

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell  
Chair, Assembly Education Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 159  
Sacramento, CA 95814

June 29, 2021

Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell and Members of the Assembly Education Committee,

**We write in support of SB 237 (Portantino) Dyslexia Screening.** The Palo Alto CAC represents over 1,000 families who have students with disabilities in the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD). Our organization has provided Parent Education, Community Building/Inclusion opportunities, and District Advisory since 1988.

The CDE published its Dyslexia Guidelines in 2017 “to assist regular education teachers, special education teachers, and parents to **identify and assess** pupils with dyslexia, and to plan, provide, evaluate, and improve educational services to pupils with dyslexia.” The guidance is not mandatory for LEAs, which has left many students still behind in reading and needed support.

We believe all stakeholders benefit from this bill. **SB 237 is equitable, economical and consistent with IDEA’s LRE requirement.** SB 237 will help eliminate inequities of opportunity that thousands of students face by establishing a statewide policy for K-2nd grade. Without universal screening in every school district, only those students with sufficient resources and advocacy on their behalf will be identified as being at risk for dyslexia and receive the appropriate instruction and support they need to reach their full potential. **Data helps drive decisions.** SB 237 will provide educators with real-time, actionable data to inform their instruction practices for students at risk of learning loss due to under-developed reading skills and/or dyslexia. As students begin another school year after the devastation of COVID, it is critical for teachers to know how to most effectively address deficits and for districts to use their funds most efficiently.

The most effective approach for students who struggle with reading and related language problems like Dyslexia, is **early diagnosis** and skilled teaching. PAUSD adopted its Dyslexia [Resolution](#) and [Plan](#) in 2018. PAUSD’s plan began by creating awareness and followed quickly with universal screening of K-3 students in Fall 2019 (consistent with the [CDE’s Dyslexia Guidelines](#) Chapter 9). The state is creating a roadmap for districts through the [California Dyslexia Initiative](#). All this brings much-needed attention to an issue that has persisted for decades.

There is no time to waste. Over a third of California's students with disabilities (38%) are identified under the category that includes Dyslexia, and Black and Latinx students are disproportionately identified. SB 237 reminds educators that structured, systematic reading skills should and can be taught and monitored first in General Education classrooms and to English Language Learners, rather than with Special Education. Reading is fundamental to learner accessibility. Students at risk of Dyslexia can become great readers and become very successful throughout their lives. But without early identification and support, poor readers are less likely to graduate high school and attend college, and face a greater risk of incarceration. The repeated failure they often experience without intervention contributes to anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions, which students with Dyslexia experience two to five times more than their peers.

We urge you to **SUPPORT– SB 237 Universal Dyslexia Screening.**

Sincerely,

Kimberly Eng Lee, Alison Guan, Christine Baker, and Rika Yamamoto  
Co-Chairs of the Palo Alto CAC, a sub-committee of the SELPA 1 CAC

<https://cacpaloalto.org/>

