

Testimony Decoding Dyslexia - KS

Mary Dillon, Lawrence Kansas

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My Name is Mary Dillon. I was born and raised in Hutchinson, KS. I attended Hutchinson Public Schools and graduated from University of Kansas and I am severely dyslexic. I raised 3 sons in Lawrence and all attended public schools through the 6th grade. All three of my sons are dyslexic, my second son, Justin, is severely dyslexic. In the 7th grade I moved all three of my boys to Bishop Seabury Academy where they were able to receive better accommodations and excel at school. Two of my sons have now graduated from college and one is in his sophomore year in college.

When Justin was in 1st grade I suspected he had inherited my dyslexia. I asked for help from his teachers at school. He was tested and qualified to get special reading help through 1st grade. This help consisted of a group of kids reading together out loud with a reading teacher for 45 minutes a couple of times a week. In second grade the reading test was again done and I was told the "good news" Justin did not qualify for special reading help. He was smart enough that he managed to score just above the cut off to receive reading help. I was told he was just one of those slow readers and was just fine. I cried.

By the time Justin was in 4th grade he started to hit a wall academically. He began to think of himself as stupid and perceived himself as not able to complete his school work well. He also started closing off from friends and isolating himself. The school did not see any reason for worry for Justin, he was doing "okay" in his grades so he did not need any help.

In March of Justin's 4th grade year I took him for private testing and he was found to be very gifted and severely dyslexic. Because Justin was very gifted, he was able to perform at grade level in reading. However, he was well below his grade level in spelling and writing. In the testing they looked at where Justin was performing while in the 4th grade and where his abilities should allow him to perform; he was way below expectations. The testing on Justin determined that he more than qualified for special services at the public schools.

When I brought Justin's testing to the school it allowed him to get some services. They were able to help with the gifted area by giving him some challenging worksheets, but what he needed the most was multisensory phonemic instruction for reading fluency, comprehension and integration with writing. The school did not have anything like that for him. I asked if it was available in the district anywhere, I would drive him to them.... No, nothing like this was available.

We had to go outside of the school system and were very lucky to connect with a tutor trained in Alphabetic Phonics who had just moved to Lawrence. I hired her to come to the school and work with Justin 3 times per week. All I asked from the school was a space for Justin to work with this tutor.

Justin received this tutoring for 3 years. He is one of the lucky ones... I hate to think about what happens to the kids who aren't lucky enough to receive this type of tutoring. To this day, Justin credits his Alphabetic Phonics tutoring for his success in school. He is now working on his masters in Secondary Education and English at Northwestern University. This past summer Justin took the initial Alphabetic Phonics training course and finished his practicum for it and is looking forward to using this training to help other kids to learn to read.

I know there have been some changes tried recently and sounds like lots of money thrown towards reading but still we have way too many stories of kids not being caught and helped. Half of the battle is early recognition of the kids who need interventions. The second half of the battle is to get these kids into a multisensory program at an early age to prevent them from falling behind in school. We barely caught Justin in time. Please Pass this Bill so that all dyslexic children will be identified and receive the help they need to become successful students. Thank You.