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Science shows us that good reading skills are the basis for future academic or professional success. Study after study also indicates how important it is to intervene early on. Researchers have found that it is easier to help struggling readers in kindergarten and first grade than later on, and that struggling readers need help early and often. The sooner they get the help, the better off they will be.

But while more than two-thirds of states already have programs in place to identify children who show signs of dyslexia, Michigan law barely mentions dyslexia at all. In the year 2021, having no statewide strategy to screen and treat dyslexia is simply unacceptable.

That is why, along with several of my Republican and Democratic colleagues in the Michigan Senate, introduced legislation last year that would finally do something to fix that. Michigan Senate Bills 1172-1175 would have provided much-needed steps to address dyslexia early on in a student’s schooling.

Under the legislation, educators would have been adequately trained to understand dyslexia, to identify students who are struggling with learning the code, and to teach these students to break the code. A five-member advisory committee of individuals who understand the struggle firsthand would have employed their experiences and knowledge to develop a dyslexia resource guide. Other bills in the legislative package would have required school districts to screen children each year from kindergarten through third grade for reading difficulties using a universal screening assessment. If the assessment indicated that a child was experiencing difficulty learning to decode, the school district would have to provide a multi-tiered system of support.

Legislation would also have required our state’s teacher-preparation institutions to offer instruction on the characteristics of dyslexia, the consequences of dyslexia, evidence-based interventions, and methods to develop a classroom infrastructure that meets the needs of these students. The Michigan Department of Education would have provided schools with “instructional methods and curriculum resources” that work for students with dyslexia by the 2023-24 school year.

All in all, this package of bills would have offered the first comprehensive statewide strategy to help students struggling with dyslexia. It is a strategy that is long overdue. In developing the bills, we worked with experts in the field, including Lauren A. Katz, one of the founders of the Literacy, Language, and Learning Institute at Ann Arbor, Mich. Dr. Katz said the legislation has far-reaching potential.

“Michigan children, no matter where they live or how much money their parents have, will receive instruction and intervention that is grounded in cognitive science,” Katz said of the bills. “And they will receive this instruction and intervention early — during a critical window of time, before negative consequences of dyslexia, evidence-based interventions, and methods to develop a classroom infrastructure that meets the needs of these students. The Michigan Department of Education would have provided schools with ‘instructional methods and curriculum resources’ that work for students with dyslexia by the 2023-24 school year. All in all, this package of bills would have offered the first comprehensive statewide strategy to help students struggling with dyslexia.