

Good Evening Superintendent _____ and Board Members.

My Name is _____, and I am the parent of ___ children that attend _____ School.

I think you would agree that reading and writing skills are integral to the Common Core Standards and being college and career ready. I'm pleased to be here tonight to make sure you are aware of a number of initiatives regarding reading disabilities, specifically dyslexia.. This topic is very important to me and my son/daughter, <include name if you wish> because he/she has dyslexia. There are many incorrect statements made regarding dyslexia such as "our school district doesn't recognize dyslexia" or "dyslexia doesn't exist" or "it's a medical term - ask your doctor" or "we don't use that term because it's too broad" or "dyslexic students can only be served through the special education process".... but none of those statements are accurate.

Researchers have known for decades that dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and that it's characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge

Researchers also know how dyslexia presents in a classroom, and they know what works for students with dyslexia. However, it has been terribly slow and difficult to bring the results of this research to where it matters - the classroom. It is estimated that up to 20% of the population display some signs of dyslexia. That's a lot of our kids who aren't achieving at the levels they should be!

Recent dyslexia initiatives that you should be aware of are:

U.S. Department of Education issued guidance in 10/23/15 that encourages the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia to describe and address the child's unique, identified needs through evaluation, special education eligibility, and in IEP documents.

- AB 1369 resulted in two new California laws:
 - The first law effective 1/1/16 adds "phonological processing" to the special education eligibility criteria for determining Specific Learning Disability [CA Education Code Section 56334], and
 - the second law requires the State Superintendent to develop program guidelines for dyslexia to be implemented by the 2017-18 academic year to help teachers and parents identify and assess pupils with dyslexia, and to plan, provide, evaluate, and improve educational services to pupils with dyslexia. It specifically clarifies that "educational services" means an evidence-based, multisensory, direct, explicit, structured, and sequential approach to instructing pupils who have dyslexia [CA Education Code Section 56335]. This approach is often referred to as "Structured Literacy."

- The CA Parent Teachers Association adopted a statewide Dyslexia Resolution on May 7, 2016 emphasizing the importance of early screening for dyslexia, appropriate teacher training in Structured Literacy programs, and appropriate accommodations for our dyslexic students. This CA PTA resolution is now going to National PTA for consideration.
- Lastly, dyslexia is not only a special education issue. California education law specifically provides that students who display the characteristics of dyslexia and do not qualify for special education must be provided appropriate instruction in the general education setting [CA Education Code Section 56337.5(b)].

Educators need to be informed that they must:

- say “dyslexia”
- learn how to identify it, and
- implement appropriate remediation and accommodations

This means a great deal to my family, because it now means that my child is included.

I'm part of Decoding Dyslexia California, a grassroots movement of CA parents, educators, and professionals concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities within our public schools. We aim to raise dyslexia awareness, empower families to support their children, and inform policy-makers on best practices to identify, remediate and support students with dyslexia in CA public schools. We sponsored the bill that resulted in the two newest dyslexia laws in our state (AB 1369) and worked with the author Assemblyman Jim Frazier in getting it passed.

I will leave you with this final thought from a preeminent researcher in dyslexia, Dr. Sally Shaywitz, who states, “We do not have a knowledge gap, we have an action gap.” I look forward to working with you to end this action gap.