

January 2017

A New Year's Greeting from YCDC Co-Directors, Bennett Shaywitz, MD and Sally Shaywitz, MD

Progress for Dyslexia on Capitol Hill

Since its first description over a century ago, dyslexia has been recognized as **an unexpected difficulty in reading in individuals who have the ability to be better readers**. Unfortunately, in some circles, this basic component of dyslexia - that it is "unexpected" - is often overlooked. A positive step was taken in 2015 when the unexpected nature of dyslexia was codified by a unanimous Senate vote for the **Cassidy-Mikulski Resolution (Resolution 275)**. Then on September 26, 2016, the Senate built on that progress by unanimously passing **Resolution 576**, which adds an additional significant step forward, expanding bipartisan support to include the Resolution's sponsor, Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and co-sponsors then-Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA). Resolution 576 calls on **"Congress, schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize the significant educational implications of dyslexia that must be addressed...."**

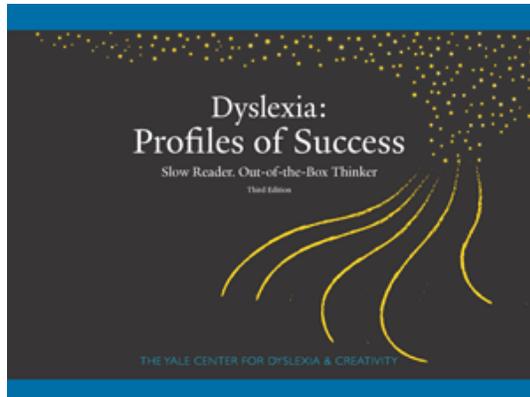
Resolution 576 defines dyslexia as "an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader," and notes that dyslexia is "most commonly due to a difficulty in phonological processing (the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken language), which affects the ability of an individual to speak, read, spell, and often, learn a second language." The Resolution describes dyslexia as "the most common learning disability," affecting "80 percent to 90 percent of all individuals with a learning disability." It goes on to assert that "dyslexia is highly prevalent, affecting as many as one out of five individuals, and persistent. Dyslexia is a paradox such that an individual with dyslexia may have (1) weaknesses in decoding that results in difficulties in accurate or fluent word recognition; and (2) strengths in higher-level cognitive functions, such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, or problem solving; ... great progress has been made in understanding dyslexia on a scientific level, including the epidemiology and cognitive and neurobiological bases of dyslexia. Early diagnosis of dyslexia is critical for ensuring that individuals with dyslexia receive focused, evidence-based intervention that leads to the promotion of self-awareness and self-empowerment and the provision of necessary accommodations so as to ensure school and life success." (To read the full Resolution [click here](#).)

With such a well-articulated, granular, cutting-edge definition of dyslexia, we are taking a major step forward in closing the action gap that so often surrounds dyslexia. This definition brings dyslexia out of the fog and into clarity so that there should be no confusion about

what dyslexia is and what must be done to bring science and education together to ensure that dyslexic children can have a fulfilling future.

This up-to-date definition of dyslexia carries into action the plea made in our Congressional testimony September 2014 where we stated the necessary goal of: 1) bringing together 21st century science and education, and 2) representing a major step forward in closing the action gap in translating scientific progress in dyslexia into policy and practice. This is a victory for every child (or adult) who is dyslexic, for his or her parents and community, and for our entire nation.

Raising the Profile of Successful Dyslexics



A major priority for YCDC is to increase public awareness of dyslexia. This past year was especially rewarding in that regard. Most notably, in December we released a very special and meaningful book that brings to life our Sea of Strengths model, which defines dyslexia as a weakness in getting to the sounds of spoken words surrounded by a Sea of Strengths in higher level thinking and reasoning. *Dyslexia: Profiles of Success* introduces the reader to 61 of today's most extraordinary innovators from a range of fields including law, medicine, business, entertainment, government, literature and art.

Each has risen to the top of his or her field and each is dyslexic. Through their personal stories they show how talent coupled with grit, determination and a careful navigation of barriers helped them overcome dyslexia and succeed. Among those profiled are renowned Attorney David Boies; ground-breaking cardiac surgeon and Cleveland Clinic CEO Delos (Toby) Cosgrove, MD; political leaders such as Senator Michael Bennet and former Senator Carol Moseley Braun; talent agent extraordinaire Ari Emanuel; and Olympic Gold Medalist Meryl Davis. The book includes an introduction by Dr. Sally Shaywitz.

Although they are slow readers, no one would ever consider any one of these brilliant individuals slow thinkers. Major damage is done to dyslexic children and later on, to dyslexic adults, by the mistaken notion that people who are dyslexic are not very smart, often dampening hopes and dreams of the future. Reading these profiles should provide children (and their parents) with knowledge that the dreams of those with dyslexia can be fulfilled -- and wonderfully so.

Act to Close the Achievement Gap

Dr. Sally Shaywitz was honored to testify before the U.S. Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee on May 10, 2016 on the Intersection of Science and Education. In her testimony she emphasized what has become YCDC's signature message: **"Dyslexia offers both an explanation and solution to the education crisis."**

She began by presenting direct evidence from the Nation's Report Card, the 2015 NAEP High School Reading Scores, showing the largest drops in scores for the lowest achievers -- data that sent a loud and alarming warning signal about the national reading crisis. In the presentation, the high cost of not identifying or providing effective interventions for dyslexia was emphasized, including very high drop-out rates from high school with the consequence of later unemployment, lower earnings and significantly higher rates of anxiety and depression. In fact, the rate of dyslexia in incarcerated men and women approaches 50 percent.

We need to ACT: We must ACT to curb this horrific epidemic by aligning education with scientific principles. Schools must screen for and identify dyslexic students early, provide evidence-based interventions, and, importantly, ensure that dyslexic students know their diagnosis and understand that they are smart. The societal cost of ignoring dyslexia is far more costly than identifying and treating it in terms of lost lives, unemployment and incarceration. We must act and act quickly to put a stop to this loss by aligning science with the education of children who are dyslexic.

Moving forward will require adopting an educational model that incorporates 21st century scientific knowledge about dyslexia. For example:

- A school climate where everyone at school is on board
- The word dyslexia is consistently used
- Small classes
- Evidence-based methods
- Knowledgeable, flexible, caring teachers
- Consistency in instruction across all classes
- A community to join where students know they are not alone

Such models are often found in independent schools and in public charter schools for dyslexic students such as the Louisiana Key Academy. We hope to see more public school models such as [Morningside Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia](#). Our observations inspire us to believe that such schools bring equality and hope to all dyslexic children so that disadvantaged dyslexic children are no longer left behind.

We at YCDC, together with our many committed supporters, will work to ensure that we move forward with passion and determination and that our website continues to share only the most trustworthy information. In 2017, we will continue to work relentlessly in each of our focus areas to:

- Increase public awareness of dyslexia
- Encourage use of the word dyslexia
- Translate the scientific knowledge of dyslexia into policy and practice
- Make sure there is early identification of children at risk through screening
- Encourage the most specific and accurate diagnosis of dyslexia
- Guide parents, dyslexic children and educators to come to a 360 degree full understanding of the explanatory Sea of Strengths model
- Provide support to dyslexic children and adults so that they may realize their Sea of Strengths
- Work toward our goal of having all stakeholders acknowledge and give credence to the unexpected nature of dyslexia
- Put into effect actions recognizing that the achievement gap occurs very early, indeed, at the very beginning of a child's educational career and that steps must be put into place now to recognize and address dyslexia
- Ensure that legislation and educational policy at the local, state and federal level are strongly aligned with and reflect both the science of dyslexia and the needs of dyslexic children
- Support and disseminate the scientific and ethical basis for providing accommodations to dyslexic students

We welcome 2017 and will work to make this year an even better one for all children and adults who are dyslexic. We invite you to join us. Many of you have asked if you could make a donation to YCDC. We welcome your support to reach our ambitious goal of creating a better world for all those with dyslexia. As our *Profiles of Success* book demonstrates -- dreams do come true for dyslexic children. Help us make the dream come true for many more who deserve it. For those who wish to contribute, contact:

Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity
c/o Sally E. Shaywitz, M.D.,
129 York St., Suite 1P,
New Haven, CT 06511