



Identify Dyslexia to Increase Graduation Rates and Decrease Incarceration Rates

The ability to read and write is essential for an individual's success in school, employment and in life. Reading difficulties impact student's learning in all subjects including, Math, Sciences, English and Social Studies. At least one in five individuals have dyslexia or a related learning disability. "Dyslexia is neurologically-based, often familial disorder which interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive, and expressive language including phonological processing, in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and sometimes in arithmetic. Dyslexia is not the result of lack of motivation, sensory impairment, inadequate instructional or environmental conditions but may occur together with these conditions" (International Dyslexia Association).

Dyslexia is a hidden disability, which has no boundaries. Dyslexia affects individuals regardless of race, gender, culture and socioeconomic standing. Dyslexic individuals have average or above average intelligence but are often seen as being inattentive or lazy because they are not reading at grade level. Dyslexia often causes poor self-esteem, lack of confidence and a poor self-image of themselves as a student. Dyslexia is a life-long disability with no cure but with remediation and accommodations dyslexics can lead successful lives. Some dyslexic individuals also have AD/HD or other learning disabilities such as dysgraphia (handwriting disability), and dyscalculia (math disability). Dr. G. Reid Lyon, the former chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development states, "substantial research supported by NICHD shows clearly that without systemic, focused and intensive interaction, the majority of children" with dyslexia "rarely catch up". Failure to develop basic reading skills by age nine predicts a lifetime of illiteracy. Unless these children receive appropriate instruction, more than 74% of the children entering 4th grade who are at risk for reading failure will continue to have reading problems into adulthood."

According to the National Right to Read Foundation, "people who read poorly often end up in low paying jobs, on welfare rolls or in jail, at a cost to the country of \$224 billion a year." Dyslexic individuals are "at risk of joining the ranks of the 90 million U.S. adults who are at best, functionally literate, meaning they can read just well enough to get by" (Star Telegram). Learn to read or go to jail is unfortunately a true statement for some. The Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report on the Educational and Correctional Populations by Caroline Wolf Harlow, PhD. states that the percentage of state prison inmates who have not completed high school or obtained their GED include 66% of inmates with a learning disability and 59% with a speech disability (can be a symptom of dyslexia). According to the Citizens Alliance on Prisons, the state of Michigan incarcerates nearly 44,000 people and spends \$2 billion a year on corrections. Education Week states that high school dropouts commit 75 percent of the crimes committed in the United States.

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“Michigan’s high school graduation rate is almost 4 percent below the national average and is trending downward, according to the latest annual report on graduation rates from Education Week, a specialty newspaper for educators. Michigan graduated 70.9 percent of public school students in 2010, ranking the state 40th overall” (Mlive.com). We have a choice to make here in Michigan. We are currently facing a crisis where we are increasingly spending more money on incarcerating people than we are on educating them. We have an opportunity to make a bold move in reversing this vicious cycle. We can choose to reallocate millions of dollars currently being spent on corrections and launch a daring new initiative to ensure that all of Michigan’s students are reading by the 3rd grade through innovative programs to assess and remediate dyslexia and related learning disabilities.

In order to improve the graduation rate and lower the incarceration rate in Michigan we must tackle the issue of dyslexia, which affects approximately 20% of the population. Dyslexia laws must be passed by the Michigan Legislature to identify and remediate dyslexia in students so they can become productive and successful citizens. The State of Michigan needs to make a financial commitment to ensure the success of this endeavor. This can be accomplished by:

1. State recognition of dyslexia as a learning disability and assessment of all students. Test all new students by the end of kindergarten and test all transfer students as they enter their new school. Those students who are identified as being at risk for dyslexia must receive immediate, appropriate and continuing instruction.
2. Provide training for all teachers and certify (additional training) a dyslexia teacher/specialist for each school. Establish dyslexia and learning disability instruction in the colleges and universities within the state who provide teaching degrees.
3. Implement technology to aid dyslexic students such as text to speech software, books on tape, iPads, Kindles, etc.

Anne Kloth is a co-founder of Reading Success Plus, a tutoring center for struggling readers and dyslexic students. She is also a founding member of Decoding Dyslexia – Michigan, and is a Board member of the Michigan International Dyslexia Association. Learn more at: www.readingsuccessplus.com.