

RE: S. 224 As Introduced

Dear Senate Committee of Education,

Sixty-two percent of Vermont's fourth-graders are not meeting reading proficiency according to the Nation's Report Card (<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>). Many of our educators do not feel qualified to teach when they leave college – the data echoes their cry.

Who are the sixty-two percent? Some struggling readers have dyslexia, others may have language barriers, or low vocabulary development. Some students frankly had poor instruction in that it did not include principals from the Science of Reading. Other students were not identified as having a reading problem. My focus will be on dyslexia. "Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities." The ability to read gives us access to our academic content areas. Lack of proficiency will affect all academic areas!

From my experience as a parent and special educator, unidentified students become frustrated and shut down. They may act out to try to get out of reading or homework. They become angry because they can't read or spell words when given a written assignment - they are very misunderstood. Misinformed parents and educators may think their child/student is lazy, stupid, or slow. The behaviors and low literacy proficiency may be blamed on family dynamics (divorce, poverty, drug abuse), and children may be labeled as emotionally disturbed. All the while their literacy gap increases.

The Truth: "Prevention studies in reading (and behavior) commonly show that 70-90% of at-risk children (bottom 20% of all children) in K-2 can learn to read in the average range with effective instruction." — Fletcher, Lyon, et al., 2007. While some students have a diagnosis of dyslexia, yet they attend a school where educators have not yet had the training necessary to provide explicit, multisensory instruction, their gap continues to grow. These students miss the reading instruction they need.

Students do not need to fail. Kelli Sandman-Hurley, wrote, "So, waiting to test does nothing but prolong the issue and cause more academic and emotional harm to the student and unnecessary financial stress on the school" (p.24) from "*Dyslexia Advocate! How to Advocate for a Child with Dyslexia within the Public Education System.*" "A majority of reading problems can be prevented in preschool and the early grades." — National Research Council, 1998. Teacher training that works for a student with dyslexia (Structured Literacy) enhances the educator's literacy instruction for the whole class.

*"The effects of academic failure are pervasive and lifelong,"* writes Cynthia Colletti in *Blueprint for a Literate Nation*. Severe consequences can result without identification and appropriate instruction. "In America, 85% of juvenile delinquents and 70% of prison inmates are functionally illiterate." – National Assessment of Adult Literacy. "Functional *illiteracy* is reading and writing skills that are inadequate "to manage daily living and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level." - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional\\_illiteracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional_illiteracy)

Who are these children? These are our neighbors. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9). " I care about the individuals within the statistics. Believing that people with dyslexia cannot be good readers is a myth! The fact is, with appropriate Tier 1 instruction, coupled with additional diagnostic Tier 2/Tier 3 instruction (as individually needed), students with dyslexia can be taught to read well. We can start at the beginning before we fail our children. Please support our children's future by keeping the definition of dyslexia, a dyslexia screener, and structured literacy teacher training in this bill.

Thank you for your time supporting our children and our neighbors. May God Bless you.

Respectfully Submitted,

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