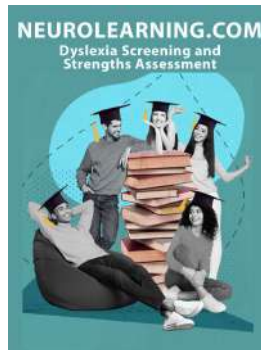


Dyslexic Advantage

NEWSLETTER



- WHY IS MY STUDENT BEING TAUGHT NONSENSE WORDS?
- DYSLEXIA NEWS
- STRENGTHS THIS SUMMER
- SCHOOL VOUCHERS LAW IN TEXAS



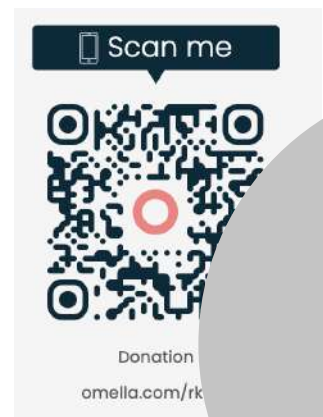
Dr. Fernette Eide
Editor-in-Chief



TEACHER MINI-COURSES FOR CLOCK HOUR CREDIT \$15 for 5 credit study with a Premium subscription.

The link for this issue is: <https://joomag.com/kpsd>

This issue will only be on Joomag for about 6 months. Afterwards, look for this issue in our **Newsletter Archives at DyslexicAdvantage.org**. Keep our programs running by **donating** or becoming a **Premium subscriber**. **We need your help.**



The **NEUROLEARNING** Dyslexia Screening App is \$79.99 and available for children and adults 7-70 years old. iPad, iPhone, Android, and Kindle Fire.



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Thanks to Shelley Wear, Trish Seres, Michelle Williams, Cheryl Kahn, and Jack Martin. Thanks to Lady Grace Belarmino for Design and layout, and Andi for their social media and admin help!

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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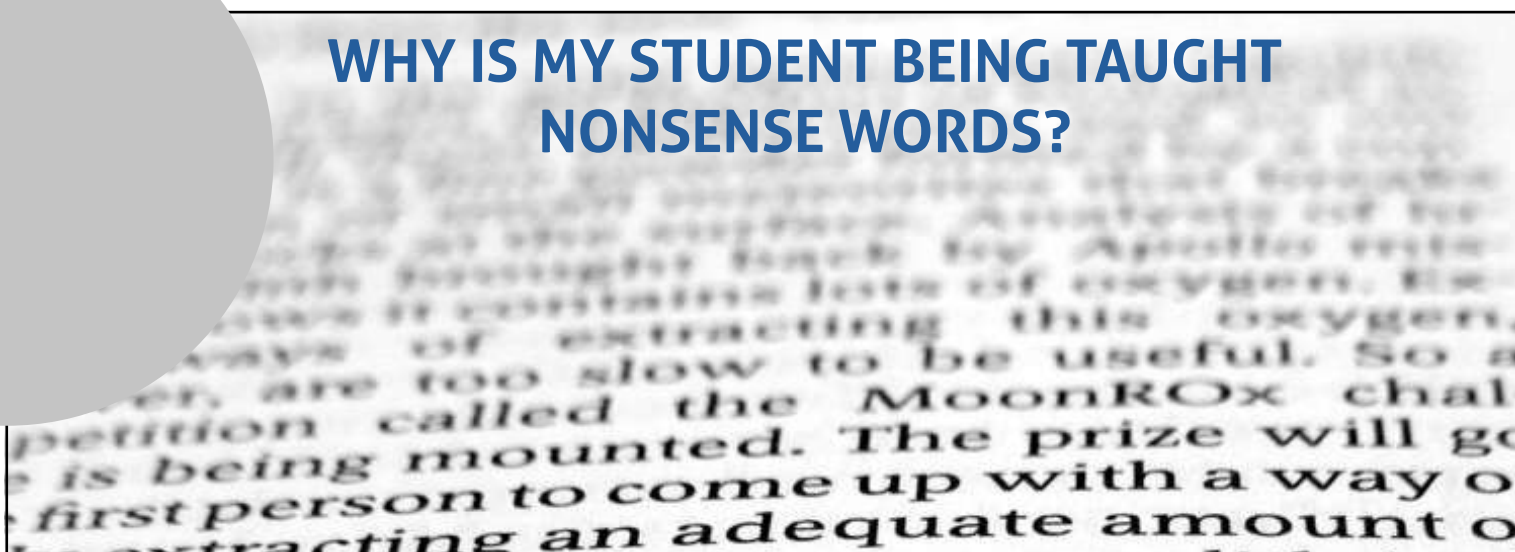
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STRENGTHS THIS SUMMER

FIND YOUR NICHE

Summertime is a great time find one's niche. If you're a student, it's likely that you'll have more free and out-of-class time than at other points during the school year.

WHAT SHALL YOU DO?

Get outside - explore and try new things. You may be playing more sports, exploring nature, spending more time with family, friends, and pets, working jobs, and getting involved with service, scouts, or volunteering for a good cause.

Summer experiences are often where dyslexic young people find what they really love doing or are good at. Young artists might look for sources of visual inspiration (non-profit art centers, museums, galleries, conventions) and seek out dedicated time to make, draw, paint, or sculpt.

Jobs and summer experiences may be the first time that students have opportunities for leadership and responsibilities. They may have felt like "below average" students during the school year, but really discover themselves and their strengths in the real world.

If your student has an unusual interest, then find reasons for them to celebrate that and deepen their knowledge. Some families may follow up on a child's interest by making a family trip to a Civil War battleground, artist studio, video game studio, or marine sanctuary.

DYSLEXIC MIND STRENGTHS

The Dyslexic MIND we described in our book, *The Dyslexic Advantage*, talked about talent areas in Material Reasoning (reasoning through physical materials), Interconnected Reasoning (relating different areas), Narrative Reasoning (storytelling and scene construction), and Dynamic Reasoning, looking into the future and making predictions.

Summer activities based on material reasoning could take the form of building a go cart or tree house, going on an architectural tour in a city, or redesigning a room.

Interconnected reasoning can take place whenever different disciplines or subjects come together - like math and physical education or art and biology or music and science.

In schools, one helpful way to create interdisciplinary programs is to partner with a teacher from another subject discipline.

Sometimes there are web resources giving examples of interdisciplinary projects (for example, [this article](#) from Edutopia), but if you want to take an approach to many projects or subjects you are planning to teach, then using [ChatGPT](#) or [Grok](#) or another AI assistant may provide many ideas for blending different topics in learning.

For example, for a prompt to suggest interdisciplinary projects based on early American history, a chat assistant suggested creative writing assignments from different points of view in early American History, research on the biological and disease impacts of early immigrants and settlers, learning about early Native American and European art traditions, in addition to other project ideas that touch on Geography, Economics, Math, or Government.

It may seem a bit of a stretch planning interdisciplinary projects for students if these haven't been a conscious part of students' education before, but this is an area where many dyslexic students (and later adults) can excel - and gaining exposure and experience with this complex higher order thinking can be exciting for students as they discover some of where their strengths lie.

SCHOOLS

Interdisciplinary projects are part of International Baccalaureate programs as well as some special schools (like STEM) and gifted / highly capable schools, but they are good fits also for dyslexic students in general.

Some students may discover their Interdisciplinary or Interconnected Reasoning strengths by working on science projects for science fairs or getting involved in [Odyssey of the Mind](#) or [Future Problem Solvers](#) competitions. These programs also help students exercise dynamic reasoning strengths - being able to forecast and make predictions about the future. Scenario-building is always a big part of these usually group projects - and dyslexic students can excel at these activities.

These programs may also take place during the school year, but summer may be a better time to go deep with a project because of competing demands of coursework.

Finally, students can enjoy their summer vacations getting immersed in stories and making some of their own. Reading can be through any modality - audiobooks, ebooks with custom voices, or even print reading the usual way if silent reading is fluent enough. If students are on the cusp of being fluent readers, then reading the first chapters with them - then letting them take over on their own may be all they need to get going. The hardest part of reading a high interest novel is usually the beginning because character names and places are difficult to read and students have to figure out what the story is about.

If your student is reading for fun - you can also preview the book by asking search or AI chat assistant.

For students who want to write stories, but have trouble with writing fast enough to keep up with their ideas, then allowing them to dictate stories or use a chat assistant to brainstorm and get their ideas down on a page.

The challenge with working with an AI assistant is that you don't want them to just write a story for you - you want to use as an assistant to brainstorm, identify plot holes, or organize what you've said.

There are many options for this - include [Vnote.ai](#) which we've mentioned before. I've also heard of several users who like [Claude.ai](#) for fiction writing.

All the main AI assistants have options for dictation and read back of replies, but they may require a paid subscription and in some cases, use of an app.

Recent updates to Claude allow you to upload content that you've personally written so that it writes with your voice and style. It might be your choice that you don't want to have younger children writing with an AI program. There are free versions where you can see how various programs work and if there are good fits or not for particular students.

There are many interesting uses for AI that can be valuable for dyslexic students. For young students, who have difficulty expressing themselves, being able to work with an infinitely patient conversation and idea partner can be valuable.

Here is an example of a teacher showing how she uses conversation mode in Claude to give English Language Learners conversational practice.



WHY IS MY STUDENT BEING TAUGHT NONSENSE WORDS?

A parent is frustrated that her child has been struggling to learn lists of nonsense words in class. What is the purpose of this? Surely it would be better to learn real words instead?

PHONEMES AND NONSENSE WORDS -WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Phonemes and nonsense words aren't the same thing. Phonemes are the smallest sounds that make up words - so in the word "cat", there's the /k/ sound, /a/ sound, and /t/ sound. If students learn phonemes, they can identify words they've never seen before. Phonemes by themselves don't have meaning, because they are parts of words; but they are different from nonsense words like "moy" or "weem".

Nonsense words may be used to assess how well students have learned certain phonemes and how they are blended, but they should not be memorized because it is purposeless and can be used to help students pass tests, but hide their weaknesses in phonological awareness and word decoding.

HOW NONSENSE WORDS ARE USED IN TESTS

Nonsense words are often used in reading assessments, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), to evaluate a student's decoding ability. Because these words are unfamiliar, they test whether a student can apply phonetic rules without relying on memorized vocabulary. For example, reading "vop" correctly demonstrates that a student can blend the sounds /v/, /o/, and /p/. This is particularly useful for identifying students with dyslexia, who may compensate for poor decoding skills by memorizing high-frequency words, masking their struggles with phonics.

So nonsense words are being used to "diagnose" phonemic weaknesses. They can be used to see how well students have mastered phonemic patterns vs. guesses based on memorization or visual cues.

THE MISTAKE OF MEMORIZING NONSENSE WORDS

Some intervention programs and teachers may mistakenly teach nonsense words to students, but doing so defeats the purpose of using them in assessments. Instead of seeing how well students have mastered phonetic rules, such tests would only determine their memory for how a nonsense word would be pronounced. It can give a false idea of a student's progress.

SLOW AND STEADY STRUCTURED INSTRUCTION INSTEAD

Instead of memorizing nonsense words, dyslexic students should work on building up their phonological awareness and decoding fluency over time. Structured literacy teaches common patterns that students will practice until they learn to recognize word parts to the level of automaticity so that reading becomes more fluent.



Some teachers may give parents and students homework with reading nonsense words aloud. Generally, this is not recommended and is controversial.

There are some school districts subject to high stakes tests where students read nonsense words aloud. If they are confronted with nonsense words for the first time

in these tests, it could cause a great deal of stress as well as lower scores than would be expected based on their skills.

The worst case is to have teachers teaching students the nonsense words that they will see on a DIBELS tests. It completely invalidates the tests - so no teacher should do this. If this is happening in your student's class, then it's time to speak up about it. For more information about this issue, check out [this post](#) by Timothy Shanahand.

SCHOOL VOUCHERS SIGNED INTO LAW IN TEXAS



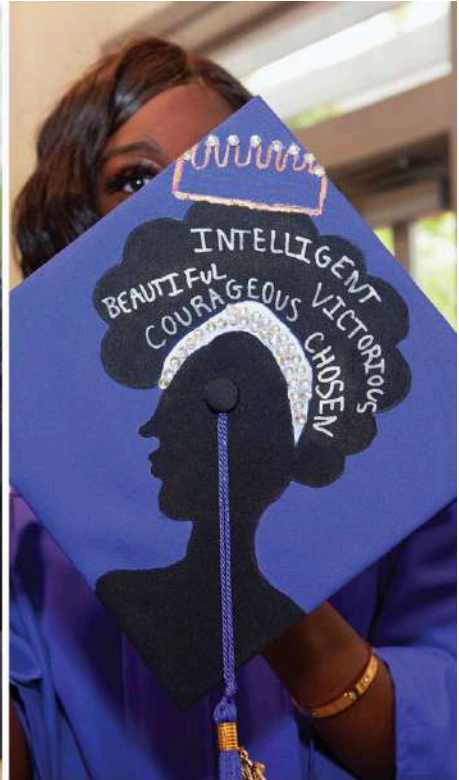
On May 3, 2025, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed into law Senate Bill 2, the Texas Education Freedom Act, establishing the country's largest ESA or Education Savings Account which will launch in the 2026-2027 school year.

It's a \$1 billion initiative that allows families to use public funds for private school tuition, homeschooling, tutoring, textbooks, therapy, and other educational expenses. Of particular note to

families with dyslexic students, up to \$30,000 could be allotted to students with disabilities. Dyslexia is considered a specific disability under law. For students without disabilities, up to \$10,330 per student annually could be allocated and homeschoolers are allocated up to \$2000 per year.

Public schools in Texas that have long been struggling to meet the demands of Texas students. In 2018, the US Department of Education found that Texas had violated federal law by denying students with disabilities (including dyslexia) necessary special education services. A follow up in 2020 confirmed that many dyslexic students were being denied services (more about this [here](#)).

The program has a \$1 billion cap for the first two years, but is projected to support 80,000 students. For dyslexic students, the extra money toward education could increase the likelihood of receiving dyslexia-specific curricula like multisensory Orton-Gillingham sequenced instruction and small group instruction.



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TEXAS VOUCHERS

Texas has a long history of prioritizing dyslexia identification and intervention, but as with other state programs, implementation at the student level remains stubbornly inconsistent with some students receiving excellent intervention while others receiving little help.

Texas code requires screening and evaluation of students for dyslexia by professionals trained in evidence-based assessments according to the [Texas Dyslexia Handbook](#) (last updated in 2024). Multidisciplinary teams must evaluate students for possible dyslexia and the teams must include a member with expertise in reading, dyslexia, and related conditions. As might be expected, with such significant financial stakes, some gridlock may occur for students who have not yet been formally identified.

This legislation could be life changing for some students with dyslexia. With access to what can be expensive curricula and tutoring support - either inside of a school or outside of it, students can have their greatest challenges remediated, access to much-needed technology, and yet also be provided with appropriate intellectual challenge that may include gifted programming for some students.

The law requires private school students to take a nationally recognized standardized test (it does not have to be the [Texas STAAR test](#)). No more than 20% of the voucher program can go to families making 500% or more of the federal poverty limit, which is about \$160,000 for a family of four.

Texas is the 18th state in the US to allow public funds to be used for private schools. To see what laws your state has regarding school vouchers or tax refunds to help with educational supports, see the listing at [EdChoice here](#).

School choice has been under consideration for 30 years in Texas, and critics of the latest law are concerned with the impact the loss of money will have on students in public schools, saying that poorer students will be disproportionately affected.

Unfortunately, Texas cannot point to documented success in helping its students become proficient in reading.

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TEXAS VOUCHERS

On the national tests known as the [Nation's Report Card](#), Texas fared especially [poorly](#), with nearly 40% of Texas 8th graders scoring below the lowest level in reading. It was also the worst performance of 4th graders scoring below the lowest level in 20 years.

The downward trend in reading started before the pandemic and scores in reading are even lower in 2024 than 2022.

From the report in Texas Public Radio:

"We are not seeing the progress we need to regain the ground our students lost during the pandemic, and where we are seeing signs of recovery, they're mostly in math and largely driven by higher performance students," said National Center for Education Statistics Commissioner Peggy Carr in an embargoed call to reporters on Tuesday. "Lower performing students are struggling, especially in reading."

There are significant worries facing public schools that could be facing catastrophic losses of funds that could result in school closures; Texas has already been experiencing severe teacher shortages. In the 2023-24 school year, 60% of teacher hires were not certified (more [here](#)).

However, currently Texas spends \$14,257 per student in K-12 schools. If students and their families aren't seeing reading performance improve, then trying a different approach that may include professional tutoring or schools with dyslexia-specific programs, may help. The funds could also help with assistive technology purchases that may help with remediation and scaffolding as well as general support.

We'll keep you updated on developments in Texas, New Hampshire just approved caps on their school choice programs (more [here](#)). Concerns have been raised about people moving to the state to take advantage of the education funds.

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- **Dyslexia and AI: Helpful Tools**
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- **App for Reading and Spelling Long Words**
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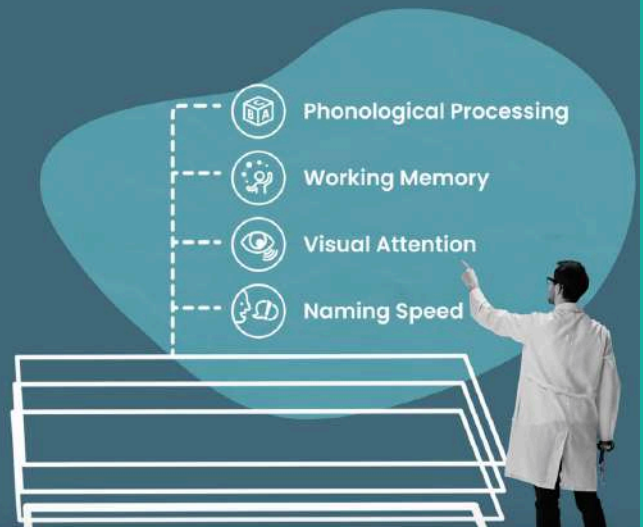
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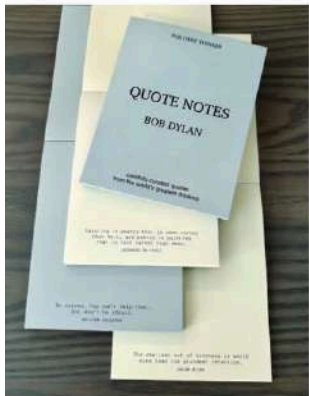
Your program...gave me the confidence to keep pushing despite no one else believing me. My daughter was finally diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia by a neuropsychologist. I highly recommend it when people ask about screening options.

— D
Parent

Having my children do the test and receiving a comprehensive feedback in a way that I, a non technical person, can understand has been invaluable. The follow up from Dr Eide and his **recommendations and guidance for each of my children has been a game changer** in our homeschooling. Also, I've **noticed a huge improvement in the past year or so since I've implemented these changes.** Thanks Dr Eide and keep up the good work!

— WJD
Parent

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Chef Jamie Oliver: Life in Education with Dyslexia

BBC



**U2 Drummer and Kelly Clarkson Bond Over Having
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People



A Brief History of Recorded Books - Dr Michael Ryan

Dyslexia Help U Michigan



**Intervention Based on Science of Reading Also Helps
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Science Daily



**Shared Genes is Why ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia Occur
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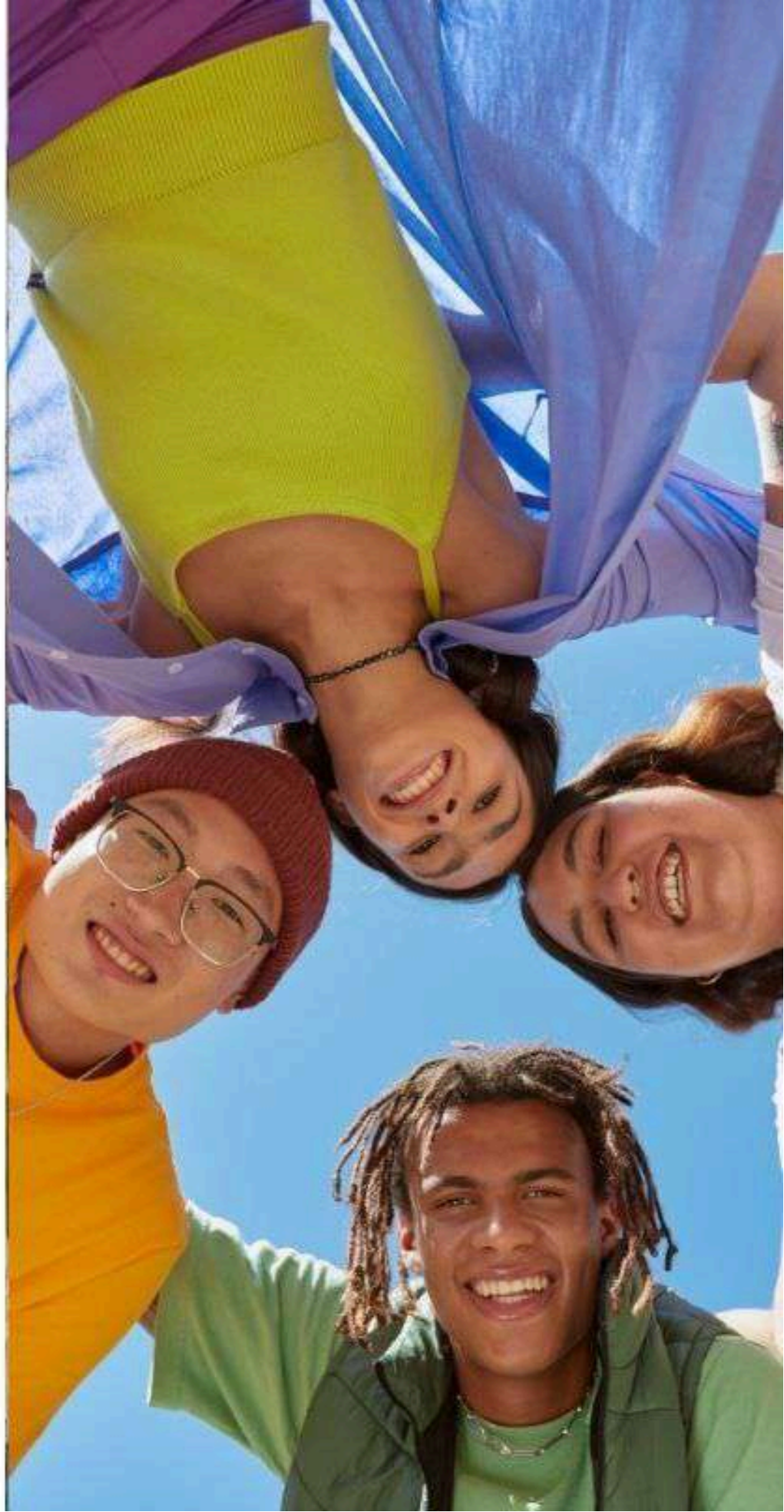
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"I genuinely think that when someone says to you, "Johnny's got dyslexia", you should get down on your knees, shake the child's hand and say, "Well done, you lucky, lucky boy."
[Long-term success is] about finding something that you're good at...I just see the problems differently and I obsess about things differently." - Jamie Oliver