

Thank you, Reps. Buckner and Wilson for sponsoring this bill. Thank you, Madame Chair at your time today. I'm Lindsay Drakos of COKID.

You have heard from kids, parents and experts today. Two of those kids were my own. I am here today because of all of those kids. I carry their stories with me. We have to do better for them. We know how to identify and teach dyslexics how to read, yet year after year, we just don't do it. House Bill 19-1134 is a step, but I hope these stories have highlighted the urgency to do better. For most of these kids that were here today, we've missed the chance to help them at all.

I'm going to focus on some Colorado data today.

60% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are not meeting expectations in reading

In 2017-18, we had 905,000 students.

101,000 in Special Ed

Of those in Special Ed, 40% have an IEP for Specific Learning Disability – that's 40,000 kids

About 85% of the kids with SLD are dyslexic – that's 34,340 kids

Conservatively, an estimated 12% of CO kids are dyslexic - 108,600

This means that 74,000 dyslexic kids are not receiving intervention through IEPs. We don't have any way of knowing how many in the State are identified, have 504s, or are receiving Tier II intervention because we don't track that. Even if they are identified and receiving intervention, there is no requirement that it's evidence based to help them!

Let's go back to the 34,340 kids that do have an IEP for SLD. The number of IEPs for SLD peaks in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The ideal age to identify kids with dyslexia is in Kindergarten – they can be identified with 92% accuracy at age 5 and a half. Moreover, most of these kids do not even belong in Special Education. These bright kids with amazing compensatory skills are put into SPED in later years because they were never taught to read. We need to do better.

More facts for you:

- From Rep. Coleman's bill 19-1206 concerning equity in higher ed - 35% of all CO high school graduates and more than half of high school graduates who attend community college are assessed as not academically ready for gateway English and Math upon enrollment in post-secondary education. We need to do better.
- 48% of prisoners are dyslexic. The prison reform bill – the First Step Act – signed into law in December of 2018 requires screening and intervention for dyslexia for all federal prisoners. We are still not screening and providing intervention for dyslexic kids in Colorado. We need to do better.
- 48.9% of students with disabilities who drop out in Colorado are kids with Specific Learning Disability. Almost half. We need to do better.
- The mental health effects of not identifying and helping these kids is immeasurable.

We are all here today because it is not unreasonable to ask that schools teach our children to read. This bill is a first step. We need to do better.

Madam Chair, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present my daughter's experiences. My name is Sharon Stevens, and I support this bill because I am an advocate for my daughter who has dyslexia and suffered due to "dysteachia". My 7th-grade daughter has regained her confidence, advocates for herself, and last semester, she made the honor roll. She is successful because she is a high achiever and she had access to resources outside of the Colorado education system that she was willing to participate in. My daughter spent on average five hours a week tutored by a HillsSprings teacher and in their afterschool and summer programs. Why isn't the Colorado public school system using evidence-based research methodologies to teach our students how to be literate (read, write, and spell)?

It has been a journey for my daughter to learn to read. She was reading above grade level in pre-k, kindergarten and first grade. I mentioned to her teachers that she is memorizing words. The reply was that is how kids learn to read. They sit down with a book and read. Later as a 6th grader, my daughter shared she would get a book, stare at it, and create her own stories in her mind. Why are we failing our students?

In November of her second grade, I received a note with her report card that she was part of the READ program and had been since August. She had a reading fluency issues due to low dibel scores. No mention of dyslexia and when I mentioned it, it seemed to be a 'dirty' word. I requested an evaluation and still no mention of dyslexia. I had my daughter tested by an external educational psychologist at my expense and for the first time, someone mentioned she has dyslexia. She also scored in the gifted range in Verbal Comprehension. I quickly educated myself. I learned about whole language approach used in most schools and in most teacher training programs. I learned about the structured approach to reading. I contacted Dr. Elaine Cheesman, a retired professor at UCCS, regarding the Orton-Gillingham methodology. I learned how my daughter could score high on standardized comprehension tests but still have issues with fluency and phonics.

As a third-grader, my daughter had an IEP with unmeasurable goals and was pulled from class to increase her fluency. I found out that she getting extra help on her homework and that she might have practiced once a week and more at the end of each month to create a progress report. Around this time, the special education teacher resigned. With the special education teacher position open, I contacted the District's Director of Special Education and the Superintendent to alert them to the necessity of hiring someone with experience working with kids with dyslexia and in Orton-Gillingham or a similar methodology. I was met with closed ears. Even more disturbing is I contacted Special Education, Colorado Department of Education and I was told that they typically do not talk to parents and that the school district that my daughter was enrolled was one of the best in the state for meeting its goals. How ironic!

As a sixth grader and a new special education teacher, things did not get any better as they still used the whole language approach. My daughter was called lazy to her face and I was told she was difficult to work with! In contrary, my daughter is a high achiever, is not lazy and does not

deserve to be called that! I waived her IEP services. My daughter had no self-confidence. With a 504 plan in place, my daughter continued to be tutored five hours a week outside of school at our expense. At home, we worked with her on self-confidence and her dedicated teachers worked with her on advocacy skills.

That is an abbreviated version of my daughter's story. Instead of exploring extra-curricular activities in elementary school, she received five extra hours a week with an evidence-based methodology to learn to read because the school was using an ineffective method of reading instruction for students with dyslexia. Please consider, that schools may be using a methodology for literacy that is not evidence-based and is not teaching our students and students with dyslexia to learn to read. Let us use evidence-based research and teach our students to read! Let us educate our teachers in a structured approach to learning literacy and adequately train our special education teachers so they can do their job. I would never want another "daughter" to have to endure my daughter's elementary school experience in the Colorado public school system!

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sharon Stevens

A Parent Advocate

Jeannine Wyer  
2895 Stephens Rd  
Boulder CO 80305  
720 934 14031

Hello Mr. or Madame Chairperson, members of the committee, thank you for taking the time today to listen to this public testimony. I would like to thank the sponsors of HB 19-1134 for bringing this bill forward. I support this bill. When myself and a number of other parents started to work on ensuring all kids are taught to read we started with our principal. In numerous conversations he sympathized with us, but maintained he couldn't do anything unless the district mandated it. We took our discussion to the district. The district would not meet with us. We had to hire a lawyer in order to set up a meeting. We were told by our superintendent that there was a long list of budget priorities and that dyslexia was nowhere on it. We were also told by the district that they could not mandate any changes to schools. They said the principals would not accept it unless it came from the CDE. We then took the discussion to the CDE. The CDE again sympathized but said they could not force districts to do anything with regards to dyslexia, including screening or interventions. They could and would only make recommendations. From the recent publicity regarding the READ Act we all know how well CDE recommendations work.

Yes, there are many stories out there about hugely successful people who have dyslexia. I guarantee that when you dig a little deeper you will never ever hear the person say, "Thanks to my public school education that identified me with dyslexic characteristics and provided effective literacy instruction I was able to learn to read and access my public education effectively allowing me to enjoy the success I have today". You will never hear that. Instead, what you WILL find is extremely dedicated parents and family members and a lot of money that was spent on private tutors and/or private schools.

My 9 yr old was diagnosed with dyslexia at age 6. We were assured by the school that a diagnosis would not change anything they would do for him. They were doing nothing. They had tried LLI and Reading Recovery and nothing was working so they dropped him out of the reading intervention group. They were right. The diagnosis changed nothing. They were doing nothing. I have left my career and we have spent \$15,000 helping our son catch up to his peers. It is becoming clear that our 6yr and 3yr old also have dyslexia. Unfortunately, this bill will do nothing to help them learn how to read. The burden is going to fall on us parents again. We will stop at nothing to ensure our children learn to read and reach their full potential. What about the kids left behind?

Please ensure that something good comes of this bill. Local control of this issue has failed. It is time the state took a stand.

Jennifer Gammel

Two of my three kids are dyslexic. Our story is much like that of many other dyslexic students in Colorado. Our oldest son is a junior in high school, he was not diagnosed until his sophomore year. Let me repeat that, he was not diagnosed with dyslexia until he was a sophomore in high school! Early intervention is the key to helping dyslexic students thrive and sadly that window was long gone before we figured it out. In fourth grade I felt something was wrong and asked the school to investigate it not knowing they don't even put dyslexia on the radar. They assured me he just needed to practice more, and he would be ok even though on several tests they conducted he tested in the 17<sup>th</sup> percentile. We believed them, after all they were trained professionals. Flash forward through 5 years of struggles, tears and frustration wondering why things didn't just click. High school came, and we saw this intelligent student struggling and falling behind. We watched him do his work, we helped him study and yet every test he took he would fail like he had never seen the material. We talked to teachers they tell us he just needs to try harder even though we know this child is trying harder than any of them could imagine. I go back to what I suspected back in fourth grade. I do a simple search of what a dyslexic teenager might be struggling with. It was everything we were seeing. Could he read? Mostly, but he couldn't spell to save his life, he left out chunks of text when reading, he couldn't remember facts at all hence the testing struggles. His dyslexia heavily impacts his math skills as well. He can do math verbally, in fact his testing showed he was borderline gifted, so this wasn't a student that wasn't trying. Again, I go to the school and I am told they don't look for dyslexia and I would have to pay for testing out of my own pocket. Thankfully I was able to pay for that testing which is not inexpensive in the slightest. I finally had some answers and could help my son be successful. So, I thought.

Our story doesn't end there with one struggling student we had two. Our middle son was struggling in school as well, and year after year we were told he is just a little behind and if he would only try harder he would do better. It wasn't until he was in fifth grade and I had the opportunity to substitute teach in his class that I discovered how truly behind he was, and I was horrified. Knowing that the school wouldn't be able to provide testing for what I suspected I was forced to pay out of pocket for a second child to be tested. I can only imagine how different our experiences would be if I wasn't able to pay for the testing. The testing once again showed that he has dysgraphia (writing) and dyscalculia (math). He is in middle school now and he has a huge gap in his math skills because year after year he was pushed through without proper support.

You would think that once we knew what we were working with things would dramatically improve. Sadly, this is not the case. We have been in three different schools, elementary, middle and high school. Not a single person is trained to work with dyslexic students. How are they supposed to support these students if they don't even know what they are looking for or what they need to be successful. Statistically we have five students in every class that are dyslexic. We must do better! Right now, my boys have a resource class which is a glorified study hall session. They aren't provided instruction that will help them work with their dyslexia because no one is trained. I must pay for an outside resource to help them be successful. In the words of the numerous professionals who told my sons, perhaps we should just try harder? Colorado must do better for our dyslexic students and it needs to happen now. Screening tools already exist for students at a young age we need to implement a plan that starts sooner rather than later. Our teachers need to be trained to look for dyslexia and how to provide meaningful instruction. I am begging you to please help rewrite the stories of the countless number of students that are struggling with dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. I don't think we are asking too much to have our schools teach our children to read, write and do math.

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## HB19-1134 Identification And Interventions For Students With Dyslexia

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From: Kathleen Boyer (kathyboyer73@yahoo.com)

To: janet.buckner.house@state.co.us

Date: Wednesday, February 27, 2019, 7:23 PM MST

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I am hoping to make it to the capitol to testify on Thursday. In case I don't, this is my testimony in favor of HB19-1134.

My name is Kathleen Boyer. I am a parent of two Douglas County School District students, a 9th grader and a 7th grader, who have attended their neighborhood schools in DCSD since Kindergarten.

My 9th grader has Dyslexia. Toward the end of 2nd grade, his teacher expressed some concern about his reading fluency. In grades 3-5, I expressed concern to his teachers. To the best of my recollection, they each performed an assessment, and told me his results were within normal range. I think he met with a reading specialist a few times, probably in 4th grade.

Finally in 6th grade, his teacher expressed some genuine concern about his writing, and I noticed that he couldn't read an article, and answer questions correctly. For the previous 3+ years, I had been waiting and assuming that, if he needed it, the school would suggest testing. No one ever did.

Everything I learned about the testing process I learned from friends who had already been through it. I learned that the school would test him, but would not give a diagnosis. I learned that, in order to get a comprehensive assessment, I would have to do it privately and pay for it. We opted to have him tested privately, and paid about \$1500 for it. He was diagnosed with ADHD and Dyslexia in the middle of his last semester of 6th grade.

This bill caught my attention because I think my son could have and should have been assessed for dyslexia as early as 2nd or 3rd grade, instead of 6th grade. He lost those formative years, struggling with assignments, because no one at the school advised us that he was showing signs of dyslexia and could and should be tested. Please vote yes on this bill.

Thank you for your time.

**Kathleen Boyer**  
**Highlands Ranch**