



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: SB 237 (Portantino) – as amended March 3, 2021 – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Portantino:

I write in strong support of your SB 237, which EdVoice is honored to co-sponsor. As you know, SB 237 would require the State Board of Education (SBE) to establish an approved list of culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate screening tools to be used by schools to screen all students in kindergarten through second grade for risk of dyslexia, and require the results be made available in a timely fashion to teachers and parents, as specified.

Hundreds of thousands of California students on the dyslexia spectrum struggle every day with reading at grade-level, often without the proper identification and support to achieve their full potential. Establishing a statewide policy of universal early screening is an important step toward eliminating inequities of opportunity in California's public schools. Without universal screening, many students without sufficient resources and advocacy on their behalf will not be identified as being at risk for dyslexia and receive the appropriate instruction and support they need to reach their full potential.

Dyslexia is the most common learning disability, with nearly 15% of the general population having the condition. Sadly, students at risk of dyslexia and struggling with reading, and therefore other academic content, often fall through the cracks. Without identification and support, these students are less likely to graduate high school and attend college and face a greater risk of incarceration. In some prisons today, nearly 80% of the inmates are illiterate, and almost one-half of these are on the dyslexia spectrum.

Specifically, SB 237 would require all local educational agencies serving students in any of the grades kindergarten to grade 2, inclusive, to use a screening tool approved by the SBE to screen students for risk of dyslexia (unless objected to in writing from the parent or guardian). The bill requires the results from the screening, state dyslexia program guidelines and information on support systems to be made available to parents in a timely manner so they are aware of the findings and strategies that can be used to support the student as appropriate.

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Identifying students at risk of dyslexia early as a statewide priority is a low-cost investment for the state to help ensure every child has equitable access to a basic education guaranteed as a fundamental right in the California Constitution. Targeting instructional support early for identified students will also significantly reduce costs to schools and families for later academic remediation and support services.

By taking less than fifteen minutes to screen a student 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, avoid costly interventions later in students' academic careers, and help end the school-to-prison pipeline.

We appreciate your authorship of this important legislation. Of course, please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Bill Lucia
President & CEO

Cc: Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations