

Parents should push LCSD1 to better teach kids to read

Intro: WY Lit knows that our incredible (and very stressed) LCSD1 teachers need support from parents and leadership from the district. In no way is this piece meant to criticize of teachers; rather, it is meant to emphasize that changes to curricula and assessments must be implemented across the district and with fidelity, and that teachers must be empowered with effective training about the use of data to support foundational reading instruction.

Are you ok with the fact that 57% of LCSD1 fourth graders are struggling readers who are likely to leave high school still struggling? I'm not. According to 2019 WY-TOPP, only 43% of LCSD1 fourth graders are reading at grade level proficiency.

A proficient fourth grade reader will almost always be a proficient twelfth grade reader. A struggling fourth grade reader will almost always leave high school still struggling. [Francis et al. \(1996\)](#) and [Shaywitz et al. \(1999\)](#) established that fourth grade reading scores predict 12th grade reading scores about 90% of the time. [Cunningham & Stanovich \(1997\)](#) found that first grade reading levels are a strong predictor of high school reading outcomes.

My family has spent the last eight months immersed in the brain research and behind struggling readers. Shortly after Christmas 2019, we realized our first-grade son might be dyslexic. We brought this to his teacher's attention and were politely brushed off. A consultant with a graduate level degree in dyslexia administered a set of reading screeners to our son. The results were consistent with signs of dyslexia. Short of paying a psychologist in Denver thousands of dollars, that is as close to a diagnosis as anyone can get. We provided this new data to the school and almost immediately they provided our son with reading intervention services. Why were we the ones who had to ask for this?

The interventionist splits her time between two schools and sees only four kids from our son's entire first grade class of over 50 students. It's widely accepted that 15-20% of the population is dyslexic. This means that 8-10 students in his first grade class are likely struggling with reading because of dyslexia - but only 4 of those students can see the interventionist (if they are even identified).

[Wyoming state law](#) requires that all K-3 students be screened for "signs of dyslexia and other reading difficulties." The law, in place since 2012, requires schools to implement an evidence-based intervention program and requires that students not showing appropriate reading competence be placed on Individualized Reading Plans (IRPs). School districts are required to report the aggregate number of students identified as having signs of dyslexia or other reading difficulties to the Wyoming Department of Education.

The district's choice of screening software, Galileo, doesn't meet the requirements of the screening law. Because of this, the district had to purchase another assessment tool called DIBELS. DIBELS was included in the WDE's bill implementation guidance document. Galileo was not.

We started asking LCSD1 administrators questions. Why were we the ones to identify our son as having signs of dyslexia? What screener was used to assess him? What were the results? What curriculum are you using for reading in the classroom? Why aren't your teachers trained to know what dyslexia looks like? Why don't you have more reading interventionists? Why aren't all of your teachers and schools using the district's reading curricula with fidelity? How many students were identified as having reading difficulties?

After hearing a list of politically correct non-answers, we finally got an answer about the number of students identified as having signs of dyslexia or other reading difficulties in our district: 48%. Pre-COVID, 48% of all K-3 students failed to read at grade level.

We have a serious problem. Our kids can't read. And this problem, which starts in early elementary school, impacts children throughout their lives. Struggling to read impacts children equally. It doesn't matter if you are upper or lower class.

Currently, 1,901 K-3 LCSD#1 parents should be aware their son or daughter is struggling with reading. If your gut tells you that your child is struggling, start asking questions. The LCSD1 administration has a responsibility to ensure that whatever evidence-based reading and intervention program they purchase is implemented at all schools with fidelity. LCSD1 has many of the right tools to accomplish this but there is a lack of implementation, accountability, and proper communication regarding these tools.

LCSD1 purchased Foundations, an excellent evidence-based program for K-2 classrooms. Unfortunately, schools aren't being required to use it. LCSD1 has provided LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training to reading interventionists. The district is beginning to conduct trainings for general classroom teachers, but at the pace it is going it will take years to train all K-3 teachers.

If only 15-20% of the population is dyslexic, why are over half our students struggling to read? It's not because they aren't trying hard enough or can't learn. It's not poverty. It's not because parents are not reading enough at home. It's because they need to be taught the right way with fidelity. Struggling readers do not magically catch up.

Everyone deserves the quiet confidence knowing how to read well imparts, not the anxiety and failure so many of our children are living with.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

The district isn't going to listen until enough of us speak up.

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