

# Congressional Hearing on Dyslexia Highlights the Need for Better Teacher Training



By: Elisabeth Liptak, Director of Professional Development, IDA

On September 18, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology convened a hearing on “The Science of Dyslexia.” Rep. Bill Cassidy and Rep. Julia Brownley, co-chairs of the Congressional Dyslexia Caucus, delivered opening remarks to the committee and described their personal experience of having children with dyslexia. The committee then heard testimony from panelists that included researchers, a parent, and a successful author with dyslexia.

One of the main messages that emerged from the hearing was the necessity of having trained professionals that understand the characteristics of dyslexia and how to help students become successful readers in our classrooms. The panelists concurred that further research was not the issue as much as implementing what is already well-known about effective teaching methods. As further testimony and the panelists’ experiences revealed, these methods have not found their way into our school systems. Author and screenwriter Max Brooks talked about his own struggles with dyslexia and the need to “teach the teachers” how individuals with dyslexia learn best. Panelist Stacie Antie, a Louisiana-based parent of a son with dyslexia, discovered that the use of Orton-Gillingham techniques taught her son to read, but it took years of searching for answers. Dr. Sally Shaywitz, co-director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, said there was no deficit of knowledge about what works in helping individuals with dyslexia become better readers, but a deficit in action. In her remarks, Dr. Guinevere Eden, director of the Center for the Study of Learning at Georgetown University Medical Center and past president of IDA, cited the work that IDA has already begun to address this gap with the publication of its *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* and the accreditation of university and independent teacher training programs that are aligned with the IDA Standards. For an in-depth look at the hearing and panel presentations, go to <http://science.house.gov/hearing/full-committee-hearing-science-dyslexia>.

At a luncheon following the hearing, Hal Malchow, president of the IDA Board of Directors, further elaborated on IDA’s plans to change the way reading is taught, not only to individuals with dyslexia, but to all students. In addition to the publication of the IDA Standards, a document that outlines the knowledge and practicum experience that all teachers should have, and the accreditation of university programs, IDA plans to develop a teacher certification exam that will be part of a process for credentialing teachers who have the necessary knowledge and skills to bring evidence-based reading instruction into their classrooms. To help increase demand for the certification, Malchow said IDA is developing a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the importance of evidence-based reading instruction. IDA is branding this approach as Structured Literacy. A major part of the marketing campaign will be the creation of a coalition that will help inform educators about how Structured Literacy can improve reading skills and reading scores in their classrooms and schools. The coalition will engage organizations that speak to the need for reading reform for all students as well as those in the special education community. Malchow invited those in the audience to join IDA in the campaign to create a nation of well-trained teaching professionals and to change the way reading is taught.

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