



May 3, 2022

Dear PAUSD School Board Trustees, Dr. Don Austin, Ms. Sharon Ofek, Ms. Anne Brown, Ms. Danae Reynolds, Ms. Leslie Faust, and Ms. Yolanda Conaway,

What started five years ago as an initiative for students with dyslexia expanded to encompass a broader equity imperative — the right to read, and this district's responsibilities to provide such education to every student.

Palo Alto CAC encourages PAUSD to formally adopt core [curriculum](#) that complies with the state ELA/ELD Framework, Dyslexia Guidelines, and Comprehensive Literacy Plan beginning this Fall 2022. 'Equity By Design' minimizes barriers and maximizes potential for every student's success, particularly those who are historically underrepresented. Public schools operate under State Standards and Guidance, and Board Policies. These are to be nonnegotiable, and they gird the [PAUSD Promise](#) for Early Literacy and Equity & Excellence. Independence and individualization exist, but within District criteria. The proposed [recommendations](#) align with ongoing CCEIS, Dyslexia and ESRI work and we concur would ensure uniform access to instruction and materials across General Ed classrooms.

Why do we need to make changes now? All metrics for PAUSD's most at-risk students with disabilities, dyslexia, ELL and limited private resources, indicate that current practices are not ensuring they graduate prepared for college and career. But if you get early literacy right, so many other things fall into place! We believe cracking the alphabetic code gives all students the ABILITY TO READ and engage with oral and written content, develops their LOVE FOR LEARNING, and sustains high hopes for students throughout their K-12 career.

Any delays in adoption, for example the next naturally occurring state adoption cycle in 2027, is too late for today's first graders who will be in middle school. And our current curricular approach compounds the exponential Matthew Effect gap, where the word-rich get richer, while the word-poor get poorer. Those who need public education most, cannot wait. In [PAUSD's Significant Disproportionality CCEIS Report](#): "The overwhelming findings that the Stakeholder group noted were that students who are African American and Hispanic in PAUSD were more likely to be referred for SST and Special Education assessment... under the eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability [which affects a child's ability to read, write, listen, speak, reason, or do math. Among the root causes of disproportionality,] Currently, [individual school] sites design and implement systems of intervention to support their students. Differences in practice from site to site make it difficult to provide systematic support to schools. As a result, resources are often siloed at sites rather than shared across the district and sometimes hinder the transition from one [grade] level to the next for both students and staff... [Additionally] Conscious and/or unconscious racial and linguistic biases negatively influence perceptions of student academic, social emotional and behavioral abilities; [plus there is a] Lack of ongoing and effective professional development on teaching diverse learners. Regardless of the data set being analyzed, analysis of data shows a pattern of disproportionate outcomes for historically underrepresented students compared to their White, Asian, and English Only peers."

It is simply unrealistic to think that we could select and purchase an off-the-shelf curriculum that perfectly meets our needs without some tailoring. But the products available to teachers are structured to take much of the burden out of planning giving them time to think about how to teach rather than what to teach and enabling them to focus on the needs of individual children.

CAC is further advocating on teachers behalf for sufficient and ongoing professional learning and support, along with continuous and early monitoring of those at-risk or who need particular attention. We recognize the pressure to strike a balance between professional autonomy and accountability. The goal is impact. Appendix H (The “Ways to Address Concerns raised by Committee Members”) indicates staff shall receive extensive and ongoing training on curriculum and differentiation, and coordination between teachers and specialists. This iterative tuning and design thinking about classroom practice honors teachers’ craft and integrity, but still accounts for what they might still lack, including lesson implementation, small and large group strategy, daily pacing, dexterity with materials, practices for multilingual learners, how comprehension develops, and standards for listening/speaking/reading/writing. We have some staff more adept, and others developing new competencies. All are to be continuous learners themselves, and can participate in a professional learning community. No one curriculum meets all needs, but with a complete hierarchy and sufficient materials, staff can select the practices which scale and differentiate, without compromising on content standards. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts require a seismic shift to transition PAUSD’s climate and outcomes. LAUSD Superintendent Carvalho wrote, “I am not aware of any school district or institution that has transitioned from good to great without some degree of tension, an immense effort and significant engagement with invested stakeholders.”

The ultimate goal we must achieve is a cohesive and holistic strategy to get quality, standards-aligned instructional materials into the hands of teachers and support their ongoing professional learning and planning with high-quality coaching and system-wide support. Elementary teachers lay the foundation academically, socially and emotionally upon which learners of all persuasions progress through PAUSD. In a unified district it is more apparent that coordination and leverage impacts students’ development. The possibilities begin when metrics are seen as assistive rather than punitive, and diversity and variability are seen as opportunities, rather than aberrations.

District staff was transparent and forthright throughout the ELA curriculum adoption about the goals and expectations regarding literacy and equity. Teachers are their daily partners in education and pedagogy. Feedback on the viability of Benchmark, the recommended core curriculum, is detailed and consistent even without the final group inter-ranking exercise. We are comfortable that a coherent review process was undertaken, and advise the adoption of Benchmark and Heggerty for reading curricula beginning the next school year.

Sincerely,

Palo Alto CAC