



Maryland Education Coalition

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BILL: HB 237

Date: January 20, 2021

TITLE: Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices –
Guidance and Assistance

POSITION: SUPPORT

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) supports House Bill 237 which would establish a stakeholder advisory group to develop a Reading and Dyslexia Handbook. The Handbook will help teachers and parents by providing information on evidence-aligned best practices for teaching students with dyslexia and students who require explicit, systematic instruction to learn to read.

When teachers and parents discover that their student is dyslexic, they often do not know what to do or how to teach that child to read. Many teachers report they were not taught about dyslexia in their teacher preparation programs. A Reading and Dyslexia Handbook would provide information on the evidence-aligned best practices for teaching reading that are helpful to all students, but essential for the students who are at risk for reading difficulty and the students with dyslexia. The Handbook would be specific to Maryland as it would be aligned with the Maryland College and Career Reading Standards and the Ready to Read Act (2019).

MEC supports this legislation because:

- 1) **A Handbook that is publicly available to all parents, teachers and administrators is a step towards equitable instruction in reading.** The fight to provide reading interventions for students with dyslexia has been described as a “rich man’s game.”¹ The fortunate dyslexic students who receive appropriate interventions are most often the students whose parents have the time and the means to pay for specialized schools or tutoring. HB237 will not fix reading instruction in Maryland public schools, but it will ensure that information on evidence-aligned reading instruction is readily available to every teacher and administrator. The Handbook will enumerate evidence-aligned components of reading instruction and interventions, assessment and screening information, as well as professional learning topics.
- 2) **A stakeholder advisory group of educators and dyslexia community members will collaborate to produce the Handbook.** A handbook produced with input from varied stakeholders will be more responsive to teacher and parent needs. Additionally, MEC supports meaningful stakeholder engagement in education because collaboration with stakeholders is required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

¹ [Emily Hanford, Hard to Read: How American schools fail kids with dyslexia, an APM Reports radio documentary, September 11, 2017](#) The students and parents interviewed in this documentary are from Baltimore County, Maryland.

- 3) **A Dyslexia Point-of-Contact at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) will be designated.** MSDE will be required to expand an existing position within the English Language Arts department to serve as the dyslexia point-of-contact for school districts seeking advice on how best to support students with dyslexia and provide effective reading instruction. In our experience, local school district administrators do not always know who they can contact at MSDE to get answers to their questions. A knowledgeable point-of-contact will be helpful to local school districts.

For these reasons, MEC supports House Bill 237 and urges a favorable report.