

**LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 169
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

BY

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**KANSAS READS TO SUCCEED ACT: AN ACT CONCERNING
SCHOOLS; RELATING TO PUPILS AND READING PROFICIENCY.**

***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 these lines 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.

Over the past 13 years, FLC has helped more than 35,000 children learn to read, write and spell. 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.

Since opening our doors in 2001, FLC has trained more than 800 individuals across the State of Kansas who work as private literacy specialists, in their homes, local schools, or businesses. FLC's instructional courses are accredited by the International Multisensory Structured Language Council (IMSLEC), and our literacy specialists may certify with the Academic Language Therapy Association. We insist and hold our literacy specialists to the highest literacy instructional standards known, to improve the lives of the child with 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 shared 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 in the lowest performing groups in Kansas are black (44%) and Hispanic.

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. 3 (a) For School Year 2016-2017...prohibiting the Promotion of a Pupil From Grade Three to Grade Four

***Research is conclusive regarding retention at any level, for any reason; retention is a significant predictor of high school dropout rates.**

Winning the Battle and Losing the War: Examining the Relation Between Grade Retention and Dropping out of High School

*Shane R. Jimerson, Gabrielle F. Anderson, and Angela D. Whipple
Psychology in the Schools, Vol. 39(4), 2002*

A systematic review of seventeen studies examining high school dropouts rates prior to graduation demonstrates that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropout status.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (1992) evaluated at-risk students within the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 data set.

Amidst an era in which education reform is highly influenced by politicians rather than educational researchers, the implications of the cumulative research...suggests caution in utilizing retention as an academic intervention for low-achieving students. However, it appears that the general public outside of academic circles is not aware of the potential long-term repercussions of grade retention.

Furthermore the child's perspective on retention is largely absent in the research literature. Retained elementary students interviewed by Byrnes & Yamamoto (1986) reported a perception of retention as a punishment. Not surprisingly, children described their teachers as using retention as a threat to students. Ironically, several of these children were identified as learning disabled during the repeated year.

“Barro and Kolstad (1987) provided a report on who drops out of high school that discusses many important contemporaneous and early predictors. The results indicate that early grade retention increased the risk of dropping out by 30% to 50%.”

“Fernandez, Paulsen, and Hirano-Nakanishi (1989) in their report suggest ...students who have been grade delayed tend to drop out because of the age disjuncture between themselves and their peers

and the consequent lack of fit between the respondent's peer group and classmates." They conclude: "Regardless of race and ethnicity, scholastic performance and grade delay affect students' decisions to remain in school or drop out".

"Roderick (1994) demonstrated that subjects retained in grades kindergarten through eighth grade in an urban school system were twice as likely to drop out compared with non-retained peers. Moreover, this study ...found that 68% of students retained once between kindergarten and eighth grade dropped out compared with a 27% dropout rate among students who had never been retained."

"Interestingly, there was a 58% dropout rate for the youths who were over age for grade (but not retained) due to starting school late or entering the school system as immigrants."

***My husband and I retained our son, Cooper, when he was in second grade (1993) because he wasn't reading where he should have been as a second grader. He was NOT retained because he was immature, younger than his peers, short, or lacking cognitive ability. Cooper had been evaluated as "profoundly dyslexic" in 1991 but didn't qualify for special education in Kansas, nor was dyslexia recognized as a specific learning disability at this time. My husband and I were told, "Cooper needs a gift of time." We bought into it and told Cooper the same. He of course didn't argue with us. This decision then raised its ugly head when Cooper was in seventh grade and lead to depression & peer difficulties that took us to a child psychiatrist who shocked me by saying "retention is never a gift of time." He gave me the above-cited research in 1998.**

This said, I'm a proponent of SB 169. Given a retention extension until 2016-2017 and the exceptions and provisions identified in Sec. 3 (a) thru (f), it is my opinion that educators, parents, guardians, the State Dept. of Ed., Board of Ed., universities, literacy specialists and special interest groups will receive a "wake up call" and hopefully many children will be rescued from the embarrassment and shame that retention creates for them before 2016/17.

Furthermore, it is my opinion that 3 years will give critical time for further review of the data provided by other states (Florida, Oklahoma, Ohio and 11 others) before Kansas implements a law requiring children be retained in third grade.

I've attached a 2012 Florida report (June 5, 2012) that provides such a review of the retention data. Children retained in the first year Florida implemented 3rd grade retention are the 10th graders listed on the report. In 2012, 50% of the first retention group (2002/03), as 10th graders, were told

they couldn't advance to the next grade level. They couldn't pass the State Standards Test.

Sec. 3 (a)(2) – a pupil who is an exceptional child receiving special education services and whose individual education plan indicates participation by the pupil in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate;

***SB 44 must be passed or many children who are not included in special education, due to the fact that Kansas has not recognized children with dyslexia as an educational condition, will be caught in the “retention net” in the 2016/17 school year. The only protection these talented, yet dyslexic children have is SB 44. It must be passed.**

***Why?**

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, 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

“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

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.

***To date, Kansas and our Department of Education have failed to address the concern of Dyslexia. "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.**

SUCCESSING 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 of five Americans associate dyslexia with mental retardation even though it has nothing to do with intelligence or mental illness of any kind.

Section 4. (a) thru (f)

***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 3 years 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.

***During Dyslexia Month, October 2012, Fundamental Learning Center hosted the conference “Face It. Dyslexia and Literacy” to educate and inspire change because children with dyslexia are unidentified in the state of Kansas. Attendance was remarkable.**

Parents and teachers are now encouraging Kansans to “Face It” with the forming of the Decoding Dyslexia-KS group made up of hundreds of parents of children who are dyslexic. DDKS is a grassroots movement driven by Kansas’ families concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia within our public schools. They aim to raise dyslexia awareness, empower families to support their children and inform policy-makers on best practices to identify, remediate and support students with dyslexia in our schools.

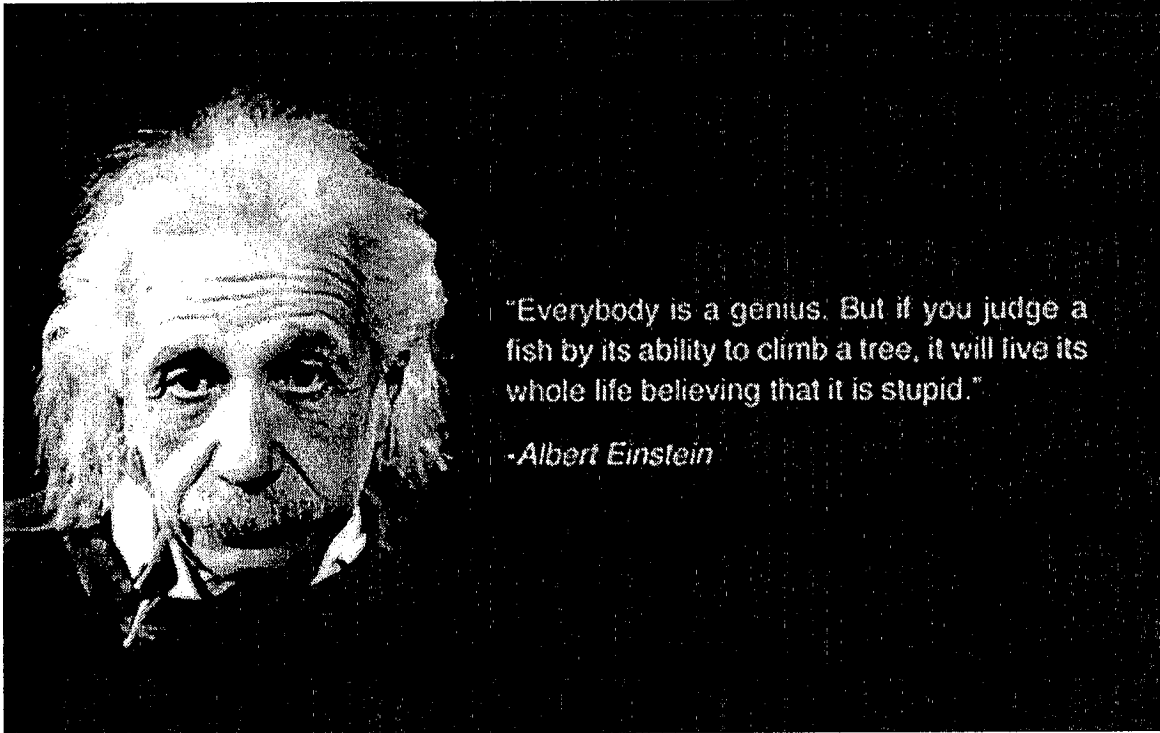
Fundamental Learning Center was honored with the prestigious 2012 Top-Rated Award from GreatNonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews about nonprofit organizations. Less than 1% of eligible nonprofits across the USA won a place on the national 2012 Top Rated nonprofit lists. Only three Non profits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

Section 5. (a) thru (d)

***Kansas can implement the Kansas Reads to Succeed incentive program successfully. It’s critical that we do so. Our children are our future.**

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“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.”
~CNNMoney



Respectfully submitted,

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