*Why do bright creative students with dyslexia score so poorly on standardized tests given by school districts even though they are reading much better as a result of Structured Literacy/evidence-based Wilson OG instruction? Can the district use these standardized measurements to argue that the reading instruction isn't working despite of the irrefutable data? Dyslexic students just don't do well on standardized tests?*

***Response to District’s evaluation:***

**Why Dyslexic Students Often Score Poorly on Standardized Tests**

1. **Test Format Bias**
Most standardized tests are *timed, text-heavy, and speed-driven*. Dyslexic students process written language differently. Even if their decoding is improving, fluency and rapid retrieval often lag behind. That can drag down scores even when comprehension and growth are real.
2. **Skills Tested vs. Skills Gained**
Standardized assessments (like district “benchmark” tests or state exams) often focus on grade-level reading fluency or comprehension under time pressure. But Wilson/OG instruction builds foundational decoding skills systematically. A child might show *tremendous progress* (e.g., moving from barely reading to handling multi-syllable words), but that growth doesn’t instantly translate into high scores on generalized tests.
3. **Cognitive Load & Anxiety**
Dyslexic students frequently experience test anxiety, slow processing speed, and working memory challenges. These amplify the difficulty of standardized test settings compared to authentic reading situations.
4. **One-Size-Fits-All Design**
Standardized tests are normed on large populations and aren’t sensitive to individualized growth. They’re not designed to capture the incremental but *critical* gains dyslexic students make with structured literacy.

**Can Districts Use These Scores to Argue the Instruction “Isn’t Working”?**

Districts sometimes try this, but legally and educationally it’s a weak argument:

* **IDEA & Peer-Reviewed Research**: If a student’s IEP specifies Wilson/OG because it’s a peer-reviewed, evidence-based program, the district can’t simply disregard that because a generic test score isn’t perfect. The law requires use of methodologies “based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable.”
* **Multiple Data Sources Required**: Federal and state regulations recognize that standardized tests are only one measure. Progress monitoring, curriculum-based measures (like Wilson mastery checks), and classroom performance are equally valid. Courts have repeatedly held that districts cannot rely solely on standardized scores to prove or disprove FAPE (see *Endrew F. v. Douglas County*).
* **Growth vs. Absolute Score**: The key is showing *progress from the student’s baseline*, not just grade-level comparison. If data shows your grandson has advanced multiple Wilson steps and can now read independently, that is irrefutable evidence of benefit—even if a standardized percentile score remains low.

**The Reality: “Dyslexic Students Don’t Test Well”**

Yes—this is widely recognized. Dyslexia often involves **slow, effortful retrieval**, so standardized testing environments rarely reflect their true ability, creativity, or intelligence. That’s why best practice (and law) requires looking at a *body of evidence*, not just one score.

**What you can argue if the district challenges Wilson progress**:

* Present Wilson step completion data (structured, measurable).
* Show classroom applications (reading menus, books, confidence restored).
* Cite IDEA’s requirement for individualized, evidence-based programming.
* Point out that standardized tests *underestimate* dyslexic ability and are not designed to measure mastery of structured literacy interventions.

**Formal Response: Standardized Tests and Progress with Wilson Instruction**

**Subject:** Reliance on Standardized Test Scores in Evaluating Student Progress

We respectfully disagree with the use of standardized test scores as the sole or primary measure of whether Wilson Reading System/Orton-Gillingham–based instruction is “working.” The following points are relevant:

**1. Standardized Tests Are Not Designed to Measure Dyslexia Gains**

Standardized reading assessments emphasize *speed and fluency under time pressure*, which are precisely the areas where students with dyslexia continue to struggle despite significant gains in decoding and comprehension. As the International Dyslexia Association has noted, “Standardized tests often underestimate the knowledge and growth of students with dyslexia because of their reliance on timed, print-heavy tasks.”

A student may show measurable progress in structured literacy (e.g., completing multiple Wilson steps, reading increasingly complex words, demonstrating comprehension), yet still perform below grade-level percentiles on generic benchmark assessments.

**2. IDEA Requires Multiple Data Sources**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1414) requires that schools use **“a variety of assessment tools and strategies”** to determine progress. Federal regulations (34 C.F.R. § 300.304(b)(2)) prohibit reliance on a single measure.

Thus, standardized test results must be considered **in combination** with curriculum-based data (Wilson mastery checks, lesson progress), teacher reports, and observable classroom performance.

**3. Evidence-Based Instruction Must Continue if Progress is Demonstrated**

Courts have repeatedly recognized that students are entitled to programs based on peer-reviewed research “to the extent practicable” (34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(4)). The Wilson Reading System and OG methodologies meet this standard.

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (137 S. Ct. 988, 2017), the Supreme Court emphasized that IEPs must be “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances.” In this case, the student’s irrefutable growth through Wilson instruction is exactly the type of meaningful progress contemplated under *Endrew F.*—even if standardized test scores remain low.

**4. Growth vs. Absolute Score**

Progress must be measured **from the child’s baseline**, not against arbitrary grade-level norms. If the student has advanced multiple steps in Wilson, gained independent reading ability, and improved self-esteem, those are legally and educationally significant indicators of progress. Districts cannot claim lack of progress simply because percentile rankings remain low.

**5. Known Fact: Dyslexic Students Do Not Perform Well on Standardized Tests**

It is widely accepted in research and practice that dyslexic learners underperform on standardized tests relative to their actual growth and potential. These tests should not override direct instructional data demonstrating success.

**Conclusion**

Standardized test results are one data point, but they cannot be used to invalidate proven instructional success under Wilson/OG. The IEP team must rely on **a body of evidence**—including curriculum-based measures, progress monitoring, and documented functional growth—to evaluate whether the student is receiving FAPE.

For these reasons, discontinuing or questioning Wilson instruction on the basis of standardized test scores would not align with IDEA, established case law, or best educational practice.