



ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

36 Bartlet Street
Andover, MA 01810
(978) 623-8501
FAX (978) 623-8505

SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Joel G. Blumstein, Esq., Chair
Susan K. McCready, Vice Chair
Paul D. Murphy
Shannon Scully
Ted E. Teichert

Sheldon H. Berman, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools
sheldon.berman@andoverma.us

**For more information, please contact:
Dr. Sheldon Berman, (978)623-8501**

How Andover Is Creating a New Paradigm for Literacy Instruction

*New Initiative Shines a Bright Light On Dyslexia for Early Detection and Intervention
And Focuses on Teaching Every Student to Read and Write To Their Full Potential*

For Immediate Release – November 8, 2016 – Andover, MA – Ensuring that every student can read and write to their full potential is a key objective for the Andover Public Schools (APS) as it announces a major initiative aimed at preventing reading difficulties and addressing the needs of students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disorders.

With combined efforts of both the special education and general education teams, the district is taking a proactive approach to teaching literacy with a three-pronged strategy – to provide general education and special education teachers with the training they need for early detection of dyslexia and other language-based learning disorders; to provide general and special education teachers with proven and consistent teaching methodologies on early intervention for students who are diagnosed with dyslexia; and to strengthen the district’s overall language-based programs in both special and regular education.

“APS’s main focus is to ensure that every child in our school district knows how to read and write,” said Superintendent Dr. Sheldon Berman. “For some children, reading and writing is more challenging and we need to address that. Andover is going to be one of the first public school systems to dig deeply into the intricacies of dyslexia to master it and overcome it, so that we are able to provide effective instruction for the benefit of all our students.”

The initiative is a collaborative effort involving Assistant Superintendent Dr. Nancy Duclos, APS Director of Student Services Dr. Sara Stetson, and APS K-5 Literacy Program Coordinator Jen Barresi. The group has set the APS literacy plan in motion with a professional development series on dyslexia for APS teachers, a speaker series for parents and guardians, and extensive training for teachers.

“Andover is conducting a full out assault on dyslexia,” said Dr. Stetson, who just returned from Canada where she was invited to speak at an international conference on public school’s response to students with dyslexia. “All of our students deserve to be literate and Andover is doing the right thing to make that happen.”

According to Dr. Stetson, who has a lengthy and distinguished career teaching diagnosis and methods for learning disabilities at the university level, explains that when you fail to intervene at an early age, students have a much harder time closing the gap. “Children with dyslexia have a strong cognitive ability, so there is no reason they should be unable to succeed in a regular school environment.” Dr. Stetson explained the limitations posed by placing students who have dyslexia in out-of-district specialty schools,

since many of these specialty schools have a more limited curriculum and lack a rich, rigorous and varied content.

In addition to the professional development and speaker series, APS has hired consultants from Landmark Outreach, Tufts Center for Language and Reading Research, Harvard Medical School, and Assistive Technology for Education to provide APS with a framework for assessment and intervention.

“We are going to distinguish ourselves as having one of the best possible responses to dyslexia, focusing on early intervention is the key,” said Dr. Stetson. “It is our hope that Andover will serve as a model for other districts to follow for combatting the problem of dyslexia and adopting effective literacy programs that ensure success for all students.”

The professional development component has a resounding 54-teacher participation, and includes an online module, speaker’s series, and a final project. Currently, 35 teachers are also participating in intensive intervention training. Teachers across schools will be trained on various teaching and reading programs for students. Dr. Stetson, along with Dr. Duclos and Ms. Barresi also formed a committee to look at consistent and effective teaching strategies for reading and writing in content areas, as well as utilizing technology for students with dyslexia. In addition, she and her team will be looking at the following areas:

- Visiting schools that specialize in language based learning disorders to see if there are any programs APS can adopt
- Co-teaching in the content areas
- Bringing in an expert on using technology for students with dyslexia
- Getting involved in the dyslexia conversation in terms of legislation
- Researching instruction models at schools
- Providing Universal screening
- Utilizing progress monitoring tools

I am very impressed with the amount of planning and level of commitment shown by the APS administration and the entire special education team. They are taking on the challenges of dyslexia head on,” said Joel Blumstein, Andover School Committee Chair. “I look forward to seeing the results as they translate into the classroom settings.”

Parents and guardians are invited to attend the next APS Parent Workshop on November 9 from 6:30-8:00 at the West Middle School auditorium. The workshop will feature Dr. Nadine Gaab of Harvard Medical School who will talk about the Neuroscience of Dyslexia. The workshop will explore neural correlates of reading and reading development; the relationship between auditory processing disorders and reading impairments; neural correlates of auditory and language processing in developmental dyslexia and specific language impairments; and the development and evaluation of remediation programs for language and reading impairments.

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