

DYSLEXIA Talking Points

Decoding Dyslexia Maryland



What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological 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. Adopted by the IDA Board of Directors, Nov. 12, 2002. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) uses this definition, as do many state education codes, including New Jersey, Ohio and Utah.

Characteristics of Effective Reading Instruction

Teaching the structure of language shows positive results for students with learning disabilities as well as culturally and linguistically diverse students. An effective, evidence proven approach to teach struggling readers, termed **structured literacy**, is marked by several elements and principles. Elements: phonology, sound symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax and semantics. Principles of Instruction: systematic, sequential, explicit, comprehensive, and individually diagnostic and prescriptive. Brain scans of students with reading difficulties show that the brain can be re-wired using a structured literacy approach to teach reading and writing (Norton, Gabrieli, Wolf, 2016).

Which Students Can Benefit from Structured Literacy?

- **Struggling Readers in Response to Intervention in K-2** (general education students). In 2016, Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College & Career (PARCC 2016) results showed that **60% of all students in Maryland read below grade level**. Similarly, 2015 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data revealed that **63% of Maryland students are below proficient in reading**. Maryland community colleges report that students are not college ready and those who enroll in remedial courses in English are more likely to drop out of college.
- **Economically Disadvantaged Students** – 82% of MD 4th grade low-income students read below proficient (NAEP 2015) and 78% of low-income 4th grade students read below grade level as measured by the PARCC 2016.
- **English Learners (culturally & linguistically diverse students)** – 97% of 4th grade MD English Learners (EL) are below grade level in reading (PARCC 2016) and 93% of ELs are below proficient according to NAEP 2015.
- **Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)/Dyslexia** – SLD is the largest disability category of students with disabilities (SWD) in MD who receive special education. 89% of MD 4th grade SWD read below proficient on NAEP 2015 and on PARCC 2016 91.4% read below grade level.

Immediate Policy Solutions to Improve Reading Outcomes in Maryland

- **Require Universal Early Identification of Dyslexia**. MD statistics show that special education identification increases in 4th grade after a student fails. Dyslexia is identifiable using simple screening tests in Kindergarten ([Final Report of the Legislative Task Force to Study Implementation of a Dyslexia Education Program \(Dyslexia Task Force\)](#))
- **Transform Maryland Teacher Preparation in Reading at the Undergraduate, Graduate and Professional Development Levels**. 20 years of NAEP results show that a segment of students is not learning to read in public schools. “Professional preparation programs have a responsibility to teach a defined body of knowledge, skills and abilities that are based on the best research in the field.” (AFT, *Reading is Rocket Science*: Adams, 1990; Pressley, 1998; Osborn & Lehr, 1998; Moats, 2009 & *Dyslexia Task Force Recommendation #5*)

Why Should Policy Makers and Educators Care about Reading Reform?

The costs of reading failure are extraordinary and these costs begin with emotional, financial and downstream socio-economic impacts on individuals and communities. Young students believe they are stupid – they read less and struggle more than their peers; and those without a support system at home often end up as a statistic in the school-to-prison pipeline. Some academics like to say that poor readers “lack motivation” and just need to read more; but if you talk to parents they will tell you their children work harder than their peers. Motivation is one symptom of a crisis in Maryland’s teacher preparation programs. Teachers often report that they “never learned about dyslexia and they don’t know how to teach struggling students to read.” **What is really needed?** A change in the approach and practice of teacher education in reading instruction in Maryland university teacher preparation programs, along with state and district-wide professional learning that focuses on the science of reading and the principles of effective instruction.