

Testimony To The House Ways And Means Committee
**House Bill 718 — State Department of Education - Early Literacy and Dyslexia
Practices - Guidance and Assistance**

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Testimony to Support HB 718 With Amendments

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Schultz, and I am a state leader and co-founder of Decoding Dyslexia Maryland. I'm here to support House Bill 718 to create a Reading and Dyslexia Handbook.

[In 2015, the Dyslexia Task Force](#) recommended that Maryland create a handbook because it found that local school system administrators, educators and parents would benefit from guidance that used the same language and applied the same principles to all children, regardless of where they live (p.52).

[23 states, including Texas, California and New Jersey](#), have Early Literacy and Dyslexia handbooks that guide implementation of their state literacy requirements.

HB 718 would create a stakeholder advisory group charged with developing a reading and dyslexia handbook. The components of the handbook include:

1. Definitions, indicators and characteristics of reading difficulties;
2. Practice guidelines for screening, identification, assessment, and intervention for reading and dyslexia;
3. Helpful tools and materials; and
4. Designation of a dyslexia liaison at MSDE who would facilitate technical assistance to local school systems.

As you know, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future sets high expectations for students; if this investment is to yield college and career ready students by the end of 10th grade, then students must be able to read proficiently by third grade.

Struggling readers do not “catch up” to their average performing peers unless evidence based reading instruction and early, intensive intervention is provided; otherwise, the gap between good and poor reader only widens over time (Adams, 1990; Good et al., 2001; National Research Council, 1998; Stanovich, 1986).

In December 2019, the findings from the [Wested special education study](#) noted that MSDE’s special education department went to great lengths to develop and share best practices with stakeholders and school districts. The report also said that the MSDE Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement did not appear to share special education documents that impacted general education or provide similar resources for their general education stakeholders, including school districts. It’s time for MSDE’s departments to share resources to be on the same team.¹

- Tomorrow, over 200 parents and school district personnel are attending the [Literacy for All Conference](#) right down the hall.
- Literacy experts from the [National Center on Improving Literacy](#) will provide specialized sessions to school districts on how to implement evidence based reading screening, instruction and interventions for dyslexia.
- The Keynote address will be livestreamed by [WETA/Reading Rockets](#) and the sessions will be recorded to scale the information to all Maryland school districts and other states.

There is clearly a demand for this information.

Decoding Dyslexia Maryland supports HB 718 along with the technical amendments that will clarify the membership of the stakeholder advisory group and the tools and materials to be developed by the advisory group.

We urge a positive report on the bill and thank you for your consideration.

¹ “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 and specially designed instruction for students with disabilities.” [Source: Dec. 2019, Maryland Special Education Study, WestEd](#)