



Teaching children to read is the most fundamental and consequential job of our schools.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio recognizes this and should be applauded for his commitment to ensure all children are reading on grade level by the end of second grade. However, there are too many children affected by dyslexia who, by no fault of their own, do not have a chance to reach this important goal. They work twice as hard as their peers who read more naturally, but accomplish only half as much. Their frustration mounts and it affects all parts of their lives. As we recognize New York State Dyslexia Awareness Day on Tuesday, let us all commit to do more to identify, educate and support students with dyslexia.

We need to create a culture for dyslexia, or what leading city advocates refer to as Dyslexia (Plus) in Public Schools, where city public school students with dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities will be provided with the opportunity to thrive and learn in their neighborhood schools. A partnership between the Department of Education and the City University of New York in creating a cadre of highly trained teachers that can be the beginning of a game changer in a system that has often left too many of our children behind.

Dyslexia is a neurologically based learning disability that makes reading, writing and spelling difficult and is the most prevalent learning disability in our school system. The fact is one in five children in our schools are dyslexic – more than 200,000 New York City public school students.

Despite the prevalence of the disability, our school system lacks a coherent plan or commitment to support dyslexic students, and schools aren't providing access to early identification of dyslexia and related language-based learning

differentiations. Therefore, a majority of students with dyslexia are not identified and struggle silently with a diminished self-esteem and anxiety about school.

The problem is particularly severe among children whose parents lack the awareness, knowledge, understanding of outcomes and resources to seek outside help. Even if these families can afford to get a diagnosis, our public schools don't have the ability to support these children. This leaves parents with the unfortunate options of either keeping their child in an under-resourced school or paying for expensive specialized tutoring. (A select few can find a seat in a private school specializing in dyslexia). Furthermore, in most cases, the schools follow a misguided policy of having these students repeat the grade or they are referred for special education services that lack a true understanding of how to address dyslexia, further hindering and stigmatizing the child.

Many dyslexic students are able to mask their reading difficulties until the third or fourth grade. However, failure to identify the problem early usually magnifies the consequences. What was a manageable academic challenge in the first grade can become a far more significant issue in the fourth grade as the child falls further and further behind. In the worst cases, the outcome can be more tragic. A scientific study at the University of Texas found the prevalence of dyslexia in prisoners was almost 50 percent – more than twice that of the general population.

The good news is there are proven methods to educate children with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences. There are many examples of famous people who have succeeded with dyslexia, including President John F. Kennedy, Nobel Prize winner Albert Einstein, attorney David Boies, Apple founder Steve Jobs, entrepreneur Daymond John, heart surgeon Toby Cosgrove and many children who get the right education and help.

While we appreciate the Department of Education's openness to a plan that would change how struggling readers get the help they need, right now New York City lags behind many other regions in dyslexia legislation, resources and care. We need to bring the teacher preparation techniques that have been successful in specialized schools to our public schools and create a new paradigm for literacy instruction.

Dyslexia (Plus) in Public Schools pushes for more than teacher training. More specifically, it involves:

- Increasing dyslexia awareness and training on dyslexia, its warning signs and appropriate intervention strategies for teachers and literacy specialists.
- Providing students access to proven teaching methodologies and helping dyslexics learn to use their learning differentiation to their advantage for success.
- Providing social-emotional support in public schools and access to affordable evaluations.
- Providing support for all parents in the form of advocacy, resources and knowledge.
- Developing partnerships between the Department of Education and CUNY to prepare teachers going into our public schools.
- Supporting policies and legislation now in Albany (such as A.4330A sponsored by Assemblywoman JoAnne Simon/S.5439 sponsored by Sen. Martin Golden) that require the certification or training of teachers, administrators and instructors in the area of dyslexia and related disorders.

Let's teach every child to read and make sure each has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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