



## Advocates celebrate funding for dyslexia screenings

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TUPELO - With legislative passage on Monday of \$1.5 million for literacy screenings and final approval from Gov. Haley Barbour imminent, dyslexia advocates are celebrating.

"I'm so excited. It's about time," said Lauren Groover of Tupelo, who has worked for the cause since her son, Troy, now 17, was diagnosed with dyslexia at age 4.

Though the governor wasn't scheduled to sign the bill on Monday, "he will sign it. It's a done deal," said state Rep. Brian Aldridge, R-Tupelo. "It's just about as plain as the nose on my face it's going to become law."

A former member of the House Education Committee from District 17 whose wife is dyslexic, Aldridge has worked with dyslexia advocates for two years to get children screened for the characteristics of dyslexia, an inherited language-based reading disorder affecting one in five people.

Some of the disorder's characteristics include poor handwriting, repeated erratic spelling errors, word substitutions in oral reading, slow reading speed and a delay in learning to talk.

Aldridge previously drafted legislation modeled after a screening program for elementary students in the Lee County Schools. It was signed into law by the governor but was not scheduled to take effect until funding was appropriated.

Now that the money is available, Aldridge said the next step will be the development of an instrument to perform screenings for children in grades K-3. The \$1.5 million appropriation coupled with federal funds available through the state Department of Education will permit screenings for all K-3 students statewide.

"We're going to identify children that have numeracy and literacy skill problems," he said. "We're going to catch them."

Becky Hendrix, testing coordinator for the Lee County Schools, said Mississippi schoolchildren will benefit.

"I think it's a good thing," she said, noting that the screenings the county school district performs

do not test specifically for dyslexia or other disorders, but instead determine if children are at or below benchmarks for their grade level.

Hoyet Pitts of Tupelo, whose son, Zachary, has dyslexia, said he is not disappointed with Monday's action but thinks more can be done.

"I think it's a drop in the bucket," Pitts said.

Groover said the funding was approved after parents pressured lawmakers.

"They were basically bombarded with phone calls," she said. "This will put a lot of money into the pot. It's a huge chapter that hopefully will be closed."

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