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Kim's Story

Here's a story that may resonate with someone reading this. My daughter was doing wonderfully in school: all A's, great feedback from teachers, no behavioral issues and all around doing well. When I look back at her elementary school years, I thought her misspelling of common 'sight' words was just part of the growing process. I would see incorrectly spelled words circled on her writing papers but when I would ask her how to spell words such as 'does,' she would spell them out loud correctly despite them being misspelled on her paper. This would happen with many words, like 'does' (she would spell it 'dose'), school was spelled as 'scool', and even her name 'Kayla' was sometimes spelled 'Kala.' I chalked a lot of it up to her using spellcheck too much on her phone. She never loved to read; reading was a chore for her at times. We read consistently to her from the time she was born, but she never grew to love it. These were a couple of things we thought were just unique to her.

As she continued on through middle school, we encountered the same things - all A's (even in advanced classes), great feedback from the teachers and all around no academic issues. We still noticed spelling errors, but it became the things we just got used to seeing, so it never really hit our radar as maybe it did in elementary school. Why would I think there was anything wrong? No one mentioned to us they saw anything unusual with her. She would complete her tasks, homework was done on time and at home we noticed her work ethic to complete assignments was amazing. She would spend lots of time making sure her note cards were color-coordinated, her to-do list sticky notes dotted her room and mirror. She was ultra-organized and could multi-task better than anyone. I took pride in these things as a parent, especially as she became busier with sports, increased her workload at school, and was engaging in middle school activities. There were times I would see her room's light on later than I would like, but she was studying. Getting good grades was important to her, she wanted to excel, and she did.

I would have never thought she had a learning disability. How could she? But something happened in 8th grade that was a turning point for her and us. Every year the students took standardized testing in Fall and Spring. This year, the 8th grade teachers offered an incentive of a pizza party for all students who went up 3 points on the standardized testing from Fall to Spring. I never really paid much attention to the score she got over the years because it always seemed to fall in the above average category compared to her peers. This time I was forced to pay attention to her score. Kayla came home very upset after the scores were released, as she went down 4 points on her standardized testing from Fall to Spring. She was not allowed to go to the pizza party with the other kids who went up the required 3 points. I looked at her score, and she was still in the high average (near above average) range, yet she didn't increase her score. This caused me to pause and think, "why?". Her peers were catching up to her and maybe she should have increased her score but instead she dropped slightly.

In turn, I asked the school to see her scores over the past couple of years. Low and behold, she had plateaued. She was above average, but her scores never really changed, yet her peers started to catch up to her. By 8th grade, her score was high average but no longer above average. I still didn't think there was a problem though, because she was still performing well on her testing, grades were great and no other feedback from teachers caused me to think anything was wrong. However, something was nagging at me to look further.

I called my sister, Pam. Knowing she did this for a living was comforting, and I asked her a simple question: "Do you think Kayla has some type of learning disability because she dropped 4 points on her standardized testing and couldn't go to the pizza party?" Not kidding, this is exactly what I said (expecting my sister to laugh and call me crazy). Instead, she listened, got more information from me, and had me gather anything I could find from elementary through middle school (e.g., report cards, schoolwork I saved, testing grades, teacher feedback, etc). I scrambled and mailed everything I had to her. My sister consulted with her husband, John, and they suggested, based on what they saw, that Kayla come in for a complete evaluation.

I wanted Pam or John to do the testing, but their ethical code says they can't evaluate or treat family members. We set up an appointment in her office with another psychologist, and Kayla and I flew in from outside of Chicago to do the testing. It was a long day; 8 hours of testing, but I wanted to make sure she either had something or she didn't. I wanted answers.

Answers is exactly what I received. My beautiful, smart, talented, organized, studious child has dyslexia. I didn't know what that meant, but over time I have learned so much about it and feel so much better prepared to guide my daughter through her academic journey. Kayla, over the years of elementary and middle school, was compensating so well that she flew under the radar. Her dyslexia wasn't noticed, because she figured out how to work around it to get her good grades. She really was a Rockstar.

I'm so glad we found this out. I no longer get frustrated with her spelling errors (although I still correct her, even in texts), but I'm more tolerant with her. She is a junior now and the amount of work a junior has in high school is massive, but with the suggestions, resources available to her, accommodations at school and the help of her team at MFS, she is continuing to be successful on her academic journey. I truly don't know where I would be without them. I am forever grateful for their expertise in this field and for guiding a lost mom and dad when we had so many questions. With their help, she now has so many wonderful things in place at her fingertips to help her in school.