

The “Dear Colleague Letter: Dyslexia Guidance” dated October 23, 2015. Here is the link to where the guidance can be found on the website of the U.S. Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf>

I have had many challenges in working with our school district. I have been told by the assistant principal in an eligibility meeting as well as the eligibility coordinator that dyslexia and dysgraphia are “not recognized by the school district,” dyslexia “is just an umbrella term,” dyslexia “does not exist,” dyslexia “is a medical issue,” and neither dyslexia nor dysgraphia “are not something schools are required to diagnose or address.” I was told it thar dyslexia was controversial and instead of a reading disability my child had ADHD and messy handwriting. As a result, my son was denied eligibility in 2nd grade and we were forced to hire an attorney, get private testing done, and request an admin review. Meanwhile, my son was being “triple dipped” with the same balanced literacy programs and met with the reading specialist, ELL teacher, and his own general education teacher. He was not given anything to help remediate or help to accommodate his dysgraphia. They wasted several years and my son fell further and further behind. We finally we able to get him found eligible. However, the problems continued because we were told in IEP meetings that schools are “not required to put the term dyslexia or dysgraphia into IEPs.”

Now let's skip to 6th and 7th grade after years of failed efforts at reading instruction (because more of the same methodology did not work..I mean really, if something has been proven not to work after 3-4 years why continue on the same path and double down on ineffective instruction?), we continue to be told that we may not discuss or include “specific methodologies” in an IEP to address our children’s reading struggles. My child was placed in a “reading strategies” class in 6th and 7th grade with children with different needs may even fall under the same Specific Learning Disability “umbrella,” while others may have disabilities that fall within entirely different IDEA disability categories. Children with dyslexia then receive interventions that are neither peer-reviewed, evidence based, nor targeted to their specific, individual challenges. Moreover, even when my child did receive a structured literacy different approach (which finally happened in 6th grade), the licensed sped teacher is completely unfamiliar with the structured literacy program and it is not done with fidelity in terms of materials, duration and frequency. They mix it up with “blended learning” balanced literacy software...there is no consistency. It is a mess. In addition, our district insists that the teachers are “trained” in a certain tier 3 structured literacy program after a 3

day workshop from a district “lead teacher” who has only had a 3 day workshop herself! This is completely misleading and harmful because now you are wasting the middle school years. Time is NOT on our children’s side. I haven't even mentioned all of the issues with Assistive technology which are plentiful.

This guidance is extremely important because it addresses these concerns with the schools at the district and state level. It came out in October 2015 when my child was in the 6th grade. Even then, we still had a difficult time because it is merely “guidance” and the district was unfamiliar with what it meant for the IEP. Everything takes so much time...it is like turning around the Titanic. There is so much resistance on all levels.

This guidance doesn’t change law or require anything different than what is provided in IDEA. The term “dyslexia” is explicitly included in the IDEA as an example of a “specific learning disability.” Accordingly, the use of the term does not affect faithful application of the individualized determinations the IDEA requires. The statutory and regulatory provisions of the IDEA remain unchanged.

While I am unable to really know, because we do not have a time travel machine, I can only imagine if this guidance had come out in 2011 when my child was in 2nd grade... perhaps he would have been found eligible from the beginning, received structured literacy, Assistive technology would not have been such a fight with the district. Perhaps he wouldn't have developed a secondary emotional diagnosis of anxiety due to having to consistently told to advocate and then be consistently denied appropriate reading instruction, Assistive technology (which we have paid for it all and had to teach teachers how to use even though our district is one of the richest districts, has a fully staffed AT department...but they refuse to do AT Evals and do not come to IEP meetings) and accommodations. Perhaps we would not have had to unilaterally place him into a private school due to the district not providing FAPE, pay for therapy due to his anxiety, pay for private OG tutoring 3 to 4 times a week, pay for an advocate, pay for an attorney, pay for a summer camp for intensive OG instruction for remediation this past summer.

Since we have pulled him out and provided him the correct instruction and remediation with fidelity his word attack, decoding skills, Reading rate, fluency and comprehension has gone from 2nd and 3rd grade to 5th and 6th grade depending on which psych testing scores you are comparing. My son does not show any signs of anxiety now that he is getting the correct instruction and appropriate structured literacy instruction.

He is able to use his AT and teachers work with him to find the best fit for the class. He is being “provided” his accommodations without having to remind or consistently request from teachers. On the rare occasion where something is not working and he advocates for himself he is not berated nor made fun of by the teacher in a classroom full of students. The huge difference between the public and private school is that the private school is not afraid to use the words dyslexia and dysgraphia. It is not taboo. This private school specifically caters to students with learning disabilities. The diagnosis gives the students a name...it helps to narrow down strategies and teaching approaches. It should not be “the disability that shall not be named.”

This guidance provides clarity to misconceptions that have been propagated by districts and state’s education systems for years. The use of the term “dyslexia” and “dysgraphia” in an IEP is necessary, because it permits parents, students, educators, and experts to “speak the same language.” Reading Failure is alarming in the country and this guidance is a tool in helping parents and educators provide an appropriate education. Please consider keeping the guidance. Please do not take this guidance and advocacy tool away from our children. Please do not dismantle our progress piece by piece. Help to protect our children, they have been through and suffered enough.