy to support our students who struggle with dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a learning disability that is neurobiological in its origin and affects as many as 1 in 5 individuals, making it difficult for students to learn to read. The significant consequences of this challenge cannot be overestimated. Reading is a life skill that impacts the future life trajectory for all children.

When I first started working for the district, I provided Orton-Gillingham or OG instruction, which is a structured literacy approach, to students significantly impacted by dyslexia. The story of John illustrates the difference OG services can have on a student's life. John's mother, a single parent, removed John from a rural public school after being told he would never go to college and would have to repeat first grade. In the fifth grade, John's mother sent him to an Olentangy elementary school, after struggling to afford a small private school for students with dyslexia. Due to his low reading skills, John was placed in a resource room, the most restrictive setting for his English instruction. As his reading skills improved with OG, John moved from a middle school resource room to an inclusion classroom and finally to a high school college preparatory English class. John graduated from Olentangy and is currently succeeding as an engineering student at the University of Cincinnati. John's story illustrates how Structured Literacy can play an important role in a student's access to education and to the development of their future career.

In 1920, Samuel Orton, a neurologist at the Massachusetts General Hospital and a native to Columbus, OH established the roots of Structured Literacy for individuals with dyslexia. Over 100 years later, through extensive research, the science of reading supports the implementation of Structured Literacy for all students, not just those with dyslexia.

As John's story illustrates, with appropriate instruction, most children have the potential to learn to read. If a child is diagnosed with dyslexia and their school district does not have teachers trained in Structured Literacy then parents often resort to paying an exorbitant amount of resources for tutors or specialized private schools. Like John's family, not all families have the resources to do this. Hence, learning to read and supporting the needs of our struggling readers becomes an issue of equity. All children no matter their socio-economic status should have access to the proper supports, such as Structured Literacy, so they can learn to read.

We know the right methods to teach children, but teachers need to be trained properly. Implementation of Structured Literacy is more challenging due to the lack of teacher training in our undergraduate universities. Given most college faculty have been trained in methods of

reading instruction that do not have a strong evidence base, most professors of education lack the training and background to teach undergraduate students in phonology, phonics, the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, the history of the English language, fluency, orthography, and comprehension. Furthermore, a practicum in Structured Literacy is essential to the integration of theory and practice.

Until our universities progress and provide teacher training in Structured Literacy there are models of training that are gathering momentum in public school districts. The Olentangy Local School District currently provides Structured Literacy to around 800 students. The key to Olentangy's growth in this area has been crucial administrative and parent support through our Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Curriculum, Pupil Services director, and the Olentangy Dyslexia Network. We have established our own dyslexia screening protocol which is efficiently tied to our universal screener. Based on screening results, children as young as kindergarten can be placed on a reading improvement plan or recommended for a Multi-factored Evaluation based on suspecting a specific learning disability in the area of basic reading or reading fluency.

We are working hard to build the capacity of certified staff in all of our buildings. Our school district is able to provide this teacher training because it is accredited as an Orton-Gillingham training facility through the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators. For OG certified staff, we currently have one Fellow, one Fellow-in-training, 2 Certified, 19 Associate, and 17 OG Classroom Educators. Thirty-three teachers are currently in a practicum and I will complete over 200 observations this calendar year.

All of our newly hired intervention specialists are required to take 30 hours of OG training, and if they are working with students identified with dyslexia then they need to take part in a supervised practicum. However, teachers often continue on to complete 60 hours of OG coursework and a 100-hour practicum. In addition, all children Pre-K through first grade engage in Tier 1 phonological processing activities through the Heggerty curriculum. Students K-3 are taught Structured Literacy through the Tier 1 Foundations curriculum.

John's story and the science of reading tell us that we have the resources to help our students to maximize their reading potential which can impact generations to come. In circa 2020, as we carry the torch for Samuel Orton, we have the essential tools to train teachers in Structured Literacy so that all of our children have access to reading, one of our most basic life skills and educational civil rights.

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