



**SB126 STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION - EARLY LITERACY AND DYSLEXIA PRACTICES -
GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE**

January 27, 2021

EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) is submitting a letter of information on **SB126 State Department of Education - Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices - Guidance and Assistance**. This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education to establish, by October 1, 2021, a stakeholder advisory group to develop a reading and dyslexia handbook to guide local school systems in the implementation of best practices for early literacy and dyslexia. It requires a completed handbook be made available to the public by June 1, 2022, and the development of tools and materials to address the needs of at-risk and struggling students with dyslexia. The bill also requires MSDE to update the handbook every 3 years.

In 2019, after deliberations through multiple legislative sessions, the legislature enacted a new law to require, beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, each local school board to ensure that students are screened to identify if the student is at risk for reading difficulties. Under the new law, if the screening results indicate that the student is at risk of reading difficulties, the local board must provide supplemental reading instruction, as appropriate, and provide a notification letter to the student's parent as specified. Furthermore, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must develop and update resources for local boards every four years and provide technical support to local boards allowing them to provide training opportunities annually. In addition, local boards must report annually to MSDE beginning with the 2020-2021 school year. AACPS is in full compliance with the requirements of the 2019 legislation and a lot of work has gone into the screener election, administration and response to instruction.

AACPS has concerns with the prescriptive nature of the handbook proposed in SB126. While the handbook is said to be best practices, processes and procedures to guide local school systems, it is extremely prescriptive, and the bill is written in a manner that is almost mandatory. AACPS also has concerns that this bill specifically provides that the State Leadership Team of Decoding Dyslexia Maryland will select two members of the advisory group established under the bill. There are many dyslexia advocacy groups in the State, and we believe that it is more appropriate for MSDE to select the two members of the dyslexia advocacy community.

AACPS appreciates the intent of this legislation to further the objectives of the recently enacted 2019 legislation. However, in light of the ongoing implementation of the 2019 law and the forthcoming immense work for MSDE to implement the many facets of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation, AACPS recommends that General Assembly reconsider enacting new educational programs at this time.

Thank you for consideration of this information regarding SB126.