

Good afternoon,

My name is Jamie Crenshaw and I am the mother of two dyslexic sons. I have been following the development of 21-0807: Education; Literacy; Teacher Training and I support the decision to include an Advisory Council on Literacy with parents as council members. I believe parents can bring a different perspective and more importantly, be a voice for the students who struggle with literacy acquisition in all our Vermont public schools.

With that being said, I am disappointed at not seeing a section in the Bill that focuses on the needs of students who struggle with literacy acquisition the most – students with dyslexia. In my opinion, the reluctance to include the word dyslexia in Vermont legislation and in our public schools is a crucial reason why we are failing to comply with the established precedent set in Title 16 VSA §2903(b) which states “Foundation of literacy. The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Agency of Human Services, higher education, literacy organizations, and others, shall develop a plan for establishing a comprehensive system of services for early education in the first three grades to ensure that all students learn to read by the end of third grade.” §2903 was enacted to ensure all students, including students with dyslexia, attain literacy proficiency by the end of third grade. The comprehensive system of services should include services provided in the general education and special education environment. The majority of Vermont public schools lack the special educators and reading specialists with the appropriate training regarding literacy instruction, dyslexia identification, evaluation, and intervention.

While some special education teachers across the supervisory unions had a strong background in the teaching of reading, others indicated that they did not have the training or background to be effective supporting students in reading.

– Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who Struggle, DMG

All students who struggle with literacy acquisition, including students with dyslexia, need to be identified early so as to receive systematic literacy instruction from educators who are skilled in teaching literacy and who also understand how best to support students as they overcome the obstacles that impact their learning. Despite the surge in special education per pupil spending – academic outcomes for students with dyslexia have barely budged. Students with dyslexia will continue to perform poorly if we disregard and fail to address both the lack of early identification and the literacy instructional needs of these students in all environments. The Specific Learning Disability category is the largest disability category in Vermont. 80% of students classified under the Specific Learning Disability category have dyslexia. These students possess a neurological difference impacting their ability to read, write, and spell but they are no less capable of learning.

As our schools and parents continue to struggle to address the needs of our dyslexic students, billions of dollars continue to be allocated to improving and enhancing the educational opportunities for general education students at the cost of opportunities for students with disabilities. As a result, the achievement gap for students with disabilities continues to widen.

Legislation that focuses on the enhancement and strengthening of literacy education should address the needs of both the general education students and those needing the most intensive support – students with dyslexia. There are proven ways to help students with dyslexia acquire literacy skills, and a federal law that’s supposed to ensure schools provide these students with appropriate supports but the reality

is that across Vermont public schools parents and teachers struggle to improve the outcomes for students with dyslexia simply because the special educators and reading specialists lack the knowledge and much needed resources.

I urge this Committee to consider including a provision within 2903a that examines and evaluates the needs of students with dyslexia. As it stands now, this Bill is not designed to improve outcomes for every student as it is intended.

#### Recommendation

##### 2093a Advisory Council on Literacy

(d) Powers and duties. The Council shall advise the Agency of Education, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly on how to improve proficiency outcomes in literacy for students in prekindergarten through grade 12, for students with dyslexia, and how to sustain those outcomes and shall:

(E) review local Child Find policies and literacy benchmark screeners and outcomes to ensure compliance with 34 Cfr §300.111.

The term “dyslexia” is found in the DSM-5, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and in our own Vermont Special Education Rules and Regulations but if using the term dyslexia is impeding the decision then the below is another option to consider.

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(E) review local Child Find policies and literacy benchmark screeners and outcomes to ensure compliance with 34 Cfr §300.111.

Thank you for considering my recommendation.

Jamie Crenshaw

Milton, Vermont