

# **Hidden in Plain Sight. Seven Common Signs of Dyslexia in the Classroom.**

## **An Educator's Guide**

*Recognizing signs. Providing support. Guiding toward success.*

## Dyslexia at a Glance:

One of the most gratifying experiences an educator can have is seeing a student succeed. Sometimes, however, educators encounter a particularly intelligent and hardworking student who excels in most subjects, but consistently struggles with reading. Most likely, this student is battling the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties: dyslexia.

Dyslexia is more than just having trouble recognizing letters; it's a complex neurological difference. The International Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as ...

*a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing and pronouncing words.*

Compounding the problem is the fact that dyslexia is a disability that too often goes undiagnosed.

### A Costly, Undiagnosed Educational Roadblock

**One in five** American students has dyslexia. Chances are you have one or more dyslexic students in your classroom.

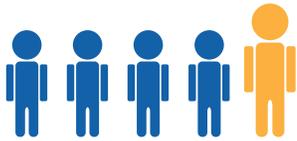
Dyslexia often gets attributed to being a behavioral issue. What might be seen as laziness or acting out in reality is a student inwardly struggling with reading. He may be working hard to cover up what he senses is a problem, but doesn't know how to ask for help.

Dyslexia can also often go undetected because the student is smart enough to find ways to compensate and hide his reading deficit, so he is never discovered. His intelligence, creativity and verbal skills mask his reading challenges. He manages to do "well enough" without reaching his potential.



**Did you know Einstein was dyslexic?**

**This despite the fact that he had an estimated IQ of 160.**

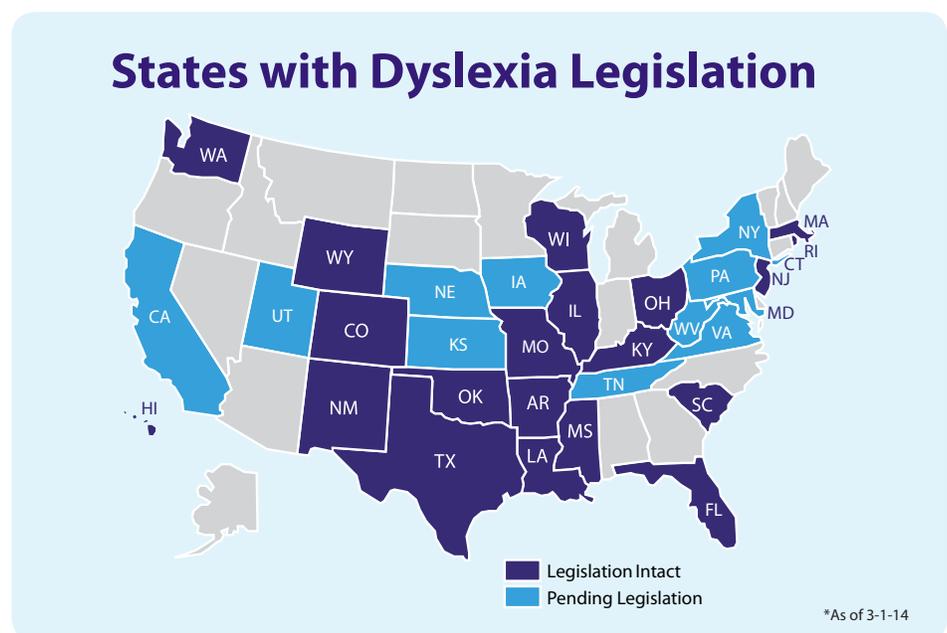


**One in five schoolchildren in America has dyslexia.**

When dyslexia is not properly identified, there are costs. Students don't get the help they need and fail to reach their potential. Over time, they struggle with school and have higher dropout rates, reducing the potential benefit and impact they can have on society. Most troubling is that, when not properly understood as a true learning difference, having dyslexia leads to feelings of inadequacy and shame in a student. There is nothing shameful about being dyslexic. Those neurological differences that make reading difficult also help dyslexics excel in other areas, like big-picture thinking, creativity, spatial relationships, design and entrepreneurialism ... which explains why some are so incredibly successful.

The challenges of dyslexia may seem daunting. But there is good news. Early identification of dyslexia helps a student receive the assistance and resources they need to be successful. And support systems exist for teachers and parents to help students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that schools provide special education services to students whose learning disabilities adversely impact their educational performance. Furthermore, 20 states have laws specifically addressing dyslexia support.



## Have you seen these signs in the classroom?

Dyslexia is something that your colleagues in special education and learning support are trained to recognize and formally evaluate. But you can use your daily experience in the classroom and knowledge of your students to recognize the signs that are commonly hiding in plain sight.

## Does this sound like one of your students?

If so, your next step should be to speak to your student's parents as well as your school's special education team to request a formal screening. If diagnosed with dyslexia (or another learning disability), you, together with the parents and your learning support team, can plan a course of action to help your student succeed in the classroom.

# Seven Common Signs of Dyslexia :

## Sign #1: He doesn't recognize words accurately.

Inaccurate word recognition is an example of poor decoding, a common symptom of dyslexia. For example, you show him a picture of rabbits, with the caption "rabbits," and he responds "bunnies." In this instance, the student is using a compensating strategy to guess at words from picture cues.

## Sign #2: She cannot read a sentence smoothly.

The process of translating a printed word into a sound is called decoding. If your student has choppy decoding skills, she may blend sounds, poorly sound words out or even skip small words.

He skipping sentence

## Sign #3: He is a poor speller.

You should raise a red flag when a student relies on phonetic spelling. For example, "said" becomes "sed" when written out. Other signs include consistently using irregular capitalization and omitting vowels.

## Sign #4: She confuses letters.

Letter confusion is a classic sign of dyslexia. Take note of a student who confuses "p" with "b" and "d," especially past the first or second grade.

pdb  
bqp

## Sign #5: He has trouble with phonemic awareness.

New research suggests that difficulty with auditory processing is one of the main symptoms of dyslexia. The sounds of some letters ("p" and "b" for example) are confused because they are produced in the same place in the mouth. He may have trouble differentiating individual letter sounds due to this limitation.

## Sign #6: She acts out at reading time.

You may notice that whenever you have reading time, your student becomes easily distracted, starts bothering classmates or desires to leave the classroom. This may, in fact, occur more often during "oral reading time" as the student tries to avoid the task.

## Sign #7: He is a really bright kid. I don't understand why he struggles so much with reading.

Dyslexia is not related or connected in any way to intelligence.

In fact, you may notice that while your student struggles in struggles with basic reading skills, he excels in many other subjects and areas.

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

You should also be aware that dyslexic students require special “reading programs that are based on the structure of the English language and delivered in a multisensory methodology (visual, auditory, kinesthetic/tactile) to help them master decoding the written word. That kind of support is critical and needs to come from a specialist, but there’s much that you can do to help in the general classroom.

## Take Action:

### *Classroom Tools and Tips*

If you have a student with dyslexia, you can incorporate certain strategies that address your student’s needs—and the rest of your classroom—even if you aren’t a specialist in teaching children with dyslexia.

### **Change Expectations**

A student with dyslexia will begin to regain his confidence as a learner if you can remove certain everyday obstacles that cause him to feel as if he is failing as a student. Consider the following:

))(( ***Don’t make him read in front of the class.***

Since people with dyslexia have difficulty decoding words and understanding punctuation, asking your student to read out loud will put extra pressure on him, and possibly make him hesitant to read at all.

))(( ***Allow extra time to take tests.***

A dyslexic student will most likely need more than the given time to read and comprehend questions on a test.

))(( ***Read quiz questions out loud to ensure comprehension.***

Dyslexics can better understand directions and questions when they hear and see the words together.

))(( ***Don’t take points off for incorrect spelling.***

Letter confusion is a classic sign of dyslexia. If the context of his answer is correct and you sense it is the dyslexia that is making him spell poorly, you can choose to overlook these “mistakes.”



**Difficulty with  
letter-sound  
correspondence.**

“ Various features of embedded and assistive technology can level the playing field for individuals who struggle to read, write, learn and communicate. We can no longer teach only to the norm; we must use tools, strategies, flexible curriculum design and technology to fix our instruction so that everyone can learn. ”

— Kirk Behnke  
RESNA-Certified  
AT Specialist

### Utilize Audiobooks

Audiobooks are proven to complement multisensory reading programs, and the two combined enable your student with dyslexia to stay on track with their studies. Audiobooks allow students to learn important information they need when reading is a challenge. Success in reading will boost self-confidence, which in turn fosters achievement.

Some of the benefits of audiobooks include:

- ))(( **Improved comprehension,**  
now that the student can hear and read the text simultaneously.
- ))(( **Better word recognition,**  
increased reading rates, and improved overall vocabulary.
- ))(( **Increased self-esteem and confidence in the classroom,**  
which leads to academic success.

Consider partnering with an organization that provides audiobooks for just this purpose. Adding audiobooks to your lesson plans can be a way to help dyslexic children get up-to-speed and stay there.



**Success in reading  
boosts self-confidence,  
which in turn fosters  
achievement.**

“ There’s nothing more important than professional development, whether it’s at the graduate level or in the schools. And any intervention can be made, or in fact broken, by the role of a teacher. And the more highly trained the teacher is, the more likely they will know how best to apply certain components of any intervention whole cloth to the needs of a given individual.” ))

— Dr. Maryanne Wolf  
Director of the  
Center for Reading  
and Language  
Research at  
Tufts University



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## Next Steps:

### *Early Action Makes All the Difference*

Experts say that a child’s brain is most adaptable at younger ages, which is why recognizing, identifying and responding to dyslexia early is key. Learning Ally can help.

Learning Ally, a national nonprofit since 1948, provides audiobooks and professional services that empower educators and parents to help dyslexic learners through:

- ))(( Professional development for dyslexia awareness, Common Core, differentiated instruction and other topics
- ))(( Audiobook service memberships, for both schools and households
- ))(( Teacher Ally, which allows teachers to easily manage and track students’ reading
- ))(( Referral services for specialists
- ))(( Dyslexia screeners for parents wanting a second opinion
- ))(( Parent support and services
- ))(( Answers to general questions about dyslexia and other reading issues

When your school becomes a **Learning Ally** member, you’ll receive essential access to the textbooks and other content students need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Included with membership is **Teacher Ally**, which allows you to assign audiobooks, track and monitor student progress and share results. It will also help you foster a positive relationship with your students’ parents by providing them with information and resources to ensure their child’s success.

### **To learn more:**

**Visit [learningally.org/educators](https://learningally.org/educators)**

**Email us at [programs@learningally.org](mailto:programs@learningally.org)**

**Call us at 800.221.1098**