

HF1496

March 5, 2019

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.

As a reading specialist, I have seen the difference that early intervention can make. The younger students are matched to the appropriate intervention, the faster they will make progress and significantly reduce the chances they will need to receive special education services because their gap has grown too big. The cost of special education is astronomically more. The signs are able to be seen as early as 5 years old. By being proactive instead of reactive, we can match students from the beginning with the strategy that works best for the way they learn.

You might be wondering why early screening is necessary when we already have so many different reading assessments. What often happens is that many students have coping skills that help mask the issue until later. They might memorize the pattern of an early level book, use pictures to guess, or put enough pieces together to answer comprehension-based questions without solid reading skills. By having a way to screen students at this early age, we can see these deficits earlier and start appropriate instruction during the early grades.

I want to share a very brief story about one of my current kindergarteners. Based on some early signs, she was matched with a Wilson program called Foundations, which is designed for the youngest learners and is based on Orton Gillingham principles. This student started intervention the 6th week of her kindergarten year and now knows all of her letters, sounds, letter formation and is ready to start putting sounds together to form words. Her success this year with the right kind of intervention has prevented her from having a loss of self-esteem, kept her gap from peers minimal and set her up for success. We didn't wait for her to fail. We can do this for all learners across the state.

If we use an early screening tool and match students to appropriate interventions, this success story could be duplicated thousands of times over.

Dyslexia was first documented before 1900. It's long overdue to implement early screening in our schools to help all readers achieve success. Thank you for your excitement and support for readers in Minnesota.