

MAY 2020 ISSUE 53

Dyslexic Advantage

NEWSLETTER

COVID SCHOOLING



IN THIS ISSUE:

- TYPING FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA AND/OR DYSGRAPHIA
- THE CHAOS OF COLLEGE AND BEYOND
- WHAT ABOUT MATH
- DYSLEXIA NEWS



Fernette Eide MD,
Editor

DOWNLOAD THIS
NEWSLETTER **HERE**.

Dear Friends,

We hope that you all are staying healthy during these uncertain times. In this issue, I've tried to address many changes that are impacting our community. Let us know what questions you have and what topics would be most helpful to you in upcoming magazines.

Stay Safe! Fernette Eide

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We're happy to announce that our partner **NEUROLEARNING** has launched their iPad-based Dyslexia app for adults and ages 7 & up! The app provides a dyslexia score as well as a report with weak areas and strengths. 3% of profits are donated to Dyslexic Advantage.

Thank you to volunteers Trish Seres, Dayna Russell Freudenthal, Michelle Williams, and Shelley Wear for their tireless proofing and feedback. Thank you Lady Grace Belarmino for her beautiful design work and admin support by Sarah Macapobre.

GO PREMIUM

Editors' Note: to ensure that our dyslexic members are able to read our publication without difficulty, our editorial policy is to avoid the use of fonts or typefaces, such as italics, that can impede readability.

If you're reading a print copy of this issue, you can find the digital copy with all the interactive features here: <https://joom.ag/G5QC>

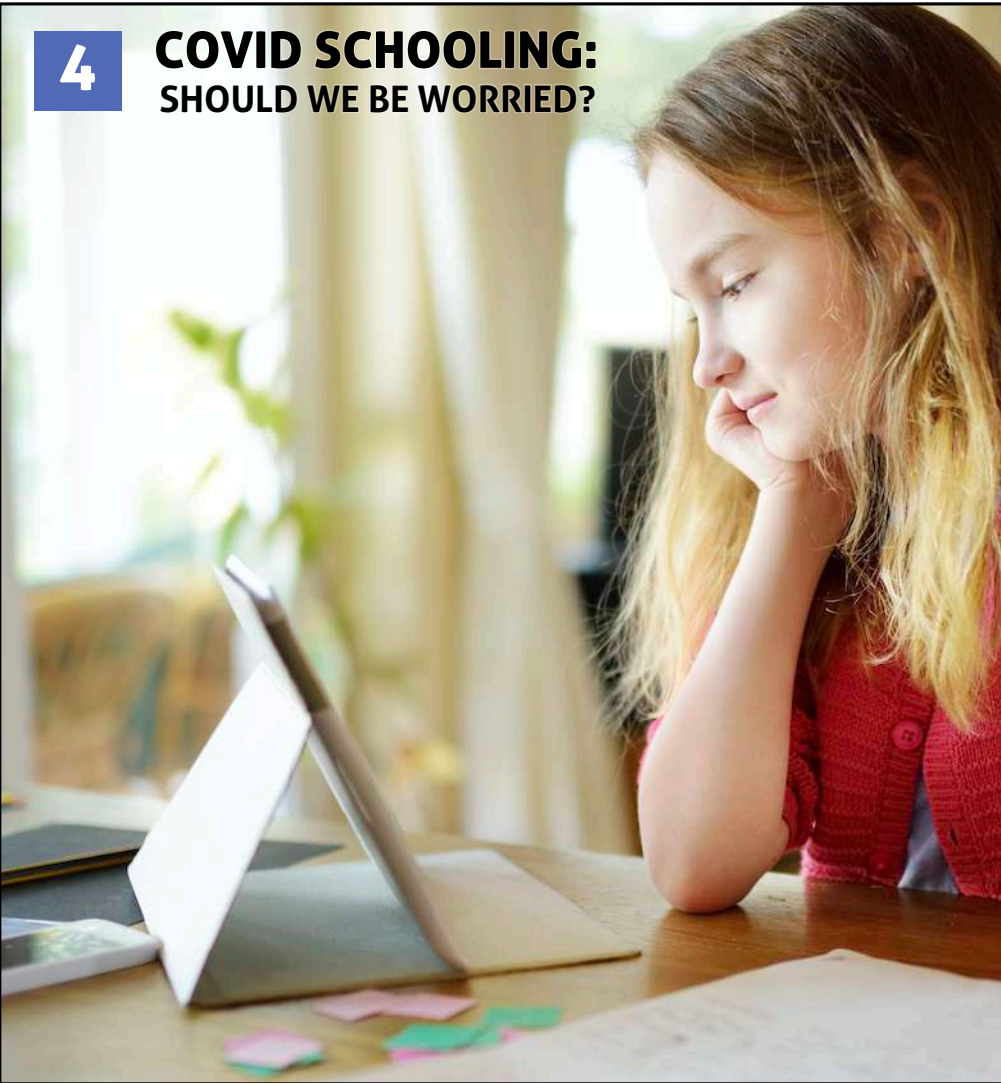


CONTENTS

DYSLEXIC ADVANTAGE ISSUE 53 MAY 2020 NEWSLETTER

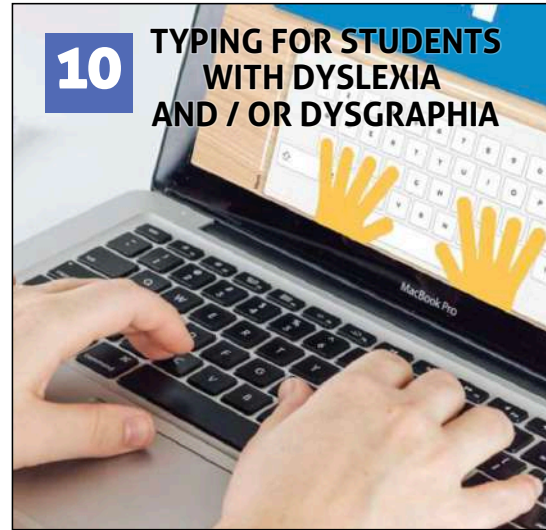
4

**COVID SCHOOLING:
SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?**



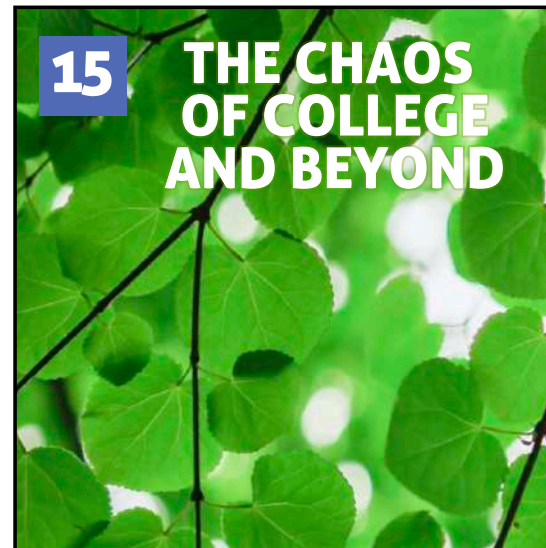
10

**TYPING FOR STUDENTS
WITH DYSLEXIA
AND / OR DYSGRAPHIA**



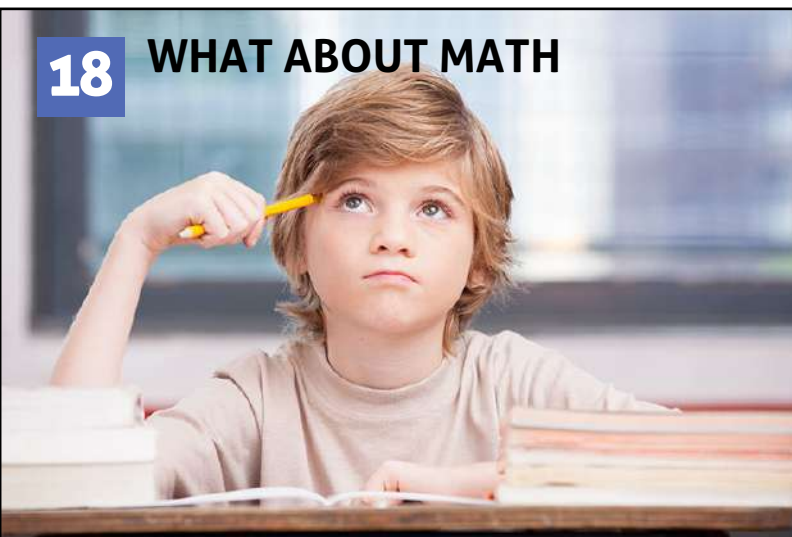
15

**THE CHAOS
OF COLLEGE
AND BEYOND**



18

WHAT ABOUT MATH



25

DYSLEXIA NEWS
zoom



COVID SCHOOLING: SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?

Short answer: NO.

As at least half of the schools across the country closed for health reasons, students from the earliest ages to post-graduates find themselves schooling from home, usually through online programs.

In the best situations, students have smoothly or semi-smoothly transitioned to distance learning. In the worst, students don't log on, and uncertainty exists as to whether there are sufficient resources (like devices and internet access) or if they know how to get connected. Teachers and school systems are undertaking many out-of-the box solutions to get entire classrooms online.

What does that mean for dyslexic students?

A [report](#) from NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) warns about potential "COVID Slide" or potential losses that occur when schools are not in session. The education researchers are extrapolating based on what they have observed in students following summer vacation:

"While there is some controversy about the magnitude of summer learning loss, three trends are consistent across seasonal learning research findings: achievement typically slows or declines over the summer months, declines tend to be steeper for math than for reading, and the extent (proportionally) of loss increases in the upper grades."

The NWEA is concerned that school closures because of the virus will be twice the duration of summer vacation, with significant impacts on school achievement.



While these are legitimate concerns, all students are in this boat together, and assuming that you're able to read this newsletter, you've at least been able to find our organization Dyslexic Advantage and read this magazine online.

Because we're all in this chaotic present together, I think for the majority of dyslexic families - this period of COVID schooling can have some incidental benefits.

Shorter School Days and More Technology

First, assuming schools are not requiring full online days for school (those that do are making a big mistake), many dyslexic students will have more 'down time' in their school day, which is a good thing. Many students fare better when able to move around and focus their concentration in short bursts.



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COVID SCHOOLING

Technology usually benefits dyslexic students as well if they are given a chance to experiment with and learn what a system can do. Remote learning may also be a great opportunity to ensure that all accommodations are in place and that your student has all the access to information and reading, writing, spelling, and math supports they may need.

With online classes, students may be able to dictate their responses and have text read aloud...something that often isn't done in conventional classrooms.

Parents Can Learn More About Their Student's Experience in School

Parents may learn more about their students' experiences in school - whether positive or negative or both. Sometimes sending students off to school is a little bit like a 'black box' - where you can't see what happens.

With live classes or recorded classes, it may be much easier to see what your student has trouble with or where she or he gets lost. At the same time, you also might get a chance to hear your student shine in an online classroom discussion.

Be Prepared to Advocate If You Need To

If your student is having trouble, then speak up about needs. Students (and families and teachers) are under great stress right now and few schools have established routines and protocols.

To read more about what other families are going through, check out ["I just can't do this..."](#)

If students aren't tech savvy, they may have difficulty learning and working with the new platform. The stress and uncertainty of the current situation is also likely to take its toll on working memory and emotional well-being.

- **Keep your teacher informed** about difficulties your student could be having with communication as well as with assigned work.
- **Request fewer assignments and more time** if necessary to complete assignments.

- **Request permission to record** classes.
- **If supports are lacking**, be prepared to request out-of-the-box solutions to problems that arise because of the pandemic.

For instance, if classroom discussions aren't in a college course, but you need discussion to comprehend material, then request an online tutor through the student support office. If none is available, contact a classmate and see if they might be willing to study together online.

If your student was given worksheet packets to complete and she or he is struggling with the quantity of material assigned or experiencing undue stress from being unable to keep up with the amount of work, request a reprieve and share the information with your teacher. With remote schooling, teachers can't see if students are getting overwhelmed or if assignments are piling up at home.

Communicate frequently in an informative and non-emotional way until expectations are manageable for all concerned. Tell your teacher if the amount of reading with the switch to distance learning is too much. If online discussions are overwhelming, shy students may have trouble thinking of what they want to say when everyone in class is looking at them. This sort of thing can also make 'tip of



the tongue' problems worse. Teachers can help by giving students the questions that they will ask them the day before - it can help students to prepare as well as build confidence.

Finally, try not to worry if you decide to take a break from formal schooling. These are unusual times.

If you wanted to keep up a little reading and your student hasn't yet gotten used to reading along with listening, this period would be a great time to find a platform and workflow with technology.

If you need to certify as having dyslexia to qualify individually for Ebook or audiobook resources from **Bookshare** or **Learning Ally**, various psychological associations have made announcements that their professionals are permitted to use "telemedicine" during this time of the pandemic. Also dyslexia screening is available through **Neurolearning.com** using an iPad, iPhone, or Android devices (for ages 7-70).

There has been some suggestion that the earlier people start with reading along with listening, the easier it will become. Some students struggle with this because of working memory being overwhelmed or problems with divided attention. If this is the case, have a student practice with a short passage (a book chapter or less depending on age), listening first, then re-listening while reading along while the text is highlighted. Having already heard the chapter first, reduces the work of having to figure what's being said while following the text by eye. Doing this does provide more print exposure and training and it's much better than not reading or listening alone.

Try reading on a phone and adjust the display so only a few words are visible at a time - it may reduce the work of reading and make it more enjoyable.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>In her prime, Henrietta herself stood only a bit over five feet tall. I first learned about HeLa cells and the</p> | A | <p>In her prime, Henrietta herself stood only a bit over five feet tall. I first learned about HeLa cells and the</p> | B |
|---|---|---|---|

Example from [research](#) about dyslexia and short lines of text.



TYPING FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA AND / OR DYSGRAPHIA

Typing is one of those tasks that every dyslexic person should master, but some students have difficulty fitting it into their already busy stressed-filled days. Some parents sign up their middle or early high school students for courses over the summer, but as almost the entire country is now locked down, finally devoting some time to learning typing might help get students ahead for the future.

There are many writing tools that become available to students if they are able to type at a level of some proficiency. Our son was severely dysgraphic and he was terribly frustrated when he entered school. He had easily the 'worst' writing in his class (one of those "I've never seen this before..." comments from his teacher) and no one was more keenly aware of this weakness than him.

As a first grader, he was allowed to hunt and peck and by the end of the year, he was pretty savvy about being able to take his computer across the hall to print his work.

Many private schools may introduce beginning typing in the 5th grade, but for many dyslexic students, they can start much earlier.

Not surprisingly, higher education students with LDs (some with dyslexia) show significant improvements in their writing when they are allowed to keyboard. One [study](#) showed that LD students could ultimately type as fast as their non-LD peers, but they may need a longer period of time to develop automaticity.



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National Center for Learning Disabilities, the International Dyslexia Association have evaluated the Sondag System(r) and deemed that the program contained the required elements for teaching reading identified by the Nation Reading Panel.

TYPING AND DYSLEXIA

There are a number of reasons why touch typing may be more difficult for dyslexic students when starting: the visual crowding of letters, difficulty with visual search, weakness in visual memory, dyspraxia (motor sequencing difficulties), and finger confusion. Ultimately, though, punching a key is much easier than the complicated movements required to write individual letters, so most dyslexic people will eventually prefer typing to writing by hand.

For young students struggling with typing, it is all right to tolerate a little hunt-and-peck; however if a student can tolerate it, learning in a low-pressure program with proper hand position for touch typing can result in benefits down the line.

One of the things we liked about the Read and Spell Program from Touch Type Read and Spell (see below) is that it's incorporated principles of Orton-Gillingham instruction into its teaching. The lessons are presented in manageable chunks and there are even special math and science modules to reinforce other types of subject learning if desired.



On-screen hands simplify typing instructions, so students don't become spatially confused. The software is also not overly gamified, which otherwise could lead to distraction.



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THE CHAOS OF COLLEGE AND BEYOND

Colleges and universities are in crisis, as they hastily cancelled in-person classes and the pandemic drags on. They face huge budget losses with refunds for student fees for housing and food, plus the prospect of students choosing not to enroll for the fall semester with risk of cancellation of in-person classes and events due to the virus. International students may also choose not to enroll which will take its toll on school budgets (read more about the college situation [HERE](#)).

Many students are rightly considering transfers to a local or online school or taking a gap year. Families who suddenly find themselves out of a job or jobs, can't afford to send students away to college. Some graduate students are even finding out that their faculty advisor has been furloughed.

We are in uncharted territory.

Many recent grads are finding out that prized internships have been cancelled or new jobs no longer exist.

Many advisors are suggesting that students who are taking a gap year, plan to do so...however, if lock-downs persist, it may also limit what good resume-building activities students can engage in from home. Budding entrepreneurs may be less hindered than others, especially if they can think of a business of minimal viable product that can be worked on at home. What is true is that many other people are also at home, though, so it may be easier to collaborate or work with another student who's in the same boat.

COLLEGE AND BEYOND

Some workplaces aren't cancelling their internships, but rather just switching their work to online. The experience won't be the same, but everyone's in the same boat together and sometimes that can transcend the obstacles. From Market Watch, check out [Coronavirus is upending summer internships — how to make your mark if your internship is now virtual.](#)

Also on the plus side, if you otherwise might be self-conscious using accommodations for reading and writing at work, there's no trouble now if you're working at home. If you're new to a job, you could see this as a positive opportunity that you can get used to the type of work in a particular internship while enjoying unfettered access to text to speech, speech to text, and spellcheck and grammar check. By the time you will be heading into the office, you will have developed a workflow that you know can work for you.

If you'd like to read more about potential positives of having a virtual internship, check out [What pandemic? How Goldman Sachs and Amazon may bring the office home for these interns.](#)

Parents Working From Home

"My 14 year old is taking French class in bed, my 12 year old is asking for food I don't have, my 10 year old is refusing to read, and my 8 year old is in my lap while on calls learning to multitask. This is what it really looks like..." - from [3 Hours Longer, the Pandemic Workday Has Obliterated Work-Life Balance](#) (Bloomberg)

Are you trying adjust to the new normal of working at home with a house full of kids?

One helpful article that tackles a variety of family and work situations is:

[How to \(try to\) work from home with kids \(in a pandemic\)](#) from Poynter.

Designate areas and rules and if you have a number of people in your household, set up schedules where the various members of your family can have relative quiet and low distraction when they are videoconferencing.

If you have young children at home, and no older siblings to watch them, then you may need to tag team supervision in order to get some uninterrupted work done. If some conflict is causing you stress, be unafraid about confronting problems and advocating for a better plan. A great example is when stress was created because students were given assignments that were due by 4 o'clock the same day. If that won't work for your student or your family (for instance you have to supervise or help and don't have free time during the day), then request that the rule be changed so that assignments are submitted that evening or the next morning.

Other good advice - communicating well with your colleagues, resetting your work expectations if necessary, and giving yourself as well as others plenty of grace might help you survive this corona time.

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WHAT ABOUT MATH?

With many states ordering schools to remain shut for the remainder of the school year AND the prospect fall quarter may also be waived, there are certainly going to be gaps in math education. Parents and teachers must try to make as intelligent decisions as they can in the midst of these worries and uncertainties.

Math is a gateway to higher education - in its requirements for college as well as for technology, engineering, math and science careers. Math is also incremental, building on itself, so that gaps - as a result of the pandemic - can set students back in ways that may make it difficult to catch up. A study by the NWEA has [warned](#) that school disruptions could result in students losing up to a year of educational growth, especially in math.

So what are students to do?

Before explaining what I would recommend for math, I first would like to say that perhaps in no greater subject is there such a wide disconnect between what a student needs to know for math and how it is taught.

For the typical dyslexic student who finds math challenging, math becomes a blur of symbols, problem sets that are impossible to finish, algorithms and procedures that they don't understand.

If you are looking at trying to keep or even advance your student's understanding in math in the midst of the pandemic, it IS possible.

For dyslexic students, it's especially important to help students understand the *WHY* and not just memorize steps or procedures. Math mastery may seem daunting when there are so many other things to work on and now the schools are in disarray. In actuality, there is not so much that has to be learned if you focus on the end goals. Dyslexic individuals in general excel at reasoning, logic, and problem solving, so it is not surprising that many can do well at mathematics if they are taught in a way that builds on their strengths and anticipates their difficulties.

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Believing in Accessibility for All

On a personal note, my son and I have struggled to a certain extent with dyscalculia. I still count on my fingers and will muddle some multiplication math facts if I'm asked to respond quickly.

Our son struggled a great deal until he mastered basic math facts and saw his working memory expand in his teen years. Even as a 1st grader, though, he could reason algebraically with Hands On Equations of the type seen in the video on the opposite page.

Until his working memory expanded, it seemed as if we could show very little progress with math. Because of dysgraphia and lack of writing automaticity, he would get lost in his problem solving, and really only fared better with talking through problems (a few at a time), later moving onto a now ancient math software called Math Pad from Intellitools. This level of working and progression was so slow and effortful that he couldn't keep up with any sort of traditional math class - whether online or in-person. There were even some years - probably in late elementary when it seemed that we did very little math - or spent time reviewing concepts because he had slipped backwards so much.

The point of me sharing the story is that for many students, math progress can look non-existent...even for years until all the cognitive skills finally meet a certain threshold and BAM! It sort of comes together.

So although the article cited at beginning of this one is typical of the type to cause parents and students to doubt themselves, what I have seen personally both in our own family and in the many families we got to know a little bit about in our clinic, the ultimate prognosis is good - don't panic - things will come together when the time is right.

I will tell you honestly, that there were many years when our son languished in his math skills to the point we thought it might prevent him from ever attending college...but progress is VERY NON-LINEAR. You cannot look at 8th grade and assume what things will look like in 9th.

Another important thing I learned from our son's math journey came from an unlikely source, an old game show called the \$64,000 question. A TV psychologist became famous for winning the question.



Dr. Joyce Brothers, a psychologist, decided she wanted to win the top prize of \$64,000. She studied people who were chosen as contestants on the show and realized that she could win if she became the master of trivia of a limited area of knowledge. She ultimately chose the field of boxing, because she thought the show would like an unusual area of expertise for a woman, and set herself to learning everything she could about boxing. Needless to say, her strategy worked brilliantly and she became a famous TV personality. It was only quite a bit later that she revealed she had no interest in boxing.



How does this story apply to math? There's not as much math that one needs to know if the goal is mainly to do well or well enough on college entrance exams. If I were to put all the math textbooks from 7th grade through 12th on a shelf, that would be a lot of math...actually an impossible amount of math for our son to work through and learn. But what he wanted to do was what I had actually done - is take his last math class ever in high school. For me it was Calculus, but for him it was Algebra - but he achieved what he set out to do at the beginning... not have math limit what he wanted to study in higher education.

In our son's case, he did work through ALEKS, that I mentioned in our last newsletter, but also a few months before he was supposed to take the SAT, we bought the College Board book of something like five actual SAT tests (old ones), and he ended up taking the same test over and over... self-correcting his scores with the answer key and then checking with his dad if he could figure out how to arrive at the answer. Our goal was much simpler than learning all that was presented in math textbooks. If you realize that this is your goal, then you should also realize you shouldn't worry. About a week before the test, he would try taking the same math section every day - sometimes getting only 20% right, then sometimes getting 80% right. The process made him more conscious of his recurring errors. Because every test had the same assortment of different questions, he even didn't have to try different tests - they were all essentially the same.

He was able to score high enough to make the top quartile on math and as was his desire, never have to take math again. When we look back, we look at all of the wasted energy worrying and dreading. Training for a high stakes test was much easier than keeping up with the homework and tests traditional classes demand. So should you worry?

No, but focus your efforts. One of the truths about dyslexia is that development is always happening for young people and designing an individual path is almost always better than an off-the-rack one.



PREMIUM ISSUE FIFTY-FOUR JUNE 2020

Dyslexic Advantage

PREMIUM MAGAZINE

SCHOOLING AT
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IN THIS ISSUE:

- RISING TO THE ZOOM CHALLENGE
- CHEAT SHEETS: GUIDES FOR LEARNING
- PATTERN FINDERS: DYSLEXIC BRILLIANCE
- MUST-HAVES TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE

PREMIUM

UPCOMING ISSUE



- Schooling at Home with Dyslexia
- Pattern Finders Dyslexic Brilliance
- Cheat Sheets: Guides for Learning
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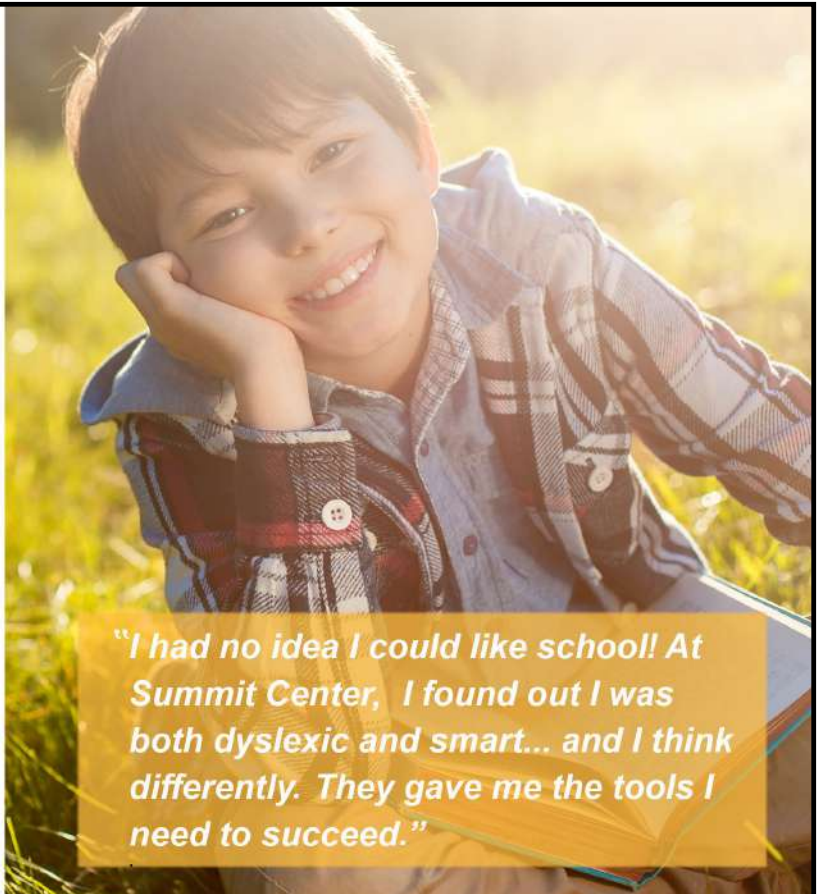
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As Schools Close to Coronavirus, Special Educators Turn to Tele-Therapy

Education Week



Four Big Questions About Teaching Kids with Special Needs in the Age of Coronavirus

LAist



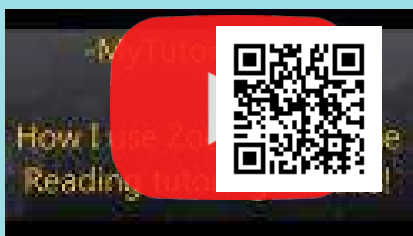
Learning from Lock Down

British Dyslexia Association



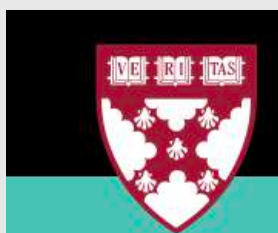
Reading Tutor's Switch to Remote Multisensory Reading Instruction

Educating All Learners



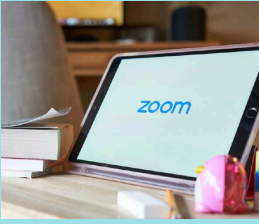
How I Use Zoom to Tutor Reading Online

Youtube My Tutoring Bee



The New Rules for Remote Work - Pandemic Edition (general, not dyslexia-specific)

Harvard Business School Working Knowledge



The Great Zoom School Experiment

The New Yorker



Colleges Waiving SAT and ACT for 2020 Admissions Only Fair Test



Gap Year Ideas for College Students

New York Times



Ultimate Quarantine: Dyslexic Billionaire Saving the World's Oceans

Forbes



When It's All Too Much: How to Quell Coronavirus Anxiety

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Setting a Schedule at Home During School Closures

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"I do not know the word 'quit.' "
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