

# **Irlen Syndrome and Testing – Does it Help? the student's view**

Bett Huffaker – English Teacher and Certified Irlen Screener

In a previous Viking Voice there was an article about the symptoms of Irlen Syndrome and how it can be helped. It involves screening to see if students are experiencing light based problems and determining what color or colors of plastic overlay can assist them to increase comprehension and reading speed. I have been doing this screening as a community service for the past two and a half years and continue to donate my time and the overlays for students.

At Canyon High I tested a number of students in a range from remedial classes through AP English and found many on all levels who were having to work harder than their peers just to get the same grades. I'd like to share with you the results of some of those students being given the opportunity to use their overlays and take the California High School Exit Exam in my classroom with the proper overlays and no fluorescent lights. I asked the students to share with me their thoughts and feelings about whether it made a difference for them and how it was different from test taking in a regular situation. Here are some of the the UNEDITED replies.

David

The Irlen room has helped me. Before taking test like these in bright rooms had bothered me. The white had made my eyes watery and it made me tired. I couldn't stare down at the paper for more than a minute. But in the Irlen room I actually went through the entire test focused, awake and comfortable. And taking STAR test in here would really be a big help.

Mia:

Working in Mrs. Huffaker's class improved my attention span greatly, because the bright lights and reflection off of the paper hurts my eyes and agrivates me which ends up giving me a headache. I finished the test without a headache and my eyes aren't tired at all.

Kelly

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever gone outside when it is so bright your eyes water? Or, perhaps you have seen a computer screen that made you want to wear shades? Well, for a person with Irlen, simply looking at a white piece of paper (or a school textbook) under our classroom's lights, is just as difficult. Luckily, I was finally approved today to test in a separate room for the CAHSEE. I started out yesterday in A Lecture Hall, with fluorescent lights and a bright white test booklet. I got a migraine within 10 minutes. The other kids finished half an hour before me. I was having a lot of difficulty reading the simplest sentences. Then, I received my Irlen sheet for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. There was a dramatic improvement. Still, thought, the glare from those awful lights was unbearable. Today, as I said, I moved into Mrs. Huffaker's room. Inside, there is dim lighting, and it is very quiet and we all had Irlen sheets. I finished 1 hour early. I am so thankful that this was available, and I hope I can do the STAR test in here to.

Devon

The Irlen overlays and the lights turned out help and have helped me with my studying and testing. The overlays keep the words from moving all over the page and the lights turned out keeps the reflective glare from hurting my eyes. When the lights are on it hurts my eyes and I often have to strain them to read but with the combination of the lights turned out and the overlays it makes reading easier and less painful for me.

Alexander

The overlays that I have received have greatly helped me in my studies. After reading for a long period of time I no longer get headaches. This is most beneficial because it is very difficult to concentrate when the pain is so intense. I feel that if I had access to this test and overlays maybe I would have better grades in my classes prior to not having them. I feel that the testing for Irlen Syndrome should continue and that teachers should be able to spot children who may show symptoms of having Irlen Syndrome.

Amanda

I think the overlays for Irlen syndrome have helped me a lot with my reading. I can read for longer amounts of time without getting nauseated. I don't get headaches as much either. When the lights are dimmed I can concentrate a lot better. . . . My whole life people have just told me that I'm dumb & don't apply myself. It hurts a lot and now that I know I'm not dumb & there is something wrong I have that extra boost to try harder & not give up. I've always hated homework because I didn't understand it but with the overlays I can remember what I read and understand what I read. Now I just hate homework because I'm a high school student and well...don't we all hate it? Yeah! I also had problems with reading out loud, but with the overlays the words come a lot easier and I don't feel so embarrassed to read aloud in class!

Talia

I think that having me put in a class with the proper lighting was a great help. If I could read a lot more comfortable and I don't get lazy and guess on the question. I feel we should have this class for every major test.

Amanda

I think that Irlen classrooms for testing is very important because it helps people with Irlen's syndrome. The overlays and darker classrooms really helped me with the CAHSEE because I was able to take the test without having a huge headache from the lights or seeing letters that shift, move or float. In my opinion, my performance improved greatly because of the overlays and dark classroom.

Terris

Being in a separate room for Irlen Syndrome is a really great help not just for the CAHSEE test but for every test. The fluorescent lights in a fully lit room hurt my eyes and usually give me headaches. During the CAHSEE my eyes were not constantly

squinted and I never developed a headache at all. Also, another major help was the Irlen filters were readily available, in case someone left theirs at home.

For more information about Irlen Syndrome check out Mrs. Huffaker's website links at: <http://staff.hartdistrict.org/bhuffak/> or the Irlen Institute at Irlen.com.