

Public Hearing on H. 668, H. 669. H. 406

House Committee on Education

January 28, 2020

Room 11

Updated February 11, 2020

Public Comment

-----Original Message-----

From: Jessica Dion <jessica@dinsaunti.org>

Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 11:30 AM

To: wfrank@leg.state.vt.us; George Till <GTill@leg.state.vt.us>; Avery Lamb
<ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] Literacy Bill

[External]

Good morning.

I am writing from Jericho, VT. I am enclosing a copy of my testimony below, which was read aloud at the hearing on 1/28/2020, in support of the Literacy bills being considered. I urge you to listen to or read the testimonies, and support a bill of substance, that will ensure early and regular screening for dyslexia for students, and importantly, provide new and current teachers with training to support these students, with evidence-based literacy programs.

We chose to live in the Chittenden East school district because of the great reputation of the schools here. In many ways, my kids (14 and 17) have had a positive academic experience, with great teachers. My son is in 11th grade and thriving academically. However, when my daughter struggled to name letters and read words in Kindergarten, I seemed to be the only person concerned. We worked with her teachers, assuming they knew what they were doing. She fell further and further behind. They kept reassuring us that it would 'click' if she found the right book, and needed to work harder to read over the summer. They offered pull-out intervention, which did not help very much, and caused her to fall behind in other subjects. It was a train wreck.

By fourth grade, she was coming home with stomach aches and migraines regularly. School made her feel terrible about herself. We were perplexed. Her teachers commented on how bright and wonderful she was, and how hard she worked.. but the reading and writing problem was an elephant in the room. This is a kid who had supportive, highly literate book lovers for parents, and wonderful teachers who cared about her.

She had "everything going for her". None of us had the education and training needed to help her, in spite of her having the most common learning disability known.

Starting middle school in 5th grade, she crashed and burned. The reading and writing demands were overwhelming. She came home in tears, spent hours on homework she didn't understand, and went to bed sobbing that she was the stupidest person in her class. Her teachers were sympathetic, but had no ideas.

I finally decided that I could not possibly do a worse job than this, and pulled her out. I put my life aspirations on hold, and we home schooled through middle school. This allowed us to figure out what she needed in order to learn. She healed emotionally, and

the headaches and stomach aches stopped. She gained confidence, began to enjoy writing, and thrived, gobbling up knowledge.

After trying unsuccessfully to get the school system to pay for an evaluation, we finally bit the bullet and had her privately evaluated (\$2,000+) in 7th grade. She had dyslexia. Looking back at the trajectory of her life, knowing what I know now, after spending hundreds of hours reading every book I could about dyslexia, I realize that she was a poster child, a textbook case. All of the early warning signs were present. It was so obvious, it's hard to forgive myself for not seeing it sooner. We paid for a private tutor for over a year (\$85/hr), to try to help her recover that lost time. If we could afford it, she would still be receiving tutoring.

I am not an expert in literacy. I didn't know what to look for until my daughter had endured years of suffering and missed educational opportunities. She is still suffering. In 9th grade at MMU, she works tirelessly, with more grit and determination than I have ever seen in a person. Her school does not understand dyslexia, and continues to give students assignments that are heavy in reading and writing, in every subject. I spend every afternoon by her side, as she works on homework from 4-10pm. In spite of having a 504, it feels like she is drowning.

She walked into the door loving learning, and is now begging to homeschool again. She has no time for sports, hobbies, or even basic self-care. This is not an equal access to education. She has no chance to enter college as a well-rounded, healthy person. Because her early educational experience was so inappropriate and damaging, she is at a great disadvantage and will spend the rest of her academic career trying to make up that lost ground.

Our schools are designed to teach to a certain kind of child, with a certain kind of brain. Kids who have alternate wiring, are invited to fill out the bottom of the bell curve. This is wrong. The people you are hearing from are the tip of the iceberg - people who have the resources and fire in their bellies, to spend a huge amount of their time and energy advocating for their child's right to a fair education.

There are thousands of families out there who did not make it to the hearing, who can't have their kids privately evaluated or pay for a tutor, and who go through K-12 thinking that the fault lies with their child, for not trying hard enough. How many brilliant minds are we sentencing to a life of illiteracy and shame?

Dyslexia is a well-understood neurological variation, as common as left-handedness. We need to pay attention to the science of reading. We need new and current teachers to get training in how to recognize dyslexia, and how to teach reading and writing using methods that are backed up by research data. I don't want to see teachers lose even more autonomy. I do want to see them get the training they need, so they have a full toolbox, and can help ALL Vermont children become strong readers and writers. You can see in the testimony, generations of pain and suffering because schools have stubbornly stuck to (heavily marketed) outdated teaching models that DO NOT WORK for many kids.

There is a saying, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." If we continue the status quo, we are essentially choosing that 20% of our children will be left in the dust, unable to access higher levels of learning, because the written word will be an enigma to them.

We can't leave these kids behind. Please support this bill. Thank you.

- Jessica Dion
Jericho, VT

PS. Here is a copy of my testimony, read aloud on 1/28/2020:

1/28/2020
Jessica Dion
Jericho, VT

Dyslexia has often been described as a weakness surrounded by a sea of strengths. Most dyslexic kids present as intelligent, articulate, creative and quite capable of learning. When a child like this mysteriously doesn't learn to read on schedule, the child and family are often held responsible. We hear:

Read to your child every night.
Make sure your child is reading every day.
S/he should spend extra time reading over the summer.
It's all a matter of finding the right book.
If the child is motivated enough, s/he will learn to read.
S/he needs to work harder on reading.
Give it time - s/he's so smart, I'm sure it will click.

For the 1 in 5 students who struggle with reading, this is NOT ENOUGH.
Every year, a new group of kindergarteners enters our school system.
Will each of them have an equal access to education, or will 20% of them not get the reading instruction they need?

We have known about dyslexia since the 1800s. Dyslexia is a variety of human - a natural variation. We have decades of solid research data on how to strengthen reading and literacy skills for dyslexic kids. Most of these methods work very well for all children, making them easy to implement in the classroom.

What we are doing now has a massive hidden cost. The population of American prisons has a disproportionately high number of people with dyslexia. Illiteracy is very expensive to society - far more expensive than implementing evidence-based early literacy education. In each

Vermont high school graduating class, there is a group of individuals who struggled their entire academic life. They think they must be stupid, because their dyslexia was never recognized, diagnosed, or addressed in school. They were called lazy, unmotivated and incapable.

We are doing a grave disservice to these students. Our failure to act, to implement science based, evidence based reading programs, is crushing the spirits of these children and sending them out into life with a negative, distorted perception of their abilities.

There are also countless examples of people with dyslexia who have achieved great success, as actors, inventors, CEOs, authors (yes!), scientists, artists, lawyers, etc. Some of them succeeded despite an arduous childhood of humiliation and shame. For the rest, early identification, strong support from family and schools, and *appropriate evidence-based education* made all the difference. Right now in Vermont, parents have to do their own research, pay thousands of dollars for independent testing, and take time off work for private tutoring outside of school, for their child to learn to read and write fluently. This means that only children from affluent families have the opportunity to close this gap.

Reading is the gateway to learning. A delay in reading fluency compounds quickly, is hard to recover from, and impacts every part of a child's life. We must give every Vermont child a strong start, with literacy instruction that is backed up by science.

-----Original Message-----

From: Liane <lpmendez@comcast.net>

Sent: Monday, January 27, 2020 7:12 PM

To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] Dyslexia bill

Dear Avery,

I am writing this letter asking you to support the Dyslexia Bill that is being proposed. I had a huge awakening this year as I learned about how our education system deals with kids with dyslexia. I have one child in the Essex school system and I'm fortunate that school has come easy for her. As an onlooker, it always appeared that there were options and assistance for kids with learning disabilities. Then, just this year, I watched our friend's family fall apart over the struggle to get their daughter some help.

Their daughter fell into the gap of not being diagnosed in elementary school because she was smart enough to find ways to get by (but never learned the concepts) and was a quiet child so there was never additional help given to her. School became a struggle and this family ended up homeschooling for several years. There were no panic attacks or anxiety issues with staying home. This past year, their daughter wanted to integrate back into the school system in hopes of being able to go through the high school and graduate with her class. Instead, they were met with such resistance and a completely unprepared principal and group of teachers. She was actually told that "College isn't for everyone" and that she should just look into a trade and even sent her into a room to read by herself. Again, no one to help teach her the skills that she needs to have to be able to read on her own. They completely wrote her off before even giving her a chance. This attitude may be why our prisons are full of people with similar disabilities. With this type of treatment, eventually you are going to believe that you are no good, so why try.

In watching my friends go through this ordeal, my mind was blown. I had always believed that our education system was one of the best in the country and yet here they were being put through the ringer to try to get a basic education for their daughter. As my friend filled me in on how the school just wanted them to go back to homeschooling, she had also learned that Mississippi and Alabama had better literacy programs than Vermont. Again, I was astonished. I'm embarrassed that I had no idea of the struggles that other families had to endure to try for an education that I have taken for granted.

Please listen to the stories behind this proposed bill. Our state can do better at helping these families. These children are bright and eager to learn, they just need a program that gets them started.

Thank you for your time and hopefully your support.

Sincerely,

Liane Mendez
Essex Resident

From: Lisa Allen <lisaloriallen@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 1:50 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] copy of my public testimony from last night

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Lisa Allen. I am testifying in support of all the parents who are trying to ensure their children receive the specialized reading instruction they deserve. My son is now a junior in Highschool and doing well but it was a long road of advocating for his needs that got him where he is today.

When he was young he attended the same preschool where I taught, and I could see he was not identifying letters, numbers, or colors. We have a family history of dyslexia. Therefore when my son entered kindergarten, we asked that he be evaluated and receive services. The reading specialist did a classroom assessment that showed he was on "grade level" and did not need support. His teacher and I continued to advocate for intervention, so he did receive some extra support later in the year.

In first grade, I was again told that he did not need an evaluation because the teacher used a classroom assessment tool that showed he was "on grade level." I continued to voice my concerns, and he again received some extra reading support but no formal evaluation. In March of that school year, I went outside of the school district to get my son evaluated privately. He showed a clear deficit in rapid naming - an early indicator of later struggles with reading fluency. I was encouraged to find someone who could give him explicit reading instruction. A few months later, at our own expense, we hired a private tutor who worked with him throughout the summer.

In second grade, we again voiced our concerns, and this time, although not until January of that school year, he was formally evaluated. This testing showed he was reading 18 words correct per minute. The fluency benchmark for second grade using this assessment tool was 80 to 100 words correct per minute. This score and other tests showed he was significantly below the grade level expectation for second grade, and placed him among the bottom 15% of his peers. He was therefore finally eligible to be placed on an IEP for Special Education in the area of Reading Fluency.

He ultimately received formal instruction through the school. Observing the instruction he was receiving at school, compared to the type of instruction he was receiving from his tutor, it became clear to us that staying with the school instruction alone would have been inadequate. So we continued private tutoring at our own expense.

By fifth grade, he had closed the gap and was reading on grade level. He will always read at a slower rate than that of his peers, and he must still do so with great intention. This is the nature of dyslexia. We are thankful to all of the teachers who continue to accommodate him with extra time to complete his work.

When I asked my son if I could share his story he responded, “Yes, I want you to because there are kids in my grade who received only reading instruction through school with me, and they are still struggling. I can’t imagine how frustrating it would feel to be in High School and not be able to read on grade level.”

I am a teacher, and we advocated for our son and did not give up when we were told he was reading on grade level. We also paid for private tutoring. Not every family has these resources, which makes our current education system inequitable and will often fail to give some children the chance they deserve.

Thank you for your time,

Lisa Allen

January 19, 2020

To Rep. Conlon and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Sarah Warner, and I live in Weybridge, Vermont. I have been an elementary school special educator in Vermont for the past 11 years. I hold undergraduate and graduate degrees from Vermont colleges, and I have also completed advanced post-graduate coursework in dyslexia. Last year through the Stern Center for Language and Learning in Williston, I earned Associate Level certification from the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators and currently working toward Certified Level certification.

I'm writing to encourage your support of the bills currently being reviewed by the House Education Committee regarding mandatory dyslexia screening and universal K-3 evidence-based structured literacy instruction. Access to structured literacy instruction for Vermont's K-3 students is the only way to ensure increased literacy scores and improve student outcomes statewide.

Evidence-based structured literacy instruction is not “drill and kill” or “one size fits all”. It’s a multisensory, systematic, explicit approach to teaching every student the foundational skills required for becoming successful readers and writers. Structured literacy instruction is beneficial for all students, but is absolutely essential for about 40% of students who struggle to learn how to read¹ (I know footnotes aren’t especially exciting, but I promise this one is worth your time). Additionally, when students receive instruction that allows them to be proficient decoders, rather than spending all of their mental energy on lifting the words off the page, they are instead able to devote cognitive resources to higher-level thinking that encourages deep text comprehension.

It is equally important that the state of Vermont enacts an early universal screening process that monitors students for dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia to ensure that students are given appropriate interventions as soon as possible. The existence of dyslexia is only refuted by those who lack knowledge of the research; I urge you to reference S. Res. 275 from October 2015 in which dyslexia was identified and defined with bipartisan support from the U.S. Senate.²

As a special educator working across grade levels, I have seen firsthand the devastating impact of being a poor reader or having dyslexia. Literacy permeates every aspect of a child’s school experience, and while being challenged to read the words on the page is demoralizing in itself, the secondary consequences of being a poor reader—low self-esteem, poor self-efficacy, and shame—are just as dire. Literacy is a social justice issue at its very core. Citizens must be fully literate to cast informed votes, complete job applications, and understand the fine

¹ <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read>

² <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/BILLS-114sres275ats.pdf>

print of loan applications. At a more fundamentally human level, being literate allows you to independently peruse a menu at a restaurant or read a bedtime story to your child.

While I can only speak from my experiences, classroom literacy instruction in Vermont is a smattering of teacher preference and ineffective strategy work based on individual beliefs³. Educators and administrators, by and large, lack knowledge about how skilled reading develops in the brain and why it is absolutely imperative that our instruction mirrors that process.

But, let me be clear: teachers are not to blame for the poor rates of reading proficiency for Vermont students. Undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs fail to provide scientifically-based training for educators around how the brain learns to read and instruction that activates and strengthens those neural pathways. Statewide, district-led professional development opportunities and the priorities of curriculum leaders remain rooted in erroneous beliefs about the acquisition of reading skills. We simply can not expect teachers to teach what they don't know.

But there is no excuse for this continued ignorance; the research community has long established and proven, through countless neurological studies, how the reading process occurs in the human brain. Sadly, most reading instruction in Vermont schools does not align with this research, and our students are the casualties. If we're honest with ourselves, the data proves how we teach literacy skills in Vermont does not work. In 2019, 63% of Vermont students were not proficient on the NAEP. In 2018, less than 60% of Vermont students in third through ninth grades were proficient on the ELA portion of the SBAC.

States like Kansas⁴, Arkansas⁵, and Georgia⁶ have recently passed legislation similar to the bills currently being discussed by our House Education Committee. Vermont has always been an educational leader in this country. I strongly encourage Committee members to continue to advocate for students by passing these bills and ensuring improved educational outcomes for all Vermont students.

I would be more than happy to continue this discussion with you should you be so inclined.

³ <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/08/22/whats-wrong-how-schools-teach-reading>

⁴ http://www.kslegresearch.org/KLRD-web/Publications/CommitteeReports/2018CommitteeReports/legis_tf_dyslexia-cr.pdf

⁵ <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2019/2019R/Bills/SB153.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20192020/181443.pdf>

With gratitude,

Sarah Warner, M.Ed., A/AOGPE

Joseph Maggiacomo III

I would like to take this time to thank this legislative body for the opportunity to submit written testimony on such an important matter, one that is dear to my heart, having three children with varying degrees of dyslexia. Last legislative session in Rhode Island, I penned perhaps the most comprehensive dyslexia bill ever written. The bill asked for numerous things, including dyslexia screening, a committee to investigate the possibility of a public dyslexic school like South Carolina and a few other states have, and teacher training.

I requested the Cadillac when it comes to teacher training, i.e., that every teacher be certified in level one Orton - Gillingham over a six year period. I also recognized that there is a one week Orton - Gillingham course that any state could mandate teachers take in lieu of the year and a half program, at a cost of approximately one thousand dollars per teacher. The states could then mandate that only the resource teachers be certified in the more intensive level 1 teacher certificate through Orton- Gillingham. What this would accomplish is putting a phonics based program in every grade, while ensuring that the children who actually need intense instruction are given such instruction by a teacher with advanced training.

During the presentation on the dyslexia bill, I had numerous experts testify. I am including the Youtube links to their respective testimony for your review in my email. What the Rhode Island legislature heard from such experts as Dr. Gabrielle from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Gabb from Harvard – Boston Children’s Hospital, and Dr. Susan Brady from the University of Rhode Island is not only the importance of a specific type of training for teachers, and education for dyslexic children, but also the importance of early dyslexic screening.

During my testimony, I asked the legislatures the following question. I have been practicing criminal law for over fifteen years. I have an LLM in criminal law. If one of you came to me and asked me to handle a complex tax law problem, would any of you feel comfortable if I said sure, I took a three day seminar in tax law? So then why are we allowing teachers who only took a three day seminar teacher the state’s dyslexic children?

As I stated supra, I have three dyslexic children. My son Aidan is profoundly dyslexic. When I challenged the Scituate School system with the fact that at the end of second grade, my son could not read, even though he was being placed with a resource teacher who had the three day Wilson training, I was told Aidan was receiving a “free and appropriate education”. When I asked what changes were going to be made, I was met with one word from the assistant director of the Northwest Special Education Region, Denise Brierley, “nothing”! Like so many other parents who have given up on public education for their dyslexic child, I moved my son to Friends Academy in Massachusetts for third grade. Remember he was not reading at the time. My son is now reading at the beginning of a first grade level, receiving Orton-Gillingham instruction from a teacher who actually took the year and a half teacher training program. Not bad for a little guy.

Great improvement! But it was not enough for my son to move onto fourth grade, and Friends Academy does not retain. So, like so many parents of dyslexic children, I asked myself “now what do I do?” I can’t send him back to public school, we already know the results. So me, a grown man of 55, laid in bed at night, staring at the ceiling at 3am, crying, trying to figure out how I was going to educate my dyslexic son. I asked myself, do I have to split the family up, me staying in Rhode Island, my law practice being in Massachusetts, and sending my family to Georgia or Florida, where there are affordable dyslexic schools. Should I home school my son for a year, focusing on just Orton - Gillingham, to get my sons reading up, in hopes a dyslexic school will accept him the following year. And like so many parents of dyslexic children, I asked “where does the money come from for all this?”

I wrote the dyslexic bill for one encompassing reason. So that no parent will have to lay in bed at night crying, not knowing how they are going too properly educate their dyslexic child so that child does not become one of the 48 percent of the prison population that is dyslexic, or the 78 percent of the juvenile justice system that is dyslexic, and so every child in the future who is dyslexic will actually receive a “free and appropriate education”! States mandates education. For a dyslexic child, the only thing being mandated is a body in a seat for 180 days under the current state of education for dyslexic children throughout this country!

It is time to listen to the parents, grandparents, children, and friends of dyslexic children, not the teachers union! This problem is not going away, but, in fact, will multiply because dyslexia is hereditary. We have the solution. It is a structured, phonics based program , i.e., Orton - Gillingham. I implore you not to allow any Vermont parent to go through what I went through. It is incumbent upon you, and only you as the legislative body, to brush aside the teachers union pressure, follow the science, and ensure that every child who you mandate education for have the resources needed.

Respectfully Submitted

/s/

Joseph Maggiacomo III, Esq.

-----Original Message-----

From: Joe Maggiacomo <jmaggiacomoiiii@yahoo.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 5:45 PM

To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] Joseph Maggiacomo Parent and HB5426 Bill Author

[External]

Please forward this to the legislatures reference H668, H669 and H446
<https://youtu.be/aO5Nz6Tyd-8>

Please forward this video to the legislatures reference H668, H669 and H446

<https://youtu.be/dWThpjQzv-I>

Please forward this video to the legislatures reference H668, H669 and H446

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0noRzbdhDM&feature=share>

Please forward this video to the legislatures reference H668, H669, H446

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98ABvNML014&feature=share>

Please forward this video to the legislatures reference H668, H669, H446

<https://youtu.be/jWnK9wqoO-8>

Please forward this to the respective legislatures reference the dyslexic bills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gL8i7w4mCzw&feature=share>

From: Marla McQuiston <marlamcquiston@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 27, 2020 11:54 AM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>; Tim Ashe <TAshe@leg.state.vt.us>; Philip Baruth <PBaruth@leg.state.vt.us>; David Zuckerman <DZuckerman@leg.state.vt.us>; Jim McCullough <JMcCullough@leg.state.vt.us>; hriehle@leg.state.vt.us; Michael Sirotkin <msirotkin@leg.state.vt.us>; Terence Macaig <TMacaig@leg.state.vt.us>; Virginia Lyons <VLyons@leg.state.vt.us>; Debbie Ingram <DIngram@leg.state.vt.us>; Christopher Pearson <CPearson@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Please pass bill requiring Dyslexia screening NOW!!

I request that you support a Dyslexia Bill that includes:

- 1) Includes a definition of Dyslexia
- 2) Requires Dyslexia screening for all elementary children
- 3) Requires professional development training so that all teachers have the tools to identify warning signs, and teach ALL children

Vermont is one of only 10 states without a bill that requires dyslexia screening for all children. The other 40 states have implemented Structured Literacy programs in their states and ALL students benefit. Their reading scores are steadily increasing, while VT reading scores continue to steadily decrease.

I had friends, in Williston, 15 years ago, who struggled to get support for their 2 children with dyslexia, one of who after getting help was a National Merit Scholarship award winner. It is amazing to me that 15 years later students are still not getting support in Vermont.

For a summary of the Dyslexia Bills:

<http://bit.ly/2NCmt63>

Thanks,

Marla McQuiston

marlamcquiston@gmail.com
201 Southfield Dr
Williston, Vermont 05495
www.marlamcquiston.com

From: B&D Naylor <bdnaylor60@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2020 2:38 PM
To: Testimony <testimony@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: H.668, H.669 & H.406

Dear House Education Committee Chair Webb and Members,

Thank you for taking testimony on the very important issue of teaching and learning reading in Vermont public schools.

I am a parent of 3 grown children all of whom were schooled in Calais, VT in the 1970's. I was an elementary school teacher in Vermont for 20 years. And I am presently a board member of the forced merged Washington Central Unified Union School District. However, today I am speaking to you as a former teacher and a community member.

It is clear that scores of Vermont Elementary students are not rising but falling. The present reading program taught to people preparing for the teaching profession and the reading program being taught in our elementary schools is failing too many children. It is time we looked at evidenced-based structured literacy instruction for our earliest learners. Continuing to use a program that is not increasing our scores significantly is wasteful. When students fall behind as they do regularly with the present program it costs time and money to give them the coaching or extra teacher time needed to get to grade level. And it is also very bad, very bad for their self-esteem. That cannot be fixed easily or in a timely manner. That hurts and can hurt for a lifetime.

The other problem I see in some schools is the tendency to wait a year or two after a deficit is discovered to address it. It is akin to waiting a few day or weeks after a person has pneumonia or bronchitis before prescribing antibiotics hoping to see if it will get better on its own. If the reading program hasn't worked to begin with, two more years of the same is not likely to, either.

These bills, H668, H669 & H406, are important bills for the future of our children, our communities and our state.
Please support them. Thank you.

Dorothy Naylor, Calais, VT

From: Lori <dufflori@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2020 8:58 AM
To: Testimony <testimony@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: Testimony - H.668, H.669 - Dyslexia

January 28, 2020

The House Committee on Education

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Honorable Education Committee Members:

I am writing today as a parent of a child with dyslexia and dysgraphia in the Montpelier Roxbury Public School system and a Montpelier resident. I would like to share my support of the current dyslexia bills in the legislature:

H.406 – “An act relating to screening students for dyslexia and ensuring teachers receive training concerning dyslexia”

H.668 – “An act relating to evidence-based structured literacy instruction for students in kindergarten–grade 3 and students with dyslexia and to teacher preparation programs”

H.669 – “An act relating to evidence-based structured literacy instruction for students in kindergarten–grade 3”

Like many individuals with dyslexia, our 8-year-old is bright and intelligent, and covers for his dyslexia and phonetic/decoding deficits with coping mechanisms. He wants desperately to read and write and be like his friends. This desire causes tremendous worry, which is misunderstood by many around him. The dyslexia/stress connection is well documented and for him it caused sleeplessness, fear, digestive issues, anxiety and ultimately a tremendous loss in self-esteem. Last year after considerable work avoidance and behavior struggles at school, we chose to pay out of pocket for an unbiased professional evaluation from a nationally certified school psychologist at the Stern Center for Language and Learning in Williston, Vt. It cost us \$2,365 but in September 2019 he was finally diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Research has shown that early identification and early intervention are keys to boosting literacy but for our child the identification of dyslexia came late - in 3rd grade. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, reading problems at this stage are much harder to remediate than they are in K-2nd grade. We are working now to get our child qualified help at school. Though there is a proven scientific approach to teaching structured literacy for dyslexic individuals (the Orton-Gillingham method) there are very few teachers who are certified.

Dyslexia is a common learning disability (the Yale Center for Dyslexia believes that it affects 20% of American students) but the Vermont Special Education Child Count numbers don't seem to reflect that. The state's "wait-to-fail" discrepancy model for Special Education eligibility leads to a failure to identify, evaluate and remediate dyslexic children in a timely manner. This is especially discouraging because the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development says that dyslexia is identifiable with 92% accuracy by the age of 5 ½!

Today, Vermont is one of seven states left in the United States that has no law related to the specific needs of dyslexic students. That means there are 43 states that have laws pertaining to dyslexia! We need to catch up. I urge you to support this bill as the first step to change.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Lori Duff

3238 Elm Street, Montpelier, VT 05602

(603) 219-4822

dufflori@hotmail.com

From: Fran Toomey <toomeyand12@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 4:15 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Hearings on Reading Instruction

[External]

Senate/ House Committees addressing Proficiency Based Learning/Reading
Instruction: H 668, H 669, H406

Dear Committee Members

I have been agonizing about what to write to support a/the dyslexia bills. I have so much respect for kids who are dyslexic and who continue to **wait for us** to recognize and respect their needs as challenged readers. At the same time, I have great respects for teachers and their right to choose what and how to teach based on their best and current knowledge of the science of teaching a particular subject matter. Most of the teachers I know personally are strong advocates for kids-- recognize their needs, strengths and challenges.

Children's needs must come first! A child's entire future depends on us--to ensure that they have the skills they need to succeed as they go through school and into adulthood. Until **all** teachers work to ensure that every child can read, I will continue my advocacy for children who are dyslexic and deserve to be readers, deserve to learn to read as they move from K to grades 1, 2 and 3. We know that children who are NOT reading at grade level after grade 3 are likely to lag behind in reading skills for the rest of their schooling. They may never catch up with their proficient reading peers. Our state statistics show that a significant % of our grade 3 to 6 students are **not** reading at a Proficient level: Grade 3:50.2% proficient, Grade 4: 53.5% proficient; Grade 5: 55.3% proficient; Grade 6: 53.3% proficient. <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/data-smarter-balanced-state-district-school-level-2018>

I speak (write) as an academic---teacher of teachers. We academics, too, must be held accountable! It is our mission and responsibility to know the research literature in our field. It is difficult for me to believe that knowing the literature on the science of reading would not demand that we teach preservice teachers the "science of reading instruction."

Having spent most of my 60 years of professional life in academia (Emerson College (Boston), UVM, St. Michael's College (Special Education/Learning Disabilities Program), I know that teachers are capable of learning how to teach reading using

structured literacy instruction. At St. Michael's, undergraduate education majors had a required 4 credit course in instruction of students with learning disabilities. It is possible to offer such a course and it benefits both the undergraduate students and the children whose lives they will **forever** impact.

In honor of my granddaughter who is dyslexic and all the children with dyslexia whom I have worked with and for, I strongly support a bill that will ensure that children who are dyslexic receive the early (K-3) structured reading instruction that they need and deserve. That will require classroom teachers who have the knowledge and skill to provide structured reading instruction in the classroom and referral for additional child-specific reading instruction as timely and ongoing data collection indicates.

Fran Toomey, Ph.D., Professor Emerita St. Michael's College

January 28, 2020

To Whom This May Concern,

I am submitting a letter of testimony to explain my belief that Vermont should keep dyslexia identification in the bill. We have the means to provide children at an early age in Vermont schools with inexpensive screenings. These screenings don't take long and can help determine the future of a child's success in school.

Also, many teachers do not have the training in the science behind reading. When I studied for my Masters in Education, I was taught the Three Cueing approach which is not based in the science of reading. The Three Cueing approach teaches children to guess and rely on picture cues. Based on the Simple View of Reading, this approach will not produce skilled readers because part of the equation is the importance of decoding. Decoding does not have to be Drill and Kill. In fact, if a teacher has adequate background knowledge the instruction is more enjoyable for everyone. There are many, many resources to support direct instruction and many are free. but, even with the plethora of resources available now, background knowledge in the science of reading is still the missing piece in many schools right now.

Vermont needs to invest in training teachers in Structured Literacy. Currently, many schools are relying on programs such as Fountas and Pinnell programs that are not based in the science of reading. It is widely known that Heinemann did their own research studies on the efficacy of The Fountas and Pinnell programs, such as LLI, and the control groups were not adequate. Structured literacy is the only way to effectively teach literacy in the early grades and for those children who are still behind after 3rd grade because it is based on the science of reading.

Please keep dyslexia identification in the bill.

Sincerely,
Cally McCrave
Literacy Specialist
Rivendell Interstate School District



January 24, 2020

Testimony to the House Education Committee re: Special Education and Literacy

Written by Karen Price, Co-Director of Family Support

I am submitting written testimony on behalf of Vermont Family Network (VFN).

VFN is the federally designated Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center in Vermont. We have been supporting families for more than 30 years! PTIs exist in every state and are required by the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). VFN Family Support Consultants are skilled parents of children with disabilities who support families in accessing services for their children in the school and in the community. As required by the IDEA, VFN provides parents with information and resources to help them advocate for the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment to which their children are entitled. To achieve the IDEA expectations of a PTI, VFN operates a statewide telephone helpline, provides in-person support to families, and occasionally attends school meetings with parents. VFN also provides written materials and conducts training on a broad range of topics of interest to families and professionals who work with children with disabilities.

Parents contact us when they have concerns and questions about their child in school. Special education laws and regulations can be very confusing for parents who are already overwhelmed with the daily challenges involved in raising a child with a disability. In 2019, we had over 4000 contacts with parents and another 1000 with professionals who called on behalf of families.

With this background information in hand, VFN offers the following comments related to the literacy bills. We support the use of evidenced-based practices for literacy instruction and early identification and remediation of learning disabilities. We hear often from families whose children do not meet eligibility for special education for learning disabilities, especially during the early grades, and are therefore unable to access special education services. As students move from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” in the later elementary/middle school years, the coping mechanisms that served to mask their learning deficits become less effective. Some of these students, embarrassed by their learning struggles, act out, become “behavior problems” and might then qualify for special education under the emotional disturbance diagnosis instead. By this time, valuable instructional time has been lost, and the child has now a level of emotional stress layered onto the original learning disability. We believe that early intervention

leads to much better results for the child and family and ultimately is most cost-effective in the long run.

VFN also supports the removal of the definition of “adverse effect,” as operationalized in the Vermont Special Education Rules, to more closely align with the federal requirement that to establish special education eligibility, the Evaluation Planning Team (EPT) should focus on what specialized instruction a student needs to meet his or her disability-related needs.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you.

Karen Price

Co-Director Family Support
Vermont Family Network
802-876-5315 ext 220
Karen.price@vfn.org
<https://www.vermontfamilynetwork.org/>

Marylynne Strachan

Thank you for providing us this opportunity.

My 9 year old daughter was a bright and confident toddler. A little boy exclaimed she would be the CEO of a company one day. Throughout kindergarten, first and second grade my husband and I watched as that confidence dissipated. Wrenn has received reading intervention since kindergarten. We have one too many notes that she has written over the course of 2 years to herself that she is stupid, not smart, that she hates herself, and some that she wants to die. The school doesn't see any of this, they kept reassuring us she is fine and making progress in reading. Wrenn is incredibly smart, and very good at compensating. One morning I watched her then 4 year old sister seamlessly execute the morning routine, while Wrenn, then 7 just couldn't get out of her own way. I requested a comprehensive evaluation and through much pushback, mostly saying she was too young, they agreed. Wrenn came back with a math disability but not a reading disability- even though there was so much variation in her subtest scores and red flags for dyslexia. I'm lucky enough to have school psychologists as friends and they all reiterated that Wrenn's scores were very concerning, so I requested an independent evaluation from the Stern Center. The report was completed this September, Wrenn is in 3rd grade. The variation between the Stern Center and district report is alarming. The stern center diagnosed Wrenn with double deficit dyslexia. The evaluator was very explicit in reviewing with the IEP team what programs Wrenn should be receiving, and what programs she shouldn't. Even with hard data showing Wrenn reading on a 1st grade level in 3rd grade I had to fight for reading services on her IEP. She is getting 1/4 of the time the Stern Center recommended and with a program that the Stern Center explicitly explained should not be used.

I want to thank you for considering the bills, and want to emphasize the importance of all aspects of H668. Without professional development the educators that want to help our children cannot understand how their beautiful but complex brains work. Without saying the word dyslexia, the stigma will continue to exist and the complexity ignored. Without building the ramp that you all speak of, the lowest tiered children will continue to struggle and fall behind. Structured literacy is that ramp and it will benefit all children. The data here is clear, it cannot be refuted.

Governor Scott continues to search for ways to attract young families to Vermont. My husband and I are taxpayers, we are active in the community, I am a member of our school board. I can't tell you the desperation I'm feeling right now- knowing my 5 year old will be diagnosed with dyslexia too, to move back home to Massachusetts, even though we love Vermont. Even if the girls were offered bare minimum services in Massachusetts, they would be exponentially better than an of the services currently offered in Vermont, except for at the Stern Center where I would have to privately pay. The legislation In Massachusetts woke districts up

to realize they had to make some changes, and I urge you to join the other 43 states that have made these changes.

January 28, 2020

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I am submitting a letter of testimony to explain my belief that Vermont should keep dyslexia identification in the bill. We have the means to provide children at an early age in Vermont schools with inexpensive screenings. These screenings don't take long and can help determine the future of a child's success in school.

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Please keep dyslexia identification in the bill.

Sincerely,
Cally McCrave
Literacy Specialist
Rivendell Interstate School District

-----Original Message-----

From: Ally Judkins <judkinsally@icloud.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 4:38 PM

To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] Dyslexia Bill

[External]

Good evening,

I'm writing today to let you know I support H.668, H.669 & H.406

Ally Judkins

Mother of a son with dyslexia and dysgraphia

From: Fran Toomey <toomeyand12@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 4:15 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Hearings on Reading Instruction

Senate/ House Committees addressing Literacy Instruction: H 668, H 669, H406

Dear Committee Members

I have been agonizing about what to write to support a/the dyslexia bills. I have so much respect for kids who are dyslexic and who continue to **wait for us** to recognize and respect their needs as challenged readers. At the same time, I have great respects for teachers and their right to choose what and how to teach based on their best and current knowledge of the science of teaching a particular subject matter. Most of the teachers I know personally are strong advocates for kids-- recognize their needs, strengths and challenges.

Children's needs must come first! A child's entire future depends on us--to ensure that they have the skills they need to succeed as they go through school and into adulthood. Until **all** teachers work to ensure that every child can read, I will continue my advocacy for children who are dyslexic and deserve to be readers, deserve to learn to read as they move from K to grades 1, 2 and 3. We know that children who are NOT reading at grade level after grade 3 are likely to lag behind in reading skills for the rest of their schooling. They may never catch up with their proficient reading peers. Our state statistics show that a significant % of our grade 3 to 6 students are **not** reading at a Proficient level: Grade 3:50.2% proficient, Grade 4: 53.5% proficient; Grade 5: 55.3% proficient; Grade 6: 53.3% proficient. <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/data-smarter-balanced-state-district-school-level-2018>

I speak (write) as an academic---teacher of teachers. We academics, too, must be held accountable! It is our mission and responsibility to know the research literature in our field. It is difficult for me to believe that knowing the literature on the science of reading would not demand that we teach preservice teachers the "science of reading instruction."

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disabilities. It is possible to offer such a course and it benefits both the undergraduate students and the children whose lives they will **forever** impact.

In honor of my granddaughter who is dyslexic and all the children with dyslexia whom I have worked with and for, I strongly support a bill that will ensure that children who are dyslexic receive the early (K-3) structured reading instruction that they need and deserve. That will require classroom teachers who have the knowledge and skill to provide structured reading instruction in the classroom and referral for additional child-specific reading instruction as timely and ongoing data collection indicates.

Fran Toomey, Ph.D., Professor Emerita St. Michael's College

From: Jennifer Townley <j.e.townley1@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2020 12:57 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Literacy Bill for Dyslexia

To the House Committee on Education,

I am writing to support a literacy bill that recognizes dyslexia as a specific learning disability requiring specific intervention and mandates early screening by public school districts. Undetected learning disabilities have a negative impact on each student that is struggling, and often creates additional depression and anxiety impacting their emotional health both now and in the future.

I am the mother of two children that were on IEP's. Fortunately, we had the resources that we were able to get my youngest son tested and he was identified with specific learning disabilities that the school did not see. Once on an IEP, because of the struggles he was experiencing in his learning while falling further behind, I was fortunate that homeschooling was an option for a period of time along with intervention by the Stern Center. He struggled with depression and high anxiety, with a chunk of it being driven by his learning experiences in the public school setting. It saddens me that there are many more students who the public school system is failing, that don't have the resources or alternative of homeschooling to address their specific needs.

I am a big proponent for early screening and intervention, which have been keys to success for my eldest child. The sooner these learning deficits can be addressed and with the proper intervention, we are providing our students the potential for a good outcome and allowing all students a more level playing field in their education.

Please support a bill that recognizes dyslexia as a specific learning disability requiring specific intervention and mandates early screening by public school districts.

Thank you.

- Jennifer Townley

From: Erin Sutherland <sutherland.erinc@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2020 7:47 AM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Support Dyslexia Bill

Hello,

I am writing in support of the Dyslexia Bill. I was unable to attend the public forum but my story is like many you heard. My son struggled with reading in K, 1,2 and 3. Each year he would be provided with a hodge-podge of services and I was told he would catch up. I finally had him tested at the Stern Center and he has dyslexia. Those crucial years of learning to read are lost but he is now making gains with support from the Stern. We need a tool to help screen for these reading disabilities and teachers need specific training to support these struggling readers.

Please support this bill and help our children be successful.

Thank you,

Erin Sutherland
South Burlington, VT

My name is Heather Rodriguez. In December 2015, my son, Estes was officially diagnosed with dyslexia at the Stern Center in Williston VT. He was 6 years old, and in first grade.

Estes was in kindergarten, when I noticed his speech seemed to be slower than my other son at the same age. I know, you should never compare two children, but something seemed off to me. I mentioned it to his general ed teacher. He was evaluated by the speech and language therapist at school and he indeed did have a delay. That was the first clue....

During the fall of his first grade year, Estes was placed in a reading Response to Intervention group (RTI), then quickly moved to a one on one with a reading interventionist. This is when I started asking a lot of questions. Why was he in a group then moved to 1-1? What is wrong, why is he not learning to read? I was told this was normal for some kids and I should just “wait he will catch up”. My husband and I decided that we couldn’t “wait” for him to fail and took him to the Stern Center for a learning evaluation. The Stern Center confirmed our suspicions, he was evaluated by Stephanie Waite and found to present a specific learning disability known as dyslexia. Shortly after receiving the Stern Center evaluation we were sitting at the dinner table and my two sons were bickering, your dumb, your dumber, you know normal kids’ stuff. That’s when we took the opportunity to explain to Estes he was diagnosed with something called dyslexia. He listened, didn’t really understand it, and couldn’t even say the word, dyslexia but what he did ask us was “So I’m not dumb?” This child was in first grade thinking he was dumb!

My husband and I began the process of getting Estes the help he needed at school. During this same time, we hired an OG trained tutor, along with tutoring at the Stern Center. He was placed on an IEP at the end of his first-grade year and remained on one until the spring of fourth grade, when he transitioned into a 504 plan. Estes flourished during the seven months he was in private OG tutoring, so much that when he entered second grade, his general ed teacher and special educator could not believe how far he had come in such a short period of time. This tutoring, laid the foundation for the next two years at JES working with his special education team. Estes, now in fifth grade is reading at grade level, and continues to receive the principal’s academic achievement award. ESTES IS THRIVING IN SCHOOL.

Estes has an AMAZING team at Johnson Elementary School, who support his out of the box ideas and his entrepreneurial spirit, which is why I am here today. **Please support the dyslexia screener part of the law, and please support dyslexia training for teachers.** I mentioned above, Estes was in kindergarten when I noticed a speech delay, his teacher had been teaching for many, many years by the time my son was in her class. This teacher had years of training and experience, is a wonderful educator, she even has a dyslexic child of her own, and was not

able to recognize the warning signs in my son. Again, I ask you, **please support the dyslexia screener part of the law. Please support dyslexia training for teachers.** Estes is lucky, he had parents who were able to get him diagnosed and tutoring at such an early age. Parents who continue to partner with his school to provide him with the necessary literacy skills to be successful. However, not all Vermont families have the ability or resources to do what my husband and I did, and someone needs to be a voice for these kids and fight for them. Please support these **literacy** bills, our children deserve better.

Thank you.

Heather Rodriguez
Everyonereads
Johnson VT

From: B&D Naylor <bdnaylor60@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2020 2:38 PM
To: Testimony <testimony@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: H.668, H.669 & H.406

Dear House Education Committee Chair Webb and Members,

Thank you for taking testimony on the very important issue of teaching and learning reading in Vermont public schools.

I am a parent of 3 grown children all of whom were schooled in Calais, VT in the 1970's. I was an elementary school teacher in Vermont for 20 years. And I am presently a board member of the forced merged Washington Central Unified Union School District. However, today I am speaking to you as a former teacher and a community member.

It is clear that scores of Vermont Elementary students are not rising but falling. The present reading program taught to people preparing for the teaching profession and the reading program being taught in our elementary schools is failing too many children. It is time we looked at evidenced-based structured literacy instruction for our earliest learners. Continuing to use a program that is not increasing our scores significantly is wasteful. When students fall behind as they do regularly with the present program it costs time and money to give them the coaching or extra teacher time needed to get to grade level. And it is also very bad, very bad for their self-esteem. That cannot be fixed easily or in a timely manner. That hurts and can hurt for a lifetime.

The other problem I see in some schools is the tendency to wait a year or two after a deficit is discovered to address it. It is akin to waiting a few day or weeks after a person has pneumonia or bronchitis before prescribing antibiotics hoping to see if it will get better on its own. If the reading program hasn't worked to begin with, two more years of the same is not likely to, either.

These bills, H668, H669 & H406, are important bills for the future of our children, our communities and our state.
Please support them. Thank you.

Dorothy Naylor, Calais, VT

Our son has struggled with reading from the start of first grade. We had him retained in first grade with the hope that this would help him catch up with the curriculum. Through the years we could still see him struggling with reading even though he was pulled for Reading Recovery. We did not feel that he was progressing as expected, even with extra help. When we would go into conferences, we were told he was doing well especially compared to the other students in his class.

We noticed in first grade that he was not progressing as expected and that he had trouble with letters, sounds and attention. We requested screening and an Occupational therapy screening was completed. The report stated, *“he seems to have difficulty organizing and processing information, specifically thru his vestibular or movement systems, visual and auditory systems”*. This was the year that our son started the Reading Recovery program at school.

During first thru third grade we did not see any improvement in his reading ability even though he was in the recovery program. With our concerns and those of his teacher, we again requested screening and another speech language test was performed. The recommendation from this language test was that our son *“have a comprehensive speech language evaluation to determine whether or not his difficulties are consistent with a specific learning disability in the areas of oral expression and listening comprehension which could impact his ability to successfully access the 3rd grade curriculum.”*

Even with the evaluations that were performed, our son continued to go to the Reading Recovery program. Our concern grew and we noticed our son still struggling with simple reading, sounding out words, missing words or substituting words while reading. Our son was falling further behind and by sixth grade he was reading at the beginning of a fourth-grade level. We decided to find help for our son through Sylvian Learning Center but feel this did not help him either.

We were talking with a friend and discussed our frustration with our sons struggle with reading even with the extra help in school. She referred us to a tutor that taught the Orton Gillingham program that had helped her child. Within a few months we noticed a difference in his reading and his ability to sound out words. We were excited that we were seeing progression with this instruction. He received this for the next year before his tutor moved and referred us to his current tutor. Our son’s current tutor’s instruction is based on the Wilson program and we continue to see improvement in his reading.

In talking to our sons’ tutor, she recommended that we should have him tested for a learning disability. Halfway through seventh grade, his tutor performed an informal assessment in reading fluency and comprehension and his words per minute and accuracy were still at a fourth-grade level. We made the request to the school for a Special Education evaluation and it was determined he had dyslexia. During the IEP discussion, it was determined the Reading Recovery program was not the most appropriate reading program for our son. Our son now receives

instruction in Wilson during school and is not attending the Reading Recovery program.

We wish this had been discovered earlier and feel like we should have known. We thought that if our son had a learning disability the school would have identified it. We have felt helpless and frustrated in watching our son struggle through the years and fall behind. We have had to fight for our son to receive a phonics-based program that has scientifically been proven to work. We have seen the instruction of whole language and the Reading Recovery program fail our son.

Sincerely,

Deb and Paul Morris

Committee on Education

Kristina Botala
7 Parizo Lane
Grand Isle, VT 05458

Tuesday, January 28, 2020

Support for H.668, H.669 & H.406

As a mother of a child whom I strongly believe is dyslexic, I am writing in support of H.668, relating to evidence-based structured literacy instruction for students in kindergarten–grade 3 and students with dyslexia and to teacher preparation programs; H.669, relating to evidence-based structured literacy instruction for students in kindergarten–grade 3; and H.406, relating to screening students for dyslexia and ensuring teachers receive training concerning dyslexia.

I have been self-studying dyslexia since I met my husband in 2011. I believe dyslexia runs in his family and has gone undiagnosed for generations. I suspected that at least one of our children would be dyslexic and have been preparing myself so that I can provide the support he never received.

Testing and tutoring for dyslexia are financially unobtainable to many of those who need the services. My four and a half year old is in her second year of pre-school and is showing signs of the learning disability. I have been proactively researching resources to formally diagnose and aide my daughter within Vermont. I have found the offerings within this state to be minimal. Having contacted the Stern Center for Language and Learning, I was informed that they won't diagnose until age six, after six months of schooling and for the hefty price of \$1,850. This amount doesn't include ongoing tutoring that she will also likely need in order to succeed in the public school system. I am fortunate enough to have the financial means to save the funds for testing over the next two years and am determined to get her any tutoring that she needs. However, many people would not be able to afford these expenses, even with a scholarship.

The cost of implementing this bill will be outweighed by the children who are properly aided, growing up to be contributing members of society. My husband and his four siblings were left behind in the school system. My youngest brother-in-law is a high school dropout who has been working as a farm hand and living in a camper year-round on my mother-in-law's property. He was recently offered a great job that required him to get his GED, which is likely unobtainable for him without extensive tutoring. Therefore, he will likely continue to struggle to make ends meet and never reach his full potential. Had he been diagnosed, and his teachers had the tools to help him succeed, maybe he would be buying his first home instead of living in a camper.

I support H.668, H.669 & H.406 because dyslexia can't continue to be overlooked. Teachers need to be trained to help their pupils with this very common learning disability succeed in the classroom. The futures of many children depend on it.

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony.

Sincerely,
Kristina Botala

From: Marie Culver <culverma@comcast.net>
Sent: Saturday, February 1, 2020 2:03 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Cc: melissa culver <melissaculvervt@gmail.com>
Subject: [External] Support for early screening for dyslexia

[External]

Hello,

My name is Marie Culver and I live in Essex Town. I am a retired school nurse and educator and worked for some 30 years in the Essex Town School system. Sadly to say, I have seen many students struggle and so many distraught parents who have tried to advocate for their children in the school system, knowing their child had a reading problem, but were told over and over again that they would just “catch up” or would read when they were ready. My own experience, even working in the system, was no different than what I see happening today. Although my son did not have dyslexia, he did have a specific learning disability and ADD, which was not addressed appropriately, either because some educators did not believe in the diagnosis, but also because either they did not know how to appropriately service him or felt that some of their strategies outside of what worked for him was what they felt would work.

Here we are, some 30 years later, and my grand-daughter is experiencing so much of what my son also experienced. Why is it taking so long for our educational system to just wake up and see that whatever they have been doing for so many years is not working. I feel that there is an apathetic overtone in many cases, as early screening is not difficult to do. My grand-daughter is very bright and exceptionally verbal. When teachers in her pre-school program reported some concerns with her association with sounds and beginning letters, this should not have been dismissed. More issues continued through third grade, and despite many school meetings and requests from her parents to have her screened, the school felt it was not warranted. The old standby response of “she is very bright”, she’ll catch up”, was a standard answer. She has been home-schooled since third grade and is now 13 and in the eighth grade. She was diagnosed with dyslexia last summer and attempted to try 8th grade public school. It was quickly discovered that the educational system did not know what services to provide a student with dyslexia and how to provide the appropriate services, even though they were spelled out in her report. Some were truly not difficult to follow.

It concerns and saddens me that Vermont is not on board with all of our New England states that do have early screening for dyslexia, along with only 5 other states that don’t. Why is this? Forty states require dyslexia screening for all students. There are highly reputable testing centers in other states and here in Vermont such as the Stern Center which provides testing, diagnosis and specific instruction that is proven to help children with dyslexia to read and decode.

Parents pay out of pocket for this testing in most cases. So with the testing being done outside why can't the school districts at least follow the recommendations?

If a teacher voices a concern about a child's reading to a parent, that should be the immediate red flag, no matter what grade they are in, and no matter how "bright and verbal" they are. Appropriate screening would give the answer.

Please vote to support dyslexia screening for all students, and appropriate training for teachers and special educators. Students have a right to a free and appropriate public education. In my case and in many others, our children's education was not free and public, as we decided that private school was in the best interest of our children in order to see them be successful

If private school teachers and administrations can provide appropriate education for students with dyslexia, why can't our public schools, which we support through our taxes, do the same.

My grand-daughter and all students deserve to have a proper education. Our future depends on them.

Sincerely,
Marie Culver

Bruce Rosow, Ed. D.
Box 66
Williamsville, VT 05362
brrosow@gmail.com
January 28, 2020

Dear House Committee on Education Members,

Thank you for taking the time to receive this letter, written in response to the three literacy bills under consideration including the Representative Web bill, the Representative Cupoli bill and the Representative Leffler bill. These bills are under consideration for a reason. Recent 2019 NAEP data shows that 32% of Vermont fourth grade students are reading Below Basic with 31% reading at only a Basic level, leaving only 37% of our fourth graders scoring Proficient or Above. Even more concerning than having 63% of our students reading at Basic or Below Basic levels, is how recent trends reflect downward movement in achievement. In 2015, 55% Vermont fourth graders scored Below or at Basic, while 44% scored Proficient or Advanced. Vermont is going backwards in literacy attainment at a time when the importance of attaining literacy is greater than ever. Digging down, in 2019, 78% of Vermont fourth grade students eligible for free or reduced lunch were reading at Basic or Below Basic levels. These results could not be more alarming. For Vermont to remain competitive and for our children to thrive, we must do better. What brings everyone together is how much we all want to do better by our children.

Why are we in such dire straits? Going back before anyone in this room was born there have been reading wars. One side remains in favor of a more natural and whole approach to teaching reading with a focus on meaning, early exposure to stories, oral language and books, and a reliance on contextual guessing, use of visual cues including shapes of words and illustrations, and some quick review of basic sound-spelling patterns to decode. The other side continues to promote a structured approach to teaching decoding, encoding, text comprehension and written expression in which all the layers of word structure including phonology and more specifically phoneme awareness, orthography (sound-symbol relationships and spelling patterns), morphology, semantics, syntax, argument structure and finally pragmatics are explicitly taught in a step-by-step, developmentally informed manner. What has changed over the a few hundred years of bickering is that now we have a science of reading. What hasn't changed is the bickering.

The science has clearly come out on the side of structured and explicit teaching of the structure of the English Language to teach emergent and basic reading skills. The National Reading Panel (NRP), in their 2000 report, presented overwhelming evidence supporting this conclusion. The NRP Report includes criteria for the 'scientific' research used to reach their findings, along with standards for future research. Much of the research used in the NRP Report came from a bank of research sites across the country funded by, and in collaboration with, the NIHCD. In

the current proposed legislation, it will be important to establish the criteria for the term 'evidence-based.' (Fletcher & Francis, 2004) Wiggle room within the definition of 'evidence-based' has allowed the bickering in the reading debate to continue, with both sides claiming to present 'evidence-based' research.

The NRP recommended five areas to target for instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics, oral-reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In the reading debate there is some common ground about the importance of vocabulary and comprehension instruction, though disagreements about how these areas are taught. There is agreement that early oral language exposure and development, including reading with children, is fundamental. However, there continues to be strong disagreement about how to actually teach decoding and spelling during emergent literacy and beyond. The NRP research resulted in no such disagreement.

The disagreement about how to teach young children to read and spell words concerns the extent to which pre-school and kindergarten-aged children need explicit exposure to letters, letter names and letter formation, and manipulation of speech from large units (spoken syllables and rhyming) to single speech sounds segmented from spoken words (phoneme awareness). What is known is that oral language development, exposure to print and knowledge of some letters, and manipulation of speech and units of speech (rhyming, alliteration; spoonerisms) are now understood to be the three legs of the stool upon which literacy rests. (Lonigan, 2003) When this foundation is built, children are prepared to discover the alphabetic principle, that a spoken word can be segmented into phonemes each of which is represented by a letter unit, or grapheme. The mapping of speech sounds to letter units we call phonics. The work of Linnea Ehri (Ehri, 1997; 2004) in particular shed light on this letter-sound mapping and how it is at the core of learning to read and spell the words.

In emergent literacy, the ability to decode and spell previously unknown words is the key to the kingdom. Those who catch on early thrive; those who don't, sink. Joseph Torgesen famously said, "catch them before they fall." (Torgesen, 1998) Early intervention saves kids. To this end, the NRP report fueled much of the Reading First Initiative focused on early intervention. There has been continual bickering about both the NRP Report and Reading First ever since, with the fracture along the same lines as always. My mentor and colleague, Dr. Louisa Moats, recently noted on the *Spelltalk* blog concerning Reading First that, "Reports from four Reading First states were published in the *Journal of Literacy Research* (Pearson, 2010, 42, vol. 1). They included Pennsylvania, Michigan, Utah, and Florida. All four states documented significant gains in 3rd graders' reading comprehension in RF schools." In states where Reading First was implemented with fidelity student achievement, especially for low-income students, significantly improved.

Since the release of the NRP Report, and the rise and demise of Reading First, the continued fracturing in the field of education has allowed for the NRP recommendations and the underlying research to be ignored in many parts of our

country and across Vermont. The term 'balanced reading instruction' has become the substitute label for what was called 'whole language,' with some phonics-lite added, and such instruction permeates Vermont. Regardless of the labels, the differences between balanced and structured instruction remain significant.

This situation is in large part due to the incomplete training most teachers receive in college, graduate school and workshops. Many of schools of education have failed to train teachers based on the science of reading, in alignment with NRP recommendations for research. A 2018 analysis by the National Council on Teacher Quality found, "one in four (23 percent) of 210 graduate elementary programs teach scientifically based methods of early reading instruction." (NCTQ, 2018. p. 18) As abysmal as this finding is, it represents improvement. When this study was first conducted in 2005, the syllabus I used to teach language structure in the Language and Literacy Program at Simmons College was one of three, out of two hundred, that passed muster. That course was built on the work of Dr. Moats. A link to teacher learning standards, developed by the International Dyslexia Association under the guidance of Dr. Moats, is provided in the citations below. (IDA, 2010) Colleges of education must be held to a higher standard in educating teachers in literacy assessment, language structure, and direct, explicit and sequential instruction in the code.

The bills under consideration start to fill the gap in Vermont between what we do versus what we know, between practice and science.

Specific Aspects of the Three Bills:

Here is input concerning the three proposals for consideration. Overall, I hope the language and scope of the final legislation is simple and direct.

- It is critically important to define what is meant in this legislation by 'scientifically-based.' The Fletcher and Francis chapter (2004) cited below is a recommended resource in this regard.
- Support for early screening and intervention is critical. This is the most powerful way to catch kids before they fall, knowing that prevention is far easier, more effective and less expensive than remediation. (Torgesen, 1998)
- Simplify Evidence Based Instruction: Evidence-based methods of instruction are **explicit and sequential and** include instruction targeting phonological, awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable structure, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Evidence-based structured literacy instruction shall be used as the primary literacy instructional method for public school students in kindergarten–grade 3.

- Systematic progress monitoring based on evidence-based benchmarks is critical: this ensures instruction and intervention are effective and allows changes if it is not.
- Teacher Training: Teachers should have to prove they have the basic knowledge of language structure to teach literacy. Colleges of education need to be held accountable for their programs as noted in the Leffler bill, and for the performance of their graduates.
- Adding ADHD is understandable, as research shows heightened co-morbidity of ADHD with dyslexia in many students. However, ADHD is a condition that impacts more than literacy attainment. To argue teachers need to be informed about dyslexia so they can identify and help struggling readers is clear and direct, and I would draw the line there.
- It may upset my colleagues, but I also would leave out reference to multi-sensory methods in this legislation. There may be convincing scientific studies demonstrating the importance of adding multi-sensory methods, but I have not seen them. In contrast, there is overwhelming scientific evidence for the evidence-based instruction noted above.
- Finally, we must provide targeted resources for low-income students who are disproportionately falling behind.

We seem to be rats on wheels, having the same arguments and providing the same instruction year after year resulting in widespread, preventable reading failure. Our children have suffered under a lack of clarity, misguided practice, and refusal to accept scientific findings from our educational leaders and institutions. No one can feel proud of the NAEP results, but we all own them. Sadly, it is now in the hands of this legislative body to consider issues that should have resolved, at least by 2000, by educators reading and applying scientific research in their own profession for the sake of our children. The bills under consideration all move the State of Vermont closer to applying the NRP results and decades of scientific findings.

Thank you for receiving this letter, and for all the endless hours you put in for the sake of our children and the citizens of Vermont.

Respectfully Yours,

Bruce Rosow, Ed. D.

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National Reading Panel Report

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https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2018_Teacher_Prep_Review_733174

Bruce Lyons Rosow, Ed. D., Special Educator, Windham Central Supervisory Union, Vermont, Post Office Box 66, Williamsville, Vermont 05362. 802 348-7213

Dr. Rosow completed his doctoral studies in educational psychology at American International College. He began his career as an intermediate grade classroom teacher at Guilford Elementary School in Southern Vermont, before moving into a remedial instruction role teaching word study and math. During this time, Dr. Rosow worked with Dr. Moats to design word study lessons for diverse students based on the principles of structured language instruction. One result was *Spellography*, (with Louisa Cook Moats; Sopris West, 2003), a word study curriculum for intermediate and middle school students. Dr. Rosow also collaborated with Dr. Moats in the second, and soon to be third, edition of *The Speech to Print Workbook* accompanying her text, *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers*. After serving as the Academic Dean at the Greenwood School for a decade, working with boys with language-based learning differences, Dr. Rosow returned to public education in the Windham Central Supervisory Union in Southern Vermont. There, he runs The Language Lab to provide remedial instruction to struggling middle and high school readers. For almost two decades Dr. Rosow also taught in the Language and Literacy Program through the Reading Institute in Williamstown, MA, Simmons College and Bay Path University.

Dear House Committee on Education,

I appreciated the opportunity to testify on Tuesday. I found the testimony of others very interesting. Hearing Dr. Seidenberg's input was interesting, as was Dr. Podhajski's and Dr. Lipson's. I am reflecting on how to improve our outcomes.

1. The methods we are discussing all include phonics instruction. The difference is the instruction will only be explicit, sequential and sustained **to the extent that the teacher understands the science behind reading**. For this to become widespread, teachers need mentors who have this knowledge. Other teachers have testified that once they saw how their students responded to Structured Literacy, they would never go back to NOT teaching phonics, to clearly explaining the way sounds and letters work together in English.
2. **Administrators, as well as Elementary and Special Education teachers in training, need required courses in Linguistics and in teaching Structured Literacy**. Certification should include proof of Linguistics mastery, and supervised Practicums in Teaching Reading. A supportive (not critical) mentor program to support early teachers would help smooth implementation. Success should not be tied to teacher salaries.
3. **The wording of the law should include terms like explicit, sequential, multi-sensory and sustained** because science-based research shows that these methods work. Note that this is not legislating one program. Attached is a list of programs that national reading expert Dr. Nancy Mather recommends. Wording in the law should be phrased to exclude methods that do not work. Leveled Literacy/Balanced Literacy (such as Fountas and Pinnell) does not work for too many of our children, as our deplorable reading scores show.
4. Looking at how the culture of reading instruction is changing in **Williamstown can show us a model for other Vermont towns**. Williamstown is turning their children into early readers. This is saving their district money already, with less special education referrals. Research shows that financial and emotional benefits will happen for other districts to the extent that Structured Literacy is implemented.

All children benefit from phonics instruction, for decoding long words and for spelling. No one disagrees that comprehension is the endpoint, and that vocabulary and general knowledge are important. However, **for a dyslexic child, the order of how the sounds are introduced, and consistent, sustained practice with those same sounds is what makes the instruction "stick."**

My students--even middle and high school boys--ask to have lessons continue during school vacations. They recognize that they are developing skills that are making them more accurate readers, which transfers directly to their life skills and to

their grades. Explicit instruction is not boring--it is a lifeline that we need to extend to those students who are now failing learn to read.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share my journey into Structured Literacy as a classroom teacher. I look forward to seeing our Vermont students ALL become proficient readers.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Gardner-Morse M.Ed.

Cynthia Gardner-Morse, M.Ed.

Literacy Tutor with Classroom Experience

From: Cynthia Gardner-Morse <tutoringgm@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, January 31, 2020 12:36 PM

To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] Documents-Re: Legislative Bills H.406, H.668 and H.669 - Education Committee Testimony

[External]

Re: Legislative Bills H.406, H.668 and H.669

Hi Avery,

These are the attachments I would like to share with the committee. The first one has a chart that shows how Balanced Literacy's methods teach guessing, not reading.

Reading science can be a bit technical, as the testimonies show. Emily Hanford's article is about how Mississippi is changing their reading outcomes.

I hope wording in the law can be phrased to exclude methods that do not work.

Leveled Literacy/Balanced Literacy (such as Fountas and Pinnell) does not work for too many of our children, as our deplorable reading scores show. Dr. Mather's list recommends Structured Literacy programs that do work.

Leaving this important choice to school boards and local districts will leave Vermont with business as usual: children vulnerable to continued exposure to guessing words, not being taught to read. The percents of our teachers nationally who are using the programs Mr. French lists in his Literacy Reform Act 146 PDF (attached) matches all too well with our poor reading scores. To do better than we are, we need to legislate out what is not working, while leaving science-based methods in as options for districts, and required by our Agency of Education, as the expert leaders wise in knowledge of reading methodology.

Where is enforcing the existing requirement to use MTSS in this mix? Multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a framework with a tiered infrastructure that uses data to help match academic, social emotional, and behavioral assessment and instructional resources to each and every student's needs. Testimony last Tuesday from many families showed that this is not being implemented in too many areas, including my own Washington Central Unified Union School District.

Thank you to all who are working to help our children be successful readers!

Sincerely,

Cynthia Gardner-Morse M.Ed.



DyingtoRead_HighFive_2020.pdf



Arkansas_Laws_Summary.pdf



Critique_picture_chart_Good-Readers-by-Dr.on_Right_Way_to_Teaching.pdf



Emily_Hanford_Opinion.pdf



Mather_List.pdf

From: Jamie <jrcrenshaw3@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 3, 2020 5:28 PM
To: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>; Kate Webb <KWebb@leg.state.vt.us>; Larry Cupoli <LCupoli@leg.state.vt.us>; Peter Conlon <PConlon@leg.state.vt.us>; Sarita Austin <SAustin@leg.state.vt.us>; Lynn Batchelor <LBatchelor@leg.state.vt.us>; Caleb Elder <CElder@leg.state.vt.us>; Dylan Giambatista <dgiambatista@leg.state.vt.us>; Kathleen James <KJames@leg.state.vt.us>; Jay Hooper <JHooper@leg.state.vt.us>; Christopher Mattos <CMattos@leg.state.vt.us>; Casey Toof <CToof@leg.state.vt.us>
Cc: Avery Lamb <ALamb@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] Structured Literacy Bill Testimony - Sean Crenshaw

February 3, 2020

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of Act 173 and the recently introduced House structured literacy bills. My name is Sean Crenshaw and I am 16 years old. I am a sophomore at Milton High School and I have dyslexia. Dyslexia needs to be recognized as a disability across the state of Vermont. I am writing about my personal experience with dyslexia and how the school failed to provide me with the appropriate learning methods and instruction.

Before I started school, I was extremely passionate and excited to learn. Starting at a young age, my mom read to me every night. I specifically remember a book called the *Turkey Ball*, which I loved. I also watched a lot of educational videos on various science topics. I remember the first YouTube video I ever watched was made by NASA. At a very young age, I loved learning. I had a passion and curiosity for how the world worked.

Around 1st grade, I began getting pulled out of class for reading and speaking services. I noticed that I wasn't around my peers often and it appeared I was being constantly pulled out even years later. In second grade, I was behind my peers academically and couldn't read any books or simple text. I was still being pulled out of class to receive reading help, but my skills were not improving. When I was in 3rd grade, I was sad because kids around me were reading chapter books and I couldn't even read a sentence. I remember looking at the pages, but not being able to read any words in the book. I just stared at the unfamiliar words. I remember crying in class. I became very frustrated that I couldn't learn anything.

It was during 3rd grade when my personality started to change and I began to lose my passion for learning. I started hating school. I was failing subjects. I wasn't able to develop social connections with my classmates. I felt isolated. I wasn't able to attend recess or my UA classes because I was receiving many services.

Teachers constantly told my parents that I would catch up to my peers and that I would eventually learn to read. My parents at the time, trusted the professionals and what they said. Meanwhile, I was moving from grade to grade, with little improvement in my skills as a reader. Every year, a part of me would be lost.

Around the end of 3rd grade, and start of 4th grade, I started to lose passion in the things I loved to do. I was no longer the talkative and curious child I once was. Instead, I was losing all joy in the world. The adults around me started to realize that my mental state was deteriorating. My parents specifically noticed a change in me. When I got home from school, I would go straight to my bedroom and never come out. I was depressed. I became withdrawn from my family. I isolated myself from everyone. Dropping out of all sports and clubs. During school, I hid all of my emotions behind a mask. My mask hid everything from everyone, including my family. I was feeling so much pain inside, that my mind started to fracture and with every fracture, I lost a piece of my soul.

Given the noticeable changes in me and the continued struggle to read, my mom was worried. She began to really question the school about my actual reading ability. Once again, the school told me and my family that I needed time. My mom no longer believed or trusted the information the school was giving to her so she started researching reading struggles and came upon the term dyslexia. My mom saw several signs or characteristics of Dyslexia that I had over the course of several years so she requested an outside evaluation be conducted by the Stern Center. I was also evaluated by the school district at that time as well. The test results from the Stern Center showed that I had severe dyslexia and dysgraphia.

My parents requested the school provide a licensed instructor in the Wilson Reading Program. The school refused saying that they could help me learn. One year later and after no progress, my parents took the school to mediation. It wasn't until 6th grade that I finally received appropriate services for dyslexia by a trained professional from the Stern Center. I did the Wilson Reading Program with the Stern Center, which taught me to read. It wasn't until the end of 6th grade when I could open a book and start to understand the words on the page. It wasn't until 8th grade that I started to enjoy school again. I started to regain passion in science and gained a new passion of history. I slowly became myself again. I redefined myself and my views of the world.

I still have mental scars from this experience. I am affected everyday. My mental state has not fully recovered. When I hear loud voices raised towards me or if someone tells me I did something wrong, I feel panic very quickly and become withdrawn. This is an emotional trigger for me, because during my whole childhood, I had teachers and parents frustrated with me because I could not understand the work I was doing. Because of this frustration, I had many adults yell at me, both at home and at school. I am still very uneasy around my own age group because I was mostly around adults my entire childhood. As a result, I became shy. I can still become withdrawn from the people I care about. This trauma will continue to be a part of me.

I don't want other dyslexic kids to experience what I went through. Every child should have a chance to grow his or her knowledge the way they understand it. Every child deserves to read. Every child deserves to have the best educational experience they can get.

Sincerely,
Sean Crenshaw

January 20, 2020

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Megan Marsh and I am writing in wholehearted support for the literacy bills that are currently being reviewed by the House Education Committee regarding mandatory dyslexia screening and universal K-3 evidence-based structured literacy instruction. I live in Vergennes, Vermont and have been an elementary school Reading Specialist for seven years. I hold two master's degrees in education, one as a Reading Specialist. I am currently working toward an Associate Level certification from the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators through the Stern Center for Language and Learning in Williston, Vermont.

I am hopeful that my written testimony will encourage your support of these important education bills. The traditional way to teach reading, which became particularly popular in the 1980s and 1990s is the whole language approach. This approach suggests that if students are surrounded by books, they will naturally learn how to read. However, with brain imaging and scientific research, it has been discovered that we do not have a natural ability to read. Reading is a skill that requires building new connections to the various parts of the brain that control language and the area of reading.

Is it any wonder that so many students struggle to learn how to read when their brains need to physically change in order to achieve such a feat? Structured literacy aims to provide all students with the ability to learn how to read through multi-sensory, systematic, explicit instruction.⁷ If a student is unable to translate the symbols on a page into words, and these words into meaning, they are unable to understand what they have read. As the goal of reading is to understand and learn, whether for fun or for a specific reason, spending too much mental effort on merely decoding the words means that understanding is lost.

My personal and professional experiences have demonstrated just how important a structured literacy approach is. I received my undergraduate degree in French. This required years of study of a foreign language, and learning all the rules, patterns, and sounds of a language. I cannot imagine how this learning would be achieved without a clearly structured study of French. I needed to learn the structure of the language in order to understand it. I have found that this background of learning the structure of a foreign language has helped me tremendously in teaching students how the English language works. While there are a few irregularities, English is far more predictable than many think. Only four percent of English words are truly irregular, the other 96% follow one of five spelling principles in English. For all those lists of words that have been memorized by students in Vermont over so many years, only four percent truly needed to be memorized. By explicitly teaching students these principles in a systematic way,

⁷ <https://dyslexiaida.org/structured-literacy-effective-instruction-for-students-with-dyslexia-and-related-reading-difficulties/>

students are given the ability to decode any word, and to understand the meaning of that word. This leads to comprehension and the whole purpose of reading.⁸

My professional experiences have been even more heartbreaking. Literacy is required in every moment of a student's day in school. Students who struggle to read feel different and inferior to others in their classes. They feel something is wrong with them and many of them develop coping strategies that, while effective in a classroom of many students, shows just how much they struggle. Many of the students I work with fake reading, or read just a beat behind everyone else to cover the fact that they cannot decode the words on a page. Their self esteem and confidence plummet the harder the tasks they are asked to do become. Our current literacy instruction encourages these coping strategies and deprives these students of the ability to share their thinking and talents with others because they are just struggling to get by.

For those who claim that structured literacy is too boring, too drill-and-kill, or that all children do not need this kind of instruction, I would like to state that students do not feel this way. Students who are given the key to understanding how sounds relate to letters and how these letters relate to words feel empowered and successful. All students need to be given the same fundamental tools to learn how to read. In my current practice, where I use structured literacy, I have found every single child to have increased confidence, higher self-esteem, and a desire to continue learning how to read. Their scores reflect this in the local assessments. Every child in Vermont deserves the instruction that will allow them to become a reader.

I strongly feel that these bills are the way for Vermont to move ahead in literacy instruction and to once again become a leader in education. Please, consider these bills as the first step in improving education for all of our students.

I am more than willing to continue this discussion if you are interested. I appreciate you taking the time to read this testimony.

Sincerely,

Megan Marsh

Dear House Education Committee

Hello, my name is Malakai Valgean and sorry I couldn't make it today, but I want my voice to be heard so I'm sending my mom this so that you guys can hear my story.

When I was younger I would always get in trouble because the school district called me a behavioral issue, but I really wasn't. The only reason why I was acting up is

⁸ <https://neuro.hms.harvard.edu/harvard-mahoney-neuroscience-institute/brain-newsletter/and-brain-series/reading-and-brain>

that I did not understand what they were giving me for work. Since I was considered a student who got in trouble all the time, I got put on a lot of medicine. Yet, the school couldn't really understand what I was going through. Then, one day my mom was like maybe he's dyslexic and, truth be told, I am, which is why I'm at a dyslexic school now.

I have been going to Landmark High School in Beverly, Massachusetts for two years now, and they have helped me understand my learning profile, and what I have to do to actually learn. When I was younger, I would get pulled out of periods that I really wanted to attend, and had to go to other separate locations. I really wanted to go to my main classes because I felt like I wasn't learning like everyone else when I was pulled out. Therefore, I decided not to go to class, which got in even more trouble.

The person that inspired me the most growing up was Kobe Bryant. I had to watch Kobe Bryant as a kid and he inspired me to do 10 times better because he was dyslexic too and everyone made fun of him for it. Kobe Bryant just recently passed away in a helicopter accident and yes I did cry because I strive to be on the level that he was and now he's so successful and sometimes that's what you need you need to look up to the people that are doing really really good and look at them and be like oh one day maybe I could be then or maybe one day I can be them. I play basketball because that is something that I feel like I can be actually good at. My biggest fear is failing that is my worst fear ever I listen to the people around me and when I was in Kindergarten and I got told by Mr. Wolfgang that I wasn't gonna be anything so now it's my time to excel. I wish this was a law back then because I feel like it would have helped me a lot but there's was nothing some teachers didn't even know what Dyslexia was so now I want every teacher in Vermont to know what it is and stop overlooking it because it is just sad they are running kid they are not different they just think different and learn differently. THANK YOU FOR LISTENING TO MY STORY.

Malakai Valgean-15-10th grade

My name is Harvey Hubbell and I am an advocate, a filmmaker and I am also dyslexic. I reside in Litchfield, CT and I am in full support of House Bill H.668, An Act Relating to Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Instruction for Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Students with Dyslexia and to Teacher Preparation Programs.

I am one of 4.3+/- million Americans who have dyslexia. I will never forget my challenges in school when trying to learn to read, write and do math like all of the other students. At age seven I was diagnosed as “dyslexic” but back then that did not mean a whole lot. In the 1960’s-1970’s, educators did not know how to handle students with learning differences. I remember my teachers having a private meeting about me. “He can barely write his first name,” said Mrs. B. “I noticed he doesn’t know how to hold his pencil,” said Mrs. W. They didn’t know I was listening, or maybe they did and didn’t care.

Little was known back then about what to do with a dyslexic student. Testing continued on me, year after year. Testing never ends when you are dyslexic. I learned to read outside of the school system through a series of one-on-one tutors. In 1977, I graduated from Newtown High School in Connecticut. My class rank was 275 out of 325 students. Perhaps I should add that I just barely graduated.

During one of my attempts to go to college, it was confirmed that I was not college material. My English professor excused me from class permanently when he learned that correct spelling and grammar didn’t exist in my writing. My ideas were not judged, but my lack of structure in writing was. “Those skills should have been learned prior to entering college classes! You may be excused now, Mr. Hubbell,” he grumped.

Years later, it became apparent to me that I was born at the wrong time to get help with dyslexia in school. It wasn’t until 1975, a few years before I graduated from high school, that the first laws were passed to identify students with learning disabilities and to support their rights to education. It was too late for me. At sixteen years old I was already considered damaged goods. I felt that my teachers and others did not understand me. If I had been born later, maybe I would not have had to go through all of the pain and struggles that I experienced in school.

Dyslexics commonly feel alone in their struggles in learning because more often than not, they are expected to learn like the other students. However this does not work so the dyslexic child gets further and further behind and self-confidence suffers. Unfortunately, not all schools in the US currently recognize dyslexia as a specific learning disability or even know what it is. A dyslexic’s fate really depends on the school district in which they live in, the parents and/or advocates, and the teachers. That is why House Bill H.668 is so important as it will look at the implementation of existing Vermont Dyslexia legislation and make recommendations on needed guidance and support.

If teachers are given the correct tools to identify specific learning differences in their students they can help to ensure that the students are put on a path for success.

Growing up in Newtown, my teachers didn't know what to do with me. My parents had to reach out to the community and find tutors to teach me to read. Now, if a child is lucky enough to be diagnosed with dyslexia early on, there are years of evidence-based research to aid in their educational journey. Whether it's through multi-sensory instruction, assistive technology, one- on-one tutoring or a structured language approach, with assistance from their advocate, a child can find the correct form of education to best fit their specific needs.

In my travels and work as a filmmaker I have seen that children who receive interventions from private tutors, are generally from families with the financial ability to pay for this instruction. We need to ensure that no matter what your zip code that you receive (and are entitled) to a free and appropriate education.

Please pass House Bill H.668! I know that it would have benefited me 50 years ago, I hope that it has the chance to do that for Vermont's dyslexic children today. You have the power to change their fate and create a positive educational experience for all of our states dyslexic students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'HHV', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Harvey Hubbell V
Filmmaker, Advocate, Dyslexic
Dislecksia: The Movie

1/26/2020

Dear House Ed Committee,

I'm Aniyah Hoskins, and I'm 10 years old almost 11. I'm in 5th grade, and I have Dyslexia. My mom told me when I was in 3rd grade that I have Dyslexia. I hated reading, I still do. Kindergarten through 4th grade I was always getting pulled out of my classes. I'd go do extra math and reading. I felt like I had to do extra work outside of the classroom. Only a few kids were doing it with me. It made me feel overwhelmed, and annoyed because it wasn't helping me.

In 3rd grade when I had my tutoring after school by a private tutor, and it made me feel anxious and frustrated. In 4th grade I had tutoring by way too many tutors online with Lindamoodbell in Boston. I was feeling stressed out and I had to miss science, and specials. I wish I could be able to do the things I like the most. I would get so overwhelmed and shut down and not do my LMB (Lindamood bell)

If this bill was in place when I was younger, I would not have to be pulled out for learning how to read in 5th grade. I want to be able to do science and social studies with my peers. I want to be able to read hard words, and know what they mean. I feel like the majority of teachers I've had, don't understand anyone's Dyslexia or Dyscalculia. They don't know how to help us learn correctly. I get distracted in my classes, when my teachers aren't giving directions I can understand. Please give my teachers the support they need to help us.

In conclusion these are all the reasons, coming from me to you, this bill should be passed. Please pay attention to the kids who need the help, we deserve the right to a correct education. So we can do what anything in our future.

Sincerely,
Aniyah Hoskins

