**What Fidelity Means in Dyslexia Instruction –**

**And Why It’s Legally Required**

## Definition of Fidelity

In evidence-based reading instruction for students with dyslexia, fidelity means delivering the program exactly as it was designed and validated by research — without shortcuts, dilution, or unauthorized changes.

Plain language: Doing it right, every time, by the book — taught by the right person, in the right way, for the right amount of time.

## Key Elements of Fidelity

• Adherence to Program Design: Follow the full scope, sequence, and methods (e.g., Wilson Reading System, Orton-Gillingham, Barton). No skipping or altering lessons.

• Qualified Instructor: Instruction must be provided by an educator who is trained and certified in the specific methodology.

• Dosage & Intensity: Meet the required frequency, duration, and group size (usually 1:1 or very small group). No shortened sessions or reduced service days.

• Consistency: Lessons must occur regularly, without interruption or substitution with unrelated activities.

• Integrity of Components: Every lesson element must be taught (phonemic awareness, decoding, encoding, fluency, comprehension). Only approved program materials may be used.

## Why Fidelity Matters

- Without fidelity, students with dyslexia often fail to make meaningful progress.
- Fidelity ensures instruction matches the proven research model.
- It also ensures schools meet their **legal obligations** under IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA.

## Legal Protections for Your Child

• **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** Requires schools to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to each child’s needs (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(A)). Instruction must be evidence-based and delivered so the child makes “meaningful progress” (Endrew F. v. Douglas County, 580 U.S. 386 (2017)). Removing or altering a proven methodology without IEP team approval can violate IDEA.

• **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. § 794):** Protects students with dyslexia as individuals with a disability. Schools must provide equal access through appropriate accommodations and services.

• **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. Denying access to qualified instruction or reducing fidelity of services can constitute discrimination.

## Parent Advocacy Tips

✔ Ask your child’s IEP/504 team:
- Who is delivering the program, and are they certified?
- How often and how long are lessons scheduled each week?
- Are all program components being delivered with fidelity?
- How is fidelity monitored by the district?

✔ Request Prior Written Notice (PWN) if the school proposes to:
- Reduce session time or frequency.
- Replace an evidence-based dyslexia program with another approach.
- Remove a trained instructor.

✔ Document concerns in writing. This creates a record that supports your right to enforce IDEA, Section 504, and ADA protections.

## \*\*Bottom Line

**Your child has the legal right to structured, evidence-based dyslexia instruction delivered with fidelity. Anything less is not just poor practice — it may be a violation of federal law.**