

Dear House Ed Committee,

Thank you for inviting me back to give my input on the 2nd draft of H.668. This is my first hands on experience with the legislation processes, and it's been a great learning experience. I realize it isn't always black and white, and that change is slow.

When I read the 2nd draft of the bill I was discouraged, and upset that it changed so drastically. Then I quickly remembered when the bill was introduced, Madamn Chair said "This bill could have 15 drafts!" So I have faith that we together can make some changes.

You've heard testimony from 30+ Vermont residents and the impact Dyslexia has had in their lives. It highlighted significant issues of inequity, and denials of Free Appropriate Public Education in Vermont. I believe each one of you on this committee heard us and you will be allies in supporting ALL children learning how to read, write, spell, and do math on grade level.

60% of dyslexic learners also experience mental illness. Secondary conditions like anxiety and depression are frequently diagnosed before neurological differences are identified. ADHD and Dyslexia frequently coexist and are often not identified until adolescence or adulthood, even though Dyslexia can accurately be identified at age 5.5.

18% of VT students are categorized as an emotional disturbance. Vermont is the highest in the country, and neighboring New England states.

Emotional Disturbance Qualifiers are below, and you only need 1 of them to qualify.

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems" (IDEA).

Emotional Disturbance rates are more prevalent among children with lower incomes, ethnicity, children in the State's custody, and children with trauma. When a child doesn't get their needs met academically it manifests as behavioral, mental health issues, somatic physical symptoms, drug use, juvenile offenders, or committing suicide. Trauma does happen when a child is mislabeled as a Emotional Disturbance, or goes undiagnosed. When children don't get properly identified under child find, their individual needs go unmet. We can do better!

We need to define what “Highly skilled teacher means” From my experience as a parent and advocate almost all of the teachers and special educators I’ve come into contact with, have had very little knowledge or training in Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, and Dysgraphia. All teachers need training by people like Louisa Moats, David Kilpatrick, Ross Greene, Nadine Gaab, and many other reputable leaders in the field. We need Scientifically evident based programming in all areas in our schools. Teachers and special educators need guidance from the AOE, their administrations, Unions and the legislators in Montpelier. We need accountability on all levels that is transparent. We need better assessments that test for all of the components of reading, and tease out and are able to

The grant funding proposal wouldn’t be equitable across the state, and isn’t mandated. Requiring four or more SU to work together in order to receive the grant, that will only equate out to about \$36,500 per SU. That amount of money will not solve the literacy crisis in our state. This seems unfair to districts given some may not have the ability or manpower to work with 4 or more districts. In my opinion the grant funding should be given to every district that applies independently. I would like to see this mandated to ensure all students are having equitable access. We need Federal child find laws to be implemented in all districts across Vermont starting in Kindergarten. Students not being identified with Dyslexia or other SLD’s until 3rd grade or after does them a disservice and causes special education to rise, and takes 4x longer because their brains are not as plausible, and plays a huge societal cost in the long run.

What we are doing in regards to reading instruction doesn’t work to produce proficient, skilled readers. Data has proven this. How much money could we save on interventions and special education by ensuring all students get effective instruction in their classrooms in tier 1 instruction from the moment they start school. Structured literacy or the Science of reading in NOT phonics only. It is phonics, in conjunction with other best practices in literacy instruction. If kids can’t lift the words off from the page, fluency and comprehension will not matter. Children do learn in different ways. Neuroscience proves this. There is only one intervention that children with Dyslexia learn to become skilled readers and structured literacy is designed to activate and strengthen those neural pathways. We aren’t talking about a small percentage of students. Up to 20% of the population has Dyslexia. Is there a % of the 20% in Vermont that doesn’t deserve to become proficient readers? I hope your answer is no. You have the authority to change a cycle for children that perpetuates a cycle most poor people can’t get out of, because they can’t afford the evaluations or private tutoring. Dyslexia is hereditary, and likely the parents struggled in school and went undiagnosed.

Vermont is 1 out of 6 in the US that does NOT have any Dyslexia legislation, the science is there and states are responding accordingly. Mississippi for instance is seeing huge growth. Vermont can and I believe could lead our country in best practices for Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia and all other disabilities in public education. We have a declining population, and people are moving away in flocks. We need to strengthen our schools and higher education, and people will want to move here. We are unique in the sense that we are progressive and forward thinking with the ability to empower our teachers, administrators, and unions in making

legislation that meets the needs of ALL children. An goes above an beyond federal law, not weaker.

“Do everything you can to learn and promote the Science of reading. Learn as much as you cant, as fast as you can. Promote it everywhere you can. Lives are on the line, and time does matter.” Steve Dykstra, PHD Psychologist

Thank you for allowing me to give testimony, and all of the hours and work you’ve put into this. If you need any supporting documents, please request them so you can support Dyslexia legislation in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Sandra Chittenden

<https://www.thereadingleague.org/knowledge-base/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/10876375/>

<https://www.thereadingleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Reading-IS-Rocket-Science-Moats.pdf>