Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Dyslexia

Is Dyslexia a Specific Learning Disability?

There has been much confusion concerning the term, dyslexia. It has been brought to the Department’s attention by parents of students with disabilities that some schools do not recognize the diagnosis of dyslexia. In the guidance contained in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, the term, dyslexia, is included in the definition of a specific learning disability. Please refer to 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10).

The definition of dyslexia adopted by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) states: “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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.” According to this definition, it is the unexpected difficulties that students with dyslexia demonstrate despite the provision of research based classroom instruction/intervention. This refers to the student who, although provided with reading interventions, does not respond to the interventions.

When a parent provides documentation from a private evaluation that gives a diagnosis of ‘dyslexia’ the school/system should respond by reviewing the documentation, meet/conference with the parent(s) to discuss the student’s progress in reading, and determine if there is an impact in academics. The student would have to demonstrate they do not make adequate response to core instruction and subsequent supplemental research based interventions don’t result in movement towards benchmarks and peer performance levels. However, this is just one piece of the multiple evaluations that need to be collected to determine if a student is a student with a specific learning disability.

It is true that a student can have a diagnosis of dyslexia, but may not meet eligibility for a specific learning disability category?

The diagnosis of dyslexia is simply stating a child is exhibiting difficulty in reading. The school/system will need to investigate if the student is experiencing significant learning difficulties that are impacting their ability to progress through the curriculum.