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Spotlight On: Decoding Dyslexia Maryland (DDMD)

On August 20th, members of the MD Dyslexia Task Force: Laura Schultz, DDMD State leader, and Special Ed teachers Lavaunda Roundtree and Robin Szymanski, addressed the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (**Kirwan Commission**). See <https://youtube.com/watch?v=hkf-36c3Pzs>). The six major Task Force recommendations include: recognizing and addressing the needs of dyslexics in all settings; implementing a universal screening protocol in kindergarten; creating an integrated, tiered system of supports across all districts; providing evidence-based Structured Literacy instruction for all beginning readers; making substantive changes to pre-service and in-service teacher training programs; and implementing a scalable Dyslexia Pilot Program model with accountability. In November, 2016, a collaborative effort between the office of the Assistant State Superintendent of Special

Phonological Awareness: Reading's Essential Foundation

*"I walked into the kindergarten classroom, and there it was, the alphabet chart complete with pictures to represent the sounds. The idea is consistent with research: connect letters with sounds through the use of keywords. The picture selection, however, reflected a poor application of the concept with an oyster for the letter *o* and a shark for the letter *s*, among others. With this predominant visual in the classroom, I had to question the teacher's knowledge of phonemic awareness and its importance in early reading."*

-E.M., McLean, VA



According to the International Dyslexia Association's Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading (K&PS),

"Phonological awareness, basic print concepts, and knowledge of letter sounds are important foundational areas of literacy for all students. Ample research exists to inform teaching of phonological awareness, including research on the phonological skills to emphasize in instruction, appropriate sequencing of instruction, and integrating instruction in phonological awareness with instruction in alphabet knowledge. Poor phonological awareness is a core weakness for students with dyslexia. Without early, research-based intervention, children who struggle in these areas are likely to continue to have reading difficulties. It is important for teachers to understand how to teach these foundational skills, especially to effectively prevent or ameliorate many children's reading problems, including those of students with dyslexia."

DDMD Update, cont.

Education and Early Intervention, the Education Advocacy Coalition, and DDMD created the **Dyslexia Technical Assistance Bulletin (TAB)**, an invaluable tool for parents. The Maryland Dyslexia TAB uses the IDA's definitions and includes warning signs of and identification criteria for dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. The TAB also specifies which school-based and outside personnel can identify dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. To help school teams #saydyslexia, the Maryland online IEP form has a drop-down menu that lists dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia for students identified with these learning differences in Maryland. Furthermore, the TAB clarifies and emphasizes the authority that teachers, special educators, and administrators now have to use the term *dyslexia* in IEPs, and to provide effective instruction. The TAB also lists the elements and principles of structured literacy, which is evidence-based instruction for dyslexic students. To download a copy of the TAB, visit: <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/TAB/MDTABulletinSLD.pdf>. Concerned, active parents have recently launched DDMD chapters in **Frederick County** and **Charles County** and have asked their **Boards of Education** to begin identifying dyslexia in students and providing Structured Literacy interventions. See http://www.localdvm.com/news/i-270/decoding-dyslexia-frederick-chapter-speaks-out/805704383?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook_WDVM and <http://www.ccboe.com/ccboetv/?videos=board-of-education-meeting-october-10-2017>.

So what exactly is phonological awareness?

Phonological awareness (PA) is a metacognitive skill that allows one to attend to, discriminate, remember, and manipulate **sounds** of oral language at the sentence, word, syllable, and phoneme (letter sound) level. An important aspect of PA is *phonemic awareness*, or the ability to segment a word into its component phonemes. The alphabet chart described above uses the skill of phonemic awareness: each of the pictures should begin with the most common letter sound. A better picture for o would have been *octopus* and for s, *snake*.

Teaching PA begins with teachers knowing the 45 English speech sounds and their letter pairings, and producing these sounds accurately for students. Teachers almost universally report never learning about PA in college and graduate school. Publishing companies likewise do not always understand the importance of correct phonemic representation, and they typically produce inadequate and sometimes incorrect classroom materials (see list of IDA accredited teacher training programs).

What classroom strategies can be used to directly teach phonological awareness?

When teachers engage students in rhyming, alliteration, or syllabication activities, they are addressing PA. These activities are done at the oral language level, well before instruction in the sound-symbol correspondences. Research indicates there is a hierarchy of PA skills (Adams 1990 – Birsh 2nd Edition):

1.) *Developing an Ear for Rhymes:*

Just listening to rhymes helps students develop an ear for like units of language. More advanced children can provide a rhyme if the teacher pauses at the end of a line: "I saw Pete take a walk on the (street, road, sand). He held a rose over his (neck, arm, nose) and carried a sack on his (arm, back, head).

2.) *Matching Words by Alliteration and Rhyme*

This skill is often taught by playing games such as 'odd man out' where students are given objects, or pictures of objects, such as a bird, ball, basket, and cat. By listening to the initial sound of words, students identify which one doesn't belong. Similar activities can be done with rhymes – which word doesn't rhyme – king, swing, ring, swan?

3.) *Partial Phoneme Segmentation*

Segmenting phonemes involves breaking words apart into onset and rime: /f/+at/. For more severe dyslexics, the post-vowel segmentation method is recommended: /fa/+t/.

4.) *Full Phoneme Segmentation*

When children are at this stage of the hierarchy, generally they are ready for formal reading instruction. They would be able to count the sounds in the word "mat", for example, as three sounds: /m/+a/+t/.

Next Steps: Another Dyslexia Family Networking Forum!

For a child with a Specific Learning Disability such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia, a knowledgeable parent working behind the scenes is often key to success in school. On **Sunday, November 19, from 10:30AM to 3:00PM at Chelsea School** in Hyattsville, MD, **DCIDA**, along with partners **DDMD** and **LDA-MC**, will host a forum featuring experts and informed parents who know the challenges parents face trying to "figure it out."



Disability Rights Attorney, **Nicole Joseph**, will discuss a range of legal and practical advocacy strategies. **Laura Schultz** (DDMD) will explain how parents can use the TAB when dealing with teachers and administrators. **Amy Siracusano**, a special ed teacher, will discuss screening, Structured Literacy, and the importance of diagnostic and prescriptive teaching. **Laurie Moloney**, **CALT** will describe specific interventions that can dramatically improve outcomes for severe dyslexics. Please join us for this information-sharing, support, and community-building event. Visit www.eventbrite.com/e/next-steps-a-dyslexia-family-networking-forum-tickets-38900334949 to register.

movements to reinforce this skill. A teacher may give a word – “stomp” – and children can tap fingers, take steps, bounce a ball, etc., to indicate the number of sounds (5) while sound segmenting. One of the most common methods teachers use to both encourage and assess this reading readiness stage is through invented spelling. Students’ use of invented spelling begins the process of mapping sounds to letters. Students unable to use invented spelling may be at risk.

5.) *Manipulation of Phonemes*

According to research, nonreaders will only rarely reach this most complex level of phonemic awareness. At this stage, children are able to delete or exchange phonemes. For example, a teacher may tell a student to add /b/ to the beginning of ‘lack’ to get ‘black’ or change the /k/ sound in ‘desk’ to /t/ to get the nonsense word ‘dest’.

Is Instruction in Phonological Awareness Only for Kids with Dyslexia?

Research indicates that all students benefit from instruction in phonological awareness and that a little bit of phonemic instruction goes a long way. However, weaknesses in this area are highly correlated with reading disabilities. In school, when phonemic awareness is taught, it is often not taught beyond the first grade. With many schools waiting to identify dyslexia until the 3rd grade or later, even remediation programs and IEP goals do not always include phonemic awareness instruction as it is not considered part of the grade level curriculum.

Assessment of Phonemic Awareness

Classroom teachers can perform informal assessments of phonemic awareness through observation of a student’s invented spelling. In kindergarten, children should be beginning to match the first letter of words with the sound. Children who do not use invented spelling are at risk. Many standardized tests used in evaluating a child for special education services include a screen or, ideally, an in-depth assessment of a child’s phonemic awareness skills. An evaluation of phonemic awareness ability is usually a component of diagnosing dyslexia.

For parents of a child with dyslexia or concerns about the child’s reading progress, asking teachers about the child’s phonemic awareness abilities is an indicator of whether these skills are being addressed in the classroom. In general, phonemic awareness is not taught after grade 1, yet a child with dyslexia may need explicit, systematic instruction in this area in order to fully remediate a reading disability. Academic Language Therapists and Dyslexia Therapists have specialized training in phonemic awareness, and instruction in this area is included in most Structured Literacy programs. Whether a ‘reading tutor’ can provide such specialized instruction is a question parents should address when seeking such intervention. Parents should ask about the tutor’s credentials, including training course, practicum/mentoring, certification, and fidelity to the scope and sequence of an evidence-based intervention.

Reference - *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*, Judith R. Birsh, Brookes Publishing; 3 edition (June 20, 2011).

This is How Schools Fail Dyslexic Students

APM Education reporter **Emily Hanford** has produced an extraordinary account of how schools across the nation and in our area fail dyslexic students. Listen to the podcast here: <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2017/09/11/hard-to-read>. Then join your local DDMD group and get involved! **Sign up today:** <https://www.decodingdyslexiamd/join>

WYPR in Baltimore recently featured Emily Hanford and Decoding Dyslexia MD member Pamela Guest in a radio interview with Sheilah Kast. Listen to the interview here: <http://wypr.org/post/underserved-and-undiagnosed-students-dyslexia>

Running Until Everyone Can Read

What does running, run-walking, power-walking, and walking have to do with reading disabilities remediation, teacher training and certification, and support for dyslexics and their families? Everything, according to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). To raise dyslexia awareness and to promote the use of evidence-based instructional solutions in school systems and colleges of education, the IDA launched its **TeamQuest** initiative in November, 2015. TeamQuest is an endurance training and fundraising program. No matter what fitness level, participants can train for a rewarding and exciting endurance event at one of the great destination events worldwide while raising money to help children and adults with dyslexia. Participants receive a customized training plan, ongoing coaching, event lodging, a TeamQuest logo singlet, pre-race dinner, and post-race party, among other perks. This is a great way to make new friends, improve your level of fitness, explore a new city, have a lot of fun, and accomplish what you may never have thought possible for yourself and struggling readers.



DCIDA board members and friends participated in the *Potomac River Towpath TeamQuest Solidarity Walk* on May 21, 2017 – concurrent with the TeamQuest Cleveland Marathon, where IDA members from branches around the nation ran to raise awareness of the prevalence of dyslexia.

TeamQuest Marathon and Half-Marathon events currently scheduled include San Antonio, TX on December 3rd; Phoenix-Scottsdale-Tempe, AZ on January 14th; New Orleans, LA on March 4th; Washington, DC on March 10th; and San Diego, CA on June 2-3, 2018. Join us and make a difference in your life and the lives of others!

To learn more, visit: <http://teamquestdyslexia.org> or email dcida.lmoloney@gmail.com