



Tremaine Foundation



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## Vermont Governor, Experts Link Dyslexia and Efforts to Promote Early Literacy

*State Policy Solutions Can Ensure More Students  
Master Reading by the End of Third Grade*

WASHINGTON--Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin, who struggled with dyslexia as a child, argued today for policy solutions that would start early to identify struggling readers and ensure more students learn to read proficiently by the time they finish third grade.

Shumlin said his proposed investments in early childcare and education, as well as his proposal to give every student a "Personal Learning Plan" on the first day of kindergarten, would reap benefits for all students, including those with learning disabilities.

"We need to start with our youngest students and identify any barriers that will keep them from reading, whether it's a disability, the lack of access to preschool or simply hunger," Shumlin told a crowd of educators and advocates at a policy briefing at the National Press Club.

The event, hosted by the [Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation](http://www.tremaine.org) and the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](http://www.gradelevelreading.org), emphasized how widespread efforts to ensure more children master reading by the end of third grade won't succeed unless schools identify and find effective ways to teach the 2.2 million students with learning disabilities.

"My teachers were quick to write me off in the early grades, but once I was identified with dyslexia, I got the help I needed to succeed," Shumlin said. "I want to make sure that every child in Vermont has a chance to learn to read proficiently, graduate from high school and go on to college."

The governor's remarks were followed by a panel discussion among experts about the need for a comprehensive approach to helping dyslexic students, emphasizing early identification, research-based lessons and new technology. These strategies, the panelists said, could be applied in every classroom to bolster reading skills for all students, helping to narrow achievement gaps and reduce dropout rates.

"A growing number of leaders in education recognize two important truths: that reading is fundamental to learning, and second, that almost all children can learn if, and only if, the tools they need to succeed are available to them not only in K-3, but even in pre-K," said Stewart Hudson, president of the Tremaine Foundation, a Connecticut-based philanthropy that invests in educational policies and programs that assist those with learning disabilities.

"Armed with these truths, leaders are recognizing that we cannot reach national literacy goals

without doing a better job of giving learning disabled children what they need to succeed," Hudson said. "So too, leaders in the learning disabled community recognize the necessity of joining their efforts with the wider goal of grade-level reading."

The foundation, along with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, recently released a study "Don't Dys Our Kids: Dyslexia and the Quest for Grade-Level Reading Proficiency."

Currently two-thirds of U.S. fourth graders--and more than four-fifths of those from low-income families--are not reading proficiently, according to results of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Students who don't read well by that point often fail to catch up and are four times more likely to drop out of high school, research shows.

To address this, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is working with foundations, nonprofit partners, states and communities to increase the number of low-income students who master reading by the end of third grade. Addressing learning differences is critical to the effort, said Ralph Smith, the campaign's managing director.

"The strategies that we use to identify dyslexic children early on and help them decode the written word can also be put to work reaching low-income children who may be struggling in school," said Smith, a senior vice president at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "We need to reach all children before that critical third grade milestone, when the focus shifts from learning to read, to reading to learn."



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The [Emily Hall Tremain Foundation](#) is a Connecticut-based foundation that focuses its grantmaking in the areas of art, environment and learning disabilities.

The [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship.