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**NJ's New Law** – “Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”  
[P.L.2013, Chapter 131, approved August 9, 2013]

**NJAC 6A:14** – “Specific learning disability” [SLD] corresponds to ‘perceptually impaired’ and means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Whether there are strengths or weaknesses, or both, in *performance* or *achievement* relative to intellectual development one of the following areas that require special education related services;

- (1) Oral expression
- (2) Listening comprehension
- (3) Written expression
- (4) Basic reading skill
- (5) Reading fluency skills
- (6) Reading comprehension
- (7) Mathematics calculation, and
- (8) Mathematics problem solving.”

Question: What features of dyslexia does this definition of list fail to account for? Spelling? Understanding and use of language? Phonemic awareness? Something else?

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**Let's Not Hurt Students with Dyslexia** – “Recently, New Jersey passed two laws to help students with dyslexia. The motives for these bills were worthy: Many schools fail to give students with dyslexia the help they need, causing them and their families extreme, prolonged, and unnecessary emotional pain. Fortunately, the bill that trains teachers to help students with dyslexia may prove effective. The other bill, which uses a neurologically-based definition may inadvertently perpetuate and perhaps intensify the neglect and suffering of students with dyslexia who don't display hard neurological signs. Much will depend on NJ's yet-to-be written rules and regulations. In any case, NJ can prevent this potential problem. It can require its graduate level, state certified reading specialists to evaluate students who may suffer from dyslexia, using NJ's current definition of learning disabilities. Most students with dyslexia will fit this definition if reading specialists apply it as written. For many students and their parents, this will eliminate the first barrier to getting the help they so desperately need.” [Voorhees Sun, 8/28/2013 – Howard Margolis]

**Bill to Help Dyslexics Could Actually Backfire** – “With the best of intentions, it looks as if the Legislature's bill to help children with dyslexia will soon become law and directly or indirectly mandate that schools use specific reading methods to teach reading to these children.

The push will likely be for Orton-Gillingham (multisensory) type methods. This is dangerous. Orton-Gillingham research has not reliably demonstrated its superiority in teaching reading to children with dyslexia. Although these methods have helped children, they have also failed many. And the prescribed methods do not reflect the unique characteristics of children, teachers and classrooms, despite special education labels.

Here are a few of the many critical ingredients for helping children with dyslexia: lots of daily, easy, systematic, explicit instruction in decoding and quickly recognizing words; interesting materials and tasks that move from easy to more challenging, but avoid frustration; lots of emotional and social support.

Despite my many concerns, I hope that the bill attains its ultimate goal: to help children with dyslexia become highly successful readers. I fear, however, that legal adherence to Orton-Gillingham-type methods will backfire, hurting many children.” – [Howard Margolis -- July 3, 2013, Press of Atlantic City]

### **Respected Researchers** –

“In the area of reading, both phonics and whole word (whole language) instruction make a significant contribution to student achievement in reading. Neither clearly supersedes the other in terms of transfer measures (reading real words and comprehending text).” [Intervention Research for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis of Treatment Outcomes, Keys to Successful Learning Summit, May 1999, -- H. Lee Swanson, Ph.D. University of California – Riverside]

“Given the small number of studies, the lack of methodological rigor of the existing studies, and the inconclusive findings of the effectiveness of Orton-Gillingham (OG) programs, additional research is needed before the scientific basis can be established.... The major conclusion ... is that the research is currently inadequate, both in number of studies and in the quality of the research methodology, to support that OG interventions are scientifically based.... It may be premature to reconsider the implementation and use of OG reading instruction programs for children with reading disabilities.” [Ritchey, K. D., & Goetze, J. L., 2006. Orton-Gillingham and Orton-Gillingham-Based reading instruction: A review of the literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 40 (3), 171-183, p. 182.]

“Currently, the [Federal research] website ... lists only two findings as meeting the ‘gold standard’ for empirical evidence: Reducing class size and providing expert one-to-one tutoring for struggling readers. These are the only areas where findings are supported by the results from multiple independent experimental studies.... Research will not be of much help in identifying effective core or supplemental reading programs. There is no set of independent studies that meets the Federal gold standard that supports the use of any specific core or supplemental reading program.” [Allington, R. L., December 2005/January 2006. What counts as evidence in evidence-based education? *Reading Today*, 23 (3), p. 16.]

**A Statistical Study of 200+ Research Studies** – “The most effective form of teaching children with learning disabilities combined components of direct instruction (teacher-directed lecture, discussion, and learning from books) with components of strategy instruction (teaching ways to learn such as memorization techniques and study skills). The main instructional components of this combined model include:

- Sequencing (e.g., breaking down the task, providing step-by-step prompts)
- Drill-repetition-practice (e.g., daily testing, repeated practice, sequenced review)
- Segmentation (e.g., breaking down skills into parts and then synthesizing the parts into a whole)
- Directed questioning and responses (e.g., teacher asks process or content questions of students) [One of the 3 most effective components.]
- Control of task difficulty [One of the 3 most effective components.]
- Use of technology (e.g., computers, presentation media)
- Teacher-modeled problem solving
- Small group instruction [interactive, 5 or fewer students] [One of the 3 most effective components.] and
- Strategy cues (e.g., reminders to use strategies, think-aloud models).” [Intervention Research for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis of Treatment Outcomes, Keys to Successful Learning Summit, May 1999, – H. Lee Swanson, Ph.D. University of California – Riverside]

**A Sample Reading Comprehension Strategy: Ellis’ RAP strategy**

- **R**ead a paragraph
- **A**sk yourself, what was paragraph about
- **P**ut the main idea and two details in your own words

**A Powerful Writing Strategy: Graham & Harris’ Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRS):**

The teacher ...

- Develops background knowledge necessary for understanding the writing strategy to be taught
- Discusses the writing strategy and its purpose with students
- Models the writing strategy for students.
- Asks students to memorize the steps in the writing strategy
- Supports students in their use of the writing strategy as they write
- Gradually removes support and allows students to independently use the strategy
- DARE Persuasive Writing Example: **D**evelop a topic sentence—**A**dd supporting details—**R**eject an argument for the other side—**E**nd with a conclusion [Hacker, in press, RWQ]