



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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COMMISSIONER LEADS SUPPORT FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES AWARENESS

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) –Commissioner of Education Stephen Pruitt is asking educators across Kentucky to join him in recognition of Learning Disabilities Awareness Month in October.

“This is a time set aside for education and understanding of the issues facing many of our children and adults with learning disabilities,” Pruitt said.

President Ronald Reagan originally proclaimed October as Learning Disabilities Month in 1985 to raise awareness of the many different types of learning disabilities, among the most common of which are:

- **Dyslexia** – Characterized by difficulty reading and accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor spelling and decoding abilities, and often the inability to distinguish or separate the sounds in spoken words. Dyslexia is a common learning challenge and can often affect a person emotionally because they think they are unable to learn. Reading difficulties affect between 2 and 8 percent of elementary school children and occur in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels. It is a lifelong condition. Even though there is no cure, people with dyslexia can still be successful learners and are often gifted in areas that do not require strong language skills such as art, computer science, design, drama, electronics, math, mechanics, music physics, sales and sports.
- **Dysgraphia** – Characterized by difficulty writing resulting from problems in vocabulary, grammar, hand movement or memory. Bad handwriting doesn't mean a person has dysgraphia. It is a processing disorder and may change throughout a person's life. A student with a writing disorder can benefit from specific strategies. To improve success, students with dysgraphia may receive accommodations providing alternatives to written expression, modifications of the expectations or tasks to minimize or avoid writing, and interventions, including additional instruction for improving handwriting and writing skills.
- **Dyscalculia** – Characterized by difficulty with mathematics and the ability to recognize numbers and symbols, memorize facts, align numbers, and understand abstract concepts like place value and fractions. Just because a person has trouble with math does not necessarily mean they have dyscalculia. Experts say the disorder never goes away, but carefully designed practice can improve math skills.
- **Executive Function Difficulties** – Characterized by problems with organization. These skills are used to study situations, plan, act and make choices. Students with poor executive function need help to organize research and have serious trouble deciding which of two or three tasks to do first. They have difficulty changing tasks or working on one project for a long period of time. Problems with executive function are strongly linked to attention deficits and other learning disabilities. Experts say executive function skills can be improved. Teenagers and adults can make lists and establish ways to make sure they perform important tasks.

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- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) – Characterized by difficulty paying attention and, if hyperactivity is present (ADHD), may also manifest in difficulty with controlling behavior. These disorders are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain and, while not a learning disability by themselves, they may affect learning. In this situation, classroom accommodations or adaptations can be used to increase success. It is estimated ADD and ADHD affect 5-10 percent of the population worldwide.

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, about 1 in 5 students across the country have learning and attention issues. This includes 2.5 million who have specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia as well as 6 million who have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. Without the right academic or emotional support, they are much more likely than their peers to repeat a grade, get suspended and drop out.

“We must recognize that learning disabilities are real for many of our students and work with them to increase their chance of success in school and in life,” Pruitt said. “These students are as smart as their peers but too often are misunderstood as lazy or unintelligent. They are very capable of achieving high levels of learning, going to college or into a job training program and being vital, contributing members to Kentucky’s culture and economy. We have an obligation as educators to work with them to help make that happen.”

Last year Pruitt convened a task force on dyslexia to study the issue in Kentucky schools and make recommendations on how to increase success for students with the learning disorder. A report will be forthcoming.

Students with diagnosed learning disabilities or ADD/ADHD may be eligible to receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In either case, the school and the child’s parents or guardian need to meet and talk about the student’s learning needs and what is available.

More information on learning disabilities and resources on how to deal with them is available through the [National Center for Learning Disabilities website](#).

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