

SB102
Cheryl Kleist
Interested Party

October 14, 2019

Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Cheryl Kleist, and I am submitting written testimony in support of the intent of dyslexia screening in SB102. I am a parent who testified in front of this very committee almost exactly 8 years ago in support of legislation to define dyslexia and establish a dyslexia pilot program. Since then, I have received training in Structured Literacy to better understand the needs of my son in order to better advocate for him. I am a founding member of Decoding Dyslexia OH, a parent driven, grassroots movement that exists in all 50 states, Canada, and now expanding into other countries. I am currently serving in my 5th year as a parent member on the Ohio Department of Education State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children (SAPEC).

I have read the testimony regarding the deficiencies in SB102 from Blythe Wood who is from the Pickerington School District, is Vice President of the International Dyslexia Association Central Ohio, and who is also the Director of the nonprofit Children's Dyslexia Center and I agree with her testimony.

I know from personal, first-hand experience in advocating for my son, niece, nephew, and neighbor who were all suspected of having dyslexia that it is extremely difficult to get schools to do an appropriate evaluation. The extreme difficulty in getting the school to even acknowledge that my son had a specific learning disability led me to testify before this very committee almost exactly 8 years ago. I am very disheartened to say that 8 years later, very little progress has been made in meeting the needs of students at-risk for or identified as having dyslexia.

The most frustrating aspect is that precious time is lost by waiting to see if the child struggles with learning to read. Typically schools offer inappropriate intervention programs that do not meet the child's learning needs while dismissing parental concerns regarding lack of progress. Many times, this requires the parent to be "that squeaky wheel", and after prolonged persistence on the parent's part, if the parent is lucky, the school will eventually relent and evaluate the child for a suspected learning disability. This is the first hurdle a parent must overcome.

The second hurdle, which is even harder, is getting the school to do an appropriate evaluation. Because I got so tired of giving parents the same advice over and over in online dyslexia groups, I created the website Decoding Dyslexia OH as a free resource to parents that spells out the steps they need to take in order to advocate for their struggling readers within the educational system.

Since parents are not allowed to request specific evaluations, because either the school may not own them, or the school psychologist may not be trained in them, I tell parents they need to request in writing that the following areas to be evaluated should include, but are not limited to:

Symptoms of Difficulty

- Letter knowledge and phonics
- Decoding and spelling of real words and non-words
- Oral Reading
- Written Expression
- Reading Comprehension
- Listening Comprehension

Causes/Correlates

- Phonological Processing (Awareness, Memory, and Rapid Naming)
- Auditory verbal working memory

Risk Factors

- Dyslexia screening results
- Family history
- History of language impairment
- Receptive vocabulary
- Cognitive ability (including processing speed and working memory)

It should not be the parents' job to tell the school what areas need to be tested, but unfortunately, schools do not do adequate evaluations. And even when the parents' request in writing, all the areas listed above, schools rarely evaluate all the areas. I know from personal, first-hand knowledge of sitting in meetings with the school for my son, niece, and nephew, and when I have asked why specific areas were not evaluated, I received inadequate answers.

For example, the CTOPP, the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, is often used to find students at-risk for dyslexia. This test consists of 12 subtests. While it may be called the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, it is not a comprehensive test if only 1 subtest is administered. This is exactly what happened with my niece, who scored in the 5th percentile on the elision subtest, but the school led us to believe they performed the whole test based on their reporting. This is a child who is now in the 4th grade, has been struggling to read since kindergarten, was identified with having a "reading disability" in first grade, and has been receiving inappropriate reading instruction that does not meet her needs. She is well below her peers in reading ability, and as that gap continues to widen, the odds are stacked against her as she now has a 1 in 8 chance of ever catching up to read at grade-level. And she was one of the lucky ones who was identified in 1st grade, but has not received the appropriate instruction to

SB102
Cheryl Kleist
Interested Party

meet her needs. This is the third, and hardest hurdle to overcome - ensuring the school provides the appropriate remediation, and the vast majority do not clear this last hurdle.

Either schools are woefully ignorant, or willfully negligent in their responsibility to appropriately identify and provide appropriate remediation to students at-risk for dyslexia. The story of my niece is the same story as my son, my nephew, my neighbor, and the hundreds of parents I have helped over the past 8 years through online dyslexia groups, my website, and as a founding member of Decoding Dyslexia OH.

As a parent member serving in my 5th year on the Ohio Department of Education State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children, I have presented on the unmet needs of students with dyslexia, the need for screening all students, the need for early identification, and the need for professional development on dyslexia for all teachers and administrators. I have advised on the unmet needs of all struggling readers. I have solicited public comments to be submitted at these meetings regarding the unmet needs of students with dyslexia. A past state-level ODE administrator even stated how tired they were of hearing concerns about public schools in Ohio not identifying and properly meeting the needs of students with dyslexia. After five years, it is clear that we need legislation to mandate the early screening and identification of students at-risk for dyslexia so they receive the appropriate reading instruction they need without undue delay.

While there are some schools who have stepped up to meet the needs of students at-risk for dyslexia, these shining examples are few and far between. The reality is that most students with dyslexia still do not make adequate progress due to lack of early identification and appropriate remediation.

This legislation needs to address the deficiencies provided in the testimony of Blythe Wood, and must reference the dyslexia handbook that was included in the initial draft screening bill that was submitted, so the schools know and understand how to implement the screening and the necessary steps to be taken if a child is identified as at-risk for dyslexia, as many schools still do not know how to meet the needs of these students.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Kleist
Parent