

Common Core State Standards and Students with Disabilities

As the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are implemented in states across the country, parents and teachers have expressed concern regarding the education of students with disabilities. Many have questions, such as the following:

- What impact will these standards have on my child with dyslexia or other disabilities if he or she cannot read or write at the expected level?
- How can I help my child meet the expectations of increased assessment of reading when he or she is just learning to read?
- What questions should I ask at my child's IEP meeting?
- Is it true that my child with dyslexia can no longer receive effective structured literacy instruction (that is, multisensory structured language instruction) under the new standards?
- Do the new Common Core state assessments allow for accommodations?

With the implementation of any major new initiative, there are many questions and also much misinformation and misunderstanding. It is impossible to explore all of the pros and cons of the new standards in this brief fact sheet, but the key points are summarized to help you navigate this uncharted territory.

A good place to begin is the *Application to Students with Disabilities* (www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf). This critical document highlights key issues related to students with disabilities and provides guidance to both parents and school staff who are assisting students with dyslexia.

One statement in the document proclaims, "These common standards provide an historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous

academic content standards for students with disabilities." This enthusiastic statement derives from the hope that all students will successfully participate in history, science, and other classes—even if they cannot read. Unfortunately, too often in the past, students with dyslexia and other reading and writing difficulties might not have been given access to core academic content because their reading was several years behind that of their peers. Due to these students' difficulties with reading and writing, their ability to understand and learn grade-level academic content may have been overlooked. The intent of the new standards is to assure that all students have access to core academic content, regardless of their reading (dis)ability. This is surely a good thing. However, for that to successfully occur, the necessary supports must be in place and well executed.

Three Key Points

The *Application to Students with Disabilities* document outlines three key points regarding the support and instruction necessary for students with disabilities to meet the high standards of CCSS:

- *Supports and related services* designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum (IDEA 34 CFR §300.34)
- Teachers and *specialized instructional support* personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services
- An *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* that includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards

Common Core State Standards and Students with Disabilities

Supports and Related Services

The standards make it clear that students should be provided diverse avenues to both accessing the content and expressing what they know as they participate in the general education curriculum. Accommodations, including changes in materials and procedures without compromising high expectations, and assistive technology devices and services may be necessary so that each child succeeds in all subjects throughout the day.

Many resources are available to help students who cannot read or write sufficiently on their own. As a parent or teacher, you may have promoted recorded text or other technologies to help your child access the curriculum. Although it made sense, you may or may not have had the cooperation of all involved with your child's instruction. With the emphasis of the new standards, providing these types of supports should be more easily accomplished. For example, a reading pen might provide sufficient support for your child to access the necessary texts or your child may need to listen to their textbooks read to them with audiobooks. Ask if one of these options is already being utilized at the school and how to enroll your child. Be aware that due to difficulty with auditory processing of language, some students will require that the text is read to them by an individual who can pause and interact to ensure understanding.

Accommodations and supports can take many forms. If your child is having difficulty with writing, for example, the additional support might take the form of a scribe or speech-to-text technology. It will be necessary to determine the functioning level of the student in relation to the grade-level standards and then identify the necessary supports to access the general education curriculum and achieve the standards.

Specialized Instruction

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA), as well as other organizations (such as the Council of Great City Schools), recommends implementing the standards within a framework

of a multi-tiered system of support. A widespread misinterpretation of the standards claims that all students—including those with dyslexia—must participate only in the general education classes. Some students, however, will require more intensive support and intervention to be successful.

The third key point found on the *Application to Students with Disabilities* document calls for “teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.” Although accommodations will allow access to the curriculum, they will not teach your child to read and write. A highly trained specialist who understands dyslexia can skillfully deliver well-sequenced instruction that will help your child achieve more independence and become a lifelong reader.

IDA has published standards called the *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* (<http://www.interdys.org/standards.htm>). These standards for the preparation of practitioners and specialists ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully teach a child with dyslexia or other reading difficulties. The teacher should be a highly trained individual who has completed an accredited teacher preparation program, including a practicum with students who have a diagnosed reading disability. For the student to succeed with the rigorous common core standards, the instruction must be specialized and more intensive. See the IDA Fact Sheet, “Multisensory Structured Language Teaching” (available from http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/MS_LTeachingRev0814.pdf) for more information about the components of this type of effective structured literacy instruction.

An Individualized Education Program

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) that aligns goals to grade-level standards is known

Common Core State Standards and Students with Disabilities

as a “standards-based IEP.” With connections to the standards, an IEP can include goals that will benefit learning as well demonstrate that learning, despite reading and writing difficulties. The IEP should specify the accommodations needed to ensure that students with reading and writing challenges are able to participate fully in the general education curriculum as discussed previously. It may be helpful to reference the listening and speaking standards during discussion of ways a child can access content or express what he or she knows. For example, your child might creatively demonstrate knowledge with an artistic and graphical presentation that aligns to the speaking standards.

Although access to the core academic curriculum is essential, equally important is the specialized instruction necessary for your child to become independent. The IEP should specify the type of instruction as well as the required frequency and intensity. Lastly, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), an IEP should specify appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the individual achievement and functional performance of a child.

Consider asking the following basic questions during the development of your child’s IEP:

- What accommodations, supports, assistive technologies, etc., are needed so that my child can access the general curriculum?
- What specialized instruction is needed to ensure that my child is learning to read and write (see below)? Are teachers available with the necessary level of training for delivery of this instruction with fidelity?
- Where will the specialized instruction occur?
- What frequency and duration of the specialized instruction will be adequate to narrow the gap?
- What data will be used to measure progress throughout the year, and how will progress toward goals be monitored?

Assessment Aligned with Standards

In addition to taking on the Common Core standards for your child’s instruction, states have also adopted new assessments that will be used to measure student progress with the new standards. As controversial as the standards are, the assessments associated with this measurement are even more so.

In order to know how to proceed with discussions about assessments at your child’s IEP meeting, begin by determining if your state/district/school is using the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers), Smarter Balanced, or another assessment.

PARCC allows a read-aloud accommodation for text passages on its English/Language Arts tests. A notation is made on a student’s results to indicate that the accommodation was used and that no claims can be made about the student’s ability to demonstrate foundational print skills, such as decoding and fluency.

The Smarter Balanced consortium will not permit a read-aloud accommodation for text passages on English/Language Arts tests in grades 3–5, but it will permit the read-aloud accommodation in middle and high school because the tests for older students measure more than just the ability to independently access text.

Ask about additional appropriate embedded supports (use of enlarged fonts and graphics) in the assessment as well as any additional preparation your child needs to become familiar with the format for taking a test online by computer.

Implementation

The implementation of the standards is an enormous undertaking that cannot be achieved overnight. Undoubtedly, these standards have raised much controversy, and states continue to grapple with the standards as well as how their

Common Core State Standards and Students with Disabilities

students' learning will be measured. It will take much teacher professional development to put this policy into action. It is essential that all educators develop a better understanding of the need for accommodations to "level the playing field" for students with dyslexia and other disabilities. Likewise, it will be critical for schools to have teachers who are prepared to deliver high quality, evidence-based instruction to all students. For their students with dyslexia, teachers with the expertise to teach reading and writing with specialized and individualized instruction are needed.

Though not perfect, these standards have the potential to provide an optimum education for a student with dyslexia, especially using the *Application to Students with Disabilities* document to help secure necessary supports and intervention services. As you navigate through this, be mindful that the standards and the assessment of the standards are separate issues for discussion. First, tackle the educational needs with the *Application to Students with Disabilities* document as your guide and then address the assessment. Remember, a child with a reading disability can achieve with the necessary supports and intervention services in place. While all — educators and parents alike—are working toward understanding the standards, continue to gather information to do as much as you can in working with others to chart a course toward the ultimate goal: success for all students, including those with dyslexia.

Web Resources

About the Standards
<http://www.corestandards.org>

Application to Students with Disabilities
www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf

Bookshare
www.bookshare.org

Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/commoncore>

Common Core Aligned Materials and Resources for Struggling Students
<http://www.achievethecore.org/dashboard/300/search/6/1/0/1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/10/11/12>

IDA's *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading*
<http://www.interdys.org/standards.htm>

IDA Fact Sheet: *Multisensory Structured Language Teaching*
<http://www.interdys.org/FactSheets.htm>

Learning Ally
www.learningally.org

Parent Advocacy Brief: Understanding the Standards-based IEP by the National Center for Learning Disabilities
<http://www.nclld.org/learning-disability-resources/ebooks-guides-toolkits/understanding-standards-based-iep>

Quicktionary Reading Pen <http://www.quick-pen.com>

State Web Sites for Accommodations Information
www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Accommodations/StatesAccomm.htm

Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to Implement Common Core
<http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/77--Achievement%20Task%20Force--RTI%20White%20Paper-Final.pdf>

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