



## Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

*DD-MN is a grassroots movement driven by MN families, educators, & physicians concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia within our public schools. DD has chapters in 50 states. We aim to raise dyslexia awareness, empower families, inform policy-makers on best-practices and support students with dyslexia.*

- **43.2% of MN 3rd graders are not considered proficient per the MCA test in 2017.** (MDE, Minnesota Report Card - <http://rc.education.state.mn.us>)
- **In a Jan. 2016 statewide released teacher survey in collaboration with Education MN:**
  - 96% of teachers said they had experience working with struggling readers who seemed unresponsive to intervention;
  - 94% of teachers were interested in attending an inservice training about dyslexia; and
  - 75% of teachers said they have not received training for teaching students with dyslexia.
- **Approximately 135,000 school age children have dyslexia in MN.** (MN Dept of Revenue Analysis)
- **NICHD longitudinal studies indicate that of children who are reading disabled in the third grade, 74% remain disabled at the end of high school.** (NICHD - Reading Program in Reading Development, 1999)
- **Throughout the United States, there are college level programs accredited by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). The state of Ohio has the highest concentration with five University accredited programs. The State of Minnesota has *no* colleges or universities that have received this IDA accreditation.**

**2018 Decoding Dyslexia is advocating to implement:**

### **SF2455 / HF3013**

- **During the 5 year recertification, teachers need 2 clock hours of dyslexia specific training as part of the reading preparation training.**
- **Reading preparation training shall enable teachers to:**
  - **Understand and recognize characteristics of dyslexia; and**
  - **Identify and access resources that use evidenced based best practices for dyslexia.**

Website: [www.decodingdyslexiamn.org/](http://www.decodingdyslexiamn.org/)  
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## Teacher Survey Responses

- In a February 2018 statewide released teacher survey:
  - 97% of teachers with a Bachelor's degree and 91.7% of teachers with a Master's or Doctorate degree said they were **NOT** adequately prepared to teach a student with dyslexia how to read.
  - 92.1% of teachers said they could **NOT** competently define dyslexia or its symptoms after completing their Bachelor's degree; and 51.2% said it was never mentioned.
  - 88% of teachers with a Master's or Doctorate degree said they could **NOT** competently define dyslexia or its symptoms after completing their degree program; and 52.8% said it was never mentioned.
  - Of the teachers surveyed, 69.5% received an education related Master's or or Doctorate degree from a Minnesota college or university.
  - 48.8% of teachers surveyed said they they had spent their own time and money on education to train themselves to teach their dyslexic students.
  
- Here is what teachers had to say about their dyslexia training:
  - "We were told that Dyslexia does not exist—that is not why we see students reverse their b/d's."
  - "Dyslexia was noted as a medical model not educational model—we did not address it nor were we trained to teach students with this disability"
  - "I feel that I had no preparation or information about dyslexia or how to identify and teach dyslexic students."
  - "A "balanced literacy" approach was promoted during my coursework. This approach is ineffective. It is not explicit or systematic enough. I have a child with dyslexia and have done extensive independent research. All students, including those with dyslexia, learn best from a structured literacy approach."
  - 'I was not prepared at all! Very sad for all the students in my first few years of teaching that had dyslexia in my class.'
  - "Winona State did a wonderful job preparing me for my teaching experience. The one thing it lacked was how to address dyslexia and meet students needs. It's one of my biggest challenges. A lot of people I go to in our school are not that knowledgeable in it as well."
  - "I feel this is an area where I am unable to help my students. When I reach out for assistance from my special education staff, they state that it is not really a problem they do anything with. My question is who is knowledgeable to help these students? Where do we reach out for help if no one seems to know."
  - "When the laws first came out about dyslexia I started mentioning it to my principal and superintendent. My administration said we would not teach this type of student any differently then we do now. They also would not acknowledge dyslexia as a possibility and were not willing to discuss the possibility with parents when they brought it up. This is extremely frustrating for me and I think the administration needs to be trained and informed as well because they do not listen to teachers."



## Teacher Support for SF2455/HF3013

I have been a public school teacher in Minnesota for 35 years. For the past two years, I have been working as a reading specialist in my building. I'm thrilled to report, with the correct instructional match, to date I've been able to teach all of my students to read. Unfortunately, the majority of my colleagues have not been trained to deliver a language-based, sequential, multi-sensory, cumulative approach to the alphabetic principle with their students. In fact, many of them know very little about dyslexia, which impacts approximately 20% of all of our students. Some don't even think it exists! This situation needs to be addressed with urgency. For too long the children have been left to flounder and believe the fault is their own! Please support any measure which will improve this situation. All of our kids deserve to be taught by teachers trained to deliver appropriate instruction. ~ Paula P.

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I am an Early Childhood Special Education teacher that works with children ranging from birth to 7 years of age. I have had very little college preparation for how to help children learn how to read let alone what to do when children struggle with learning to read. Over the past 20 years of teaching, I have used my own resources for professional development to learn strategies like Orton Gillingham, an instructional approach intended primarily for use with individuals who have difficulty with reading, spelling, and writing of the sort associated with dyslexia. What I find heartbreaking is how many children I have worked with that didn't benefit from the expertise and knowledge that I now have. I was drawn to the teaching profession to help children and families. I relied on my college preparation to give me the tools I needed to do my job. I trusted that our schools would continue to support my professional development to meet the needs of our students. Now that I am aware of the lack of teacher preparation and support from the state I am passionate about telling my story as an example of how we are failing our students and families that struggle with learning to read and the related difficulties. What students learn is only as good as what is taught to them. Please pass SF2455 and give teachers the tools they need to do their jobs. We are relying on you! ~ Michele K.

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I have been an educator since 1984. I have a degree in Elementary Education, an endorsement in middle school language arts and science, along with a master's degree in Middle School Curriculum and Instruction. I work full time in the Alexandria school district as a reading teacher for middle school students. I am also owner of an academic coaching service in my community where we tutor local students in various academic subjects, especially Dyslexic learners. As a teacher, I was never taught the warning signs of Dyslexia, how to screen for Dyslexia or how to teach a Dyslexic learner. I only became aware of Dyslexia through my own research to find a way to help a student I was tutoring. Through the process of my research, I learned my student was Dyslexic and that he needed an Orton-Gillingham reading intervention. I was so upset by this news because I had no clue about this style of learning. I had not been trained in this method of teaching. I am a professional who did not have the right training. I am highly educated. Because of my commitment to teaching, I invested my own income to get trained in what the warning signs were, how to screen for it, and how to teach the Orton-Gillingham intervention to my Dyslexic learner. One in five do every single day in a classroom. I work with them daily. The right intervention and support makes a huge difference in the lives of these learners--who can learn to read successfully. My colleagues are dedicated to helping these learners and all others because we care about our students and their future success. My district cares about these kids, and we do what we can to help them learn. The challenge we face is the lack of training of what Dyslexia is, how to screen for it, and training in how to help a Dyslexic learner learn to read and learn in all classrooms. We need to have SF2455 passed, and we need more funds available to our schools, so our districts can educate their staff in the facts about Dyslexia. Please support the kids with Dyslexia and the amazing teachers in our state who dedicate their lives educating the future leaders of our state. ~ Susan Leedahl Flynn

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As an early childhood educator, I saw early on too many children in before/after school programs struggling to read (asking us to

do 'more of the same' – read more, encourage them to sound it out, etc.). As an Early Childhood teacher (B-3), I didn't feel competent to recognize and understand the unique and demanding needs of striving readers. I decided to pursue a graduate degree with an emphasis in reading instruction and obtained my K-12 Reading Specialist license. Fast forward a few years and I am blindsided by my own youngest child struggling to read. I still wasn't equipped to intervene and differentiate to meet her needs. After three years of struggling (at third grade), I happened upon learning about dyslexia by chance and by my own parental ambition. It still has not been a smooth road once I learned about this reading difference for my daughter. The greatest obstacle we have encountered has been in educating teacher's to understand and be equipped to support diverse reader needs. We have paid for private evaluation, we have purchased our own reading/spelling curriculum, we have just this year decided to pull our daughter from the public schools (6<sup>th</sup> grade). Reading preparation for teachers under PELSB guidelines to ensure all teachers can define and recognize characteristics of dyslexia as well as differentiate using evidence-based, multisensory, systematic, and explicit strategies proven to meet the needs of ALL learners (not just dyslexic) is essential. We need to empower teachers and teacher candidates with the skills beyond hunting/pecking and guessing which strategies to pull from the district's adopted 'balanced literacy' or basal program. ~ Rachel Daley

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As an educator in the classroom for 15 years, and now an administrator I have worked with struggling readers and know just how important the concept and ability of "reading to learn" is. When my daughter was a struggling Kindergarten and 1st grader I knew we had to take steps to identify the problem. We paid to get her diagnosed as Dyslexic with phonological processing deficiencies, and worked very hard with our school district (ISD #15 St. Francis) Director of SPED and school psychologist to get her appropriately qualified for services. Because I understood the system I was able to navigate this, most parents aren't able and their child may not get services before the critical age of 10. More importantly this student may think they are simply "dumb" and lose interest and motivation to learn.

I gave a presentation to our elementary teachers as a part of my administrative licensure. I spoke with a teacher who heard it about how just understanding dyslexia allowed them to see struggling students differently. Teachers need an awareness, they need proper training, and they need to know how to intervene in effective ways to provide kids the services they need. Because of well intentioned professionals and an understanding of dyslexia, my daughter is making strides towards being a grade level reader. We don't need to qualify every dyslexic child for an IEP if we have the appropriate interventions in place, and when we get there we will see a rise in test scores. Please support this legislation, reading is a human right. ~ Ryan Hauge, Sartell-St. Stephen Activities Director

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After teaching since 1981 in Minnesota, I just this morning put in my letter of retirement. I am concerned with the lack of training teachers in our state with concern to dyslexia, what it is, how to spot it, and how to remediate it. Students continued to be passed over without appropriate intervention. Not only do teachers need education, administration needs education not only to the basics, but also to the law. In addition, schools need funding for this. This requires additional monies for the training and materials that students need. ~ Heidi Anderson

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I am a first grade teacher in Ogilvie Independent School District #333. I am writing to show my support of S.F. 2455. I am a first grade teacher, but also a mother of a 13 year old son with severe Dyslexia. After learning of his diagnosis, he spent the next 7 years receiving private tutoring as it was not provided through our school district. This was a financial burden to our family so he could receive specialized Orton-Gillingham instruction. As a teacher I see students every year in my classroom that show signs of Dyslexia and it saddens me deeply that as a professional educator I can not give my students the specialized instruction that they too may need. Please add teacher training to include Dyslexia Instructional strategies. Our Minnesota teachers, families and children are waiting for you to do the right thing. ~ Kathy A

Jerry Von Korff  
St. Cloud School Board

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House Education Innovation Policy  
Hon. Sondra Erickson, Chair [rep.sondra.erickson@house.mn](mailto:rep.sondra.erickson@house.mn)  
Cc: Tim Strom [Tim.Strom@house.mn](mailto:Tim.Strom@house.mn)  
Re: House File #3013

**Written Testimony of Gerald Von Korff  
St. Cloud School Board Member House File #3013**

Dear Committee Members:

I write in support of House File #3013 to enhance teacher preparation to meet the needs of students with dyslexia. I write also to urge that the legislature undertake a deep and probing examination of the systemic reforms necessary to address the needs of students with dyslexia.

I am a fourteen year member of the St. Cloud district Board of Education. Prior to practicing law, I received a master of arts in teaching and taught in schools in New York and the District of Columbia. For many years, as a board member, I've advocated that the State of Minnesota and my own school district implement a comprehensive systematic approach to students with dyslexia.

In great measure, my interest in this issue derives from persistent urgings by my wife Connie, a former elementary school and reading teacher, who currently has a private practice serving students with dyslexia. Connie has a Masters' degree with a reading emphasis from the Bank Street School of Education and for many years has provided private tutoring for children with dyslexia in central Minnesota. In our community, Connie has also been active in encouraging private and public schools to implement a comprehensive systematic approach to those students. She insists that public and private schools are not doing enough, and we must mobilize strategically to address this problem. Professional development addresses one aspect of the problem, but more will be required.

**House File #3013 Speaks to One of the Major Barriers is Addressing Dyslexia**

In passing prior legislation to address dyslexia, the legislature began the process of tearing down the barriers which have long denied appropriate education to students with dyslexia. Tragically, many of the institutions that prepare teachers have completely failed to include dyslexia in their curriculum. The research of Doctors Orton and Gillingham has been available for more than a half century, but for a variety of reasons--none of them sound-- that dyslexia research has not been operationalized in teacher education programs—not even in those college and graduate programs for teachers who specialize in the teaching of reading.

In the last several decades, the work of Shawitz and others has confirmed the existence of

dyslexia with sound science. The day-to-day experience of practitioners like my wife -- with real students -- proves that early identification and application of the phonics based Orton Gillingham approach can transform reading for these students.

Minnesota's teacher education programs are not doing near enough to meet the needs of teachers in this important field. And, even if those institutions were now to implement aggressive improvements in their programs, that would not address the giant gap in the preparation of teachers past. Even school districts that genuinely want to comply with state legislation, lack staff who are prepared to implement proper instructional practices in this area. Moreover, there is a need to leverage teacher resources with trained paraprofessionals working under specialized supervision.

### **Families are Being Forced Unfairly To Pay for their Own Private Instruction**

Currently, most of the approximately 15% of students who have dyslexia are being forced to choose between paying for private instruction or allowing their children to lag far behind in reading despite having the intellectual capacity to read and learn effectively. A large network of private providers currently meet this need for those who can afford it. Some of those providers, like my wife, have advanced degrees in education, psychology, and reading science. But the unmet need is so great, that a network of lay persons have begun to create tutoring networks. The cost of providing a complete course of Orton Gillingham instruction can run thousands of dollars per year, over a several year course of tutoring, and many families cannot afford that cost, nor should they be forced to do so.

My wife tells me that existing traditional RTI programs are ineffective and often undermine progress. Students with dyslexia typically lack ability to build a fund of sight words. They must read by decoding, a process that at first is laborious. They must pursue a carefully crafted curriculum in which they learn to decode the phonic units of written language. Often the student needs multiple individual sessions per week, or small group sessions using a special Orton-Gillingham curriculum, such as the Wilson series. These are big changes, and they are not yet being met with big ideas. Part of the problem is the lack of adequate professional training. Part of the problem is the major cost of actually meeting the needs of whole new class of students whose needs have never been met before.

The Minnesota Department of Education must do more. Our teacher preparation institution must do far more. School districts desperately need a supply of highly trained teachers capable of understanding and implementing the major instructional changes that are required. House File #3013 is a step in the right direction: however, we need a statewide strategic plan with smart goals to address this problem.

Sincerely,

*Gerald W. Von Korff*

Gerald W. Von Korff

My name is Jodi Smith and I am a high school special education teacher in the area of specific learning disabilities, I am dyslexic, and I know firsthand the pain and struggle dyslexia can cause. I was not diagnosed until I was 25 years old, and because I was diagnosed later in life I spent my k-12 school years believing that I was dumb. Being in school gave me severe anxiety. Knowing what I know now all of the signs were there and I should have not have made it through 13 years of public school education without 1 single teacher recognizing the warning signs. General education teachers titles are somewhat misleading. The assumption is that they teach the "general" students or students without disabilities. But this is incorrect. General education teachers usually are the first teachers to teach students with learning disabilities. It is a fact that 1 out of 5 people show signs of dyslexia that means for every general education classroom there is about 5 students that are affected by dyslexia. Are those 5 students getting the proper accommodations, are they being taught using researched based strategies, do these students even know they have dyslexia? In my experience the answer is no. This why it is so critical for ALL teachers to have the proper training on dyslexia. While a general education teacher does not need to be able to diagnose dyslexia, they do need a solid foundation on what dyslexia is and the warning signs. As a high school special education teacher I see too many students get to my classroom and still have not received the proper interventions they should have the right to. This past school year I had a new student who was a junior as I was reading his individualized education plan (IEP) I came across a line that said "the team has determined *this student* as a nonreader." I had to read it multiple times because I was in complete shock that a teacher could write this about a dyslexic student. To anyone who is knowledgeable on dyslexia you will not be surprise when I say this student in incredibly intelligent, he loves to learn, he loves to listen to books, he loves debating and discussing literature. In fact his English teacher said he was the best in the class when it came to discussing the literature that they were assigned to read. Imagine if that IEP would have fell into the hands of a teacher who was not knowledgeable on dyslexia. Would the IEP still state that he is a nonreader? When actually he reads by listening to audio instead of reading on paper. Would a teacher read that he is a nonreader and take away the rigor of the work and therefore taking away his integrity? Thankfully, I was able to change the language in his IEP but unfortunately that student moved at the end of the school year. Can I be sure that his next teacher will see him as a bright, thoughtful student or will his next teacher see him as a nonreader?

From my teaching experience I've noticed that teachers are eager to learn about dyslexia. They know it exists but they are lacking concrete information that allows them to better serve their students. Teachers care deeply about their students but they can't help their students with dyslexia if they have no training. At my school I have become a resource for those teachers seeking additional information or help with a student. I love being a dyslexia resource for my coworkers but I deeply believe that all teachers should have proper dyslexia training because not all teachers will have a resource like myself who can provide additional support and coaching.

-Jodi Smith  
Setting 1&2 SLD Special Education Teacher