

Waunakee Mom

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[00:00:00] Nicole. McGlothin from wonky and she's speaking in favor and next is Andrea Hedquist.

[00:00:12] Hello? Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the committee for letting me speak, um, you, my name is Nicole and I'm just. But now I'm also a tutor. So we've heard tutors come up once in a while. So here's how my story went. And you have my notes. I didn't write it up as a speech, but when my son was in kindergarten, he wasn't reading well.

[00:00:34] And I thought, oh, it's weird. You know, I have a master's in ABD from the UW and Madison. I'm really smart. His dad he's smarter than I am. He does education research here in Madison, so our kids should be able to read. Great. So I was highly suspicious when my child. Curling up in the fetal position by first grade, rather than read me a sentence off of a simple book.

[00:00:57] So all of a sudden it hit me like a [00:01:00] flash. Oh my God, my sister, my sister now is 35. She was dyslexic. She didn't get diagnosed until she was 17 because the memorandum substitute teacher came in to our central Wisconsin public school spent a day with my, with my sister and realized that she was. I told her, go get diagnosed.

[00:01:20] She went to the doctor, got diagnosed immediately. It wasn't even a doubt. She spent her entire school career being helped by this Mennonite girl who sat next to her in class and helped her with her homework every single day. So she could pass. And once my sister got diagnosed, she was able to go to college.

[00:01:36] Now she's pharmacy technician doing great, all those. So all of that first grade for my son that flashes through my. Oh my God, if I don't do something, my son's going to turn out 17 years old, getting diagnosed with dyslexia. So I spent, I don't know, a couple of weeks, because again, the master's degree I can read fast and I can go online and do research.

[00:01:56] And so I did, I found decoding dyslexia that [00:02:00] week that I realized something was wrong. I heard these stories you're oh, it's going to take a year or two of interventions before your school will help you. Okay. Oh, and it's going to cost you \$2,000 to get a. Really. So I reached out to a lot of people, did a lot of research.

[00:02:18] My kid's first grade. I'm like, I'm going to have to learn how to do this myself. And I found Susan Barton, I found foundation and sounds, I started tutoring my own kid. I took him out of DLI because oh, If your kid can't learn his first language very well in written form, he's going to act up at school. He couldn't learn Spanish because he couldn't hear the difference between in English.

[00:02:40] He couldn't read words with short vowels because it couldn't distinguish the difference between them when. So I had to remediate him on his short vowels before he could do anything else, pulled him out of Spanish, focused on English. And then my husband and I read represented these fellows had written something pretty poignant, right around 2019, which said, you shouldn't be read.

[00:02:59] We should, [00:03:00] parents should be rewarding schools that are doing a good job, reward them with your money. And I thought, that's right. There's something going on here at MMSD. So here I am at Madison, I'm the PTL president as a sidebar. And so I'm highly invested in helping these kids at this school. In every way possible.

[00:03:16] So I go into the principal's office. I say, Hey principal, something's wrong here. You all, aren't really teaching, reading from everything I'm understanding and people, when I tell them this, they look at me like I'm a conspiracy theorist. What do you mean? The schools aren't teaching. Reading. Yeah, no, they're really not.

[00:03:30] I've got, they're doing this thing called Skippy frog and they kind of set the kids off in the corner to read by themselves a big part of the time that they're supposed to be doing reading instruction. It's really strange. No one believes me when I tell them. So I ended up finding out, okay, what other schools maybe are doing a better job because the principal told me, yeah, you know, we've doing balanced literacy.

[00:03:52] Everything's fine. He'll catch up. Don't worry. This same story by that age, it doesn't pass the smell test. So, well, I'm not gonna wait for you to [00:04:00] figure that out with my kid. So we end up looking around what other schools to follow the money, where can I take my funding? And I, we found one. Waunakee he's got great scores.

[00:04:10] Maybe they're even one of the schools that other folks are thinking of when we're thinking of, oh, some schools are doing a great job, turns out, Waunakee, they're getting 65% proficiency. That's great for Wisconsin. That's great. Want to keep to doing great. And so we like really, we're going to move there.

[00:04:26] It's going to be great, but sure. I got there. I put my kid in first grade and won a key and I started cause I'm always there volunteering. I'm like that helpful parent, but I'm also monitoring the situation. So I am there volunteering and it turns out wanna keep using the same outdated practices that Madison was.

[00:04:40] We sold our home. We moved to a whole new city to get reading because it said on their website, we use collaborative classroom and they've got a good phonics program and collaborative classroom. And I thought I'll want to keep it going to be great. It turns out they're still using leveled readers and they're still sitting in the kid in the corner to teach themselves how to read with their just.

[00:05:00]

[00:05:00] So when the pandemic hit and they started sending home their little worksheets with Matt cat VAT, at the end of first grade, I made a big decision. We are not okay in want to key either. And we found bridges virtual through Merrill, which is an online virtual academy that lets you pick your own curriculum.

[00:05:17] And several of the curriculum choices are structured literacy and they use logic of English. They do all about reading all about spelling. So through that other public school that now we open enrolled. My student, my son has access to the structured literacy that he needed the whole time. So that's wonderful.

[00:05:34] Right? Some of the kids in the state are able to get that through this virtual school. In the meantime I vote, I went on to get certified. So now I'm a certified tandem reading tutor whose program is being used in Michigan Detroit to teach their high schoolers how to read because it's a fast program and it can shoot kids out really fast.

[00:05:55] And so Detroit realized that, and they've got a program that they're doing, they're using it for. So [00:06:00] I'm looking to the future to how can we, and you'll see, my last little paragraph in my written statement is how are we going to tutor all the kids we've missed in Wisconsin? How are we going to get to the high school kids?

[00:06:08] Because it is possible. We talk about the window and we've missed the window for consolidation, but we can still teach those older kids, but we need a good tutoring program. And I can tell you United way in schools of hope is not the good tutoring program. They purposely do not teach the tutors how to teach reading.

[00:06:25] I know because I went to the training and I raised my hand and I said, when are we going to learn how to actually tutor reading? Oh, we don't get into that. We let the teachers teach the reading. We're just there to read with the kids or do it. We're the only ones there to potentially intervene. Could you maybe train the tutors?

[00:06:42] Well, so they've got us 2.0, they've got a kickoff. They had a kickoff call. They said they were going to use a science of reading and the kickoff call. So I asked him. How are you going to implement science of reading? And the answer that was given was not clear, did not sound like they had a good plan and really [00:07:00] veered into the territory of, well, we have to be careful not to insult the parents dialect.

[00:07:04] When we teach reading, we're not just teaching academic English. I'm like I'm tutoring kids in Madison. I'm tutoring kids in Sun Prairie and I'm tutoring kids in wonky. They don't need to just learn academic English. They need to learn how to read the. In English because that's the language of our society.

[00:07:23] So that's all I really had to say if anyone has any questions. Okay. All right, good. Do you stop to take a breath at the end there? Uh, that was, that was good. That was really riveting. Actually. What you been through there? I appreciate your personal story on that committee members. Any questions for.

[00:07:47] Representative Ramson when you found out your child had dyslexia, it wasn't done by the school. You found it out. [00:08:00] So, so did you go back to the school and say, Hey, and did you help them understand that there was a problem or a failure? Or did you. Prevent that from maybe happening to other kids is where I'm going.

[00:08:15] Yes, sir. Yes. And in fact, I, again, I had another meeting with the principal. I've been in close communication with that principal this whole time, explaining every in and out with him because I care. And again, I was his PTO president. So this principal, he told me, yeah, actually that sounds good. I'd like to take a leap forward.

[00:08:35] We've been taking really small steps in literacy, but I'd really like to take a leap. And now he works for a different district. He actually got recruited to work in another district. So he's not at Madison anymore. Um, but still, yes, we're still in communication. And he know he, they knew in that moment that my child, I didn't ever choose to be told to you all, he has not gotten diagnosed with dice with dyslexia.

[00:08:59] I forgot to [00:09:00] mention. I started the interventions in first grade. He is now in third grade and he can read at a fifth grade. His spelling is still really high spelling. He has to hear a word and he tries his hardest to write it down. And then he looks at what he wrote and he reads it and he goes, Ooh, no, that says little O's and you cross off his ear and he can go through and fix it so that it's very close, but that's his dyslexia at work.

[00:09:24] He just, he can't just see the words in his head, the way. Okay. So the individual you made contact with is no longer there. There's no one else that you can help communicate your experience, that you can help other kids from not having the same problem. I hate this. You make it sound like there's a single point of failure here.

[00:09:46] That can't be just one person that. Communicate. Right. The great news is the new superintendent at Madison knows all of this, and he has mandated letters training for all the teachers and they are, the teachers are [00:10:00] currently attending meetings. Really the high school teachers I saw the latest board of education meeting are saying, why do we have to learn letters?

[00:10:06] This is for younger students. This isn't for us. The superintendent at Madison is working actively to try to fix this. He came from somewhere else and he knows it's a big problem. So actually I'm less worried about Madison now than I am about the other parts of the state that don't have that him for superintendent.

[00:10:23] I, I think they should hire you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, uh, some of what you said there, um, just reminded me of some of what I've learned. And my journey of refresher course, the last five years, he was sending kids off to, you know, just simply read which in of itself sounds like a good idea, but if you're not having all this other systematic, uh, organized way of doing things along with that, it's really just, your kids are just kind of wandering in the wilderness and they're basically [00:11:00] teaching themselves how to read.

[00:11:02] So I appreciate your words. Any other questions represent. Um, Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate, you know, we're kind of tired been here for a while, so your riveting testimony stirred our blood. So I appreciate that. I wanted to make a couple comments. Number one, I think you are to be commended for being proactive and for caring about your kids enough, that you really dug in there and did what you need to do.

[00:11:29] But I want to make sure that I understand that. There's a lot of theme. There's a theme that's going through the last couple testimonies that we've heard. And that is that the schools are not stepping up to the plate and doing what they need to do for the kids. And I think that that's an important thing that we need to hear that our parents are getting involved in doing what they need to do.

[00:11:56] Maybe with minimal help from the school, [00:12:00] if any. And is that my correct understanding that it's very difficult to get the schools to step up to the plate who was the first place I went for help. I mean, I I'm a product of public schools. I, again, I went to central Wisconsin. My hometown is this tiny town without public school.

[00:12:17] I wouldn't have learned what I learned. I wouldn't have gotten a master's degree and lived in Madison and done what I've done. I love public school. So when the kindergarten teacher said, we no longer tell kids to sound it out and we do the Skippy frog and we do the fishy lips to get ready to say the word I should have known even in kindergarten.

[00:12:37] I should've probably the bells should have been ringing harder in kindergarten, but I let them have a year because I thought, oh, I trust you. I didn't believe in you if this is going to be fine, but I couldn't the fetal position in first grade for reading a word. So I went in and, and the principal, we had a meeting and the school psychologist was there.

[00:12:56] The reading specialist was there. They were, they were on the phone. They didn't, weren't in the room. He called [00:13:00] them to talk. And I've got, I've got a parent here that, you know, you don't forget conversations like this. Right. But the principal calls the reading specialist. I've got a parent here. Who's worried about her son.

[00:13:10] Well, has the teacher, the reading specialist asked, has the teacher raised any flags? No. They just keep telling me everything's fine. Well, when we can't do

anything until he's behind. I mean, we, we literally can't do anything until he's behind. Like, that's unacceptable to me. I'm not going to wait until he's behind.

[00:13:31] Sorry guys. And so, yes, I mean, they were there watching me do this. When I asked them to take him out of DLI, the dual language immersion, I said he can't learn Spanish and English at the same time. I could tell they weren't understanding the problem because the principal tried to talk me out of it. Well, are you sure he won't be able to get back in, do what I just need to.

[00:13:51] I need the child to learn English. We're going to focus on one language at a time. I'm not sure if you're hearing me. Well, most kids catch up by sixth grade.

[00:14:00] I'm not going to wait until sixth grade. So we, I was trying to be very open with the school they knew and were not, they couldn't, they told me they couldn't be helpful.

[00:14:08] I appreciate that. And, um, it should not surprise us that there's all a loss of trust in key institutions in our country today. Thank you. All right. Thank you.