



Assistive technology
Powerful tools to
increase achievement

Act now
The importance of
early identification

Get involved
Tips to develop
an effective IEP

**MEDIA
PLANET**

May 2011

LEARNING DISABILITIES

3
TIPS

TO ENSURE YOUR
CHILD'S SUCCESS

SUCCESSING WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

**Actionable advice on how to achieve
inside and outside of the classroom**

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Identifying a learning disability
is only the *first* step.

Let us help you understand what LD means for your child.



National Center for Learning Disabilities

Find online
resources at

LD.org

CHALLENGES

Learning Disabilities: Very real, often misunderstood, frequently overlooked, but never a reason for failure.



Unleash your child's potential

Learning disabilities (LD) is the term used for a number of different disorders that affect how some individuals receive, process, and communicate information. Most children with LD struggle to learn in such basic areas as reading, writing, spelling and math, but many also have trouble with language (vocabulary and grammar, listening, comprehension) and some even struggle with socialization. Given the right kinds of help, these children can and will succeed in school, at home, in play, and later on, in the workplace.

The facts about LD

More than 15 million children, adolescents and adults struggle with LD every day and more than three decades of research has shed light on the underlying causes of LD and what works to help overcome these challenges.

■ LD affects at least five percent of the population and tends to run in families.

■ While LD cannot be “cured,” there are many ways to compensate for and overcome the challenges of LD.

■ Early identification of learning disabilities, especially during the school years, is a key to success.

■ LD is often confused with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, blindness, deafness, behavioral disorders and ADD/ADHD; these are separate disorders, but can co-exist and sometimes share features with LD.

■ LD is not caused by laziness or lack of effort, but frustration and failure in school can result in children “turning off” or “tuning out.”

All too often parents, educators and even physicians are reluctant to point to a child's struggles with learning as possible signs of an undiscovered LD. They presume that children will “outgrow” their weakness over time. The worst thing to do is “wait and see”



Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D.
Director, LD Resources & Essential Information, NCLD

BEST TIPS

Fundamental LD facts

If you suspect that your child may have a learning disability, visit the LD.org website and:

- Download NCLD's free LD checklist of signs and symptoms.
- Find ways to partner with your child's school in monitoring learning progress.
- Know your rights and become an informed advocate for your child.
- Join an online community of parents and educators interested in LD.

because LD is real, it does not go away and can quickly lead to self-doubt and a cycle of low expectations and underachievement.

High expectations

While learning disabilities are neurologically-based, they are fortunately not disorders that automatically restrict a child's ability to excel. Children with specific LD in reading (dyslexia) may, for example, struggle to sound out words but have excellent listening and comprehension skills. If they receive specialized instruction in reading, access to speak-aloud materials or text-to-speech software, extended time for independent reading, and other types of accommodations they can be at the top of their class!

Enjoy the facts, tips and resources about LD on the following pages and take action to help children with LD to hope, to learn, and to succeed.

SHELDON H. HOROWITZ, ED.D.

editorial@mediaplanet.com



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Responsible for this issue:

Publisher: Melvin Stern
melvin.stern@mediaplanet.com

Business Developer: Paul Herron
paul.herron@mediaplanet.com

Designer: Missy Kayko
missy.kayko@mediaplanet.com

Managing Director: Jon Silverman

jon.silverman@mediaplanet.com

Editorial Manager: Jackie McDermott
jackie.mcdermott@mediaplanet.com

Contributors: Sheldon H. Horowitz,
Judy Elliott, Kathleen Whitmire, Debbie
Walhof, Candace Cortiella, Anne Ford,
Laura Kaloi, Susan Tomases

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A call to action for LD Education



1 Rhode Island Tutorial & Educational Services (RITES) has been dedicated to helping LD students for well over a decade, serving those with dyslexia, ADHD, executive function disorder, and other language-based disabilities. The RITES approach is a research-based set of principles and teaching practices that center around the individual student and how he or she learns best, addressing the causes of a learning problem, not just the effects. By sharing our carefully crafted approach through individual tutorials, summer programs and teacher training, we're changing the way students see themselves as lifelong learners and helping them become successful contributors to society.
www.ritutorial.org • facebook.com/RhodeIslandTutorial • (401) 723-4459



2 The Highlander Dunn Institute is a non-profit community of educators and professionals working to improve the academic proficiency of students who struggle with learning. Our methods are based in the latest research and best practices from universities and research centers. Dunn signature initiatives include afterschool and summer Orton-Gillingham programs, literacy reform models for schools, RTI support, assessment and data analysis systems for teachers, coursework on literacy interventions, and support & advocacy for families. Dunn's quality programs are hosted by, incubated in, and proven at the Highlander Charter School – an innovative K-8 school that is achieving new heights in urban school reform.
www.highlanderdunn.org • 401-831-7323 x17 • Follow us on Facebook!



3 Child1st products are specifically designed for right-brained learners, including visual and kinesthetic learners and those labeled with dyslexia or other audio/visual processing disorders. The multisensory materials integrate learning concepts with visuals, story, humor, and body movement, targeting multiple regions in the brain. The materials have successfully brought many failing students to grade level or beyond. We're here to support you. Visit our website today!
www.child-1st.com • 800.881.0912



4 Eagle Hill School is a language-based, remedial program committed to educating children with learning disabilities. A secure, structured, nurturing environment supports and stimulates the development of the whole child. Children leave EHS with confidence in their academic abilities, a true belief in their worth as human beings, and the strategies necessary to meet the challenges of their new school and social settings.
www.eaglehillschool.org/index.cfm • 203-622-9240



5 EBL Coaching specializes in providing one-on-one tutoring and summer programs for students with learning disabilities in grades preK-12. EBL offers reading, writing, math, and study skills instruction using Orton-Gillingham and other multi-sensory techniques. They create individualized, research-based programs for students with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.
www.eblcoaching.com • 212-249-0147



6 The Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) at Curry College has over 40 years experience providing strength-based, proactive, mentoring-focused instruction for bright, college-able students with language-based learning disabilities and/or ADHD. An emphasis on individualized instruction and access to extensive adaptive technology assists students in becoming self-directed, strategic learners, with additional, specialized programs for international, high-school, and adult students. Curry College is a private, four-year, liberal arts institution outside Boston with 20 majors serving 2,000 undergraduates.
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NEWS

Help for struggling learners

TIP

2

EDUCATIONAL
MODELS
MATTER

■ **Question:** What is the best classroom solution for students who may be falling behind?

■ **Answer:** Response to Intervention (RTI) is a powerful method that can help struggling students.

In the past, students often had to wait to receive special education services, or worse, did not qualify for special help even after testing. RTI changes the rules. When implemented well, RTI enables students to receive the attention they need without delay. School-wide resources are made available to classroom teachers so they can ensure that every student receives the highest quality

and most effective instruction the school has to offer.

Embracing RTI

One compelling example of RTI in action is the child of Mendy Gomez. Mendy's son was first identified as a struggling learner at age three,

and received special education help throughout his early school years. Mendy vividly recalls being told to temper her expectations for her son's learning, predicting he would be a C or D student at best.

Now a 5th grader in a school that embraces RTI, her son's reading

level jumped by two grades, and he is reading at grade level. His last report card was all A's and one B, and Mendy and her husband are elated that, for the first time, their son's learning disability was no longer having a negative impact on his academic achievement.

A multi-year project connecting leaders from more than 200 school districts with information and resources on RTI has produced some truly outstanding results: 47 percent and 50 percent increases in student proficiency in reading and math, a 75 percent decline in disciplinary referrals, and a 53 percent decline in special education referrals. Learn more about RTI and its potential to improve learning for all students at RTINetwork.org.

KATHLEEN WHITMIRE, PH.D.,
DIRECTOR, RTI ACTION NETWORK
editorial@mediaplanet.com

FACTS

What is RTI?

■ **As schools work to improve academic achievement for all students**, many are adopting an approach called Response to Intervention (RTI). Also known as the "Problem-solving Method" or "Multi-Tier System of Supports,"

RTI begins with a snapshot of how well all students are learning and uses classroom observation and frequent assessment to monitor learning progress. This triggers the delivery of support and additional instruction in "tiers" with time and intensity of

instruction increased as needed. Simply put, it is a systemic way to proactively support struggling learners with early help, eliminating the need to wait-to-fail.

JUDY ELLIOTT, PH.D.,
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER, LOS
ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



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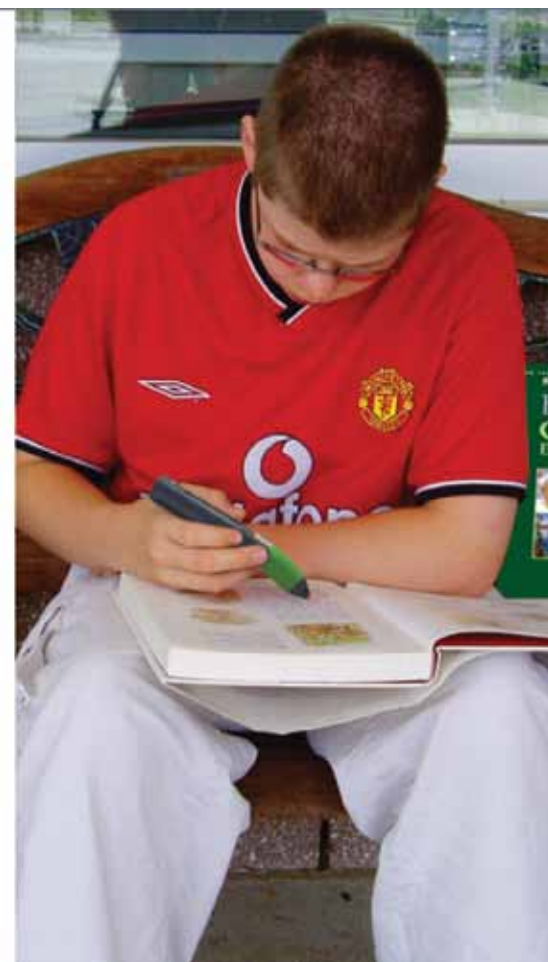
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- Provide school to home literacy support

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NEWS

Assistive technology and universal design

During the past decade, dozens of new tools have appeared in the marketplace to help students with learning disabilities experience success.

Simply put, assistive technologies are any tools that can help students learn more effectively. Different

learning styles require different tools, but when the fit is right, it is well worth the effort.

For example, technologies exist that can take printed materials and convert them into audio files so a student can listen to the text spoken out loud (text-to-speech).

Assistive technologies are often coupled with a new approach to

education called Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a new way of thinking about teaching and learning that recognizes one size does not fit all and students learn best when:

- Teachers present information in different ways (this helps address different learning styles);
- Students can demonstrate learn-

ing in different ways (not just via pencil and paper exams);

- Teaching happens using multiple formats.

AT and UDL in action

The Smarttxt Universal Learning Program is a collaboration of instructors, students, and learning specialists throughout the California Community Colleges, with Laney College in Oakland, California as the flagship institution. The mission of the program is to integrate assistive technology tools into the general curriculum through the use of student mentors.

The program has been a success due in large part to these student mentors, who started out requiring

support, but now teach their peers and faculty about assistive technology. Eager to share with others, not just those with learning differences, they know first-hand what a difference multi-sensory tools can make to all students. These tools enable students to hear textbooks and teachers' annotated study strategies, essentially creating "A Teacher within the Text." In addition, they allow students to see and hear instructors' methods for solving math equations and to review class lectures on demand.

**STACEY KAYDEN, DIRECTOR,
SMARTTXT UNIVERSAL LEARNING
PROGRAM, LANEY COLLEGE**

editorial@mediaplanet.com

IDENTIFICATION: EARLY IS BETTER

More than 80 percent of children with LD struggle in the area of reading, so parents and childcare providers should be on the lookout for early signs of "risk" for LD.

- Have your child's hearing and vision screened by a qualified professional once a year

- Read aloud to your child, point to words and pictures, and talk about the characters in the story
- Ask your child to retell the story, and expand upon it in ways that tap their imagination
- Watch for signs that your child might be disinterested in reading

or reluctant to pick up a book and read on their own

- Visit GetReadytoRead.org for a free and fun online screening and lots of tips and activities to build early literacy skills.

DEBBIE WALHOF, MD

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NEWS

PARENTING TIPS: HOW
TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

Experts often talk about children during the school years as a “moving targets”—some learning sticks the first time it is taught, some learning takes more targeted instruction and practice, and some learning doesn’t happen at all or at least not as expected. The role of parents as well-informed advocates is critically important for students who struggle and especially for those with LD.

Helpful tips:

- Rule out other possible causes of learning difficulties, including hearing and vision problems, poor eating habits and lack of sleep.
- Talk to teachers and others who work with your child to get their perspectives on specific learning concerns.
- Request a formal evaluation of

your child’s learning difficulties to help uncover causes and plan for improvement.

■ Insist that any plan of action use well-proven, effective programs and detailed measures of progress.

■ Be sure that regular progress reports are based not just on your child’s achievement but also with comparisons to expectations for all students

■ Don’t hesitate to request changes in instruction and support when expected progress is not occurring.

■ Keep notes of all meetings and ask for instructional plans and progress reports in writing.

CANDACE CORTIELLA, DIRECTOR,
THE ADVOCACY INSTITUTE,



TIP

3

BECOME
AN ACTIVE
ADVOCATE

Parents as advocates

■ **Question:** How can I help my child overcome LD?

■ **Answer:** Be well-informed, diligent and take advantage of every day.

The saying “parents are a child’s first teacher” is true for all children, and for children with LD, the word “best advocate” should be added. Throughout a child’s school journey, parents need to be well-informed and prepared to make sure that their child’s struggle is addressed quickly and with good results and not just good intentions.

Time doesn’t tell

Don’t let your guard down if you are told that your child is just going through a phase or needs time to catch up. Waiting to intervene allows problems to deepen, can quickly trigger problems with behavior, and can negatively impact social relationships.

Be courteous but firm

Remember, no one is more concerned about your child’s well-being than you are. Schools are busy places and keeping your child’s learning needs a priority for the school will be up to you. Work in

partnership with school personnel and be steadfast in your expectation that every day of every year counts.

Make every day count

Public schools are required to identify and serve students with disabilities. This process can be lengthy and complex, so be sure to learn about it by using all of the resources available. Be an active participant in identifying needed services and in developing individualized education plans (IEPs).

Put progress front and center

Getting special services for LD doesn’t mean lowering expectations or settling for less progress than other students are making. In fact, such services should result in more progress, so that your child catches up with his/her peers. There are lots of ways to measure progress, so keep asking for evidence that the services and support being offered are closing learning gaps.

CANDACE CORTIELLA, DIRECTOR,
THE ADVOCACY INSTITUTE

editorial@mediaplanet.com

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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE IEP

Tips for parents

- Be specific about the help you want for your child, based on test results as well as your intuition.
- Ask questions and request explanations; this is a blueprint for action and you are a full partner in its creation and implementation.
- Set realistic timelines for listed goals, and make sure that there is agreement about how prog-

ress will be monitored.

- Invite people you trust to attend meetings with you.
- Request (and keep) copies of meeting notes and records.
- Know your rights; a parent handbook should be given to you by the school, and a free IEP Meeting Planner is available at LD.org.

SHELDON H. HOROWITZ, ED.D.

INSIGHT

Academic achievement for your child

Helping your child transition from high school to college and beyond.

A high school diploma is essential for success in today's economy and nearly 90 percent of

the fastest-growing, highest-paying jobs require education or training beyond high school. Even though schools are required, by federal law, to provide transition planning to students with LD, the high

school graduation rate for these students remains unacceptably low. In 2008-2009, just 64 percent of students with LD left high school with a regular diploma compared to 73.9 percent of students without LD.

Don't wait to begin transition planning

- Insist that your child is taking only grade-level assessments, with accommodations if needed
- Check that your child will meet all the curriculum require-

ments to graduate with a regular diploma

- Be sure that IEP goals will support your child earning a regular diploma
- Begin the formal transition planning process when your child turns 16 (or sooner!)
- Get extra help if needed to ensure that your child remains on track
- For a list of local resources in your area, visit www.ncld.org/resource-locator for more information.

LAURA KALOI, DIRECTOR,
PUBLIC POLICY, NCLD
editorial@mediaplanet.com

PERSONAL INSIGHT

A mother's wisdom

Identifying a learning disability and getting a child the help he or she needs can be a slow, frustrating, intimidating and overwhelming process. The key to helping children succeed is to ask for help as soon as an LD is

suspected, be informed about what works to overcome specific challenges, and celebrate successes.

Listen to what children and parents have to say about their LD journey:

"Living with LD is like climbing a mountain, but my path

to the summit is covered with banana peels."

"My brain is like a computer: simple on the outside and complex on the inside, with a glitch in one of the circuits."

"Her teachers all knew she could not read like her peers

but would not recommend an evaluation for LD because her grades were too good."

"The most important lesson I learned is that my learning disabilities do not define who I am and what I can achieve."

ANNE FORD,
AUTHOR OF "A SPECIAL MOTHER"

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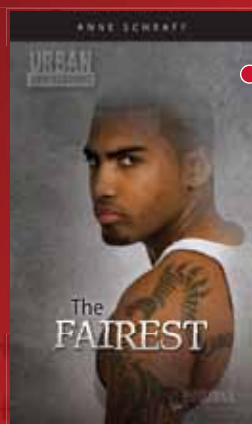
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