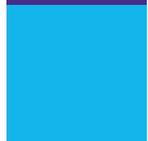
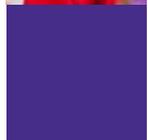
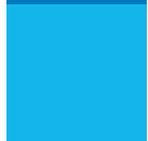
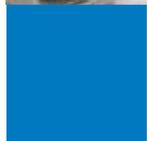


Engaging Your School



Learning Ally



There is a huge range on how well schools will collaborate, spanning categories from knowledgeable (rare) to good-hearted with bad methods (common) to unreachable (rare). I suggest you go in there assuming the best but prepared for the worst. In this context that will mean being engaging and polite with the school, but keeping detailed notes and documenting their actions at every turn in case you get to a point where you need the records.

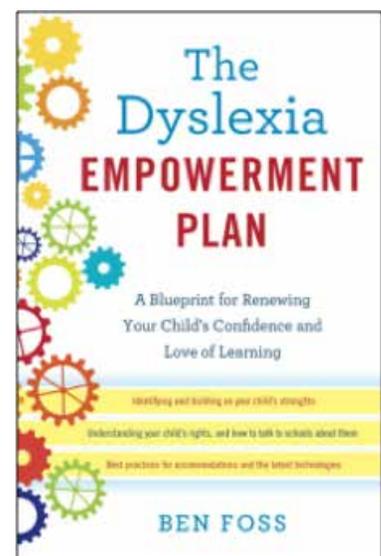
Your school will negotiate with you over what they will do to support your child. In many cases they are negotiating based on a genuine interest in the long-term outcomes for your student. However, there can be ulterior motives, such as budget or biases about what is or is not a disability, that can influence the conversation. Here are a number of common arguments that schools will use to block or delay providing accommodations, as well as some good responses that you can use.

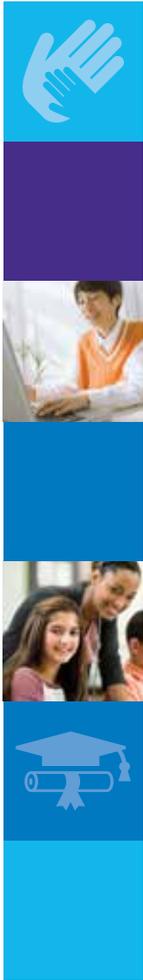
"Your child is so smart! She is performing wonderfully for a student who is dyslexic. She doesn't need this much help."

Getting good grades does not preclude a student getting services.

A response: "Thank you for that compliment. I'm interested in seeing my daughter perform to the best of her ability. The Department of Education issued a "dear colleague" letter in 2012, saying that good grades do not preclude a student from having a disability that is protected by the law nor from getting accommodations. How can we establish accommodations that will allow her to work to the level of her intellectual capabilities?"

From the Book, THE DYSLEXIA EMPOWERMENT PLAN by Ben Foss.
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"You're out of touch with your child's skills. You're just going to have to lower your expectations given his disability."

This is the inverse of the "your child is too smart" argument. You will want to push back equally as hard on this one, underscoring that you have reasonable expectations for your child and you merely want to provide an environment where he can do his best.

A response: "I don't believe we have an appropriate accommodation in place, so we don't really know what his level of performance could be. I'm committed to helping him do as well as he can."

"If we give your child accommodations, he will never learn to read like a normal student."

Reading like a mainstream person is not the goal. Learning via ear reading or finger reading are both acceptable. What you want to secure is access to information and independence for your child.

A response: "I think the goal here is learning and literacy in a broad context. If my child had a visual impairment, you wouldn't suggest to him that using Braille would mean he never would learn to read, would you? How can we work together to get appropriate accommodations in place?"

"Your child has a behavior problem, and these accommodations will just make him distract other students more."

It is not uncommon for students who are dyslexic to act out in class. Talking about your child's discipline problems in the context of accommodations is irrelevant.

A response: "I know you have a lot on your plate, and I know that my son can get frustrated. But I believe if we put appropriate accommodations in place, he will be successful in school."



"Our budget is limited and there are already too many kids with disabilities requesting services. We're not going to be able to support the cost this semester."



The law is crystal clear that it is the school's obligation to provide a free and appropriate education. In most cases the accommodations that you're asking for are relatively inexpensive. Many students with disabilities get full-time aides in the classroom as well as occupational and physical therapy that costs thousands of dollars. You are not asking for that level of expense for dyslexia. Even if you were, what the school administrator may have to deal with in answering to his or her superiors is not your concern.



A response: "I understand how much pressure you're under. It's also my understanding that we are entitled to this level of service under IDEA. This IEP meeting is not the time for us to discuss the cost of these accommodations. It's the time for us to establish which accommodations are best suited for my child."



The most important accommodations or supplemental services you should be looking for with a young child are (1) Orton-Gillingham intervention for two years in order to support the child's learning of standard eye reading and (2) access to audiobooks. These two components will stop your child from falling behind and allow you more time to get other accommodations in place.