

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

Lacrosse star Paul Rabil, writer Philip Schultz advocate for learning disabled

By [Valerie Strauss](#), Published: November 13

The academics at Johns Hopkins University are tough for any student, but for [Paul Rabil](#), they were a special hardship.

Rabil, 25, Major League Lacrosse's 2011 Most Valuable Player, has a condition called auditory processing disorder that can make reading and writing an excruciating trial. Surviving the reading-intensive courses at Hopkins required accommodations available to students with learning disabilities, and time — lots of it — to read and reread material to absorb its meaning.

That intensity — Rabil refers to himself as “cutthroat determined” — has informed his approach to lacrosse and is guiding his new effort to help young people with learning differences thrive through athletics, and to raise public awareness about the need for early diagnosis and intervention.

“I want kids with learning differences to know that they can do great things,” said Rabil, who lives in Baltimore. “It may sound like a cliché, but I don't look at my condition as a disability, but as something that made me work hard to get where I wanted to go.”

Learning disabilities are caused by differences in brain structure. Estimates vary on the percentage of Americans with a disability; government agencies cite 10 to 15 percent. The most common disability is [dyslexia](#), an inherited disorder in which the brain does not properly recognize and process symbols, making it difficult to read and write. Those with auditory processing disorder can hear, but their brains do not properly process some sounds.

These disorders have nothing to do with a child's vision or intelligence. There is no cure, but there are successful treatments. Katherine Schantz, principal of the private [Lab School](#) in Northwest Washington, one of the nation's premier schools for children with learning disabilities, said that modern brain research can show how a brain has changed after specific interventions, helping target them to individuals.

Rabil, whose new foundation is starting a lacrosse program at the Lab School, knows he is one of the lucky ones. His sister, who attended Lab, has dyslexia, and his brother has auditory processing disorder. He received his diagnosis when he was young enough to avail himself of tutors, note-takers and other accommodations as he went through school, graduating from private DeMatha Catholic High School in Hyattsville. An invaluable tool that helped him at Hopkins, he said, was the [Kurzweil 3000](#), a program that scans a document, displays it and reads it aloud while highlighting the image of the print as it is

being read.

Because the key to helping people learn to live and thrive with dyslexia is early detection and intervention — along with strong family support — Rabil plans to advocate with lawmakers in Maryland for universal dyslexia screening among school children. He is starting a lacrosse program at Lab and plans to raise funds for an annual scholarship there.

[Philip Schultz](#) wasn't as lucky as Rabil. Schultz, of New York, did not learn he had [dyslexia](#) until he was in his 50s and his son, then in second grade, received a diagnosis.

As he heard the doctor describe his son's symptoms, it sounded like his own life story. He remembers being put with other kids who had trouble learning at "the dummy table." Held back twice and kicked out once for fighting with bullies, Schultz says he was "a big disappointment" to his parents.

But he persevered, becoming a writer who won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in poetry. He's authored eight books, the latest a memoir called "[My Dyslexia](#)." His work ethic echoes Rabil's: He writes slowly, and rewrites over and over and over.

Rabil and Schultz visited the Lab School last week as two of five honorees at the annual gala. Schultz, founder and director of the Writers Studio, a private school for fiction and poetry writing based in New York City, was most struck by the environment at the Lab School, where every student can understand what the rest are going through.

"I wonder what that would have been like, to have that kind of support, and what a difference it would have made," he said.

Sponsored Links

DeVry University

Bachelor's, Master's & Associate Programs In 5 Recognized Schools.
www.DeVry.edu

Truth About Scientology

You've Heard The Controversy, Now Get The Facts. Watch Online Videos
Scientology.org

Begin a Healthcare Career

Find Top Nurse Assistant Schools Day & Evening Classes.Call Now!
www.Top-Colleges.com/CAN

Buy a link here

© The Washington Post Company