

To: Co-Chairs Representative Thiesfeldt and Representative Kitchens
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin, Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist
Re: Testimony for AB 110
Date: April 18, 2019

Recommendation: Information Only

Disability Rights Wisconsin is Wisconsin's Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities. A major focus of our work both individually and systemically across the state focuses on special education and the rights of students with disabilities. DRW aids families who are struggling to find ways to help their students who are failing to learn to read and difficulty receiving help from their school systems that don't understand the facts about dyslexia and its identification and remediation.

The Joint Legislative study committee heard from professionals about the effects of poor or low reading progress. In 2017, 65% of Wisconsin students were below proficient in reading at the 4th grade level. This ranks Wisconsin 34th nationally in reading progress for students. Studies also show that students who have limited reading skills are at higher risk of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health issues, school failure, and poor health outcomes throughout life. The risk for possible delinquency and incarceration also increases when reading levels are poor.

The bill provides for the following important provisions which would increase parent education and engagement:

1. Creation of a guide book for parents, guardians, teachers, and administrators regarding dyslexia and related conditions.
2. Establishing an advisory committee with diverse membership recommended from the International Dyslexia Association and the Wisconsin State Reading Associations, which could include parents.

The creation of a guide would require important features that would help parents navigate the complicated process related to a dyslexia diagnosis. The guide would include a description of the screening process, a description of intervention and instruction strategies to improve academic performance, and a description of resources and services related to dyslexia and related conditions.

Recently, DRW represented a 5th grader who has struggled for years with reading and spelling. The student has received interventions on and off from the school district. Last year, the family did seek out an outside evaluation due to concerns with lack of progress. The student received a diagnosis of dyslexia for their child. It took the parents several years to find the resources and information they needed to help their child. If a guide would have been available to the parent, it is possible early intervention would have taken place. This has taken a toll on the student to the point of developing anxiety and depression due to the lack of progress.

If schools do not appropriately identify students with reading deficits, especially at an early age, they will not be able to provide targeted, research-based instruction that remediates their disability. Studies by the National Institute of Children's Health and Human Development (NICHD) have repeatedly shown that early intervention is the key to positive outcomes by middle school and beyond. A failure to make early identification and provide appropriate research-based interventions is a failure to the student because it will have lifelong effects, impacting school success and life/career choices.

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