

3/5/19

HF 1495

Madam/Mister Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kelly Fisher and I am currently the reading specialist at Excelsior Elementary in the Minnetonka School District. I wanted to be there for the hearing to testify, but I do not have any more days left that I can be absent from school.

I started my professional journey at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN, and later earned my Master of Arts in Education at Hamline University. In addition, I am a Wilson Certified Dyslexia Specialist, and most recently was named one of the 2019 candidates for Minnesota Teacher of the Year. I am also a dues-paying union member of Education Minnesota.

After graduating from Gustavus, I taught 1st grade for 10 years. While I felt successful teaching reading to those students who were typical learners, I knew that I didn't have enough knowledge for helping those who were struggling. A life-changing moment came when the parents of a student came back to me the following year and told me that their daughter had been diagnosed with dyslexia. I thought, "How could I have missed this?" That was just the beginning of me realizing that *I didn't know how much I didn't know.*

I decided that I needed to pursue learning more. But, even as a teacher who was actively trying, the path was difficult. I applied for staff development funds to go to Orton Gillingham training, which is one multi-sensory instructional strategy known to work well for dyslexic readers. I was only partially funded and paid the rest of the fee on my own and take all of my personal days to attend the training. For every MINUTE of the training, my jaw was dropping open thinking, "WHY doesn't EVERY teacher know this?" Back in my classroom, I did my best to integrate it into my teaching for ALL students, because ALL students benefit from this instruction and it is absolutely *critical* for some.

A couple of years later, as I started my new role as our school's reading specialist, I advocated for changes across our school and district for students with dyslexia. I was not alone in wanting this professional development. The amount of teacher interest blew me away. I got emails hourly from teachers districtwide who desperately wanted more training. Along with the help of some amazing parent advocates and administrative support, we were able to bring on board different levels of the Wilson

Reading program, providing students with a sequential, systematic and multi-sensory approach to learning reading that is scientifically researched and proven effective. Unlike my original Orton Gillingham endeavor, I was finally able to receive district-supported training, but I that is an anomaly compared to most districts across the state.

An estimated 15-20% of students have this learning difference. With those statistics, it is very probable that every classroom in the state of Minnesota has at least one student, likely more, with dyslexia. And with numbers like those, every teacher in our state should be equipped with professional development to be able to better-support those learners.

Students should have access at public schools to teachers who have had training to know what dyslexia is, understand how dyslexic students learn best, how to see early signs of it and get them connected to the type of instruction at school that best fits their needs as EARLY as possible. If teachers do not have state-wide professional development, students with dyslexia will continue to be missed and we will continue to have students falling short of our expectations with staggeringly low numbers of students meeting state benchmarks.

In an increasingly text-demanding society, literacy is a major gatekeeper to a good quality of life. This is about improving student test scores, but it is so much more. This is about educating our teachers who WANT more training to do everything they can for their students, and many don't yet know what they don't know. Giving them these dedicated professional development hours that *they already are required to do* could make a life-changing difference for this significant population of students in our state. We need to give students the very best that Minnesota education has to offer-- the education they deserve. Professional development for teachers would be a great step in making that happen. Thank you for your consideration of this incredibly important step to help Minnesota students succeed!