

June 4, 2014

Ms. Kelli Unnerstall, Cofounder
Decoding Dyslexia-MO
318 South Forest Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63119

Ms. Pam Kortum, Executive Director
St. Louis LDA
13537 Barrett Parkway Drive
Suite 110
Ballwin, MO 63021

Dear Ms. Unnerstall and Ms. Kortum:

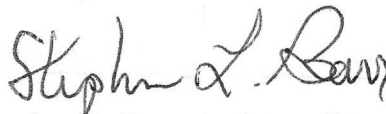
This responds to a letter you jointly sent to Ms. Nancy Thomas, Assistant Director of Compliance, Office of Special Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. I am responding on her behalf. Your letter indicated frustration with some districts and/or schools being hesitant to include the term “dyslexia” in the written Individualized Educational Program (IEP) and perhaps even hesitant in using the term during conversation. I am interpreting your letter as requesting we provide some non-regulatory guidance and advice to districts informing them there is no prohibition in including the term dyslexia in conversations regarding the IEP or writing it in portions of the IEP or in supporting documents. Use of specific terms is often helpful in improving communication with parents and with clarifying existing conditions and strategies that might be most effective. Students must still be identified as eligible under one of the categories approved by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and incorporated into the State Plans.

We recently received a similar request related to another condition labeled “Sensory Disorder.” Based on these inquiries, it appears some districts might be hesitant to include terms not in statute or regulation. We know of nothing that prevents districts from mentioning the term dyslexia in IEPs if the purpose is to help clarify the issues. We will be pleased to provide some advice to districts indicating that use of terms other than the approved categories is appropriate in the context of developing the IEP and will likely improve the communication and rapport with

parents. We will also want to include some suggestions for district to help parents understand that acknowledging a medical term does not automatically make a child eligible for services under IDEA. We will provide this guidance in August to coincide with the return of district staff for the beginning of the 2014-15 school year.

Thank you for your suggestion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen L. Barr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "S" and "B".

Stephen L. Barr, Assistant Commissioner
Office of Special Education

lmb

c: Ms. Nancy Thomas
Ms. Thea Scott
Ms. Pam Williams