

**Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Hearing  
“Educational Milestones of Dyslexia”  
October 13, 2015, 3:00PM  
Baton Rouge, LA**

**U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, MD  
Opening Statement and Script**

Welcome. Thank you all for being here

I am pleased to host this hearing today to discuss the issue of dyslexia. It is an issue that is very important to me, both as a parent and as a Senator. My hope is to bring a greater awareness and understanding of dyslexia to help drive new federal policies and resources to help students identified as dyslexic.

The goals of the hearing are to show the importance of the identification of students with dyslexia. How high stakes testing affects such students, and the need for providing appropriate accommodations for dyslexic students.

Dyslexia is an unexpected difficulty in reading highlighted by a gap between an individual’s intelligence and their reading level. It is the most common learning disability. A National Institutes of Health (NIH) study found the prevalence rate of dyslexia is nearly 20 percent. Dyslexia impacts Americans from all walks of life, including members of Congress, our staff, our families, and thousands of constituents.

A couple of years ago, my youngest daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia. Prompted by concerns about my daughter and my constituents' children, I set out to learn as much as I could about dyslexia and was amazed at how much is known and yet, far too often, not incorporated into public policy and education.

A recent GAO report (GAO-12-40) found that many students with learning and other disabilities, including dyslexia, are not receiving accommodations, such as extended testing time, required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when they take high stakes examinations such as the SAT, GRE, LSAT, or US Medical Licensing Examinations and others. This is unacceptable, and by working together we can make sure that those with learning disabilities are receiving their proper and legal accommodations.

For those with money, there are excellent schools in some areas of the country where your child will learn to read and have all the opportunities reading allows. If a family cannot afford a \$10,000 to \$50,000 annual tuition, the option is typically a traditional public school in which dyslexics are "mainstreamed," which is to say, they likely will not receive the remediation they need.

So I applaud schools and educators who have embraced science by providing students with the proper educational environment and curriculum that will enable them to thrive personally and academically. Proper support at every level can make all the difference for a student struggling with a learning disability.

There are schools in Louisiana, like Louisiana Key Academy in Baton Rouge and the Max Charter School in Thibodaux, that specialize in teaching dyslexic students. For college, Nicholls State University has the Louisiana Center for Dyslexia and Related Learning Disorders which provides an extensive list of support services to students, comprehensive assessments to determine eligibility for accommodations, and training for professionals in all aspects of student learning. Through all of these services, schools remove barriers to learning that can cripple the student experience. But these schools are too few and far between. We need more schools to embrace and replicate this model so students can reach their full potential.

There is much work to be done in raising awareness about dyslexia and making policy changes that create opportunity for all dyslexics and remove barriers to success. We all have an interest in ensuring that each member of our society is fully contributing to our nation and our economy. We cannot afford to ignore those who are challenged with dyslexia. Dyslexia robs individuals of their ability to read quickly and automatically, but it does not dampen their creativity and ingenuity – skills important for America to prosper.

While in the House of Representatives I started the Congressional Dyslexia Caucus to raise awareness about those affected and I have continued this work in the Senate. Last week, I passed a bipartisan resolution in the Senate with Senator Mikulski of Maryland that “calls on Congress, schools and state and local educational agencies to recognize the significant educational implications of dyslexia that must be addressed and designates October 2015 as ‘National Dyslexia Awareness Month.’” I hope this resolution is the first of many steps in the right direction.

Despite great strides, we still have a lot to learn about dyslexia and I am looking forward to hearing what our panel of witnesses have to say.