

Dr. Gini Taylor's Breakout Session

How do you find a safe school for dyslexics?

In order of importance, you should:

1. Find a school that won't kill their souls.
2. Find a school that allows them to learn the way that they learn.
3. Find a school that helps them with what is challenging for them.

Acknowledging that there is overlap in the above categories, ultimately we want to know the characteristics of an ideal school, and about real solutions in schools.

In our brainstorming session, we combined ideas (and some research data) to create a list of what the ideal school would look like.

Normalize dyslexia (for teachers, parents, and students).

*Train all administrators and teachers:

- to understand dyslexia (and ADHD/other learning difficulties).
- to understand PTSD/toxic stress.
- to understand and *believe* the neurologic basis of these differences.
- to be patient and flexible with children with learning challenges. (Never tell a child they aren't smart enough or capable of reaching a goal.)
- to encourage children to express themselves, and to listen with their hearts.
- in the use of technology. (keyboarding, T2S/S2T, videos, internet resources)
- in Orton-Gillingham (or similar) methodology: explicit, sequential, multi-sensory reading/writing techniques.

*"Model, model, model" the behaviors you expect from others.

*No bullying!! Address it when it happens.

*Include focus on the Social-emotional growth of a child; Consider Playworks program (teaches/promotes teamwork, cooperation, conflict resolution, diversity)

*Use Allied Professionals for support of staff, parents and children.

*Screen all kids by kindergarten, and follow through on children with learning differences to get learning evaluations and proper identification and instruction.

*Promote role models (bios, stories) of successful, happy dyslexics.

*Provide guidance to career success. (Strength-based career coaching.)

*Teach all kids about learning differences.

*Provide support groups for children to share their challenges and successes with peers.

- *Provide alternatives to reading out loud.
 - *No homework.
 - *Promote extracurricular activities that enhance their strengths.
 - *Offer alternative system to standard grading.
 - *No peer grading. (Teach kids how to offer positive suggestions for change on each other's work.)
 - *Coach review and revision, with emphasis on reworking *strategies* that fail, so that improvement is based on improvement of *strategies* for success. Focus on strategy rather than ability.
 - *Encourage positive, encouraging and motivating approaches, no matter where they are in their ability.
 - *Encourage oral discussion.
 - *Honor accommodations (e.g. extra time, preferential seating)
 - *Expand learning from 2D to 3D: experiential, kinesthetic learning (create, build, invent)
 - *Use project-based/problem-solving learning.
 - *Remove artificial time barriers.
 - *Learning and assessment tools should be diverse. Concepts/ideas should be valued.
 - *Increase individuality (and control) in choosing assignments.
 - *Celebrate their strengths and individuality. Welcome their difference.
 - *Use multi-sensory learning techniques.
 - *Support different learning styles. Normalize individual needs (pull-ins/pull-outs).
 - *A diverse curriculum for all students. Support sports, music, art.
 - *Use evidence-based interventions.
 - * Reading, writing, math classes should be separated by ability.
 - *Provide experiential math programs.
 - *Use writing techniques that work for dyslexics.
 - *Provide accommodations for exams (readers/scribes)
 - *Provide summer school (that is not just remedial)
 - *Honor how kids learn and not just addressing how they don't learn.
 - *Small class sizes.
 - *Pay great teachers what they are worth! :)
 - *Provide better tools to spell correctly.
 - *Minimize timed-tests
 - *Minimize standardized testing
 - *Provide opportunities for dyslexic children to showcase their strengths/gifts. Embrace and celebrate different gifts (athletic, artistic, academic and non-academic skills).
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- *Improve communication between school and parents, especially if the child is struggling. (No child should be failing. They should be getting intervention.)
 - *Use parents as resources, and be parent-friendly. Collaborative approaches with parents/students and teachers.
 - *Monitor progress, and communicate this frequently to parents.
 - *Provide parent and student advocates.

*Support student self-advocacy - including understanding their IEP/504, with ability to ask for what they need;. Teachers need to know (at a glance if needed) the IEP/504 accommodations.

*Teach use of technology, dictation, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, video, visual media, recordings of teachers, notes in advance, text available in digital or audio-formats (Learning Ally, Bookshare)

*Frequent recess - movement/exercise/brain breaks - critical to learning and memory.

*Make this school be affordable to all.

*Honor American Sign Language for foreign language credit.

*Address executive functioning with specific strategies.

Specific books/programs to consider:
Playworks (social-emotional curriculum)
The Homework Myth - Alfie Kohn
Peacemakers program

I hope this was helpful!

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