

June 24, 2021

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Education Committee
1020 N Street, Room 159
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: SB 237 (Portantino); as amended on May 20, 2021
POSITION: OPPOSE

Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell,

The California Teachers Association must **oppose** SB 237 by Senator Anthony Portantino. The bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to establish a list of approved screening instruments to be used by school districts to identify pupils in kindergarten through grade 3 for risk of dyslexia. Education professionals are committed to meeting the needs of students with dyslexia to succeed academically; however, this bill creates unintended harmful consequences for all students in the early grades.

Learning to read is a little like learning to ride a bike because both require doing many things at once with precise timing. With practice, typical readers gradually learn to read words automatically so they can focus their mental energy on comprehending and remembering what they have read. Students with dyslexia, though, have trouble with phonemic awareness and phonics; as a result, reading does not become automatic. The education professionals who are the core of CTA's membership understand children with dyslexia need different types of help at different times. CTA members understand reading skills will improve. With the right support, children who struggle with reading will improve skills and feel more confident.

CTA supports addressing dyslexia and other reading and writing dysfunctions in the planning and implementation of any school literacy plan; however, the Association strongly opposes the approach in SB 237 because it simply requires students in kindergarten and grades 1 through 3 be screened for dyslexia each year. Universal screening alone will not prevent the impact of dyslexia on student gains in reading, nor minimize the impact of the frustration of students, nor improve thoughtful planning for instructional support.

The Association has met multiple times with the bill sponsors as well as legislative staff from Senator Portantino's office. During the meetings, three key CTA issues were identified as needing resolution:

- (1) address the mandate for testing all students, initial assessment, and possibility to "assess" if necessary, at the end of first grade or beginning of 2nd grade;
- (2) evaluate how to strengthen what districts are doing, what they could be doing better, and how to improve data collection for student outcomes and age appropriateness;

(3) update the State's dyslexia guidelines as developed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction so that screeners provide better information on differentiation, assuring local education agencies (LEAs) can rely on that data to make decisions for earlier interventions. CTA offered multiple proposals to address these concerns. To date, the association's concerns have been altogether ignored.

CTA believes preschool to grade three students should have access to a curriculum that prepares them for further elementary education and leads them to a secondary and post-secondary education. This curriculum should be developmentally appropriate and allow time to master appropriate grade level skills.

SB 237 (Portantino) is unnecessary, leads to over identifying dyslexia in young students, mandates more testing, and jeopardizes the limited instructional time for students. For these reasons, CTA urges your **NO** vote on SB 237 (Portantino) when it is heard in the Assembly Education Committee.

Sincerely,



Teri Holoman
CTA Associate Executive Director of
Governmental Relations



Lori Easterling
CTA Manager of Legislative Relations

CC: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Education Committee
The Honorable Anthony Portantino

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