

Senate Bill 126 – State Department of Education – Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices – Guidance and Assistance

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

January 27, 2021

David Murray, Board Member, District 1, Prince George’s County Board of Education; and Special Educator

Position: **SUPPORT**

Good Morning Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and all Committee Members,

My name is David Murray. I serve as the Board Member representing District 1 on the Prince George’s County Board of Education. I am also a dedicated special education teacher. I am here to offer my support for Senate Bill 126 because the guidance and assistance outlined in this bill, is needed to help schools and teachers implement preventative, accelerated and remedial support for students who are struggling to read, including students at risk for reading disabilities like dyslexia.

As you know, dyslexia is a learning disability that is not typically identified by schools until the student has failed to respond to instruction and interventions – sometimes this is as late as 9th grade, which is not ideal. Dyslexia affects areas of the brain that process language – resulting in difficulty reading, spelling, and writing. What many of us may not know is that dyslexia is quite common. It is important to have a plan in place to figure out who will struggle to read AND who is at risk for dyslexia and what to do about it.

As we have learned from our COVID experience, it is useful to provide districts and schools with an evidence-based road map that allows consistency and supports teachers and helps generate positive outcomes for all children. In my classroom, I see children struggle with reading difficulties and learning disabilities every day, and I do my best to help them every single day. I would like to have a Reading and Dyslexia handbook so I and my fellow educators would know what to do to help children who struggle, get the help they need. This Handbook will include evidence-based best practices, protocols and processes to address reading needs and will focus on students who live in poverty, students who are speakers of other languages, students of color and students at risk for and with learning disabilities. It will help teachers and schools ensure core reading and writing curriculum is evidence-based and include resources and tools that are shown to improve student outcomes. Additionally, this Handbook will help schools apply early detection protocols, understand best practices and use that information to close reading gaps. The truth of the matter is – children who struggle with reading, do not catch-up without effective, evidence-based intervention provided by a knowledgeable teacher. Sharing resources, and information as it pertains to best practices is our best path forward.

Children with reading difficulties and dyslexia need us to provide systematic, explicit, evidence-based instruction and interventions that follow the science.

More than 20 states have a handbook, and I am hopeful that Maryland will soon be one of them.

I urge a favorable report from this committee on SB 126. Thank you.