EducationWeek® | SPOTLIGHT®

2025

Unlocking Potential: Building Resilience and Support For Students with Dyslexia

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dyslexia is a learning difference marked by challenges in acquiring literacy skills, but its effects reach far beyond reading and comprehension. It can influence students' social skills, classroom behavior, and self-esteem. In this Spotlight, we explore the importance of **social-emotional support and resilience**, the effectiveness of **early screening**, and the **critical role teachers** and schools play in helping students with dyslexia thrive.

F. Sheehan for Education Week / Getty

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DYSLEXIA

Recognize and nurture the many talents and skills in every learner.

There is strong evidence showing the majority of students learn to read better with the **structured teaching of basic language skills**. Additionally, the components and methods of Structured Literacy are critical for students with reading disabilities, including dyslexia, according to the International Dyslexia Association®.

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3 New Studies to Know on Screening Students for Dyslexia

By Sarah D. Sparks

Early, universal screening for reading disabilities is fast gaining traction among states, with 46 states now requiring some kind of dyslexia assessment in the early grades.

An estimated 1 in 5 U.S. children has a reading disability like dyslexia, but it can be difficult for school-based assessments, or screeners, to differentiate between reading difficulties caused by academic disruptions or insufficient instruction and those related to language processing or other disorders that would qualify students for special education services.

Emerging research suggests new ways educators should think about how to identify dyslexia, particularly among vulnerable populations.

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1. Students of color may be underidentified

Students of color and those in high-poverty schools may be significantly underidentified for reading disabilities, finds a new study in the journal Nature Science of Learning.

Researchers used a teacher-administered dyslexia assessment to screen K-2 students in New Orleans schools serving predominately Black students. The state requires every student to be assessed for dyslexia at least once before grade 3, but the screening identified nearly half of the children at risk of reading disabilities, and a majority of these were later diagnosed as having dyslexia.

"Schools don't want to identify kids as having a problem," said co-author Bennett Shaywitz, a child neurology researcher at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital. "The hope is that studies like this will encourage schools to want to do that. "

Co-author Sally Shaywitz said the results are far from atypical at a time when the average Black 4th grader readers below basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, but she said many schools with low-performing readers do not target interventions for dyslexia specifically. "It means that educators teaching kids in those classrooms have to be aware of [dyslexia]," she said. "Those kids should have been identified at least as at risk and then should have fuller evaluations."

2. Attention deficits may play a role in dyslexia

A new study in the Journal of Experimental Child Psychology suggests early attention problems could play a role in dyslexia.

A team led by researchers at the Center for Brain and Cognitive Development at the University of London trained more than 100 children ages 7-12 to associate speech sounds with eight symbols, and then to use the symbols to read real and made-up words. The researchers tracked how well the students paid attention during the symbol training and how well they focused on the specific sounds during distractions.

For both regular readers and those with dyslexia, children's auditory attention during training predicted how accurately they could match sounds with symbols and use them to read made-up words.

Phonemic awareness has long been associated with early reading development, researchers said, and "poor attentional skills may constitute a risk during the early stages of reading acquisition, when children start to learn letter–speech sound associations."

The results suggest early screening for attention deficits, particularly in listening skills, could help identify students at risk of later reading problems.

3. Struggling readers affected well into adulthood.

Children don't just grow out of dyslexia if it's not treated. A longitudinal study in the journal Nature Science of Learning suggests children's early reading proficiency can predict their literacy into their 40s.

As part of an ongoing longitudinal study, researchers tracked reading achievement over more than three decades for more than 300 children who started school in the early 1980s They found that students' 1st grade reading performance and particularly their reading growth over the first five years of school was strongly linked with their reading ability at age 42.

That link was even stronger for children whose early reading skills would qualify them as having dyslexia. Only about a third of children in the study who were identified as dyslexic ever received interventions, and the quality of services varied significantly for those who did.

"When children are in the first few grades, kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, the slope of reading acquisition is very steep," said Sally Shaywitz, who also co-authored that study with her husband, Bennett."That's when you'd like to catch the kids so that they can get some intervention. But as they get older there, the slope sort of flattens out and they don't respond to intervention as easily." ■

Additional Resource
View this article's charts

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Jaclyn Borowski/Education Week

Students in the hiking club explore during an early morning walk around the campus before the start of the school day.

The school incorporates a daily 25-minute exercise break into each morning where students rotate between different activities. Here, students play spikeball together.

Samantha Sullivan, a math teacher and reading tutor at the Odyssey School, incorporates a card game into the daily small group reading instruction.

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A Day in the Life of a School Designed To Support Students With Dyslexia

By Jaclyn Borowski

At this independent school for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences, the schedule, the environment, and the curriculum are all designed to set students up for success.

There are movement opportunities throughout the day that give students a chance to work out their energy and gather their focus, and teachers make an effort to incorporate student passions and interests into their lessons. The idea is to ensure a positive school experience for a group of students who've felt frustrated or left behind in the regular public school environment.

At The Odyssey School, a K-8 school in Lutherville, Md., for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences, learning differences are embraced and celebrated. Creativity and individuality are encouraged. One of the school's goals is to give students the tools for a successful return to mainstream school environments, including the ability and language needed to advocate for their needs and accommodations.

Here, a look at a typical day in the life at The Odyssey School. ■

First graders begin their art class with fine and gross motor warmups led by art teacher Kesling St. Denis, left.

Harper, 10, wears a mask with pipe cleaners sticking through it to experience the feeling of whiskers in Sophie Gerard's science class.

Published March 26, 2023

A Reading Teacher Makes a Case for Early Dyslexia Screening

By Elizabeth Heubeck

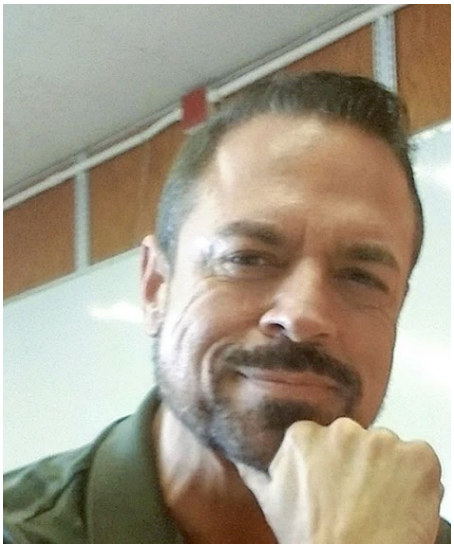
Only 10 states have not passed legislation requiring universal, school-based screening for dyslexia risk factors.

The issue of whether to require early screening in schools is currently up for debate in California and Colorado. Proponents say universal screening as early as kindergarten catches reading delays early, allowing for more effective intervention to help students catch up. Critics argue that there aren't enough people in schools to screen students, that it takes away from valuable class time, and overidentifies students, especially English learners, as being at risk for dyslexia.

But what do the educators whose job it is to teach children how to read think about screening for reading delays in the early grades?

We asked Doug Rich. He's a 27-year veteran educator, former classroom teacher of grades 1 through 4, and a current math and reading interventionist at McKinley Elementary School in the San Francisco Unified School District, where he works with "Tier 2" students (those identified as at risk for delays). He's also a father of two sons with dyslexia. Rich shared his professional journey in teaching literacy—how he came to learn about the disorder, his adoption of simple screeners to identify reading delays in students, and his structured and individualized approach to teaching students how to read.

The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



Courtesy of Doug Rich

California reading interventionist Doug Rich persuaded his own school to begin screening students early for signs of dyslexia.

How long have you been aware of dyslexia and its impact on students' ability to read?

Before I had two sons with dyslexia, I had a student for whom, no matter what I was doing, nothing seemed to be working. I found the term dyslexia and started educating myself. Every now and then, a kid [who fit the profile] would come along; some would stick out more than others. Every now and then, I look back and say to myself: This kid, and this kid, and this kid was probably dyslexic.

How have you become an advocate for early identification and intervention of children with reading delays?

As a teacher, I saw that there was all this attention put on 3rd, 4th, 5th grades; like 75 or 80 percent of the focus on academic support was on these grades. I went to my principal and I said: This is backwards. We're spending a lot more money—and getting a lot less bang for our buck—waiting. What do you think if we identify kids [who are at-risk readers] earlier, and I would work with them in small groups? So we funded it via our PTA about 10 years ago, and it's been funded that way at my site ever since.

California doesn't require universal dyslexia screening. What's your take on early screening to identify reading delays?

I've used screeners for a long time to identify which kids needed help. I use basic screeners that are free. DIBELS is free. There are other free screeners out there. If screeners were in place, it would most likely fix the issue that some kids can get to 3rd or 4th grade and are OK enough to have fooled a system like the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems. I see this all the time: students who suddenly in 3rd grade are struggling because the assessment changed to an accurate one; in this case, from F&P to the Reading Inventory.

What do teachers miss by not using screeners?

Because teachers have not been trained to use quick assessment measures such as screeners like DIBELS and other quick surveys like the CORE Phonics Survey or the BPST-3 (Basic Phonics Skills Test) that identify where the breakdowns are, they don't know specifically what the student is struggling with. Is it reading fluency, or is it vocabulary? Is it decoding words, or is it phonemic awareness?

Not all schools screen for dyslexia risk factors, but students do routinely take standardized assessments. What's the difference?

To do all this other testing takes much longer than a screener would. [Standardized tests are] not cheap. They have to hire subs, the teachers take a whole day off from work, the assessment takes anywhere from 30 to 40 minutes. And then the information they get isn't even great. There are plenty of kids who do fine according to standardized assessments, and when I test them on the screeners I use, they're not reading well.

Approximately 15 to 20 percent of students, depending on who you talk to, fall on the spectrum of dyslexia. And dyslexia isn't the only reason kids struggle to read. At our school, we get this list each year, at the end of kindergarten, and at the end of every year after that, of students who, according to the district's assessments, should be considered for Tier 2 intervention. One year there were only four kids on the list, from kindergarten through 2nd grade. Statistically, that's just not possible; it should be more like 30 or 40.

You teach literacy skills to Tier 2 students—those identified as at risk but not in special education. What does that look like?

How I teach reading is going to depend on what a student is having difficulty with. But it's

definitely going to involve a structured approach. They're not going to just 'pick it up.' My kids come out of here understanding why that "w" is in two and why that "g" is in sign and why no complete English word ends with a "v"; there's got to be an "e" after it. Until we're able to explain to students why things are the way they are, they're going to struggle. But screening is so important because we need to get started right away. ■

DYSLEXIA: Three Myths and What Teachers Can Do Now

By Louisa Moats, Ed.D.

Dyslexia means, by its Greek roots, difficulty with words. More specifically, dyslexia is an unexpected problem with accurate and efficient recognition of and spelling of printed words. It is to be distinguished from reading comprehension problems that may occur even though students can read the words reasonably well.

Dyslexia affects 5 percent–17 percent of all students—likely 1–2 in every classroom

Dyslexia is the most common type of developmental reading disability and one of the most studied of all learning disorders. Advocates have successfully urged leaders in more than 40 states to adopt rules and guidelines for the identification and treatment of dyslexia. Given prevalence estimates of about 5 percent–17 percent of all students, one or two who merit this descriptor are likely to be in every classroom. Thus, every teacher should be familiar with the nature of the disorder and how to teach children who are affected by it.

Myth #1

Dyslexia has a uniform set of symptoms.

One is that the term refers to a distinct and uniform set of symptoms. In fact, the only firm diagnostic criterion is that the student experiences significant difficulty reading and spelling words, out of context, in spite of reasonably good instruction.

The condition can range from mild forgetting and confusion to a severe inability to learn to read. Beyond that, individuals may also have coexisting problems with attention, memory, language comprehension, processing speed, and varying abilities or strengths in visual-spatial reasoning, problem solving, art, athletics, math, and so forth.

Myth #2

Dyslexia is a visual problem.

Another common myth about dyslexia is that it is a visually based disorder that requires vision therapies and/or remediation of "visual memory." A popular idea, reinforced in media, is people with dyslexia have directional confusion, see things backwards, or have a general problem with sequencing.

Voluminous research, however, points squarely to specific language processing difficulties as the culprit in faulty word recognition. Word recognition and spelling depend on the ability to notice, remember, and make sense of linguistic details in spoken and written language.

Linguistic abilities affected in dyslexia include problems recognizing and mentally manipulating individual speech sounds or phonemes, syllables, and/or meaningful parts of words (morphemes). Many students also have difficulty understanding grammatical elements in

sentences and aspects of text organization, including story structure and expository text conventions.

Myth #3
Dyslexia only affects highly intelligent or creative students.

A third myth is students with dyslexia are unusually creative or intelligent and must demonstrate average IQ or above to qualify for remedial services. In fact, dyslexia can occur at all levels of intellectual ability.

Some individuals have unusual talents and gifts, but most are typical people who have strengths and weaknesses. It is not true Albert Einstein had dyslexia, that dyslexia is a gift, or that students with dyslexia must be gifted. It is true that word-level reading problems require explicit, systematic instruction aimed at the language skills underlying reading, no matter the IQ of the individual.

Taking Aim at Language Abilities

Since learning to read words depends on linguistic awareness and knowledge of language forms and uses, effective instruction explicitly and systematically builds students' command of both word recognition and language comprehension. In a nutshell, here's how.

Phoneme Awareness

Many students with dyslexia struggle to accurately hear and separate speech sounds, which makes it difficult to map sounds to letters and store words in memory. Teachers must understand the 44 English speech sounds and how phonological skills develop so they can help students practice identifying, blending, and manipulating sounds, even in upper grades.

Orthographic (Spelling) Knowledge

Use a phonics survey to pinpoint what students know about sound–symbol correspondences. Teach explicitly using a well-designed Scope and Sequence so skills build logically. Pair phonics with spelling, provide decodable texts aligned to what's been taught, and gradually move to longer words by teaching syllable patterns and morphemes.

Oral and Written Language Comprehension

Language is learned through human interaction. Teacher talk, reading aloud, and classroom discussions about meaningful content support growth in vocabulary as well as higher-level language abilities such as understanding complex syntax, paragraph structure, and story grammar. These aspects of language comprehension can be addressed through shared reading even if a student can't yet read the words in the passage.

It's Called Structured Literacy

The term Structured Literacy is shorthand for the content and methods referred to here. What teachers should know and do to reach students with word-level reading and spelling problems is elaborated in the Center for Effective Reading Instruction's Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. *LANGUAGE! Live*® embodies that content and those methods, effective for all adolescent students with underdeveloped language and reading abilities.

Let's leave the myths behind and focus on providing the instruction that will work best for all students who have language-based problems with reading.

To learn more about dyslexia and Voyager Sopris Learning's science of reading-based solutions, visit: voyagersopris.com/dyslexia

Dr. Louisa Moats served on the board and as Vice President of the International Dyslexia Association, leading the development of its *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading.*

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How Teachers Can Help Students With Dyslexia: What Our Readers Say

By Hayley Hardison

"If you have dyslexia, you have a superpower," says Gaby Edwards, a speech language pathologist at The Odyssey School just outside Baltimore. "Because in order to be diagnosed with dyslexia, your cognitive skills or your intelligence level is extremely high. You have incredible capabilities."

Dyslexia is a processing disorder that hinders children's ability to read. Children with dyslexia typically struggle to relate sounds to letters and words, interfering with how they "decode," or lift words off the page when reading.

We asked our social media followers on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn what teachers can do to support their students with dyslexia. We broke down their responses into five main themes. Here's what they said.

More training for teachers

Estimates suggest about 3 percent to 7 percent of the population have dyslexia. Not all teachers are well equipped to help these students, commenters said.

"[W]e need to make sure that all teachers understand the way dyslexia works; what it impacts and what it does not. After all, how can students understand their condition if their teachers and schools do not understand it?" wrote 5th grade teacher Kyle Redford in a 2016 Education Week Opinion essay.

Commenters pointed to better teacher training on working with dyslexic students as a foundation to support them.

"Implement curriculum in college to teachers to learn what dyslexia is and is not! It's very frustrating as a parent, teaching teachers what dyslexia is and how they can help my child. As my child got older, she took over this role."
— *Erin F. S.*

"Have teachers understand the term dyslexia is an umbrella that could mean central auditory processing issues, visual discrimination issues, depth perception issues

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and then have access to diagnostic tests to identify which one student is dealing with and strategies to support students dependent on their learning disability."
— *Peta N.*

Employ the 'science of reading'

Education Week reporter Sarah Schwartz has extensively covered the "science of reading" movement, which pushes for the implementation of an evidence-backed approach to teaching kids how to read.

"In brief, the science of reading embraces the systematic, explicit teaching of sounds and letters. While [students] learn how to crack the code, [they] are also introduced to rich stories and texts that build their background knowledge. Eventually, teachers help students weave these skills together like strands in a rope, allowing them to read more complex texts," Sarah wrote last July.

More than half the states now mandate a "science of reading" approach to early literacy. The literacy movement has been bolstered by parents of children with dyslexia, who advocate for explicit instruction in phonics, noting that the practice—while crucial for dyslexic students—helps all children learn to read.

EdWeek's social media followers echoed their support for this approach in helping dyslexic students.

"Learn about the science of reading and how instruction and practice aligned to the body of evidence can make a huge difference for those with dyslexia. Advocate for early screening and intervention. Prioritize early literacy as a school/system to ensure kids with dyslexia have access to the instruction they need to achieve literacy in the early grades."
— *Megan L. P.*

"Make learning to decode words as multi-sensory as possible to activate more areas of the brain. Let them use speech to text to get their ideas down without having to try to struggle how to spell words, read aloud text to them, let them use spell check & word prediction software."
— *@Michellspedtchr*

Advocate for universal dyslexia screening

Proponents of universal screening for dyslexia in the early grades argue that it helps curb the need for interventions for students later in school, and research supports this claim.

EdWeek reporter Elizabeth Heubeck recently wrote about researchers' findings that "[e]arly identification of struggling readers and subsequent prevention programs can reduce by up to 70 percent the number of children placed in special education ... [and] [i]nterventions for struggling readers that start in 4th grade take four times longer than those that start in late kindergarten."

Commenters seconded the importance of universal screening for dyslexia in the early grades as a pillar of support for dyslexic students.

"Teachers need training about dyslexia and to use universal screening to identify struggling students as early as possible. Early intervention is crucial for students with dyslexia! A structured literacy approach & using evidence-based interventions & instruction is needed."
— *@melbrethour*

"They should advocate for universal screening and early intervention in their districts. Dyslexic students need structured literacy interventions asap! Teachers should also learn about dyslexia and how to best support their students."
— *@RachelDelCarlo1*

Provide accommodations

"Teachers also need to know about the powerful role that accommodations and supports can play in unleashing the capacity of

dyslexic students to thrive. Simple tools and adjustments like employing audiobooks, using speech-to-text and predictive spelling apps, and allowing extra time on assessments can be game-changers for students with dyslexia," wrote teacher Kyle Redford in his EdWeek Opinion essay.

Commenters responding to our query echoed that sentiment, highlighting how useful simple accommodations can be in supporting students with dyslexia.

"The interventions others have mentioned are key. But teachers also need to support the accommodations. There are amazing tech options that empower students. Text-to-speech, annotation, editing to mention a few. Districts need to make it easy for students to access these and teachers/schools need to set up and implement systems for students to access the content digitally (and I am not talking about telling kids to take photos of the work) so they can actually use their accommodations."
— *Debbie A. C.*

Employ tech tools wisely

Ed tech has made its way into various facets of education. Most educators responding to an EdWeek Research Center survey reported feeling invigorated by the use of these tools in the 2023-24 school year.

The jury is still out on many uses of educational technology, including for students with dyslexia, but some commenters offered up tech-tool suggestions. Here are some examples.

"Aside from all the things we can do, not sure if everyone knows about OpenText. It's a Google extension that, when turned on, uses enhanced font for assisting reading for dyslexics in all docs and websites. Have a student who said it does make reading a bit easier."
— *Donna B. R.*

"Allow them to use text-to-speech programs like Bookshare so they can keep up on their reading assignments."
— *@anntirrell*

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Schools for Students With Dyslexia Also Promote Social Emotional Resilience. Here's How

By Elizabeth Heubeck

The research on how students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences learn to read is well-documented. Evidence-based approaches, such as structured literacy, are increasingly making their way into a growing number of schools—especially those designed expressly to serve dyslexic students. But they're not the only way that these specially designed schools are preparing students for future success.

Intentionally built into the day at many of these private and public schools for dyslexic students are opportunities to grow "soft skills" like self-awareness, competence, and confidence. At first glance, such opportunities may seem to have nothing to do with literacy per se. But they but are often integrated into the school day with as much intent as the most systematic and intensive reading instruction, and some school leaders argue that they are critical students' long-term success.

"People think it's all about instruction," said Timothy Castanza, co-founder and executive director of The Bridge Preparatory Charter School in the Staten Island borough of New York city. "Kids who come here have had a really bad experience in school. They've experienced sadness, anger, frustration ... We spend a lot of time on culture, and on building a culture of acceptance, and elevating students' voices."

Castanza and other leaders of schools for students with dyslexia and literacy challenges share some of these strategies—unique, sometimes fun, and always deliberate—that promote self-awareness, build confidence, and support literacy competence.

Jaclyn Borowski/Education Week

Students in a hiking club take an early morning walk around the Odyssey School grounds in Lutherville, Md., with Outreach Program Coordinator Kate McElderry, before the start of the school day.

Building self-awareness, self-esteem

"Students' self-awareness and self-esteem are every bit as important as literacy," said Martha H. Sweeney, head of The Odyssey School, a private school in a Baltimore, Md., suburb for students with dyslexia and other language-learning differences.

Many of these students, prior to enrolling at such specialized schools, developed little to no self-esteem because they struggled academically. Now, they participate in activities designed to build students' awareness of their natural capabilities and passions—and in turn, boost their self-esteem.

Students at Odyssey join special-interest clubs that take place before the academic day begins. This means they find themselves hiking through their sprawling wooded campus, knitting, building robots with classmates, or exploring any number of other interests.

Pursuing individual passions takes an even more focused turn in 7th grade, when each student participates in "genius hour," where for the entirety of the academic year they pursue a chosen area of study, create a project related to that passion, and eventually showcase what they've learned in an event open to faculty, families, and classmates.

"We've had students learn how to make sushi, make a dunking booth, or learn a new approach to [constructing] a ballet shoe," said Sweeney.

At the Pittsburgh-based Provident Charter School, which serves 330 students with dyslexia and other language-based disorders in 2nd through 8th grades, every student takes taekwondo, a form of martial arts, as a "special"—just like art, music, or physical education.

"The school founder wrote taekwondo into the charter [as part of the curriculum]. He is dyslexic, as are his two children, and he recognized the benefits," said Maria Paluselli, the school's chief executive officer, who explained that the practice instills self-control, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment in participants.

It also shares unique similarities to literacy, explained Paluselli, in that it teaches patterns and sequences.

Creating awareness of positive traits and possibilities

"We talk a lot about the 'dyslexic advantage'," said Rebecca Thompson, director of academic services at ALLIES Elementary (which stands for Academy for Literacy, Learning, and Innovation Excellence), a public school in Colorado Springs, Colo., serving students with dyslexia in grades 2 to 5.

There are plenty such advantages, some of which include a strong propensity toward spatial reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and empathizing, according to educational researchers at the University of Michigan.

Introducing students to adults with dyslexia who have harnessed such strengths and subsequently achieved great success can inspire children who have experienced intense feelings of defeat when unable to learn to read alongside their general education classmates.

At Bridge Preparatory, classrooms are named after famous people with dyslexia so that students are constantly reminded of what's possible. Odyssey routinely brings to campus dyslexic guests, some of whom have achieved fame, to talk with students about their personal and professional journeys. This year, they welcomed Mark Stoddart, an internationally reputed sculptor from Scotland who has severe dyslexia. Students also recently enjoyed a virtual visit from Bryan Perla, the 23-year-old founder and CEO of Little ELF Products, Inc., an e-commerce and retail gift wrap solutions company, and a graduate of Stanford with an engineering degree. He, too, has dyslexia.

Sweeney noted that the school also makes an effort to bring alumni back to school to talk with students. "It's really valuable to our students to see previous students who have taken what they learned from Odyssey and moved forward," she said.

The school also works hard to ensure that students are ready to move on at the end of 8th grade. Most graduates attend mainstream high schools.

"When they come here, they wonder why they're more challenged by reading than their peers," Sweeney said. "We help them understand that they think a little differently, but that they are perfect just the way they are. Every child here hears that many times over. When they develop competence [in reading], they know it." ■

Advertisement

Dyslexia Awareness & Support Checklist

Supporting students with dyslexia begins with awareness, understanding, and intentional action. This checklist offers practical guidance to help educators recognize the impact of dyslexia, advocate for meaningful accommodations, and create inclusive learning environments across all disciplines.

Recognizing the Role of Literacy

- ☐ **Reflect** on how daily life involves reading and writing (e.g., road signs, emails, books).
- ☐ **Understand** literacy skills are essential across all aspects of life and education.
- ☐ **Acknowledge** students with dyslexia often face challenges in reading and writing.

Understanding Dyslexia

- ☐ **Know** dyslexia is the most common learning disability.
- ☐ **Recognize** dyslexia affects individuals across all demographics.
- ☐ **Accept** dyslexia impacts students daily—not just during Dyslexia Awareness Month.

Importance of Accommodations

- ☐ **Understand** accommodations provide access to curriculum and learning.
- ☐ **Recognize** accommodations are not cheating—they level the academic playing field.
- ☐ **Advocate** for accommodations across all disciplines and staff members.

Types of Accommodations

- ☐ **Instructional** or test adaptations that maintain academic standards.
- ☐ **Presentation** accommodations (e.g., visual aids, audiobooks).
- ☐ **Response** accommodations (e.g., speech-to-text, extended time).
- ☐ **Setting** accommodations (e.g., quiet environments).
- ☐ **Organizational** supports (e.g., graphic organizers).
- ☐ **Testing** accommodations (e.g., alternate formats).

Assistive Technology

- ☐ **Use** low-tech tools (e.g., highlighters, reading guides).
- ☐ **Use** high-tech tools (e.g., digital highlighters, audiobooks, speech-to-text).
- ☐ **Match** technology to student needs and tasks.

Educator Responsibilities

- ☐ **Apply** accommodations intentionally and mindfully.
- ☐ **Teach** students how to use accommodations effectively.
- ☐ **Integrate** tools into lessons and explain their purpose.
- ☐ **Guide** students in reflecting about how accommodations help.
- ☐ **Empower** students to advocate for their needs.

When educators understand, teach, and advocate for accommodations, they empower students with dyslexia to access learning, build confidence, and thrive. Voyager Sopris Learning® offers science-based solutions and programs designed to support educators and students at every step.

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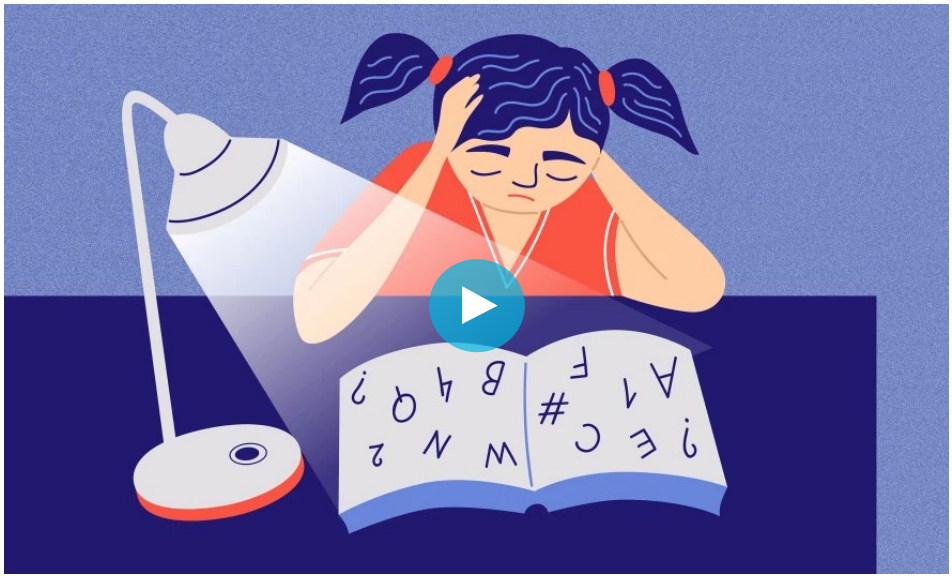

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What Do Students With Dyslexia Need From Schools? Two Experts Weigh In

By Elizabeth Heubeck

As many as 15 to 20 percent of students show some symptoms of dyslexia, such as inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words, according to the International Dyslexia Association.

But the number of symptoms and the degree of their severity vary widely among affected students. So too does the knowledge, training, and resources that schools have at their disposal to address it. But awareness around dyslexia is increasing among educators, who are looking for deeper understanding about this complicated neurological-based disorder.

In a webinar earlier this month, Education Week featured two seasoned educators who have dedicated their careers to creating pathways to literacy for students with dyslexia. Maria Paluselli is chief executive officer of Provident Charter School in Pittsburgh, which serves students in grades 2 through 8 with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences. Doug Rich is a math and reading interventionist at McKinley Elementary School in San Francisco, and the parent of two sons with dyslexia.

In a fascinating conversation with these experts, Paluselli and Rich shared insights they've gleaned through their decades of work in this field—from the frustrations experienced by students with dyslexia and their families when the disorder goes undiagnosed, to the demanding and intensive interventions that enable students with dyslexia to crack the reading code.

During the webinar, Rich shared his own educational journey toward understanding dyslexia as both a parent and a reading interventionist in an elementary school. "I kept discovering layers. This is not a three-hour or a day-long or even a week-long training," he said. "There is so much to learn about our writing system."

The complexity of dyslexia underscores why, as Paluselli aptly observed, "these really bright people don't understand why school is so dang hard for them."

Hear from these two educators as they discuss how to recognize early warning signs of dyslexia; the key components of effective intervention; what schools designed for students with the disorder include, and what they purposefully omit; and more. ■

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Educating Dyslexic Students Starts With Educating Teachers About Dyslexia

Understanding the science of reading is a necessary starting point

By Robin Zikmund

F. Sheehan for Education Week / Getty

I am a mom of a child who has been misunderstood and unsupported in our public school system for more than a decade.

I sent my child off to kindergarten full of excitement. Soon into his school days, my happy, outgoing, confident kid became withdrawn, scared, and anxious. Getting him out the door to school became a challenge.

Full of worry, I reached out to our schools and began to ask questions. The teachers reassured me with common phrases: Relax, give it time, he's a boy, some kids take longer to develop. But I knew in my gut that something wasn't right. My story will be familiar to every parent of a child with dyslexia—a story I hope that no other parents will have to share in the future.

I trusted my son's educators. In fact, I cared very much for them and I could feel their genuine care for me and my son. I trusted they knew and understood what was best to teach my son how to read. They are the ones who studied to become teachers—surely, they know best.

But it quickly became clear that my son's teachers felt as lost as educators as I did as a parent. It didn't make sense to any of us why learning was so difficult for my son. He was bright, his vocabulary was beyond that of his peers, and his abilities in some areas came with ease. Why was he struggling with reading?

I now have a plaque on my desk that says, "A Worried Mother Does Better Research Than The FBI," and it's so true. I was deeply concerned for my son, so I dove into research.

I came across a dyslexia screener; my son checked every box. The more I learned, the more I understood my son. I went to his teachers and was surprised to discover they didn't have any real knowledge of this common learning disability. My son's teachers told me their college-prep programs hadn't included a single course covering these learning disabilities—disabilities that are covered under federal law.

Multiple special education teachers even told me they were not allowed to call it dyslexia—years after the U.S. Department of Education issued specific guidance correcting that common reluctance. (In 2015, the department's office of special education and rehabilitative services released a letter to state and local educational administrators to "clarify that there is nothing in the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP [individualized education program] documents.")

I was confused as to why any teacher would graduate with a degree prepared to teach our youth without a basic knowledge of how to meet the needs of this population of students. Far too many special education teachers leave their universities without the skills to effectively teach reading to children with dyslexia.

By 3rd grade, my son became so withdrawn and full of anxiety and said words no parent should have to hear. "What's wrong with me? I just want to kill myself, Mom." My son's academic struggles quickly expanded to a larger concern for his mental health. I realized our education system was not set up to support students like him. Instead, it is often even detrimental to their well-being.

Imagine going to work each day only to struggle with all the tasks that your colleagues can do with ease; that's what it's like for our children with dyslexia.

I am passionate about changing the narrative that labels students with dyslexia as "troublemakers." These children are often seen as lazy, fidgety, and unwilling to focus. It is no surprise they then develop anxiety and depression at higher rates than their peers. Early intervention is key.

I am incredibly grateful there is a light shining on the literacy crisis across our nation. Over the years advocating for awareness and appropriate training for our teachers and effective instruction for all children, I have been fortunate to meet many educators that I would call leaders of change: teachers who follow their instincts and are willing to do whatever it takes to help their students. They ask hard questions of their leaders and do their own research to learn what they may not know. These educators may not know it, but they are the heroes in the lives of many students.

My son has had many teachers eager to meet him where he was, but their access to training and resources was limited. In four short years, he will graduate from high school. If we had left things in the hands of our public school system alone, he would be graduating

with a reading level below 3rd grade.

My son is one of the fortunate ones; my family was in a position to hire a dyslexic specialist who started working with my son this past January, in his 8th grade year. In just three short months, the specialist made more progress with him than his school had in a decade. But the cost was more than many families can afford.

Our teachers deserve to attend preparation programs that give them the knowledge and understanding of this common learning disability. Any teacher seeking certification in special education or a master's degree in literacy certainly deserves to understand the science of reading. They deserve to know the five early-reading components defined by the 2000 National Reading Panel report: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Change needs to start at the university level in our teacher-prep programs.

I am incredibly grateful for the growing attention the media, many states and school districts, parents, and teachers are giving to our national literacy crisis and the endless work that is being done by the change-makers in education.

To the parents out there of a struggling child, know you are not alone, never question your gut instincts. They are almost always right.

To all the teachers and administrators, join the leaders of change and lead from where you are. Changes are coming. ■

Robin Zikmund is the mother of a rising 9th grader with dyslexia, ADHD, and dysgraphia. She is the founder of the Decoding Dyslexia Idaho chapter and a dyslexia advocate for the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education, an organization dedicated to providing effective structured literacy professional development for all teachers.

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