Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

Comprehensive Parent Toolkit

October 2016

This toolkit was compiled by the DD-MN parent advocacy team to serve as a resource for parents beginning their dyslexia journey. The mission of DD-MN is to ensure that all children struggling with dyslexia have the ability to reach their full potential with access to an equitable education. We hope the resource provided will serve to assist you in advocating for your child and inspire you to take further action in your community on behalf of all children in MN.

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Disclaimer: Please note that DD-MN does not endorse, represent or have any legal connection with any of the resources. These are resources that many parents have found useful in searching for information about dyslexia.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

October 23, 2015

Dear Colleague:

Ensuring a high-quality education for children with specific learning disabilities is a critical responsibility for all of us. I write today to focus particularly on the unique educational needs of children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, which are conditions that could qualify a child as a child with a specific learning disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) has received communications from stakeholders, including parents, advocacy groups, and national disability organizations, who believe that State and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) are reluctant to reference or use dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or in developing the individualized education program (IEP) under the IDEA. The purpose of this letter is to clarify that there is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents.

Under the IDEA and its implementing regulations "specific learning disability" is defined, in part, as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, *dyslexia*, and developmental aphasia." See 20 U.S.C. §1401(30) and 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10) (emphasis added). While our implementing regulations contain a list of conditions under the definition "specific learning disability," which includes dyslexia, the list is not exhaustive. However, regardless of whether a child has dyslexia or any other condition explicitly included in this definition of "specific learning disability," or has a condition such as dyscalculia or dysgraphia not listed expressly in the definition, the LEA must conduct an evaluation in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311 to determine whether that child meets the criteria for specific learning disability or any of the other disabilities listed in 34 CFR §300.8, which implements IDEA's definition of "child with a disability."

For those students who may need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment, schools may choose to implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), such as response to intervention (RTI) or positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). MTSS is a schoolwide approach that addresses the needs of all students, including struggling learners and students with disabilities, and integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level instructional and behavioral system to maximize student achievement and reduce problem behaviors.

MTSS, which includes scientific, research-based interventions, also may be used to identify children suspected of having a specific learning disability. With a multi-tiered instructional

framework, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, including those who may have dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia; monitor their progress; provide evidence-based interventions; and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness. Children who do not, or minimally, respond to interventions must be referred for an evaluation to determine if they are eligible for special education and related services (34 CFR §300.309(c)(1)); and those children who simply need intense short-term interventions may continue to receive those interventions. OSERS reminds SEAs and LEAs about previous guidance regarding the use of MTSS, including RTI, and timely evaluations,[1] specifically that a parent may request an initial evaluation at any time to determine if a child is a child with a disability under IDEA (34 CFR §300.301(b)), and the use of MTSS, such as RTI, may not be used to delay or deny a full and individual evaluation under 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311 of a child suspected of having a disability.

In determining whether a child has a disability under the IDEA, including a specific learning disability, and is eligible to receive special education and related services because of that disability, the LEA must conduct a comprehensive evaluation under §300.304, which requires the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child. This information, which includes information provided by the parent, may assist in determining: 1) whether the child is a child with a disability; and 2) the content of the child's IEP to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum. 34 CFR §300.304(b)(1). Therefore, information about the child's learning difficulties, including the presenting difficulties related to reading, mathematics, or writing, is important in determining the nature and extent of the child's disability and educational needs. In addition, other criteria are applicable in determining whether a child has a specific learning disability. For example, the team determining eligibility considers whether the child is not achieving adequately for the child's age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or the relevant State standards in areas related to reading, mathematics, and written expression. The team also must determine that the child's underachievement is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or mathematics. 34 CFR §300.309(a)(1) and (b). Section 300.311 contains requirements for specific documentation of the child's eligibility determination as a child with a specific learning disability, and includes documentation of the information described above. Therefore, there could be situations where the child's parents and the team of qualified professionals responsible for determining whether the child has a specific learning disability would find it helpful to include information about the specific condition (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia) in documenting how that condition relates to the child's eligibility determination. 34 CFR §§300.306(a)(1), (c)(1) and 300.308.

[1] *See* OSEP Memo 11-07 (January 21, 2011) available at: www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/osep11-07rtimemo.pdf Under 34 CFR §300.307(a)(2)-(3), as part of their criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, States must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention, and may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures in making this determination.

Stakeholders also requested that SEAs and LEAs have policies in place that allow for the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia on a child's IEP, if a child's comprehensive evaluation supports use of these terms. There is nothing in the IDEA or our implementing regulations that prohibits the inclusion of the condition that is the basis for the child's disability determination in the child's IEP. In addition, the IEP must address the child's needs resulting from the child's disability to enable the child to advance appropriately towards attaining his or her annual IEP goals and to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum. 34 CFR §§300.320(a)(1), (2), and (4). Therefore, if a child's dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia is the condition that forms the basis for the determination that a child has a specific learning disability, OSERS believes that there could be situations where an IEP Team could determine that personnel responsible for IEP implementation would need to know about the condition underlying the child's disability (e.g., that a child has a weakness in decoding skills as a result of the child's dyslexia). Under 34 CFR §300.323(d), a child's IEP must be accessible to the regular education teacher and any other school personnel responsible for its implementation, and these personnel must be informed of their specific responsibilities related to implementing the IEP and the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP. Therefore, OSERS reiterates that there is nothing in the IDEA or our implementing regulations that would prohibit IEP Teams from referencing or using dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia in a child's IEP.

Stakeholders requested that OSERS provide SEAs and LEAs with a comprehensive guide to commonly used accommodations[2] in the classroom for students with specific learning disabilities, including dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. The IDEA does not dictate the services or accommodations to be provided to individual children based solely on the disability category in which the child has been classified, or the specific condition underlying the child's disability classification. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funds a large network of technical assistance centers that develop materials and resources to support States, school districts, schools, and teachers to improve the provision of services to children with disabilities, including materials on the use of accommodations. The U.S. Department of Education does not mandate the use of, or endorse the content of, these products, services, materials, and/or resources; however, States and LEAs may wish to seek assistance from entities such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention at: http://www.intensiveintervention.org, the Center for Parent Information and Resources available at: http://www.parentcenterhub.org, and the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials available at: http://aem.cast.org/. For a complete list of OSEP-funded technical assistance centers please see: http://ccrs.osepideasthatwork.org/.

In implementing the IDEA requirements discussed above, OSERS encourages SEAs and LEAs to consider situations where it would be appropriate to use the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia to describe and address the child's unique, identified needs through evaluation, eligibility, and IEP documents. OSERS further encourages States to review their policies,

[2] Although the IDEA uses the term "accommodations" primarily in the assessment context, OSERS understands the request to refer to the various components of a free appropriate public education, including special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications or supports for school personnel, as well as accommodations for students taking assessments.

procedures, and practices to ensure that they do not prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility, and IEP documents. Finally, in ensuring the provision of free appropriate public education, OSERS encourages SEAs to remind their LEAs of the importance of addressing the unique educational needs of children with specific learning disabilities resulting from dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia during IEP Team meetings and other meetings with parents under IDEA.

I hope this clarification is helpful to both parents and practitioners in ensuring a high-quality education for children with specific learning disabilities, including children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. If you have additional questions or comments, please email them to sld@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michael K. Yudin

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

November 16, 2015

Dear Colleague:

Ensuring that all children, including children with disabilities, are held to rigorous academic standards and high expectations is a shared responsibility for all of us. To help make certain that children with disabilities are held to high expectations and have meaningful access to a State's academic content standards, we write to clarify that an individualized education program (IEP) for an eligible child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must be aligned with the State's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.[1] Research has demonstrated that children with disabilities who struggle in reading and mathematics can successfully learn grade-level content and make significant academic progress when appropriate instruction, services, and supports are provided. [2] Conversely, low expectations can lead to children with disabilities receiving less challenging instruction that reflects below grade-level content standards, and thereby not learning what they need to succeed at the grade in which they are enrolled.

The cornerstone of the IDEA is the entitlement of each eligible child with a disability to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the child's unique needs and that prepare the child for further education, employment, and independent living. 20 U.S.C. §1400(d)(1)(A). Under the IDEA, the primary vehicle for providing FAPE is through an appropriately developed IEP that is based on the individual needs of the child. An IEP must take into account a child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, and the impact of that child's disability on his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. IEP goals must be aligned with grade-level content standards for all children with disabilities. The State, however, as discussed

[1] The Department has determined that this document is a "significant guidance document" under the Office of Management and Budget's Final Bulletin for Agency Good Guidance Practices, 72 Fed. Reg. 3432 (Jan. 25, 2007), available at www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2007/012507_good_guidance.pdf. The purpose of this guidance is to provide State and local educational agencies (LEAs) with information to assist them in meeting their obligations under the IDEA and its implementing regulations in developing IEPs for children with disabilities. This guidance does not impose any requirements beyond those required under applicable law and regulations. It does not create or confer any rights for or on any person. If you are interested in commenting on this guidance or if you have further questions that are not answered here, please e-mail iepgoals@ed.gov or write to us at the following address: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 550 12th Street SW., PCP Room 5139, Washington, DC 20202-2600.

[2] For a discussion of this research *see Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities*, Final Rule, 80 Fed. Reg. 50773, 50776 (Aug. 21, 2015).

on page five, is permitted to define alternate academic achievement standards for children with the most significant cognitive disabilities.[3]

Application of Provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to Children with Disabilities

Since 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), has required each State to apply the same challenging academic content and achievement standards to all schools and all children in the State, which includes children with disabilities. 20 U.S.C. §6311(b)(1)(B). The U.S. Department of Education (Department), in its regulations implementing Title I of the ESEA, has clarified that these standards are grade-level standards. 34 CFR §200.1(a)-(c). To assist children with disabilities in meeting these grade-level academic content standards, many States have adopted and implemented procedures for developing standards-based IEPs that include IEP goals that reflect the State's challenging academic content standards that apply to all children in the State.

Interpretation of "General Education Curriculum"

Under the IDEA, in order to make FAPE available to each eligible child with a disability, the child's IEP must be designed to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. 20 U.S.C. §1414(d)(1)(A). The term "general education curriculum" is not specifically defined in the IDEA. The Department's regulations implementing Part B of the IDEA, however, state that the general education curriculum is "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children." 34 CFR §300.320(a)(1)(i). In addition, the IDEA Part B regulations define the term "specially designed instruction," the critical element in the definition of "special education," as "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, *so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children*." 34 CFR §300.39(b)(3) (emphasis added). Otherwise, the IDEA regulations do not specifically address the connection between the general education curriculum and a State's academic content standards.

[3] In accordance with 34 CFR §200.1(d), for children with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take an alternate assessment, a State may define alternate academic achievement standards provided those standards are aligned with the State's academic content standards; promote access to the general curriculum; and reflect professional judgment of the highest achievement standards possible. See also 34 CFR §300.160(c)(2)(i).

Analysis

The Department interprets "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children" to be the curriculum that is based on a State's academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. This interpretation, which we think is the most appropriate reading of the applicable regulatory language, will help to ensure that an IEP for a child with a disability, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability, is designed to give the child access to the general education curriculum based on a State's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled, and includes instruction and supports that will prepare the child for success in college and careers. This interpretation also appropriately harmonizes the concept in the IDEA regulations of "general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children)," with the ESEA statutory and regulatory requirement that the same academic content standards must apply to all public schools and children in the State, which includes children with disabilities.

The IDEA statutory and regulatory provisions discussed above, the legislative history of the IDEA, and clarification the Department has provided on the alignment of the IEP with a State's content standards in the Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 IDEA Part B regulations also support this interpretation. When it last reauthorized the IDEA in 2004, Congress continued to emphasize, consistent with the provisions in the ESEA, the importance of "having high expectations for [children with disabilities] and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible." 20 U.S.C. §1400(c)(5)(A). The Senate Report accompanying the 2004 reauthorization of the IDEA also explained that "[f]or most children with disabilities, many of their IEP goals would likely conform to State and district wide academic content standards and progress indicators consistent with standards based reform within education and the new requirements of NCLB." S. Rep. No. 108-185, 105th Cong., 1st Sess. 29 (Nov. 3, 2003).

The Analysis of Comments and Changes accompanying the 2006 IDEA Part B regulations also included important discussion that further clarifies the alignment of an IEP with a State's academic content standards under the ESEA, explaining: "section 300.320(a)(1)(i) clarifies that the general education curriculum means the same curriculum as all other children. Therefore, an IEP that focuses on ensuring that the child is involved in the general education curriculum will necessarily be aligned with the State's content standards."[4]

[4] *See* Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities, Final Rule, 71 Fed. Reg. 46540, 46662 (Aug. 14, 2006); see also 71 Fed. Reg. 46579.

The Department's interpretation of the regulatory language "general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children)" to mean the curriculum that is based on the State's academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled is reasonable. This interpretation is also necessary to enable IDEA and ESEA requirements to be read together so that children with disabilities receive high-quality instruction that will give them the opportunity to meet the State's challenging academic achievement standards and prepare them for college, careers and independence. Therefore, in order to make FAPE available to each eligible child with a disability, the special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, and other supports in the child's IEP must be designed to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining his or her annual IEP goals and to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum based on the State's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.

Implementation of the Interpretation

Based on the interpretation of "general education curriculum" set forth in this letter, we expect annual IEP goals to be aligned with State academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. This alignment, however, must guide but not replace the individualized decision-making required in the IEP process.[5] In fact, the IDEA's focus on the individual needs of each child with a disability is an essential consideration when IEP Teams are writing annual goals that are aligned with State academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled so that the child can advance appropriately toward attaining those goals during the annual period covered by the IEP. In developing an IEP, the IEP Team must consider how a child's specific disability impacts his or her ability to advance appropriately toward attaining his or her annual goals that are aligned with applicable State content standards during the period covered by the IEP. For example, the child's IEP Team may consider the special education instruction that has been provided to the child, the child's previous rate of academic growth, and whether the child is on track to achieve grade-level proficiency within the year.

[5] The IEP must include, among other required content: (1) a statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum; (2) a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and (3) the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals, and to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum in accordance with the child's present levels of performance. 34 CFR §300.320(a).

The Department recognizes that there is a very small number of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities whose performance must be measured against alternate academic achievement standards, as permitted in 34 CFR §200.1(d) and §300.160(c). As explained in prior guidance,[6] alternate academic achievement standards must be aligned with the State's grade-level content standards. The standards must be clearly related to grade-level content, although they may be restricted in scope or complexity or take the form of introductory or pre-requisite skills. This letter is not intended to limit a State's ability to continue to measure the achievement of the small number of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities against alternate academic achievement standards, but rather to ensure that annual IEP goals for these children reflect high expectations and are based on the State's content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled.

In a case where a child's present levels of academic performance are significantly below the grade in which the child is enrolled, in order to align the IEP with grade-level content standards, the IEP Team should estimate the growth toward the State academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled that the child is expected to achieve in the year covered by the IEP. In a situation where a child is performing significantly below the level of the grade in which the child is enrolled, an IEP Team should determine annual goals that are ambitious but achievable. In other words, the annual goals need not necessarily result in the child's reaching grade-level within the year covered by the IEP, but the goals should be sufficiently ambitious to help close the gap. The IEP must also include the specialized instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability necessary to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the State academic content standards that apply to all children in the State.

An Example of Implementation

We provide an example of how an IEP Team could apply the interpretation of "general education curriculum" set forth in this letter. For example, after reviewing recent evaluation data for a sixth grade child with a specific learning disability, the IEP Team determines that the child is reading four grade levels below his current grade; however, his listening comprehension is on grade level. The child's general education teacher and special education teacher also note that when materials are read aloud to the child he is able to understand grade-level content. Based on these present levels of performance and the child's individual strengths and weaknesses, the IEP

[6] See U.S. Department of Education Non-regulatory guidance: Alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities August 2005) available at: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/altguidance.pdf

Team determines he should receive specialized instruction to improve his reading fluency. Based on the child's rate of growth during the previous school year, the IEP Team estimates that with appropriate specialized instruction the child could achieve an increase of at least 1.5 grade levels in reading fluency. To ensure the child can learn material based on sixth grade content standards (e.g., science and history content), the IEP Team determines the child should receive modifications for all grade-level reading assignments. His reading assignments would be based on sixth grade content but would be shortened to assist with reading fatigue resulting from his disability. In addition, he would be provided with audio text books and electronic versions of longer reading assignments that he can access through synthetic speech. With this specialized instruction and these support services, the IEP would be designed to enable the child to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum based on the State's sixth grade content standards, while still addressing the child's needs based on the child's present levels of performance.[7] This example is provided to show one possible way that an IEP could be designed to enable a child with a disability who is performing significantly below grade level to receive the specialized instruction and support services the child needs to reach the content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled during the period covered by the IEP.[8] We caution, though that, because the ways in which a child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum are highly individualized and fact-specific, the instruction and supports that might enable one child to achieve at grade-level may not necessarily be appropriate for another child with the same disability.

Summary

In sum, consistent with the interpretation of "general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children)" based on the State's academic content standards for the

[7] For information on developing, reviewing, or revising the IEP for a child with limited English proficiency, *see*: *Questions and Answers Regarding Inclusion of English Learners with Disabilities in English Language Proficiency Assessments and Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives* https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/q-and-a-on-elp-swd.pdf.

[8] While the Department does not mandate or endorse specific products or services, we are aware that many States have issued guidance addressing standards-based IEPs . For example see Minnesota Department of Education, Developing Standards-Based IEP Goals and Objectives *A Discussion Guide* available at: https://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=050483&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary. States and LEAs also may consider reviewing the following examples from OSEP-funded projects regarding implementation of standards-based IEPs: *inForum: Standards-Based Individualized Education Program Examples* available at: www.nasdse.org/portals/0/standards-basediepexamples.pdf. For an example of annual goals aligned with State academic content standards for a child taking the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards, *see*: an issue brief provided by the OSEP-funded National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), *NCSC Brief 5: Standards-based Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Children Who Participate in AA-AAS* available at: http://www.ncscpartners.org/Media/Default/PDFs/Resources/NCSCBrief5.pdf.

grade in which a child is enrolled set forth in this letter, an IEP Team must ensure that annual IEP goals are aligned with the State academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. The IEP must also include the specially designed instruction necessary to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and ensure access of the child to the general education curriculum, so that the child can meet the State academic content standards that apply to all children, as well as the support services and the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals.

Opportunities for Input

We are interested in receiving comments on this document to inform implementation of this guidance. If you are interested in commenting on this document, please e-mail your comments to iepgoals@ed.gov or write to us at the following address: US Department of Education, 550 12th Street SW, PCP Room 5139, Washington, DC 20202-2600. Note that we are specifically interested in receiving input from the field on examples of models of alignment of IEP goals with State content standards that are working well at the State and local level, and how this guidance could be implemented for children with disabilities who are English learners and children with the most significant cognitive disabilities. We will share appropriate models with you in further communications as they become available. We would also be glad to help answer your questions and help with your technical assistance needs in this important area.

We ask you to share this information with your local school districts to help ensure all children with disabilities are held to high standards and high expectations. Thank you for your continued interest in improving results for children with disabilities.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michael K. Yudin
Assistant Secretary

/s/

Melody Musgrove
Director
Office of Special Education Programs

Your Name
Your Address
Your City, State

Date

Name of school official
Title
Address

Dear,

I am a parent in the _____ School District of a student that has been diagnosed with _____. According to a Yale study 1 out of 5 people suffer from dyslexia. It crosses racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, and with proper instruction and accommodations, it can be remediated.[1]

_____ is an amazing school district and that is one of the main reasons we chose to live in this district. ___#___ families and counting within our district have been meeting to discuss dyslexia. Many of these families have more than one child with learning disabilities. We represent students at all of the elementary schools, within the middle schools and at the high school level. We would like to partner with you to see an improvement in how intervention services are given to students with dyslexia and any other learning disabilities. This is a passion for us and an opportunity for you to uncover some valuable resources by using our experience and seeing the steps on our journey that we noticed could use some improvement.

Within our group an average family spends _____ per year on outside help to assist their child to understand what he or she has been taught in the classroom *in a way that makes sense for them*. Currently there isn't a reading program available for kids with dyslexia in the district. I can't imagine how many families don't have the means to make this work and therefore that child suffers. It's very important for us to level the playing field for these kids and give each and everyone of them the help that they deserve. Not just for families that can't afford it, but for EVERYONE that needs it.

The US Department of Education recently made a statement to specifically recognize dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia as conditions that qualify a student as a child with a specific learning disability. We should no longer be reluctant to reference dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility determinations or in developing IEP and 504 documents.[2]

Here is a list of suggested actions we recommended the school district take to better support our kids:

1) Basic training for all elementary school teachers to identify dyslexia and/or any students who are struggling with phonics and a set of options for formal testing/early diagnosis.
    - MN Dept of Education's: Navigating the School System when a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia 7/20/15 http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/SpecEdStu/index.html

2) Access to *at least one* highly trained specialist in evidence based practices research-based reading and writing program in each Invention Specialist department of each school (such as Orton Gillingham for individual instruction or the Wilson Reading System for group instruction).
    - Orton-Gillingham of MN; Teacher Training Courses available. http://ogmn.org
    - Wilson Language Training - Ellen Engstrom, Director of Education: engstrome@grovesacademy.org or 952-915-4247

3) Reach out to a local specialist in dyslexia to make sure your plan will be effective. **And** include parents of students with dyslexia in early conversations to determine the best actions for change of how intervention services are given.
    - Groves Academy - http://www.grovesacademy.org/events/workshops/
    - The International Dyslexia Association – Upper Midwest Branch http://www.ida-umb.org/home.html

4) Develop a transparent process within the district for parents to access before an IEP or 504 meeting. So that all parties involved know what to expect, such as a menu of options given out before the scheduled meeting.

5) School licenses to assisted technology programs and digital books to use in the classroom and for the children to study/read at school AND at home.
    - Learning Ally http://learningally.org/educator, 1-800-221-1098
    - Simon Technology Center at PACER Center - http://www.pacer.org/stc/

6) Contact one of our advocates to set up a meeting to present your action plan and to hear our feedback.
    - Name - email/phone

7) A list of resources available to parents on the district website for children who have been diagnosed with dyslexia, any other learning disabilities or children who would benefit from a direct, sequential, systematic, alphabetic code-based instruction (not just for students who are failing).
    - MN Dept of Education's: Navigating the School System when a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia 7/20/15 http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/SpecEdStu/index.html

Thank you for your time to hear us out. We have kids with high academic potential and we hope to work with you soon on improvements within the whole school district at every level to help all kids reach their greatest level of achievement. Please consider helping to make sure improvements are made for the kids with dyslexia.

Sincerely,

Name
Parent of a child with learning disabilities

[1] http://dyslexia.yale.edu/MDAI/
[2] https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf

Dyslexia Speech for School Board Meeting

Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley

Dyslexia Training Institute

Well, we did it. Tracy and I went to the San Diego Unified School Board meeting and expressed our concern about the lack of instruction and identification of dyslexia. We attempted to educate the board within the three minutes we each had. I would love to report that it was a transformative experience and that they get it, but then I would be lying. While we are unsure of the impact of our statements, we are sure that we helped someone in that room and we exercised our rights as citizens to express concern about the public education system. What we can promise is that we will be back and we may be back every month until they do more than nod their heads.

Below is the speech that I wrote and delivered. Feel free to adapt if for your own use.

> As you probably know, Autism affects one in 52 children which is 2% of the population. So, every school in San Diego Unified is affected by autism. What you might not know is the dyslexia affects 1 in 5 children, that is 20% of the students in your district. This means that in every *classroom* from kindergarten to twelfth grade sits a child, and probably 2 or 3, who have dyslexia – that's a lot of kids. And to be sure, dyslexia is real. In fact, congress also agreed that it was real when it included dyslexia as a qualifying condition under the Special Education eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability and this was in 1975. Since that time we have collected a tremendous amount of evidence (point to books) about how dyslexia is manifested in the brain, how it manifests in the classroom, the genetic component of dyslexia, but more importantly, we know what works for students with dyslexia. Despite this mountain of research that has been well documented and is available to anyone interested in laymen's terms, we attend IEP meetings on a regular basis in the SDUSD where the IEP team repeatedly tells parents that dyslexia does not exist, that it is a broad term (which it is not, it is SLD is the broad term), that SDUSD does not work with dyslexia and the list of unfounded comments goes on and on. Our concern tonight is that these bright children are marginalized despite the vast amount of research. They are held back and asked to change, when the instruction is what needs to change. They are denied their potential due to schools continued lack of education in the area of dyslexia. This is a civil rights issue. When twenty percent of a school district struggles to read and spell because of dyslexia and the district refuses to respond with an appropriate intervention, they fail not only to provide FAPE on a regular basis, but they violate the civil right to an appropriate education.
>
> Tonight we implore you, we beg you, to make dyslexia a priority in your professional development as you are urged to do in CA statute 56245 which states, "The Legislature

encourages the inclusion, in local in-service training programs for regular education teachers and special education teachers in local educational agencies, of a component on the recognition of, and teaching strategies for, specific learning disabilities, including dyslexia and related disorders.'

Imagine being a smart kid sitting in class day after day, failing day after day, despite knowing you were smart. Imagine being told to 'work harder,' 'focus,' or to 'try harder.' Imagine that you know you have, dyslexia, yet, you are told it doesn't exist. Every day you are told to be more motivated. A student who fails day after day and continues to try is not lacking motivation. Imagine being the parents and advocates of these children with the current and research-based information about dyslexia and being told the school will not help. Imagine sitting in IEP after IEP and listening to educators continue to spread myths and misconceptions that have long since been debunked. Is that not a civil rights issue? These kids are being told to sit in the back of the bus, while those who do not have dyslexia are treated to the education they deserve.

Dyslexia is real and SDUSD owes it to these to kids to allow them to reach their potential.

I will leave you with these last two thoughts. The first is from the preeminent researcher in dyslexia, Dr. Sally Shaywitz, who states, "We do not have a knowledge gap, we have an action gap."

Lastly, I would like to assure you that if the schools fought as hard for those with dyslexia, as they do against it, you would have a completely different and substantially less impacted special education system.

Navigating the School System When a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Minnesota Department of Education

SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICY DIVISION
APRIL 2015

We would like to acknowledge the contributions and endorsement of the many people who made this paper a reality.

Amy Schulting, parent, clinical psychologist at the Center for Behavior and Learning, education policy researcher at Duke University and advocate for Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota

Barbara Commers, Assistive Technology Specialist and Speech Pathologist

Barbara Troolin, parent and Director of Special Education for Minnesota Department of Education

Bette Erickson, Orton-Gillingham practitioner, Reading Coach, and Education Policy Advocate

Christine Stern, parent, advocate and president of The June Stern Family Foundation for Children with Dyslexia

Cory Stai, Reading specialist, pre-service teacher trainer and Reading Specialist for Minnesota Department of Education

Jan Hagedorn, Reading Readiness Director of the Reading Center, expert in dyslexia, teacher and parent

Jan Parkman, Specific Learning Disability Coordinator for Metro ECSU, Special Education teacher and parent

Jane Olson, Reading Specialist, reading coach, recognized speaker, Special Education teacher and parent

Jody Manning, Director of Parent Training and Information Center for PACER

Marcia Henry, distinguished author, teacher trainer and teacher

Marilyn Leifgren, school psychologist, teacher, administrator and pre-service school psychologist trainer

Martha Moriarty, Executive Director of Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

Mary Beth Kelley, pre-service teacher trainer, Special Education teacher and Program Director of Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

Marikay Canaga Litzau, Director of Compliance and Assistance for Minnesota Department of Education and lawyer

Miriam White, Special Education teacher and pre-service teacher trainer Bemidji State University

Rachel Berger, parent of dyslexic, advocate, chair of Decoding Dyslexia

Sara Carlson-Wallwrath, parent and Executive Director of the International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest Branch (IDA-UMB)

Thomas Strewler, individual with dyslexia, teacher, and President of the International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest Branch (IDA-UMB),

Additional thanks and permissions to reprint material

Louisa Moats, teacher, psychologist, researcher, graduate school faculty member, and distinguished author

Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity

We would like to additionally thank all the reviewers who read and made additional suggestions to the paper.

Amy Mahlke, Special Education teacher, pre-service teacher trainer

Heather Smythe, parent of a dyslexic, tutor

Heidi Springborg, School Psychologist

Kyra Campbell, tutor of dyslexic children, teacher, parent of dyslexic child.

Shari Barr, reading teacher and Wilson trainer

Participants at the IDA-UMB conference

Introduction

In Minnesota, a community of experts, advocates, administrators, educators and parents came together to answer questions that are most frequently asked about dyslexia and reading problems. There are many resources available that provide basic information about what it means to have dyslexia; however, there are few resources that discuss how to navigate the various terms used to describe reading problems and services within the school and community.

This informational paper was developed to support parents and teachers in providing evidence-based supports for students with dyslexia and those who persistently struggle in learning to read. This paper includes a discussion of resources and supports that go beyond the walls of the school, intentionally acknowledging a wider network of resources that are available. Readers will find links to nationally recognized resources for those seeking additional information or clarification.

This informational paper will provide answers to the following questions frequently asked by parents and teachers:

- Why not just call it dyslexia? Why are there so many terms to describe a student with a reading problem?
- What does dyslexia or a struggling reader look like?
- How can I prepare myself to request services and supports for a child who is struggling with reading?
- What services and supports are available through the school and community, and how can we get access to those services?
- What can I do when services are not offered within the school?
- How do I know that what is being offered will work?
    - What should instruction look like (instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity)?
    - What can I do when interventions or special education supports aren't working?

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component and or auditory processing of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Additional consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA/NICHD, 2002). Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities. Research from the National Center on Learning Disabilities suggests that one in five individuals is affected by dyslexia (NCLD, 2015). For more specific information, read about the **Myths and Truths of Dyslexia** on the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

Dyslexia can co-occur with other specific learning disorders in math, writing and spoken language, as well as other related learning disorders. For more information on specific learning disorders and disabilities read the state of Learning Disabilities on the **National Center for Learning Disabilities website**.

Administrator's View

Labels are limiting. Students don't fit in boxes. What we need are clear descriptions of students needs, resources, training, and staff to provide those services. My concern with labels is that they can lead to lowered expectations.

Parent's View

It is natural and logical to seek a label or a term to describe a challenge or difficulty. Obtaining a diagnosis of dyslexia helps me to realize that I am not alone, the struggle is real, and someone is working on finding solutions.

A label allows me to educate myself and empowers me to advocate effectively for my child. I am able to stop seeing the behavior as intentional or a character flaw. I recognize that a label provides a description which can help with a prescription for next steps.

I found the information provided on how diagnosis helped a student in college helpful, like **How my Diagnosis Improved My College Experience** at the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity.

Why not just call it dyslexia? Why are there so many terms to describe a reading problem?

One of the first challenges parents and teachers may face in supporting struggling students is a dizzying array of terms that mean essentially the same thing: the student cannot read accurately, fluently and with comprehension.

There is often confusion about terms used to label or describe a reading problem. Clinicians and researchers use different terminology than the schools. For example: medical professionals, psychologists and other practitioners outside of the school use the term "dyslexia," "reading disorder," and "specific learning disorder." Schools and educators use the terms "reading difficulty," and " specific learning disability in reading." The preferred terms in a field can change over time, further complicating the issue.

Terminology

We have collected terms you may encounter to describe a student who is struggling to read:

Dyslexia, a widely used term to describe reading and spelling difficulties

Reading Disorder, synonymous with Dyslexia; both are considered **Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) With Impairment in Reading** in DSM-5

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in Reading, used by Special Education

Struggling Reader or **Reading below grade-level**

The variety of terms parents and teachers have to navigate comes from the fact that people in different fields (research, medicine, psychology, education and policy) use terminology specific to their field. For example, the diagnosis of dyslexia typically comes from clinicians working with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition* (*DSM-5*). This is the handbook used by clinical psychologists, health care professionals, school psychologists, school social workers and researcher professionals. It provides a common language for professionals and researchers and establishes consistent and reliable diagnoses. However, schools do not diagnose clinical disorders.

The language used in schools comes from federal and state educational laws. Laws define the criteria under which students have a guaranteed right to services. Compliance with these laws and the mission to educate all students drives school's decision making. Parents will find that the school's primary focus is on determining the need for instructional supports, accommodations and modifications. A student may have dyslexia or a reading disorder and not qualify for school services.

What does dyslexia or a struggling reader look like?

Learn what a reading problem looks like to parents, teachers and community experts.

There are many professions that work on describing and addressing reading problems from different perspectives. As mentioned earlier, each has their own language and ownership for solving reading problems. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop common terminology. Therefore, we have created a tool to help parents navigate the language used.

The table that follows will be useful to parents and teachers identifying and communicating concerns about a child's reading. The table lists characteristics of concerns that are proven indicators of a reading problem and strengths that the students may possess despite reading difficulties. Included in the table are key words or phrases used by professionals to label the characteristics. To a parent and teacher, the terms used by professionals are less of a concern than the fact that the challenges are real and must be addressed as soon as possible with high quality instruction and supports. Children do not mature out of reading challenges on their own. The last column in the table provides some suggested actions to take. We all need to take action as early as possible to improve the student's long-term reading.

Because students may present with difficulties at different ages, we have formatted this table according to what teachers and parents may see at different ages. You will find redundancy in both characteristics and actions because not all characteristics and actions are age specific. The table provides a list of potential strengths; the number and degree of strengths will likely vary in each student. Use the list of strengths to describe why the reading difficulties are unexpected. Listing a student's strengths with data is an important contrast showing ways a student learns and succeeds despite challenges in using print (reading and writing). Document and monitor what you are seeing to provide complete picture of the child over time. (Content adapted from *Overcoming Dyslexia* © 2015, Sally E Shaywitz, M.D. Reproduced with the permission of The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity • Yale School of Medicine.)

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

The Preschool Years

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
▸ Trouble learning common nursery rhymes, such as "Jack and Jill" ▸ Difficulty learning (and remembering) the names of letters and their corresponding sounds in the alphabet ▸ Difficulty recognizing letters in his/her own name ▸ Mispronounces familiar words; persistent "baby talk" ▸ Difficulty recognizing rhyming patterns like cat, bat, rat	Emergent reader Language Delayed At-risk reader Immature learner	▸ Read more about early reading development to help you know what is expected at this age ▸ Gather examples and information on what your child can do compared to what is expected for the age (for more information on what to look for read the page on Screening Tools on the Get Ready to Read website) ▸ Start working at home to build skills in phonemic awareness and sound symbol relationships; be ready to explain how much practice it takes for progress to be seen ▸ Have your child formally screened at school or with a psychologist or speech pathologist to determine: • Differences between the child's listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities and age or grade level expectations • If the child is at-risk and appropriate services

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

Kindergarten and First Grade

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ Makes errors that show no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page—will say, "puppy" instead of "dog" when shown picture labeled dog ▸ Does not understand that words come apart ▸ Complains about how hard reading is, or "disappears" when it is time to read ▸ Has parents with or family history of dyslexia and reading problems ▸ Cannot sound out even simple words like cat, map, nap ▸ Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with the "b" sound **Speaking and Listening** ▸ Uses vague or generic terms for specific things ▸ Needs directions repeated frequently ▸ Relies on body language or non-verbal cues to support communication ▸ Slow to find the word to use in a conversation ▸ Complains that others are better readers ▸ Resists reading and practicing at home	Struggling reader At-risk reader Student in need of interventions Possible dyslexia	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: ▸ Read more about early reading development to help you know what is expected at this age ▸ Ask your child's teacher to describe or provide examples of grade level expectations ▸ Have your child formally screened at school or formally evaluated with a psychologist or speech pathologist to determine differences between the child's listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities and age or grade level standards ▸ Advocate for and accept evidence-based interventions or intervention services ▸ Continue working at home to build skills in phonemic awareness and sound symbol relationships. When talking to professionals, be ready to explain how much practice it takes for progress to be seen If all above have been done, move to actions listed at the next grade levels

Kindergarten and First Grade, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Potential Strengths ▸ Curiosity ▸ Creative imagination ▸ Ability to figure things out ▸ Eager embrace of new ideas ▸ Gets the gist of things ▸ Good understanding of new concepts ▸ Larger vocabulary than peers ▸ Talent at building models ▸ Oral language is relatively stronger than phonemic awareness and decoding abilities		Do not let reading problems define your child Look for and support the child's interests and strengths Avoid talking about child's reading struggles with other adults when child can hear you

Second Grade and Up

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ Is very slow in acquiring reading skills; reading is slow and awkward ▸ Has trouble reading unfamiliar words, often making wild guesses because he cannot sound out the word, or same errors over and over ▸ Does not have a strategy for reading new words ▸ Avoids reading out loud ▸ Confuses or reads "saw" for "was", "what" for "that" ▸ Omits small words or parts of words when reading aloud	Struggling reader At-risk reader Student in need of interventions Possible dyslexia	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: – ▸ Closely monitor and make a log of your observations and share the data ▸ Discuss needs and options available for using accessible educational materials (AEM) to make print materials accessible ▸ Request meetings to work with the school to share what is working and how to help your child make progress

Second Grade and Up, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Speaking and Listening ▸ Searches for a specific word, but uses vague language such as "stuff" or "thing" a lot, without naming object ▸ Pauses, hesitates and/or uses lots of "umm's" when speaking ▸ Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying "tornado" for "volcano," substituting "lotion" for "ocean" ▸ Mispronounces long, unfamiliar, or complicated words ▸ Needs extra time to respond to questions **School and Life** ▸ Frequently misunderstands what was said ▸ Has trouble remembering dates, names, telephone numbers, random lists ▸ Has trouble finishing tests on time because of slow reading or writing ▸ Has great difficulty learning a foreign language ▸ Has messy handwriting and or poor spelling; poor handwriting may mask poor spelling ▸ Practice spelling words do not stick and do not show up in daily writing ▸ Demonstrates low self-esteem that may not be immediately visible ▸ Frequently misses steps in multi-step directions (indicates weaknesses in working memory)	Adults express concerns that the student has poor attention, is being lazy or unmotivated, doesn't work to his potential, or is not trying hard enough In need of intervention In need of an IEP	▸ Participate in meetings to adjust ineffective interventions; make a plan with the school on when to move forward with an evaluation ▸ Know your rights and how to request services so that you know what to do if you disagree with school's course of action ▸ Monitor and notice if your child shows physical or emotional symptoms related to the stress of school and reading ▸ Continue to build skills at home and monitor how much practice is required to see improvement ▸ Seek supports within the community to help you understand, advocate for and support child; this may include obtaining an independent evaluation ▸ Discuss with language specialists if there are concerns about the child's speaking and listening, attention and/or memory If all above have been done, move to actions listed at the next grade levels

Second Grade and Up, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Potential Strengths ▸ Relatively strong thinking skills: conceptualization, reasoning, imagination, abstraction; gets the "big picture" ▸ Stronger with tasks that are meaningful, rather than rote memorization ▸ Understands most of what is read aloud ▸ Reads and understands overlearned (highly practiced) words in a special area of interest at a high level; for example, reads and understands auto mechanic magazines if hobby is restoring cars ▸ Reading in an area of interest becomes easier and productive as vocabulary is mastered ▸ Stronger listening vocabulary than indicated by reading and writing scores and samples ▸ Excellence in areas not dependent on reading, such as math, computers and visual arts, or excellence in more conceptual (versus factoid-driven) subjects such as philosophy, biology, social studies, neuroscience and creative writing		▸ Continue to build a picture of your child's growth, strengths, weaknesses and what supports are working; add new information from all professionals working with you and your child ▸ Encourage a growth mindset and focus on effort and strategies that lead to success and independent learning ▸ Continue to advocate for use of alternate instructional materials to balance practice in reading with access to subject matter vocabulary subjects ▸ Encourage and support areas of interest and special talents. Balance school with other interests and family time; consider tutoring as needed

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

Young Adults and Adults

What you might see and hear from your young adult	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ A childhood history of reading and spelling difficulties ▸ While reading skills have developed over time, reading still requires great effort and is done at a slow pace ▸ Rarely reads for pleasure ▸ Slow reading of most materials—books, manuals, subtitles in films ▸ Avoids reading aloud **Speaking and Listening** ▸ Not fluent, often anxious while speaking ▸ Pausing or hesitating often when speaking; using lots of "um's" ▸ Using imprecise language, for example, "stuff" or "things," instead of the proper name of an object ▸ Often mispronounces the names of people and places; trips over words ▸ Difficulty remembering names; confuses names that sound alike ▸ Struggles to retrieve words ▸ Slow response in conversations and/or writing; struggles when put on the spot ▸ Spoken vocabulary is narrower than listening vocabulary ▸ Avoids saying words that might be mispronounced ▸ Oral language difficulties persist	Student is unmotivated, not reaching his her potential, not completing work and should just try harder Student needs a 504 Plan Student needs special education Student has dyslexia, depression, anxiety, attention, or other disorders Student is at-risk of dropping out or not graduating	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: ▸ As the child grows older provide opportunities for him or her to self-advocate and actively participate in making decisions about when, how and to what degree supports are provided ▸ Watch for changes in ability to recover from failure and frustration, and attitude towards school and learning ▸ Continue monitoring and supporting a balance between work and special interests ▸ Ensure documentation of disability and need for accommodations, modifications, services, etc. stays current and shows what is working ▸ Begin discussing and planning for post school plans in junior high school, if not earlier ▸ Ensure assistive technology and Accessible Educational Materials are in place and effective

Young Adults and Adults, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your young adult	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
School and Life ▸ Despite good grades, will often say that she is dumb or is concerned that peers think that she is dumb ▸ Penalized by tests that limit ability to communicate knowledge (ex. multiple choice tests) ▸ Sacrifices social life for studying ▸ Suffers fatigue when reading ▸ Performs rote clerical tasks poorly and struggles to complete tasks on time ▸ Struggles with writing projects and essay tests		
Potential Strengths ▸ Demonstrates persistence in areas of interest ▸ Noticeable improvement when given more time on multiple-choice exams ▸ Noticeable excellence when focused on a highly specialized area such as medicine, law, public policy, finance, architecture, or basic science ▸ Quality thought and elaboration of ideas in writing (spelling poor) ▸ Relatively articulate in the expression of ideas and feelings ▸ Success in areas not dependent on rote memory ▸ Talent for high-level conceptualization, ability to come up with original insights ▸ Big-picture thinking; inclination to think outside of the box ▸ Noticeable resilience, ability to adapt		

The instruction that is proven most effective must be in small groups or one-on-one, intensive, explicit, systematic, structured. In addition, all instruction must be reviewed and monitored continuously to ensure it matches student needs and is effective. For example, students with decoding and spelling needs get phonetically based and multisensory instruction in small groups for the number of minutes as designed. Data on improvement of decoding and spelling is gathered and analyzed to make sure the intervention is leading to improved decoding/spelling skills. For students who have the greatest need in oral language and listening comprehension, intervention is focused on explicit instruction in vocabulary, active listening, morphology, syntax and grammar. Data on tracking growth in oral language and listening comprehension is gathered and analyzed to ensure the intervention is leading to improved language skills. Explicit instruction means that all learning is explained, modeled and practiced so that the student knows exactly what to do. The researchers, teachers and parents will say that the sooner that effective evidence-based interventions are provided in addition to the core instruction that all students get, the more likely the student is to learn to read with minimal difficulty. Students with more severe dyslexia and specific learning disabilities in the area of reading are not going to be "cured," but they will learn to be highly successful with a combination of instructional and technology supports.

By definition, students with dyslexia don't learn to read the same way as everyone else.

Although many children learn to read with the instruction provided in the regular classroom, students with dyslexia and readers two or more grades behind, will not learn to read without additional services.

How can I prepare myself to request services and supports for a child who is struggling with reading?

Getting Started

We have created a checklist of things to do to help you be effective in talking with a teacher or to parents.

1. Describe what you are seeing:
   - **First describe exactly what you see as being the problem.** Create a picture of language development and reading performance over time. Be as specific as you can and include any data or notes from school, community, or other providers that indicate how the student is reading compared to students of the same age. If you need some language to get you started, look at examples in the chart titled "Signs of a Reading Difficulty That Signal a Need for Action" beginning on page 3.

Parent Tip

Keep a log of important documents relating to your child. This will serve as a historical representation of your child's needs, abilities, and responses to interventions.

Purchase a three-ring binder with plastic sleeves and tabbed dividers. Keep examples of typical homework: evaluations, progress monitoring charts, conference notes, report cards. Date, divide, and tab appropriately per subject, school year, and quarter.

Add assessments both formal and informal, progress reports, IEPs or 504 plan, accommodations, progress from outside tutors, etc. Bring it with you to conferences and team meetings.

   - **Document specific thing(s) that seem to be making a difference.** People, supports, resources and places change, so focus on what happens during instruction. If you find an intervention or something that is improving your child's reading, willingness to read, or comprehension, make note of it. The more specific you can be the better.

     For example:

     - After school and tutoring, Jose will read if he can listen to a book.
     - Amy likes to compete against herself, so she wants to see her progress graphs and set goals for herself.
     - Tracing with her finger seems to be more helpful than focusing on what her lips are doing.

Also make notes of what hasn't worked so staff know it has been tried with limited effect:

- She likes using Spelling City, but I don't see that it helps her spelling as much as practicing with a white board or finger paints.

- **Include both the student's strengths and weaknesses.** Too often adults focus on persistent weaknesses. Our children/students pick up on this and take on a failure mindset. Instead we should draw their attention to effective effort and the payoff of persistence in understanding how to learn. Every student has strengths that can become means of engaging them when the going gets tough. Frame every discussion about the student in the form of strengths and weaknesses in reading. Be sure to note ways of compensating for challenging tasks. (To see examples of strengths in students with reading difficulty, review the chart "Signs of a Reading Difficulty That Signal a Need for Action" beginning on page 3.)

  Following is some sample language you can use to start organizing your description:

  > *"I have a concern about* [CHILD'S NAME] *in reading. I first started thinking about it when…*[PROVIDE EXAMPLE AND DATA]. *Now I am seeing* [TEST DATA], [WILLINGNESS TO READ], [TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK] *and* [DESCRIPTION OF WHAT YOU ARE HEARING WHEN STUDENT READS]. *Additionally,* [PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS] *make this difficulty with reading unexpected.*

2. Gather your notes and practice explaining your concerns with another adult or advocate. Get feedback on how clear you are. Ask if you make a logical case with the data you have.

3. Meet with your child's teacher(s), discuss your concerns and share your data. Work together to define the problem and identify what it will take to get the student reading at least one grade level higher. Schools set what they call **SMART** goals. The acronym stands for:

   - **Specific**—target a specific area for improvement.
   - **Measurable**—quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
   - **Attainable**—Can be achieved with instruction or supports.
   - **Results-oriented**—the goal is relevant to what the student has to learn and the results lead student closer to grade-level expectations.
   - **Time-bound**—specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

   We are recommending starting the discussion with what it will take to read at least one grade higher because that seems immediately realistic, reasonable and timely within a school year. Some sample language for you to set reasonable goals for progress:

"So we agree that [CHILD'S NAME] *needs to improve* [NAME SPECIFIC SKILLS SUCH AS DECODING AND SPELLING] *from* [STARTING POINT USING DATA] *to* [ENDING POINT—ABOUT ONE YEAR HIGHER DEPENDING ON TIME OF YEAR]."

Additionally, when you walk away from the meeting you should be clear on where your student's performance is starting and what will be done to achieve the goal (end point). You should be clear on who is responsible for the support and how student progress will be communicated on an on-going basis.

Parent's Tip

Persistence pays off. Some parents stop at the first "no" they encounter. Sometimes "no" means: "I don't know what to do", "I don't have the ability to do it", or "it goes beyond what I am able to do with all the things I am responsible for." There is still a problem that has to be worked on, so give yourself permission to persist in communicating your concerns.

4. When you come across something you don't understand or when what is offered doesn't feel right in your gut, use the resources provided in this paper to further educate yourself.

5. Persist in clearly communicating the problem with the student's teacher to begin to get informal supports, differentiated instruction and evidence-based interventions. If you want to request an evaluation for special education or consideration of special education services, put the request in writing and submit it to the principal. Include all the previous descriptive language of the problem, additional data you have from outside the school and the goals, then add:

   "I would like to request… [NAME WHAT YOU HOPE TO SEE HAPPENING, SUCH AS: A MEETING TO CLARIFY THE INTERVENTION AND PROGRESS DATA OR EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION, ETC.]. *I look forward to hearing from you and talking about this issue. I can be reached at…*[YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]."

6. Advocate for **accessible educational materials** (AEM) and resources which can provide support for the student and help to "even the playing field" for the student. As parents and teachers, we have to focus on the long-term goal—the student needs to have the will and skills to read, as well as all the language and terminology to unlock the meaning of print. Audible books, text readers, or speech to text applications can help. Note that for students with language comprehension issues, AEM may not provide benefit unless the content is provided at the language level of the student.

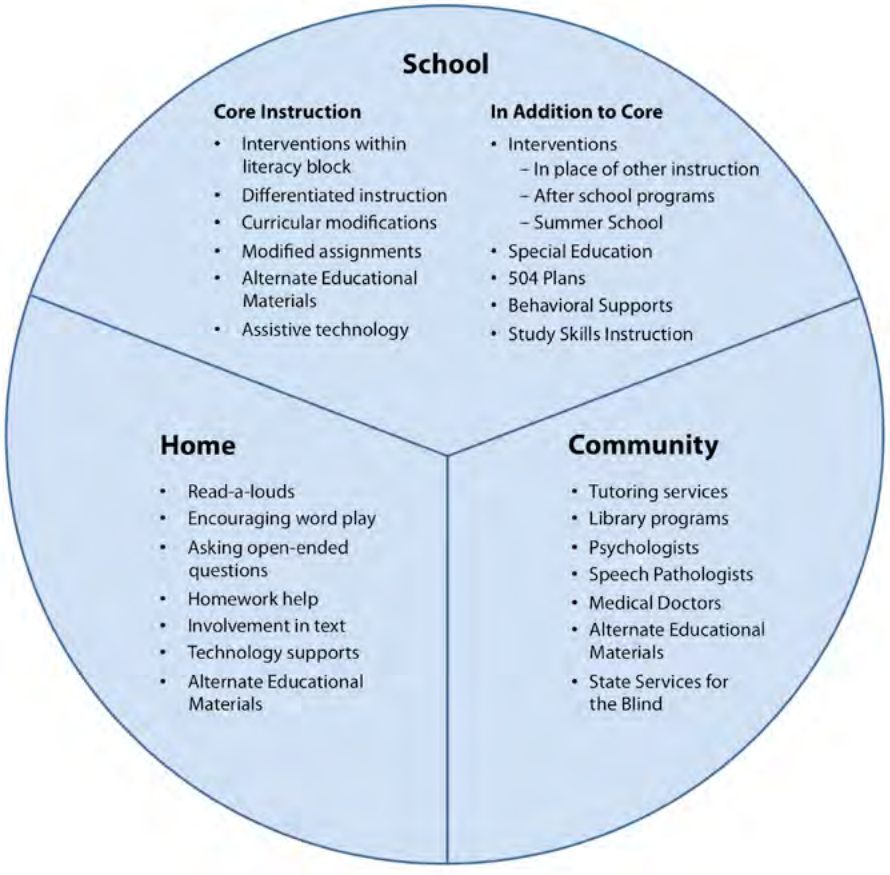
For more information on the importance of accessible educational materials and assistive technology read ***Failure Is Not An Option*** by David Edyburn, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Edyburn's teaching and research interests focus on the use of technology to enhance teaching, learning and performance.

What services and supports are available through the school and community, and how can we get access to those services?

Parents and teachers sometimes have difficulty understanding a path forward when their gut is telling them that something is wrong for the student. Both parents and teachers should know that there are multiple routes and options of support.

The pie chart below provides an overview of a holistic approach to support students who are dyslexic or significantly behind in reading. In the following pages we will describe the supports that can be used starting with school supports.

Holistic Approach to Support Students with Reading Difficulties



Within the school setting there is a continuum of services and supports available. Access to these supports is often gained through a multi-step process. Because this topic is complex, we start by providing a visual of the multi-step process. Starting from the top left with Step one,

we illustrate the ways that a student may be identified as having a need. The next level down, Step two describes three possible outcomes as teachers move forward with interventions and gathering data on the student. In the last step, Step three illustrates options for how students may continue to be supported as they participate in any multitude of school activities.

Steps and Supports Available Within the School Setting

If Suzy is struggling with reading in school, we can identify her need through:

Step 1: Identify

- A parent or teacher describing need and requesting interventions
- A system of screening identifies Suzy as at-risk and in need of intervention
- A parent or teacher requesting an evaluation for a disability
  - Evaluation from the school
  - Evaluation from independent evaluator

Step 2: Monitor and Adjust

- If interventions are working continue to monitor
- If interventions are not working then adjust and or evaluate for a disability
- If there is a disability and if there is a need for supports
  - When the need is about increasing access to grade level materials and learning, then use a 504 Plan to improve access
  - When the need is about access and progress to grade level materials, then use a IEP to improve access and progress

School staff may provide alternate educational materials and technology to improve classroom performance.

Step 3 : Continue supports in all areas of instruction

Advanced courses or gifted services | Core Instruction | Additional instructional opportunities | Special Education and related services

Parent has a right to continue with and seek additional supports through community psychologists, tutors, speech pathologists, etc.

Students may function with supports in many programs. In the following pages, we describe what program options may be available to students who struggle with reading. After a description of the programs, we provide more information on how students are identified as needing that program. We describe these programs and the procedures to access them in general terms; please know that schools may have more specific procedures than presented here. We start with discussing programming at the high end of achievement and ability describing services for students who may have mastered content ideas but struggle with the act of reading and end with students who meet criteria and need Special Education.

Twice Exceptional: Exceedingly Bright and Struggling Students

Twice exceptional or "2e" students are both intellectually gifted and also struggle with a learning disability, such as dyslexia. These students have a profile of advanced content knowledge that lead them to high performance as long as they are not required to read to gain information. Twice exceptional students benefit from "dual differentiation" which includes both appropriate intellectual stimulation as well as supports and accommodations to address reading and learning difficulties.

Twice exceptional students need to be actively engaged and challenged in school through enriched and advanced course taking. Services can vary from meeting with a specialist one or more times per week to taking advanced placement and post-secondary options courses. There are also many options for accessible educational materials and assistive technology supports. These supports allow twice exceptional students to learn and produce high-quality work that is commensurate with their strong cognitive abilities. Without these supports, 2e students are more likely to struggle with social-emotional difficulties, such as anxiety and depression, disengage from school and lack confidence in their intellectual skills and abilities.

Parent's View: A 2e Profile

I suspected my son was intellectually gifted in preschool. He had an advanced vocabulary, strong Lego skills and loved listening to chapter books. I expected that he would love school and excel academically. But he didn't.

In first grade, he struggled to remember vowel sounds and sound out unfamiliar words. I knew something was wrong. The school denied a special education evaluation as he was performing close to grade level. But when his reading struggles, stomach aches and tears continued in second grade, I opted for a private evaluation. It changed our lives. I learned that his IQ was at the 98th percentile, and that he has Dyslexia.

He now participates in gifted programming at school, private tutoring to improve his reading and spelling, and his 504 plan accommodations allow him to demonstrate his strengths without his disability getting in the way. He still has occasional stomach aches, but we have come a long, long way!

How will we know if the student qualifies?

Identifying 2e students can be a challenge as their undiagnosed reading difficulties can mask their intellectual strengths. Conversely, their intellectual strengths may also allow them to compensate so that their reading difficulties go undetected. When considering if a child may be twice exceptional, it is important to look for inconsistencies in performance. 2e students may demonstrate precocious learning or language skills, but then struggle to spell, decode

words, or read fluently. They may excel when answering questions verbally, but their reading and writing skills are well below their performance on verbal tasks.

Both intellectual capacity and dyslexia are inherited to some degree. Therefore, if a child is struggling in school but has intellectually gifted siblings or parents, it may indicate that a child's cognitive potential is being underestimated due to their academic difficulties. Or, if a child has been identified as gifted but resists writing assignments, has an uneven reading profile, or has siblings who also struggle in reading, it may make sense to consider the presence of a learning disability.

For more information on identifying students who are twice exceptional, read **Twice-Exceptional: Students with Both Gifts and Challenges or Disabilities** found on the Idaho State Department of Education's website.

For local resources and support, visit the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented website's section on **Twice Exceptional**.

For more information on supporting students who are gifted and dyslexic, visit the International Dyslexia Association website's section titled **Gifted and Dyslexic**.

Differentiation of Core Instruction

Core instruction is the term used to name the instruction that is delivered to all students in the area of literacy including reading every day. High-quality core instruction includes evidence-based practice in all areas of reading every day. Teachers who use data to make adjustments to the amount of time and targeted practice they provide to learners who are behind are providing interventions within core instruction. This may be just what some struggling readers need; however, for students who have persistent reading difficulties and/or are diagnosed with dyslexia, this high quality instruction taking place during the typical reading block will not be sufficient.

Additionally teachers may include what is called differentiated instruction to not only catch up learners who are behind, but also grow skills for students who have already mastered the content. A teacher using differentiated instruction might change the pace, level or kind of instruction in response to the individual learner's needs, styles, or interests. Teachers may vary the content, activities, learning environment or student projects, based on student readiness, interests or level. Student assessment data and progress monitoring are typically used to determine how to differentiate instruction. Differentiation is not an intervention because it does not provide additional targeted practice. The students described in this paper will not close the gap with differentiation alone. To learn more about differentiated instruction, visit the **Reading Rockets** website.

Minnesota Law requires schools to identify and provide interventions for students who are not reading proficiently by grade 3. Excerpts from the law follow.

Minnesota Statute 120B.12.

"...each school district shall identify before the end of kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 students who are not reading at grade level before the end of the current school year. Reading assessments in English, and in the predominant languages of district students where practicable, must identify and evaluate students' areas of academic need related to literacy. The district also must monitor the progress and provide reading instruction appropriate to the specific needs of English learners.

…For each student identified under subdivision 2, the district shall provide reading intervention to accelerate student growth and reach the goal of reading at or above grade level by the end of the current grade and school year. District intervention methods shall encourage family engagement and, where possible, collaboration with appropriate school and community programs. Intervention methods may include, but are not limited to, requiring attendance in summer school, intensified reading instruction that may require that the student be removed from the regular classroom for part of the school day, extended-day programs, or programs that strengthen students' cultural connections."

Interventions for students not making progress with regular instruction

What are interventions?

Intervention, for the purposes of this paper, is defined by the additional practice provided that is intended to alter the rate of skill acquisition. Reading interventions take place in addition to the reading instruction that all students get every day. In Minnesota, the interventions must have evidence that they are effective for helping students learn how to read. By law, schools are to provide at least two interventions that are proven effective (also known as evidence-based or research-based) prior to evaluating the student for special education services.The classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, a reading teacher, literacy coach, or others trained to deliver a specific research-based practice may provide the intervention to small groups of students. Interventions should be specifically designed to meet the instructional needs of the student and not solely dependent on the schedule.

Note: the school district may not use the intervention requirement to deny a student's right to a special education evaluation. If a parent requests an evaluation for special education services, the district must proceed with the special education evaluation without implementing the pre-referral or Response to Intervention (RTI) interventions to provide the parent with a prior written notice explaining its refusal to evaluate the student.

How will the school know if my student needs interventions?

Schools may organize how to identify students for intervention services in two different ways.

One way is based on teacher or parent request. A school that identifies students for interventions in this way may use standardized tests, unit tests, grades, or other indicators of progress in reading. Typically this data is brought to a team of professionals who review the data and recommend interventions that the teachers try within the regular classroom. The teacher is responsible for gathering data and documenting the results of the intervention. If the intervention was not successful, the results are shared with the team. The team uses all the information, old and new, to recommend a better intervention. A request for intervention is covered under Minnesota Statute 125A.56. The following is a selection from the law that provides interventions to students at-risk.

Advocate's Tip

Parents have the right to request an evaluation at any time regardless of where the school is with interventions. Put the request for a special education evaluation into writing and submit it to the school principal. Schools cannot delay your request for an evaluation until interventions are complete. Sometimes parents are told that an evaluation has to wait until interventions are complete. The law permits an evaluation to be conducted while interventions are taking place *as well as* allow them to continue during the evaluation for special education. Student progress in interventions should continue to be communicated regularly.

Minnesota statute 125A.56:

- *Before a [student] is referred for a special education evaluation, the district must conduct and document at least two instructional strategies, alternatives, or interventions using a system of scientific, research-based instruction and intervention in academics or behavior, based on the [student's] needs, while the [student] is in the regular classroom.*
- *The [student's] teacher must document the results.*
- *A special education evaluation team may waive this requirement when it determines the [student's] need for the evaluation is urgent.*
- *This section may not be used to deny a [student's] right to a special education evaluation.*

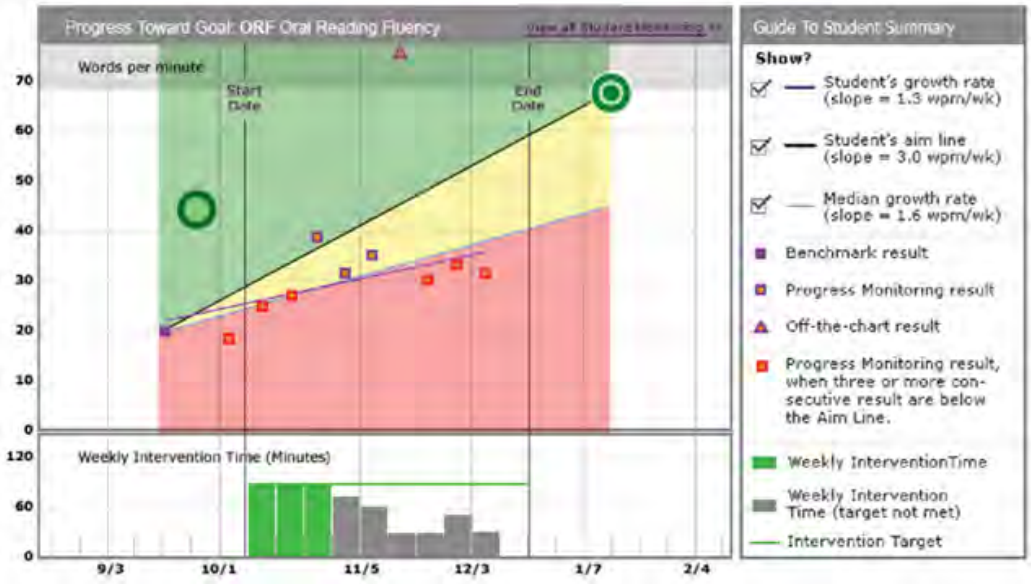
Another way schools organize interventions is through a defined system. This system may be called a Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS). RTI and MTSS takes a school-wide approach to identify students in need of additional instruction and supports. Minnesota law does not currently define a single way to do RTI or MTSS. It is up to each school to define the process. That said, there are common elements that are nationally recognized for how students are identified for and provided interventions:

- All students are given a quick screening to determine their levels of risk in not meeting grade-level reading expectations.
- Using scores on screening, students whose performance is below a target are provided additional assessment to match their needs to an evidence-based intervention available in the school.
- Intervention is delivered by a trained individual.
- Reading interventions are in addition to—and not replacing—the reading instruction that all students receive.
- While interventions are being delivered, students are assessed for progress. This is called progress monitoring data and it is used to determine if the intervention is working.
- Progress monitoring data is reviewed and communicated regularly so interventions can be changed when the student stops improving.

A full description of RTI and MTSS goes beyond the intention of this informational paper. For more explanation follow the link to:

- *Understanding Response to Intervention* on **National Center on Learning Disability's website**.
- *What is RTI?* on **Response to Intervention Network's website**.
- *So What do I do Now? Strategies for Intensifying Intervention when Standard Approaches Don't Work*—see more on the **National Intensive Intervention Center's website**.

Illustrative Example of Progress Monitoring Data Useful for Adjusting Instruction



This image shows progress monitoring data illustrating a child's progress compared to a set goal. When the student is progressing towards the goal, indicated by the circle within the circle at the top right of the graph, the smaller squares show trend towards the goal. There is a second graph at the bottom of the image. This graph uses bars to show how many minutes of intervention were received as compared to minutes scheduled. We can see by the bars at the bottom that the student is not receiving the full number of minutes scheduled. Simultaneously we see the student's growth level off. This graph should be used to suggest that the student is not making progress because the intervention is not being delivered as intended. If the square dots showed the same pattern, but all the minutes of intervention were received, then it would suggest that intervention was not effective and lead to an adjustment. (Image used with permission from Wireless Generation.)

What does a (504 plan) provide?

What is a 504 plan?

Section 504 is a federal civil rights law that protects students in K-12 public schools from discrimination on the basis of disability. A 504 plan describes accommodations, accessible educational materials and assistive technologies that must be provided to remove barriers to learning. All school districts that receive federal funding are responsible for the implementation of this law.

How will the school know if my student needs a 504 plan?

A 504 plan protects a student with an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, whether the student receives special education services or not.

Examples of physical or mental impairments that may be covered under Section 504 include: epilepsy, AIDS, allergies, vision impairment, broken limbs, cancer, diabetes, asthma, temporary condition due to accidents or illness, ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, autism, depression, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Examples of major life activities that can be affected by the student's disability include: learning, thinking, concentrating, reading, speaking, walking, breathing, sleeping, caring for oneself, as well as major bodily functions, including brain function, immune system function, or digestive functions. This is not an exhaustive list.

Teacher's Tip

A child that has gaps in reading compared to same age peers and grade level expectations, requires supplemental interventions and supports. Those supports should be provided at the earliest signs of difficulty and monitored regularly. Students performance should not level off or decline if the interventions are effective. In addition to parent's observation of progress when reading with the student, the schools should be routinely assessing student performance at a minimum of every two weeks.

When the data suggests that the student is plateauing or making minimal improvements, the intervention or instruction should be adjusted to intensify the effects by: 1) increasing the amount of time provided for the intervention; 2) increasing the frequency of the intervention; and/or 3) adjusting or changing the approach used for the intervention.

It may be useful for the adults to track the growth on a chart at home and/or school to assure the growth is moving in a positive direction. This is not the child's responsibility.

If you want to know more about 504 plans in Minnesota, please visit the **504 section of the Minnesota Department of Education website**. Information from the **Office of Civil Rights can be obtained by visiting their website and reading their FAQ on 504 plans**.

If you have never heard of a 504 plan, please click on the link to visit the National Center for Learning Disabilities website that provides basic information about **504 Plans**.

For an explanation comparing 504 plans to Individual Educational Programs, please click on the link that will take you to the National Center for Learning Disabilities website **comparing IEPs to 504 Plans**.

Special Education Services

What is special education and how is it different from intervention?

Special education services include specially designed instruction, support and related services provided to students with an identified disability. For every student who needs special education services, a team develops a special document called an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP outlines the unique needs of the student and the specialized goals and objectives that will help the student make educational progress. For more information on Special Education, see the website for **Center for Parent Information and Resources**. For a copy of parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services see the section on **Parental Rights Under IDEA** on the web site at the Center for Parental Information and Resources.

When an evaluation for special education is requested, a team from the public school that includes parents makes a plan for the data to be gathered and evaluated. This data is used to determine if the student is a child with a disability and if the student has a need for specially designed instruction. The evaluation must support both the presence of a disability and the need for specially designed instruction in order to make progress in the general curriculum. This is a higher standard than a 504 plan which requires a team to determine the presence of a disability and the need for accommodations and modifications in order to access the general curriculum.

Sometimes a student is evaluated outside of the school setting and has received a diagnosis of a learning disability such as Dyslexia. Information from such an evaluation should be considered as part of an evaluation conducted in the school setting, but the need for specially designed instruction requires school-based data to meet criteria for special education services to be provided. When a parent brings in evaluation results that come from an independent evaluator, the school is likely to compare the findings with how the student is performing within the school setting. For more information on this topic, visit Learning Disabilities Association of America and read their information sheets on **Qualifying for Special Education Services**.

How do I know if my child will qualify for Special Education?

Public School Districts in Minnesota follow a set of criteria to determine if a student has a specific learning disability in the area of reading as defined in federal and state law. Independent evaluators, such as psychologists, speech pathologists or medical professionals, in instances of comorbid ADHD or other health disabilities, may carry out evaluations which are termed "independent evaluations" because they are conducted independent from the school. Independent evaluators may use Minnesota's criteria, but most likely also use the definition of specific learning disorders in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5), which has a similar set of criteria.

The table on the next page shows the similarities and differences between school evaluation criteria and independent evaluation criteria. The reason to know the difference is that an independent evaluator may determine the student meets the DSM criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder, while the school looks at the data and determines there is not sufficient evidence of educational need as dictated by the state criteria for SLD. The school criteria is more strict than the DSM criteria which is why a student can meet DSM criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder or Dyslexia and not meet State special education criteria for SLD.

More information about the evaluation process may be found in chapters 1 and 10 of the **Manual for Determining the Eligibility of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities** on the Minnesota Department of Education's website.

Educational Model	DSM-5 Definition Used by Clinicians
Criteria for Minnesota Specific Learning Disability (LD/SLD)	**Criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder**
1. Evidence of achievement is below grade level expectations (can be in any of these areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, reading fluency) 1a. Multiple sources of data are used to confirm below grade level achievement (grades, work samples, teacher records, state/district tests, formal/informal tests) 1b. The learning disability cannot be due to vision, hearing, motor impairment, cognitive impairment, emotional disorders, or environmental, cultural, economic influences, limited English proficiency, or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math 2. Profile indicates strengths and weaknesses in basic psychological processes, including but not limited to: organization, planning, sequencing, memory, taking in information and retaining it, visual and auditory processing, verbal/nonverbal expression, transfer of information, motor control for written tasks 3. Gap is unexpected 3a. There is significant difference between ability and achievement 3b. Data from response to intervention model shows student is not making progress with interventions (there are four parts to this criteria)	1. Difficulties learning and using academic skills, as indicated by the presence of at least one of the following symptoms that have persisted for least six months, despite receiving interventions for those difficulties: a) inaccurate or slow effortful word reading, b) difficulty understanding the meaning or what is read, c) difficulties with spelling 2. The child's academic skills are below age level and cause significant difficulty with academic or occupational performance or with activities of daily living as confirmed by a standardized test. 3. The learning difficulties may have shown up while the child was in school, but it wasn't extreme enough to receive additional interventions or supports. A youth or adult may experience a higher degree of difficulties based on the demands of the work or school tasks 4. A learning disability cannot be due to vision, hearing, cognitive impairment, emotional/mental/neurological disorders, psychosocial adversity, or environmental, cultural, economic influences, limited English proficiency, or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math

How can we get access to instructional supports?

Accessible Educational Materials

Students who qualify for accessible instructional materials including textbooks from the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (NIMAC) are only those students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who are identified as blind/visually impaired, have a physical or reading disability and can benefit from text materials which are identical to content used by classroom peers. Accessible educational materials do not reduce the demands of what is to be learned or understanding that is to be demonstrated.

There are three ways a student can access print materials in alternate formats:

1. According to the laws that govern copyright, students must qualify as having a "print disability" to have free access to textbooks and other materials in accessible formats. Students who have been identified as having dyslexia may meet the criteria for a "print disability" and qualify for accessible instructional materials (AEM) regardless of whether they have a 504 Plan or IEP. A competent authority must certify that the individual has a reading disability resulting from organic dysfunction of sufficient severity to prevent reading printed material in a normal manner. Districts have an obligation to provide AEM for students certified as having a "print disability" who need them even if those students do not have a 504 plan or IEP.

2. Students who were identified as having dyslexia and meet the criteria for a 504 Plan will have the 504 team identify the need for accessible instructional materials (AEM). A source for 504 teams to use when making a determination of a print disability is the AEM Navigator, which can be found on the **AEM website**.

Teacher's View

Guiding questions teams should use to determine appropriate devices and supports include:

- What task do we want this student to do that they are unable to do at a level that reflects their skills/abilities?
- What device or support will help with that task? Some examples that have been beneficial to students with dyslexia include but are not limited to:
  - Reading: text to speech AT, access to digital material.
  - Writing: speech to text software, word prediction software.
  - Note taking: audio and video recording devices, mobile devices to take photo of notes on the board and agenda, copies of peers' notes.
  - Math: calculators, hands-on manipulatives, online simulators.

3. Students who have an IEP and a documented print disability have additional protections and access to textbooks in alternate formats from the NIMAC. The NIMAC does not accept textbook requests from family and community members even if the student meets eligibility for AEM.

Families can access libraries of materials, including public domain libraries of digital materials, which can be provided to students. **View a list of Accessible Media Producers on the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials website**.

Educators can request textbooks from the NIMAC. View more information on district procedures to request and create AEM on the Minnesota Department of Education's **Accessible Educational Materials webpage**.

How can we get access to assistive technology?

Assistive technology (AT) is defined as devices that increase, maintain and support the independence of a person with a disability, and services to support the selection, acquisition and use of those devices. An assistive technology device means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The devices facilitate the ability of the student to gain or produce evidence of learning.

Assistive technology devices do not reduce the demands of what is to be learned. There is no "one size fits all" form of assistive technology. It is not practical to generate a checklist or disability-based list of AT. Each student's needs must be considered to determine appropriate AT.

Teams need to plan for time to train the student, teachers and family members to use the device. Training increases effective and consistent use of the AT. For more information on assistive technology, you will find a list of additional resources at the end of this paper.

Can the school deny services for a student with a diagnosis? Can they refuse a diagnosis?

Let's first review the process of how a diagnosis may or may not be translated into an identifiable disability and need for special education services within the school environment. When a parent brings an independent diagnosis to the school special education team, either as a request for evaluation or request for special education services and supports, the school must consider the request and the data provided by the parent. There are legal timelines the school has to follow. The school may honor the request and proceed with an evaluation for special education services or respectfully deny the request and provide their reasoning for the denial in a prior written notice form. Schools must provide an explanation of the data they are considering to make the determination that the student is not in need of interventions, 504 plan, or special education services.

For Parents and Teachers

We recommend the following data be included in the review of academic achievement:

- Year to year changes in performance.
- Growth within the school year.
- Growth across short periods of time documenting progress towards a pre-determined goal.

The school must comply with federal and state laws in determining if a student has a disability and needs accommodations, modifications and/or special education services in order to access and make progress in the grade level standards. The criteria or threshold for need is established in law. The school may determine through a review of the evaluation and existing student achievement data that there is not a "need" or that student does not meet legal criteria for special education by law.

In situations where the school-based assessment data indicate the student is performing within grade level expectations, the school may suggest that they do not anticipate that the student will meet criteria for special education services. Parents have valid concerns when their home experience is that the student struggles with hours and hours of homework, is experiencing increasing emotional and physical side effects, is receiving failing grades and becoming increasingly detached from school. We strongly encourage the parent to communicate all the concerns and data to the school as part of establishing a picture of disability and the need for instructional accommodations and modifications (for more information refer to the section on twice exceptional learners and accessible instructional materials). Parents have the right to simultaneously seek community based supports, including accessible educational materials and technology supports while they work with school staff.

In situations where the data suggests below grade level performance and the services offered are not sufficient to address all the concerns, we strongly encourage the parent to communicate the data indicating persistent below grade level academic performance, such as progress monitoring data from interventions, level of proficiency on state accountability tests, or screening results, examples of work and the amount of supports provided to reach the result (see page 11 for examples of what information to gather and organize).

Parents have a right to challenge decisions. These rights are documented in the **Parental Rights And Procedural Safeguards** provided at the school meeting, and also found on the Minnesota Department of Education's website.

What can I do when services are not offered in the school?

If your child does not qualify for school services, he may still benefit from and need additional help to reach his full potential. Families want to find the right instructional supports and should start with reputable organizations and supports that can help select resources to help him. **Learn more about the how to select from options and programs available to students**.

In Minnesota, there are branches of national organizations that can help a parent of a struggling reader or dyslexic get started. From finding a tutor, educational therapist, or after school program that will meet your child's needs from remediation or intervention to homework help, these organizations can help parents find the resources they need:

- International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest Branch
- Minnesota branch of the Learning Disabilities Association of America

Some communities have resources that would not immediately come to mind, so if you live near a college or church or adult literacy center consider asking about services they can provide. If you have sought an independent evaluation, request additional resources and supports from these providers. When you have found a potential provider consider observing a session, interviewing prior clients and asking for what a typical session will look like. We have included a checklist of "look for's" and a section on "buyer beware" to support your selection process.

Buyer beware

There are no silver bullets or cures. In your research, you may come across programs that claim to able to help any student with reading, but be wary of programs or techniques that rely on approaches that have not been shown to be effective. These include:

- Things that don't include practice with reading in a systematic, explicit, multisensory phonetic method (some examples include colored lenses, overlays, vision therapy, spinal or cranial realignment therapy, crawling therapy, cognitive improvement therapy, midline crossover exercise therapy, diet related claims).
- Tutoring chains, ad hoc tutors, nannies, or volunteers who are not trained to work with children who have specific instructional needs. Individuals who effectively remediate reading difficulties use evidence-based practices in reading and language development. They have had very specific training and coaching in evidence-based practices.

- Therapies that do not include actual practice with reading. Therapies designed to improve eye coordination, near and far focus, depth perception, etc. may improve students use of their eyes while reading, but they are not a replacement for teaching the necessary components for reading.
- Programs that guarantee an outcome. Read the fine print. Many programs that guarantee results do not apply when the student has an identified reading disorder or disability. If a disability is identified during the tutoring, the guarantee may be disregarded. It is very difficult to know what will work for each child and how long it will take for interventions to begin to close the gap.
- Programs that require very large sums of money upfront before the therapy begins should be a red flag. Proceed with caution if the claims seem too good to be true.

Minnesota has a policy of "open enrollment." This means that, within certain timelines, you may apply for enrollment in a school district outside of the city or area you reside. Open enrollment procedures vary by district, so additional research will be required. For parents of struggling children, this option may provide access to programs or services that are a better fit with the child's needs.

For more information on how to choose a school visit the **Choosing or Changing Schools page** on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

If you want to find information out about local schools, you can review their achievement and growth data for students by visiting the **Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center website** for reviewing school performance.

Specific Learning Disabilities in reading and Dyslexia are lifelong.

With appropriate remediation and support, individuals can combine technology, compensatory strategies, and good instruction to be very successful. They are not likely to ever be "cured."

Indicators of quality instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity

We know that parents and teachers are not always aware of the practices that should be taking place within interventions or tutoring sessions. In the first column we name an area of instruction. Within the named area we provide examples of evidence-based practices. For example within 'Additional Practice' you will see a listing of some of the evidence-based practices that lead to improved performance. You will want to match what is happening with your student to the bulleted list. Ideally, the more things you can observe on the list the greater your confidence will be that the instructor is doing the right things. If you don't see any of the bulleted items, you may wonder if the instruction is evidence-based. Ask the individual if the session you observed was typical. If it was a typical session, you may have an instructor that is not using evidence-based practices. Instructional sessions vary in what they cover, so mark all the appropriate areas for which you observe, and note what is typically provided.

Checklist for Monitoring Quality Interventions

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Additional practice	▸ Modeling, guiding and independent practicing with specific corrective feedback ▸ Gathering and sharing data on student's performance with the student in each session providing specific feedback of what and how to do better ▸ Adjusting the ratio of student to teacher talk in favor of more student than teacher talk ▸ Adjusting the amount and type of practice opportunities throughout the session and across sessions to improve student's accuracy and performance ▸ Mixing opportunities to speak, listen, read and write within sessions to improve the student's application of skills ▸ Including a quick pace and ratio of student talk that is 2:1 over teacher talk ▸ Teaching the student how to become independent in use of strategies and technology		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with listening comprehension and developing vocabulary *Sometimes the instruction for building vocabulary is called **morphology**. Morphology is studying the smallest parts of words that carry meaning (roots, prefixes and suffixes).*	▸ Asking and answering questions relevant to the conversation or text starting at the phrase and working up to extended communications ▸ Practicing active listening (including how to listen differently based on purpose such as following directions, acquiring information from text , learning to interpret inferred meanings, recalling facts and details, finding the main idea or summarizing) ▸ Making meaning and using figurative language (metaphors, similes, alliteration, idioms, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, analogies, etc.) ▸ Maintaining comprehension while listening to accessible instructional materials ▸ Building vocabulary includes specific practice: • Pronouncing words and writing words • Learning the meaning and origin of words • Building networks of related words and identifying how they relate to each other. This is critical for developing language skills of categorizing, comparing, contrasting and selecting words for specific meaning • Building multiple meanings of words that carry different meanings depending on how they are used • Using word parts (roots, prefixes and suffixes) to build and make sense of unfamiliar words and their meanings. Practice includes reading and spelling words, discussion of possible word meanings given the parts • Building vocabulary and language skills for thinking and communicating thinking (such as what it means to describe versus define, how to compare vs. contrast)		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with hearing the sounds accurately and representing sounds *This is also called **phonemic awareness**.*	▸ Playing with sounds listening for similarities and differences (examples include matching pictures to sounds, making up rhymes, hunting for words that have similar sounds, finding the word that doesn't fit, sorting pictures by sound, etc.) ▸ Hearing and speaking the sounds in beginnings, middle and endings of words (ex. "snatch" is broken down into these sounds /s/ /n/ /a/ /tch/) ▸ Discussing word relationships, inventing words, sorting words, comparing and contrasting meanings and enjoying the sounds of speech		
Help with reading and spelling words *Reading words can also be called **phonics** or **decoding** and spelling can also be called **encoding** or **orthography**.*	▸ Listening for sounds in a word, speaking individual sounds or syllables, writing sounds in a word and reading what has been written ▸ Focusing on patterns not a list or rules to be memorized. Work with spelling patterns, includes creating new words that fit and or break the pattern ▸ Reminding students to use patterns and syllables for sounding out and and spelling words ▸ Working from word lists to sections of text in the same session ▸ Using word parts (roots, prefixes and suffixes) to build and make sense of unfamiliar words and their meanings (also known as morphology). Practice includes reading and spelling words, discussing of possible meanings given the parts,then reading words in sections of text to support comprehension		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with reading comprehension	▸ Modeling (teacher speaks thoughts out loud while reading) to show student how to think and make meaning while reading ▸ Working with making meaning from phrases, sentences, sections of text and extended discourse ▸ Teaching strategies for monitoring when comprehension has broken down and what to do to repair it ▸ Using and evaluating strategies that support comprehension (discussions include how well strategies are working, looking at data to notice when strategies are improving performance, as well as determining how and when to use the strategies effectively) ▸ Identifying and practicing strategies for maintaining comprehension ▸ Techniques and strategies for making pictures or movies in mind while reading ▸ Explicit teaching in use of text structures and text features(headings, captions, diagrams, pictures, bold and italic print, etc.) ▸ Use of graphic organizers or thinking maps (examples look like flow charts or bubbles) showing relationships of ideas ▸ Annotating and questioning within text ▸ Sticky notes, highlighting, summarizing, etc.		

What can you do when interventions or special education supports aren't working?

Defining what is working (agreeing on growth and targets)

It is not uncommon for disagreements to emerge when it comes to establishing how much growth can be expected within a year. This is because students present with individualized needs and varying levels of motivation. Schools, communities and families have varying resources and abilities to provide the types of intensive and sustained supports that are often needed.

While there are cases where students have made exceptional gains in reading in short amounts of time, three or more grades in a few months to a year, this is not the norm for most struggling readers. One group of researchers set out to quantify how much growth could be expected for students with severe reading difficulties. The entire section can be found in the linked paper **Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida**. It will be sufficient to reference some of the key ideas in that paper.

- At best, students receiving remedial reading instruction in special education make one year's growth for each year of instruction, but rarely do they make the substantial improvements (two or three years growth) that are required in order to help them eventually "close the gap" with their same-age peers.
- For older students with dyslexia we do know how to accelerate reading growth in older students with dyslexia, but that it is exceedingly difficult to bring them to grade level standards in all areas of reading skill.
- The instructional conditions in studies that accelerate reading growth in older students are universally more powerful (smaller groups, more instructional time, highly trained teachers) than those typically available to students receiving special education services in our public schools.

We recommend establishing clear targets for growth based on past performance and intensity of supports. Parents who have kept data showing progress across grades and providers will be more prepared to advocate and help establish targets for the next 12 months than those who have not. School staff will also have data indicating trends in student performance across time with more and less intensive instruction. One opportunity that is frequently missed is the impact of use in Accessible Educational Materials (AEM). For students who have the listening comprehension skills to make use of AEM additional growth in language and reading comprehension can be expected. We recommend tracking student progress in three areas to

ensure growth in component skills leading to overall improvement and access to grade-level reading materials.

- Targets for phonemic awareness, decoding and spelling
- Targets for listening and language comprehension
- Targets for silent reading comprehension

By tracking progress in the three different areas the team can account for growth made with explicit instruction as well as AEM.

Services

Schools retain the right to select, train and coach the evidence-based practices used in school. Although parents cannot dictate the practices used by teachers in the school setting, they can advocate for the faithful delivery of evidence-based practices matched to the learner's needs as promised in the instructional plans. We have provided examples of what to look for in the section titled "Indicators of quality instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity," beginning on page 31. The table should help parents and teachers be sure they are delivering the types of instruction proven effective.

Resources

504 Plans

504 plan section of the Minnesota Department of Education website.

Office of Civil Rights FAQ on 504 plans

Basic information about 504 Plans on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Comparison of IEPs and 504 Plans on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Accessible Educational Materials

Accessible Educational Materials on the Minnesota Department of Education website for more information on how educators can request textbooks from the NIMAC, and district procedures to request and create AEM.

National Center on Accessible Educational Materials website provides resources for educators, parents, students, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers, and others interested in learning more about AEM.

Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology Basics on the National Center on Learning Disabilities website.

Center on Technology and Disability for information on how to advocate for, acquire, and implement effective assistive and instructional technology practices, devices, and services.

Failure Is Not An Option by David Edyburn, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, for more information on the importance of accessible educational materials and assistive technology.

Minnesota Star Program at the Minnesota Department of Administration.

PACER Simon Technology Center provides a variety of services including a lending library, training and consultations.

Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT), a community dedicated to identifying, disseminating and implementing quality practices for using AT in schools.

The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity provides information both on dyslexia as well as assistive technology for students with dyslexia.

Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disorders

Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida for basics on dyslexia and information on setting realistic targets.

How my Diagnosis Improved My College Experience at the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

Myths and Truths of Dyslexia on the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

National Center for Learning Disabilities website for more information on specific learning disorders and disabilities.

Evaluation

Manual for Determining the Eligibility of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities on the Minnesota Department of Education's website; more information about the evaluation process may be found in chapters 1 and 10.

Parental Rights Under IDEA on the Center for Parental Information and Resources website for parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services.

Goal Setting

Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida for basics on dyslexia and information on setting realistic targets.

Screening Tools on the Get Ready to Read website, including reading expectations for age.

SMART goal setting as used in schools.

Interventions and Supports

Options and programs available to students outside of the school system on the National Center on Learning Disabilities website.

Reading Rockets website to learn more about differentiated instruction.

So What do I do Now? Strategies for Intensifying Intervention when Standard Approaches Don't Work on the National Intensive Intervention Center website.

Understanding Response to Intervention on the National Center on Learning Disability website.

What is RTI? on the Response to Intervention Network website.

Parental Rights

Parental Rights Under IDEA on the Center for Parental Information and Resources website for parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services.

Parental Rights And Procedural Safeguards on the Minnesota Department of Education's website for more on parental rights to challenge decisions.

Schools

Choosing or Changing Schools on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center website for reviewing local school performance and student growth data.

Special Education Sevices

Center for Parent Information and Resources website for more information on Special Education.

Qualifying for Special Education Services on the Learning Disabilities Association of America website.

Twice Exceptional

Gifted and Dyslexic on the International Dyslexia Association website.

Twice-Exceptional: Students with Both Gifts and Challenges or Disabilities on the Idaho State Department of Education's website.

Twice Exceptional for local resources and support on the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented website.

Appendix A

Here we have listed the questions teachers should be addressing in conferences and communications with parents about student needs.

Suggested Teacher Steps: Need for supports for a student who is struggling with reading

1. Screening:
   - Parent, teacher and/or valid measures of data raise concerns about student's performance.
   - Verify data and identify student needs
   - Determine evidence/research based interventions with parent or should we move forward with an evaluation for Special Education?
2. Implement instructional and intervention decisions:
   - Verify needs, data and instructional strategies and interventions to student needs.
   - Plan, document and implement instructional strategies and interventions.
3. Monitoring Progress:
   - Monitor Progress using valid and reliable measures regularly.
   - What is the data indicating?
   - Send progress report summary to parents regularly.
   - Follow established decision guidelines per intervention plan or district guidelines
   - Results of Progress Monitoring may reveal:
     - Measurable and sustained growth in reading skills
     - Measurable but variable rate of growth in reading skills
     - Measurable lack or variable rate of adequate growth in reading skills
4. Question: Modify Interventions? If yes:
   - Review data and gather additional data further describing the learning problem
   - Modify intervention plan, faithfully implement and regularly monitor progress
   - Results of Progress Monitoring may reveal:
     - Measurable and sustained growth in reading skills ~ observe and document performance

- Measurable but variable rate of growth in reading skills ~ continue or modify intervention
- Measurable lack or variable rate of adequate growth in reading skills ~
  - modify or change intervention
  - consider comprehensive evaluation for special education

5. Decision: Modify Intervention or Suspected Disability?
   - Team Decision: Modify or Change Intervention:
     - Review data and gather additional data further describing the learning problem
     - Modify intervention plan, faithfully implement and regularly monitor progress
     - Team Decision: Suspected Disability ~ Comprehensive Evaluation

Dyslexia In the Classroom:

What Every Teacher Needs to Know

The International Dyslexia Association

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INTRODUCTION

The degree of difficulty a child with dyslexia has with reading, spelling, and/or speaking varies from person to person due to inherited differences in brain development, as well as the type of teaching the person receives. The brain is normal, often very "intelligent," but with strengths in areas other than the language area.

This "difference" goes undetected until the person finds difficulty when learning to read and write. Each individual with dyslexia is unique, but the multisensory approach is flexible enough to serve a wide range of ages and learning differences. A multisensory approach can be valuable to many; to the dyslexic child it is essential. The expertise of the teacher is the key.

The intent of this toolkit is to provide classroom teachers with basic information about dyslexia, dispel some of the myths and misconception surrounding it and be a resource that will increase their capacity to ensure the success of the diverse group of learners in their classrooms.

ABOUT IDA

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) was founded in 1949 as The Orton Society to honor and further the work and passion of Dr. Samuel Torrey Orton. IDA serves individuals with dyslexia, their families, and professionals in the field. We have more than 8,000 members, 43 branches throughout the United States and Canada and have 21 global partners in 19 countries. Together we are working to help those with and affected by dyslexia.

We believe that all individuals have the right to achieve their potential, that individual learning abilities can be strengthened, and that social, educational and barriers to language acquisition and use must be removed.

IDA actively promotes effective teaching approaches and related clinical educational intervention strategies for individuals with dyslexia. We support and encourage interdisciplinary research. We facilitate the exploration of the causes and early identification of dyslexia and are committed to the responsible and wide dissemination of research and evidence based knowledge.

The purpose of IDA is to pursue and provide the most comprehensive range of information and services that address the full scope of dyslexia and related difficulties in learning to read and write...in a way that creates hope, possibility, and partnership, so that every individual has the opportunity to lead a productive and fulfilling life, and society benefits from the resource that is liberated.

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

The formal definition of dyslexia is:

> *Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.*

But what does that mean exactly?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills, such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, and/or extra support services.

What causes dyslexia?

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a person with dyslexia develops and functions. Moreover, most people with dyslexia have been found to have problems with identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods, students with dyslexia can learn successfully.

Dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels. People with dyslexia can be very bright. They are often capable or even gifted in areas such as art, computer science, design, drama, electronics, math, mechanics, music, physics, sales, and sports. In addition, dyslexia runs in families; having a parent or sibling with dyslexia increases the probability that you will also have dyslexia. For some people, their dyslexia is identified early in their lives, but for others, their dyslexia goes unidentified until they get older.

What are the effects of dyslexia?

The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the timeliness and effectiveness of instruction or remediation. The core difficulty involves word recognition and reading fluency, spelling, and writing. Some individuals with dyslexia manage to learn early reading and spelling tasks, especially with excellent instruction, but later experience their most debilitating problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

People with dyslexia can also have problems with spoken language, even after they have been exposed to excellent language models in their homes and high quality language instruction in school. They may find it difficult to express

themselves clearly, or to fully comprehend what others mean when they speak. Such language problems are often difficult to recognize, but they can lead to major problems in school, in the workplace, and in relating to other people. The effects of dyslexia reach well beyond the classroom.

What misconceptions exist regarding dyslexia?

It is equally important to understand what dyslexia isn't. There are great misconceptions and myths about dyslexia which make it that much more difficult for someone with dyslexia to receive help and generally be understood.

It is a myth that individuals with dyslexia "read backwards." Their spelling can look quite jumbled at times not because they read or see words backwards, but because students have trouble remembering letter symbols for sounds and letter patterns in words.

Dyslexia is not a disease and, therefore, there is no cure. With proper diagnosis, appropriate and timely instruction, hard work, and support from family, teachers, friends, and others, individuals who have dyslexia can succeed in school and later as adults.

Individuals with dyslexia do not have a lower level of intelligence. In fact, more often than not, the complete opposite is true.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DYSLEXIA

It is crucial to be able to recognize the signs of symptoms of dyslexia. The earlier a child is evaluated, the sooner he or she can obtain the appropriate instruction and accommodations he or she needs to succeed in school.

General problems experienced by people with dyslexia include the following:

- Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Keeping up with and comprehending longer reading assignments
- Spelling
- Learning a foreign language
- Correctly doing math operations

Some specific signs for elementary aged children may include:

- Difficulty with remembering simple sequences such as counting to 20, naming the days of the week, or reciting the alphabet
- Difficulty understanding the rhyming of words, such as knowing that *fat* rhymes with *cat*
- Trouble recognizing words that begin with the same sound (for example, that *b*ird, *b*aby", and *b*ig all start with *b*)
- Pronunciation difficulties

- Trouble easily clapping hands to the rhythm of a song
- Difficulty with word retrieval (frequently uses words like "stuff" and "that thing" rather than specific words to name objects)
- Trouble remembering names of places and people
- Difficulty remembering spoken directions

It is important to note that not all students who have difficulties with these skills have dyslexia. Formal testing of reading, language, and writing skills is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

An individual can have more than one learning or behavioral disability. For example, in various studies as many as 30% of those diagnosed with a learning or reading difference have also been diagnosed with ADHD. Although disabilities may co-occur, one is not the cause of the other.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Samuel T. Orton, M.D. was one of the first researchers to describe the emotional aspects of dyslexia. According to his research, the majority of preschoolers who were later diagnosed as having dyslexia are happy and well adjusted. Their emotional problems begin to develop when early reading instruction does not match their learning needs. Over the years, the frustration mounts as classmates surpass the student with dyslexia in reading skills.

Stress and Anxiety

Jerome J. Schultz's informative IDA fact sheet entitled, "The Dyslexia-Stress-Anxiety Connection, Implications for Academic Performance and Social Interactions," is a must read for those wanting guidance on understanding the relationship between dyslexia and emotional and social difficulties. Dr. Schultz explains his DE-STRESS model in a step-by-step guide for addressing stress, anxiety, and dyslexia.

> Stress and anxiety increase when we're in situations over which we have little or no control (e.g., a car going off the road, tripping on the stairs, reading in public). All people, young and old, can experience overwhelming stress and exhibit signs of anxiety, but children, adolescents, and adults with dyslexia are particularly vulnerable. That's because many individuals do not fully understand the nature of their learning disability, and as a result, tend to blame themselves for their own difficulties. Years of self-doubt and self-recrimination may erode a person's self-esteem, making them less able to tolerate the challenges of school, work, or social interactions and more stressed and anxious.
>
> Many individuals with dyslexia have experienced years of frustration and limited success, despite countless hours spent in special programs or working with specialists. Their progress may have been agonizingly slow and frustrating, rendering them emotionally fragile and vulnerable. Some have been subjected to excessive pressure to succeed (or excel) without the proper support or training. Others have been continuously compared to siblings, classmates, or co-workers, making them embarrassed, cautious, and defensive.
>
> Individuals with dyslexia may have learned that being in the company of others places them at risk for making public mistakes and the inevitable negative reactions that may ensue. It makes sense, then, that many people

with dyslexia have become withdrawn, sought the company of younger people, or become social isolates. (Schultz, 2013, p. 2)

This fact sheet can be found on the IDA website, www.interdys.org.

Self-Image

Dyslexia can also affect a person's self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling "dumb" and less capable than they actually are. After experiencing a great deal of stress due to academic problems, a student may become discouraged about continuing in school.

If children succeed in school, they will develop positive feelings about themselves and believe that they can succeed in life. If children meet failure and frustration, they learn that they are inferior to others, and that their effort makes very little difference. Instead of feeling powerful and productive, they learn that their environment controls them. They feel powerless and incompetent.

Researchers have learned that when typical learners succeed, they credit their own efforts for their success. When they fail, they tell themselves to try harder. However, when learners with dyslexia succeed, they are likely to attribute their success to luck. When they fail, they simply see themselves as stupid.

Research also suggests that these feelings of inferiority develop by the age of 10. After this age, it becomes extremely difficult to help the child develop a positive self-image. This is a powerful argument for early intervention.

Depression

Depression is also a frequent complication in dyslexia. Depressed children and adolescents often have different symptoms than do depressed adults. The depressed child is unlikely to be lethargic or to talk about feeling sad. Instead he or she may become more active or misbehave to cover up the painful feelings. In the case of masked depression, the child may not seem obviously unhappy. However, both children and adults who are depressed tend to have three similar characteristics:

- They tend to have negative thoughts about themselves, that is, a negative self- image.
- They tend to view the world negatively. They are less likely to enjoy the positive experiences in life. This makes it difficult for them to have fun.
- Most depressed youngsters have great trouble imagining anything positive about the future. The depressed child with dyslexia not only experiences great pain in his present experiences, but also foresees a life of continuing failure.

So how can you help?

Children are more successful when early in their lives someone has been extremely supportive and encouraging, and when they have found an area in which they can succeed. Teachers can create an incredible support system by:

- Listening to children's feelings. Anxiety, anger and depression can be daily companions for children with dyslexia. However, their language problems often make it difficult for them to express their feelings. Therefore, adults must help them learn to talk about their feelings.
- Rewarding effort, not just "the product." For students with dyslexia, grades should be less important than progress.

- When confronting unacceptable behavior, do not inadvertently discourage the child with dyslexia. Words such as "lazy" or "incorrigible" can seriously damage the child's self-image.
- Helping students set realistic goals for themselves. Many students with dyslexia set perfectionistic and unattainable goals. By helping the child set an attainable goal, teachers can change the cycle of failure.

In his IDA fact sheet, "Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia," Michael Ryan reminds us that:

> Even more important, the child needs to recognize and rejoice in his or her successes. To do so, he or she needs to achieve success in some area of life. In some cases, strengths are obvious, and self-esteem has been salvaged by prowess in athletics, art, or mechanics. However, the strengths of someone with dyslexia are often more subtle and less obvious. (Ryan, 2004, p.5).

Above all, it is critical that school personnel, parents, and outside professionals working with the child with dyslexia communicate on an on-going basis in order to provide the support needed, so he or she can become a happy and successful student, and eventually, a happy and successful adult.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES, TIPS AND TOOLS

Schools can implement academic accommodations and modifications to help students with dyslexia succeed. For example, a student with dyslexia can be given extra time to complete tasks, help with taking notes, and work assignments that are modified appropriately. Teachers can give taped tests or allow students with dyslexia to use alternative means of assessment. Students can benefit from listening to books on tape and using text reading and word processing computer programs.

Teaching students with dyslexia across settings is challenging. Both general education and special education teachers seek accommodations that foster the learning and management of a class of heterogeneous learners. It is important to identify accommodations that are reasonable to ask of teachers in all classroom settings. The following accommodations provide a framework for helping students with learning problems achieve in general education and special education classrooms. They are organized according to accommodations involving materials, interactive instruction, and student performance.

Accommodations Involving Materials

Students spend a large portion of the school day interacting with materials. Most instructional materials give teachers few activities or directions for teaching a large class of students who learn at different rates and in various ways. This section provides material accommodations that enhance the learning of diverse students. Frequently, paraprofessionals, volunteers, and students can help develop and implement various accommodations. Material accommodations include the following:

- **Clarify or simplify written directions**. Some directions are written in paragraph form and contain many units of information. These can be overwhelming to some students. The teacher can help by underlining or highlighting the significant parts of the directions. Rewriting the directions is often helpful.

- **Present a small amount of work**. The teacher can tear pages from workbooks and materials to present small assignments to students who are anxious about the amount of work to be done. This technique prevents students from examining an entire workbook, text, or material and becoming discouraged by the amount of work.
- **Block out extraneous stimuli**. If a student is easily distracted by visual stimuli on a full worksheet or page, a blank sheet of paper can be used to cover sections of the page not being worked on at the time. Also, line markers can be used to aid reading, and windows can be used to display individual math problems. Additionally, using larger font sizes and increasing spacing can help separate sections.
- **Highlight essential information**. If an adolescent can read a regular textbook but has difficulty finding the essential information, the teacher can mark this information with a highlight pen.
- **Use a placeholder in consumable material**. In consumable materials in which students progress sequentially (such as workbooks), the student can make a diagonal cut across the lower right-hand corner of the pages as they are completed. With all the completed pages cut, the student and teacher can readily locate the next page that needs to be corrected or completed.
- **Provide additional practice activities**. Some materials do not provide enough practice activities for students with learning problems to acquire mastery on selected skills. Teachers then must supplement the material with practice activities. Recommended practice exercises include instructional games, peer teaching activities, self-correcting materials, computer software programs, and additional worksheets.
- **Provide a glossary in content areas**. Students often benefit from a glossary of content-related terms.
- **Develop reading guides**. A reading guide helps the reader understand the main ideas and sort out the numerous details related to the main ideas. A reading guide can be developed paragraph-by-paragraph, page-by-page, or section-by-section.
- **Use an audio recording device**. Directions, stories, and specific lessons can be recorded. The student can replay the tape to clarify understanding of directions or concepts. Also, to improve reading skills, the student can read the printed words silently as they are presented on tape.
- **Use of assistive technology**. Assistive technology products such as tablets, electronic readers/dictionaries/ spellers, text to speech programs, audio books, and more can be very useful tools.

Accommodations Involving Interactive Instruction

The task of gaining students' attention and engaging them for a period of time requires many teaching and managing skills. Teaching and interactions should provide successful learning experiences for each student. Some accommodations to enhance successful interactive instructional activities are:

- **Use explicit teaching procedures**. Many commercial materials do not cue teachers to use explicit teaching procedures; thus, the teacher often must adapt a material to include these procedures. Teachers can include explicit teaching steps within their lessons (i.e., present an advanced organizer, demonstrate the skill, provide guided practice, offer corrective feedback, set up independent practice, monitor practice, and review).

- **Repeat directions**. Students who have difficulty following directions are often helped by asking them to repeat the directions in their own words. The student can repeat the directions to a peer when the teacher is unavailable. If directions contain several steps, break down the directions into subsets. Simplify directions by presenting only one portion at a time and by writing each portion on the chalkboard as well as stating it orally. When using written directions, be sure that students are able to read and understand the words as well as comprehend the meaning of sentences.
- **Maintain daily routines**. Many students with learning problems need the structure of daily routines to know and do what is expected.
- **Provide a copy of lesson notes**. The teacher can give a copy of lesson notes to students who have difficulty taking notes during presentations.
- **Provide students with a graphic organizer**. An outline, chart, or blank web can be given to students to fill in during presentations. This helps students listen for key information and see the relationships among concepts and related information.
- **Use step-by-step instruction**. New or difficult information can be presented in small sequential steps. This helps learners with limited prior knowledge who need explicit or part-to-whole instruction.
- **Simultaneously combine verbal and visual information**. Verbal information can be provided with visual displays (e.g., on an overhead or handout).
- **Write key points or words on the chalkboard/whiteboard**. Prior to a presentation, the teacher can write new vocabulary words and key points on the chalkboard/whiteboard.
- **Use balanced presentations and activities**. An effort should be made to balance oral presentations with visual information and participatory activities. Also, there should be a balance between large group, small group, and individual activities.
- **Use mnemonic instruction**. Mnemonic devices can be used to help students remember key information or steps in a learning strategy.
- **Emphasize daily review**. Daily review of previous learning or lessons can help students connect new information with prior knowledge.

Accommodations Involving Student Performance

Students vary significantly in their ability to respond in different modes. For example, students vary in their ability to give oral presentations; participate in discussions; write letters and numbers; write paragraphs; draw objects; spell; work in noisy or cluttered settings; and read, write, or speak at a fast pace. Moreover, students vary in their ability to process information presented in visual or auditory formats. The following accommodation involving mode of reception and expression can be used to enhance students' performance:

- **Change response mode.** For students who have difficulty with fine motor responses (such as handwriting), the response mode can be changed to underlining, selecting from multiple choices, sorting, or marking. Students with fine motor problems can be given extra space for writing answers on worksheets or can be allowed to respond on individual chalkboards/whiteboards.

- **Provide an outline of the lesson**. An outline enables some students to follow the lesson successfully and make appropriate notes. Moreover, an outline helps students to see the organization of the material and ask timely questions.
- **Encourage use of graphic organizers**. A graphic organizer involves organizing material into a visual format. To develop a graphic organizer, the student can list the topic on the first line, collect and divide information into major headings, list all information relating to major headings on index cards, organize information into major areas, place information under appropriate subheadings, and place information into the organizer format.
- **Place students close to the teacher**. Students with attention problems can be seated close to the teacher, chalkboard/whiteboard, or work area and away from distracting sounds, materials, or objects.
- **Encourage use of assignment books or calendars**. Students can use calendars to record assignment due dates, list school related activities, record test dates, and schedule timelines for schoolwork. Students should set aside a special section in an assignment book or calendar for recording homework assignments.
- **Have students turn lined paper vertically for math**. Lined paper can be turned vertically to help students keep numbers in appropriate columns while computing math problems.
- **Use cues to denote important items**. Asterisks or bullets can denote questions or activities that count heavily in evaluation. This helps students spend time appropriately during tests or assignments.
- **Design hierarchical worksheets.** The teacher can design worksheets with problems arranged from easiest to hardest. Early success helps students begin to work.
- **Allow use of instructional aids.** Students can be provided with letter and number strips to help them write correctly. Number lines, counters, calculators, and other assistive technology can help students compute once they understand the mathematical operations.
- **Display work samples**. Samples of completed assignments can be displayed to help students realize expectations and plan accordingly.
- **Use peer-mediated learning**. The teacher can pair peers of different ability levels to review their notes, study for a test, read aloud to each other, write stories, or conduct laboratory experiments. Also, a partner can read math problems for students with reading problems to solve.
- **Use flexible work times**. Students who work slowly can be given additional time to complete written assignments.
- **Provide additional practice**. Students require different amounts of practice to master skills or content. Many students with learning problems need additional practice to learn at a fluency level.
- **Use assignment substitutions or adjustments**. Students can be allowed to complete projects instead of oral reports or vice versa. Also, tests can be given in oral or written format.

MULTISENSORY STRUCTURED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Early identification and treatment is the key to helping individuals with dyslexia achieve in school and in life. Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach. It is important for these individuals to be taught by a systematic and explicit method that involves several senses (hearing, seeing, touching, moving) at the same time. Many individuals with dyslexia need one-on-one help so that they can move forward at their own pace. In addition, students with dyslexia often need a great deal of structured practice and immediate, corrective feedback to develop automatic word recognition skills. For students with dyslexia, it is helpful if their outside academic therapists work closely with classroom teachers.

What is Multisensory Structured Language Teaching?

Effective instruction for students with dyslexia is explicit, direct, cumulative, intensive, and focused on the structure of language. This is the idea of structured language instruction.

Multisensory learning involves the use of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile pathways simultaneously to enhance memory and learning of written language. Links are consistently made between the visual (language we see), auditory (language we hear), and kinesthetic-tactile (language symbols we feel) pathways in learning to read and spell. . Margaret Byrd Rawson, a former President of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), said it well:

> *"Dyslexic students need a different approach to learning language from that employed in most classrooms. They need to be taught, slowly and thoroughly, the basic elements of their language—the sounds and the letters which represent them—and how to put these together and take them apart. They have to have lots of practice in having their writing hands, eyes, ears, and voices working together for conscious organization and retention of their learning."*

Teachers who use this approach help students perceive the speech sounds in words (phonemes) by looking in the mirror when they speak or exaggerating the movements of their mouths. Students learn to link speech sounds (phonemes) to letters or letter patterns by saying sounds for letters they see, or writing letters for sounds they hear. As students learn a new letter or pattern (such as *s* or *th*), they may repeat five to seven words that are dictated by the teacher and contain the sound of the new letter or pattern; the students discover the sound that is the same in all the words. Next, they may look at the words written on a piece of paper or the chalkboard and discover the new letter or pattern. Finally, they carefully trace, copy, and write the letter(s) while saying the corresponding sound. The sound may be dictated by the teacher, and the letter name(s) given by the student. Students then read and spell words, phrases, and sentences using these patterns to build their reading fluency. Teachers and their students rely on all three pathways for learning rather than focusing on a "whole word memory method," a "tracing method," or a "phonetic method" alone.

The principle of combining movement with speech and reading is applied at other levels of language learning as well. Students may learn hand gestures to help them memorize the definition of a noun. Students may manipulate word cards to create sentences or classify the words in sentences by physically moving them into categories. They might move sentences around to make paragraphs. The elements of a story may be taught with reference to a three-dimensional, tactile aid. In all, the hand, body, and/or movement are used to support comprehension or production of language.

Is there solid evidence that multisensory teaching is effective for students with dyslexia?

Current research, much of it supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), has demonstrated the value of explicit, structured language teaching for all students, especially those with dyslexia. Programs that work differ in their techniques but have many principles in common. The multisensory principle that is so valued by experienced clinicians has not yet been isolated in controlled, comparison studies of reading instruction, but most programs that work do include multisensory practice for symbol learning.

SCREENING, EVALUATION, AND DIAGNOSIS

Early identification and intervention with students who show the warning signs of dyslexia are critically important for better outcomes later on. Researchers have identified the specific skill weaknesses that predict later reading difficulties, making early testing, identification, and remediation possible. For most children, problems can be remediated with programs at the kindergarten and first-grade levels that take about 30-45 minutes per day.

Before second grade, it is more important to focus an evaluation on the precursors of reading development. Measures of language skills, phonological awareness, memory, and rapid naming are more suggestive of being at-risk for dyslexia among young children than are measures of word reading, decoding, and spelling. Therefore, measures of phonological awareness, memory, and rapid naming are typically included in Kindergarten and beginning first grade screening tests that can identify children who need targeted intervention to improve these critical skills so these children can meet grade- level benchmarks.

How is dyslexia diagnosed?

A comprehensive evaluation typically includes intellectual and academic achievement testing, as well as an assessment of the critical underlying language skills that are closely linked to dyslexia. These include receptive (listening) and expressive language skills, phonological skills including phonemic awareness, and also a student's ability to rapidly name letters and names. A student's ability to read lists of words in isolation, as well as words in context, should also be assessed. If a profile emerges that is characteristic of readers with dyslexia, an individualized intervention plan should be developed, which should include appropriate accommodations, such as extended time. The testing can be conducted by trained school or outside specialists.

Why is evaluation important?

An evaluation is the process of gathering information to identify the factors contributing to a student's difficulty with learning to read and spell. First, information is gathered from parents and teachers to understand development and the educational opportunities that have been provided. Then, tests are given to identify strengths and weaknesses that lead to a diagnosis and a tentative road map for intervention. Conclusions and recommendations are developed and reported.

When should a child be evaluated?

It is possible to identify potential reading problems in young children even before the problems turn into reading failure. Screenings should be used with all children in a school, beginning in kindergarten, to locate those students who

are “at risk” for reading difficulty. Preventive intervention should begin immediately, even if dyslexia is suspected. How the child responds to supplementary instruction will help determine if special education services are justified and necessary.

There are numerous types of screeners; one simple one we recommend is the Colorado Learning Disabilities Questionnaire – Reading Subscale (CLDQ-R) School Age Screener. If the risk factors are present, teachers should follow the protocols set-up within their school’s policies to meet with parents regarding further evaluation.

The Colorado Learning Disabilities Questionnaire – Reading Subscale (CLDQ-R) is a screening tool designed to measure risk of reading disability (i.e. dyslexia) in school-age children (Willcutt et al., 2011). Normative scores for this questionnaire were developed based on parent-reports of their 6-to-18- year- old children, as well as actual reading testing of these children. Willcutt, et al. (2011) found that the CLDQ-R is reliable and valid. It is important to note that the CLDQ-R is only a screener and does not constitute a formal evaluation or diagnosis.

School Age Dyslexia Screener – CLDQ-R

Please read each statement and decide how well it describes the child. Mark your answer by circling the appropriate number. Please do not leave any statement unmarked.

		Never/ not at all	Rarely/ a little	Sometimes	Frequently/ quite a bit	Always/ a great deal
1.	Has difficulty with spelling	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Has/had difficulty learning letter names	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Has/had difficulty learning phonics (sounding out words)	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Reads slowly	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Reads below grade level	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Requires extra help in school because of problems in reading and spelling	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring Instructions:

Add up the circled numbers and record that as the Total Score _____

The following cutoffs apply:

- Total Score <16 = Minimal Risk
- Total Score 16-21 = Moderate Risk
- Total Score >21 = Significant Risk

See below for details for each Risk Group.

Minimal Risk: The score indicates that there is little in the child’s developmental history to indicate that he/she is at risk for a reading disability (dyslexia). However, if there are concerns about the child’s reading progress, an evaluation with the school or a licensed child psychologist is recommended to examine the nature of these difficulties.

Moderate Risk: The score indicates that there are features of the child's developmental history (e.g. difficulty learning letters, required extra reading help) that may be consistent with a reading disability (dyslexia). Reading disability constitutes a very common learning disability, affecting approximately 5% of the United States population. Reading disability is characterized by slow or effortful reading, difficulty sounding out new words, and problems with spelling. If there are concerns about the child's reading progress, an evaluation with the school or a licensed child psychologist is recommended to examine the nature of these difficulties.

Significant Risk: The score indicates that there are several features of your child's developmental history (e.g. difficulty learning letters, required extra reading help) that are consistent with a reading disability (dyslexia). Reading disability constitutes a very common learning disability, affecting approximately 5-10% of the United States population. Reading disability is characterized by slow or effortful reading, difficulty sounding out new words, and problems with spelling. The results of this questionnaire indicate that your child may be experiencing some or all of those symptoms. A formal evaluation with the school or a licensed child psychologist is strongly recommended, so that your child can get the reading support he/she needs, if appropriate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

There are a great many resources available for a deeper understanding of dyslexia, co-morbidities, treatments as well as specific topics including neuroscience, comprehension, fluency, other learning disabilities, response to intervention and much more.

We encourage you to go to our website, www.interdys.org, and explore a variety of information including:

- IDA Fact Sheets
- FAQ's
- Interventions & Instructions
- IDA Provider Directory
- IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading

There are numerous publications and books available, including those listed in the Recommended Reading for Professionals Fact Sheet, but here are some incredible options to get you started:

Moats, L., & Dakin, K. (2008). *Basic facts about dyslexia and other reading problems*. Baltimore, MD: International Dyslexia Association.

Moats, L., Dakin, K., & Joshi. R. M. (2012). *Expert perspectives on interventions for reading. A collection of best-practice articles from the International Dyslexia Association*. Baltimore, MD: International Dyslexia Association.

Tridas, E. (2007). *From ABC to ADHD: what parents should know about dyslexia and attention problems.* Baltimore, MD: International Dyslexia Association.

Further, there are extraordinary workshops, conferences and trainings available all over the United States and Canada hosted by IDA branches; conferences all over the world hosted by our Global Partners; and the Annual IDA Conference hosted by IDA Headquarters. Please go to www.interdys.org to find the next event near you!

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The Dyslexia Toolkit

An Essential Resource Provided by the
National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Center for Learning Disabilities
The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed

Table of Contents

Part One: The Basics

Part Two: Living and Learning with Dyslexia

What Is Dyslexia?

As with other learning disabilities, dyslexia is a lifelong challenge that people are born with. This language processing disorder can hinder reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes even speaking. Before we go further, let's take a look at how dyslexia can manifest itself in writing:

This text was taken from our interview with Stanford University graduate Ben Foss. You'll find the interview on page 34.

> *It is criticla they you experiment with being public about who you are and see what ifeels like not to hide on this issues. It canbe scary to tell people that you are of part of a lable that is associated with being lazy or stupid. I have fel this sting. The day I turned in mt thesis at Stanford Law School, a classmate laughed outloud at the registers office bcause I had the term learning disabilities in my title. "They can;t articulate anything!" I looked at him and explained that I had a learning disabili-ties. He was embarrassed and appologized.*

Dyslexia is not a sign of poor intelligence or laziness. It is also not the result of impaired vision. Children and adults with dyslexia simply have a neurological disorder that causes their brains to process and interpret information differently.

Dyslexia occurs among people of all economic and ethnic backgrounds. Often more than one member of a family has dyslexia. According to the National Institute of Child and Human Development, as many as 15 percent of Americans have major troubles with reading.

Much of what happens in a classroom is based on reading and writing. So it's important to identify dyslexia as early as possible. Using alternate learning methods, people with dyslexia can achieve success.

What Are the Effects of Dyslexia?

Dyslexia can affect people differently. This depends, in part, upon the severity of the learning disability and the success of alternate learning methods. Some with dyslexia can have trouble with reading and spelling, while others struggle to write, or to tell left from right. Some children show few signs of difficulty with early reading and writing. But later on, they may have trouble with complex language skills, such as grammar, reading comprehension, and more in-depth writing.

Dyslexia can also make it difficult for people to express themselves clearly. It can be hard for them to use vocabulary and to structure their thoughts during conversation. Others struggle to understand when people speak to them.

It becomes even harder with abstract thoughts and non-literal language, such as jokes and proverbs.

All of these effects can have a big impact on a person's self-image. Without help, children often get frustrated with learning. The stress of dealing with schoolwork often makes children with dyslexia lose the motivation to continue and overcome the hurdles they face.

What Are the Warning Signs?

Dyslexia has different warning signs in people of different ages. See pages 5-16 for more information on signs of dyslexia in different age groups.

Everyone struggles with learning at times. Learning disabilities such as dyslexia, however, are consistent and persist over time. The following lists are a general guide, for identifying dyslexia. Our Interactive Learning Disabilities Checklist is an additional resource to consider. Finally, be aware that some of the "symptoms" listed also apply to other learning disabilities as well as other disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), which often co-exist with LD.

If you or your child displays several of these warning signs, don't hesitate to seek help. Check off the warning signs that apply to your child, and take the list to the professional(s) who you consult. With proper identification and support, your child will be better able to succeed in school, the workplace, and in life. No one knows your child better than you do, so trust your instincts if you think help is needed.

How Is Dyslexia Identified?

Trained professionals can identify dyslexia using a formal evaluation. This looks at a person's ability to understand and use spoken and written language. It looks at areas of strength and weakness in the skills that are needed for reading. It also takes into account many other factors. These include family history, intellect, educational background, and social environment.

How Is Dyslexia Treated?

It helps to identify dyslexia as early in life as possible. Adults with unidentified dyslexia often work in jobs below their intellectual capacity. But with help from a tutor, teacher, or other trained professional, almost all people with dyslexia can become good readers and writers. Use the following strategies to help to make progress with dyslexia:

- Expose your child to early oral reading, writing, drawing, and practice to encourage development of print knowledge, basic letter formation, recognition skills, and linguistic awareness (the relationship between sound and meaning).
- Have your child practice reading different kinds of texts. This includes books, magazines, ads, and comics.
- Include multi-sensory, structured language instruction. Practice using sight, sound, and touch when introducing new ideas.
- Seek modifications in the classroom. This might include extra time to complete assignments, help with note taking, oral testing, and other means of assessment.
- Use books on tape and assistive technology. Examples are screen readers and voice recognition computer software.
- Get help with the emotional issues that arise from struggling to overcome academic difficulties.

Reading and writing are key skills for daily living. However, it is important to also emphasize other aspects of learning and expression. Like all people, those with dyslexia enjoy activities that tap into their strengths and interests. For example, people with dyslexia may be attracted to fields that do not emphasize language skills. Examples are design, art, architecture, engineering, and surgery.

CHAPTER 2

Common Warning Signs of Dyslexia: Pre-K to Grade 2

While dyslexia is most often formally identified in school-age children, signs of dyslexia can frequently be detected in preschoolers.

If you're concerned about your child, review the following checklist of common warning signs of dyslexia in children in pre-kindergarten to grade 2.

For at least the past six months, my child has had trouble:

Language:

- ☐ Learning the alphabet, numbers, and days of the week
- ☐ Naming people and objects
- ☐ Speaking precisely and using a varied, age-appropriate vocabulary
- ☐ Staying on topic
- ☐ Getting or staying interested in stories and books
- ☐ Learning to speak (delayed compared to his peers)

- ❑ Understanding the relationship between speaker and listener
- ❑ Pronouncing words correctly (Example: says “mazagine” instead of “magazine”)
- ❑ Learning and correctly using new vocabulary words
- ❑ Distinguishing words from other words that sound similar
- ❑ Rhyming words
- ❑ Understanding instructions/directions
- ❑ Repeating what has just been said

Reading:

- ❑ Naming letters
- ❑ Recognizing letters, matching letters to sounds, and blending sounds when speaking
- ❑ Learning to read as expected for his/her age
- ❑ Associating letters with sounds, understanding the difference between sounds in words
- ❑ Accurately blending letter sounds within words
- ❑ Recognizing and remembering sight words
- ❑ Remembering printed words
- ❑ Distinguishing between letters and words that look similar
- ❑ Learning and remembering new vocabulary words
- ❑ Keeping one’s place – and not skipping over words – while reading
- ❑ Showing confidence and interest in reading

Writing:

- ❑ Learning to copy and write at an age-appropriate level
- ❑ Writing letters, numbers, and symbols in the correct order
- ❑ Spelling words correctly and consistently most of the time
- ❑ Proofreading and correcting written work

Social-Emotional:

- ❑ Making and keeping friends
- ❑ Interpreting people's non-verbal cues, “body language,” and tone of voice
- ❑ Being motivated and self-confident about learning

Other:

- ☐ Sense of direction/spatial concepts (such as left and right)
- ☐ Performing consistently on tasks from day to day

Common Warning Signs of Dyslexia: Grades 3 to 8

Are you concerned that your elementary or middle school child isn't learning, communicating, or relating to others as successfully as his or her peers? Does your child especially struggle with reading? Is it affecting your child's confidence and motivation?

If so, the following checklist of common warning signs of dyslexia in children in grades 3 to 8 may help clarify your concerns.

For at least the past six months, my child has had trouble:

Language:

- ☐ Understanding instructions or directions
- ☐ Repeating what has just been said in proper sequence
- ☐ Staying on topic and getting to the point (gets bogged down in details)
- ☐ Naming people and objects
- ☐ Speaking with precise, accurate language, proper grammar, and a varied vocabulary
- ☐ Distinguishing between words that sound similar

- ☐ Pronouncing words correctly
- ☐ Speaking smoothly, without much halting or use of "filler words" (like "um")
- ☐ Rhyming
- ☐ Understanding humor, puns, and idioms

Reading:

- ☐ Reading age-appropriate content with good fluency
- ☐ Reading aloud or silently with good understanding
- ☐ Feeling confident and interested in reading
- ☐ Remembering sight words and other printed words
- ☐ Learning and remembering new vocabulary words
- ☐ Accurately analyzing unfamiliar words (tends to guess instead)
- ☐ Reading words and letters in the correct order, seldom reversing or skipping over them
- ☐ Understanding word problems in math

Writing:

- ☐ Mastering spelling rules
- ☐ Spelling the same word consistently and correctly
- ☐ Writing letters, numbers, and symbols in the correct order
- ☐ Proofreading and correcting self-generated work
- ☐ Expressing ideas in an organized way (older children)
- ☐ Preparing/organizing writing assignments (older children)
- ☐ Fully developing ideas in writing (older children)
- ☐ Listening and taking notes at the same time

Social-Emotional:

- ☐ Participating in a peer group and maintaining positive social status
- ☐ Interpreting people's non-verbal cues, "body language," mood, and tone of voice
- ☐ Dealing with peer pressure, embarrassment, and expressing feelings appropriately
- ☐ Setting realistic social goals
- ☐ Maintaining positive self-esteem about learning and getting along with others
- ☐ Maintaining confidence about “fitting in” with his classmates and other peers

Other:

- ☐ Learning/remembering new skills; relies heavily on memorization
- ☐ Remembering facts and numbers
- ☐ Sense of direction/spatial concepts (such as left and right)
- ☐ Performing consistently on tasks from day to day
- ☐ Applying skills from one situation to another
- ☐ Learning new games and mastering puzzles

Common Warning Signs of Dyslexia: Teens

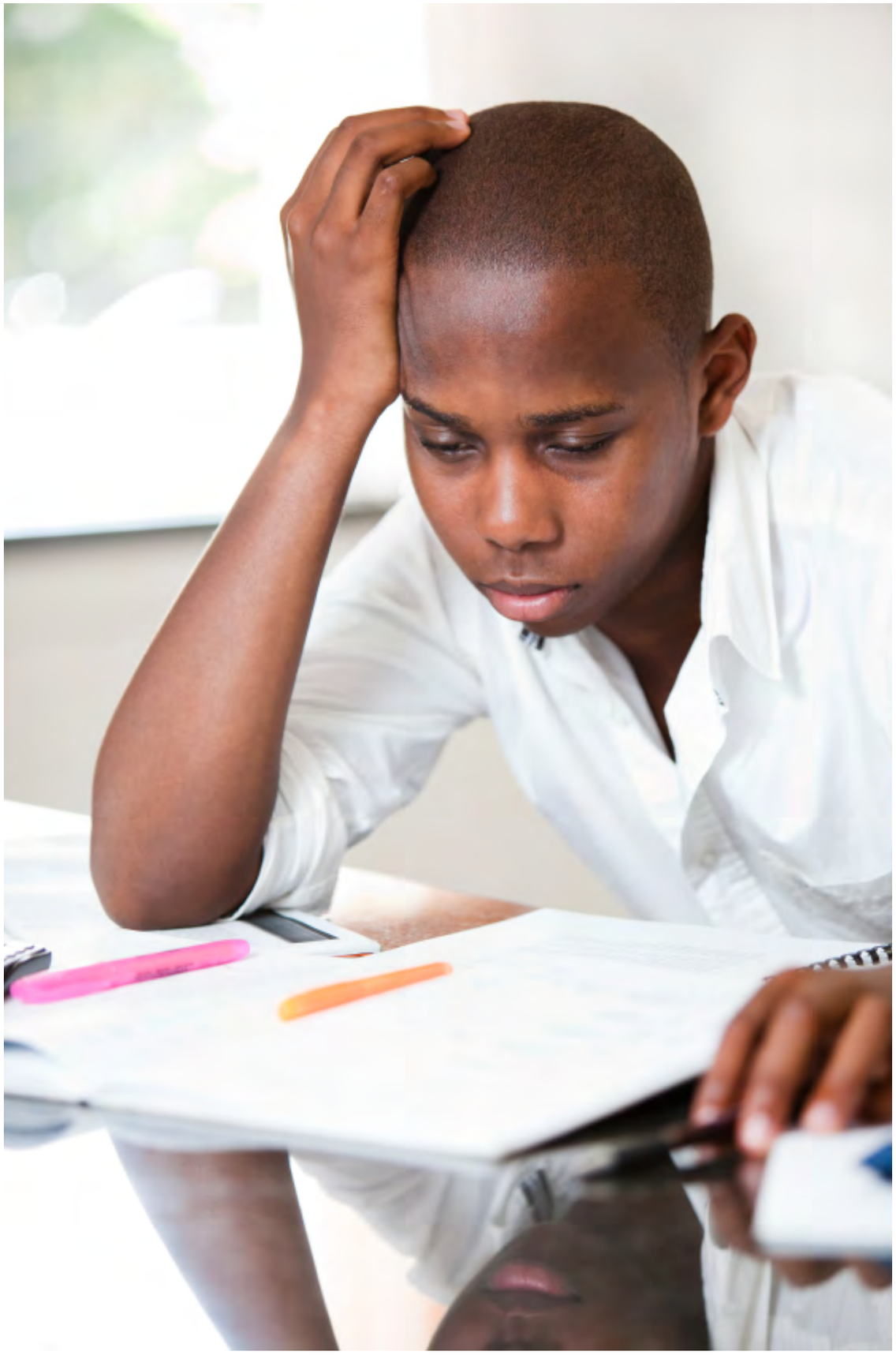
Are you concerned because your teen is struggling with academic learning in school? Have you noticed any social awkwardness or a tendency to keep a distance from peers? Does lack of motivation seem to be a problem? Do you worry about whether low self-esteem is taking the joy out of learning?

These may all be signs of a not-yet-identified learning disability (LD) such as dyslexia. Look over the following checklist of common warning signs of dyslexia in teens.

For at least the past six months, my teen has had trouble:

Language:

- ☐ Speaking fluently (not haltingly) and precisely, using a rich vocabulary
- ☐ Understanding instructions/directions
- ☐ Using correct grammar and vocabulary
- ☐ Understanding the relationship between speaker and listener; participating in conversation appropriately



- ☐ Staying on topic and getting to the point (gets bogged down in details)
- ☐ Summarizing a story
- ☐ Distinguishing between words that look or sound similar
- ☐ Understanding non-literal language such as idioms and jokes

Reading:

- ☐ Reading with speed and accuracy for one's expected grade level
- ☐ Reading aloud
- ☐ Reading without losing one's place or substituting/ skipping over words
- ☐ Recognizing sight words
- ☐ Using word analysis (not guessing) to read/learn unfamiliar words
- ☐ Finding enjoyment and confidence in reading

Writing:

- ☐ Spelling accurately and consistently
- ☐ Proofreading and editing written work
- ☐ Preparing an outline for written work
- ☐ Expressing ideas in a logical, organized way
- ☐ Fully developing ideas in written work

Social-Emotional:

- ☐ Picking up on other people's moods and feelings
- ☐ Understanding and responding appropriately to teasing
- ☐ Making and keeping friends
- ☐ Setting realistic goals for social relationships
- ☐ Dealing with group pressure and embarrassment, and unexpected challenges
- ☐ Having a realistic sense of his or her social strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ Being motivated and confident about learning and relationships

Other:

- ☐ Organizing and managing time
- ☐ Navigating space and direction (e.g., knowing left from right)
- ☐ Reading charts and maps

- ☐ Performing consistently from day to day
- ☐ Applying skills learned in one situation to another situation
- ☐ Learning and mastering new games and puzzles
- ☐ Memorizing
- ☐ Learning a foreign language

CHAPTER 5

Common Warning Signs of Dyslexia: College and Adults

Have you always struggled with reading, spelling, or writing and wondered if you (or an adult you care about) might have a learning disability (LD) such as dyslexia?

It's never too late to seek help to discover whether LD is contributing to or underlying these problems. The following is a checklist of common warning signs of dyslexia in college students and adults. This list may describe struggles that have perplexed and plagued you for years!

For at least the past six months, I've had trouble:

Language:

- ☐ Distinguishing between words that look or sound alike
- ☐ Understanding non-literal language such as jokes and idioms
- ☐ Picking up on non-verbal cues; participating properly in conversation
- ☐ Understanding directions/instructions

- ☐ Avoiding "slips of the tongue" (e.g., "a rolling stone gathers no moths")
- ☐ Summarizing the main ideas in a story, article, or book
- ☐ Expressing ideas clearly, in a logical way, and not getting bogged down in details
- ☐ Learning a foreign language
- ☐ Memorization

Reading:

- ☐ Reading at a good pace and at an expected level
- ☐ Reading aloud with fluency and accuracy
- ☐ Keeping place while reading
- ☐ Using "word analysis" (rather than guessing) to figure out unfamiliar words
- ☐ Recognizing printed words
- ☐ Finding enjoyment and being self-confident while reading

Writing:

- ☐ Spelling words correctly and consistently
- ☐ Using proper grammar
- ☐ Proofreading and self-correcting work
- ☐ Preparing outlines and organizing written assignments
- ☐ Fully developing ideas in writing
- ☐ Expressing ideas in a logical, organized way

Social-Emotional:

- ☐ Picking up on other people's moods and feelings
- ☐ Understanding and responding appropriately to teasing
- ☐ Making and keeping friends
- ☐ Setting realistic goals for social relationships
- ☐ Dealing with group pressure, embarrassment, and unexpected challenges
- ☐ Having a realistic sense of social strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ Feeling motivated and confident in learning abilities at school and at work
- ☐ Understanding why success is more easily achieved in some areas compared with others

Other:

- ☐ Organizing and managing time
- ☐ Navigating space and direction (e.g., telling left from right)

- ❑ Accurately judging speed and distance (e.g., when driving)
- ❑ Reading charts and maps
- ❑ Performing consistently from day to day
- ❑ Applying skills learned in one situation to another

CHAPTER 6

Testing for Dyslexia

If you suspect that a child has dyslexia, an evaluation can lead to a better understanding of the problem and to recommendations for treatment. Test results are also used to determine state and local eligibility for special education services, as well as eligibility for support programs and services in colleges and universities.

Ideally, evaluation results provide a basis for making instructional decisions and help determine which educational services and supports will be most effective.

At What Age Should People Be Tested for Dyslexia?

People may be tested for dyslexia at any age. The tests and procedures used will vary according to the age of the person and the presenting problems. For example, testing with young children often looks at phonological processing, receptive and expressive language abilities, and the ability to make sound/symbol associations. When problems are found in these areas, targeted intervention can begin immediately. Of course, a diagnosis of dyslexia does not have to be made in order to offer early intervention in reading instruction.

Who Is Qualified to Make the Diagnosis of Dyslexia?

Professionals with expertise in several fields are best qualified to make a diagnosis of dyslexia. The testing may be done by a single individual or by a team of specialists. A knowledge and background in psychology, reading, language, and education is necessary. The tester must have a thorough working knowledge of how individuals learn to read and why some people have trouble learning to read. They must also understand how to administer and interpret evaluation data and how to plan appropriate reading interventions.

What Test Is Used to Identify Dyslexia?

There is no one single assessment measure that can be used to test for dyslexia. A series of tests (or sub-sections of tests) is usually chosen on the basis of their measurement properties and their potential to address referral issues. While a variety of tests may be used, the components of a good assessment remain the same. Special attention should be paid to gathering data in areas such as: expressive oral language, expressive written language, receptive oral language, receptive written language, intellectual functioning, cognitive processing, and educational achievement.

What Should an Evaluation Include?

The expert evaluator (or team of professionals) will conduct a comprehensive assessment to determine whether the person's learning problems may be specific to reading or whether they are related to other disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), affective disorders (anxiety, depression), central auditory processing dysfunction, pervasive developmental disorders, and physical or sensory impairments.

The following elements should be included in an assessment for dyslexia:

- Developmental, medical, behavioral, academic, and family history
- A measure of general intellectual functioning (if appropriate)
- Information on cognitive processing (language, memory, auditory processing, visual processing; visual motor integration, reasoning abilities, and executive functioning)
- Tests of specific oral language skills related to reading and writing success to include tests of phonological processing
- Educational tests to determine level of functioning in basic skill areas of reading, spelling, written language, and math

Testing in Reading/Writing Should Include the Following Measures:

- Single-word decoding of both real and nonsense words

- Oral and silent reading in context (evaluate rate, fluency, comprehension, and accuracy)
- Reading comprehension
- Dictated spelling test
- Written expression: sentence writing as well as story or essay writing
- Handwriting
- A classroom observation, and a review of the language arts curriculum for the school-aged child to assess remediation programs that have been tried

What Happens After the Evaluation?

Discuss the test results with the individual who did the testing. You should receive a written report consisting of both the test scores as well as an explanation of the results of the testing. The names of the tests administered should be specified. The strengths and weaknesses of the individual based on interview and test data should be explained, and specific recommendations should be made.

In the case of school-aged students, a team meeting should take place when the evaluation is completed. This meeting should include the student's teachers, parents, and individuals who did the testing.

When there is a reading problem, the report should suggest recommendations for specific intervention techniques. This intervention should be provided by skilled teachers who are specifically trained in explicit, research-based instruction.

How Long Does Testing Take?

An average series of tests will take approximately three hours. Sometimes it will be necessary to conduct the testing in more than one session, particularly in the case of a young child whose attention span is short or who might fatigue easily. The extent of the evaluation is based on clinical judgment.

Who Is Entitled to Testing?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for free testing and special education services for children attending public school. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provide protection against discrimination in federally funded programs for individuals who meet the criteria for qualification. This includes individuals diagnosed with dyslexia.

CHAPTER 7

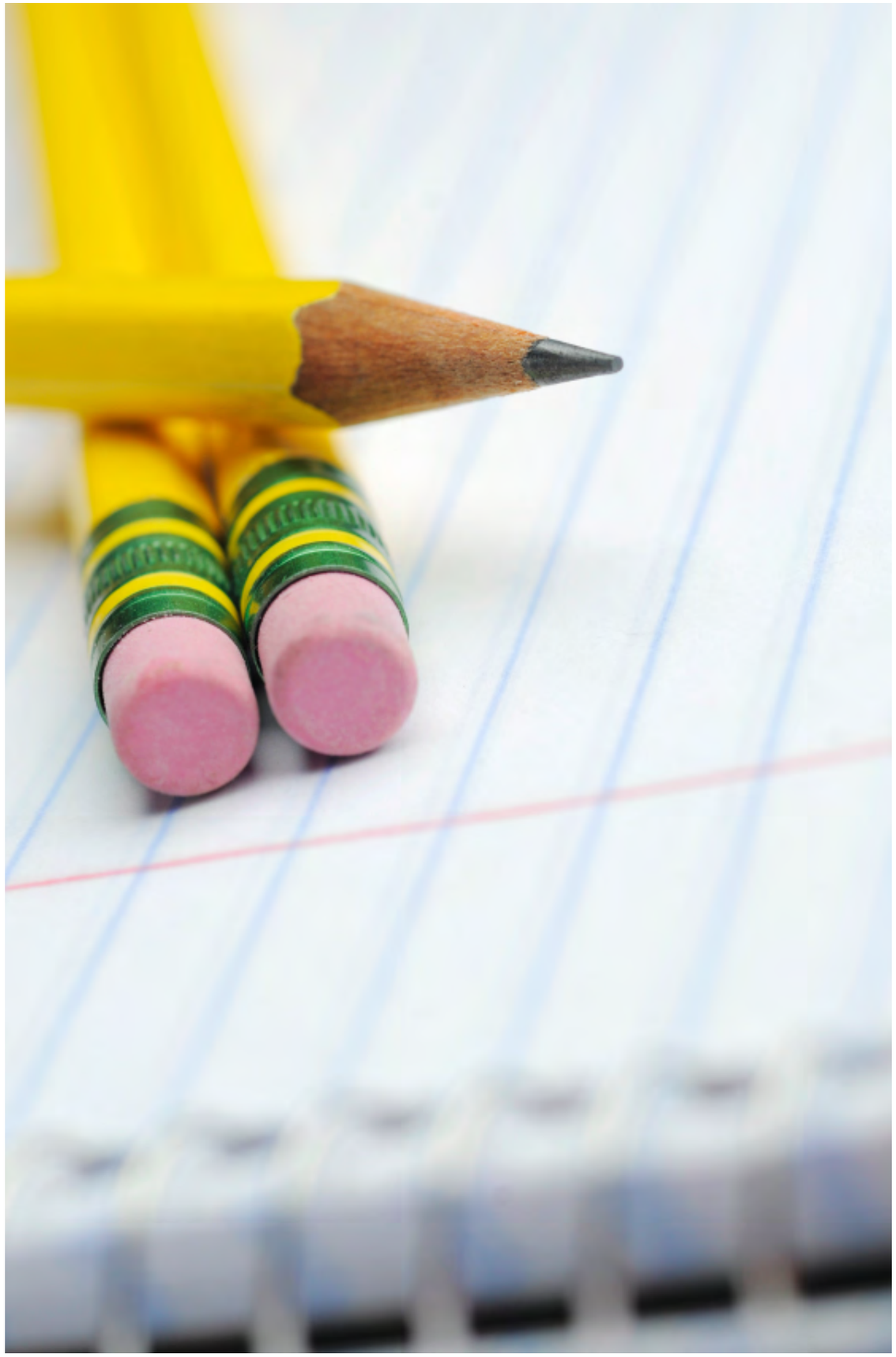
Helpful Dyslexia Resources

Looking for more information on dyslexia? Check out our homepage LD.org, which we've packed with content (including videos and podcasts) on all aspects of learning disabilities. The following resources will help you learn more about dyslexia and find local help. You can always use NCLD's Resource Locator to find programs in your local area.

- Bookshare: Bookshare is an accessible online library for people with dyslexia and other disabilities. Over 160,000 titles are available, and membership is free for students.

- Dyslexia Help at the University of Michigan: Dyslexia Help is designed to help you understand and learn about dyslexia and language disability. Visit their site for a wealth of information for individuals with dyslexia, parents, and professionals. If you've ever wondered about celebrities who have dyslexia, be sure to check out their "Dyslexia Success Stories" section.

- Dyslexia on Kids Health and Dyslexia on Teens Health: Are you a parent or educator looking for age-appropriate materials on dyslexia? These articles offer the basics of dyslexia, tailored for the reading and developmental level of kids and teens.

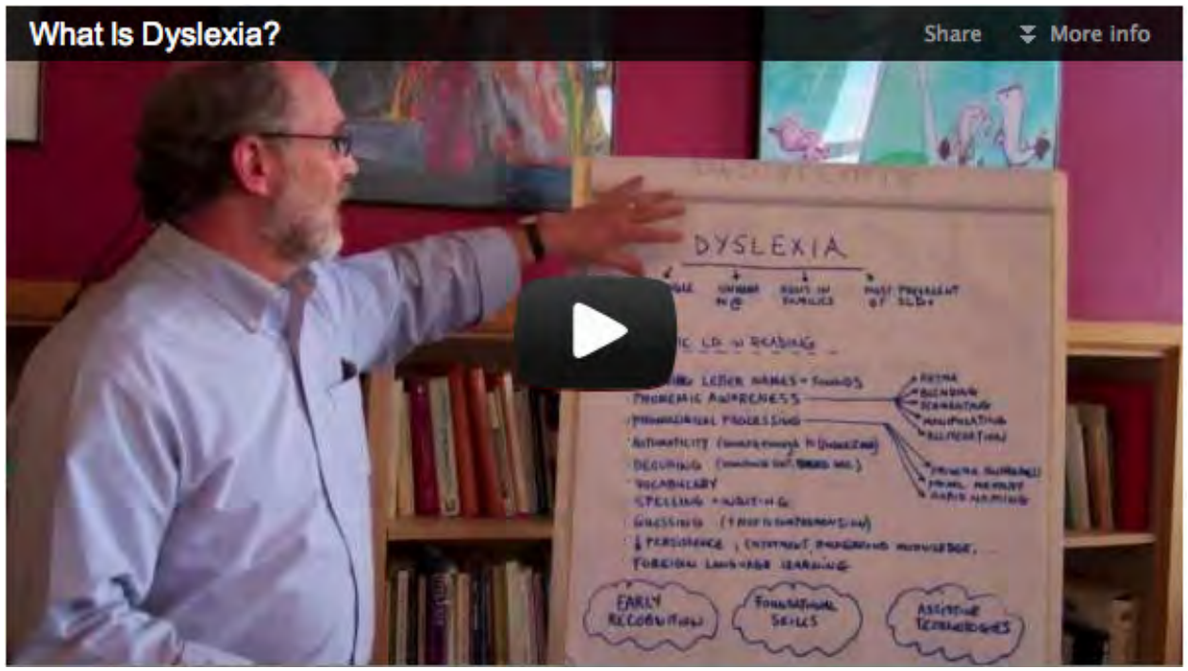


- Eye to Eye: Eye to Eye is a “mentoring movement for different thinkers,” providing mentoring programs to students identified with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and AD/HD. Visit their site to learn more about their program and find out how to get involved.
- International Dyslexia Association: The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) is a national non-profit dedicated to helping individuals with dyslexia, their families, and the communities that support them. Visit their site to connect with a local branch near you, find IDA-member providers in your area, and learn more about dyslexia.
- Learning Ally: Learning Ally, formerly known as Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, offers more than 75,000 digitally recorded audiobooks (including both textbooks and literary titles).
- Parent Center Network-Parent Center Listing: If you are the parent of a K-12 student with dyslexia, you’ll want to take a look at this site and find your nearest Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). PTIs are funded by the federal government and offer parents assistance in navigating special education and their child’s rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia (film): The website of the new film “The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia” (scheduled for a television premiere in October 2012), offers video clips from the film, ways to take action to support people with dyslexia, and offers uplifting advice for students with dyslexia and their parents.
- The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity: Yale University’s Center for Dyslexia and Creativity seeks to illuminate the strengths of those with dyslexia, disseminate information, practical advice, and the latest innovations from scientific research, and transform the lives of children and adults with dyslexia. Visit their site to learn more about their cutting-edge research and get concrete tips for parents, educators, and individuals with dyslexia.

CHAPTER 8

Video: What Is Dyslexia?

Learning disabilities expert Dr. Sheldon Horowitz talks about dyslexia and its impact on individuals with LD in this insightful video. If you're connected to the internet, click to watch the video.



Can Audio or Digital Books Improve Learning Outcomes?

Children with learning disabilities (LD), like dyslexia, have trouble understanding words they read. Causes are unclear, but we now know that LD is not due to a lack of intelligence or a desire to learn.

While dyslexia is a life-long condition, early identification, support from a parent or teacher, and access to digital or audio books and other learning materials may help your child to improve their learning outcomes and be better prepared to successfully work around their LD.

Research now demonstrates that when children with LD are given accessible instructional materials (often referred to as AIM) — textbooks or learning materials that are delivered in audio and/or digital formats — they can excel in school and also learn to enjoy reading.

Reading with digital (or e-books) and audio books can enrich a user's learning experience by engaging them in the content in multi-sensory ways (e.g., reading and listening at the same time, reading along while the e-book highlights each word).

Sadly and too often, thousands of children who struggle with reading because of a print disability such as dyslexia do not receive access to resources that may help them enjoy reading.

About Accessible Formats

Accessible instruction materials are specialized digital formats of textbooks and other printed materials that are provided specifically to accommodate persons with print disabilities due to visual impairment, blindness, a physical disability, or a reading disability due to dyslexia. For those with dyslexia, digital formats make it possible to “listen” to text at the same time as “seeing” it on a computer screen or device.

AIM formats include braille, audio, large print, and digital text in a common standard file format called DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System). Through audio books, DAISY enables a user to hear audio by a recorded human voice or synthesized electronic speech. The digital files use reading software so that users can simultaneously see and hear text read aloud, typically by a computer voice. Many children are familiar and comfortable with computer voices because of video games, computer use, and other electronics.

Access Is the Law

The nation’s special education law, IDEA, includes the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS).

The purpose of the NIMAS is to "facilitate the provision of accessible, alternate-format versions of print textbooks to pre-K–12 students with disabilities.” The NIMAS helps IEP teams discuss how students with reading disabilities such as dyslexia should be provided access to textbooks and other school materials in electronic formats.

If your child has an IEP or a 504 plan due to a reading disability, review it to see if there is a question related to eligibility for AIM. If your child was not found eligible for AIM, you have the right to meet with the school and discuss why your child isn’t considered eligible for access to the alternate formats of his or her school materials as well as the technology (digital reader and/or software) to use it. It’s never too late to discuss with the school how your child learns best and how adding accessible instructional materials can sometimes make a dramatic difference in both their ability to learn as well as build their confidence and excitement about learning.

Where to Find Accessible Audio and Digital Books

Ask if your school has a membership to organizations that specialize in providing accessible formats such as Bookshare (bookshare.org), an online digital library of more than 150,000 copyrighted books and textbooks and Learning Ally (learningally.org), an audio library of over 70,000 digitally and human-recorded textbooks and literature titles.

Both organizations are approved by the U.S. Department of Education to provide AIM to school districts and schools when they request the digital files/formats for students who qualify with print disabilities. Once you are a "qualified" member of either organization, it is fairly easy to become a member of the other, thanks to their cooperative mission. Although not always the case, some schools and districts will pay for an eligible child's membership to one or both organizations. You may even choose to give both organizations a try to determine the best reading solution for your child.

So, you've learned about AIM and why students with print disabilities such as dyslexia should generally be found eligible by schools and districts. You've also learned about the digital (or e-book) file formats, been given suggestions in talking with your IEP team about AIM, and learned where to find quality audio and digital resources.

Features and Benefits of Reading Technologies with Text-to-Speech (TTS)

Today, there is research to suggest that students with learning disabilities can read with better comprehension and fluency skills using digital or audio formats with the right reading technologies. The experience of hearing content read aloud through text-to-speech or TTS (i.e., seeing words and sentences highlighted on a computer screen or portable device) is referred to as "multimodal" or "multi-sensory" reading.

In today's digital education environment, where learning can happen anywhere – in a classroom, home, or on the go – there are several quality reading assistive technology programs to support children with learning and print disabilities.

These include Kurzweil 3000 by Cambium, Read Write Gold by TextHelp and Read: OutLoud by Don Johnston. There are portable devices (e-readers) such as the iPad that can read digital formats with apps like Read2Go, created by Bookshare for members to download and read digital books from the online library to Apple devices. Through digital text, users can navigate by paragraph, page, chapter, or table of contents and manipulate settings and preferences such as:

- Background displays
- Font size and color hypertext links
- Selection of male and female voices
- Rate of speech
- Read aloud on/off function
- Bookmarking

Some software and portables may have built-in scanners, graphic organizers, note taking tools for essays, writing outline support, bibliographers, dictionaries, spell checkers, and keyword search features. Some may have voice recording or voice recognition and options to hear text read aloud in

Spanish or other languages using Acapela Voices – a good option for English language learners.

One note is that there are still limitations to full accessibility of digital formats today. Not all images can be accurately described through text-to-speech, such as graphs, charts, and mathematical concepts. A new web application tool called POET, created by the DIAGRAM Center at Benetech, the parent organization of Bookshare, shows great progress. POET is an open source resource that makes it easier to create image descriptions for DAISY books and allows crowd sourcing of image descriptions.

New Ways to Learn and Receive Knowledge

Research on text-to-speech as an effective way to teach reading is well documented since the National Reading Panel Report of 2000 identified three key elements of effective reading instruction:

- Alphabet (phonemic awareness and phonics)
- Fluency and comprehension (vocabulary, text comprehension
- Comprehension strategies

In our quest to ensure that more students with LD and print disabilities receive full access to AIM, we asked teachers and school assistive technology specialists to share their thoughts about the benefits of digital books and technologies. Here are some of their top responses.

Maybe one or several points will catch your eye to start a new conversation with more parents and teachers:

- Opens a world of new learning possibilities
- Provides flexible options based on learning styles and preferences
- Promotes independence, socialization, and personal achievement
- Unlocks decoding struggles
- Holds a reader's attention span longer
- Ensures readability on grade level
- Encourages note taking and annotations
- Corrects spelling

Will a Multi-Sensory Reading Experience Help My Child?

If this is the question on your mind, it's time to explore AIM and the reading technologies that can best support your child. Start with an investigation of what works best (i.e., strategies and tools) for your child with a special education or tech-savvy teacher, a teaching professional such as speech and language pathologist (SLP), a reading teacher, or an assistive

technology specialist. You can point to the 2004 IDEA law and compliance with AIM, the research behind TTS, and the benefits of digital formats suggested by teachers to engage learners in multi-sensory reading experiences and best practices of UDL.

Opening the door to new conversations may enable more children to receive access to quality digital and audio formats and technologies that exist today. Inquire about accessible curriculum (e.g., books, literature, and textbooks) to determine if your child needs an IEP or 504 plan that includes resources and tools to improve their academic skills. Maybe you'll start a digital reading program or parent technology network and tweet about the benefits of digital books in this article. The steps you take today will ensure that your child, or anyone with LD, can improve their learning outcomes and enjoy a meaningful reading experience.

Additional Resources

The Center for Implementing Technology in Education (CITEd): Universal Design for Learning

The National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials: Assistive Technology Research

The DIAGRAM Center at Benetech

Click here to learn more about assistive technology.

CHAPTER 10

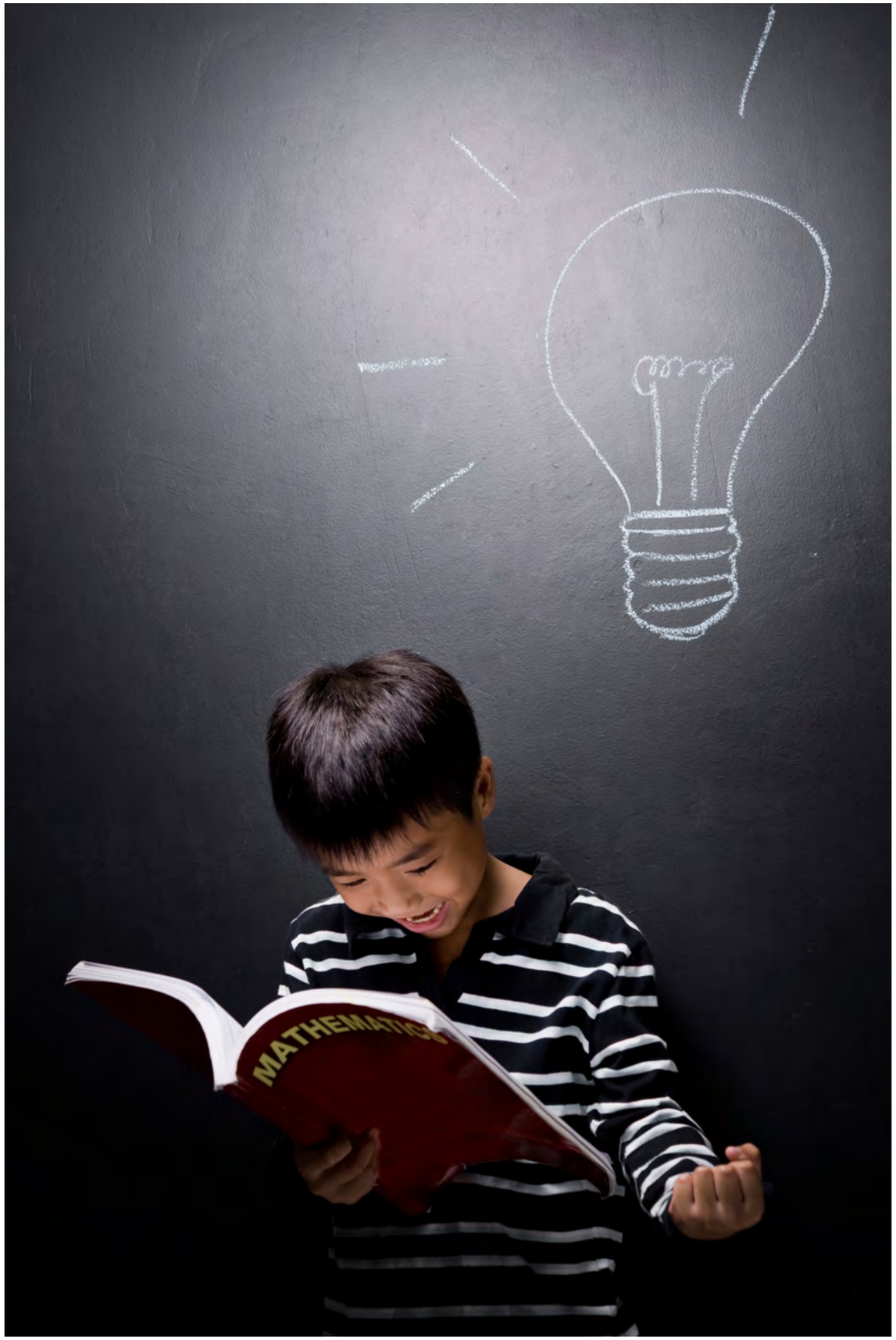
Accommodating Students with Dyslexia

Teaching students with dyslexia across settings can be challenging. Here are some accommodations that general education and special education teachers can use in a classroom of heterogeneous learners.

Accommodations Involving Interactive Instruction

The task of gaining students' attention and engaging them for a period of time requires many teaching and managing skills. Some accommodations to enhance successful interactive instructional activities are:

- Repeat directions. Students who have difficulty following directions are often helped by asking them to repeat the directions in their own words.
- Maintain daily routines. Many students with learning problems need the structure of daily routines to know and do what is expected.
- Provide students with a graphic organizer. An outline, chart, or blank web can be given to students to fill in during presentations. This helps students listen for key information and see the relationships among concepts and related information.



- Use step-by-step instruction. New or difficult information can be presented in small sequential steps. This helps learners with limited prior knowledge who need explicit or part-to-whole instruction.
- Simultaneously combine verbal and visual information. Verbal information can be provided with visual displays (e.g., on an overhead or handout).
- Write key points or words on the chalkboard. Prior to a presentation, the teacher can write new vocabulary words and key points on the chalkboard or overhead.
- Use balanced presentations and activities. An effort should be made to balance oral presentations with visual information and participatory activities. Also, there should be a balance between large group, small group, and individual activities.
- Emphasize daily review. Daily review of previous learning or lessons can help students connect new information with prior knowledge.

Accommodations Involving Student Performance

Students vary significantly in their ability to respond in different modes. For example, students vary in their ability to give oral presentations; participate in discussions; write letters and numbers; write paragraphs; draw objects; spell; work in noisy or cluttered settings; and read, write, or speak at a fast pace. Moreover, students vary in their ability to process information presented in visual or auditory formats. The following accommodations can be used to enhance students' performance:

- Change response mode. For students who have difficulty with fine motor responses (such as handwriting), the response mode can be changed to underlining, selecting from multiple choices, sorting, or marking. Students with fine motor problems can be given extra space for writing answers on worksheets or can be allowed to respond on individual chalkboards.
- Encourage use of graphic organizers. A graphic organizer involves organizing material into a visual format.
- Encourage use of assignment books or calendars. Students can use calendars to record assignment due dates, list school related activities, record test dates, and schedule timelines for schoolwork. Students should set aside a special section in an assignment book or calendar for recording homework assignments.
- Reduce copying by including information or activities on handouts or worksheets.
- Have students turn lined paper vertically for math. Lined paper can be turned vertically to help students keep numbers in appropriate columns while computing math problems.

- Use cues to denote important items. Asterisks or bullets can denote questions or activities that count heavily in evaluation. This helps students spend time appropriately during tests or assignments.
- Design hierarchical worksheets. The teacher can design worksheets with problems arranged from easiest to hardest. Early success helps students begin to work.
- Allow use of instructional aids. Students can be provided with letter and number strips to help them write correctly. Number lines, counters, and calculators help students compute once they understand the mathematical operations.
- Display work samples. Samples of completed assignments can be displayed to help students realize expectations and plan accordingly.
- Use peer-mediated learning. The teacher can pair peers of different ability levels to review their notes, study for a test, read aloud to each other, write stories, or conduct laboratory experiments. Also, a partner can read math problems for students with reading problems to solve.
- Use flexible work times. Students who work slowly can be given additional time to complete written assignments.

Click here to learn more about accommodations.

Homework 101

When your child has dyslexia, homework can be a particular chore. When it's time to sit down and do homework, students' struggles with reading, writing, and/or spelling collide with difficulties like organizing and managing time. It's easy to see how stressful this can be for students and their parents alike. But homework doesn't have to be a daily struggle for students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Read these tips to help your child build skills and systems that will reduce the stress of homework for your whole family.

School-to-Home Organization:

- Eliminate the risk of forgotten books/notebooks at school by asking teachers to check in with your child at the end of the day. For those children using lockers, hang a typed list on color paper reminding your child what to ask him/herself each day when packing up homework. In addition, a small index card could be taped on the cover of your child's planner.
- Advocate for a well-established communication system between home and school.

Homework Organization:

- Select a specified area for homework and necessary supplies. When completed, request that your child return all materials/supplies to their appropriate places.
- Help your child avoid avoiding homework. Work with your child on establishing rules on when and how homework will be accomplished. For example, should your child start with his favorite subject? Take a break after each assignment? How will your child know when it is time to return to work? (Verbal reminders, such as "Johanna, just a reminder that there are only two more minutes left in your break," and timers are very effective in reminding your child to return to work.) What stimuli is acceptable or unacceptable when studying? How homework is completed is equally important as completing it.
- For weekend homework, encourage your child to begin on Friday evenings. This is invaluable. Not only is information fresh in their minds but it allows enough time to make contingency plans for forgotten books or purchasing materials for projects.
- Ask yourself: "Are the teachers giving homework and instructions that suit my child best?" If not, don't hesitate to share concerns and ideas with the teacher.
- If your child misses school, help your child be responsible for finding out the next day's homework. While there may be times your child cannot complete the homework without the classroom instruction, it is still good to have your child follow through by calling a classmate or emailing the teacher (if this option is available) during the day. This learned skill becomes very important by mid-elementary years and, certainly, by middle school. It further minimizes some anxiety when your child returns to school.
- For children taking medication, ask yourself and your child if he or she is finding that the medication is working as optimally as possible. Work with your professional to determine if a change may be required.

Reinforce Learning:

- Become intimate with your child's areas of need (for example, organization, inattentiveness, comprehension, decoding) and help find appropriate techniques to enhance and reinforce learning. Locate professionals early in the school year at your child's school and/or in the private sector who can provide helpful strategies.
- In general, study cards or index cards are easier than a study guide or worksheet. Have your child write words, thoughts or questions on one side and answers on the other. The act of writing out a card is one more opportunity to enhance learning by reinforcing memory.
- Use the internet to supplement and complement classroom materials.

- For children having difficulty extracting ideas, build lists of words for your child from which to choose. Similarly, ask them to compare and contrast ideas. For those with writing challenges, there are several approaches: Have your child verbalize his or her ideas first. Use a word-web format or an old-fashioned outline using bullets before writing an essay. Encourage your child to refer to the list/chart/web/rubric and use a minimum of details (two to three details for younger children; four to 10 details for older children).
- Consider making board games, such as a bingo or lotto board, as another way to reinforce learning. An opened manila folder works great as a board, index cards can be used for questions and coins can be a player's pawn. It is inexpensive, simple and a great addition to family time!
- Offer to give practice tests. After a few weeks of school, you will have a sense of a teacher's testing style. Practice tests that mirror the teacher's style offers your child the opportunity to "experience" what could be asked.
- Consider a study group. For slightly older children, a study group of two or three can be very beneficial and make learning more enjoyable.

The ultimate goal is to provide your special learner with good work habits, to prepare and anticipate, to avoid unnecessary tardiness, and to stay on task. Par for the course with teaching organization, homework, and learning strategies is making a long-term commitment. The foremost rule is to find the best system for your child; frequently this will mean many trials before finding the best one. Parental assistance can go a long way in making your child feel a sense of accomplishment and progress while minimizing stress for all of you.

Click here to visit our “Homework & Study Skills” page.

How Self-Advocacy Can Lead to Innovation: An Inteview with Ben Foss

Ben Foss was formerly the director of access technology for Intel. He leads a team that makes tools for people with specific learning disabilities and others who have difficulty reading printed text. His experiences as an individual with dyslexia have motivated him to find new ways to help others with reading disabilities access information. He is also passionate about creating new opportunities for those with learning disabilities to connect with one another. He has an MBA and a law degree from Stanford University.

NCLD: When was your learning disability first identified? How did your parents share this information with you?

Ben Foss: I was identified in first grade. My mom was asked to come into the school and was seated at a desk with a box of tissue in case she burst into tears. She said, “I figured something was up. So what do we do?” They explained that they had just gotten new money — the first funds from IDEA were just reaching the schools at this time — and wanted to place me in special education.

My parents were very straightforward with me, making a point to involve me in the discussions. They talked to me about what dyslexia meant — that it meant I had trouble with reading, and that it didn't mean I wasn't smart. They also made a deal with me that I could act out in my room — even throwing things or wrecking my stuff — when I was angry over having failed a spelling test or sad about having to sit alone during reading time, but I needed to be respectful in school or elsewhere. This gave me space to express my frustration while still showing up to school ready to learn.

NCLD: There was a time when you didn't want people to know you had dyslexia. What changed your mind and how did you feel when you decided to be more open about it?

Ben Foss: Throughout elementary and secondary education, I was militant about keeping it quiet. In college, I set up secret accommodations, working out a relationship with a writing teacher to sit and read my papers aloud to me to help me check for errors. This caused two problems. I got less help than I needed, meaning I spent late hours struggling through textbooks when books on tape could have helped. More importantly, I carried this as a dreaded secret, one that took emotional energy to hide.

The biggest turning point was in business school at Stanford. There I met a fellow MBA candidate named Mark Briemhorst who had no hands.

He encouraged me to join a panel of people with disabilities to explain to the future leaders at our school that disabilities in the workplace take all forms. I learned from him that giving people context on how to deal with you as a person with a disability is critical. He sent a mail to everyone at the school explaining, "Hi, I am Mark. I have no hands. When you meet me, shake my wrist. If you see me in class, I do not need your help picking up my bag. I brought it in with me in the first place..." and so on. It showed me that if you explain who you are and what you need, people generally are open to it. If they are not, that's on them to resolve.

NCLD: When did you first start to play an active role in advocating for your own needs? Was there a particular experience early in your school career that helped you understand the importance of self-advocacy?

Ben Foss: I was taught early that I had a say in what happened to me. Whether it was what clothes I wore or when I went to bed, my family let me have a say in how my world was set up. In school, I was invited to all my parent/teacher conferences. Sometimes advocating for myself meant making a tough call. When I got a D in Algebra in middle school, I was told I could progress if I worked hard the following year. Instead, I decided to repeat the year because I knew mastering Algebra would be important to all of my future math classes.

When I got to law school, I learned the real power of standing up for the right to accommodations. Often schools know they have an obligation to provide accommodations, but they do

not know what you need. In my first year of law school I negotiated an agreement that let me have someone read my papers aloud to me in addition to using text-to-speech software where my computer read it aloud. I needed the person to spot homonyms — council v. counsel — in my essays and I had to have repeated meetings with the deans, signing a written pledge that I was not relying on this person to get help other than this.

NCLD: We know it's important for those with LD to build a "community of support." What did your community of support look like when you were in school, and is this still a valuable resource for you today?

Ben Foss: Support comes in many forms. Ideally, the first is family. My mother, father and brother were sounding boards for strategies. In college, I let some people know about my experience. It was important to offer examples and concrete anecdotes. Instead of saying, "I am dyslexic," I'd say "I fax papers home to my mom to have her read them to me." This gives tangible details that stick in people's minds.

The hardest community to find is other people with LD. We are invisible to others, though I like to point out that if you look out in Times Square and see 10,000 people, there are likely 1000 or more with LD there. Finding them through online communities like Headstrong (headstrongnation.org) or campus mentoring programs is critical. There is a special bond between members of the community. We function like immigrants from the same place, with common experiences and challenges. If we can just come up with a national dish we might even apply for passports!

NCLD: Despite your dyslexia, you've worked for the White House National Economic Council, and the Children's Defense Fund, and you've earned graduate degrees from Stanford. How did you build the necessary confidence to thrive, despite the daily challenges of your LD?

Ben Foss: Not despite dyslexia. Because of my dyslexia I functioned well in these professional environs. I learned to pay attention to what matters in an academic or a professional setting. I knew that I could not read an entire book, so I would prioritize, reading only the most important chapter. In the White House, no one has enough time, so being able to prioritize and delegate is critical. I also learned to engage people and understand their roles. This is how I navigated third grade. I understood that the resource room teacher was my ticket to getting through spelling tests, not the general ed classroom teacher. The same applied at the Children's Defense Fund. The budget director of the organization is critical to supporting my budget requests, not the executive director, and so on.

NCLD: As the project manager for development of the Intel Reader, what were your main goals for developing this innovative tool? And, what makes it different from other assistive technologies that support reading?

Ben Foss: I was frustrated with the existing tools. I used to wait three weeks to get my books in an audio format I could use, and this was at Stanford, a fancy school with lots of money. I wanted to be able to read right on the spot. In 2006 at Intel, I started playing with cameras and computers and realized that I could build a system that gave me independence, allowing me to point, shoot and listen to printed text. My overall goal was to get the best technology into the hands of people who need it. Intel has brilliant scientists on staff and working with them to solve the technical issues allowed us to develop something portable you can carry with you. This means you can read on the go, reading a handout in class or a menu in a restaurant, as opposed to trying to lug around a flatbed scanner.

NCLD: As an adult, you've been a passionate spokesman for those with dyslexia and an avid promoter of the importance of self-advocacy. Tell us about your organization, Headstrong.

Ben Foss: I started Headstrong in 2003 because I was frustrated that all the useful information about learning disabilities was in books. This made about as much sense as having the wheelchair meeting upstairs. We put this information into formats people in our community can use, like film. We made a national award-winning film Headstrong, about the first person to win a civil rights victory in the area of dyslexia.

You can watch the film for free on the site. We also have forums for discussion, information on resources and a website that will read itself aloud to you with the click of a button. Overall, we are re-framing this as a public policy and a civil rights issue.

How many people could we keep out of prison if we offered the right accommodations in schools, allowing people to get a high school diploma? How many more jobs could our economy produce if we trained people with LD to ask for what they need in the workplace? These are the questions we should be asking.

NCLD: What are your top five tips for parents of kids with LD?

Ben Foss:

- Talk to your child early and often about what you know about their LD. Engage them, show them the numbers, reinforce that they are smart and they will do well.
- Get formal identification of their LD for your child. An education psychologist or a learning specialist at your school can point you to the right resources. If they do not want to offer testing, look for a way to get the documentation on your own. This can be expensive, but it is critical to get services, to understand your child's specific profile and to establishing a history for Glossary Link accommodation on testing.

- Use assistive technology such as books on tape or talking computers early and often. Exposing your child to language and getting them comfortable with the tools they will need helps them stay on grade level. Microsoft Windows has a basic speech engine built into it – look in the Control Panel under “Speech.” Same with Apple computers. It will allow them to try it out and see if they like it. It takes 10 minutes to set up and will give your child the ability to read an email or a website on the spot.
- Seek out mentors in the LD community for your child. Show them the films at headstrongnation.org/documentary, reach out to other parents in your schools, look for local college mentoring programs and so on.
- Self-determination is the highest goal for your child. My parents told me I could go to Yale or win a Nobel Prize. Some of us can do great things and some of us cannot, but the key is that it should be up to the person with LD to decide what that looks like. Teach your child to think about themselves as agents of their own destiny.

NCLD: What are some specific tips for teens and adults with LD?

Ben Foss: Come out. It is critical that you experiment with being public about who you are and see what it feels like not to hide on this issue. It can be scary to tell people that you are part of a label that is associated with being lazy or stupid. I have felt this sting. The day I turned in my thesis at Stanford Law School, a classmate laughed out loud at the registrar’s office because I had the term learning disabilities in my title. "They can’t articulate anything!" I looked at him and explained that I had a learning disability. He was embarrassed and apologized. I could have laughed with him and hid, but I would have been doing damage to myself. The key to this is finding a community of people who get your experience. Tell your best friend about your experience. Tell your siblings. Work your way up to telling a teacher you trust. Then try a new teacher. Rehearse and develop a script that tells specifics, is honest and works for you. Eventually, you will be comfortable talking to strangers about it. And then other people with LD will start coming to you, allowing you to be part of something larger. It is a good feeling and is the most important accommodation you can have.

As part of coming out about this, I like to show people the raw version of what it looks like when I write. Below is my last answer with out the benefit of spell check, and the three passes I make through it with text to speech (think Steven Hawking voices) reading it back to me to allow me to improve the grammar. In a public forum like this, there will also have been a copy edit by a non-LD person. See the raw version below to understand where I start on this stuff and remember this is today – I have a JD/MBA from Stanford, and I spell terribly:

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Click here to download our LD Advocates Guide.

Dyslexia: An Obstacle, Not a Limitation

2012 Anne Ford Scholar Silvia Ortiz-Rosales (pictured at right) describes herself as having a "thirst for knowledge and success." Once her dyslexia was identified in fourth grade, Silvia promised herself that she would not let LD hold her back from academic and personal success. Her story begins below.

My teacher walked to the board and began to write down our assignment. Tonight it was simple: log into an account and register our names. When I got home, I hoped to make a good impression and register my name early. To my surprise red words came to the screen claiming the password I entered was incorrect. I tried several times and came to the conclusion that the teacher must have given the class the incorrect password.

As I approached her after class the next day, she seemed concerned. She asked me why I had failed to register and I told her it was because the password she had given us didn't work. She checked my agenda, where I had written down all of my assignments, and she said to me "Silvia, the password on the board says m4kog, not w4kog. You shouldn't be so careless." I looked up at the board and noticed she was right.

It's little things like that, which remind me I must take my time whenever I'm doing school work. When I was younger I found myself struggling in school. I was in the fourth grade when my teacher noticed that I wasn't learning at the same speed as my peers. Taking tests was very difficult for me. Most of my time at school was spent trying to understand what the teacher was talking about. On average I spent twice as long on tests and quizzes than my peers. After meeting with my mother, my school decided to send me to a learning center to see if I had a learning disability. As it turns out, I am dyslexic and have auditory processing differences.

Of course as a fourth grader I didn't understand, nor did I think it was important. However, as I got older, I began to realize that I had to work harder than my peers to understand the material. My mother began to blame my dyslexia and for a while I hopped on the bandwagon and thought I didn't have to succeed in school. The more my family pushed the idea that my low grades were because of my dyslexia, the more I yearned to prove them wrong.

One day I had enough. I began studying harder and working on different techniques to teach myself the materials I didn't understand at school. I learned how simple tricks and searching the Internet for further background helped me remember things. I also realized that being accurate and correct is much more important than being the first one to finish. Thanks to the accommodations that were provided by my high school, St. Joseph Notre Dame, I was finally given the time I needed to finish all of my assignments, tests and quizzes with accuracy. After coming to terms with my learning disability I gained an amazing quality. I acquired the ability to keep trying, to adjust and learn despite my disability. I learned that the best way to overcome my dyslexia and auditory processing differences is to accept them and strive through them to show others I can compete with my peers. I also learned that there's nothing wrong with asking for help when you need it. My focus has helped me exceed people's expectations and show them that my learning disabilities will not hold me back.

I have become a driven individual and that makes me proud. Although I take multiple Advanced Placement classes and challenge myself with numerous extracurricular activities, I know college will present me with even more opportunities to be involved. There is nothing that excites me more than the thought of meeting new people and becoming an active member of a new community. I look forward to the coming years, even though I must continue to push myself. I will succeed. My thirst for knowledge and success fuels my passion for college. As a first generation college student who struggles with a learning disability I'm eager to prove to the world that dyslexia isn't going to hold me back. I plan to continue my studies, fueled by my desire to prove dyslexia isn't a limitation, it is merely an obstacle designed to keep you motivated. I know college will be difficult, but I embrace the new opportunities that college life will bring me.

I will be a student at California State University, East Bay when I graduate from high school. While in college I hope to study journalism. Writing is something I've always enjoyed doing. People have often challenged my writing and reading capability with comments such as "You're dyslexic, you shouldn't even be able to write. I thought dyslexics couldn't read?" However, I've found that I'm quite good at both reading and writing. Although it takes me longer than most, I write and read for fun. Last year, to my surprise, I was awarded my school's Certificate of Merit in English. In my free time I try to push myself to write in new and creative ways in order to further develop my skills. I read literature that challenges life themes and give my own interpretations of them simply because I love it. I constantly share on my blog the challenges of dyslexia as well as the struggles of everyday life.

I hope that pursuing a career in journalism will ultimately get my writing out to the general public. It would be a blessing if my writing became accessible to other students with learning disabilities, and would in turn inspire them to strive past their disability. I want people regardless of age to see me as a role model and advocate for those who are struggling with any learning disability. Although I have learning differences I continually reach for more, regardless of the challenges thrown my way.

Click to watch a video interview with Silvia.

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