



DECODING DYSLEXIA MARYLAND

Senate Bill 575 — State Department of Education - Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices - Guidance and Assistance

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

March 3, 2020

Written Testimony

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Decoding Dyslexia Maryland represents parents, students and educators across Maryland and has 14 local chapters with active members in each school district.

This bill was recommended by the [2015 Dyslexia Task Force](#), which found that local school system administrators, educators and parents of K-12 students would benefit from a handbook that included best practices for reading and dyslexia along with materials and processes to support general educators in the regular education classroom.

SB 575, as amended, would bring together general educators, administrators, special educators, and parents to develop a comprehensive resource on reading and dyslexia; this effort is similar to those in [23 states, including Texas, California and New Jersey](#).

Some suggest that the 6-page, special education Dyslexia Technical Assistance Bulletin is enough guidance. We disagree. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future expects to see cost savings from reductions in special education -- guidance on best practices for reading instruction in the general education curriculum would help that process. Administrators, general educators and special educators can work collaboratively to reduce the number of students who are failed by ineffective core reading instruction.

Students who are helped the most by effective core reading instruction are students living in poverty, English language learners, students with dialectical differences, students who experience trauma and students who are at risk for reading disabilities like dyslexia. These students rely on schools to provide effective, evidence based instruction and intervention



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frameworks and the Handbook would help schools do just that.

Components of the Handbook legislation include:

1. Best practices for reading screening, instruction, identification of reading difficulties, dyslexia assessment and interventions;
2. Definitions, indicators and characteristics of reading difficulties;
3. Tools and materials to support teachers and parents; and
4. Designation of a dyslexia liaison at MSDE to facilitate technical assistance to local school systems.

If we expect our investment in education to yield college and career ready students by the end of 10th grade, then students must be able to read proficiently by third grade.¹ The Handbook would collect, and make available to all educators, best practices that address reading and dyslexia. It will shine a light on practices that support struggling students to *prevent* and close academic gaps ([see TX & CA handbooks](#)).

A Handbook can also support improved student outcomes by connecting general and special education departments not only to best practices, *but to each other*. The bill does not mandate curriculum or programs, but it does encourage inter-professional practices (IPP) where two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve outcomes for students.

A recent study undertaken by WestEd found that MSDE's special education department went to great lengths to develop and share best practices with stakeholders and school districts, but the general education department did not appear to do the same.² The study said:

¹ "One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for students who are proficient." ["Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation" Donald J. Hernandez, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011.](#)

² "However, the researchers observed that the joint guidance provided is led by DEI/SES and does not appear to be distributed to general education leadership by their respective leadership at MSDE. A scan of the materials made available by the MSDE Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement on its Resource Hub did not find materials that indicated promotion of cross-training with special education or information on how the resources provided could be applied to increase the quality of core



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“[We] did not find materials that indicated promotion of cross-training with special education or information on how the resources provided could be applied to increase the quality of core and specially designed instruction for students with disabilities.”

- Last week, Decoding Dyslexia Maryland partnered with literacy experts from the [National Center on Improving Literacy](#) to provide professional learning sessions on strong screening, instruction and intervention for reading and dyslexia. 12 school districts, MSDE and over 150 parents participated. There is clearly a demand for this information.³

Thank you for your consideration of this simple, yet important bill - it is one way to create a collaborative community, provide best practices and boost accountability for the Blueprint. The data collected by the Maryland Longitudinal Data System can help us discern if policy changes support positive student outcomes.

We urge a favorable report on the bill as amended.

AMENDMENTS Summary:

1. Expands the advisory to include school psychologists (MSPA), speech language pathologists, dyslexia community members, an adult with dyslexia (ARC) and a psychologist. Most positions are chosen by the State Superintendent.
2. Removes the provision to create a list of reading programs and intervention programs for dyslexia.
3. Clarifies that the dyslexia liaison can be part of an existing position within the Department.
4. Technical amendments to clarify certain language but not change the meaning or intent.

and specially designed instruction for students with disabilities.” [Source: Dec. 2019, Maryland Special Education Study, WestEd](#)

³ The sessions were recorded by [WETA/Reading Rockets](#) and will be districted in order to scale the information to all Maryland school districts and other states.