

I am writing to you for your work on senate educator committee. I am a Vermont parent hoping the state senate will vote in support of S.75, an act relating to screening students for dyslexia. Our Vermont children deserve to be taught evidence-based literacy instruction.

This bill is personal to me because my first grade son was diagnosed with dyslexia this year. As a former special educator, I noticed red flags for dyslexia when my son was in kindergarten. He struggled to sound out simple words and often guessed based on the first letter or picture on the page. As a student in Burlington School District, the district uses [Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System](#), which encourages early readers to look at pictures and guess the words based on picture clues. Despite the fact this assessment is not valid or reliable, it is often the sole criteria schools use to identify those in need of reading intervention.

In fact, I was shocked to learn at a PTO meeting just how much money our school budget spends on Balanced Literacy programs that are based on [theories widely debunked by the scientific community](#), such as Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) and The Units of Study for Teaching Reading created by [Lucy Calkins](#). Using the F&P assessment, my bright son looked like a strong reader because he can rely on picture clues to read the predictable text. F&P and Lucy Calkins programs also encourage students to substitute words for other words in the picture (e.g., reading pony for horse). Here's a short, ten-minute [video](#) that explains why the predictable text used in F&P and Lucy Calkins programs promote guessing in beginning readers.

We paid to have my son privately evaluated where he was diagnosed with dyslexia. Knowing that the public school uses [Leveled Literacy Intervention \(LLI\)](#), which is not research-based, we opted to send him to a private school that exclusively uses a systematic phonics program and found a certified Orton-Gillingham tutor for after-school tutoring twice a week. After only a couple months of tutoring, my son began to not only read words accurately, but his reading is less laborious. He no longer searches the page for a picture when he comes to an unknown word. Most importantly, he doesn't put up a fight when it's time to read or yells that he hates reading or feels he is dumb. Structured Literacy, in his specific case Orton-Gillingham, made the difference. Had he received LLI in the public school, he would have been encouraged to continue substituting words (e.g., reading pony for horse) and relying on pictures.

My son is the lucky one. He had parents with education and resources, but so many other Vermont children do not. I was appalled to learn from a recent report (and podcast) from [American Public Media](#) how children of color are disproportionately affected by illiteracy. I believe ensuring all of our children grow into skilled readers and writers is an issue of equity and a moral imperative.

**Passing this bill is not only the moral thing to do, but the best economic decision so that Vermont has a literate workforce.**

Thank you again for reading my story and for all of your tireless work on behalf of Vermont families.

Sincerely,

Peggy