

**PIEDMONT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO:** Board of Education

**FROM:** Randall Booker, Superintendent  
Douglas Harter, Director of Special Education

**DATE:** October 27, 2021

**RE:** **Dyslexia Awareness Month**

---

**I. SUPPORT INFORMATION**

Assembly Bill 1369 was passed in October 2015 after strong parent and educator advocacy related to clarifying and directing practices toward supporting dyslexia.

Most people with dyslexia can learn to read and lead successful lives, such as Thomas Edison, Stephen Spielberg, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Some people believe that dyslexic thinking can actually be an asset. It is neurologically and genetically based with no scientific evidence of a relationship between intelligence and dyslexia.

Dyslexia falls under the eligibility category of Specific Reading Disability. 15-20% of the population has a language-based learning disability; of the students with specific learning disabilities receiving special education services, three out of 4 have reading deficits. Dyslexia is the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties. It affects males and females as well as people from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds nearly equally. Students who receive high-impact phonological awareness and phonics training in Kindergarten and 1st grade will have significantly fewer problems in learning to read proficiently than do children who are not identified or assisted until 3rd grade. Early intervention with fidelity is critical as 74% of children who are poor readers in 3rd grade remain poor readers in 9th grade.

Dyslexia includes deficits in one or some of the following literacy skills: phonological awareness (sound structure), phonemic awareness (sound manipulation), phonological memory (coding in short term memory), and rapid naming (from long term memory). Expressive and receptive language may also be a struggle. Even if early quality instruction results in literacy proficiency, when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, higher-level textbooks, and writing essays, struggles may again worsen. Self-concept may also suffer.

According to the California Department of Education Dyslexia Guidelines (2017),

Extensive research has shown us that reading instruction for students with dyslexia must teach phonemic awareness—the ability to recognize and manipulate phonemes in words. Students must be taught how to link these phonemes to letters and how to blend sounds and segment words when reading and spelling—a method of teaching early reading known as “phonics.” This reading instruction must also teach vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension strategies. Additionally, we have learned that effective reading programs for students with dyslexia incorporate multisensory techniques to explicitly and systematically teach all of the skills mentioned above, so that each new skill builds logically and coherently on the skills that were taught before.

The California Dyslexia Guidelines prescribe:

- a knowledge-based and active system of support that includes families, educators, and other professionals.
- Learning needs related to dyslexia exist on a continuum; therefore, systems of support must be designed to meet the diversity of students’ needs.
- An educational system should address the needs of individual students within an integrated and tiered system of support.
- Students who have dyslexia are “general education students” first, can be educated in general education classrooms, and benefit from a wide variety of supports. Those supports must include a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to reading and language instruction that is implemented by trained educators. Required supports may include various accommodations and assistive technology. Students with dyslexia sometimes require special education.
- An interdisciplinary team approach is most effective when it takes advantage of everyone’s expertise and includes all team members in decision making, problem solving, and instructional leadership.
- Guiding principles for educating students with dyslexia must be anchored in programs that are evidence based, whenever possible, and that incorporate structured literacy instruction that is comprehensive, systematic, explicit, cumulative, and multisensory.

How does Piedmont Unified School District assess and support students with dyslexia?

Each of three elementary schools have an assigned reading specialist. Classroom teachers have participated in Orton-Gillingham and/or Barton training, resources that are research-based in effectively supporting reading skills that align with dyslexia. All students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade participate in formative screener assessments throughout the school year. New students to the district are also screened. Students that are flagged for concern are discussed with the RtI/MTSS team, provided

interventions, progress monitored, and provided more targeted/intensive supports. Communication and recommendations are discussed with the family. Teams are flexible to integrate other school professionals in observations, during the collaborative process, and with service provision. Resources such as Foundations, Wilson, Barton, and SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) are used to provide supplemental intervention to students beyond the tier 1 level. When the need presents itself, the student is brought to the Student Services Team to discuss the need to recommend a special education evaluation.

Our secondary schools use data from the elementary settings along with their own observations and assessments to continuously identify and support reading skills. A part-time reading specialist was recently hired; she is working directly with a few identified students, is collaborating with teachers and teams, and is modeling lessons to help support teacher development. Piedmont Middle School and Millennium High School are universally screening and progress-monitoring students using the Scholastic Reading Inventory multiple times per year. MHS targeted reading interventions are implemented using MindPlay. The special education staff is trained in Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), a Fountas & Pinnell resource intended for small group, intensive, supplementary reading intervention. MHS staff has also participated in professional development on assistive technology and accommodations that help with accessibility and reading success.

References:

[cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/documents/cadyslexiaguidelines.pdf](https://cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/documents/cadyslexiaguidelines.pdf)  
[dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-at-a-glance/](https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-at-a-glance/)

II. **RECOMMENDATION: REVIEW AND ACTION**

Review and discuss Piedmont Unified School District's implementation, practices, and opportunities for continuous improvement in relation to AB 1369.