

SB 237 (Portantino) Dyslexia – Universal Screening

PROBLEM

The California Department of Education (CDE) recognizes that “one of the greatest contributing factors for lower achievement scores in reading is lack of early and accurate identification of students with dyslexia.”

Dyslexia is the most common learning disability with at least 10% of the general population having dyslexia—some estimate it to be over 15%. And, research has found as high as 80% of struggling readers are on the dyslexia spectrum. Students struggling with dyslexia often go undiagnosed.

Students with dyslexia are less likely to graduate high school and attend college, and also experience higher rates of incarceration. In some prisons today, where nearly 80% of the inmates are illiterate, almost one-half of the inmates are on the dyslexia spectrum.

Research evidence from multiple scientific studies is unequivocal: early identification and intervention with scientifically based early reading instruction strategies and materials improves literacy outcomes for students with dyslexia and other struggling readers.

By screening all students for risk of dyslexia early, California can help families and teachers achieve the best learning and life outcomes for all students, close academic achievement gaps, and help end the school-to-prison pipeline.

BACKGROUND

Most school districts in California do not currently support their teachers and staff to provide universal screening for students at risk of

dyslexia. Even when screening is performed it is not always performed consistently and using reliable and valid screening instruments. Students at risk of dyslexia are frequently not identified unless they are otherwise found eligible for special education services pursuant to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The lack or delay in screening of struggling readers and students at risk of dyslexia results in unnecessary delays in receiving appropriate support and intervention. Due to these delays, the academic gap and learning loss in core content is often insurmountable to overcome even after significant cost and interventions.

In a typical population almost two-thirds of students with dyslexia could fail to get the help they need and are entitled to under state and federal law.

SUMMARY

SB 237 requires all students in California to be screened for risk of dyslexia in their early elementary years.

Specifically, the bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to establish a list of approved screening instruments to be used by school districts to screen pupils for risk of dyslexia, as specified. The SBE approved instruments must include developmentally-appropriate screening for phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol (and symbol-sound) recognition, letter naming fluency, decoding skills, and rapid automatized naming, all of which are consistently supported as necessary foundational skills in reading science.

SB 237 requires all local educational agencies serving students in any of the grades kindergarten to grade 2, inclusive, to annually screen every student for risk of dyslexia (unless objected to in writing from the parent or guardian). If a new student from out-of-state enrolls in grades K-2, they must be screened upon enrollment.

SB 237 would require the results from the screening and state dyslexia program guidelines to be made available to the student's parent or guardian and teacher in a timely manner so they have awareness of the findings and knowledge of the strategies that can be used with pupils for remediation, and so that parents understand their rights.

EXISTING LAW

The term "dyslexia is found in state and federal law. In federal law, it is found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) under the category of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Thirty-five states have passed legislation addressing screening and/or support for students at risk for dyslexia.

Existing state and federal law require a pupil who is assessed as having characteristics of dyslexia under the category of SLD, and meeting specified eligibility criteria, be entitled to special education and related services. IDEA requires that a student's individualized education plan (IEP) team tailor specifically designed instruction to meet the individual needs of eligible students, including students with dyslexia.

Existing federal law states that screening of a student by a teacher or specialist to determine appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum implementation shall not be considered to be an evaluation for eligibility for special education and related services.

Current California law does not require universal early screening of all children to identify children at risk for dyslexia to enable parents and teachers to be aware of the student's needs as early as possible and provide appropriate instruction and help in the regular education program.

SUPPORT

Co-sponsors:

Decoding Dyslexia CA
EdVoice

Support:

California Youth Services
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
International Dyslexia Association:
 NorCal Branch
 Los Angeles Branch
 San Diego Branch
 SoCal/Tri-Counties Branch
Eye to Eye, Inc.
Glean Education
Learning Rights Law Center
The California Association of School Psychologists (CASP)
La Comadre Network
Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center
Association of Regional Center Agencies
The Diverse Learners Coalition
Coalition for Students with Disabilities
Speak UP
Dyslexia Training Group