

Spring 2016

# The Bridge

KENTUCKY'S CONNECTION TO RURAL HEALTH ISSUES

Watching Over  
the Smallest of Lives  
The Blue Angels Program

 **KORH**  
Kentucky Office of Rural Health

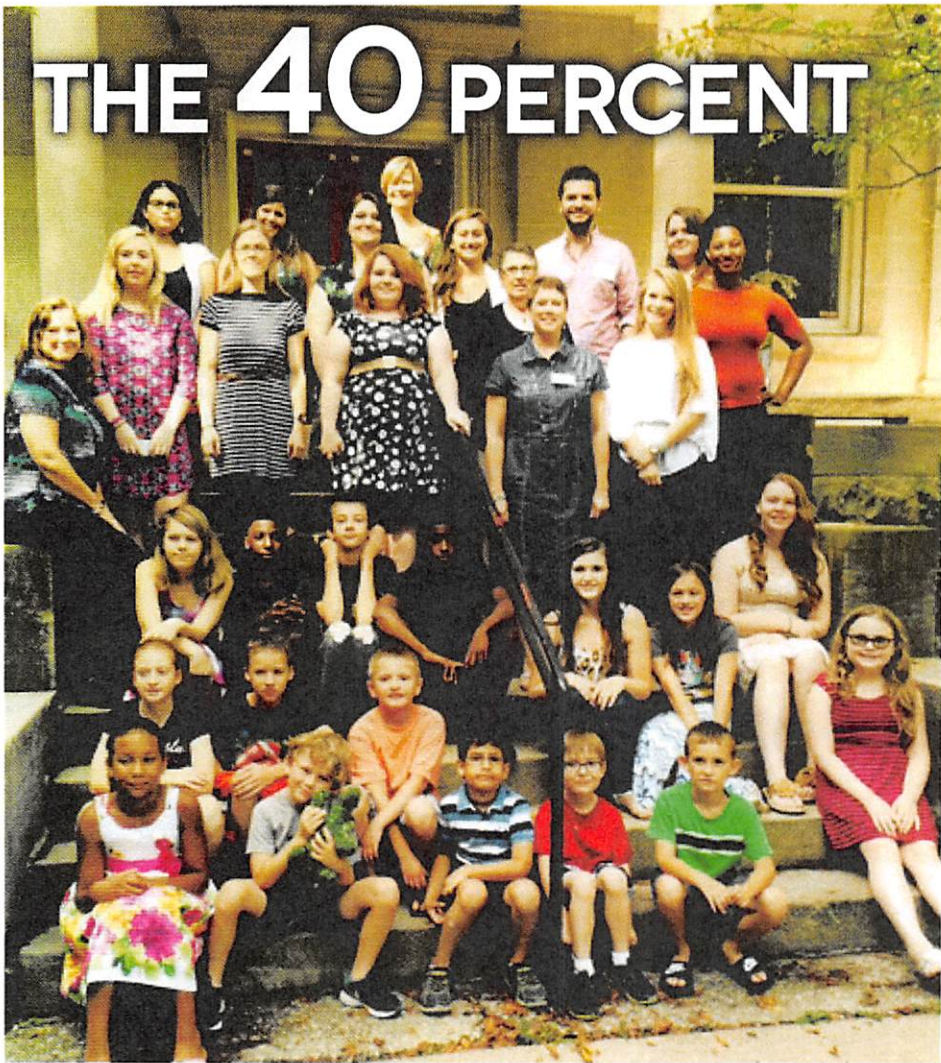
**UK**  
UNIVERSITY OF  
KENTUCKY  
Center of Excellence  
in Rural Health

Check & Connect:  
Behavioral, Mental  
Health Services Go  
To School

The 40 Percent



# THE 40 PERCENT



setting. If we want students to be literate in language, we need to use an educational curriculum that matches their needs - diagnostically, this would be processing the sounds of language and executive function.

Officially, "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..." (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development). Research also shows that dyslexia often runs in families; the genetic component has been identified. Students with dyslexia typically have difficulty in processing the sounds of language.

Unofficially, dyslexia is a self-esteem killer, a frustration to teachers and a trial for parents. Parent advocacy, begun decades ago, is coming to fruition as evidenced in state (KRS 158.305) and federal legislation (READ).

## *Article by Jill Orthman Hatch*

They are in every classroom, on every playground; some even make it to college graduation. In educational parlance, they are called the achievement gap. The 40 percent. These are students with dyslexia (20 percent) and their companion struggling learners (20 percent). The percentage remains persistent. Forty percent or more of children in Kentucky are not ready for Kindergarten. On average, 40 percent enter fourth grade less than proficient in reading. They graduate eighth grade unable to read proficiently in their content subjects. Only two percent currently graduate college.

For persons with dyslexia, this is not due to a style of learning. Dyslexia is a different way of processing. It is like being a Mac computer in a PC world.

Medically speaking, MRIs have demonstrated that the brains of dyslexics function differently with more activity in the right hemisphere (creative side) and less activity in the language processing area of the left hemisphere. This is a normal and natural variation in the human genome. This neurodiversity means there is a physical basis for dyslexia rather than lack of motivation and laziness often ascribed to the students. There is no magic pill for dyslexia and there shouldn't be. It is addressed in an educational

Advocates point out the assets of dyslexia. "Dyslexia is surrounded by these strengths of higher cognitive and linguistic functioning, reasoning, conceptual abilities, and problem solving," says Sally Shaywitz of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity. "There are so many positive areas in dyslexia and so many strengths." Strengths often exhibited by persons with dyslexia include intuition and insightfulness, visual talents that see patterns, similarities and connections, and spatial thinking needed by engineers and architects. More often than not, persons with dyslexia are holistic thinkers; they do not get bogged down in details. This last characteristic may explain the frustration of educators.

IDEA: Center for Excellence, a non-profit founded by Lois Weinberg, M.Ed. and located in Knott County, has been both an outgrowth and a driver of this advocacy. IDEA has as its main goal to optimize the educational experience for students with dyslexia in order to reach their full potential. Currently, the spectrum of dyslexia awareness ranges from denial of its existence to praise for its advantages. Students are also on a spectrum. Most can and do remain in traditional classrooms.

A major strategy for IDEA is to engage teachers and administrators in professional development activities. While education has, in many ways, ignored students with



dyslexia; it has, in other ways, ignored teachers-leaving them with no tools with which to approach their hardest to reach students.

In Letcher County, with funds provided by Berea College Appalachian Fund, IDEA provides access to information with an online professional development program. This came as a follow up to face-to-face professional development with some teachers in Letcher County. Participants indicated they wanted more information on classroom techniques. Online access allows for teachers' schedules and classroom needs. Preschool, Kindergarten and primary teachers can find links to the Get Ready to Read website that provides a screening for literacy prerequisites as well as a transition toolkit. Grades 6-12 can access and use the SMARTS On-Line Executive Function Curriculum. All participants have access to links such as Dyslexic Advantage and National Center for Learning Disabilities. This online group has 43 members from Letcher County and Jenkins Independent Schools. In a recent exchange online, Brett Lewis, teacher at Letcher Elementary commented on the SMARTS curriculum, "I know that it really helped me to also incorporate many other techniques and approaches with every individual student, and not just a "specific class" of students.

IDEA supports, through training and assessment, an after school program in Floyd County. This program includes students from Martin and Pike counties and is maintained and operated by parents of the students.

IDEA's activities, while focused on Appalachia, extend to other parts of the state. A partnership with the Kentucky Chapter of the International Dyslexia Association led to the annual Prevention of Failure Conference to bring research to classroom teachers. The first two conferences held in Hindman featured Drs. Victoria and Dennis Molfese, currently of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They shared their research on early identification of dyslexia with Kindergarten, Head Start and preschool teachers in the region. The past two conferences held in Lexington focused on identification and diagnosis of dyslexia in elementary grades and featured Carla Proctor, Ph.D, Education Evaluator from the Dallas, Texas, Independent School District and Kalyani Krishnan, M.A., School Psychologist from the Research Institute for Learning and Development in Massachusetts.



Lois Weinberg, M.Ed. brought tutorial services for students with dyslexia to eastern Kentucky. Weinberg has served as Director of both the Knott County after-school program and the James Still Learning Center. She is currently the Executive Director of IDEA: Center for Excellence.

Since 2012, IDEA Academy, a joint summer venture with the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning, has been held in Lexington. IDEA Academy provides one-on-one tutoring to students with dyslexia. The Family Resource and Youth Services Center (FRYSC) in Lincoln County seeks to establish their own summer school program. IDEA's technical assistance includes securing funding, tutor and supervisory training.

All of IDEA's tutorial programs use the Sequential English Education Curriculum, an Orton Gillingham-based program developed by Dr. Charles Shedd in Berea, Kentucky. Addressing the needs of students with dyslexia, this structured, multisensory, linguistic curriculum is both systematic and cumulative. After-school programs use predominately volunteer parent tutors; summer programs usually employ college students and some teachers.

Benefits include an average gain of one school year in reading ability for every 40 hours of instruction in both after school and summer school programs. There is an observable gain in self-efficacy.

Several studies have found dyslexia to be very common among entrepreneurs. Julie Logan, a professor of entrepreneurship at the Cass Business School in London, released a study in 2007 that reported that more than a third (35 percent) of American entrepreneurs she surveyed said they were dyslexic. Examples include investor Charles Schwab; Paul Orfalea, who created the copy chain Kinko's; and John Chambers of Cisco Systems.

Nicholas Montenegro of the MIT Media Lab, points out that because many people with

dyslexia are different kind of thinkers, they represent what the new economy needs and rewards. They are "at promise." Several reading curricula, like Project READ, Wilson Reading System, embody the Orton Gillingham (OG) standard. The OG standard is successful with struggling learners, as well as students with dyslexia. With attention to neurodiversity, the 40 percent, both dyslexic and struggling learners, can bridge the achievement gap. With appropriate instruction, they can be ready to enter Kindergarten and be proficient by fourth grade. The 40 percent can graduate eighth grade with a proficiency that allows for successful completion of high school and college. The 40 percent can imagine possibilities and become the entrepreneurs of our new economy. ■