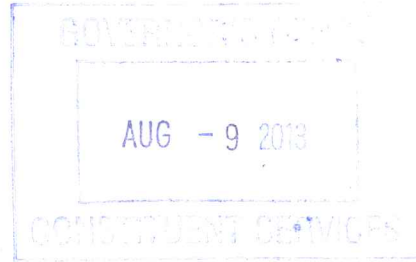




August 8, 2013

The Honorable Deval Patrick
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor
Room 280
Boston, MA 02133



Dear Governor Patrick,

In many states Decoding Dyslexia groups raise dyslexia awareness during the month of October, National Dyslexic Awareness Month. I am writing to you to request that Massachusetts join states like Maine, New Mexico, Tennessee, South Carolina, Nebraska, Hawaii and New Jersey and many others, to issue a Governor's Proclamation to declare October 2013 to be Dyslexia Awareness Month in Massachusetts.

Dyslexia is a Specific Learning Disability listed in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) affecting one out of five people. Dyslexia is scientifically documented neurological difference identified by "an unexpected difficulty in reading, a disparity between intelligence, and reading ability, particularly reading fluency."¹ To overcome dyslexia, these people learn to read differently than their peers. Many highly successful people are and have been dyslexic including Albert Einstein, Steven Spielberg, Steve Jobs, and Charles Schwab, to name a few.

Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts is not alone in hoping to raise awareness of this topic. The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity recently sponsored a Multicultural Awareness Initiative Conference in Hartford, to raise awareness that dyslexia is affecting one in five people equally across all cultures and ethnic backgrounds, but often remains undiagnosed. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) highlights October as an Awareness Month through social media and programs. There is a Bipartisan Dyslexia Caucus in Washington. HBO is also raising awareness with showings of its award winning documentary *The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia*. Programs and associations like these are important steps in improving literacy for all.

Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts members know literacy is important to Massachusetts. According to the 2010 -2011 Annual Report to the Massachusetts Legislature, 31.5% of special education students in Massachusetts were categorized as Specific Learning Disability, (SLD). That was 51,900 of the 164,711 students in the special education programs for the school year 2010-2011. Awareness and support especially targets these students and their families and teachers.

Awareness can make all the difference in a student's ability to succeed. There are scientifically proven methods to successfully overcome dyslexia. When parents, teachers, and students themselves understand dyslexia they can find the best ways to overcome it and thrive. Awareness provides incentive to struggling readers by drawing attention to the successful members of society who are dyslexic. Finally, awareness encourages people to share their stories and promotes taking an active role in success. If you or any member of your staff has a question please contact me.

Please consider the supporting material in this packet and proclaim October 2013 Dyslexia Awareness Month.

Sincerely,

Nancy Raso Duggan
Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts
rasonan@me.com 186 Pope Road Acton, MA 01720
Tel: 617-510-5849 (August 10 - 20, 2013) Tel: 978-621-6064 (all other dates)

¹ Shaywitz http://dyslexia.yale.edu/Policy_QA.html

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Julia Duggan
186 Pope Road
Acton MA 01720

August 8, 2013

The Honorable Deval Patrick
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor
Room 280
Boston, MA 02133


Dear Governor Patrick,

My name is Julia Duggan. I am a Massachusetts resident currently enrolled as a sophomore at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut studying Neuroscience. After my first semester at Trinity, I received a National Field Hockey Coaches Association Academic (NFHCA) Award for outstanding student-athletes. NFHCA Scholars of Distinction recognized students who have achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.90 or higher through the first semester of the 2012-13 academic year. It might surprise you after learning this that I was identified as dyslexic going into 4th grade and tested as "with out literacy skills" in 3rd grade.

I mention this not to congratulate myself but to demonstrate that dyslexia can be overcome with the right instruction and hard work. Awareness of dyslexia changed my life. I was lucky that my teachers and parents understood how to help me and I worked harder to overcome dyslexia once I understood that I was not stupid. Promoting more awareness of dyslexia, its neurological/biological causes, and how to overcome it to achieve your individual potential can improve lives.

Please consider issuing the proclamation of October 2013 as Dyslexia Awareness Month in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I have enclosed a copy of my college essay as an explanation of my experience growing up with dyslexia and the impact it had on my life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia R. Duggan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Julia Duggan

Harry Potter and the True Confessions of a Dyslexic Reader

I could tell you that I always wanted to be a reader. I could say that I did not enjoy checking out arts and crafts and other specialty books from the grade school library, but I have promised the truth. One of my favorite books in first and second grade, which I took out repeatedly, was called *Puddings, Custards and Flans* by Linda Zimmerman. Regardless of what books made it into my backpack, I was not actually reading any of them.

My library book choices raised suspicion with my teachers. I thought I was getting along just fine. Though reading aloud in class was my biggest nightmare, I was by no means a second grade failure. For example, I was the most articulate Martha Washington ever portrayed at living wax museum day. I was unaware that behind the scenes my parents and teachers were collaborating. They finally discovered that I was dyslexic and compensating for my disadvantage. There was nothing exciting or motivating about this discovery. I confess I was embarrassed.

Meanwhile, the wizarding world of Harry Potter had captured the hearts of the world. While friends were toting tomes over 200 pages, I carried 86 page *Love that Dog*, by Sharon Creech, with its big print and spaced out lines. It stayed in the depths of my backpack. My older siblings had read “the Harry books” so I knew they were cool, but they were out of reach. I spent hours with Mrs. Raymond, the reading specialist, but it was not enough to let me join the craze.

During the summer after third grade, my mom brought home the first Harry Potter on cassette. I remember listening to it in the car on road trips. The first thing I heard was a warm, accented voice say, “Listening Library presents *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.” The

voice was Jim Dale, who immediately became my best friend. I was mesmerized by his ability to interpret each character. Moreover, I thought I could finally catch up to my classmates.

These books became my incentive to overcome dyslexia. My mom brought me the second book and presented me with a challenge. I could listen if I followed along using the reading strategies Mrs. Raymond taught me. For another summer I went to see Mrs. Raymond three times a week. Step by step, she taught me how to read more challenging work. I practiced on my own using the Harry Potter tapes.

Over time, I saw my improvement. I actually wanted to read aloud in class and completed all of my reading without, tapes, tutors, or extra time. I had one more goal to relish; I wanted to read a Harry Potter book on my own.

I was at summer camp when the last Harry Potter book was released. My parents promptly delivered the seventh book. Camp culture was so dominated by Harry Potter that each girl in the dorm had a sign on her bed signifying if she had finished. Discussion was banned until all signs read "done". As I finished the final book of Harry's magical world, I closed my chapter on dyslexia as well. I flipped my sign and waited for the ban to lift.

Supporting Documentation References

Book Resources:

[Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level](#)

by Sally Shaywitz, M.D.; Vintage (2005) — A great book that explains what dyslexia is and gives parents tools for helping their children become fluent readers. One of the most helpful and informative books that most parents read early in their journey that really open their eyes and pointed them in the right direction to seek the help their kids needed.

[Parenting a Struggling Reader](#)

by Susan L. Hall and Louisa C. Moats; Broadway (2002) — This book helped explain how school systems work and provided real-world practical guidance on how to understand and work within the framework of the public school system. It also helped us understand the need to sometimes look outside public schools for additional resources.

[Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide](#)

by Pam Wright and Pete Wright; Harbor House Law Press (2006) — Realizing that your child has an LD (or any disability) can set parents off on a roller coaster of emotions. This fabulous book helped us distinguish facts from emotions in order to properly document the facts and best advocate for our daughter.

[The Human Side of Dyslexia: 142 Interviews with Real People Telling Real Stories About Their Coping Strategies with Dyslexia](#)

by Shirley Kurnoff; London Universal, (2001) — Just as the title says, this book is packed with real stories by people with dyslexia. While many books on dyslexia focus on the mechanics of the learning disability, this is the human story of the people who live with it. Through their stories we learn their strategies and tools for coping with the reading disability. Many of the stories are inspirational and will be a comfort to parents who worry about their child's future.

[The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science](#)

by Norman Doidge; Penguin Books (2007) — An astonishing new science called “neuroplasticity” is overthrowing the centuries-old notion that the human brain is immutable. In this revolutionary look at the brain, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Norman Doidge, M.D., provides an introduction to both the brilliant scientists championing neuroplasticity and the people whose lives they've transformed.

[The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain](#)

by Brock L. Eide M.D. M.A. and Fernet F. Eide M.D., Plume (2012) — In this groundbreaking book, Brock and Fernet Eide explain how 20% of people—individuals with dyslexia—share a unique learning style that can create advantages in a classroom, at a job, or at home. Using their combined expertise in neurology and education, the authors show how these individuals not only perceive the written word differently but may also excel at spatial reasoning, see insightful connections that others simply miss, understand the world in stories, and display amazing creativity.

Websites that have current and accurate science based information describing the neurological and biological indications of dyslexia.

Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts <http://www.decodingdyslexiama.org/about-dyslexia.html>

The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity <http://dyslexia.yale.edu>

National Center for Learning Disabilities <http://www.ncl.org>

Suggested Language

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
A Proclamation
His Excellency Governor Deval L. Patrick**

Whereas Dyslexia is a Specific Learning Disability (SDL) that is defined as a difficulty in reading, a disparity between intelligence and reading ability, particularly reading fluency which affects one in five people, across all cultures and ethnic backgrounds, without regard to gender, race, age or economic status; and

Whereas there are scientifically documented studies that show that dyslexia is a neurological difference in the process of learning to read that can be identified by an unexpected difficulty in reading, a disparity between intelligence and reading ability, particularly reading fluency; and

Whereas dyslexia can make learning to read difficult and keeping up with age appropriate curriculum a challenge; and

Whereas literacy for all and age appropriate curriculum is an important goal for all Massachusetts residents; and

Whereas there are scientifically proven reading instruction methods that can, with student, parent and teacher support, assist dyslexic readers learn to read and improve fluency and comprehension; and

Whereas with proper diagnosis, appropriate instruction, hard work, and support from families, friends, and teachers individuals with dyslexia can excel at school and later as working adults; and

Whereas in an effort to assist parents, students, educators and individuals with dyslexia, Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts is designating October as Dyslexia Awareness Month, to coordinate with similar designations by the International Association of Dyslexia, many other states; and

Now, Therefore I, Deval Patrick, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, do hereby proclaim October 2013, to be

Dyslexia Awareness Month

And urge all the citizens of the Commonwealth to take cognizance of this event and participate fittingly in its observance.

Given at the Executive Chamber in Boston, XXXXXXX, in the year two thousand and thirteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America, the two hundred and thirty-sixth.

By His Excellency

Deval L. Patrick
Governor of the Commonwealth

William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

THE YALE CENTER FOR DYSLEXIA & CREATIVITY

Transforming dyslexia from a liability to an asset.

Getting on The Bus:

Stopping practices that leave some children on the curb and creating space for all to thrive.

by Wanda M. Holland Greene, Head of The Hamlin School



Wanda M. Holland Greene

As an African-American educator and school leader who came of age during the 1970's, I am well acquainted with and inspired by the chapters and verse of the Civil Rights Movement. I absorbed American history and life lessons by listening to my father's dinner-table stories about growing up in the segregated South, and I learned freedom songs and spirituals while fidgeting on wooden pews at church. Even as a young child, I remember thinking deeply about people being excluded and rendered invisible because of who they were, and I wondered about the meaning of liberty and the possibility of justice for all. My school bus ride between my black and Hispanic neighborhood in Brooklyn and my all-white elementary school in Queens

was a daily reminder of the geographical and psychological boundaries that kept people ensconced in their zones of fear and ignorance, and I decided then that my life's work would focus on leveling those walls and the playing field, too.

My vivid childhood memories of racial integration and religious instruction have provided an important ethical foundation for my present-day leadership and have fueled my commitment to diversity and inclusion. Moreover, those early experiences have become my bridge to understanding dyslexia and the plight of students whose strengths go unnoticed in the classroom. When I consider the struggles and marginalization of many dyslexic children and their families, the passionate activists and allies who are pushing for school reform, and the

shared vision for a more inclusive and innovative world, it seems natural to reframe dyslexia as a civil rights issue.

What makes the critical difference between helpful testing which empowers children and harmful testing that marginalizes children is the conclusion we draw from the data.

Statistics show that one in five students are dyslexic. Obviously, some are more severely dyslexic than others, and some go through school without proper diagnosis. When a child's learning profile is baffling and beyond the scope of expertise of the classroom teacher (an issue that I will return to), then formal testing is an appropriate course of action. What makes the critical difference between helpful testing that empowers children and harmful testing that

marginalizes children is the conclusion we draw from the data. **Too often, testing is mistakenly interpreted to lead us to believe that something is broken, terribly wrong, slow, shut down, and dysfunctional.** When we are neither thoughtful in our interpretations nor intentional in our actions, the information we receive from formal evaluations wraps a child in a cloak of deficits; as a result, parents and educators respond by spending inestimable time and other limited resources trying to mitigate the deleterious effects of a learning disability. The language of telephone calls, parent conferences, and report cards begins to focus on what a child cannot do rather than his or her unique strengths, and the implied and explicit message is that the child is no longer considered smart or successful. It does not have to be this way; I have witnessed first-hand the liberation, pride, and excitement which become a part of a child's life at school when an evaluation provides insights into how the child's brain functions as well as a set of reasonable accommodations and strategies to support instruction.

The impressive roster of successful adult dyslexics is further proof that the world is shaped by all kinds of brains. While we should embrace and hold sacred the legal protections and accommodations afforded to dyslexic people and to all Americans with disabilities...

Noted Harvard professor Howard Gardner gave us the language of multiple intelligences in 1983, yet the struggle to broaden the definition of intelligence persists in schools and in society at large. Indeed, dyslexic children have trouble getting to the individual sounds of spoken

words which lead to difficulties with spelling and slower reading, yet we also know that dyslexic children are highly intelligent and adaptable, incredibly creative, and tenacious in the classroom. The impressive roster of successful adult dyslexics is further proof that the world is shaped by all kinds of brains. While we should embrace and hold sacred the legal protections and accommodations afforded to dyslexic people and to all Americans with disabilities, we also need to think about the basic human right to be viewed as intelligent and capable of achievement. Shifting the current educational paradigm about fixing learning disabilities to a conversation about accommodating and celebrating true diversity in the classroom would be revolutionary.

Being a drum major for justice means educators, employers, and legislators working tirelessly to eradicate old mindsets about who can succeed.

Speaking of revolutions, the quest for equality has always required collective energy and effort: just as whites marched with blacks, and men became champions for women's rights, people without dyslexia will need to link arms with those with dyslexia. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, we must "come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom." Becoming an ally for

children—getting on the proverbial bus—means learning as much as we can about the biological basis of dyslexia and its impact. It's also about recognizing dyslexia as early as possible, identifying it, and providing children with effective interventions while at the same time celebrating their strengths. Being a drum major for justice means educators, employers, and legislators working tirelessly to eradicate old mindsets about who can succeed.

Teachers, in particular, have a large role to play in leveling the playing field by understanding the root causes of dyslexia and not letting it become a label or liability. All heads of school need to prioritize increasing teachers' capacity to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. In some cases, this will mean a reallocation of funds for professional development as well as creating time for teachers to collaborate and discuss teaching and learning goals. When teachers acquire new knowledge and refine their pedagogical skills, they will be more adept in designing learning environments that are dynamic, flexible, and fertile for student growth. Of course, some of the "old-school" knowledge and best practices still work. Recommitting to direct instruction in phonics, decoding, spelling, and writing, integrating assistive technology, and using formative and summative assessments to monitor growth and drive instruction will increase the levels of engagement and achievement for all students. Mainstream classrooms, which are more inclusive, will be necessary but not sufficient for success; a referral to a

specialized school with smaller class sizes and a higher concentration of trained learning specialists may be the key to unlock learning for some students. There may be times when the best way for an educator to be an ally is to recognize one's limits. Of course, parents will need to educate themselves, trust their instincts about their own children, and respect teachers' insights as well. Students will be the direct beneficiaries when parents and teachers join in open dialogue and courageous action.

Ultimately, dyslexia will not be reframed as a civil rights issue until two fundamental truths are evident: first, there must be an unshakeable belief in the importance and power of heterogeneous communities. I believe wholeheartedly that brain differences are a gift and that diversity is a component of excellence. Professor Scott Page, author of [The Difference](#), asserts that when it comes to problem solving and productivity, diversity trumps homogeneity and matters more than individual ability. Simply put, the more variation in the brains around the table, the better the outcomes.

We all lose human capital when dyslexic children's creativity is stifled and when they are made to feel less valuable than others. It's time to disrupt the practices that have left some children on the curb and create seats for all on the bus.

Recently, a group of technology leaders, entrepreneurs, and medical professionals joined forces to announce large cash prizes for innovations in life science research. Their stated goal is to spur innovation and to motivate creative minds to solve some of the world's greatest problems. Given the big-picture thinking that characterizes many dyslexic students, the panel of judges would be wise to award the prize money to them. The second truth that must be evident in order for justice to roll down like water is a willingness to recognize unearned privilege. Ultimately, the majority of the population was not negatively affected by the development of the printing press and the proliferation of books in the 1400's; those people were unwittingly granted power to navigate reading, spelling, and writing with ease. On the other hand, a smaller subset of the population whose brains were not wired in that way did not become fluid readers, struggled mightily in school, doubted their self-worth, and often disappointed their parents and teachers. I believe it's time for the majority to share their power and sit down next to the people who have been deemed unworthy. We all lose human capital when dyslexic children's creativity is stifled and when they are made to feel less valuable than others. It's time to disrupt the practices that have left some children on the curb and create

seats for all on the bus.

Wanda M. Holland Greene is currently in her fifth year as Head of School at The Hamlin School. She is a proud New Yorker and a graduate of Columbia College, receiving her B.A. in English and Psychology. She earned her M.A. in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University. Wanda complements her work as an educator by serving independent schools and non-profit organizations as a trustee. She is a vocal performer (jazz, gospel, and soul), an avid reader, poet, and writer.