

**STATE SENATOR KATHY BERNIER**  
TWENTY-THIRD SENATE DISTRICT



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**From: Senator Kathy Bernier**  
**To: The Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families**  
**Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 579**

**Relating to:** requiring each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist.

**Date: January 22, 2020**

Chairman Kooyenga and members of the committee, thank you for hearing Senate Bill 579 today. I am pleased to be working alongside Representative Kulp on behalf of families and educators across Wisconsin who feel alone as they try to help a child with dyslexia.

One of the biggest challenges facing families and teachers of a child with dyslexia is a lack of resources on this critical issue. The 2018 Legislative Council Study Committee on the Identification and Management of Dyslexia identified this shortfall and recommended that a statewide dyslexia specialist be hired to assist school districts in preparing for and proactively meeting the needs of students with dyslexia. Senate Bill 579 would act on this recommendation and would create a dyslexia specialist at each cooperative educational service agency (CESA). The bill specifies that a specialist must have at least five years of experience screening, identifying and treating dyslexia and related conditions and has received advanced training in reading disorders.

Providing dyslexia specialists at each CESA will provide a desperately needed resource for our schools, teachers and parents as they work to help each and every child succeed in school and realize their full potential. Please join me in supporting this valuable piece of legislation by voting yes on Senate Bill 579. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

# BOB KULP

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 69<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**TO:** Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families

**FROM:** State Representative Bob Kulp, 69<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

**DATE:** January 22, 2020

**RE:** Support for Senate Bill 578 / Assessments to Evaluate Reading Readiness  
Support for Senate Bill 579 / Requiring Each CESA to Employ a Dyslexia Specialist

Thank you Chairman Kooyenga and fellow committee members for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 578 ("SB 578") and Senate Bill 579 ("SB 579"). I appreciate having the opportunity to express my support for both:

- SB 578 which relates to assessments to evaluate reading readiness; and
- SB 579 which requires each cooperative educational service agency ("CESA") to employ a dyslexia specialist.

More than 2 million American children receive special educational treatment because of dyslexia which is a common learning disorder that negatively affects a person's ability to read. Wisconsin's reading scores have fallen to 34th in the country. However, Wisconsin is one of only seven states that has not yet implemented some form of dyslexia educational programming.

Wisconsin cannot afford to leave dyslexic students behind. The dyslexia guidebook bill currently working its way through our state legislature is a good start, but more can be done to tackle this issue. As Chair of the 2018 Legislative Council Study Committee on the Identification and Management of Dyslexia, I received input from people across the state. As many of you know, I've introduced a package of dyslexia bills which are the product of those discussions and input. Introduction of the dyslexia bills coincided with the Governor's declaration of October as Dyslexia Awareness Month.

One of the bills included in the dyslexia package is SB 578 that relates to assessments to evaluate reading readiness. Currently, each school board and operator of an independent charter school must annually assess the reading readiness of children from kindergarten through the second grade. Currently, chapter 118.016 of the statutes addresses assessments in reading readiness. However, current statutes lack enough specific categories in which to identify an individual with a reading disability. SB 578 adds language to chapter 118.016 that includes not just phonemic awareness but rapid automatized naming, letter-word reading, and picture-naming vocabulary. By adding these methods of screening our schools will be able to catch a reading problem at an earlier age.

A second bill included in the dyslexia package is SB 579 that requires each CESA to employ a dyslexia specialist. The 2018 Legislative Council Study Committee on the Identification and Management of Dyslexia identified in their recommendations to the state legislature that a dyslexia specialist position

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 69<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

should be created. The individual would be tasked with assisting school districts in developing and maintaining dyslexia programs. SB 579 creates a dyslexia specialist at each CESA based upon this recommendation. The bill defines a dyslexia specialist as an individual who meets specific criteria, including that the individual has at least five years' experience in screening, identifying, and treating dyslexia and related conditions and that the individual has received advanced training in various topics related to dyslexia and related conditions. A dyslexia specialist at the CESAs will offer a valuable resource of dyslexia related information for parents and schools.

SB 578 and SB 579 aim to give parents and teachers more tools than are currently available in order to help kids learn to read. I think that is a goal that everyone can get behind.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for scheduling the public hearing today on SB 578 and SB 579.

January 22, 2020

Senators,

Senate Bill 579 would require each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist. This statute is being proposed to replace the AB 50, requiring the state of Wisconsin to employ a dyslexia specialist.

The need for a dyslexia specialist at each CESA couldn't be greater. There are about 37,000 children with a primary **disability** of SLD in **Wisconsin**. (DPI website) An estimated 90% of students referred for special education are referred for reading difficulties. (Bender, 2007 Cited in Howard, Albe-Morgan, & Konrad (2017) Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education. Pearson)

Individuals that are highly trained having received advanced training and are knowledgeable on dyslexia and related conditions using interventions that are scientifically based is truly needed. As you may be aware, the current teacher preparation programs statewide, are inadequate. Teachers are not trained using evidenced based instructional practices as required in statute. Teacher preparation programs DO NOT provide teachers with the knowledge on identification and remediation of students with dyslexia or related conditions. Students with characteristics of dyslexia are not identified early on due to the teachers' lack of training. Students then fall further and further behind. The downward spiral continues for students until they are referred for special education. However once in special education, they most likely will continue the downward spiral, since the special education teachers have also not learned evidenced based instructional strategies. I speak from personal experience as I received my reading specialist certificate four years ago. None of my training was in evidenced based (brain based) instructional approaches. The term dyslexia was mentioned once in two years of classes.

CESA's are able to provide professional development to districts. A dyslexia specialist for each CESA will provide districts with a resource to answer questions on dyslexia and related conditions, model interventions and assessments, and consult with parents, teachers, and administrators. Other states have dyslexia specialists at various levels. Some are at the state level, some at the cooperative agency level and some are at the district level. In Wisconsin, the Learning Disability position for DPI has been vacant since last spring. Who do parents and teachers ask if they have questions about Learning Disabilities?

I urge you to seriously consider the need for a dyslexia specialist for each CESA. A highly trained individual is needed and would be welcomed in every Wisconsin district.

Donna Hejtmanek  
International Dyslexia Association Legislative Chair  
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715-525-2259

Senate Bill 579 testimony from Brenda Warren, M.D, Ph.D

I am speaking in favor of SB 579.

It is imperative that we have teachers and reading specialists who are well trained and highly skilled in how to teach students with dyslexia, especially if we are screening and identifying them in higher numbers if SB 578 passes. There is nothing more frustrating than having a diagnosis with no available treatment.

Employing at least one dyslexia specialist in each Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) will be a good start to providing teachers, administrators and reading specialists the necessary professional development and support to insure all children, even those with dyslexia, receive the instruction they deserve so they can all learn to read.

Most teachers and even most reading specialists are not taught in their university programs the skills they need to successfully teach children with dyslexia to read. They also do not have a good understanding of what the scientific reading research has demonstrated about how the brain learns to read. For this reason, they are also not even very well prepared to teach readers who struggle for reasons other than dyslexia.

The qualifications for the dyslexia specialist listed in this bill are very important to include in order to insure that we are providing the very best training for school personnel. Without these qualifications, CESAs might end up hiring reading specialists who are not dyslexia specialists.

In addition to improving how we teach students with dyslexia, the same professional development from the dyslexia specialists will greatly improve the ability for teachers to teach all children to read. This is because the skills students need in order to learn to read are the same; the difference is that some children learn what they need to know more easily than others, and those with dyslexia require the highest intensity and frequency of instruction.

Good reading instruction for children with dyslexia is actually good reading instruction in general. Therefore, what we do today for our teachers by providing resources and support from our CESA dyslexia specialists will ultimately help all students learn to read. It is an investment in all Wisconsin students. *& an investment in Wisconsin's teachers.*

Again, I want to emphasize that it is time to provide equity in reading instruction across Wisconsin. All students deserve to learn to read. One way to take one more step toward providing this equity is to pass SB 579.

Thank you.

Brenda Warren

Brenda Warren  
President

Board of Education  
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**Green Bay Area  
Public School District**  
*Engagement. Equity. Excellence.*

## ACCREDITED INDEPENDENT EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Updated September 12, 2018

*Individual Schools, Clinics, and Training Sites Partnering with Accredited Programs Listed Below Can Be Located by Clicking on the Provided Links or by Contacting the Accredited Independent Educator Preparation Program Directly*

**Program Graduates from Designated Accredited Class Years  
Eligible for Specified CERI Certifications\***

PROGRAM	CREDENTIAL	ACCREDITED CLASS YEARS	RE-ACCRED. DUE	SL Teacher Knowledge Certificate	SL/Dyslexia Interventionist	SL/Dyslexia Specialist
Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators (AOGPE)  Search AOGPE Accredited Training Programs: <a href="https://www.ortonacademy.org/accreditation/aogpe-accredited-programs/">https://www.ortonacademy.org/accreditation/aogpe-accredited-programs/</a>	Classroom Educator	2015-2016 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X		
	Associate Level	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	
	Certified Level	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	X
Academic Language Therapy Associates (ALTA)  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="https://www.altaread.org/chapters-list.asp">https://www.altaread.org/chapters-list.asp</a>	CALP	2015-2016 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X	X	
	CALT	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	X
Programs Accredited by: The International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC)  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="https://www.imslec.org/directory.asp?action=zipsearch-training">https://www.imslec.org/directory.asp?action=zipsearch-training</a>	Category: Teaching	2012-2013 through 2018-2019	2/1/19	X	X	
	Category: Therapy	2012-2013 through 2018-2019		X	X	X
National Institute for Learning Development (NILD)  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="http://nild.org/educational-therapy-training/courses-workshops/">http://nild.org/educational-therapy-training/courses-workshops/</a>	Level I	2015-2016 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X		
	Level II	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	
	Level III- PCET	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	X
Neuhaus Education Center  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="https://www.neuhaus.org/educators/literacy-interventionist-preparation">https://www.neuhaus.org/educators/literacy-interventionist-preparation</a>	Online Literacy Interventionist Program	2017-2018 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X	X	
Wilson Reading System (WRS)  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="https://www.wilsonlanguage.com/professional-learning/accredited-partners/list-accredited-partners/">https://www.wilsonlanguage.com/professional-learning/accredited-partners/list-accredited-partners/</a>	Level I WRS Certification	2015-2016 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X	X	
	Level II WRS Certification	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	X
Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham Approach (YOGA)  Search Training Courses/Providers for IDA Approved Credentials: <a href="https://www.ortongillinghaminternational.org/our-training-programs">https://www.ortongillinghaminternational.org/our-training-programs</a>	Classroom Educator	2015-2016 through 2019-2020	9/1/19	X		
	Dyslexia Specialist	2015-2016 through 2019-2020		X	X	

**HISD PARENT INTERVIEW (Dyslexia)**

*Donna  
Hightmire  
5/8/59*

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

*To help us in better understanding the difficulties that your child may be experiencing in school, and to detect the possibility of dyslexia, please answer each of the following questions.*

**FAMILY HISTORY:**

**Yes No Don't Know**

- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Have any other members of the family had learning problems?
- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Father
- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Mother
- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Sibling

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**PHYSICAL HISTORY:**

**Yes No Don't Know**

- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ 1. Has your child ever been critically or chronically ill?

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ 2. Has your child ever had an extremely high fever?

- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ 3. Does your child have any physical problems that you feel may cause difficulty in learning?

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ 4. Is your child currently taking medication?

Please list \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Yes No Don't  
Know

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 5. Does your child seem to have trouble hearing?

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 6. Does your child seem to have trouble seeing?

***Please circle the term that indicates the degree of your concern regarding each skill area.***

**Phonological Awareness Skills: (oral language skill that involves the ability to notice, think about, and use the sounds in words)**

My child has / had:

Difficulty recognizing or reproducing rhyming words.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty naming the first or last sound in a word.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty blending sounds together to make a word.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Alphabet: (ABCs)**

My child has / had:

Difficulty learning or remembering names of letters.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty learning or remembering sounds of letters.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Decoding and Word Recognition: (Sounding out and learning words)**

My child has / had:

Difficulty sounding out unfamiliar words.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty reading words correctly.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Fluency: (Reading quickly and easily)**

My child:

Makes frequent reading errors.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Reads with hesitations.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Reads slowly.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Spelling: (writing correct letters in words in the right order during free writing)**

My child has:

Difficulty memorizing words for spelling tests.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty spelling words correctly.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Comprehension: (understanding what is read)**

My child has:

Difficulty understanding what he/she reads.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty answering textbook questions.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Written Expression: (writing down ideas)**

My child has:

Difficulty writing sentences correctly.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty writing stories and reports.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Cognitive/Academic Ability: (learning)**

My child needs many repetitions to learn something new.	No	Yes	Don't Know
My child has difficulty learning math facts.	No	Yes	Don't Know
My child has trouble with math word problems even when they are read aloud.	No	Yes	Don't Know
My child has reading difficulties that seem unexpected compared to his/her other abilities.	No	Yes	Don't Know

**Oral Language: (talking)**

*When **listening**, my child has:*

Difficulty understanding verbal directions.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty understanding stories read to him/her.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

*When **speaking**, my child has:*

Weak or limited oral vocabulary.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty finding the right word.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty speaking with correct grammar.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Difficulty explaining ideas or elaborating on thoughts.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Attention: (ability to focus and concentrate)**

My child:

Has trouble organizing time and materials.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Is easily distracted by sights and sounds.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Does many things too quickly.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Is often overactive or fidgety.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Is inconsistent in classwork and homework.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Needs direct supervision to complete homework.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Handwriting: (forming letters correctly on paper)**

My child:

Is slow with handwriting and copying tasks.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know
Displays overall poor quality handwriting tasks.	Rarely	Often	Don't Know

**Academic Development:**

English is a second language for my child.	No	Yes	Don't Know
My child has been retained. (in what grade?) _____	No	Yes	Don't Know

My child has been in special programs. (for example - <i>Special Education</i> )	No	Yes	Don't Know
Please identify any programs you are aware of: _____			

January 22, 2020

Senator Kooyenga,

Senate Bill 579 would require each cooperative educational service agency (CESA) to employ a dyslexia specialist. This statute is being proposed to replace the AB 50, requiring the state of Wisconsin to employ a dyslexia specialist. The need for a dyslexia specialist at each CESA is greater than it has ever been. There are about 37,000 children with a primary disability of SLD in Wisconsin. (DPI website) An estimated 90% of students referred for special education are referred for reading difficulties. (Bender, 2007 Cited in Howard, Albe-Morgan, & Konrad (2017) Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education. Pearson)

Individuals who are knowledgeable and highly trained in the use of scientific interventions related to dyslexia and related conditions are truly needed. As you may be aware, current teacher preparation programs statewide are inadequate. Teachers are not trained in using evidenced based instructional practices as required in statute. Teacher preparation programs DO NOT provide teachers with the knowledge of identification and remediation of students with dyslexia or related conditions. Students with characteristics of dyslexia are not identified at the critical early stage due to the teachers' lack of training. Students then fall further and further behind. The downward spiral continues for students until they are referred for special education. However, once in special education, the downward slide continues since the special education teachers also have not learned evidenced based instructional strategies. I speak from personal experience as I have been a private reading practitioner working with dyslexic students for over 30 years and have worked with many teachers who related their stories and wanted to know about how I was able to help their student learn to read. It was with evidence based instructional methods. I also have friends who have been through the reading specialist training and hardly ever heard the word dyslexia.

Since CESA's are able to provide professional development to districts, a dyslexia specialist for each CESA would provide districts with a resource to answer questions on dyslexia and related conditions, model interventions and assessments, and consult with parents, teachers, and administrators. Other states have dyslexia specialists at various levels, including at state, cooperative agency and/or district levels. In Wisconsin, the Learning Disability position for DPI has been vacant since last spring. Who do WI parents and teachers ask if they have questions about Learning Disabilities including dyslexia?

I urge you to seriously consider the need for a dyslexia specialist for each CESA. A highly trained individual is needed and would be welcomed in every Wisconsin district.

Sincerely,

Pam Heyde

My name is Rachel and I am the mother of 3 children. An 8 year old boy and twin 7 year old girls. My single child and my twins are 13 months apart. I am here today on behalf of my daughter Remiah and my story on the road to dyslexia begins when my twin daughters were about 4 years old. Because all 3 of my children were so close in age it was easy for me to compare how they were growing and developing language. I was, and still am, a very involved mother who loves to read to my children. We would sing nursery rhymes, I would search Pinterest to find fun learning activities, games to learn the alphabet, games and songs for counting, craft projects, felt story board stories, and so on. I loved doing these activities with my children.

I began to notice when we would do these learning games and activities that two of my children seemed to be successfully learning to count, learning their alphabet and remembering colors and shapes. However, my daughter Remiah seemed to be struggling. While she could take cut out numbers and physically put them in the correct order she could not verbally count to 10 in the right order. If I had a pile of magnetic letters in front of her and asked her to find me the "C" she could, but if I showed her the letter "C" and asked her what letter it was she could not come up with the letter verbally on her own. I also noticed when she would be telling me a story she would stop in the middle of it trying to find the right words she wanted to say. Remiah would then change the word she wanted to say to something similar or would perhaps act out the word she was looking for when she would struggle to come up with the word herself.

When I mentioned my concerns to her primary care physician about her struggles with word retrieval she told me "children learn at their own pace" and "don't compare Remiah to her twin sister and older brother". Her words were "she's perfect". And as her mother I agreed. She was perfect. She is funny, sweet, creative, thoughtful, and very bright. But in my gut I just felt something was not right and I was concerned. I asked that she be tested in speech and language before she started school. To put my mind at ease, the doctor put in the order and a few weeks later Remiah was tested by a speech pathologist. She passed her language part of the test by state standards, but they were all only by a point or two. The speech pathologist agreed with me that she noticed Remiah's struggles with word retrieval. Since she technically passed her tests, she recommended Remiah receive speech services. By receiving the speech services, they were able to add in language services despite her passing the language test by state standards. This allowed Remiah to enter 4K with an IEP in speech and language services.

4K was the start of Remiah's school career. She entered school in the same classroom as her twin sister. Her twin sister was a quick learner excelling above expectations in every area of her report cards. However, when I would discuss with the teacher how Remiah was doing I would be told what a hard worker she was, how great she was at perseverance, how well she got along with everyone, and what a great attitude she had. It would be followed up with, she is still struggling to count, know her alphabet, her colors and shapes. She could take felt letters and use them to spell out her name correctly but she could not verbally tell you what those letters were. Same was true with counting, shapes, colors, and so on. This continued the entire school year, despite extra help at school and help at home. Kindergarten was much the same. By mid-kindergarten she was finally beginning to be able to verbally tell us her letters and numbers but at this point the other children are beginning to read. They were memorizing sight words. While her teacher was concerned, she told me at this age children all develop at their own pace and that she would get it eventually. I was watching my smart, sweet,

hardworking daughter fall further and further behind. I decided to take her to the neuropsychology at Children's Hospital in WI to be evaluated for a learning disability. I needed someone to tell me how to help my daughter before she fell so far behind it would be too difficult to get caught back up.

Children's Hospital did 4 days of testing with her. They found her to be of average to high average IQ. They diagnosed her with an expressive language disorder but did not diagnose her with any specific learning disorder. As I was physically leaving their office on that last day, the man who had been going over the results with me casually mentioned to me that if she's still struggling at the end of second grade come back and get tested for dyslexia. I immediately dismissed this suggestion because from what I knew about dyslexia, at that time, it's when you see letters move on the page or see letters backwards. That just was not my kid. I left in tears feeling frustrated and with no answers.

Fast forward to first grade. My daughter is now far enough behind in reading that she is receiving services with a reading intervention teacher. Despite the extra help she is making very little progress. I got called in for a special conference with her general education teacher, her speech pathologist, and her reading intervention teacher about their concerns. They once again tell me what a bright hard worker Remiah is, and how she has such a great attitude, and never gives up but is falling very far behind in school despite the efforts they can see Remiah is making. Her general education teacher suggests I have Remiah tested by the school for a learning disability. I put my request in and they begin testing Remiah. We then set up a meeting to go over the results and once again Remiah scores just high enough that she does not qualify for a learning disability. During this meeting the LD teacher who was there to tell me she does not qualify for her services suggested the possibility of dyslexia. She mentioned some of Remiah's struggles with word retrieval and phonological awareness makes her think of dyslexia. I left that meeting that afternoon and spent the night devouring any information I could find on dyslexia. As I was reading article after article I felt someone was writing specifically about my little girl.

We now enter the current year of second grade. The schools do not test for dyslexia so I had to go on the waiting list at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee to have my child tested. The wait time to get an appointment to be tested is over a year long. Her first STAR testing for the year at school gave her a score of 1% on her reading test. Meaning 99% of the students in her grade at her school scored higher than she did. And yet, the school says she does not qualify for a learning disability.

Intervention seems to be failing her. And we have over a year wait at Childrens for any kind of possible diagnosis. During my learning of dyslexia I kept reading about the most successful way of teaching a child with dyslexia is by using the Orton Gillingham reading programs. My school did not offer these programs, so I began with a private tutor twice a week using the Barton reading program which is a branch off of the Orton Gillingham method.

I also recieved a tip from another mom that a psychologist in Appleton could get me in sooner than Children's for a fraction of the cost to evaluate for a diagnosis. I decided to try it and in January 2020, midway through second grade we finally received our diagnosis for dyslexia. Even with this diagnosis she does not receive any services at school. Her teachers have no training in dyslexia and I am responsible for any help my daughter needs when it comes her learning disability. As far as the school is concerned she officially has no learning disability since they do not look at outside medical diagnosis's.

I'm still very new on my journey of having a diagnosed child with dyslexia. But I have known for 3 ½ years that my daughter needed help. That she was incredibly bright, but learned very differently than my other two children. I repeatedly sought out help from doctors, speech pathologists, general education teachers, reading intervention teachers, and complete strangers. It took 3 ½ years of persistence on

my part before finally getting a diagnosis. 3 ½ years of precious time wasted for my child. 3 ½ years of my child struggling and not getting the help she needed. She still struggles and if it was not for the money I put towards tutoring and the time I spend driving her to a different town to get services twice a week she would still not be getting any of the resources she needs. It is my job to educate her teachers on what dyslexia is and how to best help my dyslexic child to read.

A child can be diagnosed with dyslexia at 5.5 years old with 92% accuracy.

Research shows that when measures like specialized tutoring are taken in grade 1 80% percent of kids who have difficulty reading can be remediated, meaning their accuracy when reading can be improved greatly. If steps are differed until grade 2, the success rate is 50%. And if remediation is deferred until grade 3, the success rate falls to about 20%. Early diagnosis and intervention is essential to success.

<https://www.todayparent.com/kids/school-age/dyslexia-in-children-screening/>

I often find myself wondering where my daughter would be academically right now if the proper measures had been taken when I first began to express concern about her word retrieval. If I would have found a teacher, or a speech pathologist, or a doctor who was educated on dyslexia and would have recognized the signs right away. If she would have been able to get the proper intervention at school when I first expressed concern instead of just waiting to see if she “gets it eventually” where would her reading levels be right now? I still worry about how the school is going to help her academically when there is no dyslexic reading program in her school. No teacher trained on what dyslexia is or how to help a child with dyslexia. I worry if I’m going to be able to continue the financial burden of paying for private tutors for her since she is not receiving the proper help at school. Statistically 20% of the population suffers from some form of dyslexia. That’s 1 in every 5 children in the classroom. It is the most common of language based learning disabilities that cause reading, writing, and spelling difficulties. Most go undiagnosed and without proper help because our teachers are not educated on what it is, how to recognize it or how to teach someone with it. I’m asking on behalf of my child and on behalf 1 in every 5 children in the classroom to pass legislation SB579 relating to requiring each cooperative education service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist and to pass legislation SB578 relating to assessments to evaluate reading readiness. Let’s strive to get all our children at grade level literacy skills in the state of WI.

Thank you so much for allowing me the time to tell you my daughter’s story today.



To: Senator Dale Kooyenga, Chair  
Members, Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children & Families

From: Kathy Champeau, WSRA Legislative Committee Chair  
Deborah Cromer, WSRA President

Date: Wednesday, January 22, 2020

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 579: Requiring CESAS to employ a dyslexia specialist.

The Wisconsin State Reading Association's mission focuses on developing expertise to help all children achieve high levels of literacy. Children who experience reading difficulties exhibit varied individual profiles. There are many factors that impact their learning and knowledge of these factors, which are critical to successfully teaching children who have difficulties. Reading specialists and reading teachers by licensure need to understand the many factors that impact literacy learning and how to meet individual student needs. They not only have critical reading backgrounds but also are licensed teachers with knowledge of pedagogy and the many factors that impact learning. Reading specialists hold administrative licenses and their backgrounds include knowledge of research.

Because overseeing reading demands a depth and breadth of knowledge, WSRA does not support SB 579. The proposed legislation clearly excludes a licensed reading specialist who has a depth and breadth of literacy knowledge, including experience teaching children with teaching difficulties from holding this position. This experience includes dyslexia. A school psychologist and a speech and language pathologist are not required by licensure and training to hold a reading specialist license nor a teaching and learning license.

Wisconsin Statute 118.015 requires each district to have a reading specialist whose responsibilities include: developing and implementing a K-12 reading curriculum; acting as a resource person to classroom teachers; work with administrators to support and implement the reading curriculum; conduct an annual evaluation of the reading curriculum; and coordinate the reading curriculum with other reading programs and other support services within the school district in grade K through 12. In other words, a district reading specialist must have a depth and breadth of knowledge to understand the complexities of literacy learning K-12. This position requires time and resources to successfully carry out these responsibilities.

A reading specialist also holds a reading teacher license. A reading teacher must demonstrate the following:

- (a) Eligibility to hold a Wisconsin license to teach or completion of an approved teacher education program.
- (b) Two years of successful regular classroom teaching experience.
- (c) Proficiency in the teaching of reading that includes a clinical program teaching reading in all of the following:
  1. Developmental reading for pupils in the early childhood through adolescent level.
  2. Assessment and instructional techniques for readers with special needs.
  3. Language development.
  4. Learning disabilities.

5. Content area reading.
6. Literature for children or adolescents.

The concern is that the bill does not provide that a dyslexia specialist have this type of depth and breadth of knowledge.

There are a variety of aspects of learning to read including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, in addition to issues of engagement, motivation, and background experiences. Children's difficulties with learning to read might be influenced by a combination of several of these factors. All of these are required in the licensure programs for reading specialists.

Questions to consider:

1. What are the related conditions that SB 579 is referring to under 116.03 (c)?
2. What specific scientific interventions and treatments does this law refer to and what are the research studies to prove their efficacy for all dyslexic students?
3. The term multisensory is used in this law. What specifically constitutes multisensory approaches and what is the research that shows the efficacy of the multisensory approaches this bill refers to?
4. In section 116.03 (b) what specifically does the legislation mean by screening, identifying and treating dyslexia. Because many reading teachers do teach and provide effective methodologies to children who are dyslexic, does that mean that somehow their license and the extensive training they receive does not qualify them for teaching children who have significant difficulties?

Suggestions:

1. The NAEP and the Forward exams are frequently used by some to indicate that all Wisconsin schools are deficient in meeting the needs of their students. The results are publicly available. WSRA suggests that to better understand the complexity of literacy learning and services in Wisconsin, further data collection is recommended:
  - a. It would be helpful if we studied and collected data around the students in public schools receiving help from dyslexia clinics around the state. The screening scores at grade levels 4K – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade could be collected as well as their 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade scores on the Forward Exam. This would give us a more in depth and longitudinal look at the levels of proficiency of these students.
  - b. The conditions for instruction could be documented. How many students receive the gold standard of one on one intervention, how often and for how long? These are *important variables in instruction*. If students in dyslexia clinics are serviced in group settings, how many students are in a group?
  - c. The NAEP is a test of complex comprehension. It would be helpful to understand how dyslexia clinics address complex comprehension in their approach.

## Schmidt, Melissa

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**From:** Bentz, Nick  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 3:04 PM  
**To:** Hoey, Joseph; Janis, Nick; Keith, Rachel; Lambert, RJ; Lonergan, Sandy; Mikalsen, Mike; Sargent, Justin; Schmidt, Dan; Schmidt, Melissa; Schmudlach, Shelby; Sen.Bewley; Sen.Darling; Sen.Kooyenga; Sen.Larson; Sen.Nass; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Schachtner; Smith, Sarah; Tomten, Amanda; Youngman, Lori; Zantow, Jenna  
**Subject:** FW: Jan. 22 Dyslexia Bill

Members and staff,

Below is additional testimony for our hearing tomorrow regarding SB 578 and SB 579.

**Nick Bentz**  
State Sen. Dale Kooyenga  
5<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
310 South, State Capitol  
608-266-2512  
[Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov)

Follow Sen. Kooyenga on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).  
Visit Sen. Kooyenga's [website](#).

*NOTE: Emails sent to and from this account may be subject to open records requests and should not be considered private.*

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**From:** Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 9:30 AM  
**To:** Bentz, Nick <[Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** FW: Jan. 22 Dyslexia Bill

**From:** Mary Jo Bolwerk <[mjb4393@gmail.com](mailto:mjb4393@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Saturday, January 18, 2020 3:52 PM  
**To:** Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** Jan. 22 Dyslexia Bill

Dear Senator,

I am writing to kindly ask your support for the bills related to dyslexia that will come before you on Jan. 22. Wisconsin is one of only a few states that does not have dyslexia laws in place and we owe it to our struggling kids to move forward in this area. As a high school teacher, I see every day what happens when dyslexia is NOT caught early. Students are frustrated. They act up or they give up. School is a miserable experience for them because they cannot read. When the state of Wisconsin takes steps to address dyslexia, we will see an increase in our reading achievement scores as well as a decrease in our mental health incidents and drop out rates. Reading skills are crucial to success and I look forward to seeing more Wisconsin students succeed when these bills are passed.

Thank you,  
Mary Jo Bolwerk

## Schmidt, Melissa

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**From:** Bentz, Nick  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 2:59 PM  
**To:** Hoey, Joseph; Janis, Nick; Keith, Rachel; Lambert, RJ; Loneragan, Sandy; Mikalsen, Mike; Sargent, Justin; Schmidt, Dan; Schmidt, Melissa; Schudlach, Shelby; Sen.Bewley; Sen.Darling; Sen.Kooyenga; Sen.Larson; Sen.Nass; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Schachtner; Smith, Sarah; Tomten, Amanda; Youngman, Lori; Zantow, Jenna  
**Subject:** FW: AB110, SB578, SB579

Members and staff,

The comments below pertain to two bills we will hear in committee tomorrow.

Contact information is included should you have further questions.

**Nick Bentz**  
State Sen. Dale Kooyenga  
5<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
310 South, State Capitol  
608-266-2512  
[Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov)

Follow Sen. Kooyenga on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).  
Visit Sen. Kooyenga's [website](#).

*NOTE: Emails sent to and from this account may be subject to open records requests and should not be considered private.*

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**From:** Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 11:17 AM  
**To:** Bentz, Nick <[Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** FW: AB110, SB578, SB579

**From:** Betsy Ryan <[redbetsy@gmail.com](mailto:redbetsy@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 10:54 AM  
**To:** Sen.Nass <[Sen.Nass@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Nass@legis.wisconsin.gov)>; Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>; Sen.Risser <[Sen.Risser@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Risser@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** AB110, SB578, SB579

Dear Senators,

I urge you to support the bills listed above which relate to the identification of and intervention for dyslexia. As the parent who searched unsuccessfully for years to find appropriate intervention for our middle daughter I know firsthand the frustration, anxiety and great difficulty in trying to identify her learning issue and to arrange treatment for my child who struggled in school from the beginning. Though as bright as her high achieving older and younger siblings, and enrolled in a great school with caring and creative teachers, our daughter could not keep up with her classmates in reading and language related tasks. My husband and I, though well educated in Social Work and Nursing respectively did not know anything about dyslexia, and even with master teachers

and a physician to consult within our family, not to mention easy access to our pediatrician, could not get any answer but to "wait", which is totally and tragically the wrong advice. What parent who truly cares will wait as children fall further and further behind before being able to arrange for help at school, where they spend most of their waking hours feeling totally inadequate; consequently, their self esteem takes a daily beating, and they can become anxious, unhappy and depressed

Parents need access to information about dyslexia and other reading disorders so they can secure appropriate assistance for their child as early as possible. Hopefully, armed with factual information, appropriate screening and timely intervention from dyslexia specialists, parents will not have to witness the untold suffering of hearing, as we did, their fifth grade child tell them that "if this is living, I don't want to do it anymore." You can imagine our distress at realizing the depths of our daughter's despair and suffering. Fortunately, we were able to get her tested and to connect with a program to address her specific learning issues, but it had taken years to know what could and should be done, and not for lack of trying on our part. Well-meaning, well-educated, very caring professionals had just not known the right advice to give us, and our child had suffered untold agonies of realizing she just did not measure up to her sisters or her peers.

(Like many other parents, my experience with our daughter's challenges led me to see what I could do to help. While serving as a reading tutor for 15 years at a local middle school, I encountered students with recalcitrant reading issues. I longed to be better prepared to work more effectively with them, and I completed the training and practicum to become a Certified Orton-Gillingham tutor, and was thrilled and encouraged to see my students make substantial progress in reading and related tasks as well as becoming dedicated, enthusiastic learners while gaining in self-confidence and independence.)

Unfortunately, this scenario is not uncommon; with up to 10% (and some would argue this number is greater) of the population affected by dyslexia, I as a Certified Orton-Gillingham tutor, with advanced training, and as a Certified Academic Language Practitioner, have tutored many children and adults whose academic experience has been fraught with failure, frustration, anxiety and depression because they can not read adequately. The crippling effects of poor self esteem and being labeled "stupid" due to living in a cycle of failure can unfortunately last a long time, if the student has had to wait years before receiving the correct intervention. A final note about obtaining help for the struggling reader who is dyslexic is that the presence of this reading problem in a parent or other family members should serve as an indicator that the child should be screened, as dyslexia runs in families. In fact, some parents, grandparents and others do not realize that they too have suffered from this issue until a child in the family has been diagnosed. As you can see, if parents do not know when, where and how to look, their child may not be accurately diagnosed in a timely way, and fall far behind before any intervention is suggested or given, which can result in a host of academic, emotional and social problems for a child who is already suffering.

Fortunately, we have hope. Scientifically based reading intervention programs such as Orton-Gillingham which are explicit, phonologically based, cumulative, and prescriptive are proven to be highly effective, but parents and teachers have to be aware that such programs exist and are efficacious. My own daughter, who copes with dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder was able to finally receive intervention and successfully graduated from high school and university, is an accomplished musician, leads a Montessori program, and is also a highly respected Certified Orton-Gillingham tutor and Certified Academic Language Practitioner. I have witnessed the powerful effect of appropriate, scientifically based reading intervention programs. I have celebrated with my students who had been in despair when we first met, but have grown to be independent, competent and successful as a result of our work together.

Senators, I urge you to pass this vital legislation. While we have been discussing the needs of connecting children affected by dyslexia as early as possible to break the cycle of failure and thus mitigate their potential suffering, please remember that intervention is possible at any age, and it is never too late. Finally, providing an

effective way for parents and teachers to access needed, timely intervention is life saving for students driven to despair for the lack of it.

Elizabeth H Ryan, B.A. Social Work  
Certified Orton-Gillingham tutor  
Certified Academic Language Practitioner

## Schmidt, Melissa

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**From:** Bentz, Nick  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 9:08 AM  
**To:** Hoey, Joseph; Janis, Nick; Keith, Rachel; Lambert, RJ; Lonergan, Sandy; Mikalsen, Mike; Sargent, Justin; Schmidt, Dan; Schmidt, Melissa; Schmudlach, Shelby; Sen.Bewley; Sen.Darling; Sen.Kooyenga; Sen.Larson; Sen.Nass; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Schachtner; Smith, Sarah; Tomten, Amanda; Youngman, Lori; Zantow, Jenna  
**Subject:** FW: SB 579

Committee members and staff,

Below is testimony being submitted to the committee prior to the hearing tomorrow for SB 579.

If you have questions, please feel free to reach out.

**Nick Bentz**  
State Sen. Dale Kooyenga  
5<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
310 South, State Capitol  
608-266-2512  
[Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wi.gov)

Follow Sen. Kooyenga on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).  
Visit Sen. Kooyenga's [website](#).

*NOTE: Emails sent to and from this account may be subject to open records requests and should not be considered private.*

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**From:** Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 9:03 AM  
**To:** Bentz, Nick <[Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Nick.Bentz@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** FW: SB 579

**From:** Mary Brod <[mary.brod1116@gmail.com](mailto:mary.brod1116@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 20, 2020 10:01 AM  
**To:** Sen.Kooyenga <[Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Kooyenga@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** SB 579

Senator Kooyenga,

Senate Bill 579 would require each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist. This statute is being proposed to replace the AB 50, requiring the state of Wisconsin to employ a dyslexia specialist.

The need for a dyslexia specialist at each CESA couldn't be greater. There are about 37,000 children with a primary disability of SLD in Wisconsin. (DPI website) An estimated 90% of students referred for special education are referred for reading difficulties. (Bender, 2007 Cited in Howard, Albe-Morgan, & Konrad (2017) Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education. Pearson)

Individuals that are highly trained having received advanced training and are knowledgeable on dyslexia and related conditions using interventions that are scientifically based is truly needed. As you may be aware, the current teacher preparation programs statewide, are inadequate. Teachers are not trained using evidenced based instructional practices as required in statute. Teacher preparation programs DO NOT provide teachers with the knowledge on identification and remediation of students with dyslexia or related conditions. Students with characteristics of dyslexia are not identified early on due to the teachers' lack of training. Students then fall further and further behind. The downward spiral continues for students until they are referred for special education. However once in special education, they most likely will continue the downward spiral, since the special education teachers have also not learned evidenced based instructional strategies.

CESA's are able to provide professional development to districts. A dyslexia specialist for each CESA will provide districts with a resource to answer questions on dyslexia and related conditions, model interventions and assessments, and consult with parents, teachers, and administrators. Other states have dyslexia specialists at various levels. Some are at the state level, some at the cooperative agency level and some are at the district level. In Wisconsin, the Learning Disability position for DPI has been vacant since last spring. Who do parents and teachers ask if they have questions about Learning Disabilities? Currently I work at the Children's Dyslexia Center in Madison (we also have centers in Milwaukee, Eau Claire, and Superior). I have met public school teachers getting training in structured literacy at our center who have asked "why did I never learn this when I was in college?"

I urge you to seriously consider the need for a dyslexia specialist for each CESA. A highly trained individual is needed and would be welcomed in every Wisconsin district.

Sincerely,  
Mary Brod, CALP

Middleton, WI

January 22, 2020

Re: SB578 assessments to evaluate reading readiness and SB579 requiring each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist

Dear Senators:

Thank you for holding this hearing today. I am here as a mom of two children with dyslexia and I support SB578 and SB579. We need to make sure that our state is providing our children with the best possible assessments and resources so that they can be productive citizens.

SB 578, the reading readiness bill, outlines key components necessary to assess for early literacy skills. My own children were in 4k-2<sup>nd</sup> grade before the reading screenings were made law in 2016 and our district failed to catch our daughters weak reading readiness skills. Current statute only requires assessment in phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. Expanding the screening to include rapid automatized naming and picture-naming vocabulary will help catch more children at risk for reading failure. Rapid naming assesses for processing speed or executive functioning issues. The ability to process information quickly is crucial for proficient readers. Many in Wisconsin rely solely on public education to assess for reading readiness and don't have the means to do outside testing. These changes would ensure a more comprehensive reading readiness assessment. The fiscal estimate from DPI states that last year \$1.7 million of the appropriated \$2,151,000 was claimed for assessments of reading readiness. As a tax payer, I would like to see my tax dollars put to good use and clearly there is money available to assess for reading readiness. More information on RAN.

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/evaluations/types-of-tests/rapid-automatized-naming-tests-what-you-need-to-know>

Furthermore, SB579 is particularly crucial to provide teachers a local resource for training and questions regarding dyslexia. It is my understanding that CESA were developed to assist school districts to fill gaps in training or staffing. There is currently a huge gap for training and information on dyslexia in Wisconsin. To my knowledge, DPI has given no guidance on dyslexia to schools, teachers or parents. Where do staff, teacher or parents turn when they have questions about dyslexia? If DPI won't provide services or guidance, then the schools can turn to their own CESA for guidance and training. Providing each CESA with a Dyslexia Specialist would evenly distribute dyslexia help throughout the state. We have 83 school districts in my CESA 2 region. I am asking for ONE dyslexia specialist for all of those school districts. Finally, DPI over estimated the cost of a Dyslexia Specialist. I think we would all be Dyslexia Specialists if they were getting paid \$95,000/year. Ziprecruiter lists Dyslexia Specialist average salary at \$54,000/year.

Thank you and please support SB578 and SB579.

Sincerely,

Katie Kasubaski, CALP

Oregon, WI 535754  
[kkasubaski@gmail.com](mailto:kkasubaski@gmail.com)

Dear Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges, Children and Families Members,

My name is Susan Garcia Franz and my daughter's name is Pacha. She is a senior at Neenah High School and was diagnosed with dyslexia 5 years ago in 7th grade. My daughter had a reading specialist and a math specialist for most of her elementary years and continued to move up in her STAR reading exams but she was not keeping pace with the materials that were being presented. Her teachers often wrote report cards that made statements like "if Pacha would just apply herself and stay focused on her work, she will do better". We heard these comments grade after grade. In 7th grade, the district had invited our daughter to join the project-based learning internal charter school within Shattuck Middle School but did not explain her specific learning disability or reason for moving her in this curriculum. They said I needed to decide quickly and later explained that they didn't have time to meet with all the parents before the children entered their project-based learning program. After multiple behavioral infractions and an expulsion and we were forced to homeschool and asked for a school assessment for our daughter as online schooling was not going to be viable for her. Our predicament may be unique in some aspects but probably sounds all too familiar for children in our state that don't receive the proper reading intervention or assessment and then are deemed "behavioral" problems by the schools. Our dyslexic children want to learn and have a lot to offer but need to be included in the curriculum and the process to identify how they learn and get them the proper tools to learn to read.

SB578 will go a long way to begin the process to better identify through assessments that would expand current reading screening laws for 4 year-olds through second grade. This bill addresses screening for phonological and phonemic awareness, rapid automatized naming, letter-word reading, and picture-naming vocabulary. Children with dyslexia struggle most in these areas and can be helped with better assessment and ultimately better curriculum to address their needs to become better readers.

SB579 will also help to give each CESA district a dyslexia specialist. Each CESA exists to help fill educational gaps and provide professional development and training that would help where current educators may have not received training in dyslexia and ways to teach reading to those with dyslexia. As a parent, I reached out to DPI to get some help for my dyslexic child and I was given several different staff people that each had small pieces of the overall puzzle and none of the information helped my daughter directly with her reading difficulty.

We have obligations as a state to make sure our children are getting appropriate public education. We can continue to improve and these bills will be another step to helping all students succeed especially those with dyslexia.

Sincerely,

Susan Garcia Franz

Neenah WI 54956

TO: Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children, and Families  
Senator Kooyenga – Chair  
Senator Nass – Vice Chair  
Senator Darling  
Senator Olsen  
Senator Bewley  
Senator Larson  
Senator Schachtner

Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you for your consideration. My name is Christi Hunter and I am a mother of five from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. And, since 2016, I am also a dyslexia interventionist and advocate. I am here today to express my support of the proposed bills SB 578 and SB 579, believing they can provide the needed identification and support to families of struggling readers throughout the State.

In 2012 we were told that my oldest son is dyslexic. Sam was 11 when we finally received the diagnosis, even though we were concerned with his struggles in reading, writing, and memorizing his math facts since he had begun schooling at age 5. At the time, I believed many of the myths you yourselves may have heard or are familiar with. I thought (and was told) that he would “outgrow” his struggles, that he “wasn’t trying hard enough,” or that dyslexia was seeing and writing letters and numbers backwards (which he didn’t really do), that dyslexia meant someone could not read at all (which he could—a little); or worse, dyslexics could not be taught to read, write, or spell no matter what approach was applied. I was wrong. SB 578, related to dyslexia screening, could be instrumental for children, like Sam, who struggle with the phonological components or automatic processing of language from an early age. Screening is a necessary first step in remediating reading struggle; and we know that the earlier we can intervene, the better our success.

Now...years later, I have seen firsthand the powerful effect correct information, early screening and intervention, reading science, and ongoing support have on students and their families...when they know and can afford to intervene. Many students, including my own son, become depressed and anxious about their abilities, living with what others deem as “failure” for years. Student confidence begins to soar as their reading improves when they are taught using a Structured Literacy approach. Unfortunately for many families this early identification and effective instruction comes at a steep cost – out of pocket evaluation and screening costs to determine reading deficits and many hours of out of pocket private tutoring after school hours, disrupting down time and family time. Dyslexia affects children from every culture, background, and socioeconomic status. Providing early screening, identification, and quality reading instruction and intervention to ALL STUDENTS (not just those who can afford extra help) is an equity issue that needs to be remedied.

There are over 850,000 students attending Wisconsin public schools and over 60,000 teachers serving them, according to the Department of Public Instruction. As we know, Dyslexia affects as many as 5-20% of the population. So, even if only 10% of those students struggle with reading, over 85,000 students throughout the State can benefit from early screening, intervention, and additional support. But, according to the latest results on the State Forward

assessment, we know that number is even higher. 60% of Wisconsin's 4<sup>th</sup> graders are not reading proficiently. We also know if a student is not reading proficiently by 4<sup>th</sup> grade, they often will not be able to read proficiently in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond. Right now, if a student is struggling with reading, or a parent suspects there is a problem, school districts do not know where to turn. The question begs to be answered: Who is better positioned to identify and intervene with a struggling reader when the timing is most critical (when the student is 5 or 6, rather than 10 or 11, or later? School districts, teachers, and families NEED the guidance, resource, and support that early screening and a Dyslexia Specialist can offer. It is critical that SB 578 and SB 579 be passed to provide school districts with better awareness of dyslexia and its signs, as well as provide ongoing resource and training to teachers that allow for more effective intervention for those who struggle with which is arguably the most essential skill one will ever achieve: Reading. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted on 1/22/2020

Christi Hunter, CALP

Certified Structured Literacy//Dyslexia Interventionist

Decoding Dyslexia-Wisconsin

1280 Promontory Dr.

Lake Geneva, WI 53147

262-812-6616



Decoding Dyslexia Wisconsin

Katie Kasubaski State Lead/Legislative Coordinator  
Kari Baumann Advocacy Coordinator  
Claudine Kavanagh Education Coordinator

January 22, 2020  
RE: SB578 and SB579  
Dear Senators:

*Decoding Dyslexia WI is a mostly parent-led volunteer grassroots organization of over 600 members. We work throughout the state to raise dyslexia awareness and empower families to support their family members with dyslexia, as dyslexia has no social or economic boundaries. Parents come to our organization looking for resources for struggling readers that they expected to find in the public school system. On any given day, we receive inquiries from members including signs of dyslexia, dyslexia testing and assessment procedures, Federal special needs law, and proper remediation programs for their children with dyslexia that these families were unable to have addressed in their schools.*

*Therefore, Decoding Dyslexia-Wisconsin supports SB578, the reading readiness bill. This bill will provide school districts with the essential information to identify students who lack the skills required for proficient and independent reading. This bill would assess for the (4) pre-reading and reading skills necessary for positive growth for ALL readers, and that are currently lacking in many districts.. According to the Wisconsin State Journal from October 31, 2019, Wisconsin has the widest racial achievement gap in the nation. Is this a headline we want to keep seeing in Wisconsin, or are we ready to begin actively screening children for poor reading skills? We know that when the needs of struggling readers are identified early, targeted interventions for those areas can begin before the achievement gap is too large to effectively close.*

*In addition, we support SB579 to have all CESAs hire a dyslexia specialist to assist the school districts they represent. Children with dyslexia, teachers, and families with dyslexic children need an empathetic resource to help school districts understand dyslexia and be able to effectively teach struggling readers. This legislation will effectively create a resource to school districts in every region of the state, which is currently noticeably absent. ALL children deserve to be taught in a way that can provide growth and understanding. Currently many districts are moving forward with ineffective teaching practices and not providing a Free and Appropriate Education due largely to myths of dyslexia and the lack of information on teaching practices that align with the science of reading and are known to not only help struggling readers, but support ALL readers.*

*We would like to thank each of you for your continued commitment to education and the future of our great state. We have printed out and brought a folder for each of you. These folders contain the letters from concerned parents, community members, and even school board members on the struggles of Dyslexia and how to help. Thank you for your time.*

Sincerely,  
Decoding Dyslexia-WI  
decodingdyslexiawi@gmail.com

January 21, 2020

Dear Senator Kooyenga and Honored Committee Members:

I am here today to give testimony in support to Senate Bill 578 and Senate Bill 579. I have a 10-year son who was going into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at a public school in Door County, he was only reading at a pre-kindergarten reading level despite the schools offered interventions. I feel the school was not supporting my son in the best capacity to meet his needs. Like the saying goes, "you can't help what you don't know." Dyslexia is a learning-based disability, and our educators, administrators and school boards need access to resources for our children. Senate Bill 579 will be a great step in providing that resource.

This school year 2019-2020; I made the decision to pull my son from the public education system and relocate him to Illinois for private tutoring. The program we are currently enrolled in is \$19,000 for an 8-week intervention. My son grew 2 grade levels in 8 weeks, I repeat 2 grade levels in 8 weeks. We then were blessed to receive a scholarship through the same program for another 19 weeks. We are currently traveling back and forth from Door County to North Illinois weekly. He is nearing the end of the scholarship term and will finish at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. He still needs continued support to continue the growth so we are now hoping the school district will work with us after they have seen the growth. Many people have asked me if the amount of money and time away from home was worth it. To that I say; what if you couldn't read a menu at a restaurant, drive a car because you can't read the road signs, play your favorite video game because it had instructions on screen that you couldn't read? What if you were afraid of sleepovers and playdates because your friends could do things you couldn't. What if you were so depressed because you felt stupid and useless, now what if that was your child, what would you give up to help? Yes, it is all worth it. I have seen firsthand what an effective reading instruction, that meets the needs of a struggling reader, can do. My son's mental health has improved along with his ability to read.

My son was diagnosed with dyslexia in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade from an outside source, but he had signs way before we received the medical diagnosis. Senate Bill 578 would help schools identify reading readiness in young readers, it can help identify students who do not have the four pre-reading and reading skills necessary for reading growth. Once identified the child could receive proper instruction early so the potential of failure is minimal to none.

With the current State of Wisconsin reading crisis, we need to move forward and help to identify, address, and intervene quickly and effectively to help all children meet their potential. Please put my son and many others in your thoughts when you discuss SB 578 and SB 579.

Thank you so much for your time,

Kari Baumann

Baileys Harbor Wi 54202

Gibraltar School District

Kari8292@gmail.com

January 18, 2020

Chairman Kooyenga and Committee Members

Dear Senators,

My name is Misty Powers and I live in Sturgeon Bay Wisconsin, located in Door County. I am a mother of 4 children. My youngest child, Brooke has been struggling academically since the 2nd grade. Brooke is now in the 5th grade. For years I've had conferences with the teachers to try and figure out why reading and writing are so difficult for my daughter. Never once was dyslexia mentioned to me by any staff from our school district. Starting in the beginning of this school year Brooke could not complete any of her homework. So when I started googling her symptoms, dyslexia came up. I found an organization that would do a screening for dyslexia. It was very pricey but worth trying to figure out why she was not achieving her full potential academically. Brooke's screening demonstrated signs of dyslexia in her reading and writing. Brooke has below average phonemic decoding skills in the 16th percentile (about 84% of her peers decoding at a higher level than she is). I feel if Brooke would of had this assessment 3 years ago the current gap wouldn't be as wide now. This why I fully support SB578.

Brooke is still not receiving the proper help in our school district. This is why SB579 would be so beneficial to my daughter's success in education. I support SB579!

We just started tutoring using a scientific evidenced based program (Barton Reading) which is costing my family over \$600.00 a month. I've had to get a 2nd job to help support the cost. Please move these bills forward to help bring our youngest learners to a higher level of achievement by screening for dyslexia soon enough and by adding a specialist to help guide our public schools in the appropriate direction.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Misty Powers

Sturgeon Bay, WI

[mistypowers4@yahoo.com](mailto:mistypowers4@yahoo.com)

**From:** Carol Poppy  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 8:48 AM  
**To:** decodingdyslexiawi@gmail.com  
**Subject:** dyslexia legislation

As the mother of a dyslexic student and the grandmother of 2 dyslexic students I know firsthand the struggles these students endure. My grandchildren have had the privilege of private tutoring. The direct phonics instruction they received during tutoring should be available to all dyslexic students(probably 1 in 5 students). This legislation is an important first step in providing appropriate tools to public school teachers to work with these students.

Sincerely,

Carol Poppy  
retired K-12 math chairman, Chilton High School, Chilton, Wisconsin  
Chilton, 53014

Dear Members of the Senate Committee,

First, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. It expresses the need for and importance of SB578 and SB579, and why I support them. Having a dyslexia specialist and a screening for dyslexia characteristics would have made a difference for our son. The dyslexia characteristics my son portrayed were undeniable. If we would have known 7 years ago, what we know now when our son's school career began, I'd be telling a different story. As a parent, you always fear the unknown. The fear of not knowing 'why' turned into a nightmare. This letter is our story simplified.

Our son is 12, in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and he reads at a 2nd-grade level. Two years ago, we received a diagnosis of severe dyslexia. Our son has struggled from the beginning of his school career. The road we've traveled has been tough. Rather than addressing the reason behind his struggles, we were often met with "he's a boy", "he'll get there", "he's not far enough behind", "there's no reason for concern at this time", "he's not trying hard enough", "boys are slower learners", or "your son is his own roadblock". Those phrases will forever haunt me. The impact those comments have played in our son's learning, confidence, social skills, and independence is upsetting.

If it was left up to our school system, our son's learning difference never would have been properly addressed. He would have continued to struggle, left behind, not able to keep his head above water. He was drowning in a sea of ignorance, our harsh reality of unrecognized dyslexia. He now sees a private tutor. Thankfully, by implementing proper instruction following the science of reading, he's making progress. We are finally headed in the right direction and seeing positive change.

Dyslexia was never mentioned by the district. My husband and I came across dyslexia by determination, persistence and a lot of self-education. We wanted to figure out 'why' our son wasn't able to learn or make adequate progress in school. When we mentioned our thoughts of dyslexia to the school (principal, classroom, school psychologist and Assistant Director of Special Ed for our district) that we were having our son evaluated, there was no support. All we received was a simple response of "We don't recognize dyslexia. If that is how you feel, then you can pursue it outside of school." A dyslexia specialist and screening could have prevented this.

A learning difference should not escalate into a disability. We can avoid that from happening by supporting both SB578 and SB579. The past, present, and future all deserve this. Let's change the way this story ends. I ask you to please support these bills.

A mother who holds on to hope for the future,

Nicole Van Ooyen

Appleton, WI 54914

January 21, 2020

Dear Senators on the Senate Universities and Colleges Committee,

Thank you for reading my testimony. I am the mother of an 11 year old boy who is now excelling with dyslexia. This was not the case 5 years ago. It was only through the volunteer generosity of a local organization that I was able to have him screened and then I was trained to tutor him myself at no cost. The organization Lake Superior Tutoring Center for Dyslexic Children and Adults lends out all the materials I need for tutoring for free.

We are an exception to the norm, I am able and willing to tutor my child, many families are not. Many families do not even realize that the difficulties their child faces stems from dyslexia.

When I asked my local school principal how they help and support kids with dyslexia I was told that there was not a large enough population that deemed them address it. It is believed that 1 in 5 people on the planet are dyslexic. That is 6 children in a classroom of 30.

The school could not offer me any information, support or ideas on how to help my child. I am grateful that fate interceded and that we found the Lake Superior Tutoring Center for Dyslexic Children and Adults. The school never told me they were a resource.

This all leads to why I strongly urge you to support:  
SB578 (assessments to evaluate reading readiness) and  
SB 579 (requiring each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist)

SB578 would expand Wisconsin's current reading screening laws to 4 yr olds through 2nd graders. This bill specifically requires screening for phonological and phonemic awareness, rapid automatized naming, letter-word reading, and picture-naming vocabulary. Screening of this happening at young ages would help identify dyslexia in children since most people who are dyslexic struggle in most of the areas that this bill requires screening of.

SB579 requires that the Board of Control of each CESA district in Wisconsin would employ a dyslexia specialist. CESA fills education gaps and provides professional development in their regions.

If both of these tools had been available years ago when I spoke with our local school they would have been more educated and aware of how to help us or where to direct us for support.

Thank you for your time and again please SUPPORT SB578 AND SB579!

Jennifer Sauter Sargent  
Mother to Lake Sauter Sargent 11 years old

Bayfield, WI 54814

February 20, 2020

Dear Senator Kooyenga and Honored Committee Members:

I write relative to 2019 Senate Bill 579 and the necessity for CESA provision of a dyslexia specialist to its member school districts. As a career educator, I write with hat-in-hand and the recognized humility that classroom teachers in Wisconsin public schools are ill-prepared through baccalaureate degree programs to teach children with dyslexia. Children with dyslexia, teachers, and families with dyslexic children need a new resource to help schools understand and effectively teach children with dyslexia. Your legislative direction can create a regional resource that, in the absence of direction, otherwise is not and will not be available.

As the Admissions Officer for the CESA 7 Educator Preparation Program, I evaluate baccalaureate transcripts of teachers. As a retired school superintendent seeking highly qualified teachers, I evaluated baccalaureate transcripts of teachers. Now, as a member of a school board responsible for ongoing teacher professional development, I evaluate baccalaureate and post-graduate education transcripts. In order to find educator preparation for teaching children with dyslexia, one must dive beyond course titles and into the syllabi for baccalaureate and post-graduate courses to find units of instruction that touch upon dyslexia. Educators know more myths and untruths about dyslexia than they know its factual basis and evidence-based strategies for teaching children with dyslexia. The upshot is that educators participating in child study teams and IEP writing are burdened with a lack of knowledge about dyslexia. And, classroom teachers teaching children with dyslexia, who have scant professional background on dyslexia, act upon plans that are faulted. None of this is by intention. It is the product of an absence of educational preparation, professional resources and professional development. Schools need the assistance of a dyslexia specialist. This provision will not require state funding, but will be paid for by CESA membership and subscription for the specialist's services.

Stephen Seyfer, PhD

Fish Creek, WI 54212

[sseyfer@gibraltar.k12.wi.us](mailto:sseyfer@gibraltar.k12.wi.us)

[sseyfer@cesa7.org](mailto:sseyfer@cesa7.org)

school board member - Gibraltar Area Schools

January 20, 2020

Dear Senator Kooyenga and Honored Committee Members:

I write relative to 2019 Senate Bill 578 and assessments to evaluate reading readiness.

The State of Wisconsin has been engaged in public education since 1848, yet we continue to be presented with challenges in the assurance that public education is preparing children ready for their worlds of college and career. Since February, 1848, Wisconsin has been committed to the education of a literate population, a citizenry that can read and write and engage in the commonwealth of community and state. Today, we cannot sign off on that commitment, because too many children at too early an age do not obtain required pre-reading skills resulting in graduating high school students whose reading competency is far below the education goals of our state. How children begin to read is a clear indicator of how they read in student- and adulthood. And, people who do not read well do not choose to read enough to be the informed citizenry Wisconsin wants and needs.

Senate Bill 578 provides school districts and independent charter operators with the mandate to use reading assessments that will identify students who have and do not have four (4) pre-reading and reading skills necessary for their advancement as readers. More importantly the mandate of skill-specific literacy assessment will identify and screen students who do not demonstrate these four skills into age- and developmentally appropriate reading instruction that will assist and cause them to learn the foundational reading skills we want for all children.

As a retired school superintendent and now school board member, I give testimony that such legislative direction is necessary and desired. Do not leave those responsible for our future literate population at the whim of the latest educational journal or convention speaker's opinion on pre-reading and reading instruction. Instead, be direct and attach phonological and phonemic awareness, rapid automatized naming, letter-word reading, and picture-naming vocabulary to a school district and charter school provider's mandated responsibility to fine screen each child's pre-reading skills. Schools educate children based upon what we know of their learning needs; we cannot educate them if we do not know what they need.

Thank you.

Stephen Seyfer, PhD

Fish Creek, WI 54212

sseyfer@gibraltar.k12.wi.us

Gibraltar Area Schools board member

**From:** Novak, Margo  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2020 3:54 PM  
**To:** decodingdyslexiawi@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Dyslexia legislation

Please vote for bills SB 578 and SB 579. I am a reading intervention teacher and we are not equipped to handle all of the needs. The early screener and resources would be an absolute gift!

Thanks,  
Margo Novak

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:** This electronic transmission (including any files attached hereto) may contain information that is legally privileged, confidential, and exempt from disclosure. The information is intended only for the use of the individual or entity named above. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient or any employee or agent responsible for delivering the message to the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any disclosure, dissemination, copying, distribution, or the taking of any action in reliance on the contents of this confidential information is strictly prohibited.

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My name is Rachel and I am the mother of 3 children. An 8 year old boy and twin 7 year old girls. My single child and my twins are 13 months apart. I am here today on behalf of my daughter Remiah and my story on the road to dyslexia begins when my twin daughters were about 4 years old. Because all 3 of my children were so close in age it was easy for me to compare how they were growing and developing language. I was, and still am, a very involved mother who loves to read to my children. We would sing nursery rhymes, I would search Pinterest to find fun learning activities, games to learn the alphabet, games and songs for counting, craft projects, felt story board stories, and so on. I loved doing these activities with my children.

I began to notice when we would do these learning games and activities that two of my children seemed to be successfully learning to count, learning their alphabet and remembering colors and shapes. However, my daughter Remiah seemed to be struggling. While she could take cut out numbers and physically put them in the correct order she could not verbally count to 10 in the right order. If I had a pile of magnetic letters in front of her and asked her to find me the "C" she could, but if I showed her the letter "C" and asked her what letter it was she could not come up with the letter verbally on her own. I also noticed when she would be telling me a story she would stop in the middle of it trying to find the right words she wanted to say. Remiah would then change the word she wanted to say to something similar or would perhaps act out the word she was looking for when she would struggle to come up with the word herself.

When I mentioned my concerns to her primary care physician about her struggles with word retrieval she told me "children learn at their own pace" and "don't compare Remiah to her twin sister and older brother". Her words were "she's perfect". And as her mother I agreed. She was perfect. She is funny, sweet, creative, thoughtful, and very bright. But in my gut I just felt something was not right and I was concerned. I asked that she be tested in speech and language before she started school. To put my mind at ease, the doctor put in the order and a few weeks later Remiah was tested by a speech pathologist. She passed her language part of the test by state standards, but they were all only by a point or two. The speech pathologist agreed with me that she noticed Remiah's struggles with word retrieval. Since she technically passed her tests, she recommended Remiah receive speech services. By receiving the speech services, they were able to add in language services despite her passing the language test by state standards. This allowed Remiah to enter 4K with an IEP in speech and language services.

4K was the start of Remiah's school career. She entered school in the same classroom as her twin sister. Her twin sister was a quick learner excelling above expectations in every area of her report cards. However, when I would discuss with the teacher how Remiah was doing I would be told what a hard worker she was, how great she was at perseverance, how well she got along with everyone, and what a great attitude she had. It would be followed up with, she is still struggling to count, know her alphabet, her colors and shapes. She could take felt letters and use them to spell out her name correctly but she could not verbally tell you what those letters were. Same was true with counting, shapes, colors, and so on. This continued the entire school year, despite extra help at school and help at home.

Kindergarten was much the same. By mid-kindergarten she was finally beginning to be able to verbally tell us her letters and numbers but at this point the other children are beginning to read. They were memorizing site words. While her teacher was concerned, she told me at this age children all develop at their own pace and that she would get it eventually. I was watching my smart, sweet, hardworking daughter fall further and further behind. I decided to take her to the neuropsychology at Children's Hospital in WI to be evaluated for a learning disability. I needed someone to tell me how to help my daughter before she fell so far behind it would be too difficult to get caught back up.

Children's Hospital did 4 days of testing with her. They found her to be of average to high average IQ. They diagnosed her with an expressive language disorder but did not diagnose her with any specific learning disorder. As I was physically leaving their office on that last day, the man who had been going over the results with me casually mentioned to me that if she's still struggling at the end of second grade come back and get tested for dyslexia. I immediately dismissed this suggestion because from what I knew about dyslexia, at that time, it's when you see letters move on the page or see letters backwards. That just was not my kid. I left in tears feeling frustrated and with no answers.

Fast forward to first grade. My daughter is now far enough behind in reading that she is receiving services with a reading intervention teacher. Despite the extra help she is making very little progress. I got called in for a special conference with her general education teacher, her speech pathologist, and her reading intervention teacher about their concerns. They once again tell me what a bright hard worker Remiah is, and how she has such a great attitude, and never gives up but is falling very far behind in school despite the efforts they can see Remiah is making. Her general education teacher suggests I have Remiah tested by the school for a learning disability. I put my request in and they begin testing Remiah. We then set up a meeting to go over the results and once again Remiah scores just high enough that she does not qualify for a learning disability. During this meeting the LD teacher who was there to tell me she does not qualify for her services suggested the possibility of dyslexia. She mentioned some of Remiah's struggles with word retrieval and phonological awareness makes her think of dyslexia. I left that meeting that afternoon and spent the night devouring any information I could find on dyslexia. As I was reading article after article I felt someone was writing specifically about my little girl.

We now enter the current year of second grade. The schools do not test for dyslexia so I had to go on the waiting list at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee to have my child tested. The wait time to get an appointment to be tested is over a year long.

Her first STAR testing for the year at school gave her a score of 1% on her reading test. Meaning 99% of the students in her grade at her school scored higher than she did. And yet, the school says she does not qualify for a learning disability. Intervention seems to be failing her. And we have over a year wait at Children's for any kind of possible diagnosis. During my learning of dyslexia I kept reading about the most successful way of teaching a child with dyslexia is by using the Orton Gillingham reading programs. My school did not offer these programs, so I began with a private tutor twice a week using the Barton reading program which is a branch off of the Orton Gillingham method.

I also received a tip from another mom that a psychologist in Appleton could get me in sooner than Children's for a fraction of the cost to evaluate for a diagnosis. I decided to try it and in January 2020, midway through second grade we finally received our diagnosis for dyslexia. Even with this diagnosis she does not receive any services at school. Her teachers have no training in dyslexia and I am responsible for any help my daughter needs when it comes her learning disability. As far as the school is concerned she officially has no learning disability since they do not look at outside medical diagnosis's.

I'm still very new on my journey of having a diagnosed child with dyslexia. But I have known for 3 ½ years that my daughter needed help. That she was incredibly bright, but learned very differently than my other two children. I repeatedly sought out help from doctors, speech pathologists, general education teachers, reading intervention teachers, and complete strangers. It took 3 ½ years of persistence on my part before finally getting a diagnosis. 3 ½ years of precious time wasted for my child. 3 ½ years of my child struggling and not getting the help she needed. She still struggles and if it was not for the money I put towards tutoring and the time I spend driving her to a different town to get services twice a week she would still not be getting any of the resources she needs. It is my job to educate her teachers on what dyslexia is and how to best help my dyslexic child to read.

A child can be diagnosed with dyslexia at 5.5 years old with 92% accuracy. Research shows that when measures like specialized tutoring are taken in grade 1 80% percent of kids who have difficulty reading can be remediated, meaning their accuracy when reading can be improved greatly. If steps are differed until grade 2, the success rate is 50%. And if remediation is deferred until grade 3, the success rate falls to about 20%. Early diagnosis and intervention is essential to success.

<https://www.todayparent.com/kids/school-age/dyslexia-in-children-screening/>

I often find myself wondering where my daughter would be academically right now if the proper measures had been taken when I first began to express concern about her word retrieval. If I would have found a teacher, or a speech pathologist, or a doctor who was educated on dyslexia and would have recognized the signs right away. If she would have been able to get the proper intervention at school when I first expressed concern instead of just waiting to see if she "gets it eventually" where would her reading levels be right now? I still worry about how the school is going to help her academically when there is no dyslexic reading program in her school. No teacher trained on what dyslexia is or how to help a child with dyslexia. I worry if I'm going to be able to continue the financial burden of paying for private tutors for her since she is not receiving the proper help at school. Statistically 20% of the population suffers from some form of dyslexia. That's 1 in every 5 children in the classroom. It is the most common of language based learning disabilities that cause reading, writing, and spelling difficulties. Most go undiagnosed and without proper help because our teachers are not educated on what it is, how to recognize it or how to teach someone with it. I'm asking on behalf of my child and on behalf 1 in every 5 children in the classroom to pass legislation SB579 relating to requiring each cooperative education service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist and to pass legislation SB578 relating to assessments to evaluate reading readiness. Let's strive to get all our children at grade level literacy skills in the state of WI.

Thank you so much for allowing me the time to tell you my daughter's story today.

January 18, 2020

Senate Universities & Colleges Committee Hearing  
Madison State Capitol  
2 East Main St.  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to you in support of SB 587 (assessments to evaluate reading readiness) and SB 579 (requiring each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist). I wish I could be at the meeting to talk with you personally today but was unable to attend. I am concerned about reading struggles of students in our state. I am a parent of 3 children and a licensed teacher in Wisconsin. My oldest child was a bright bubbly youngster who began to struggle academically in middle school. As a parent with a strong work ethic, I was concerned about her academic struggles and the anxiety I began to see in my child. I worked to help her with tutoring and academic needs, but she continued to struggle into high school. I was seeing her give up on her ability to learn and knew that this was not going to lead to the success in life I had hoped for her. I sought counseling and found out her junior year in high school that while she was in AP English she was dyslexic! As an elementary student I had seen some signs of concern when learning to read but she had overcome those initial issues and educators re-assured me all was well. After the diagnosis, I was able to learn about techniques that dyslexics need to learn to decode words. I hired a private tutor and Ashlynn attended tutoring outside of school hours to learn these skills. I saw not only increased ability to comprehend her reading but relief from the anxiety of feeling that she was incapable of learning. The years of frustration and anxiety have taken a toll on my daughter. The good news is that with her Orton Gillingham based tutoring to learn explicit decoding of words she is a successful college student at UW Oshkosh. She still struggles with self esteem and believing she can succeed.

Shortly after Ashlynn was diagnosed I learned more about dyslexia. It is genetic and runs in families. Nearly 1 in 5 students have some dyslexic tendencies and just like autism, it is a spectrum disorder where it can be mild (like my daughter who was a junior year in high school in advanced classes without knowing) or severe. I had my youngest tested as a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. He came back through private testing as dyslexic. Evan was eager to learn, and I had raised questions on his struggles for years. He had horrible hand writing and was very overwhelmed with learning to write sentences and read. I chose to wait to send him to kindergarten as an older child with a summer birthday, so he is old for his grade level. In spite of this, Evan did not meet expectations in Kindergarten and his teacher recommended summer school for him which he completed with no significant gains. In 1<sup>st</sup> grade, we did extra hand writing practice at home and worked with him often, but he was still frustrated and overwhelmed at times by school. By 2<sup>nd</sup> grade his frustration in writing and just scraping by as an on-target reader had me concerned. When I learned Evan was dyslexic I shared this information with his Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers. As they compared notes about Evan as a learner they found that many times they would need to find a different way to explain a concept to Evan and there would be a light bulb moment where it then made sense to him. Dyslexia is a processing disorder so there were elements of this learning difference they were not aware of. As a licensed educator myself, I know that teachers traditionally have not been trained to know the signs/characteristics of dyslexia nor given tools to help these students.

After the diagnosis, the school psychologist in Neenah agreed he needed Orton Gillingham based instruction to learn to decode words. I was informed that Evan was successful enough in school that he did not qualify for services at school to support his needs. He met benchmarks for expectations for his grade level. I located a private tutor, but she only had openings during the day. I was informed that I could not take him during lunch and part of Intervention time twice a week out of school for tutoring as he would be marked truant. I found another tutor and Evan spends 2 hours after school each week and during the summer to get his tutoring. I have been able to prevent much of the

Committee Members:

January 18, 2020

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anxiety and frustration my oldest child had by giving Evan the tools to be successful. Instead of being in the lowest at grade level reading group, Evan is now in one of the highest in his class and enjoys writing at school! At the start of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, he had gained 3 reading levels over the summer months due to his private tutoring! He continues on to middle school this fall and has almost completed private tutoring interventions.

Can students be identified who need explicit instruction techniques? Can we prevent frustration and anxiety for up to 20% of struggling readers in our schools? Can students who are given explicit decoding techniques retrain their brain to make more direct connections to decode words? The answer is yes. **If we can PREVENT struggles for students, we will see gains in students' academic and mental health as well. Nothings is more frustrating than not knowing why you can't comprehend what those around you can grasp.** As a substitute teacher in Neenah Public Schools, I have worked with many students who show dyslexia characteristics. Many families cannot afford private tutoring or do not prioritize the time outside of school to help their children. I have researched and found options to support my kids but wish other students did not have to go without the benefits of effective techniques to meet their academic needs.

I urge you to approve SB 578 and SB 579. Screening of children for phonological and phonemic awareness, rapid automatized naming, letter-word recognition, and picture-naming vocabulary can help PREVENT frustration for kids in their learning by providing the proper techniques for support right away. By providing a dyslexia specialist in each CESA school districts will have the resource to help fill educational gaps. If 1 in 5 youth can be identified early and schools are provided with proven techniques Wisconsin students can learn more effectively. Teachers need information to help our students meet their full potential. Please use this letter as official written testimony to be included in the public hearing.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Please help our students across Wisconsin. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Numrich

Private Math Tutor

Neenah Joint Schools Substitute Teacher/ Library Media Educational Assistant Part-Time

Licensed Math teacher with masters in Math Education

Neenah

WI 54956-5636

NeenahNumrichs@Numrichacademy.org

To whom it may concern,

I am sending my testimony to show a need for the services provided in the bills SB 578 and SB 579. Here is our experience thus far as parents of a 6yo who is likely dyslexic. My son is a first grader. He is a summer baby and in WI that means he is either started on time and young for his class or held back and made to be the oldest. As he is quite tall and perfectly mature for his age, we trusted the school to be able to provide education sufficient for all children who were meant to be in that class while knowing some would be a full year older, maybe more if they were also held back. What we found was we are still questioning ourselves in this second year of actual school-should we have him repeat a grade? Should we provide extra tutoring? What are the areas he is struggling in? We have asked the school for this information and as you will see, this is very limited.

The public school he is in is a "choice" school and my son has received Tier 2 interventions in reading since K. Overall, we have seen him "making progress" on all report cards or still at "limited progress" for most areas. Recently, we have noted a familial link regarding dyslexia and saw that our child was very likely dyslexic, or showing signs enough to prompt us to figure out how to test for it and assess his skills/needs. Things that I would figure out through a variety of resources as red flags were pushing us to move forward in assessing. I thought, as a parent, the school district screened kids for dyslexia in school, and was told this is not the case. I had asked his teacher and reading teacher, very explicitly, multiple times throughout K and 1<sup>st</sup> grade if they had any concern that he may be dyslexic. Had he been screened, the areas of concern might be apparent. The only answer I was given was "we encourage you to talk to your pediatrician." Had we had a dyslexia specialist in our region (4) I feel I would be much more supported in this journey. Our primary care provider did not know where or how to go about testing for dyslexia and eventually found that we have a learning and development center in our healthcare organization. To assess for and diagnose dyslexia, we need to pay \$1000 here to providers that should be covered by medical insurance, but are not. Tutoring here is also not covered (through the learning center) and a list of "testing professionals" led us to another private place in our area. Schoolhouse Tutoring can assess our son for \$1200 including behavior issues as well as learning disorders. They can write up an official diagnosis as well if we wish, to help support an IEP or legal rights in his future. This all stemmed from a cognitive skills assessment (\$150) we had done at a private place called Natural Learning Solutions, which showed huge gaps (1y 8m) for our kid in his word attack and phonics skills as well as auditory processing. In my short 3 months of understanding dyslexia and school support, I have come to know that a diagnosis by a medical professional does not translate directly into services provided by the school. The school also does not have to accept any diagnosis we obtain, thus, we may end up spending a lot of money on something that really means nothing to the school. Unless the school does their own assessment, they can't, for example, just provide my son Orton-Gillingham based instruction, even though it is the absolute best for dyslexic kiddos. In addition, he has many needs in learning that stem from not forming his baseline of literacy, likely due to dyslexia and the way in which his classes were taught. All through K the focus was on sight words and the ABC's. To me, a person needs to know the ABC's well before jumping to words, and the whole-language based approach is not

helpful for most kids as we see the decline of reading abilities in our WI kids. A dyslexia specialist in each district should help create the foundation for which students learn, knowing what happens when support is not given the right way in the very early years.

Now, as a parent, I trust the school can assist us in our needs here. I also know the earlier one is provided support in learning, the better the outcome. Technically, we are probably a year behind in support. I brought the screening results to the school and asked to talk to a school psychologist as well so we could start, what I thought, would be an assessment done by the school. When I brought my concerns to school, noting that the screening test we did, the signs we see, and the support he is getting at school coupled with his STAR assessment (which "all first grade teachers have chosen to disregard here at our school" – he landed in the severe intervention category), the discussion with teachers and school psychologist resoundingly reflected that "he'll probably grow out of it," "he just needs to focus," "he's not bad enough" and "we don't assess all kids or everyone would have a need." I repeatedly asked how they know where my son's needs are, and was met with blank, cold stares and basically told he won't qualify for special education, because he is doing "ok enough, though still at least 6 months behind his peers" so we don't assess unless he is failing and needs 2 tier 3, more intense, interventions, and he won't be provided those interventions because he is making some progress. Though as a parent I also know I am not comfortable waiting to see if he grows out of it, when an assessment via the school is 1, my right to request, and 2, able to help show that he actually is fine, or does indeed have needs. In my, small, non-educational focused nurse mind, if there is a problem, you find the root cause and treat all aspects, you don't just fix the broken bone of a dehydrated diabetic, you fix the dehydration, the low blood sugar, and the broken bone. I just do not understand how I can have this concern, that could affect EVERY aspect of my child's future, and have absolutely no resources in the school I am at. I am lucky to have family who works in the education field and can help support me on this journey, as well as resources noted below that I found on my own.

I was encouraged by the decoding dyslexia page to talk to the DPI rep for my area who was more than helpful and connected me to the district head of student services (over the special education dept) who again was more than happy to help me and made things very simple. He made it clear to the school psychologist that this is indeed an assessment they must provider and that I was requesting from the school a comprehensive evaluation of my child's needs as a learner. I thought things would go smoothly after asking for this assessment and having his help, but they did not. Nothing is easy as a parent who is educated on some, but not all of the needs our kiddos have. I can only imagine the struggles of kids who do not have a parent like me to question things. I was asked by the school psychologist, after I sent in a official referral request letter (which she at first, again, blew off) as guided by decoding dyslexia advocates, for exactly which areas I needed him to be tested in-OT, Speech, etc-what are the concerns that validate each therapy? I was cold-called in the end of a workday with two people on speakerphone trying to assess my request. Mind you, this was the point of the meeting I had set up the week prior, to talk about our needs and what I assumed would be a plan to move forward with assessment. I felt distraught, crazy, like I was making things up at this point because the red flags that seem so obvious to us, were not listened to by the staff

when I did share them, they also were not reflected with teachers until I mentioned them, and it became clear the teachers truly have ZERO knowledge of dyslexia! They couldn't answer me on whether they thought he was dyslexic or not because they do not know anything about it! WHAT! How do we have college educated teachers who know nothing about learning disorders? This proves a clear need for a dyslexia expert in each region, who is accessible by all parents and oversees the screening of all children for potential learning disabilities. All children should also be screened, with an actual screening tool (it is my understanding the "screening" does not have to be an actual test of any sort), and supported accordingly. My son is in the 10-25% of learners and this is apparently the hardest age to figure out whether they do grow out of issues or whether there are greater needs. Not once was an assessment discussed, progress made known to us as parents in the intervention he was getting, or ideas to improve his weak areas at home, because they do not know his weak areas! We struggle every, single, day to manage the 5 page reading assignment he has consisting of short, repetitive words a kid his age should know. We watch him excel in so many areas, only to come crashing down the second he needs to do something he is likely truly unable to do. Here we sit, a week into the official "request for assessment process" and will be waiting for likely a full 60 days to receive assessment results, coordinated by the person we have been instructed to trust and use as a resource and confidant for this entire situation, the school psychologist who has blown off every word thus far. I have come to understand she is struggling to understand this request as it is not typical that red flags are raised at home (while school does agree once I bring them up, but only if I do and also point out the connection to dyslexia). We are also "on the list" to be seen and evaluated for dyslexia through our learning and development center which is a year and a half wait.

Now, imagine my experience had the school noted in K that my child was amazingly creative but potentially dyslexic, that they screened him routinely in November, for example and it showed he was indeed lacking skills that are common in dyslexics like phonemic awareness. Then, they told us things we saw on the screener we just paid \$150 for. On top of that, they explained it all well and offered resources for us to use to help him at home and in our future. Instead, we fight, day by day, because the world of education is apparently an us (parents) against them (school) situation where we need to try to educate ourselves with resources only some are able to find.

Please, for the love of my sanity and the future of all children, pass SB 578 and SB 579 to implement screening for reading skills and deploy a regional dyslexia specialist in every region throughout Wisconsin. It seems much easier to do that than retrain all educators and change college curriculum to bring more awareness in this area!

Thank you,

Gabby Hansen

I thank you for your time in advance for reading about my "journey with Dyslexia".

It started 6 years ago when my daughter was entering kindergarten. As an avid reader myself, I have read to both my children since they were born. So, it was very surprising to me when my oldest entered into kindergarten, extremely behind all of her peers. The counselor at the school called to ask if Petra could be put into a program called Target Time. She was taken out of class every day to go read with another teacher. In parallel, I was in constant communication with the counselor to understand what we are working towards...what are the goals for Petra.

On paper the progress was slow, but at home it was a daily struggle to work with flash cards and small readers. My child was exhausted, and I look back at those moments and want to burst into tears at how much I was pushing something on her I now know was not remotely effective for her.

As the years progressed, they were filled with calls and progress meetings with the school. Regular communication with each of her teachers, each time I was told...wait until 2nd grade because then we can test her. Second grade comes and goes, she is tested and tagged with a "Learning Disability in Reading". She is now put into special education and it is a rinse and repeat of questions, new techniques, progress reports I don't understand because my daughter is not reading any better. Because of this, we are now looking at extra help needed in math...surprising because up until word problems are introduced, she performed at the top of her class in Math.

At the same time this is happening, I am also doing what I can to find an answer, figure out why my very intelligent daughter was struggling the way she was. Her eyes don't work...binocular separation...enter Vision therapy. It worked a little.

Because she never crawled, we were told to put her in occupation therapy to work on her cross-brain development, improving motor and cognitive skills. It worked a little.

Each year that passed made both my husband and I feel even more helpless to find a solid answer. Yes, we have explored Dyslexia, but were told the school cannot speak to this or test specifically for this. We were told, it was highly unlikely she was dyslexic. They didn't ask if a parent has dyslexia...and we didn't know to tell them because my husband has long suspected himself as dyslexic. Dyslexia is hereditary. Unfortunately, at the time, we could also not afford to spend \$5,000+ to get her formally tested.

Third and fourth grade are further rinse and repeat of the previous years, with very little progress and more light leaving my daughters eyes. She is more aware of her "differences" and now other students are noticing too. Bullies...tears...temper tantrums...and above all EXHAUSTION because she works 10x harder to keep up with her peers EVERY SINGLE DAY. This was further confirmed by each of her teachers telling us the same thing. In fourth grade we took a different approach, build her strengths...take time out to go skiing (something she loves), and have more fun! Spend no more than 20 minutes on homework a night. I see the light slow return to my daughters eyes. 😊

As she was preparing to enter 5th grade, I looked up one last resource and as luck would have it...we confirmed...PETRA IS DYSLEXIC, all the struggles can be summed up with 1 single word!

We are fortunate and can make the \$400/month payment in private tutoring work, and in the 5 months since we have started this...Petra is already reading at a 2nd grade level, up from the kindergarten level she read at entering 4th grade.

But...this letter is not about dyslexia education, but approving the necessary legislation to help parents like me navigate through these reading challenges. At the end of the day, if the teachers I was working with had only been educated in Dyslexia or other reading disabilities...we could have saved some of my daughter's self-esteem, decreased her tears and would be in a very different place right now.

I implore you to please, PLEASE approve Senate Bill 578 and 579.

It won't help me so much as the 1 in 4 other students struggling with Dylsexia.

Kind Regards,

Phoebe Sederstrom