

January 22, 2020

Senators,

Senate Bill 579 would require each cooperative educational service agency to employ a dyslexia specialist. This statute is being proposed to replace the AB 50, requiring the state of Wisconsin to employ a dyslexia specialist.

The need for a dyslexia specialist at each CESA couldn't be greater. There are about 37,000 children with a primary **disability** of SLD in **Wisconsin**. (DPI website) An estimated 90% of students referred for special education are referred for reading difficulties. (Bender, 2007 Cited in Howard, Albe-Morgan, & Konrad (2017) Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education. Pearson)

Individuals that are highly trained having received advanced training and are knowledgeable on dyslexia and related conditions using interventions that are scientifically based is truly needed. As you may be aware, the current teacher preparation programs statewide, are inadequate. Teachers are not trained using evidenced based instructional practices as required in statute. Teacher preparation programs DO NOT provide teachers with the knowledge on identification and remediation of students with dyslexia or related conditions. Students with characteristics of dyslexia are not identified early on due to the teachers' lack of training. Students then fall further and further behind. The downward spiral continues for students until they are referred for special education. However once in special education, they most likely will continue the downward spiral, since the special education teachers have also not learned evidenced based instructional strategies. I speak from personal experience as I received my reading specialist certificate four years ago. None of my training was in evidenced based (brain based) instructional approaches. The term dyslexia was mentioned once in two years of classes.

CESA's are able to provide professional development to districts. A dyslexia specialist for each CESA will provide districts with a resource to answer questions on dyslexia and related conditions, model interventions and assessments, and consult with parents, teachers, and administrators. Other states have dyslexia specialists at various levels. Some are at the state level, some at the cooperative agency level and some are at the district level. In Wisconsin, the Learning Disability position for DPI has been vacant since last spring. Who do parents and teachers ask if they have questions about Learning Disabilities?

I urge you to seriously consider the need for a dyslexia specialist for each CESA. A highly trained individual is needed and would be welcomed in every Wisconsin district.

Donna Hejtmanek
International Dyslexia Association Legislative Chair
dhejtmanek@yahoo.com
715-525-2259on