

This is written in strong support of dyslexia legislation in Connecticut. Because of the prevalence of Specific Learning Disabilities in general, and dyslexia, specifically, it is crucial that Connecticut education regulations, policies, and procedures reflect the need to provide early intervention and appropriate, research-based educational treatment for those who struggle with literacy skill development. It is also important that Connecticut legislation clearly state that dyslexia must be identified and supported in the public schools as required by law. United States federal special education law, IDEA 2004, defines Specific Learning Disabilities as follows:

20 USC Sec. 1401 (30) Specific learning disability

(A) In general

The term "specific learning disability" means a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

(B) Disorders included: Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Dyslexia is included under the category of Specific Learning Disabilities as defined in federal legislation. It is interesting to note that this definition has been in place since the first special education legislation, PL94-142. Despite this fact, many school systems and professionals seem confused about Specific Learning Disabilities and dyslexia. Parents report that they are told that schools 'do not test for dyslexia' or 'dyslexia is not covered in special education plans,' despite the longstanding wording to the contrary in state and federal special education laws. Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disabilities in Reading and/or Written Language should be clearly understood, diagnosed, and treated educationally (by providing specially designed instruction together with accommodations) in the public school system, as defined and mandated in federal and state laws.

Dyslexia is very common, as decades of research have shown. In Connecticut, the majority of identified special education students are students with Specific Learning Disabilities or dyslexia. Dyslexia is prevalent, affecting as many as 1 in 5 who have average or above average intellectual potential but struggle to learn to read and spell.

"Dyslexia (or specific reading disability) is the most common and carefully studied of the learning disabilities, affecting 80% of all those identified as learning disabled."

Sally E. Shaywitz, M.D.

Department of Pediatrics, Yale University

New England Journal of Medicine, Volume 338, Number 5

Dyslexia is defined as follows:

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 growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Adopted by the International Dyslexia Association's Board of Directors in 2002, this Definition has been used by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

Early assessment of Specific Learning Disabilities and dyslexia must happen at the public schools and must include reliable and valid, standardized measures that test in the areas of phonological processing (phonemic awareness, phonological or language-based memory, and rapid automatic naming) together with decoding, phonics accuracy and automaticity, reading fluency, reading comprehension, spelling, and writing. Early intervention must be provided, not a 'wait-and-see' approach, to take advantage of brain plasticity for early language and early literacy learning. Responding early to interventions provided at school and providing additional direct, specific instruction for students who are behind in reading and spelling is required to remediate early literacy problems.

It is critically important that dyslexia legislation passes in Connecticut so that teachers, school administrators, psychologists, and parents understand the nature, prevalence, assessment, and treatment of this most common learning disability as described in state and federal regulations.

References:

- IDEIA, 2004, U.S. Federal law
Fletcher, J., Lyon, R., Fuchs, L., Barnes, M., (2007). Learning Disabilities, From Identification to Intervention. London, NY: The Guilford Press.
Lowell, S.C., Felton, R.H., Hook, P.E., (2014). Basic Facts About Assessment of Dyslexia: Testing for Teaching, Baltimore, MD, The International Dyslexia Association.
Moats, L.C. and Dakin, K.E., (2008). Basic Facts About Dyslexia and Other Reading Problems, Baltimore, MD, The International Dyslexia Association.
National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). (2011). Nation's Report Card: National Assessment of Educational Progress. Washington. D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
Pennington, B., (2009). Diagnosing Learning Disorders, Second Edition. NY: The Guilford Press.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan C. Lowell, M.A., B.C.E.T.
Adjunct Faculty, Simmons College
Past Vice President, The International Dyslexia Association

Susan C. Lowell, M.A., B.C.E.T.
Simmons College, Adjunct Faculty Member
Director, Educational Therapy Associates

Franklin Square, Suite 1100B
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(ph) 919-933-8880 (fax) 919-933-8003
Email: edutheraPy@earthlink.net
Website: www.edutheraPync.com

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”
Eulogy for Nelson Mandela