

## **Dr. Julie Gocey: We can and must help kids with dyslexia**

**Dr. Julie Gocey | Posted: Tuesday, October 20, 2009 4:30 am**

Educators, parents and health professionals must work together to improve literacy for ALL students in Wisconsin. It is well known that early literacy is one of the most powerful predictors of school success, gainful employment and many measures of health.

For that reason, the sincerest expression of child advocacy is to ensure that ALL students in Wisconsin have the opportunity to become proficient readers. In my experience as a pediatrician, co-founder of the Learning Difference Network, and as a parent, current policies and practices do not routinely provide the 10 percent to 17 percent of our students who have some degree of dyslexia with adequate opportunities for literacy.

Dyslexia is a language-based learning problem, or disability if severe. The impact that this neurobiological, highly heritable condition has on learning to read, write and spell cannot be underestimated.

Dyslexia is the best understood and most studied of all learning difficulties. There is clear evidence that the brains of dyslexic readers function differently than the brains of typical readers. But the good news is this: Reading instruction from highly skilled teachers or tutors who use evidence-based techniques can change how the brain processes print and nearly ALL students can become proficient readers.

Early intervention is critical to successful outcomes, but there is a disconnect between research and practice on many levels.

Current obstacles include myths about dyslexia, lack of early identification and a need for educators to be given training in the science of reading and multi-sensory, systematic, language-based instruction. This is critical for students with dyslexia, but can be beneficial to all learners. For those of us who are able to pay for private testing and instruction for our children, the outcomes can be phenomenal. Unfortunately, where poverty and its associated ills make daily life a struggle, this expert instruction is not routinely available.

Families who ask school personnel about dyslexia are often referred to a physician, who in turn sends them back to school for this educational problem. Educational testing is often denied coverage from insurance companies, though the implications for health and wellness are clear. Unfortunately, parents may be left without useful information from anyone, and appropriate treatment - excellent reading instruction - is further delayed.

October is Dyslexia Awareness Month. On Thursday, Oct. 22, there will be a noon rally in the Capitol rotunda to raise awareness about the need to improve reading instruction for students with dyslexia and for all struggling readers in Wisconsin.

State Rep. Keith Ripp, R-Lodi, is introducing bills this week to help identify and help children with dyslexia. One bill calls for screening for specific skills to find kids with a high chance of struggling to learn to read. The other bill aims to improve teacher training to deal with reading problems.

There is too much evidence describing the science of reading, dyslexia and the costs of illiteracy to continue without change. Parents who suspect dyslexia must not be dissuaded from advocating for their children; keep searching until you find help that works.

Health professionals must seek the latest information on this common condition in order to support families and evaluate for related conditions. Educators must seek out training to understand this brain-based condition that requires educational care. The information is solid. We must work together to give ALL our kids the opportunity to read and succeed.

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