Dyslexia: Five Things to Know about IEP Meetings (and is there ever a time to raise the white flag?)

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School has only been back in session for a little over one week and if I were being totally honest with you, I am not having a good year when it comes to dyslexia advocacy. There are moments, and lately it is happening more and more, when I just want to raise the white flag and say to the educational system, “You win. I cannot continue to have the same asinine conversations with different people in different meetings at different schools in different districts, on a daily basis. I cannot continue to argue about eligibility criteria and appropriate interventions. You win. I’m out. Instead of beating my head against the wall in yet another meeting, I am going to get a frozen yogurt.” So far, I’ve been able to get through those moments, but in those moments I learn things, things that I would like to pass on to those of you who are also having asinine conversations.

1. The team often needs to be reminded that the parent/s is/are part of the IEP team. When you hear that something is a team decision, that decision should include you. It should include your observations, your input, your data, your outside evaluation and your outside tutors.
2. Goals are individualized, just as the IEP is individualized. IEP teams are not confined to the drop-down menu for goals and, for the record, those drop-down menus are the complete antithesis of responding to identified individual needs.
3. Remember to use the word ‘appropriate’ not ‘best’. You are not entitled to the best, you are entitled to what is deemed as appropriate and that can range wildly from school to school. This usually leads to one of the asinine conversations I was talking about. You need to remember not ask for Orton-Gillingham, but describe it instead.
4. Most goals are poorly written – get educated on goal writing.
5. You can call an IEP meeting at any time. Be reasonable, but also hold the school accountable and don’t be afraid to be ‘that parent’.

It has recently been suggested that those advocating with students with dyslexia already have the laws and court decisions needed to get what is appropriate for that student. Although I see the point the author is trying to make; which is, what is currently in place ***should*** be enough, but the reality is that it is not enough. Parents are still met with remarks like: dyslexia isn’t real, they don’t work with dyslexia, what we are currently using works for kids with dyslexia, he is not far enough behind yet, and we won’t test until he or she is older. If we had a category in IDEA, like autism has a category, with a definition of what dyslexia is and what teachers should know about dyslexia, and a description of what is actually appropriate, maybe our kids (and let’s not forget those kids who will never have an advocate in their corner and slip through the cracks on a daily basis) would get the help they need without wasting a phenomenal amount of time hashing through the mountains of misinformation and maybe I wouldn’t want to surrender and eat too much frozen yogurt.