

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2263

BY

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FUNDAMENTAL LEARNING CENTER, WICHITA, KS**

AN ACT concerning school districts; enacting the school district special needs scholarship program act.

Good afternoon Honorable Chairwoman Kelly and members of the House Ed. Committee,

***My name is Jeanine Phillips, Executive Director of Fundamental Learning Center (FLC), a 501(c)(3) educational not-for-profit organization, located in Wichita, Kansas. I co-founded this business because my son, was diagnosed with profound dyslexia in 1991, as a first-grader in the Wichita Public School system. My co-founder, Gretchen Andeel and I incorporated Fundamental Learning Center (FLC) in 2000. (*Bolded print from this line forward is my own personal testimony – the rest of the information, in non-bolded print are the facts.)** FLC's Board of Directors established a mission in 2001 to disseminate quality research validated programs and knowledge to educate and empower children, including children with dyslexia, educational professionals, concerned parents, and the broader community for the purpose of significantly improving individual literacy skills.

Since opening our doors in 2001, FLC has trained more than 800 individuals across the State of Kansas who work as literacy specialists, in their homes, local schools, or businesses. FLC's instructional courses are accredited by the International Multisensory Structured Language Council (IMSLEC), and endorsed by the International Dyslexia Association. Our literacy specialists may certify with the Academic Language Therapy Association by completing 700 hours of instruction with children, and completing 220 classroom contact hours at FLC over the course minimally of 24 months. We insist and hold our literacy specialists to the highest literacy instructional standards known, to improve the lives of the child with dyslexia.

Over the past 13 years, FLC has helped more than 35,000 children learn to read, write and spell with services provided by literacy specialists trained at our center, our workshops and serving children in the community in our lab program. Annually we raise approximately \$500,000 for the purpose of providing much needed literacy intervention services for families who cannot afford the expensive diagnostic services and literacy instruction necessary to improve the lives of their children who struggle in school as a result of low-literacy skills, including dyslexia.

We have a saying at our center, *With what we know about teaching children with dyslexia to read, give us the “struggling garden variety readers” and watch us go.

***For years we’ve graciously welcomed all educators to our center. For years we’ve known yet ignored the criticism, skepticism and attacks dealt our way, staying focused on the personal gains of each and every child we had the opportunity to teach.**

The Facts About Reading in Kansas:

1. NAEP Scores for Kansas are and have been shameful. FLC has been concerned and sharing our concerns for years.

Kansas NAEP Reading Scores for 4th graders –

The average score for students in Kansas in 2011 (224) was not significantly different from their average score in 2009 (224) and was not significantly different from their average score in 1998 (221). The percentage of students in Kansas who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 36 percent in 2011. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2009 (35 percent) and was not significantly different from that in 1998 (34 percent).

Disaggregated data of the scores reveal a large percentage of the children reading below the proficiency levels in Kansas are Black (82%) and Hispanic (81%).

2. Reading related scientific studies, many funded and garnered by the National Institutes of Child Health & Development (NICHD) have given all educators a “road map” to follow that effectively remediates all but the most seriously affected children with reading related disabilities. NCLB (2001) was built upon this evidence.

“Teaching language, reading and writing effectively, especially to students experiencing difficulty, requires considerable knowledge and skill. Regrettably, the licensing and professional development practices currently endorsed by many states, are insufficient for the preparation and support of teachers and specialists. Researchers are finding that those with reading specialist and special education licenses often know no more about research-based, effective practices than those with general education teaching licenses. The majority of practitioners at all levels have not been prepared in sufficient depth to prevent reading problems, to

recognize early signs of risk, or to teach students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities successfully.” (Louisa Moats, 2010)

***To summarize: FLC has been identifying and teaching children to read, write and spell, using evidence-based scientific knowledge garnered by NICHD’s studies of “what works” for children who struggle because they are dyslexic. We are specialists, and have specially trained others to teach children to read and offered our community a lab school so educators can observe “what works”.**

Sec. 2. The purpose of the school district special needs scholarship program act is to provide special needs students with the option to attend the public or nonpublic school of their choice.

***To date, Kansas and our Department of Education have failed to address the concerns of children with dyslexia which could have provided instructional and remedial methodologies solutions years ago for most all children who struggle to learn to read. “Kansas is one of only a handful of states that does not recognize dyslexia as a specific learning disability with a specific literacy intervention prescription. In short, this lack of appropriate classification denies these students the rights and benefits of a free and adequate education as guaranteed in the Kansas Constitution,” wrote Jason Watkins, Past Kansas State Representative for the 105th District.**

***Why? Because if they recognized dyslexia, they would need to fund literacy instruction for thousands of children (90,000 over the course of k-12 every year.) The Dept. of Ed. came up with a financial solution – call dyslexia a “medical condition” and refuse to recognize it in our teacher education classes, IEP and 504 assessments, and therefore refuse the scientific-based and proven methods of instruction.**

DYSLEXIA: THE FACTS

DYSLEXIA

Persons with dyslexia have a neurological disorder that causes their brains to process and interpret information differently (Dr. Gordon Sherman, former president of the International Dyslexia Association). This language-based processing disorder can hinder reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes even speaking.

Many medical dictionaries define Dyslexia as “an inability or unexpected difficulty in learning to read despite adequate IQ,

“When you think about it, that anyone can read at all is something of a miracle. Reading requires your brain to rejigger its visual and speech processors in such a way that artificial markings, such as the letters on a piece of paper, become linked to the sounds they represent”.
~Time Magazine

motivation and education". It is not a sign of poor intelligence or laziness or the result of impaired hearing or vision (*National Center for Learning Disabilities*). These facts come as a surprise to most of the general population who think it is reading backwards.

According to the National Institutes of Health, dyslexia is hereditary and affects one in five students (NIH, NINDS, 2011). This leads us to believe there are approximately 90,000 Kansas children and 12,547 Wichita children. "Dyslexia composes anywhere from 80 to 90 percent of persons with learning disabilities," says G. Reid Lyon, PhD, former chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Between 15% and 20% of American elementary school children have significant, continuing difficulties with learning to read, but only about 5% are referred for special help in reading (*Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine*). Dyslexia occurs in people of all races, and income levels.

Over the last decade, researchers have gotten better at spotting reading disabilities early — even as early as infancy (*Drs. Dennis and Victoria Molfese, The Brain's Role in Dyslexia*). Yet, most dyslexics are not identified until 3rd grade or later making them "much more difficult to remediate" (Sally Shaywitz, M.D., Yale Pediatrician and Neuroscientist). Approximately 75 percent of the students identified with reading problems in the third grade are still reading disabled in the ninth grade. According to Frank Wood, a professor of neurology at Wake Forest University, new research shows that children with un-remediated dyslexia are more likely than non-dyslexics to be retained in third grade or later, drop out of school, withdraw from friends and family or attempt suicide.

Early intervention is critical for problem readers. Those who fall behind in the first three years of their schooling may never become fluent readers. A strong body of research suggests they will continue to fall behind as they move further into their schooling.

SUCCEEDING WITH DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a lifelong challenge caused by inherited traits that affect how the brain works. The effects of dyslexia can only be alleviated, not cured. Most children with dyslexia who receive specific quality tutoring or a specialized education program can succeed in school (*Shirley Cramer, Head of Britain's Dyslexia Institute*).

Early identification and treatment is the key to helping dyslexics achieve in school and in life. "If children who are dyslexic get effective phonological training in kindergarten and first grade, they will have significantly fewer problems in learning to read at grade level than children who are not identified or helped until third grade" (*International Dyslexia Association, IDA*).

A groundbreaking study by researchers at Yale University School of Medicine revealed that when children are taught solid decoding skills (connecting sounds with letters) early on, and get prompt, intensive help in learning spelling, vocabulary and comprehension skills, they can indeed master necessary reading skills. In fact, researchers discovered — through comparing brain scans of struggling readers with those who received intense help — that the intervention helped "turn on" and stimulate the brain's reading systems.

Dr. Shaywitz reports that brain scans of dyslexic kindergartners and first-graders who have benefited from a year's worth of targeted instruction start to resemble those of children who have never had any difficulty reading. "Kids with reading problems need reading programs that are scientifically proven to work; they also need to have intensive intervention — not just 15 minutes or a half-hour a week. They need to practice often; the brain learns from practice. If we want a child to be a good baseball player, we say, 'Go out there and throw that ball.' Reading is not natural; speaking is. Reading needs to be taught, and it needs to be taught in ways that are proven to be effective".

A 2010 Roper Poll showed that four out five Americans associate dyslexia with mental retardation even though it has nothing to do with intelligence or mental illness of any kind.

***Fundamental Learning Center can help! Whether it is teacher training or directly helping individual children learn to read – FLC has the expertise – whether the child is a “garden variety struggling reader” or dyslexic – we can help..**

FUNDAMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

Currently our “Neighborhood Literacy Initiative” is focused on serving children ages 5 through 16 who have not received literacy remediation while in a traditional classroom. Furthermore most of our children’s parents or guardians cannot afford expensive tutoring programs as they qualify for free and or reduced lunch programs. Within our center, children receive daily, 60 minutes of small group, evidence-based, dynamic literacy remediation. Last year, 120 children served by this initiative saw incredible gain (**averaged over 60% gains**) in Total Word Reading Efficiency.

FLC highly qualified instructors have completed FLC’s Literacy Intervention Specialists Courses over 24 months of extensive training and mentored classroom teaching. This is a graduate level program, specifically designed to teach children with dyslexia and other reading disabilities to read, write and spell.

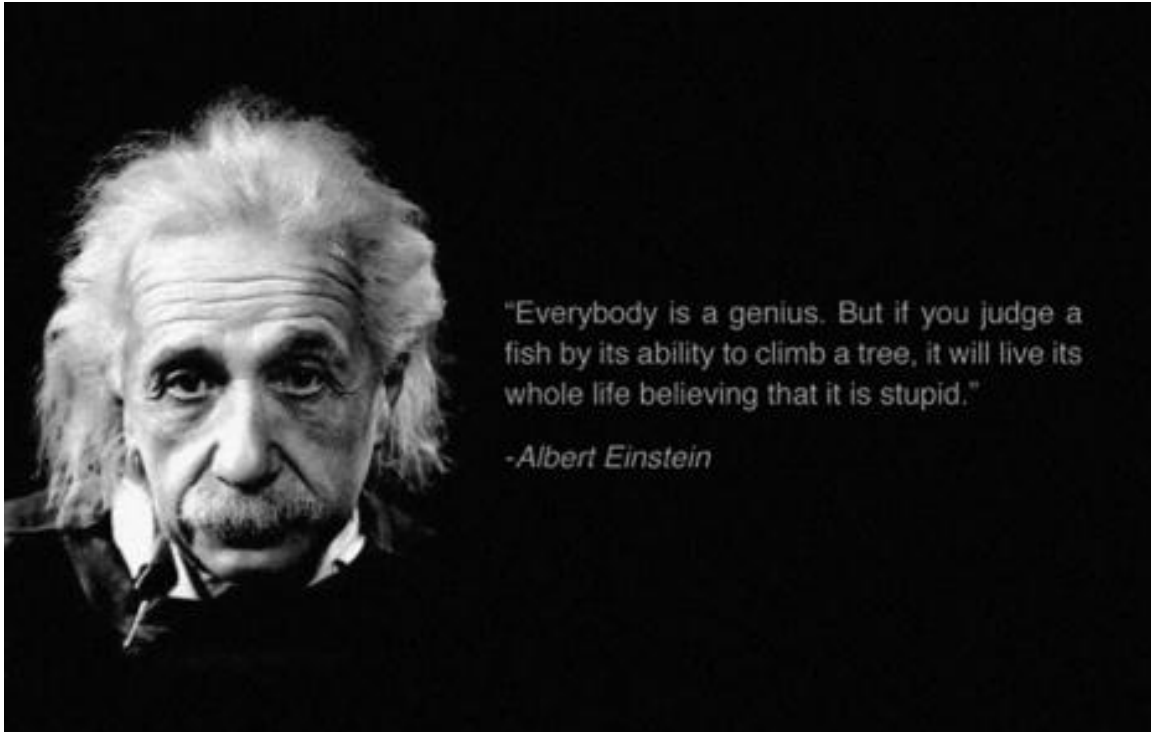
FLC is an accredited member with the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC). Accredited courses meet IMSLEC strict criteria and offer extensive coursework and supervised teaching experience leading to professional certification. IMSLEC’s accreditation process supports essential standards and criteria for academic and practicum work that are crucial to the successful quality training of dyslexia teachers, therapists and other specialists. FLC is 1 of only 22 IMSLEC accredited sites in the nation and the only one in Kansas.

Fundamental Learning Center was honored with the prestigious 2012 Top-Rated Award from GreatNonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews about nonprofit organizations. Less than 1% of eligible nonprofits across the USA won a place on the national 2012 Top Rated nonprofit lists. Only three Non profits in Kansas were recognized and FLC received the top honor of the state.

Kansas must implement the special needs scholarship program, school choice, charter schools, vouchers or something to save the children. We can no longer afford to waste time. This fund must be effective the fall semester of school year 2013-2014. This program must be private and separate of the public school

*“Dyslexics are over represented in the top ranks of people who are unusually insightful, who bring a new perspective, who think out of the box.”
~CNN Money*

system. Our children can no longer afford the time that is wasted in our schools, doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results, or the definition of “*insanity*” according to Albert Einstein.



Respectfully submitted,

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