Pittsburgh’s Third PBIDA Conference an Outstanding Success

Pittsburgh’s third biennial conference, *Dyslexia Today 2014: A Conference for Professionals and Parents* was held on April 5, 2014. The Pittsburgh area is pleased to be reaching more people at the western end of the state with current information about dyslexia and how best to help dyslexic students. Two hundred and twenty eight people—teachers, tutors, parents, and other school ‘professionals’—attended the conference. The keynote address, “The Developmental Web: Diagnosis and Management of Learning Disorders,” given by Dr. Eric Tridas, National IDA President, was lively and highly informative. Following the keynote address, those in attendance obtained more information from the 15 exhibits, and from a variety of morning and afternoon workshop sessions including an abbreviated version of Experience Dyslexia®: A Simulation. During the lunch break special networking sessions were available: parents heard a presentation on Decoding Dyslexia while teachers heard from students with dyslexia. We thank the University of Pittsburgh chapter of Eye to Eye and the high school students from Total Learning Center for coming to share their experiences of dealing with dyslexia and to explain ways that teachers can help them be successful.

We look forward to more events in this part of the state in the future. This issue of FOCUS contains articles summarizing the information presented at this conference.
HELPING TEACHERS TO INSPIRE

CONNECTING PARENTS TO ANSWERS

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

AUDIOBOOKS • PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT • SPECIALIST DIRECTORY
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Read “Hidden in Plain Sight: Seven Common Signs of Dyslexia in the Classroom,” and share it with your colleagues. Download the white paper from LearningAlly.org/PBIDA.
Over the years that PBIDA has been spreading the word about dyslexia, the research into reading -- who learns to read and who doesn’t, and how the brain works differently in those who learn to read easily and those who don’t -- has provided us with amazing documented information that has led to clearer understanding of how this process works.

Along with this research, instructional methodologies had been developed, modified, improved and revised to follow the guidelines of what we have learned from the research. As these methodologies have developed, different terms, descriptors, systems, and brand names have entered the lexicon of dyslexia. Now there are many ways to describe what we know are the structured, sequential, multi-sensory language-based instructional methodologies that work to teach reading, not just to dyslexics, but to all. This wealth of names has become cumbersome and often confusing, especially to those who are not professionals working in the field.

The International Dyslexia Association, in an effort to clarify and simplify this situation, has completed a survey to develop a name that can encompass all the various names currently used.

I have copied the letter from IDA President Hal Malchow below to further explain.

Dear Friends of IDA:

Over the past few months we have invited almost a thousand professionals in our community to participate in an extraordinary undertaking. As you know, IDA advocates an approach to reading instruction that is defined in our Knowledge and Practice Standards. Study after study has proven that our approach delivers far better results than the reading instruction that takes place in most American classrooms. But our approach goes by many names -- Orton-Gillingham, Multi-Sensory, Explicit Phonics and others. And the absence of one name makes it harder for educators to understand what we do and connect the many success stories our approach produces.

As IDA embarks on an effort to market our brand of reading instruction, it is important that we build a brand and that we have a name that can encompass all of these different names. That is why IDA reached out to you to seek your opinion about a name.

After hearing from hundreds of professionals, we narrowed our list of possible names and conducted a Google survey to measure the reactions of both parents and teachers. Using those results we conducted a long discussion of possible names at our IDA board meeting in April. Then on July 1st, the board held a second meeting and decided to adopt “Structured Literacy” as the name to describe all of the programs that conform with our Knowledge and Practice Standards.

“Structured Literacy” need not replace other names currently in use. It is an umbrella name that includes Orton-Gillingham, Multi-Sensory and teaching program like Wilson, Neuhaus, and LETRS. For an educator considering ways to teach reading, it offers one brand, defined in our Knowledge and Practice Standards. It offers a common term that can unite all of our many success stories. We know that Structured Literacy is the best way to teach reading. Now we have a name that provides us with the best way to market and explain what we do so well.

If you participated in our survey, I want to thank you for providing your opinion and advice. But regardless of your participation, I hope you will help us in bringing this new term into common usage and advancing a teaching approach that can provide effective reading instruction, not only for children with dyslexia, but for all beginning readers as well.

Sincerely,

Hal Malchow
President, IDA

To me, this seems a sensible step to help promote awareness and understanding of dyslexia.

Julia Sadtler, President, Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association
We are so pleased that this issue has much practical information for parents and educators, information that will enhance their knowledge about dyslexia as well as inform them on strategies and interventions to address learning needs. We are grateful to our contributors who have taken time to share their wealth of information. We also would like to congratulate the Pittsburgh Region for their very successful and well-attended conference, *Dyslexia Today 2014: A Conference for Professional and Parents*, held in the Pittsburgh Region on April 5, 2014. Dr. Eric Tridas, President of the International Dyslexia Association and behavioral pediatrician, delivered the keynote address, *The Developmental Web: Diagnosis and Management of Learning Disorders*. This web is a systematic structure for describing observations and conditions, and then for devising treatment of learning difficulties. We are fortunate to have summaries from many of these sessions; the summaries provide information that range from explanation of the diagnostic process to research based intervention programs and strategies. Both parents and educators will find informative the articles on identification of dyslexia, assistive technology, Apps, effective interventions and accommodations for dyslexia in school settings, writing strategies and multisensory reading. Read about the Pittsburgh conference and the summaries of the sessions in our special section featuring this event.

We would also like to direct parents to an article from our regular contributor, Allison Einslein, and an article by Nancy Scharff. First, in the *Parents’ Corner*, Allison Einslein helps parents identify possible symptoms of dyslexia and characteristics common to children with dyslexia at various stages of development. With heightened awareness of these symptoms parents can seek additional help to diagnose a possible problem and to intervene early, as early intervention is essential in developing a competent reader. Once equipped with knowledge of a child’s strengths, relative weakness, and learning needs, parents then can move forward in working with the school to meet the instructional needs of their child. But how does a parent know what to look for and what questions to ask to assure that the school is delivering an effective reading program and that the child is receiving the instruction he/she needs? Second, Nancy Scharff provides this guidance to parents in her article, *How Elementary Schools Can Teach All Students to Read*. In a simple and straightforward manner, Ms. Scharff guides parents in what to look for in an effective reading program including assessment, a research based curriculum, involved and knowledgeable school leadership, and well prepared teachers. She also provides a very helpful “Parent Checklist” which parents can use to review a school’s reading program.

We also are very proud of the accomplishments of our members and the recognition they have received for their hard work and contributions to the community. PBIDA volunteers presented two simulations on dyslexia which have had a powerful impact on educators’ and parents’ understanding of dyslexia. Members of PBIDA also have been involved in legislative actions by working on making our state legislators aware of dyslexia and the need for effective screening and instruction, by participating in public hearings and by attending a state senator’s constituents’ open house. (*See What’s Happening in the Eastern Region?*, *The Dyslexia and Early Literacy Intervention Pilot Program* and *(HB 198) is passed by the State Legislature and signed by Governor Corbett!* for more information about these endeavors) Contact PBIDA if you want to get involved in these exciting efforts.

We hope this brief overview entices you to carefully read and to delve deeper into all of the articles in this issue. We also hope to see many of you at our 36th annual conference, *The Next Generation of Reading Science: Proven and Developing Trends in Literacy*, October 10 at Delaware Valley Friends School.
PBIDA thanks the two Corporate sponsors of the Annual PBIDA conference on October 10, 2014: Learning Ally and Wilson Programs. Below read about some of the exciting new activities supported by the two sponsors.

Teachers Embrace Audiobooks for Students with Dyslexia

There’s good news for students who learn differently—and those who teach them.

Learning Ally, a national nonprofit, is considered a critical resource by thousands of students across the country who have learning disabilities like dyslexia, blindness or visual impairment, and has the world’s largest library of human-narrated audio textbooks—more than 77,000 titles.

Learning Ally has also built a community of support, giving teachers and parents the tools needed to help students succeed. For parents, the organization provides personalized consultations, interactive webinars and assistance in finding specialists. For teachers, it offers professional development workshops including dyslexia awareness training and Teacher Ally, a web-based tool that allows teachers to individualize instruction, track reading progress and help students maximize their audiobook resources.

Pamela Greenblatt, director of curriculum and instruction at AIM Academy, a school for students with learning disabilities in Pennsylvania, says, “With Learning Ally, the teachers have much more control of what their students are reading. Other programs don’t give us that central online account where teachers can log in to assign books and see what books the students are adding themselves.”

“Our philosophy is that we explicitly teach students on the level they are currently performing at while pushing them to use their skills and tools in a variety of ways,” she added. “With Learning Ally, students get the benefit of the text without being slowed down by their ability to decode. Students who would normally have to spend hours drudging through higher level text feel a sense of relief when they can listen to a human voice reading to them through a Learning Ally audiobook.”

Learning Ally has served millions of K-12, college and graduate students, as well as veterans and lifelong learners—all of whom cannot read standard print due to blindness, visual impairment, dyslexia or other learning and physical disabilities. Learn more at www.LearningAlly.org.

Wilson® Programs Support Strong Teaching and Professional Learning Practices

With a growing emphasis on teaching and learning standards across the country, and the subsequent link to teacher evaluations, teachers need support to master their craft. Perhaps your school system uses teaching and learning frameworks, the criteria and indicators defining effective instruction, set forth by the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards, The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, or Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning. Maybe it utilizes a combination of these, or more individualized frameworks. In all likelihood, your school system’s teaching and learning frameworks are based on the same body of research evidence that also informs the content, planning, and delivery of Wilson’s programs and their accompanying professional learning. Wilson Fundations®, Wilson Just Words®, and Wilson Reading System® (WRS) programs and professional learning models assist with the development of strong teaching and professional learning practices.

Wilson® Programs:

• Help teachers plan and deliver rigorous instruction to ensure that students develop strong foundational reading and writing and its application to meet college- and/or career-readiness standards.
• Foster a positive learning environment in the classroom and at the school that supports individual learning, active engagement, and self-motivation.
• Provide teachers with the skills they need to teach rigorous content, make connections with past and future learning, and engage students in critical thinking and problem-solving.
• Support teachers in assessing student learning and understanding, and then differentiating instruction.
• Support teachers as they engage in professional learning and other professional responsibilities.

Implemented as recommended, with the associated training models, Wilson programs get students reading and writing and on the path of lifelong success. Additionally, they help teachers by providing rigorous and comprehensive content, background knowledge, procedures and routines, principles of instruction, and the support that teachers require in order for them to acquire or solidify strong teaching and learning practices. (See 2014 Summer Decoder Newsletter for more information at www.wilsonlanguage.com)
Editor's Note: Readers of *FOCUS* are already aware of dyslexia. Unfortunately, most parents learn about dyslexia only after their children grow frustrated trying to learn to read in schools that can’t teach them. This doesn’t have to be the case. What if parents knew what to look for in school reading programs – programs that are effective for all children? Please share this article and the accompanying checklist with parents whose children, some of whom will struggle to read, are just beginning school.

How Elementary Schools Can Teach All Students to Read
Nancy Scharff, Member, Pennsylvania Dyslexia Legislative Coalition; Board Member, KIPP Philadelphia Schools; Former Executive Director, Current Board Member, ReadWorks.org; M.Ed. Special Education, 2012, Saint Joseph’s University.

Too many elementary schools fail to identify struggling readers, including dyslexics, and therefore fail to provide the right instruction. How can schools do a better job? What should parents look for in a school to be confident their children will receive effective reading instruction?

While not always easy to implement, the key components of an effective reading program are fairly straightforward. What follows is an overview of those components plus a brief review of teacher preparation, another essential consideration. Parents can use the checklist provided in the adjacent column to evaluate schools they are considering.

The three important components of effective elementary school literacy instruction are:

1. Early and ongoing assessment;
2. Use of a research-based reading curriculum; and
3. School leadership and culture that support quality implementation.

**Early and Ongoing Assessment:** Early identification is critical to addressing every reading issue. The most successful schools screen new kindergartners with a norm-referenced screening tool, like the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), or another inventory that identifies early reading readiness. Based on this screening, teachers can provide reading instruction at the precise instructional level of the students.

Then throughout the year, teachers should conduct regular assessments in order to adjust the intensity and method of instruction to fit each student’s progress. Teachers should measure progress both through benchmark assessments (e.g., performance relative to grade level or age group) and through curriculum inventories. Benchmark assessments indicate whether the student is making progress relative to established norms, while the curriculum inventory enables teachers to assess student mastery of content before introducing more advanced skills. For instance, a student needs to master the sounds of letters and letter combinations before trying to blend those sounds into words. An inventory tells the teacher exactly which letters or letter combinations the student has or has not mastered.

Assessments such as these are part of Response to Intervention (RTI), when properly implemented. RTI is designed specifically to provide early and systematic support. It uses frequent assessments and changes to student instruction (the intervention) in response to the students’ level of progress.

**Research-Based Reading Curriculum:** Students need to be taught with curriculum that has been proven effective. Although many reading programs claim to be effective based upon research, the research often is not rigorous or scientific. As stated by the RTI Action Network, “Scientifically based research involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.”

In 2010, to support parents and educators, the National Reading Panel (NRP) reviewed the highest quality research in the field and then established clear recommendations. An effective reading program, the NRP determined, must include five critical areas of instruction:

- Phonemic awareness (knowledge of the sounds in words)
- Phonics (how sounds are represented by letters)
- Fluency (ease and speed of reading words)
- Vocabulary, and
- Comprehension

Further, the NRP states that the method of instruction must be explicit (e.g., teach six types of syllables) and systematic (e.g., teach syllables in a logical order). Curricula that meet these criteria will help all students to become strong readers.

In addition to using the recommendations of the NRP (National Reading Panel), parents can evaluate a curriculum in relation to the research through resources available online. Two such websites are the Florida Center For Reading Research (www.fcrr.org) and the RTI Action Network (www.rtinetwork.org). A particularly useful review of early reading programs by FCRR can be found in a summary table at the following: bit.ly/1qW6wVs

**School Leadership and Culture:** Leadership and culture are the most challenging of the components. Curriculum and assessments are simply tools, but the leadership enables quality implementation throughout the school. School leadership creates the culture and establishes the vision; provides professional development and coaching to teachers on the curriculum and assessments being used; and organizes the school so that small group instruction can take place.

*(Continued on page 8)*
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In successful schools the leadership develops a strong culture around literacy instruction. These schools have a vision statement embraced by all teachers in the school. An ideal statement might be: The overall goal of our approach to literacy instruction is to ensure that every student in our school is making progress regardless of his or her instructional level, cognitive ability, or behavioral challenges. To realize this vision, the school leadership must provide adequate staffing to ensure that a sufficient number of teachers are available to work with small groups. The most successful schools have co-teachers in at least kindergarten and first grade, where early identification and intervention are critical. During phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency instruction (frequently known as Word Study), teachers need to group students across the grade, not within a single classroom – thus allowing for more precise groupings. Teachers should use the same approach to groupings for Guided Reading instruction (where the focus is on vocabulary and comprehension - while also incorporating phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency). All available teachers, including special education teachers and reading specialists, can participate in instruction, thus enabling teachers to work with struggling readers in groups of less than five.

It takes time to analyze assessment data, group and regroup students and prepare quality instruction. The most successful schools schedule intervention meetings every few weeks. Four things happen in these meetings: 1) data analysis; 2) collaborative problem solving conversations; 3) intervention planning (what to do); and 4) follow up on impact of interventions to date. In addition, two or three times a year teachers meet for an entire professional development day to analyze individual student progress as well as any necessary changes to staffing, intensity of instruction, the curriculum or assessments.

**The Bedrock: Well-Prepared Teachers**

Underlying these components are the bedrock issues of teacher knowledge and skill with regard to reading instruction. According to the Rand Corporation, “Many personal, family, and neighborhood factors contribute to a student's academic performance, but a large body of research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most.” So while the components above are critical for student success, teacher knowledge and skill remain the bedrock of effective reading instruction. And yet there is growing awareness that the schools of education across the country, including the most prestigious, are not adequately preparing teachers in reading instruction. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) had this to say in their 2013 Teacher Prep Review:

> “…three out of four elementary teacher preparation programs still are not teaching the methods of reading instruction [research-based] that could substantially lower the number of children who never become proficient readers.”

Moreover, schools of education frequently tell teacher candidates to develop their own unique approach to teaching reading, as if research in reading instruction did not exist. Fortunately, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) is addressing this gap in teacher preparation rigor by establishing and disseminating research-based standards of preparation for the schools of education. In 2010, the IDA developed “Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading.” These Standards provide a framework for course content in university and other teacher preparation programs, offering the most thorough, research-supported documentation of what every teacher ought to know and be able to demonstrate - whether they are teaching dyslexic students, other struggling readers or the general student population. Teacher candidates prepared in IDA-accredited university programs have the ability to identify, diagnose and teach all students. These well-prepared teacher candidates, working in elementary schools that embrace the components outlined here, can change the future of student reading performance – and ensure that every child becomes a strong reader.

To date, the IDA has accredited 17 university programs across the country, only one of which is in Pennsylvania – the Masters of Special Education program at Saint Joseph University in Philadelphia. Clearly, Pennsylvania needs more IDA-accredited programs.

**Summary**

Whether you are a parent evaluating an elementary school for your child or a school leader evaluating your school’s reading program, the components discussed above can serve as a useful guide. Does your school have a vision statement for literacy instruction? Is the curriculum research-based? Is the curriculum taught with fidelity? How do teachers assess student progress? Use the “Parent Checklist” to review a school you are considering for your child. Every parent deserves to feel confident that their child will receive the instruction they need.

At the same time, school districts and individual elementary schools need to be confident that the teacher candidates they are hiring have deep knowledge and skill in teaching reading. The IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards can help provide that confidence. With 60% of Pennsylvania 4th graders “below proficient” on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress, the need couldn’t be clearer or more urgent.
Parent Checklist – Ten Questions
For Evaluating an
Elementary School That Teaches All Students to Read
Nancy Scharff

Quality reading instruction for all students is dependent upon a “Yes” answer to every question below. Since it is not possible to name every research-based curriculum and assessment, please use the resources referenced in the article to gain further insight.

Assessments
1. Are all students screened for early reading skills, and if so, what screening assessment is used?
   A. Right Answer: Yes. Note the name of the assessment in case you have further questions.
   B. Wrong Answer: We use informal inventories developed at the school, or we do not use any screening procedure at this time.
2. Is the progress of students monitored over the course of the school year, and if so, how frequently and with what assessments?
   A. Right Answer: Yes, student progress is monitored over the course of the school year. The frequency of progress monitoring assessment varies depending on the student. Lower achieving students should be monitored more frequently, as often as weekly. Higher performing students are generally monitored less frequently, with highest performing students monitored only at that beginning and end of the school year. Again, note the name of the assessment in case you have further questions.
   B. Wrong Answer: We assess all students at the beginning and end of the school year.
3. When do teachers have time in their schedules to review the assessment results and plan instruction?
   A. Right Answer: Regularly scheduled meetings occur at least once per month, with at least two all-day Professional Development days during the school year.
   B. Wrong Answer: Our teachers find time to meet and plan on their own.
4. What curriculum does the school use to teach early reading skills, and does that curriculum include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency?
   A. Right Answer: The school should be able to tell you that the curriculum includes phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency, and that activities throughout the day incorporate these early reading skills as well. Note the name of the curriculum in case you have further questions.
   B. Wrong Answer: The school does not use a specific curriculum that includes phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency instruction, but rather informally incorporates these skills into instruction. [This is an example of instruction that is not explicit or systematic.]
5. Is the reading curriculum research-based, and can the school provide some proof that backs that up?
   A. Right Answer: Yes, and the school should be able to direct you to a website or provide literature that will clearly verify this.
   B. Wrong Answer: We have one teacher per classroom and our teachers are qualified to teach reading and all other elementary school subjects.

Curriculum
6. Does the school have a vision statement for teaching reading?
   A. Right Answer: Yes, and it focuses on all students, regardless of need, being given the instruction they need, when and how they need it.
   B. Wrong Answer: School personnel might say they have a vision, however, it is general or not focused on reading or not documented.
7. Are reading groups organized within one classroom or within multiple classrooms in the same grade?
   A. Right Answer: Within multiple classrooms of the same grade. As an example, with 75 students from three second grade classrooms, the school would be able to accommodate eight reading groups, each at a different reading level. With 25 students from one classroom, the teacher would be able to accommodate no more than four different reading groups.
   B. Wrong Answer: Each classroom teacher organizes reading groups strictly within his or her own classroom.
8. Are there enough teachers to teach the many small groups of students during reading?
   A. Right Answer: Yes. Kindergarten and First Grade classrooms should ideally have two teachers. In addition, all K-3 classrooms should use specialist teachers such as the Reading Specialist and the Special Education teachers to teach reading groups.
   B. Wrong Answer: We have one teacher per classroom and our teachers are qualified to teach reading and all other elementary school subjects.
9. Curriculum and assessments are only effective if well taught. How does the school leadership monitor implementation, and how does the leadership support teachers in improving the quality of their teaching?
   A. Right Answer: First, teachers are initially well trained in the use of the curriculum and assessments. Second, a highly qualified faculty member or supervisor regularly observes teachers and then coaches them to improve their skill. Third, teachers have time to support one another through the meetings referenced in #3 above.
   B. Wrong Answer: Our teachers are trained in the curriculum and therefore know how to teach the curriculum effectively.

School Leadership and Culture
6. Does the school have a vision statement for teaching reading?
   A. Right Answer: Yes, and it focuses on all students, regardless of need, being given the instruction they need, when and how they need it.
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Teacher Knowledge and Skill
10. How many of your classroom teachers and specialists have specific preparation in research-based reading instruction and in working with struggling readers, including dyslexics?
   A. Right Answer: Ideally, all teachers. Realistically, leadership is confident and clear that one or more teachers has expertise in research-based reading instruction and dyslexia, and that individual supports all teachers.
   B. Wrong Answer: The school believes that credentialed teachers have the knowledge they need to be effective in teaching reading. The school does not look for specific expertise in research-based reading instruction or specific knowledge in teaching struggling readers.
One year ago Representative Ed Neilson, PA State Representative from 169th Legislative District, Philadelphia County, came to the PA Dyslexia Literacy Coalition (PADLC) meeting to talk to us about his proposed Dyslexia Pilot bill. The result of this meeting was a strong collaboration between Representative Neilson and the PADLC. The journey from the day we were introduced by Representative Neilson to HB 198 until Thursday, June 26, 2014, when Governor Corbett signed HB 198 into law, was filled with much hard work, meeting after meeting, raised and dashed hopes, but nobody gave up—we all persevered.

The PADLC began because there was a need for a movement that could improve education for students with dyslexia in PA. Other organizations were already in existence but PADLC was a way to bring us all together under one umbrella with the same objective. PBIDA, Decoding Dyslexia PA (DDPA), Learning Ally and a variety of representatives of public and private schools, parents, educators and psychologists, came together as a team. By bringing together varied backgrounds and strengths, we were able to help Representative Neilson amend the language and shepherd HB 198 through the Senate and the House, and finally to the Governor for his signature.

Sponsored by Representative Neilson (D-Philadelphia) in the House, The Dyslexia and Early Literacy Intervention Pilot Program has passed and is now ready for implementation as Act 69! On June 30, 2014 we met with the PA Department of Education to begin the first steps to get the pilot ready to be rolled out in September 2015.

The purpose of this bill is to screen all incoming children who are enrolled in a full day Kindergarten. The screener used will be one which has been demonstrated to have predictive validity and classification accuracy. The program will provide a multi-tier support system, using evidence-based intervention services for students with potential risk factors for early reading deficiencies and dyslexia, such as low phonemic awareness, low letter and symbol naming, and inability to remember sequences. Intervention services will include multisensory structured language programs for students scoring below the benchmark and will provide timely targeted instruction and strategic re-teaching and intensive intervention in identified areas. The program will operate in three school districts for three full school years. Following implementation and evaluation, the state Secretary of Education will submit an evaluation of the pilot program to the General Assembly, with recommendations to continue, expand or make changes to the program. The Pennsylvanian Department of Education would also determine whether programs of this type have the potential to reduce future special education costs in the state.
Benchmark has graduated almost 1,700 young people since 1970. A recent independent survey* revealed the following about their Benchmark experience.

98% said Benchmark taught me to think critically and creatively, reason analytically, and solve problems.

93% said Benchmark helped me develop high standards and expectations for myself.

95% said that Benchmark helped me become independent and confident.

93% said that Benchmark worked for me because the teachers really knew me and my family.

98% said Benchmark prepared me well for my next school.

(*Feb. 2014)

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Before You Prescribe Treatment, You Must Consider The Whole Child
Keynote Address by Dr. Eric Tridas
Presentation Summarized by Catherine Davidson, M.A., the parent of a college student with dyslexia
and a member of the Pittsburgh Region-PBIDA Committee

The Developmental Web: Diagnosis and Management of Learning Disorders

“If you can describe it, I can prescribe for it.”

That was the advice of Dr. Eric Tridas, a behavioral pediatrician and president of the International Dyslexia Association, as he urged parents and teachers to observe children’s behaviors carefully before jumping to any conclusions about diagnosis.

In his keynote address to the PBIDA Pittsburgh conference on April 4, 2014, Tridas described the “developmental web” of factors in any description of children and young people with learning issues, and the ways in which the complexities of this web affect both diagnosis and treatment of dyslexia, ADHD, and other neuro-developmental and behavior disorders.

Tridas is Medical Director of the Tridas Center for Child Development in Tampa, Florida, and is Editor of the book From ABC to ADHD: What Parents Should Know About Dyslexia and Attention Problems. He is completing his term as IDA president in 2014.

Tridas’ “developmental web” was organized as a useful and systematic structure for describing conditions and for devising treatment of learning difficulties. He emphasized that these conditions are only a problem when they impair quality of life, and it is being alert to impairments that helps to clarify diagnosis and treatment. He identified four, interconnected aspects of this developmental web: development, behavior, health, and environment, and described how each area plays a role in helping physicians, families, and schools respond to children most effectively.

A careful description of how symptoms in each aspect of the web combine to cause impairment allows physicians and others to plan intervention techniques to manage these conditions. Effective management could include a blend of educational, psychological, medical, and environmental strategies and will vary according to each child’s strengths and needs.

Tridas frequently illustrated his points with stories of children and families in his practice. For example, to underscore the need to take developmental stages into account, he told the story of a mother worried about her six-year-old child’s inability to sit still and get his kindergarten homework done. Tridas’ prescription: any six-year-old needs much more play time and little or no homework.

Tridas reviewed a wide range of questions, tests, and considerations which affect diagnosis and management for each of the four areas of the developmental web:

- Developmental: Are there problems with visual and spatial perception, spoken or written language production and comprehension, working and short-term memory, visual and spatial perception, or motor skills?
- Behavioral: are there signs of internalizing (depression and anxiety), externalizing (oppositional-defiant behavior), or atypical conditions (autism, or schizophrenia)?
- Health: are there chronic conditions like asthma, allergies, other co-occurring conditions, or side effects of medications?
- Environmental: what are the roles of parents, peers, and teachers in the life of the child?

The descriptive profile created by careful attention to these four areas leads to the development of individualized treatment and management plans. In most cases, this would include a mixture of behavioral strategies (often including ideas for parental or teacher behavior as well as the child’s); accommodations in school or at home; and appropriate medications.

“It is not your fault, but it is your problem,” Tridas said in encouraging parents and teachers to take a pro-active but not guilt-ridden approach to supporting children with developmental, behavioral, health, or environmental issues.

(Continued on page 18)
Challenging the Myth of Normal.

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Maria Paluselli is committed to helping children with dyslexia, and she has been an inspiration and moving force behind expanding awareness and knowledge about dyslexia in the Pittsburgh region.

A graduate of Duquesne University with a Master’s Degree in special education, Maria became the director of the Pittsburgh Children’s Dyslexia Center when it was established in 1999. This center (supported by the Pittsburgh Scottish Rite Masons) provides free Orton-Gillingham tutoring for dyslexic children in the region.

Maria is certified as an Orton-Gillingham Tutor at the Advanced Level and as an Orton-Gillingham Trainer by the Scottish Rite. In Maria’s 10 years as director of the Children’s Dyslexia Center, more than 150 dyslexic students were taught to read, and Maria trained more than 40 tutors in this powerful and effective instructional method. Today, the center continues to flourish, a testament to the high standards and supportive learning environment that Maria helped to establish.

Maria has been an adjunct instructor at the University of Pittsburgh and a consultant to the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Non-Public Schools division (AIU). At PITT and the AIU, she trained over 300 teachers in the basic principles of Orton-Gillingham methods. She is also a consultant for Winsor Learning Corp. and has trained teachers in the use of the Sonday System, an Orton-Gillingham based system used by numerous school districts.

In 2001 Maria helped to found a regional group of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) in Pittsburgh as part of the Pennsylvania Branch (PBIDA). Maria served as the second chair of that group, and has been active in the group in countless ways.

In 2013, Maria became a learning support teacher in the Pine Richland School District, where she uses her Orton-Gillingham training to support students coping with dyslexia.

Maria’s skill, warmth, optimism, and commitment to supporting struggling readers continues to have a wide and enduring impact on teachers, families, and thousands of young people in western Pennsylvania.

We are proud to honor Maria Paluselli with the 2014 Christopher Gardner Award.

This award was established by the Pittsburgh Regional Group of PBIDA to honor those who make a significant difference in the lives of people with dyslexia in the Pittsburgh Region. Christopher Gardner, who was dyslexic, had to struggle to find the resources he needed to help him learn to read. His wife, Carrie, and daughter, Valerie, chose to support the Pittsburgh Regional Group of PBIDA in his memory, to help create greater awareness of dyslexia and spread the knowledge of best practices for helping people with dyslexia. Their gift made possible the first IDA-sponsored conference in Pittsburgh.
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Surviving Your Child’s Homework
by Dr. Dawn Hodges
Presentation summarized by Kathleen Hartos, Certified Orton-Gillingham Tutor in the Pittsburgh area and a member of the Pittsburgh Region - PBIDA Committee

Although homework is an important part of the school learning experience, many parents find they have problems with their children over homework at one time or another. For parents of children with dyslexia, homework can become a nightmare. Dr. Dawn Hodges, Director of the Hill School of Wilmington, shared tips to help parents and children survive and complete homework. Dr. Hodges’ perspective is personal as well as professional. She is the daughter of a dyslexic parent, the mother of three dyslexic children, a teacher, and the director of a unique half-day academic program for students in grades 1-8 with learning disabilities and/or attention deficit disorder.

The mission of Hill School is to empower children who have learning differences with the skills needed to become confident, independent learners, and managing homework is one part of that process. Dr. Hodges maintains that it is the job of teachers, administrators, and especially parents to make homework a successful experience. Parents can empower their children by providing a framework for organization and incorporating helpful strategies: getting good notebooks and book bags, arranging the locker, managing time, and setting a specific location in your home for homework can all help.

As the school year begins notebooks should be purchased and arranged as specified by the child’s teacher. If not specified, a three-ring binder stocked with regular rule notebook paper and every page dated aids organization. All books should be labeled clearly on the front and the spine. Book bags should be purchased with room for supplies—consider multiple bags for different activities. Teach children to clean out the book bag nightly and sort any loose papers. Lockers should have a class schedule posted and the supplies in easy reach. If possible, parents are encouraged to assist with locker set-up and maintenance.

In some families, having a central location where all children in the family do their homework works best. This may be the dining room or kitchen table. When planning a child’s workspace, think about possible distractions that will need to be avoided such as a nearby television. Stock the child’s study area with pencils and paper and any miscellaneous supplies they are likely to need such as a dictionary, calculator, highlighters, pens, ruler, scissors, glue, tape, colored pencils, stapler, and access to the internet. Children can waste a lot of time tracking down supplies when beginning their homework, and parents can avoid that wasted time by having everything available at the homework site. It is also helpful to color-code notebooks and folders for each subject the child is taking in school. Completed homework should be placed in the child’s corresponding notebook and then in the backpack as soon as it is finished to ensure it gets to school.

Time is organized by having a calendar, paper or digital, available at all times where daily homework is recorded. It is also advisable to have a monthly calendar on which long-term assignments can be written as soon as they are assigned. Sometimes it is difficult for kids to organize homework time because of other obligations such as family events, practices, and appointments. A long-range calendar/bulletin board displayed in the home helps in keeping track of activities. Parents and children can reference this calendar when planning homework to allow time for the other activities children are involved in. Once a week parents should sit down with each child and review the week together. A Google calendar, which can let a family view schedules that have been shared electronically, can be great resource.

A homework session should begin by reviewing what the day’s assignments are. Parents can help each child list assignments and help prioritize and break down longer tasks into shorter ones. Parents can also make sure all necessary books, notebooks and worksheets were brought home and check to see what other tasks the child has to do that should be included on the list such as long-term assignments and tests later in the week for which the child should begin studying.

Strategies for reading, writing, note taking, remembering information, spelling, and self-advocacy were also presented. Technology has opened many educational doors to children, particularly to children with dyslexia. Audio textbooks are available. Recording devices can assist with capturing and preserving thoughts and ideas making writing assignments easier. The Notebook Layout view in Word for Mac is an exceptionally valuable tool and allows for Audio Notes if permissible by teacher. Dr. Hodges particularly recommended the following software and apps: Google, for calendaring; Dragon Naturally Speaking, speech to text software; Pocket, which saves articles and bookmarks to one place; and Lisgo, which reads to you. In addition Dr. Hodges recommended Ben Foss’s book The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan: A Blueprint for Renewing Your Child’s Confidence and Love of Learning.

Homework is a great predictor of success at any level of education — primary, secondary, and beyond. It can help children develop good habits, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Dr. Hodges’ suggestions were helpful and seemed doable. She herself survived homework with her three dyslexic children, and currently two are in college and one is a college graduate!
Do you have a child that is struggling with reading or writing?

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Hill Methodology – A Multisensory Reading Program
by Dr. Dawn Hodges
Presentation summarized by Joyce Vargo, M.S. Ed, Reading Specialist, Pittsburgh-Mount Oliver Intermediate Unit, Orton Gillingham Certified Tutor, and member of the Pittsburgh Region - PBIDA Committee

Dr. Dawn Hodges, Director of The Hill School of Wilmington (North Carolina), presented the unique half-day academic program used in the school. Modeled after the Hill Center in Durham, North Carolina, the Half-Day School curriculum offers a multisensory structured approach to help students with learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Disorder reach their full academic potential. Students attend this private school on a half-day basis, 5 days a week and are taught in small groups of up to 4 students by teachers certified by the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC).

At the Hill School of Wilmington, students receive 3 hours of instruction 5 days a week. Each hour is dedicated to a multisensory structured approach covering the core subjects of reading, math and writing. In reading, for example, students have a class schedule that encompasses phonics, phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension with a designated number of minutes dedicated to each of these areas. Teachers use a combination of oral drill to review, systematic phonics instruction, and word attack strategies such as scooping onset and rime and labeling VC patterns. Timed fluency tests are routinely administered and results are graphed to monitor student progress. Teachers employ word sorts to reinforce Tier I, II and III level vocabulary words. Dialogic reading, or teacher guided conversations such as PEER and CROWD, are directed by teachers to promote students’ comprehension along with other before-during-after strategies including Somebody/Wanted/But/So and It Says- I Say – And So. In addition, teachers may also use commercially prepared materials such as decodable texts and phonic workbooks to supplement classroom materials.

Dr. Hodges also explained that the HILLMATH program uses many of the same multisensory techniques as the reading instruction including oral drill to review, fact fluency and timed tests that are graphed, dictation and reading of numbers, and computation exercises. Similarly, HILLWRITE uses oral drill, oral and written spelling, copy and dictation, handwriting, and composition. All teachers at The Hill School of Wilmington are trained by the Neuhaus Education Center in writing and multisensory grammar.

The Hill School of Wilmington offers students who have learning differences the opportunity to succeed as independent learners. This is accomplished by using a program of research-based and multisensory structured instruction replicating the 30-year history of documented success of the Hill Center in Durham, North Carolina.

(Continued from page 12)

Workshop Session
IDA: The Perfect Storm—Inattention, Dyslexia, and Anxiety

Building on the “Developmental Web” framework Dr. Tridas outlined in his keynote address, Dr. Tridas used this session to delve more deeply into the relationship among attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, and dyslexia. He focused on the ways in which attention and anxiety symptoms can affect reading. He explained that while these three conditions are each expressed distinctively in a child, they often coexist and must be assessed and dealt with. Any management plan for supporting children with these disorders must take this complexity into account. Getting a true picture of how each of these may appear in a child can guide clinicians and families in creating treatment plans and strategies to address each of these issues appropriately and create a multifaceted and dynamic approach to supporting the child.
Save the Date for PBIDA Dyslexia Simulation

Wednesday, November 12, 2014
7-9 pm

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“My son now recognizes his potential and talks enthusiastically about planning for a future full of possibility and hope.”

-TQS Parent
With technology changing daily, it is almost impossible for educators to keep up with the overabundance of newly created Apps and with the advances in Assistive Technology Software. Technology can be so helpful for students and adults with dyslexia and those with other learning differences. A better understanding of these valuable tools greatly enhances lesson planning and student material preparation.

At the PBIDA conference in Pittsburgh on April 5, 2014, Scott A. Dougherty, an Instructional Technology Specialist (K-12) at PaTTAN (Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network), provided an extensive overview of an assortment of Assistive Technology (AT) tools that can be beneficial to individuals with dyslexia and other learning differences and can help teachers more easily prepare appropriate materials for these students.

- **Microsoft Word** includes a number of options that can help to make text more accessible to a variety of learners. Using and applying the styles option in word documents, an educator can more easily customize documents to meet individual needs. Applying styles to a document allows the writer to quickly change the appearance of any style rather than making separate adjustments to each isolated element of text. Examples include increasing the font size or underlining paragraph headings in an outline to make them more easily recognized by a student. Another capability of Microsoft Word is its ability to create electronic quizzes or worksheets, which a student can access electronically. Microsoft also allow for the creation of books which will allow a student to read a teacher created book and listen to added audio information.

- **Adobe Acrobat** is an application used to create and access files in portable document format (PDF). A free reader version of the software allows individuals to share, view, print, and annotate documents in PDF format.

- **Text to speech software** is an enormous help to students who lack the reading fluency necessary to cover the content load encountered in a multitude of classes. Mr. Dougherty suggested the following:  
  - Natural Reader software can convert any written text such as MS Word, web pages, PDF files, and Emails into spoken words. It can also convert any written text into audio files such as MP3 or WAV for your CD player or iPod. www.naturalreaders.com
  - Kurzweil 3000-firefly educational software program provides literacy support for students. It includes built-in tools for reading, writing, study skills, and test taking; helping students who struggle with dyslexia or are English Language Learners to become independent.
  - TextHelp Read & Write Gold software includes scan and read capability. www.texthelp.com/North-America

Other sources of accessible materials which allow students to listen to printed material are:

- Audible www.audible.com
- Kindle Store• Bookshare www.bookshare.org
- Learning Ally www.learningally.org
- Listening to audio books allows a student to benefit from advanced exposure to vocabulary and concepts that their independent reading ability may not allow.
- Writing is difficult for many students and www.gingersoftware.com helps students proofread their work.
- Speech to text software can also be helpful for students who struggle with dysgraphia (the physical act of writing), or students who struggle with keyboarding.
- Software to simplify challenging text is beneficial when reading and understanding advanced text becomes overwhelming. www.rewordify.com is a free online software program that helps simplify challenging text. The program also interfaces with www.dictionary.com

Hundreds of apps are available to assist with organization and scheduling, list and note taking, planning, spelling and word study, keyboarding, as well as apps that can make learning more engaging.

For iOS devices such as an iPod or iPad, apps can be obtained from Apple www.apple.com/itunes

Android device apps can be obtained from play.google.com/store, Amazon App Store for Android, Google Chrome Extensions chrome.google.com/webstore/category/apps

Windows 8 apps can be obtained from: windows.microsoft.com/en-us/apps

Interactive whiteboards or slate apps can also enhance lessons.  

Technology is constantly evolving and new apps are created daily. While one app may be perfect for one student, it may not be suited to another. Educators must be creative and find the app which best meets an individual’s needs. Scott A. Dougherty possesses a wealth of knowledge about technology and its uses to make education more engaging and accessible to students. His handouts are available in a dropbox, which can be accessed through the PBIDA website: Click on Conferences, on Dyslexia Today 2014, on Handouts, on PM-8, and look for the conference link in the dropbox.
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www.ChildrensDyslexiaCenters.org
Why is an evaluation important? According to Drs. Joe and Carol Utay, testing gives us data, and helps us to know what areas of need to focus on, so that we then can target those areas effectively. The co-founders of Total Learning Center in Wexford, PA shared information on getting and understanding a diagnosis during their workshop at the PBIDA Pittsburgh Regional Conference.

Dr. Carol Utay explained the process by which concerned parents can request that their child be tested. Parents must make a request for testing in writing and then, within 10 days, the school will offer a Permission to Evaluate (PTE) form that needs to be signed by them. At this point, a 60 day “countdown” starts, where the school has that much time to perform the requested evaluations. One thing to note: the time during summer vacation does not count towards the 60 days.

“"You need to put your (initial) request in writing,” stressed Carol Utay. Nothing will likely occur with just a verbal request.

A school may also respond to parents’ written request with a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement, or NOREP form. This form indicates that the school has reviewed the child’s situation and determined that he already has an appropriate placement. According to the Utays, parents can dispute this and still request testing. In the majority of the cases, the Utays have found that the schools will comply with the parents.

Once testing results are in, the school will meet with the parents, share results and make recommendations. If parents are not satisfied with the results of testing, they also have the option of requesting an independent evaluation, which the school may or may not agree to. If they do agree to the independent evaluation, the school district will pay for the evaluation, at a monetary level the district sets.

The lengthy time frame can be a problem for some parents, who want to get a diagnosis, and begin to get help for their child sooner. These parents may elect to pay for and get an outside diagnosis. Dr. Joe Utay, himself a Certified School Psychologist, explained that in Pennsylvania, only Certified School Psychologists are recognized as the persons qualified and recognized to test and diagnose children for learning disabilities. “By law,” explained Joe, “the school must consider results from a qualified tester.” However, every school district interprets what it means to “consider results” differently.

But ultimately, the Utays stress that the main reason for testing is to help the child, and to gather data that will help formulate a targeted plan to address that child’s specific issues. A good evaluation helps to write a good IEP. It’s important for parents to ask questions and to seek help with understanding testing jargon such as, “percentiles,” “percentages,” “standard scores,” and “grade equivalents.”

As for the diagnosis, while it is good to have the term “Dyslexia” used as a diagnosis, if the school findings use a term such as “Specific Learning Disability,” instead, what is more important is that a child get the right kind of intervention.

According to Dr. Carol Utay, “It is up to the school to decide the intervention used, however, the evaluator and the parents can define what the child needs.” Parents should ask for a, “multisensory, systematic, explicit, and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.”

By learning as much as they can and seeking expert guidance, parents can navigate the process and work towards getting the best help possible for their child.
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“Teaching Writing: Complex Sentence Structures,” and “Teaching Paragraph & Essay Skills to Struggling Students” by William Van Cleave

Presentations summarized by Maria Paluselli, a Learning Support Teacher in the Pine Richland School District, past Director of the Pittsburgh Children’s Dyslexia Center, and past Chair of the Pittsburgh Regional Group of PBIDA.

In “Teaching Writing: Complex Sentence Structures,” Van Cleave explained that many students struggle at the sentence level, yet most instruction ignores this and moves right to the paragraph level with an emphasis on assessment prompts. Van Cleave demonstrated the value of teaching grammar, or parts of speech, to improve sentence writing. The key in teaching parts of speech is to go beyond the memorization of the meaning of nouns and verbs, and show the relationship between words in a sentence. Van Cleave demonstrated teaching the parts of speech by using both grammar cards and a chart format in order to visually represent how words relate together. He encouraged teachers to prepare and deliver multiple lessons focused on sentence writing and what he called, “sentence sense.” The heart of “sentence sense” lies in knowledge about clauses. During this session, participants had many opportunities to practice identifying the types of clauses, as Van Cleave provided multiple suggestions for activities which would help students improve “sentence sense” and sentence writing. His handouts, website, and published materials provide teachers with many good suggestions for sentence development activities.

In “Teaching Paragraph and Essay Skills to Struggling Students,” Van Cleave provided teachers with a framework for understanding instruction in writing a basic paragraph as well as an expanded paragraph. He shared one of his favorite pre-writing activities: “list generation.” Forget the fancy graphic organizer; simply encourage students to brainstorm ideas into a list before writing. There is something very simple, straightforward and non-threatening about this. During this session Van Cleave modeled for teachers his process in helping students develop a thesis statement, add details to basic paragraphs, enhance writing through the use of transition words and ultimately tackle the five paragraph essay. His handouts also provided useful suggestions to share with students as they begin to write from informational text, including the use of highlighting, note-taking and summarizing. Van Cleave is very skilled at taking the difficult task of writing instruction and breaking it down into manageable parts for teachers. His years of experience as a teacher and tutor give him valuable knowledge and insight into the writing process.

Van Cleave’s handouts are available at www.pbida.org, Conferences, Dyslexia Today 2014, Handouts, Sessions AM-2 and PM-6. He also has books, grammar cards, and writing games available on his website: wvced.com

SAVE THE DATE:
October 18 in Pittsburgh
For High School Students with Dyslexia and their Families

- Do you worry about how to help your child make the transition from high school to college or a technical school?
- What are the options after high school?
- How can you determine what school will be a good fit?
- What kinds of accommodations are available for students with dyslexia in a college or technical school, and how does a student go about getting those accommodations?
- Should a student reveal a learning disability on an admissions application?
- Is there a difference between the SAT and the ACT? Which test is better?
- These questions and others will be addressed by current college students, by college Disability Services personnel, and by parents who have been through the process.

What’s Next After High School?
Preparation and Planning for High School Students with Dyslexia and their Families
October 18, 2014, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Allegheny Intermediate Unit at The Waterfront, Homestead, PA
Registration will be available at www.pbida.org in September
Understanding Pennsylvania’s framework for effective interventions and accommodations for students with dyslexia was the topic of Dr. Maura Paczan’s workshop at PBIDAs Pittsburgh Conference this past April. Dr. Paczan, a certified school psychologist, is the Lead School Psychologist for the Pine Richland School District. She clearly explained Pennsylvania’s response to instruction and intervention framework, clarified the path for receiving testing, and presented potential accommodations that could be included in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a student with dyslexia.

Pennsylvania’s response to instruction and intervention framework is centered on the three-tiered mode. In Tier I school-wide screening is provided which leads to group interventions. In Tier II students who are considered non-responders to Tier I interventions are given individually tailored interventions. In Tier III students who fail to respond to Tier II interventions are provided more long-term interventions in the form of intensive instruction from support specialists in specified areas of need.

Parents may request an evaluation of a student at any time. Within 10 days of receiving a request for evaluation, schools should provide parents with a Permission to Evaluate Request Form. After receiving the signed forms from a parent, the school has 60 days to conduct an evaluation and complete a report. The parent should receive the report at least 10 days before a scheduled IEP meeting. In seeking a determination for dyslexia, a student should be given an IQ test, a test of phonological awareness, a rapid naming test, a verbal memory test, a naming test, a test of visual spatial skills, and test for set shifting and attention. In addition, a family history should be taken.

Once a determination of a learning disability is made, an IEP is developed. The school’s special education team in conjunction with the parents specifies the student’s academic goals and the method to obtain these goals. The plan also identifies transition arrangements. The law expects school districts to bring together parents, students, general educators, and special educators to make important educational decisions with consensus from the team for students with disabilities; those decisions will be reflected in the IEP.

In addition to individualized instruction, a student who is identified as having special needs may be given specific accommodations to assure success in the school setting. Such accommodations may include making adjustments to the environment of the classroom, the classroom materials, the instructional strategies, the student’s performance (in reading, writing, or processing tasks), and/or the use of assistive technology.

Accommodations in the classroom may include:

- Writing schedules on the board
- Providing visual representation of all oral instruction whenever possible
- Previewing transitions or changes in schedule
- Writing rules on the board
- Using preferential seating as per student needs
- Using color-coding to organize desk, classroom and student’s books
- Using a multi-sensory approach for activities
- Using a positive reinforcement program
- Creating a private signal to identify any frustration
- Increasing communication with parents
- Using a quiet room for testing where there are minimal distractions
- Providing extended time on tests
- Allowing student to take test orally
- Providing alternatives to testing, such as projects and oral or video presentations
- Reading test questions to student, and writing down answers as the student speaks

(Continued on page 28)
Two highlights for PBIDA’s simulation program occurred in May: our outreach expanded to southern Delaware, and our capacity increased to reach 180 teachers at an in-service in Pennsylvania.

First, PBIDA partnered with the newly formed Decoding Dyslexia-Delaware (DD-D) to present Experience Dyslexia at the Reily Brown Elementary School in Dover, DE on May 15. DD-D coordinator, Lisa Frankel, and teacher, Kim O’Hea – both parents of children with dyslexia – organized the event and recruited 10 additional teachers at the school to be trained as facilitators for the simulation. The program, which was also open to the community, had a powerful impact in an area with limited resources for learning disabilities. One educator commented: “I now know that there are resources out there. My summer reading list is now very long.” Another said, “I will be sharing this information with the other teachers in our building so that they are at least aware of how a student feels, so they do not think a child is just being lazy or not trying.” The experience also elicited change: “I immediately went back to some assignments I had graded and wrote encouraging comments. My struggling readers are putting forth every ounce of energy into tackling this amazingly difficult task of reading and I need to praise that effort more often instead of just correcting and reteaching.”

Second, Lower Merion School District (LMSD) contracted with PBIDA to present an in-service for 180 middle and high school special education staff and speech & language pathologists on May 23. Thirty PBIDA volunteers spent a Friday afternoon before a holiday weekend staffing two simulations on separate floors. Their remarkable commitment made a difference. Even though the participants had more background knowledge than most, the impact from the simulation program was much the same - greater understanding and empathy. “It made dyslexia more real and tangible. “I found it challenging, draining and eye opening. If I was a student experiencing what we did, I would be hard pressed to keep at it day after day.” Some participants are rethinking their classroom situations - more breaks, additional technology, utilizing wait time, and openness to new strategies. “I will provide more support in wait time and not assume my students have the skills to complete the task.”

For information on how PBIDA can tailor the dyslexia simulation for your organization, contact Betsy Boston at dyslexia@pbida.org or 610-527-1548.

Panelists: Becca Boston, Becca O’Hea, Kathy Craven, Head Pilot School, and Lisa Frankel, Decoding Dyslexia Delaware.

Teachers trained as simulation facilitators at Reily Brown Elementary School in Dover, DE: Katie Shafer, Kim O’Hea, Pam Hill, Melissa Christensen, Doris Ridenour, Kathy Lingo, Valerie Freeman, Candice Pyne, Kirstin Voshell, Alisa Warner.

Camille Conrad, LMSD Supervisor of Special Education, and Eugenie Flaherty, facilitator and panelist

Jeanne Dagna, LMSD Supervisor of Special Education for Out-of-District Placements, with student panelists (left to right) Becca Boston, Haley Mankin, Matt Reott, Mary Katherine Ortale.

Photo credits: Becca Boston
PBIDA TESTIFIES AT PUBLIC HEARING
On April 15, 2015, PBIDA testified at a Public Hearing on Dyslexia Funding, co-hosted by Representative Kinsey (D-201 1st Legislative District, Philadelphia) and presented by the Pennsylvania House Democratic Policy Committee. PBIDA joined many organizations and individuals in this event, including Rev. Clarence Pemberton (Philadelphia Black Clergy), Dr. Rahmanda Campbell (The Reading Clinic), Dr. Surajante Campbell (McGill University), Paul Edelblut (Education Solutions for Learning Ally), Susan Raymond (co-producer of Journey to Dyslexia), Kathleen Carlsen and Marilyn Mathis (Children’s Dyslexia Center), Gail Crane (The Quaker School at Horsham), Tracy Johnson (Vessels of HOPE), Rachel Hooper (Legislative Policy and Research Fellow, Philadelphia City Council), Khalil Munir (Temple University), Tina Marie DeLong (Decoding Dyslexia PA), Daphne Uliana (Pennsylvania Dyslexia Literacy Coalition), Connor Williams (Delaware State University), and several parent advocates, including Fitzia Justice, Lisa Hassler, Cliff Isaac, Arthur and Darlene Turner, Charlotte Granito.

PBIDA ATTENDS CONSTITUENTS’ OPEN HOUSE
PBIDA was represented at Senator Bob Mensch’s Constituents’ Open House at the Red Hill Fire Company in Red Hill, PA, on April 21. Thank you to Eileen Tait-Acker, energetic Coordinator of the Upper Bucks DDPA chapter, for organizing PBIDA’s participation, and for the opportunity to talk about dyslexia with Senator Mensch’s constituents.

Calendar of Events

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER
Woodlynde School Admissions Open House, October 14, 8:45am, Woodlynde School. Register at www.woodlynde.org/openhouse.
Wilson Fundations Level 2, October 16, 8:30am-3:00pm, AIM Academy. Contact kkeesey@aimpa.org.
AIM Academy Parent Open House, October 21, 9:00—11:00am, AIM Academy. Contact abedrosian@aimpa.org.
The Quaker School at Horsham Open House, October 21, 9:00-10:30am, The Quaker School at Horsham. Contact Mia Glenn, Director of Admissions, mglenn@quakerschool.org; 215.674.2875 ext. 14.

NOVEMBER
Jenny Mills, M.Ed., Incorporating Mindfulness into Daily Teaching and Parenting Practices, November 6, 7:00pm, Woodlynde School. Email ratka@woodlynde.org to register.
Peg Dawson, Ed.D., Smart but Scattered: Executive Dysfunction at Home and at School, November 7, 9:00am –3:00pm, AIM Academy. Contact kkeesey@aimpa.org.

(Continued on page 34)
Accommodations for Classroom Materials may include:
- Using an audio recorder
- Clarifying simple written directions
- Using large print
- Providing verbal directions that are clear and concise
- Breaking tasks into smaller chunks
- Focusing on the quality of the work rather than the quantity
- Blocking out extraneous stimuli (e.g., larger print to limit information on a single page)
- Highlighting the essential information for the student
- Providing a glossary in content areas
- Developing a reading guide (page-by-page, section-by-section, or paragraph-by-paragraph)

Accommodations for Instruction may include:
- Using explicit teaching materials (advanced organizers, demonstration of the skill, guided practice, extra independent practice, monitoring, review)
- Being clear and concise with directions; repeating directions
- Providing a copy of lecture notes, cloze notes
- Providing students with a graphic organizer or outline
- Providing study guides for quizzes and exams
- Using step-by-step instruction (clear and concise)
- Using simultaneous multi-sensory strategies (connect visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
- Writing key points or words on the board
- Balancing oral and visual presentation
- Using mnemonic instruction
- Emphasizing daily review (pre-teach and re-teach concepts)

Accommodations for Student Performance may include:
- Changing response mode (e.g., allow student to answer a test orally)
- Providing an outline of lecture
- Allowing student to copy notes
- Using graphic organizers
- Encouraging use of assignment books or calendars
- Providing a self-monitoring checklist to develop independence for multiple tasks (mini-task analysis) to complete throughout the school day.
- Reducing copying (handouts, notes, worksheets readily available)
- Allowing for flexible work times
- Being flexible with assignment substitutions (oral, multiple choice, fewer problems)

Assistive Technology may include:
- Using audio books
- Using eBook readers
- Using iPads
- Using speech-to-text software
- Using instructional software

Accommodations in Writing may include:
- Using graphic organizers
- Providing rubrics such as outlines
- Reducing spelling tests, giving spelling test orally, not taking off points for spelling errors on written work, reducing spelling words, relating spelling to reading intervention program, limiting lists to no more than 10 words, allowing use of spell checker
- Allowing student to dictate work to a parent, teacher, paraprofessional
- Offering alternative projects instead of written reports
- Allowing student to use a keyboard or word processor to take notes for any written work
- Reducing written work
- Allowing student to respond orally to questions rather than writing each answer
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Dyslexia is a word of Latin origin that means “difficulty with language.” It is used to describe a neurological disorder that causes a person to process and interpret information differently. Children with dyslexia have trouble reading, writing, spelling and/or doing math. Often diagnosed as a specific learning disability, dyslexia is the most common learning disability and affects approximately 15-20% of the population. The effects of dyslexia range from mild to severe. Dyslexia affects girls as well as boys and is thought to have a strong genetic contribution. Research tells us that roughly between 30 and 50% of the children of a parent with dyslexia will develop dyslexia, and that the biological siblings of a child with dyslexia have a 40% chance of having dyslexia.

Some believe that dyslexia can also be considered a gift. They hypothesize that Dyslexics tend to be creative and inventive and are good at seeing the “big picture.” In one study 40% of entrepreneurs (considered to be adept at creative problem solving) were shown to be dyslexic. (For a thorough and balanced discussion of this issue, see Upside of Dyslexia? Science Scant, but Intriguing, by Carolyn D. Cowen, Ed.M. and Gordon F. Sherman, Ph.D. International Dyslexia Association, reprinted with permission in Focus, Spring/Summer 2014).

So, how do you know if your child is dyslexic? There are many characteristics that are common to children with dyslexia. A person with dyslexia usually has several of these characteristics that persist over time and interfere with his or her learning. The following characteristics are listed by age and are provided by the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity and the book Overcoming Dyslexia by Sally Shaywitz.

**Pre-School Years**
- Has trouble learning common nursery rhymes, such as “Jack and Jill”
- Has difficulty learning (and remembering) the names of letters in the alphabet
- Seems to be unable to recognize letters in his/her own name
- Mispronounces familiar words; persistent “baby talk”
  Doesn’t recognize rhyming patterns like cat, bat, rat

**Kindergarten and First Grade**
- Makes errors when reading that show no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page—will say “puppy” instead of the written word “dog” in an illustrated page with a dog shown
- Does not understand that words come apart
- Complains about how hard reading is, or “disappears” when it is time to read
- A history of reading problems in parents or siblings.
- Has difficulty speaking
  Cannot sound out even simple words like cat, map, nap
  Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with the “b” sound

**Second Grade and Up**

**Reading:**
- Very slow in acquiring reading skills. Reading is slow and awkward
- Trouble reading unfamiliar words, often making wild guesses because he/she cannot sound out the word.
- Doesn’t seem to have a strategy for reading new words
  Avoids reading out loud

**Speaking**
- Searches for a specific word and ends up using vague language such as “stuff” or “thing” a lot, without name the object?
- Pauses, hesitates, and/or uses lots of “umm’s” when speaking
- Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying “tornado” for “volcano,” substituting “lotion” for “ocean.”
- Mispronunciation of long, unfamiliar, or complicated words
- Seems to need extra time to respond to questions.
- Trouble with remembering dates, names, telephone numbers, random lists.
- Has trouble finishing tests on time
- Extreme difficulty learning a foreign language
- Messy handwriting
  Low self-esteem that may not be immediately visible

(Continued on page 34)
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36th Annual Fall Conference  
Parent Track  
for  
Parents of Students Who Learn Differently  

9:00-10:45: Keynote Address: Dr. Kenneth Pugh: "Neuroimaging Studies of Reading and Development and Reading Disability: An Update on Recent Findings"

Parent track includes Keynote, 1 AM Session, 1 PM Session and lunch

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
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| AM 11 | Children with Dyslexia: Your Rights to Orton Gillingham Instruction and other Effective Instruction  
Sonja Kerr, J.D., M.S., Director, Disability Rights, Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia  
This session will include an overview of the rights of children with dyslexia in the IEP process and will explicitly focus on strategies and methods by which parents and advocates can encourage school districts to utilize research-based Orton-Gillingham methods of instruction to teach children with dyslexia. The presenter will address the need to focus on the five components of the National Reading Panel in requests for appropriate instruction regardless of the “brand name” of the type of instruction |
| AM 11 | Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers: To Proficiency and Beyond!  
Paul Edelblut, Vice President of Education Solutions for Learning Ally  
For years we have seen the impact accessible instructional materials can have on individuals yet often challenges remain for wider adoption frustrating parents. While small-scale studies have shown improvements in fluency and comprehension, no large scale study had been undertaken to determine the outcomes of the provision of these materials. Using data from more than 10 states, multiple grade levels, multiple years and across multiple subjects this talk reviews the impact of accessible instructional materials as measured by performance on statewide AYP exams. Walk away with an understanding of data that will help you convince and engage your student’s school in bringing accessible instructional materials to the classroom. |
| PM 10 | Survival Guide for College-bound LD Students  
David Carson, Author  
David Carson will discuss his journey from grade school through college. He will use his real life experiences to show students, parents, and educators that the next great wave of diversity for colleges is students with learning disabilities. The skills and coping strategies it takes for youth/young adults to succeed in college will be reviewed. |
| PM11 | Experience Dyslexia®: A Simulation  
Lisa Goldstein, M.D., Private Practice  
Eugenie Flaherty, Ph.D.  
The Simulation experience challenges participants to learn and to demonstrate knowledge under conditions which mimic having a learning disability such as dyslexia, and increases participants’ understanding of the profound impact of dyslexia. In this lively and thought-provoking program, participants will take part in six simulated activities which mimic the experiences and processing of those with dyslexia. The program ends with participants asking questions of an experienced panel. This session will be 2 hours. |

Reduced fee of $50 for parent track attendees! Register at www.pbida.org. Please note that no CEUs will be provided at the conference for parent track attendees, but you will receive a certificate of attendance.
Young Adults & Adults
Reading
- A childhood history of reading and spelling difficulties
- While reading skills have developed over time, reading still requires great effort and is done at a slow pace
- Rarely reads for pleasure
- Slow reading of most materials—books, manuals, subtitles in films
- Avoids reading aloud
Speaking
- Not fluent, not glib, often anxious while speaking
- Pausing or hesitating often when speaking
- Using lots of “um’s” during speaking, lack of glibness
- Using imprecise language, for example, “stuff,” “things,” instead of the proper name of an object
- Often pronounces the names of people and places incorrectly; trips over parts of words
- Difficulty remembering names of people and places; confuses names that sound alike
- Struggles to retrieve words; has the “it was on the tip of my tongue” moment frequently
- Rarely has a fast response in conversations and/or writing; struggles when put on the spot
- Spoken vocabulary is smaller than listening vocabulary
- Avoids saying words that might be mispronounced
- Earlier oral language difficulties persist
School & Life
- Despite good grades, will often say that she/he is dumb or is concerned that peers think that she/he is dumb
- Penalized by multiple-choice tests
- Frequently sacrifices social life for studying
- Suffers extreme fatigue when reading
- Performs rote clerical tasks poorly

If you suspect that your child is dyslexic, communicate your concerns with your child’s pediatrician and/or teachers. Your child will need to be tested by a licensed psychologist to determine whether or not she has a specific learning disability.

Once your child has been diagnosed, she will need to be provided with the appropriate instruction so that she has the best chance to learn to read, write and spell independently. Instruction needs to be multisensory, explicit, and structured and must be provided by a highly qualified teacher who is trained and certified to deliver the method or program chosen.

For further information on this topic, visit The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity at http://dyslexia.yale.edu and The Interna-
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