



September 6, 2017

Honorable Tom Torlakson
California Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

RE: *California Dyslexia Guidelines*

California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) appreciates the efforts of the Dyslexia Work Group as it reviewed and consolidated the large base of knowledge regarding dyslexia and provided a concise document that includes valuable information to practitioners in the recently published California Department of Education Dyslexia Guidelines.

We are concerned about the apparent lack of knowledge regarding the skill set, knowledge base and role of school psychologists. Training standards for school psychologists require that they have knowledge regarding the following:

- CTC PPS State School Psychologist Specialization Standard 22: “Candidates are able to use data-based decision making to improve outcomes for instruction, development of cognitive and academic skills...”
- National Association of School Psychologists Training Domain 3: Use assessment and data collection methods to develop appropriate academic goals for children with diverse abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, strengths, and needs. Implement services to achieve academic outcomes, including classroom instructional support, literacy strategies, home-school collaboration, instructional consultation, and other evidence-based practices. School psychologists have knowledge and skills that are critically important for screening for reading problems and for identifying students with dyslexia. School psychologists are knowledgeable about a variety of assessment methods: screening, identifying risk factors, monitoring progress, as well as diagnostic assessment. In addition, they are trained in developing academic interventions and aligning assessment to evidence-based interventions. Their training in individual assessment of cognitive processes includes understanding and assessing for phonological processing as well as other cognitive processes important to reading (e.g. rapid naming, working memory, language skills). Critical to any assessment, school psychologists understand the importance of considering ALL information relevant to a comprehensive assessment for dyslexia, **including social/emotional factors that may be secondary to dyslexia**. School psychologists are critical members of the Multidisciplinary Assessment Team in every school.

In anticipation of Assembly Bill 1369’s passage in 2015, CASP began to hold refresher courses on dyslexia and phonological processing throughout the state. Armed with the latest in dyslexia and phonological processing assessments and interventions, hundreds of

school psychologists are anticipating being called upon to assist schools' multidisciplinary teams working to identify students with dyslexia and reading disorders.

In light of the school psychologist's roles in reading interventions, we were very concerned with the paragraph on Page 40 of the Guidelines that states:

"School psychologists and school counselors. Regarding students with dyslexia and other learning challenges, the role of school psychologists and school counselors is a critical yet often unrecognized one. Wilson and Colmar (2008) suggest that school counselors are important professionals in advising students with dyslexia who exhibit poor self-esteem, behavior challenges, and a lack of interest in school. They also state that school counselors and school psychologists are often unaware of the research-based practice for reading intervention and, consequently, are not prepared to fully understand the challenges experienced by individual students who are struggling to learn to read. Wilson and Colmar (2008)¹ recommend that school counselors learn about the elements of phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics in addition to the socioemotional needs of these students."

This paragraph, with references from a 2008 issue of *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, is inaccurate and does not describe the training, role or skills for school psychology as practiced in California, or throughout the United States. CASP believes the paragraph misrepresents the role of school psychologists and could be confusing to teachers, parents and administrators. It discounts the school psychologists' skill set and is a major setback for the association as it works to convince California administrators and others that school psychologists do much more than simply test and assess students.

With all these reasons in mind, CASP respectfully asks that CDE redact that paragraph and replace it with one that accurately reflects the school psychologist's role. CASP suggests that the following language be used:

"As part of a multidisciplinary team that conducts comprehensive assessment of students suspected of reading disorders and dyslexia, School Psychologists have unique training in understanding and diagnosing processing disorders including phonological processing, neuropsychological processes related to reading such as rapid naming, knowledge of effective screening and assessment processes, and understanding patterns of strengths and weaknesses in learning. School Psychologists review and consider a student's history of learning and areas of difficulty to help teachers and specialists effectively use response to instruction and intervention to address reading problems early in the student's education, and assist in collecting and monitoring data on student progress. School psychologists are knowledgeable regarding screening tools, assessment methods, effective class-wide and individual interventions, and can assist schools in selecting evidence-based interventions for specific reading difficulties (VanderHayden and Burns, 2017). School Psychologists are essential members of the diagnostic assessment process for identifying students with dyslexia and reading disorders."²

¹ Wilson, J., and S. H. Colmar. 2008. "Re-Evaluating the Significance of Phonemic Awareness and Phonics in Literacy Teaching: The Shared Role of School Counsellors and Teachers." [*Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*](#) 18 (2): 89–105.

² VanDerHayden, A. & Burns, M. (May, 2017). Four dyslexia screening myths that cause more harm than good in preventing reading failure and what you can do instead. *NASP Communique*, 45 (7).

Thank you for your consideration of our request. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Heidi Holmblad, CASP executive director, at 916/444-1595 or executivedirector@casponline.org.

Sincerely,



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