

Dyslexic Advantage NEWSLETTER

THE HIGHS AND LOWS
OF REMOTE LEARNING
including the Dark Side of I-Ready



- MATH DISTANCE LEARNING

- SHOULD I HOMESCHOOL?
- DYSLEXIA NEWS



Fernette Eide MD, Editor

Dear Friends,

Some highs and lows of remote learning are the focus of this month's issue. Education and work conditions can vary widely due to the pandemic. Also in the news, some mixed news with dyslexia screening - there seems a substitution going on - schools are NOT screening for dyslexia; instead they are looking at various reading skills - these may good things for education, but NOT the same as screening for dyslexia!

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The app may be used to identify and qualify for services such as Benetech's huge free library of e-books.

Thank you volunteers Shelley Wear, Trish Seres, Dayna Russell Freudenthal, and Michelle Wiliams for their astute critique and proofing. Thanks to Lady Grace Belarmino for beautiful design and layout.

PREMIUM

Editor's Note: to make our publications easier to read, we will avoid use of italics and certain types of fonts.

Newsletters can be read online **HERE**. This issue will be available on the Joomag site for 3 months and can also be downloaded as a pdf file.



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DYSLEXIA NEWS

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF REMOTE LEARNING

"I don't know how I'll get through this. I know I must, but I am beyond exhausted."

- a parent, **APM Reports**

"What did we do to deserve this torture?"

- a student about **I-Ready**

By now, many school children and university students around the world have had some experiences with remote learning. What were the highs and lows of the experience? How can we learn from it?

If a student's household has appropriate devices and Internet speeds, the availability of remote learning had the potential to be a godsend as the pandemic has dragged on.

For dyslexic students, the experiences have ranged from high to low - depending a great deal on how remote learning was used and how well a match it was to students. First, the potential positives:

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FOR DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

Dyslexic students can have positive experiences with remote learning - but that can also be dependent on the teacher or tutor anticipating potential accessibility problems, or if homeschooling, flexibility in classes.

Remote schooling can't replace in-person schooling, but if the alternative is nothing, it can be helpful ensuring students don't fall a year or more behind.

Some examples of positive experiences included students who liked being able to find all their assignments and requirements online. With lectures that were video recorded, there was an opportunity to re-listen if necessary and also take more frequent breaks if assigned time in front of screens was not too great and they could move around when they desired.

Students with shorter logged-on school hours, more project-based assignments, and fewer distractions at home (for instance, not having to watch or baby sit younger siblings), may actually enjoy the switch to at-home learning.

Some families were happy to learn that remote tutors or assessment professionals were available without having to commute long distances during the pandemic. Although in-person is often preferred to remote, the benefits of having this help in the convenience of one's home was not lost on anyone.

Some gifted dyslexic students thrive in remote or hybrid learning situations - especially if it allows them an opportunity to take above-level programs in their areas of strengths. Having to spend whole school days in instruction below their intellectual level is otherwise mind-numbing and soul-killing, whether a pandemic is going on or not.

Tech-savvy students tend to do well with distance learning to their advantages... whether it involved listening to websites and textbooks or dictating papers.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES FOR DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

There have been many negative experiences of dyslexic students who suddenly experienced the transition to distance learning because of the pandemic. Like all students, some teachers were caught unprepared or technical issues like poor bandwidth or other technical problems further created problems.





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REMOTE LEARNING

Nevertheless, there are reasons why many dyslexic students might particularly struggle with remote learning and those are helpful to understand when trying to make educational choices or troubleshoot students' difficulties.

PERSONAL LEARNING AND IN-PERSON EXPERIENCES

Many dyslexic students are strong personal learners who thrive in 1:1 or small group interactions. For many, the shift to masks, plexiglass barriers, or remote learning has been difficult to say the least.

Many dyslexic students rely on social strengths to develop a rapport with classmates as well as their teachers and tutors - and the need to be isolated makes forming stronger personal relationships more difficult.

PROBLEMS WITH CERTAIN 'ADAPTIVE' READING PLATFORMS LIKE I-READY

Despite the promise of some "adaptive" reading programs adjusting to students' needs, some students find it to be a nightmarish program that is poorly fitted to dyslexic students' needs. There are several problems with the software [I-ready](#), for instance (currently implemented for millions of students across the US; 25% of K-8 students), students get placed into a lexile level that they cannot leave until they get a certain number of reading or math questions correct. The problem is that students who commonly misread or skip words can accidentally place into lower reading levels and find themselves trapped forced to texts below their reading level, then slowly climbing their way out, only to get dropped again if they get too many questions wrong by misreading question or skipping words. To make matters worse, the platform does not teach why an answer is right or wrong - so students may be oblivious as to why they cannot place out, yet know they are testing at a low lexile level. The similar principle applies to I-ready's Math tests.

The additional sad thing about the I-ready program is that it purports to screen for dyslexia (and therefore accepting district money across the US that should have been designated for true dyslexia assessments and interventions). The platform checks boxes for some reading instruction, but there is no dyslexia screening and students, parents, and teachers get no report for their students. Instead, the platform assigns activities for students "like this student" and supposedly that is enough.

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REMOTE LEARNING

The result of such a program being chosen to meet new state dyslexia laws is that no student using the "diagnostic" will be identified specifically with or without dyslexia, no student is recommended for further testing for IEP or 504 or formal diagnosis, no recommendations or intervention will be given in regards to structured literacy, accommodations, or assistive technology. Adaptive online reading programs should not be accepted as a substitute for comprehensive dyslexia screening; dyslexia is much more than reading and it is misleading to believe that these programs could in any way accurately screen for dyslexia.

Some students may struggle with so much screen-based reading assigned through programs such as I-ready. Not surprisingly, students may become demoralized and stress may increase. It is not difficult to find accounts of students suffering under poorly designed programs like I-ready (see [Ban I-Ready](#) at Change.org). An example: "the lessons take forever to do and cause too much stress. When you get a question wrong, it does not tell you what you did wrong which does not help me learn..." or "I've had so many negative experiences with I- ready it isn't even funny anymore. Back in like third grade, I was extremely anxious of the diagnostic to the point I had nightmares over it. I also redid the same lessons over and over worried I would fail them..."

Is this what we want students to do for their reading?

Programs such as [Read Naturally](#) or [Lexia](#) are not as punishing as I-Ready.

Why these failure-oriented programs are so toxic for dyslexic students is that they weigh heavily on students who are already suffering from a lack of positive experiences at school. What a mistake it would be to have remote learning programs that also demoralize students.

Remote programs that are strength-focused and provide a greater sense of choice and agency will empower rather than add to students' stress and anxiety.



"There's just nothing better than success for getting you back on track and getting your brain ready to learn again."

DON'T FORGET DYSLEXIC STUDENTS' INTELLIGENCE

Remember - by the definition of dyslexia, students have average or above-average intelligence so that their understanding and conceptual level is typically much higher than their reading level. Programs and approaches for dyslexic students

that don't address this or account for this will inevitably be frustrating and take their emotional toll on students.

Dyslexic students will also likely be able to progress more rapidly in 1:1 or small group instruction - especially with a well-trained teacher who can recognize what difficulties they may be having. Well-structured literacy programs will have a lesson, activities, then decodable books that build on prior knowledge.

Time should also be given for students to listen to audiobooks and other materials at their intellectual level. Dyslexic students should not be denied access to interesting subject material due to their current reading level ability. It will take time for these gaps to close, but there is no reason to starve them of content before then.

Poorly designed adaptive programs do not teach students explicitly, but rather require them to repeat lessons endlessly until they manage to "pass"...even if it is by guessing. This can become a nightmarish cycle of repeated failure that causes more problems than it solves. If your student is suffering under such a program, see if you can opt-out and perhaps substitute a better program or activity.

Look for so-called [Hi-Lo](#) books which have more intellectually-interesting content, but at a lower reading level. In some cases, you may have to request that a teacher checks that your student's responses are being registered correctly. I

TROUBLESHOOTING REMOTE LEARNING PROBLEMS AND TRAINING

If a student is struggling with remote learning, try sitting through the session (or screen recording it) in order to see what students are having difficulties with. Different platforms have different ways they employ assistive technology with controls hidden under multiple tabs or accessibility features not being activated at all. If a platform is assessing reading, it will typically not enable text-to-speech because it seeks to assess a student's reading in the absence of assistive technology. For some students the sounds may be unclear, or for others, problems activating assistive technology may be evident. The quality of text-to-speech also varies a great deal in different platforms - and some students with auditory processing and or attentional difficulties will have trouble following oddly pronounced robotically-read text.

As a for instance, I recently tried out the Sensus Access resources that is widely used at universities around the world. I can understand the convenience - students upload any documents that they don't have in text-to-speech and then an mp3 file is given, but I personally found the audio substandard with robotic pronunciation that's difficult to understand - certainly worse than many of the better voices through [Voice Dream](#) or [ReciteMe](#).

If you haven't already, take time to optimize the assistive technology for your students on the computer....and allow time for students to be able to do this. If you cannot do this yourself, see if there is someone at a school or other tech-savvy parent who may be able to help you. Sometimes the tech expert may be a family member, IT professional, SPED teacher, or private computer technology coach. Don't be embarrassed about getting outside help. We believe technology training (that includes assistive technology training) should be a part of every LD student's educational plan. it's surprising that it is not.

And the initial setup can be confusing. There are so many different computers and mobile devices that it may be difficult learning which program is needed if you aren't somewhat sophisticated about working with different devices and operating systems.

When possible, get the help of an expert who will also know about resources that dyslexic people are likely to use - like [Bookshare](#), [Learning Ally](#), and [Voice Dream](#),

REMOTE LEARNING

Larger corporations may have funds available for technology, training in technology and workplace coaching if needed. Ask if you can record sessions if you may need to review steps later.

REMOTE LEARNING AT COLLEGE

Some changes may be necessary for succeeding in remote or hybrid learning situations at college or university. Some college platforms are notoriously bad about organization and electronic notifications. Some students may struggle because they fail to realize certain assignments are due and the asynchronous learning makes it hard to get in sync with the schedule of different classes. Sometimes required discussion or quizzes are hidden under different tabs and students may find out too late that they've missed critical assignments.

Use your student success center as soon as possible - even before the start of a quarter or semester. Make an effort to meet with any teachers who are available early - and visit office hours even if they are virtual so you can make a personal relationship with your teachers. Tell them that you are dyslexic. It will help tremendously later if you underestimated your need for accommodations and miss a critical assignment or fail an exam. Ask for what you need to be successful, and if you're not certain, contact your student success center. You can ask if a tutor is available who has expertise with tutoring dyslexic students - sometimes this may be a staff professional; other times it may be an upper class student. Either way, their advice can be invaluable. They can help you with organizing your schedule, assistive technology, and talking to your professors if you aren't getting the



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MATH DISTANCE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

Here are several desirable features for remote math programs for dyslexic students:

- Comprehensive (math builds on prior knowledge; programs must be comprehensive)
- Spiralling (reviews and deepens knowledge of concepts over time; more info [here](#))
- Video and Audio Support
- Visual and Animation Examples for Concepts
- Interactive Activities
- Option for manipulatives
- Explicit instruction
- Adaptive and positive reinforcement
- Not requiring excessive repetition or practice
- Reduced writing demands
- Use of color coding

Some strong personal learners may prefer to learn from a person (even if recorded) rather than impersonal software platform, whereas others may prefer the opposite.

The dilemma for individual students is having the "just right" amount of practice and options for review. Many dyslexic students don't need a lot of practice questions assigned for homework - they just need to understand the concepts being presented - and why they made mistakes if their answers are wrong.

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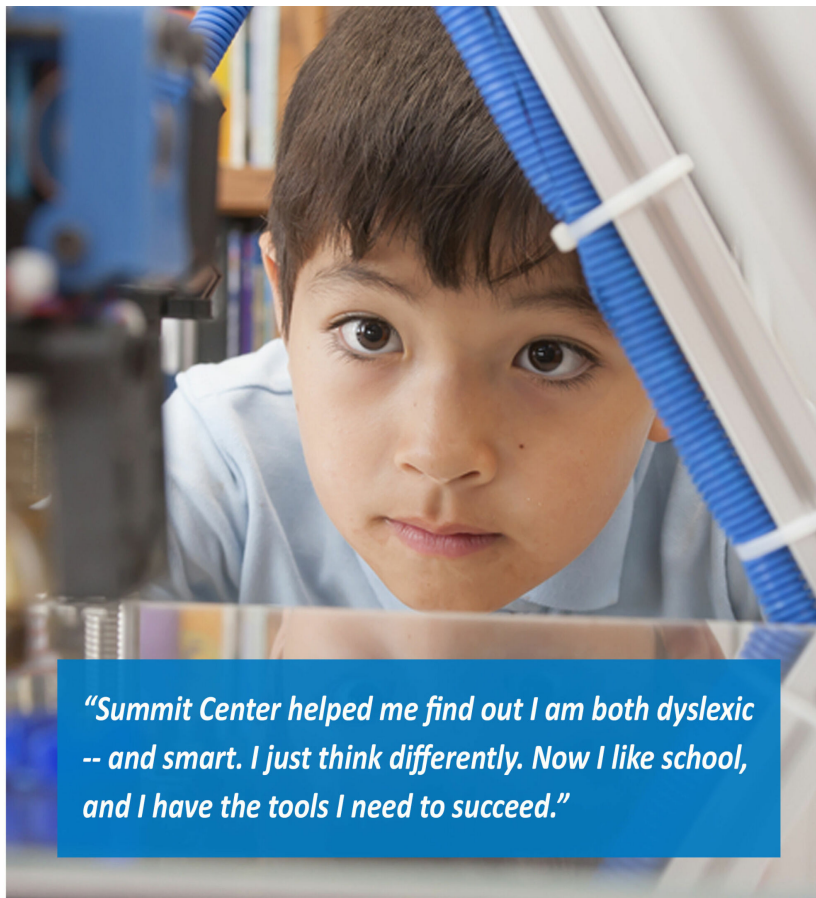
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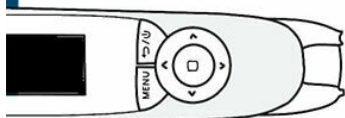
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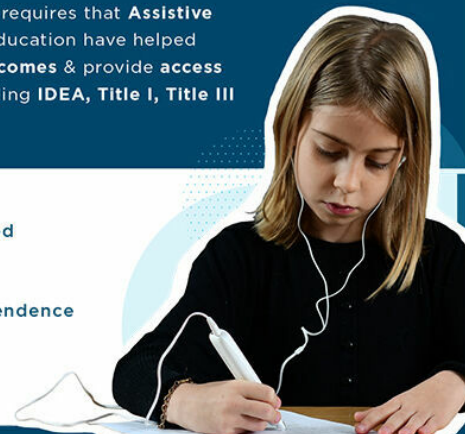
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MATH

Many dyslexic students have working memory overload problems as well as dysgraphia; as a result poorly fitting programs may greatly contribute to stress.

Another student's complaint over the disastrous I-Ready program mentioned in the [previous article](#):

"I-ready is absolutely garbage. I took a diagnostic and it gave me 5th grade math. I'm in 9th grade, I...didn't put any effort into the test. I ended up testing on a 2nd grade level, Even though I did 5th grade math. So instead of I-ready giving me lessons on things I was struggling on and things I needed to learn..."

Now obviously, the above student made the mistake of not taking a diagnostic test seriously, but programs should also have some statistical guidelines to see if a student's performance may be invalid because of poor effort.

BENEFITS OF DISTANCE LEARNING MATH TO SUPPORT DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

As of the writing of this article, there are some predictions that the very active phase of COVID may be at its peak with omicron and soon turn down, but regardless of whether school gets disrupted by closures, having a distance learning option for math can support dyslexic students in many ways.

The typical developmental time course for dyslexia often is a poor match for conventional education because working memory, writing automaticity, and reading fluency tend to be late blooming. As a result, young children with dyslexia can look as if they are weak in their math skills, but then in the middle-high school grades, they may undergo a spurt in abilities such that they can make more progress than they could have possibly dreamed in the early grades.

One of the challenges, then, is to not go entirely off the rails in the early grades, and to make up for weaker foundational skills in the teen years (including reviewing more basic concepts) if necessary.

MATH

Our son had fairly flat progress in the early grades, then jumped up in 8-9th grades and scored high enough on math and English parts of the PSAT to be in the top 3-4% of college-bound test-takers. It was a very non-linear path, with constant forgetting of basic math facts in the elementary school years and little progress for years in the early grades. There were also glimmers that things were not bad as it seemed. Although he seemed very forgetful with math facts and procedures, he had intuitive strengths with algebraic thinking ([Hands On Equations](#)) even in elementary school. Working with that program helped his confidence about other parts of math.

QUANTITY MATTERS

When trying to find a good match for a student, quantity matters. Most students can tolerate lessons and practice that last 10-20 minutes depending on age. Some students may struggle depending on the settings of the programs - for instance thresholds that are too high for advancing levels (not accounting for accidental mistakes) or programs that require too many repetitions to move ahead.

Tried and true and low tech, [Khan Academy](#) with its free videos remains a helpful resource that can be used as a standalone or as a backup for explaining math problems. It is more rote sequential (inchworm and not grasshopper if you know that terminology), but clear and helpful when parents or students are stuck on certain types of problems.

The best programs will allow some customizations for individual students; if you are investigating a match for a particular student, try a free trial to see how well the program might fit.





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MATH

HOW DO YOU WANT TO USE THE MATH PROGRAM?

With most students suffering at least some "pandemic loss" in math because of school disruptions, some families may choose to have a backup program to test for math gaps and close them in as easy a way as possible.

Others may be focused on a backup plan if students don't understand new math concepts in class.

Still others may want to "go nuclear" and have a comprehensive math program that can completely take the place of math at school.

Some families love the low-tech [Khan Academy](#) as a backup program, but although it's comprehensive, video-based, and free, it takes a more recipe-oriented approach to math, showing you step-by-step, but not necessarily why something is correct or works. It also has fairly limited use of visuals and manipulatives.

DOES YOUR STUDENT WORK BETTER WITH VISUALS AND MANIPULATIVES?

For the early grades, here are some programs that employ more visuals or manipulatives:



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This Spring, it's time to hit the books!

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With an exciting program of media and events taking place in **March and April**, there's never been a better time to get back into books.

Our 2022 campaign also concludes with a free DEAR for Dyslexia Learning Festival!



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SHOULD I HOMESCHOOL?

With a large part of the world at least partially homeschooling this past year and students falling behind, some parents are asking whether they should homeschool their kids for the rest of the school year or perhaps for the 2022-23.

Homeschooling during the pandemic really isn't like how homeschooling was before the pandemic - because many museums and community groups are closed or have closed their classes, homeschooling groups may not be meeting in-person, or if in-person, smaller, with social distancing in place.

Still, homeschooling can be a powerful option for students if financially viable. Homeschooling can allow students to have more individualized remediation and cultivate their strengths and talents.

ADVANTAGES OF HOMESCHOOLING FOR DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

- Customized education - build on strengths and remediate weaknesses
- Potentially less stress, less bullying, time to catch up
- Better social and emotional well-being; fewer failures and negative associations with learning
- More time to de-stress and have a life outside of school

DISADVANTAGES ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

- Do I know enough or can I find the resources I need to help my student with all I need to be prepared for the next step - whether that's middle school, high school, college or something else?

One of the old worries of prospective homeschoolers was whether their kids would get enough socialization - now that's kind of a problem for everyone depending on your state's COVID policies.

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me find out I am both
dyslexic -- and smart.
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HOMESCHOOLING

GOOD NEWS - YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Although many worries are understandable, experienced homeschooling parents know that they are not alone as teaching parents. Enhanced by the pandemic, there's an explosion of classes and tutors available to all remotely - and many a parent also navigated their way through with the help of homeschooling support groups and well-designed curricula that make step-by-step instruction (if necessary) doable.

MOST STUDENTS CAN THRIVE WITH HOMESCHOOLING

Dyslexic students have such peaks and valleys in their profile, homeschooling can allow students to take advanced classes in subjects of special interest or strengths, but remedial work wherever they are.

When our son was homeschooling as a 3rd grader, he took a mythology course for 5-6th graders, but his math was probably at a 2nd grade level, and he struggled with writing by hand although his typing was pretty good. The advanced course was successful because it was interest-based, and more discussion-oriented, and he could take it for pleasure without testing on the above-grade subject. Over the course of years, the gap between his strengths and his ability to show what he knew (through writing for instance) grew narrower and narrower until they completely closed up. But in that time- in-between, he didn't have to suffer the full academic consequences of his unevenness or get punished by assignments that he couldn't possibly complete.

Homeschooling the upper years of K-12 may also be easier than you might think because students can place out or take selected college classes in isolation so that they can experience success and also have outside authorities and transcripts that can provide independent confirmation of their high ability.

If you took your student out of a chaotic or toxic traditional school situation, allow time to "detox", whether it's a few weeks or few months.

If you are newly considering transitioning over to homeschooling, don't think that you need to do everything at once. When my husband and I decided to homeschool our son (our daughter at that time wanted to stay in traditional

school), we dutifully copied the syllabus for the grade our student was in thinking that we would try to roughly parallel what he was doing...just outside of school. It gave me a little security and mentally I was thinking it would help if we or he decided it was best he return in a year or two.

What we found is that there were worlds of possibilities for him to do school that built on his talents and strengths - and that once we found well-matching programs, teachers, or at times, tutors, he could make much more progress with less official time spent on school.

If your student has not yet mastered the basic groundwork for fluent reading, then you should build your homeschooling educational plan on a foundation of solid reading, writing, and spelling remediation. That may mean one of the excellent programs offered by one of our sponsors (like [Winsor Learning / Sonday System](#) or [All About Learning](#)) or other programs from [Lindamood Bell](#), [Barton, Wilson](#), or [Voyager-Sopris](#).

But once you have decided on a program that fits your student, then it's time to begin exploring the wide world that schooling can offer. There's no need to limit your student to programs catered solely to dyslexic students for subject learning. Some resources for ideas: [Learning Lift-Off](#) and [Homeschooling with Dyslexia](#).

Also consider taking Dyslexic Advantage's on demand video [Homeschooling Course](#). It comes with a free subscription of our Premium magazine too!

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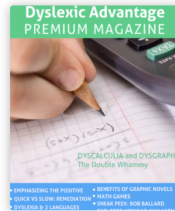
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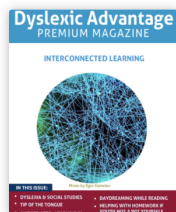
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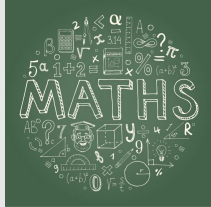
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DYSLEXIA NEWS



After Setbacks, Dyslexia Screening for Young Children Move Forward (from Fernette: read carefully though, California is screening for phonological skills but not actually dyslexia.)

EdSource



When Careless Mistakes Aren't (Dyscalculia, Math) Anxiety, Learning Strategies)

Additude



**Golden State Warriors
Gary Payton II Shares His
Dyslexia Advice**
SF Gate



**Deadline for NJ Kids
Requesting SPED
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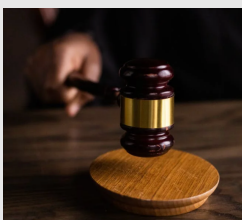
New Public School for Dyslexia in NYC

Chalkbeat



**BBC Furniture Restorer Host Jay Blades
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The Guardian



**CT: Delays Implementing Dyslexia Laws Leave
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CT Examiner

PREMIUM ISSUE SEVENTY-FOUR FEBRUARY 2022

Dyslexic Advantage PREMIUM MAGAZINE



READING LITERATURE TO CULTIVATE EMPATHY

- DON'T GIVE UP: HIGHER MATH FOR SCIENTISTS
- PANDEMIC EDUCATION: PREPARING FOR UNPREPARABLE
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DYSLEXIC ADVANTAGE

INGENUITY AWARDS

K-12 Dyslexic Students

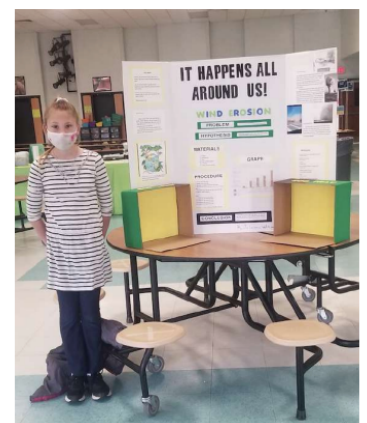


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"Dyslexia lends itself to original thinking, not rote formulas, because you can't do the formulas - you think up your own method based on intuition and instincts. Creativity is trial and error, trying to figure out a way to do something emotionally and intuitively."

- Pulitzer Prize Winning Poet Phillip Schultz, The Writers Studio