



## *Let's Make a Difference*

share your  
STORY

Letter writing campaign for  
Decoding Dyslexia CA

### *Use Your Voice!*

Writing letters to policy-makers is a great way to be heard and to create change. Thank you for joining this Decoding Dyslexia CA Letter Writing Campaign! Let's keep a steady stream of powerful personal stories arriving in front of key decision-makers in California.

The goal of this campaign is to inspire these individuals to care about and act on behalf of students with dyslexia in California. Your letter should be focused on raising awareness and making suggestions for positive change rather than criticizing current practices, expressing overly negative opinions of educational official/systems or asking for specific remedies to any personal issues. Use your story to emphasize the knowledge gap that exists between what research has shown to be effective for students with dyslexia and with current practices in schools and teacher training programs across the State of California.

You might consider highlighting some of the following points in your letter:

- There is a need for improved teacher training on dyslexia, its warning signs and appropriate reading intervention strategies. Teachers need to graduate from their teacher preparation programs with the skills needed to teach ALL students to read using evidence-based practices.
- Early screening for dyslexia is possible and would identify students at risk for reading failure before they experience academic failure and despair. Data can be collected to match a student's specific areas of weakness to appropriate evidence-based interventions instead of subjecting students with dyslexia to generic, inappropriate reading programs.
- Students with dyslexia need access to appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies so they continue to progress and prosper with grade level and advanced level content and skill development.
- Using the term "dyslexia" affords the student the opportunity to understand the nature of their learning challenges so that they do not begin to assume they are somehow broken or stupid. It is vitally important to identify what "specific learning disability" the student faces so appropriate remediation strategies are researched and prescribed.

*The Ask!* Most importantly, you need to make sure you let them know what they need to do for you. For this Awareness Campaign, be sure to make it clear that you are asking them to take your story to heart and to begin to investigate what is currently happening to students with dyslexia in their school districts. Ask that they share their constituents' input with CA Department of Education and encourage CDE to support students with dyslexia in more meaningful or substantial ways.

Here are some guidelines to help you formulate your thoughts and craft a concise, impactful letter. Get creative...consider including photos, work samples or even personal pleas from students themselves, just remember to keep it short and to the point.

Your Name & Address [PLEASE DO NOT FORGET THIS!]  
DATE

Dear Assembly Member or Senator\_\_\_\_\_:

1. The first paragraph of the letter should contain your purpose for writing the letter. This way, they know exactly what you're talking about.
2. Include information that supports your position and how the dyslexia affects you personally. Anecdotal evidence is a very effective and persuasive lobbying tool.
3. Offer your expertise, if it is relevant. Believe it or not, as a parent/tutor/educator you may have experiential or trained expertise that may be useful to legislators.
4. Use simple language (within reason). Political staffers are not experts on all issues. An example: the term "letter-sound associations" may be more understandable than "grapheme-phoneme correspondence."
5. Always ask the policymaker for something. For this campaign, please refer to The Ask! Information listed above.
6. Thank the recipient for something. You can thank them for their time, effort or for their support in considering new policy.
7. Be courteous, to the point, and try to keep the letter to one page.
8. Your name and address must be included so that you may receive a response.
9. Include a photo or example to bring your story alive!
10. For this campaign, please send via USPS, deliver in person, or read it at a town hall meeting.

Sincerely,  
Your signature  
Your printed name

# SAMPLE LETTER

Jane Doe  
1 Any Street  
Anytown, XX 00000

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 201X

Dear Assembly Member or Senator:

I am a resident of Anytown, XX, and I am writing because I have found it very difficult to access supports and services for my dyslexic son within my public school district.

A gap exists between what research shows us to be effective for students with dyslexia and what is currently available in my public school. It is estimated that up to 20% of children in our K-12 public schools show some signs of dyslexia. Dyslexia impacts over 1.2 million children in our CA public schools. It is the single largest learning disability.

When my son began showing early signs of reading struggles in kindergarten and first grade, it was extremely difficult to get my school district to evaluate and take a look at what was causing my son's struggles. There was a "wait & see" attitude that caused my son to lose precious time for appropriate interventions. Any remediation strategies that were introduced as a part of my district's tiered intervention approach were not specifically matched to my son's needs or areas of weakness. They were generic and seemed to be just more of the same ineffective reading strategies he was getting in his regular classroom setting. It brought tears to my eyes as my son, John, began referring to himself as "stupid" so I took matters into my own hands.

When I brought John's private evaluation reports which identified his dyslexia to the school, I was shocked to find that his teachers, principal, and even the special educators they consulted did not seem to be familiar or have a strong understanding of dyslexia. Ultimately, my son was found eligible for special education but the school district does not have the appropriate, evidence-based reading remediation programs to teach him to read. We are currently paying out of pocket for private tutoring with a trained dyslexia specialist that is 45 minutes from our home. We are personally incurring several hundred dollars a month in private tutoring costs because the school has been unable to provide appropriate help for our son.

I have learned a lot about dyslexia and all of the research that has occurred over the past decades. It is time for our nation's schools and their educators to begin putting this knowledge into practice. Teachers should have the skills needed to teach ALL students to read, including my son. Educators should know about dyslexia, the most common of all learning disabilities and parents should not have to fight or look for outside resources just to keep their dyslexic children on target for learning grade level standards.

I thank you for your service as our State Legislator. I ask that you take our story to heart and begin to investigate what is currently happening to students with dyslexia. Our school districts need assistance in closing this knowledge gap on literacy instruction; educators need awareness, teachers need training, and students need to be screened, remediated and accommodated appropriately and in a timely manner. A collection of best practices for dyslexia endorsed by our state and CA Department of Education would go a long way to helping close this knowledge-practice gap. The information exists; it just hasn't made its way into our public school systems where it can help children.

Attached is a photo of my son, John, showing off his latest Lego creation. We thank you for taking the time to read our story and we will look forward to hearing from you on how our state will support dyslexic students in our districts schools.

Sincerely,

*Signature*

Jane Doe