



**DIVISION FOR
LEARNING
DISABILITIES**

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2800 Eisenhower Blvd, Suite 220
Alexandria, VA 22314

July 24, 2026

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D., Chair
The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Ranking Member
Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) of the Council for Exceptional Children, we write to respectfully oppose S. 3010, the 21st Century Dyslexia Act, and urge the Committee to carefully consider how the proposed legislation would create unintended consequences within existing federal special education frameworks rather than its presumptive goal of meaningfully improving outcomes for students with dyslexia.

DLD strongly supports efforts to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia and recognizes the very real concerns expressed by families regarding delayed identification, inconsistent access to services, and inadequate reading instruction. These experiences reflect persistent challenges that warrant continued federal attention. However, we believe that **the concerns raised by families stem primarily from inconsistent implementation of existing law, inequitable access to evidence-based instruction, and variability in educator preparation rather than from the absence of a distinct dyslexia category within IDEA.**

The proposed legislation would create dyslexia as a separate disability category under IDEA and adopt a statutory definition describing dyslexia as "an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader." While well intentioned, both changes raise significant concerns.

First, dyslexia is already recognized under IDEA as part of the category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD), and federal guidance has explicitly clarified that the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia may be used in evaluations, eligibility determinations, and individualized education programs (IEPs). The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services' 2015 Dear Colleague Letter already provides districts with authority to identify and document dyslexia within IDEA without requiring statutory amendments. Accordingly, **the principal barriers facing students with dyslexia are not legal barriers to naming the condition, but rather barriers related to implementation, educator capacity, and access to appropriate services.** As DLD has previously noted, identification addresses what a student is called; it does not determine what services a student will receive. Services are instructional decisions, and the disconnect between identification and intervention contributes substantially to the inequities experienced by families.

Second, creating a separate IDEA category for dyslexia risks fragmenting IDEA's longstanding individualized framework. Students frequently present with co-occurring conditions, including developmental language disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dysgraphia, autism, and other learning disabilities. IDEA appropriately focuses on individualized educational



needs rather than elevating one disability label above another. **Creating separate statutory pathways for dyslexia is unlikely to resolve the concerns raised during recent congressional roundtables because those concerns largely involve implementation failures rather than definitional shortcomings.** In fact, separate categories may inadvertently increase confusion regarding eligibility, service delivery, and placement decisions.

Third, we are particularly concerned by the bill's proposed definition of dyslexia, which defines dyslexia as an "unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader." This formulation is inconsistent with emerging scientific consensus and with the International Dyslexia Association's recently adopted 2025 definition, which no longer references intelligence or cognitive discrepancy as defining features of dyslexia. Instead, the updated definition emphasizes persistent difficulties in word reading and spelling that occur despite effective instruction and recognizes dyslexia as a multidimensional condition that exists along a continuum of severity. Research over the past several decades has consistently demonstrated that students with and without IQ-achievement discrepancies exhibit highly similar reading profiles, cognitive characteristics, and instructional needs. Consequently, **contemporary researchers have largely rejected IQ-discrepancy approaches as valid methods for distinguishing students with dyslexia from other struggling readers.** Continued reliance on intelligence-based conceptions of dyslexia risks excluding students with significant reading difficulties who do not demonstrate the expected discrepancy, particularly students from historically underserved backgrounds, multilingual learners, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Such approaches may also contribute to delayed identification and intervention by reinforcing "wait-to-fail" practices that Congress and the field have worked for decades to move beyond. Contemporary identification frameworks increasingly emphasize reading performance and response to evidence-based instruction rather than discrepancies between intelligence and achievement.

Importantly, the bill itself recognizes concerns regarding inequitable access for students from low-income backgrounds and multilingual learners by adding provisions regarding equal access to accommodations and services. However, creating a separate disability category may not address the underlying causes of these inequities. Resource disparities, variability in instructional quality, and insufficient educator preparation remain the primary barriers to equitable access.

Rather than amending IDEA to create a separate dyslexia category, Congress should consider policy approaches that reinforce and strengthen existing frameworks. Such approaches could include:

- Strengthening implementation of existing federal guidance regarding the use of dyslexia terminology within IDEA evaluations and IEPs;
- Increasing investments in evidence-based reading instruction, educator preparation, and professional development;
- Supporting state and local implementation of high-quality multitiered systems of support and early intervention frameworks;
- Expanding technical assistance regarding appropriate identification and service delivery practices;



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- Supporting research and dissemination efforts related to effective reading interventions in general and special education; and
 - Increasing federal investments in IDEA implementation to reduce persistent disparities in access to services.

The concerns raised by families are real and deserving of congressional action. However, DLD respectfully submits that these concerns are best addressed through improved implementation, educator preparation, and evidence-based instructional supports rather than through statutory changes that may inadvertently fragment IDEA's coherent framework for individualized identification and service provision.

DLD remains committed to supporting policies and practices that improve outcomes for students with dyslexia and all students with learning disabilities through evidence-based instruction, aligned systems, and faithful implementation of federal law. **We appreciate the Committee's attention to these important issues and stand ready to serve as a resource as Congress considers policies to support students with reading disabilities.**

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Hughes, DLD President
David Bateman, DLD President-Elect
Jonté Myers, DLD Vice President
Lisa Goran, DLD Past-President
Miriam Ortiz, DLD Executive Director

Division for Learning Disabilities,
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