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Answering Your Questions About the New Government Letter on Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia

Expert Corner blog post by The Understood Team

Nov 09, 2015

You might have heard the big news.

Last month the U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued a guidance letter to send a clear message to states and schools. The letter reminded them that there's nothing in the law stopping them from using the terms dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. In fact, it encouraged them to do so.

The letter also explained how these terms fit into the law that covers special education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

After hearing the news, many of you asked us what the Department of Education's letter means for your child. We gathered your most-asked questions about this issue and took them to the experts at Understood founding partner the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), including Director of Public Policy and Advocacy Lindsay Jones. Here's what they had to say.

Q. Why is the use of these terms even an issue?

NCLD: There's been some confusion about it.

It's always been OK to say *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* and *dyscalculia*. But some schools have been using these terms, while others haven't. So this letter was an important clarification.

Q. What does the guidance letter tell schools?

NCLD: In a nutshell, the letter reminds schools that they can use the terms *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* and *dyscalculia*.

These terms can be used in [IEPs](#), evaluations and elsewhere. The Department of Education confirms that using them can be helpful for schools in addressing a child's unique needs. And it encourages states and schools to review their policies to make sure they don't say schools *can't* use these terms.

Q. Does that mean a school evaluator is allowed to use the terms *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* or *dyscalculia* in an evaluation report?

NCLD: Evaluators aren't *required* to use those terms. But the ED letter says there's nothing in the federal law that prevents the person doing an evaluation from identifying these learning issues. In fact, it says that being specific about a child's learning challenges is important to determining if a child is eligible for services.

Q. Will the school still use the term *specific learning disability* if they know my child has *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* or *dyscalculia*?

NCLD: Yes.

IDEA covers 13 categories of disability. [Specific learning disability](#) (SLD) is one of those categories. This term covers many learning issues that can co-exist, such as trouble with reading, writing and math. So that's the term school will generally use. But the ED letter encourages schools to use the more specific terms if it helps address a child's unique needs.

Q. Will including any of these three specific learning issues in my child's IEP change the services he receives?

NCLD: It depends on your child's unique needs.

IDEA doesn't tell schools exactly what services they must provide. That's true even if your child is identified with a particular learning issue. So if the IEP team writes the term *dyslexia* in your child's IEP, it doesn't automatically mean he gets a particular service.

Using these terms can be helpful, however. Specific information about your child's learning issue may help the IEP team decide on an appropriate service.

Q. Does the letter apply to other learning issues besides the three it mentions?

NCLD: Yes.

The letter itself only mentions dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. But the ED letter points out that the list of conditions under SLD isn't "exhaustive" and can include other things.

Q. What should I do if a school still refuses to use the terms *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* and *dyscalculia*?

NCLD: Talk directly to your school.

The first step is always to talk to your child's school. Try to work together to have your child's needs addressed. You may want to bring a copy of the ED letter to your meeting with the school to help you start the conversation. (You can access a PDF of the letter [here](#).) If you don't agree with a school about the use of a term, consider other steps to work with the school to resolve your concern.

Q. Is the ED letter related to my state's dyslexia law?

NCLD: No.

There is no direct relationship between the ED letter and state laws on dyslexia. If you want information on your state's dyslexia law, reach out to your child's school or your local Parent Training Information Center.

Get more in-depth information on using the terms *dyslexia*, *dysgraphia* and *dyscalculia* in schools. Watch this video interview with Michael Yudin, the top official for special education at the U.S. Department of Education.

Saying Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia in Schools: An Inter...



About the Blogger



The Understood Team is composed of writers, editors and community moderators, many of whom have children with learning and attention issues.

Chat With an Expert

Mon May 14 at 12:00pm ET

ADHD, Movement and Learning

Lynne Kenney

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