**Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities**

LDAO chapters and SEAC members may be receiving inquiries from parents who are confused by the use of the terms dyslexia and learning disabilities. A parent group in the U.S.,[Decoding Dyslexia](http://www.decodingdyslexia.net/), have been politically active and seeking services specifically for students with dyslexia through their state legislators. An offshoot of that group has been active recently in Ontario, and may have approached you or the parents you deal with.

LDAO is in line with other longstanding organizations in viewing dyslexia as a subcategory of learning disabilities. For example, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Definition states:  
*“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”*The IDA definition is also used by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).(<https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/>)

The Ontario Branch of the IDA, ONBIDA, states on their website: *“Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Students with dyslexia experience difficulties with language skills such as reading, spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical /traditional instructional environment*.” (<http://www.idaontario.com/about-us/what-is-dyslexia/>)

It is the mandate of LDAO to serve individuals with all types of learning disabilities, which may effect math, written expression and many other areas in addition to reading. We do not use the term dyslexia in isolation from learning disabilities for several reasons.

First of all, the Ministry of Education uses the term ‘learning disabilities’ in PPM 8, and IPRC identification is under Communication – Learning Disability. Parents need to know this.

Secondly, the term ‘dyslexia’ is used differently by different people, including researchers. sometimes meaning just reading disabilities and sometimes including all written language areas.

Thirdly, even if the term ‘dyslexia’ is used, dyslexia is not all the same.The key point for parents to understand is that, whatever the label, thepsychoeducational assessment report should outline their child’s unique areas of strength and processing weakness, and make recommendations specific to that profile of strengths and needs. The recommendations would be the same whether or not the term ‘dyslexia’ is used.

Fourthly, individuals usually have difficulties in several areas, not just one. That is the reason the group of professionals who wrote the Specific Learning Disorder section of DSM 5 chose to have one label, with impairments manifested in reading, math and/or written expression difficulties. Dr. Rosemary Tannock, one of the lead professionals, explained “Past criteria limited learning disorders to three specific diagnoses: namely, disorders of reading, mathematics, and written expression. But research has shown that these areas of learning are highly interrelated and shouldn’t be divided as though they were separate disorders.” (<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/2013/05/01/rethinking-learning-disorders/>)