

**DYSLEXIA:
ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2016

- WHEREAS,** Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin and is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities, which 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, whose secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge; and
- WHEREAS,** Up to 20% of the general population, or over 1 million students in California K-12 public schools, display signs or symptoms of dyslexia; and
- WHEREAS,** The term dyslexia is found in twenty-two states' laws, including California Education Code, and in Federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) within the broad eligibility category of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), yet many public schools have historically avoided the term "dyslexia" in evaluations, when determining special education eligibility, and in Individual Education Program (IEP) documents; and
- WHEREAS,** Without appropriate remediation, most students who struggle to learn to read, continue to struggle with reading, with lasting consequences including not reaching college and career readiness, increased risk of not earning a high school diploma, not attending or completing college, and social/emotional problems; and
- WHEREAS,** There is compelling scientific evidence that early identification and intervention using an evidence-based multisensory, direct, explicit, structured and sequential approach to instructing pupils with dyslexia (defined as "Structured Literacy Instruction" by the International Dyslexia Association) improves literacy outcomes for most students with symptoms of dyslexia; and
- WHEREAS,** Most teacher preparation programs provide no training regarding dyslexia, appropriate accommodations or evidence-based Structured Literacy Instruction, leaving most teachers unprepared to adequately address the learning needs of children with dyslexia; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that need to be better addressed by public schools and school districts; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts hereby adopt the following definition of dyslexia (previously adopted by the Board of Directors of the International Dyslexia Association and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)):

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is 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”; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts support teacher/staff training necessary to improve the understanding of dyslexia and its warning signs, including training in appropriate evidence-based Structured Literacy Instruction for students with dyslexia in accordance with the International Dyslexia Association’s Knowledge & Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading, and to promote knowledge of appropriate accommodations for dyslexic students; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts support early screening for signs and symptoms of dyslexia in kindergarten through the third grade, with parental notification; the use of evidence-based Structured Literacy Instruction as defined by the International Dyslexia Association; and the use of appropriate accommodations in order to provide students with dyslexia equitable access to the general education curriculum; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA, and its units, councils and districts forward this resolution to the National PTA for consideration by the delegates at the National PTA Convention in June 2017.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Dyslexia is a language-based disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is also the most common learning disability in the nation. Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities, and it occurs in a continuum from mild to severe. Scientific research from the past few decades has resulted in remarkable progress in the understanding of reading and reading disorders; however, this knowledge, particularly about dyslexia, has yet to bridge the gap between academia and educational practice in public schools, despite the longstanding efforts of the International Dyslexia Association. That is now changing as parents from across the country are coming together in grassroots movements such as Decoding Dyslexia which now has chapters in every state. The U.S. Congress has formed a bipartisan Dyslexia Caucus, and several federal dyslexia initiatives are underway. In addition, as of July 2012, twenty-two states have passed laws regarding dyslexia. Continued legislation, advocacy, training and research is necessary to address the educational implications of dyslexia in public schools.

Dyslexia: Addressing The Educational Implications In Public Schools - continued

Research shows that if students who display the characteristics of dyslexia are provided with evidence-based, multisensory instruction in a structured and explicit manner, most of them learn to read and spell successfully. This instructional approach is defined as “Structured Literacy” by the International Dyslexia Association. Early identification and intervention with the appropriate duration and intensity are critical because the longer students struggle with basic reading and spelling skills, the more difficult the task of remediation and the lower the rate of success. Currently, most general education teachers, special education teachers, and reading specialists, and other professionals in our public schools do not have training in dyslexia. Many teachers don’t know what dyslexia is or how to identify it, nor do they have access to, and training in, evidence-based Structured Literacy programs.

There is also a lack of knowledge about appropriate classroom accommodations and modifications necessary for dyslexic students to be able to access the curriculum.

Although dyslexia is recognized under federal and California special education law under the broad eligibility category of “Specific Learning Disability,” most public schools and school districts do not identify dyslexia or use the term. Without identifying dyslexia, it is unlikely that appropriate remediation and accommodations will be provided. This issue has become so significant that the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services issued guidance to states and local education agencies stating the importance of using the term dyslexia. The majority of students with dyslexia are not identified for special education services until after the third grade, if identified at all in public school. Studies show that the likelihood of successful remediation decreases significantly for students who are not identified before third grade.

In order to address this critical literacy issue, it is imperative that our schools identify students with the symptoms of dyslexia as early as possible and provide evidence-based Structured Literacy instruction by trained teachers.