

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Commissioner's Update

March 22, 2004



A New Tool to Help Improve Reading Scores

Reading deficiencies are a major concern in our state. Although the math performance of Massachusetts students has improved on the national level, recent MCAS scores for English indicate that a significant number of our children are not achieving at expected levels. One innovative program that has indicated promise in helping some of these students is screening for Irlen Syndrome.

Irlen/Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome

I have been asked to inform you about Irlen/Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, a sensitivity to light, particularly fluorescent light, that can interfere with reading and written language. According to the Irlen Institute, research shows that it can lower test scores and impact a person's ability to function in school and work situations. Traditional means of diagnosing this syndrome are not successful but the Irlen Institute can diagnose and treat this syndrome using specific colored overlays.

How do you test for Irlen Syndrome?

The Irlen Screening Method is a very efficient and economical process. The testing is administered individually in 45 minutes, and results are immediately known. Treatment is by using specifically designed inexpensive colored overlays. This testing can be given as part of other diagnostic or educational testing, or administered alone. The Irlen Method is currently being used in schools throughout the world.

One study done in the Pioneer Valley in western Massachusetts, identified thirty 4th graders with symptoms of Irlen Syndrome. After being given their appropriate colored overlay, their reading comprehension score showed a 2 year increase in only three months. Another example is that of a low income minority district in Texas (Galena Park). After providing the correct colored overlays to students with Irlen Syndrome, 98 out of 100 students who had previously failed the state competency test were able to pass. In 1993, in the Jurupa School System in Riverside, CA (a district of 17,000 students), Dr. Bill Hendrick, Administrator of Educational Support Services, estimated that the district saved approximately \$800,000 a year by screening children for Irlen Syndrome before testing for Special Education.

How do you implement an Irlen Screening Program in your school?

Training to become an Irlen Screener takes place during a two-day workshop conducted by a Certified Irlen Trainer. The workshop includes theory and history, administration of the tests, scoring and interpretation of test results, reporting test results, treatment procedure using Irlen Colored Overlays, and a practicum in administration, scoring and interpretation.

All the best, and

Sincerely,



David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education