

## Setting Measurable and Attainable IEP Goals for Children with ADHD and Reading Disabilities

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The majority of students with a reading disability respond to intensive empirically-based remediation programs according to research by The International Dyslexia Association. They demonstrate their progress on standardized measures of reading rate, accuracy and comprehension. However, a subset of students with reading disabilities, who may also have additional diagnoses such as ADHD, may make progress but cannot demonstrate true progress on standardized testing. The research conducted by the Help Group/UCLA Neuropsychology Clinic and presented at The Help Group/UCLA Summit on Best Practices in Learning Disabilities, ADHD and Autism, suggests that the problem is due to the misinterpretations of the testing utilized to measure progress, as opposed to a lack of progress on behalf of the student. In particular, students with a co-occurring diagnosis of a Reading Disability (RD) and ADHD, when compared to students with RD alone or ADHD alone, tend to read slower and make more pronunciation errors.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual reports that Reading Disabilities (RD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are the two most commonly diagnosed disorders of childhood; each affecting approximately 5% of the population. A diagnosis of ADHD can lead to difficulties with reading. Conversely, students with RD, often experience difficulties with inattention. RD and ADHD co-occur more frequently than expected. In fact, 30% of students with a primary diagnosis of ADHD meet criteria for RD, and 35% of students with a primary diagnosis of RD meet criteria for ADHD. However, there are relatively fewer students who can be diagnosed with both RD and ADHD. To be diagnosed with both RD and ADHD indicates the presence of increased symptoms in both areas.

For example, Steven, a 15-year-old student at The Help Group's Summit View School, has a reading disability. After many years of reading remediation, his parents and teachers believe that he has made progress, but no progress has been demonstrated on standardized measures. When school staff members measure the number of words that Steven can read per minute, or the number of nonsense words that he can sound out, the results show very little change over time. Yet, when he reads in class, he is able to read from his text book with adequate accuracy and comprehension.

In developing goals for an IEP of a student with both a reading disability and an attention deficit, the following approaches are helpful to assess progress in a more effective way:

- For students with co-occurring disorders, a careful review of the types of errors made within the evaluation is necessary in order to conclude whether the errors are related to inattention or poor reading. As a result, the team can make proper decisions about the types of behaviors and the type of reading skills that need to be targeted for a goal.
- A mixture of standardized measures (e.g. Woodcock Johnson-III Tests of Achievement) and curriculum based approaches (e.g. measuring reading comprehension from the student's science text) should be used when measuring the outcome of any goal. For example, while a student with RD + ADHD may read fewer words per minute, if they can demonstrate knowledge of the text that they are reading for class, than rate may not be a concern.
- Teacher reports of the ability to decode from text in other subjects, such as history, should also be considered in determining whether the student has met their reading goals.
- Finally, "real world" measurement of progress should be included in the annual updates of progress. For example, can the student adequately read the newspaper, work applications, and popular interest magazines? These types of publications are apt to be what the student will be reading in the future. It is therefore more important that students gain information from everyday text than their ability to decode increasingly difficult words which may never occur in more widely read material.

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