Dyslexia Informational Handbook

Guidance for Local School Systems

Georgia Department of Education

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Foreword

"I don't 'suffer' from dyslexia, I live with it and work with it. I suffer from the ignorance of people who think they know what I can and cannot do."

- (Erica Cook, Learning Ally member)

"Dyslexia has turned my daughter into the hardest working person I know."

- (Amanda, parent of a child with dyslexia)

These are some of the quotes about children and adults who have dyslexia. As the research on dyslexia becomes clearer, educators are learning how to better support these learners. In Georgia, Senate Bill 48 (2019) was written in response to the concerns of parents, medical professionals, and educators who want to ensure schools more systematically support students with dyslexia. Educators can take individual action, but they will need system-wide supports in place as well.

This handbook describes what dyslexia is and what it looks and sounds like when a child is experiencing difficulties in learning to read. It addresses how to screen for characteristics of dyslexia and how to systematically improve reading instruction, while ensuring each and every child has access to individualized supports if the system is not meeting their needs.

The Georgia Department of Education's primary function is serving students; therefore, we are dedicated to providing the services and supports educators need to serve students. This Handbook is just one support. We will continue to modify the Handbook as we learn more, as schools improve processes for system-wide foundational literacy instruction, and as additional research emerges.

We express our gratitude to the many parents, educators, advocacy organizations, and researchers who contributed to the development of this Handbook and continue to work on behalf of Georgia's students.

Sincerely,

Richard Woods

State School Superintendent

Acknowledgments

Statement of Collaboration

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) recognizes that collaboration is a commitment to work together as partners toward common goals. In an effort to ensure collaboration, GaDOE worked in partnership with states and organizations who have undertaken extensive measures in order to build professional capacity in the area of dyslexia. We will continue to partner with organizations and other states to reinforce the effective practice of constant collaboration to improve quality instruction in all classrooms.

Alabama State Department of Education – *Dyslexia Resource Guide*
Arkansas Department of Education – *Dyslexia Resource Guide*
Arizona Department of Education – *Arizona Technical Assistance System Dyslexia Handbook*
California Department of Education – *California Dyslexia Guidelines*
Tennessee Department of Education – *Dyslexia Resource Guide: Guidance on the "Say Dyslexia" Law*
Texas Department of Education – *The Dyslexia Handbook*
Virginia Department of Education – *Guidelines for Educating Students with Specific Learning Disabilities*
International Dyslexia Association

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Section 1: Introduction

Purpose

In 2019, Georgia's legislature signed Senate Bill 48 (S.B. 48) into law. As a result of S.B. 48, the Georgia Department of Education, with assistance from experts in the fields of dyslexia, literacy, and language, created this informational handbook.

This handbook provides educators and families with information related to dyslexia, reading, and learning disorders and how they interact, as well as professional development resources. The Dyslexia Informational Handbook was developed by the Dyslexia Task Force, comprised of representatives who have experience in the area of dyslexia, and will be revised periodically with input and feedback from key stakeholder groups. The Dyslexia Resource Guide for Georgia Families is a supplemental resource for families.

Visit the GaDOE Dyslexia webpage at http://www.GaDOE.org/dyslexia for dyslexia information and updates.

Section 2: Dyslexia and Other Associated Disorders

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.[1]

Common Characteristics of Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurobiological condition (characterized by differences in the brain) that impacts an individual's ability to process sound-symbol relationships and language, which makes reading more difficult.2 Dyslexia is a language-based condition, not a vision-based condition. It does not go away, but individuals with dyslexia can learn to read well when provided with evidence-based instruction and interventions. Dyslexia is not due to poor instruction or a lack of effort on the part of the student and has nothing to do with intelligence.

Students with dyslexia struggle with the relationship between letters and sounds. Because of this, they have a hard time decoding—or sounding out—unfamiliar words, and instead often misread them based on an overreliance on their sight-word memory. Deficits are "unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities" in that the student's reading skills are lower than skills in other areas and are not due to a lack of intelligence. Screening for characteristics of dyslexia is a proactive way to address skill deficits through appropriate interventions. Screening results that reflect characteristics of dyslexia do not necessarily mean that a student has dyslexia, nor can dyslexia be diagnosed through screening alone.[2]

Students with dyslexia share some common characteristics, but it is important to remember that dyslexia manifests differently depending on the individual, their age, and other factors affecting their foundational reading skill development. In addition, students may have co-occurring disabilities or learning differences, including twice exceptionality (i.e., gifted and dyslexia).

Comorbid symptoms may mask characteristics of dyslexia. For example, inattention, behavioral and emotional issues may be more apparent than problems with reading; or gifted students may compensate well and mask their reading difficulties. On the other hand, a student's disability may impair their participation in grade-level instruction, creating deficits that may be misinterpreted as characteristics of dyslexia.

[1] International Dyslexia Association Definition of Dyslexia
[2] International Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Basics

The table below, from The Schenck School in Atlanta, GA, describes phonemic awareness and reading skills that typically present at certain ages and grades.

Table 2.1: Phonemic Awareness & Reading Skills Red Flag Checklist[3]		
Preschool	**Kindergarten – 1st Grade**	**2nd – 5th Grade**
A child should be able to: ☐ produce rhyming words ☐ divide words into syllables ☐ divide sentences into words ☐ discriminate rhyming words ☐ divide words into phonemes ☐ delete roots, syllables, and phonemes *e.g., Say "cowboy." "Now say it again, but don't say boy."* ☐ substitute a phoneme to a new word *e.g., Say "f-u-n" What is that? Now say it again but change /f/ to /s/."* ☐ identify a phoneme by its position in a word (beginning, middle, end)	A child should be able to: ☐ write words ☐ write sentences ☐ blend sounds together ☐ decode nonsense words ☐ segment words into syllables ☐ identify sounds and letters *(sound/symbol relationships)* ☐ begin to decode *(vc, vcv, words, words with blends, words with consonant digraphs, magic e words, etc.)*	A child should be able to: ☐ spell well ☐ have appropriate handwriting ☐ enjoy reading and writing ☐ have appropriate or strong written expression ☐ have appropriate or strong reading strategies ☐ recall words quickly without much repetition ☐ comprehend reading material at or above grade level ☐ read accurately

Individuals may present different characteristics at different ages. Table 2.2 shows common characteristics of dyslexia for various age levels.

Table 2.2: Common Characteristics of Dyslexia[4]		
Age Group	**Potential Difficulties**	**Potential Strengths**
Grades K - 1	☐ Reading errors exhibit no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page (e.g., will say "puppy" instead of the written word "dog" on an illustrated page with a dog shown) ☐ Does not understand that words come apart ☐ Complains about how hard reading is, or disengages when it is time to read ☐ A familial history of reading problems ☐ Cannot sound out simple words like *cat, map, nap* ☐ Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with /b/.	☐ The ability to figure things out ☐ Eager embrace of new ideas ☐ Gets "the gist" of things ☐ A good understanding of new concepts ☐ A large vocabulary for the age group ☐ Excellent comprehension of stories read aloud (i.e., listening comprehension)

[3] Adapted from The Schenck School, Red Flag Checklist
[4] Taken from The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, Signs of Dyslexia

Age Group	Potential Difficulties	Potential Strengths
Grades 2+	☐ Very slow to acquire reading skills; reading is slow and awkward ☐ Trouble reading unfamiliar words, often making wild guesses because the student cannot sound out the word ☐ Doesn't seem to have a strategy for reading new words ☐ Avoids reading out loud ☐ Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying "tornado" for "volcano," substituting "location" for "ocean" ☐ Mispronunciation of long, unfamiliar, or complicated words ☐ Avoidance of reading; gaps in vocabulary as a result	☐ Excellent thinking skills: conceptualization, reasoning, imagination, abstraction ☐ Learning that is accomplished best through meaning rather than rote memorization ☐ Ability to get the "big picture" ☐ A high level of understanding of what is read aloud (listening comprehension) ☐ The ability to read and to understand highly practiced words in a special area of interest ☐ Sophisticated listening vocabulary ☐ Excellence in areas not dependent on reading

Common Misconceptions of Dyslexia

Every child is unique, and therefore the rate of their development may vary. It is possible that a child may not reach a developmental milestone until the upper end of the expected range. Concerns are warranted if they continue over an extended period of time and adversely affect the child's ability to progress and meet expectations. For example, many young children reverse letters and numbers, misread words or misunderstand words as a normal, developmental part of learning to read. Children with dyslexia, however, continue to struggle with reading and language after their peers have become successful.5 This is one of many misconceptions that surround the term dyslexia. See Figure 2.1 for some other common misconceptions associated with dyslexia.

Figure 2.1: Common Misconceptions About Dyslexia[5]

[5] *Source. Australian Dyslexia Association*

Section 3: The Teaching of Reading

Effective Literacy Instruction and the Science of Reading

"About 20 percent of elementary school students nationwide have serious problems learning to read; at least another 20 percent are at risk for not meeting grade-level expectations. Among those who struggle throughout life—school dropouts, incarcerated individuals, underemployed and unemployed adults, and those experiencing chronic physical and emotional ill health—are high percentages of people who cannot read" – (Louisa Moats, 2020).

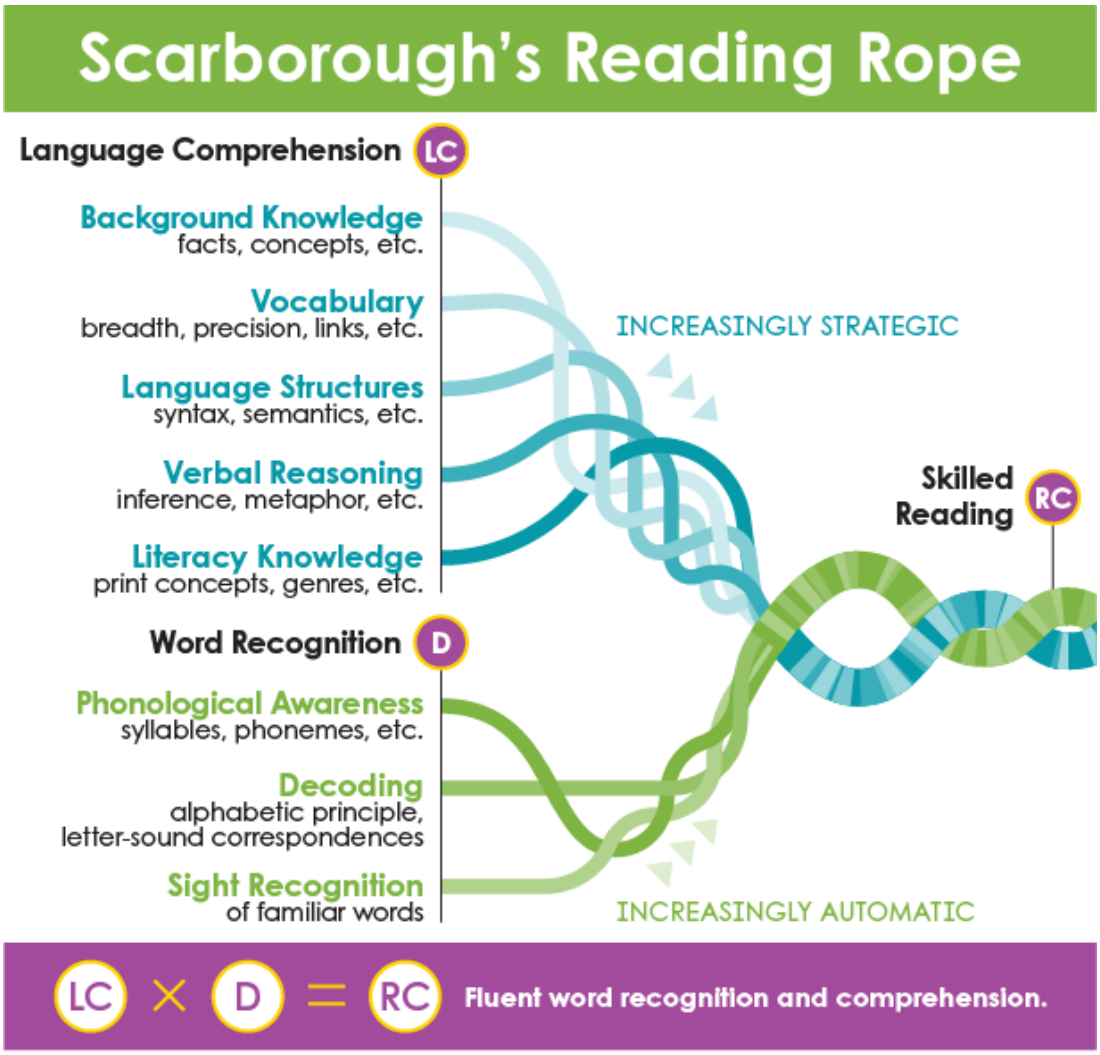
What is the Science of Reading?

According to the Georgia Early Literacy Act (House Bill 538, 2023, lines 73-76), "'Science of reading' means the body of research that identifies evidence-based approaches of explicitly and systematically teaching students to read, including foundational literacy skills that enable students to develop reading skills required to meet state standards in literacy." Cognitive psychologists, neuropsychologists, and other researchers around the world have conducted this research in labs and classrooms, and more research is being done every year. The science of reading is the converging evidence of what matters and what works in literacy instruction, organized around models that describe how and why.

The gist of this research is that reading involves five main skills: 1) phonological awareness, 2) phonics, 3) fluency, 4) vocabulary, and 5) comprehension. Attention to meaning making and oral comprehension must be incorporated into explicit reading instruction. A focus on vocabulary and oral language development is critical in this process. Elements of these skills combine together with teaching and practice to produce skilled reading (see Figure 3.1 on the next page). Until recently, this large body of research was not included in many teacher training programs, and it was not used to develop many of the commonly used reading curricula in schools. This is beginning to change.

In Figure 3.1, Dr. Hollis Scarborough (2001) compares skilled reading to a rope consisting of many different strands (see Reading Ropes – Let's Learn GA! for a brief video about the reading rope). These strands all work together to enable skilled reading. The strands develop over time and with more instruction and experience. The Reading Rope consists of upper and lower strands. The language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice. This does not happen overnight; it requires instruction and practice over time.

Figure 3.1: Scarborough's Reading Rope[6]



This interpretation of the Reading Rope incorporates Gough & Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading.

Georgia has recently undergone several developments that impact policy and practice statewide. In the 2023 legislative session state legislators passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (House Bill 538), which addresses kindergarten through third grade reading in five parts: (1) high-quality instructional materials, (2) universal reading screeners, (3) reading interventions, (4) professional learning, and (5) teacher preparation. The Aligning State Literacy Policies and Practices guidance document provides key connections and information to support school districts in effectively and efficiently implementing these new expectations with the ultimate goal of increasing literacy outcomes for Georgia's students.

Per state law, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) are defined as, "…instructional materials aligned to the science of reading that instruct students in foundational literacy skills and grade-appropriate English language arts and reading standards approved by the State Board of Education" (House Bill 538, lines 65-68). The list of SBOE-approved HQIMs can be found here.

Effective literacy instruction is essential for all students and is especially critical for students with characteristics of dyslexia. High-quality classroom reading instruction provides all students with a strong foundation and allows intervention to have a greater impact for those who need additional support. Instructional content of the

[6] Image used with permission from Really Great Reading

core reading program should include instruction in the five essential components of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Instruction in oral language, writing, spelling, and handwriting and content that builds students' background knowledge is also essential. These components should be addressed in a comprehensive and effective manner.

The following resources can help guide selection of evidence-based practices:

- Structured Literacy Fact Sheet from IDA
- What Works Clearinghouse
  - IES Practice Guides include a guide for teaching foundational reading skills to students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. One of the recommendations is "Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters." The guide provides three evidence-based practices to carry out this particular recommendation as well as ways to address potential obstacles.
  - Another guide, Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades, offers five recommendations to help educators identify struggling readers and implement strategies to support their reading achievement.
- National Center on Intensive Intervention Academic Intervention Tools Chart
- Evidence for ESSA: Evidence-based Reading Programs
- The IRIS Center
  - Under "IRIS Resource Topics" click on the "Reading, Literacy, and Language Arts" link for research summaries and curriculum descriptions.
- Florida Center for Reading Research
  - Select the "for Educators" tab to find specific instructional strategies for all five components of reading, ways to integrate assessment and instruction, and questions to guide your instruction.

For more information on the science of reading, visit The Reading League's Science of Reading Defining Guide: https://www.thereadingleague.org/what-is-the-science-of-reading/

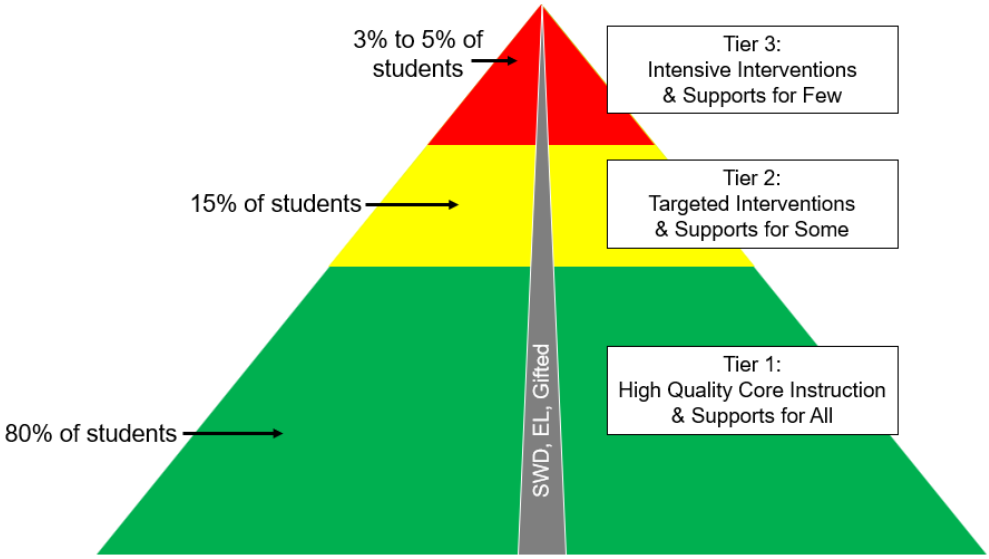
Section 4: Addressing Reading Difficulties in General Education

Georgia Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The Georgia Multi-Tiered System of Supports (GaMTSS) is a data-driven, multi-level prevention system designed to meet the needs of the whole child by implementing a continuum of tiered supports. GaMTSS is founded on the belief that academics, behavior, and wellbeing are interconnected and impact student success. By integrating academic, behavior, and wellbeing data, teams can more effectively identify and address barriers to learning.

GaMTSS uses a data-based decision-making process to design and deliver a continuum of integrated academic, behavior, and wellbeing instructional and intervention supports focused on prevention. This integrated system of supports is organized and operationalized within three tiers, as shown in Figure 4.1. Tier 1 includes high-quality, schoolwide academic, behavior and wellbeing instruction and support to meet the diverse needs of all students. Interventions and supports are designed to meet the needs of about 20% of students who require extra assistance, with targeted groups at Tier 2 and individualized student interventions at Tier 3.

Figure 4.1: Multi-Level Prevention System



With strong core curricula and high-quality reading instruction, it is possible to meet the needs of many students who have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia or who may have characteristics of dyslexia in the general education environment. Some students are successful with Tier 1 instruction, while others will require additional interventions and supports. These interventions and supports are determined according to each student's needs and are identified using universal screening and other quantitative and qualitative data.

In Georgia, most students who are identified with characteristics of dyslexia using the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric have already demonstrated needs for support that could not be met with Tier 2 targeted interventions and supports. These students will likely require Tier 3 intensive interventions and supports, which are provided more frequently and are individualized to each student's needs. See Table 4.1 for more details.

Table 4.1: Identifying and Addressing Reading Difficulties Across the Tiers			
	Tier 1: High-Quality Core Instruction and Supports	**Tier 2: Targeted Interventions and Supports**	**Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Supports**
Focus	All students	Students identified through screening and other data sources who are at risk of not reaching the desired performance target	Students who are not responding, as intended, to Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, intervention and support or students who have severe and persistent needs
Instruction	• District curriculum, high-quality instructional materials align with state or district standards • Differentiated instruction • Evidence-based practices such as explicit and systematic teaching of foundational literacy skills	• Systematic, evidence-based interventions and support • May target more than one foundational literacy skill (e.g., phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency) • Supplements the instruction and support provided to all at Tier 1	• Intensive, individualized intervention and support using evidence-based practices that address student's data-based needs • Aligns with Tier 1 and supplements or supplants Tier 2, depending on the needs of the student
Setting	General education classroom or other education setting within the school	Group size determined by student need and group composition (typically 3-7 students) within the general education classroom or other education setting	Group size determined by student need and group composition (typically 1-3 students) within the general education classroom or other education setting
Assessment	Universal screening, continuous monitoring of progress (formative assessments), and outcome measures or summative assessments	Progress monitoring (minimum of once per month) with additional diagnostic measures utilized as needed	Progress monitoring occurs more frequently than at Tier 2, and diagnostic assessment information is often needed to individualize intervention.

Section 5: Universal Screening Process

Reading and Dyslexia Screening

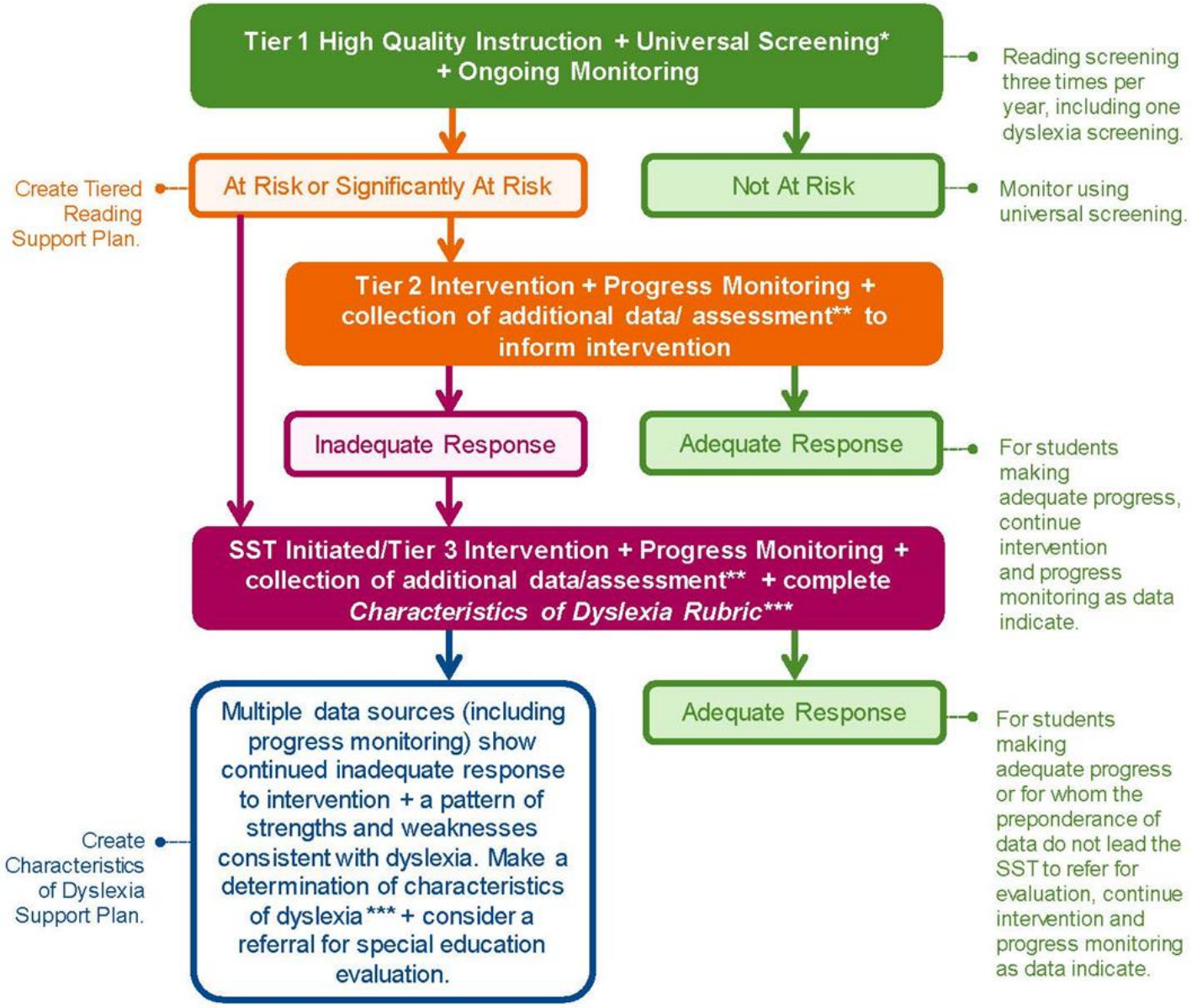
Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, local educational agencies must administer a universal reading screener to all students in kindergarten through grade 3; one of those screeners must be a dyslexia screener (see Figure 5.1). Parental consent is not necessary for administering an assessment that is administered to all students. However, parental consent must be obtained prior to individualized assessments and/or additional screening for suspected risk for dyslexia.

If the screening data and additional information—such as classroom performance and academic history—indicate that a student is at risk of reading difficulties, the local educational agency will begin or continue academic intervention and progress monitoring to determine the growth trajectory toward the student's learning goal(s). A Tiered Reading Support Plan should be created for students with a significant reading deficiency to document the supports provided to the student. If the student does not demonstrate progress or expected growth during the designated time frame, the intervention(s) should be intensified (see Table 4.1) and the student may be referred to the Student Support Team (SST). The SST will consider all available data for the student and may collect additional information to inform additional strategies and interventions or upon consent of the parent, a referral for an educational evaluation. If the available data indicate that the student may be at risk of dyslexia or other disorders, the SST may complete the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric and make a determination. In the interim, the local educational agency should adjust and intensify the frequency, dosage, and strength of the intervention and continue to progress monitor the student.

Figure 5.1, the Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process, explains the process and procedures for determining whether a student has a significant reading deficiency and, possibly, characteristics of dyslexia. Although the process originates with high quality instruction and a universal screener, this is not the only path to receive an evaluation when attempting to identify struggling readers who may have a disability. A Section 504 referral or special education evaluation may be requested at any time upon request of a parent/guardian. Also, a student may be referred for a comprehensive evaluation if data show that a student continues to struggle with one or more components of reading despite the provision of evidence-based intervention.

Figure 5.1: Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process

This flow chart incorporates requirements from S.B. 48 and the Georgia Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538). All components must be implemented with fidelity.



* If more than 20% of students in the grade level are at risk, evaluate what support may be needed to improve Tier 1 Instructon (e.g., additional instructional materials, supplementation of foundational skills, decodable readers, professional learning, coaching).

** As data dictate and the school team determines appropriate. The collection of additional data may include work sample analysis, criterion-referenced assessments, norm-referenced measures, and/or other classroom data the team determines necessary to inform instructional planning and intervention and/or determine level of risk.

*** The determination that a child "may have characteristics of dyslexia" can occur at this point in the process if the SST/Tier 3 Team has adequate data over a period of time. However, districts may also defer this determination until additional assessment has been completed as part of a special education evaluation should the SST/Tier III Team agree that a disability, as defined by the Georgia Special Education Guidelines, is suspected and that this designation is necessary to meet a student's needs. School Teams are encouraged to complete and utilize the ***Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric*** to provide guidance in making this determination.

Essential Components of an Effective Screener for Reading Difficulties

When considering characteristics of dyslexia, screening in the areas of foundational reading skills, reading fluency, and written expression help identify students who may need additional assessment to determine possible deficits related to the characteristics of dyslexia and the need for intervention. Personnel administering the dyslexia screener need to be trained to administer the assessment tool.

According to S.B. 48, the components of a universal screener to address reading difficulties must include but are not limited to:

1. Phonological and phonemic awareness;
2. Sound symbol recognition;
3. Alphabet knowledge;
4. Decoding skills;
5. Rapid naming; and
6. Encoding skills.

NOTE. A screener alone cannot identify dyslexia. The results of a screener can indicate that more information from further individualized assessment is needed.

In May 2023, the State Board of Education approved the list of Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tools. The Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tools are to be used by school districts for the identification and referral of students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Table 5.1: Skill Areas Required to be Assessed in Grades K-3

Key Areas	Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538)	Dyslexia Law (S.B. 48)
Phonological Awareness*	Yes	Yes
Phonemic Awareness	Yes	Yes
Letter Naming Fluency (Alphabet Knowledge)*	No	Yes
Sound Symbol Recognition (Phonics)*	Yes	Yes
Decoding (Phonics)	Yes	Yes
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) - Rate & Accuracy**	Yes	No
Spelling/Encoding	Yes	Yes
Vocabulary	Yes	No
Reading Comprehension	Yes	No
Oral language	Yes	No
Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN)	No	Yes

Note: All students in grades K-3 must be screened three times per year, including one dyslexia screening.
**Recommended in grades K and 1 only.*
***Recommended in grades 1, 2 and 3 only.*

Considerations for Interpretation of Universal Screening Data

After every universal screening, screening data along with additional school-level data are analyzed to determine whether Tier 1 instruction has met the diverse needs of at least 80% of students. If data indicate that more than 20% of students will require additional support and intervention to reach the desired performance target, consider the following:

- Are the core curriculum and high-quality instruction being implemented with fidelity?
- Are all students getting access to the core curriculum and high-quality instruction?
- Is the core curriculum and high-quality instruction differentiated to meet the needs of a wide range of learners?
- Is professional learning and coaching needed to implement the core curriculum and high-quality instruction with fidelity?

Screening data should be viewed as a single data point that helps differentiate between students who are at risk of difficulties and students who are not at risk. Screening is step one of a process and does not provide a comprehensive assessment of a student's specific problems. Once a pool of at-risk students is identified using screening results and other data, more specific assessments of their reading ability may be needed to inform intervention. A student whose performance on a screening instrument is extremely low may require a different type and/or intensity of intervention than a student whose screening score is close to the pre-determined cut-score.

Districts should use screening data primarily to identify next steps in instruction and intervention. This information, combined with progress in instruction and formative assessment, can inform the multidisciplinary team as to whether a student is displaying characteristics of dyslexia (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Considerations for English Learners At Risk for Dyslexia

Dyslexia, a specific type of learning disability, affects individuals in all cultures and languages. While home language may impact how characteristics of dyslexia present, English Learners (ELs) can still be identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. However, it can be difficult to determine whether the literacy needs of students who are learning English as an additional language are the result of ongoing language development or of a learning disability. Therefore, ELs may experience delayed, over-, or under-identification of disabilities.

The Considerations for English Learners at Risk for Dyslexia resource guide addresses important considerations for the successful identification and monitoring of students who are both multilingual ELs and at risk for learning disabilities, including dyslexia. Like all other students, K-3 students who are learning English must be screened for reading difficulties and dyslexia. The screening results should be interpreted in combination with other sources of information, including classroom observations, student work samples, and the student's WIDA ACCESS English language proficiency scores. Examples of typical and atypical language errors that may be seen as English learners acquire a new language are described in the resource guide and can help educators distinguish between students whose reading difficulties are due to their level of English acquisition and those whose difficulties may indicate a need for further investigation.

Section 6: Comprehensive Evaluation

Evaluation

When a student continues to have difficulty as discovered through the reading and dyslexia screening process (see Figure 5.1) despite implementation of a robust Tier 1 reading program, the local educational agency will begin or continue academic intervention and progress monitor to determine growth trajectory toward the student's learning goal. If the student does not demonstrate progress or expected growth over a period of time, the SST will examine student data to determine whether the student may have characteristics of dyslexia and/or consider a referral for special education evaluation (see final step of the Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process and the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric). In the interim, the local education agency should adjust the frequency, dosage, and strength of the intervention and continue to progress monitor.

An evaluation is the process of gathering information to identify the factors contributing to a student's difficulty with learning to read and spell. First, information is gathered from parents and teachers to understand development and the educational opportunities that have been provided. Then, diagnostic assessments are given to identify strengths and weaknesses that lead to a conclusion and a tentative road map for intervention. Conclusions and recommendations are developed and reported.

What Should be Included in an Evaluation?

There is no single test for dyslexia (a specific type of learning disability). A comprehensive evaluation consisting of multiple assessments is critical to support the identification of dyslexia.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, the following areas should be considered when carrying out a comprehensive evaluation for dyslexia (a specific type of learning disability):

- Phonological Awareness – an individual's awareness of and access to the sound structure of his/her oral language
- Phonological Memory – ability to recall sounds, syllables, words
- Rapid Automatic Naming – speed of naming objects, colors, digits, or letters
- Receptive Vocabulary – understanding of words heard
- Phonics Skills – understanding of the symbol (letter) to the sound(s) relationship, either individually or in combination with other letters
- Decoding –ability to use symbol-sound associations to identify (read – pronounce) words
- Real Words (timed and untimed)
- Nonsense Words (timed and untimed)
- Oral Reading Fluency – ability to read accurately, at a story-telling pace – to facilitate / support comprehension
- Single Word, Sentence, and Paragraph Reading
- Spelling
- Writing (Sentence and Paragraph level)

What Must Be Documented

The evaluation report should provide the documentation necessary to determine eligibility[7] for individualized supports, including Special Education, and Section 504. If the child will need Special Education Services, the local educational agency will follow the requirements as outlined in 160-4-7-.03 (Child Find Procedures). If the child will need other modifications, the local education agency will follow the requirements for Section 504.

Information about the child's specific skill needs should be detailed in the report to assist in identifying the starting point for instruction. Recommended instructional approaches or intervention strategies should be consistent with the types of content and methods that research has shown to be effective for students with dyslexia and other poor readers. If warranted, a recommendation for further testing—vision, hearing, fine motor control (occupational therapy), attention, emotional adjustment—might also be included.

Outside Clinical Diagnosis of Dyslexia

A clinical diagnosis of dyslexia is made based on the current diagnostic guidelines in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 5th Edition (DSM-5). This diagnosis is called a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) - with impairment in reading. If parents seek an evaluation outside of the school district, they are encouraged to share the results with the district. A diagnosis of dyslexia (a specific type of learning disorder) by an outside professional does not mean the school district must automatically identify the student as a student with a disability. However, a diagnosis is not required for your child to receive additional support in reading.

Doctors and clinicians "diagnose" conditions such as dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). School districts working under the IDEA "identify" learning differences and then determine if a student is eligible for special education services. Schools identify conditions based on IDEA. IDEA covers 13 categories of disability. Dyslexia falls under the category SLD.

[7] Georgia Department of Education Eligibility Determination

Section 7: Instructional Support for Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

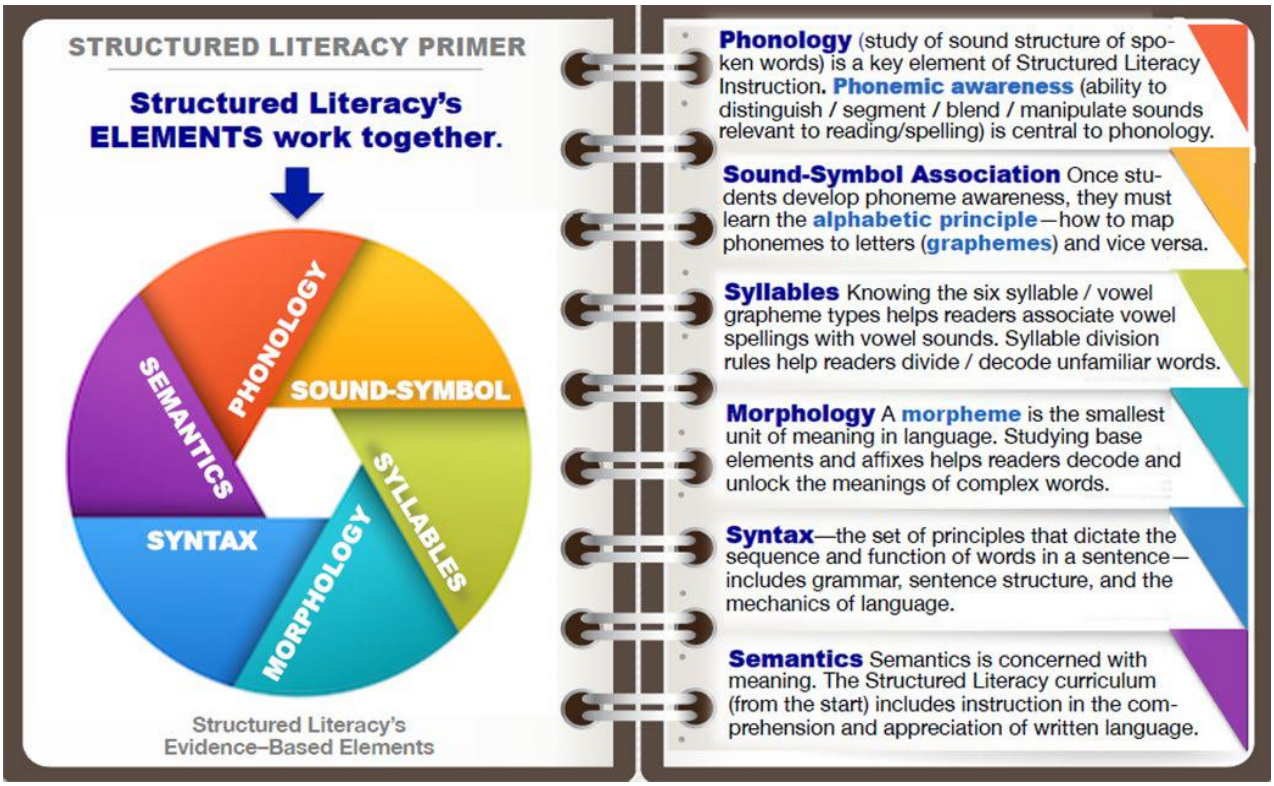
What is Structured Literacy?

Structured Literacy describes an approach to teaching reading that is beneficial for all students but essential for some, including students with dyslexia and other reading challenges. The method is systematic and cumulative, explicit, and diagnostic. It covers all the essential reading skills, including word identification and decoding strategies.

Instructional Principles of Structured Literacy

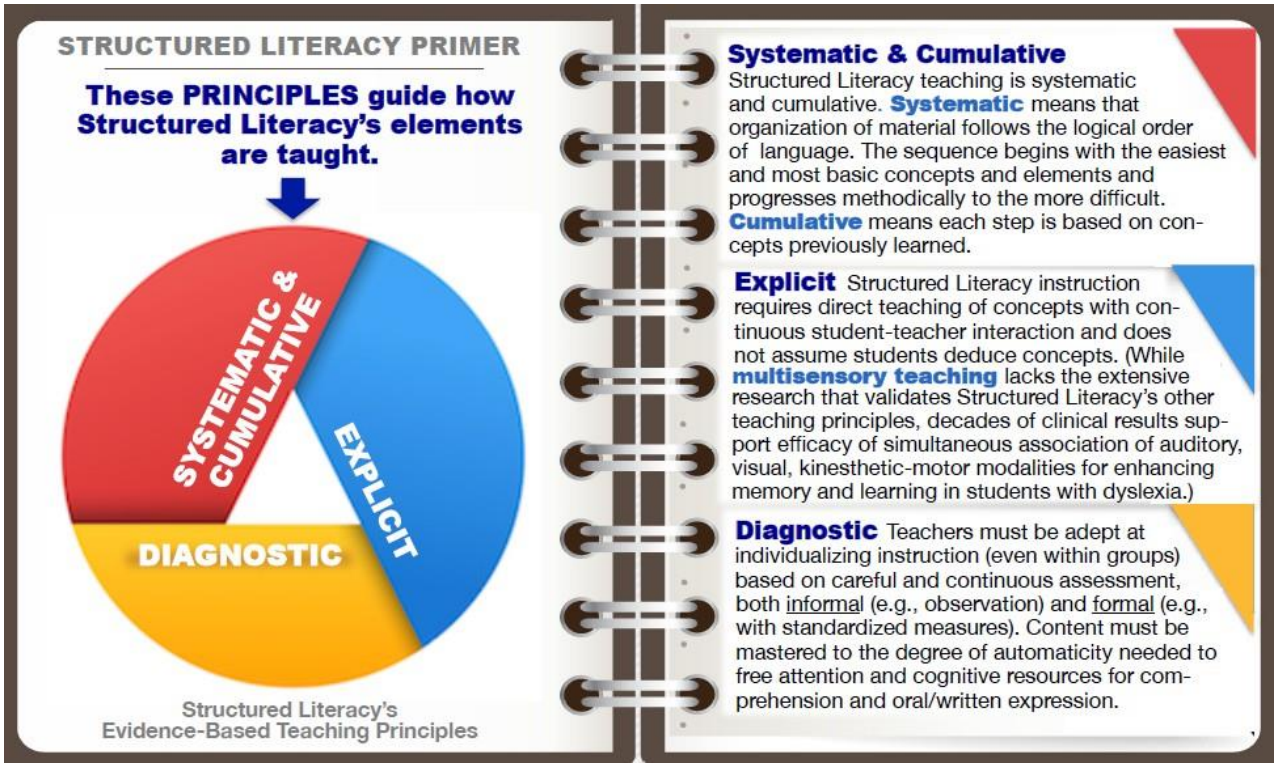
Figures 7.1 and 7.2 describe the elements of Structured Literacy and the evidence-based teaching principles used in a Structured Literacy approach.

Figures 7.1: Elements of Structured Literacy[8]



[8] Source: International Dyslexia Association. For more information, see Structured Literacy: An Introductory Guide.

Figures 7.2: Teaching Principles of Structured Literacy[9]



A tool to evaluate reading programs can be found https://www.thereadingleague.org/curriculum-evaluation-guidelines/.

[9] Source: International Dyslexia Association. For more information, see Structured Literacy: An Introductory Guide.

Section 8: Special Education Services and Dyslexia

Specific Learning Disability

For some students with characteristics of dyslexia, more individualized instruction may be needed to address reading deficits. In some instances, special education settings may be deemed appropriate. In these cases, dyslexia is categorized as a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), and the evaluation process for determining eligibility for special education services will be implemented.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), “The term ‘specific learning disability’ means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. This term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, **dyslexia**, and developmental aphasia. This term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage." (IDEA, 2004, 20 U.S.C. §1401 [30])

Specially Designed Instruction for Students Eligible for Special Education Services

Students who are found eligible to receive special education services based on the IDEA criteria will receive “Specially Designed Instruction” (SDI) to address areas of reading difficulty through the implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). SDI is the instruction delivered to a student with an IEP to help the student access the general education curriculum. SDI goes beyond differentiated instruction and addresses the unique needs that exist because of a student’s disability.

The IEP of a student identified with a SLD in foundational reading skills (e.g., dyslexia) must contain the components required by IDEA, such as the present level of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, placement, and the participation in the state and district accountability system. Because dyslexia is a disorder that affects decoding, word recognition, spelling, and reading fluency, the IEP of a student with a SLD in reading must include standards-based and/or functional reading goals that address foundational skills (and objectives if necessary), as well as accommodations to facilitate their performance in the general education curriculum.

For more information on Specially Designed Instruction, see GaDOE’s Specially Designed Instruction.

Accommodations

Identifying a student as having characteristics of dyslexia does not, by itself, guarantee eligibility for accommodations. However, informal accommodations can also be implemented by teachers and may help facilitate learning for all students, and especially students with characteristics of dyslexia. These include:

- Clarifying and simplifying written directions; repeating verbal directions
- Chunking assignments
- Highlighting essential information
- Providing additional practice activities
- The use of reading guides and graphic organizers to help students understand what they read
- Using peer-mediated learning
- Allowing students to demonstrate learning in multiple ways—visually, orally, or in written form

More ideas for accommodations teachers can use in the classroom to help students with characteristics of dyslexia and all other learners can be found here. These accommodations do not require a formal 504 Plan or IEP.

Students who are eligible for a 504 Plan or Special Education services often receive formal instructional and assessment accommodations that are written into a child's 504 Plan or IEP. Accommodation determination is based on what the child requires to access the general curriculum.

Instructional accommodations may include how instruction is provided, how the child is expected to respond to instruction, how the child participates in classroom activities and the kinds of instructional materials used. Examples of test accommodations may include providing extended time, allowing for breaks, reading the test questions aloud, and/or taking the test in an alternate location. Test accommodations should only be included if they are also an instructional accommodation. Not all instructional accommodations are appropriate for test accommodations as they may interfere with the purpose of the measurement.

The International Dyslexia Association provides information in its Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia Fact Sheet. Further information on GaDOE's Test Accommodation Guidance, taken from the GaDOE Student Assessment Handbook, can be found here.

Dyslexia Endorsement Programs in Georgia

Per S.B. 48, "The Professional Standards Commission shall create a dyslexia endorsement for teachers trained in appropriately recognizing and responding to students with characteristics of dyslexia and language disorders, such as difficulty with expressive or receptive language." In accordance with the bill, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) and GaDOE have collaborated to create a dyslexia endorsement program that is currently available at numerous colleges, universities, and RESAs across the state of Georgia. In order to receive a GaPSC endorsement for dyslexia, educators must enroll in a GaPSC-approved program. Alternative routes are not possible. Please contact the program provider or refer to GAPSC Approved Dyslexia Endorsement Programs for updates and further information. For information about the Dyslexia Endorsement, contact the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

Professional Learning Opportunities and Support

Professional learning about how dyslexia differs from other reading difficulties is a necessary focus for professional learning among educators in Georgia. The following resources may serve districts with dyslexia-related professional development opportunities and assist districts in the identification and instruction of students with dyslexia. Additional resources and services may be available in local school districts.

In addition, many local organizations are working to provide educator and parent support for students with dyslexia. Below is a list of local organizations to contact if more information is needed. **(Note. These are not exhaustive lists, and GaDOE does not endorse any organization.)**

Professional Learning Resources

- Georgia Literacy Academy
- AIM Institute for Learning and Research
- The Center for Effective Reading Instruction (CERI)
- Dyslexia Training Institute
- IDA Teacher Training Programs (Independent)
- IDA Teacher Training Programs (University)
- Institute for Multi-Sensory Education
- International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLE)
- Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS)
- ReadSource
- SREB Teacher Training Resources
- Tennessee Center for the Study and Treatment of Dyslexia

Local Organizations Supporting Educators and Parents

- International Dyslexia Association-Georgia
- Decoding Dyslexia-Georgia
- Reading League-Georgia
- Georgia Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Appendix

Appendix A: OSERS Dyslexia Dear Colleague Letter

Appendix B: Senate Study Committee Recommendations

Appendix C: Senate Bill 48 (2019)

Appendix D: Dyslexia Board Rule (2022)

Appendix A: OSERS Dyslexia Dear Colleague Letter

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

October 23, 2015

Dear Colleague:

Ensuring a high-quality education for children with specific learning disabilities is a critical responsibility for all of us. I write today to focus particularly on the unique educational needs of children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, which are conditions that could qualify a child as a child with a specific learning disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) has received communications from stakeholders, including parents, advocacy groups, and national disability organizations, who believe that State and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) are reluctant to reference or use dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or in developing the individualized education program (IEP) under the IDEA. The purpose of this letter is to clarify that there is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents.

Under the IDEA and its implementing regulations "specific learning disability" is defined, in part, as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, *dyslexia*, and developmental aphasia." See 20 U.S.C. §1401(30) and 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10) (emphasis added). While our implementing regulations contain a list of conditions under the definition "specific learning disability," which includes dyslexia, the list is not exhaustive. However, regardless of whether a child has dyslexia or any other condition explicitly included in this definition of "specific learning disability," or has a condition such as dyscalculia or dysgraphia not listed expressly in the definition, the LEA must conduct an evaluation in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311 to determine whether that child meets the criteria for specific learning disability or any of the other disabilities listed in 34 CFR §300.8, which implements IDEA's definition of "child with a disability."

For those students who may need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment, schools may choose to implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), such as response to intervention (RTI) or positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). MTSS is a schoolwide approach that addresses the needs of all students, including struggling learners and students with disabilities, and integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level instructional and behavioral system to maximize student achievement and reduce problem behaviors.

MTSS, which includes scientific, research-based interventions, also may be used to identify children suspected of having a specific learning disability. With a multi-tiered instructional

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framework, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, including those who may have dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia; monitor their progress; provide evidence-based interventions; and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness. Children who do not, or minimally, respond to interventions must be referred for an evaluation to determine if they are eligible for special education and related services (34 CFR §300.309(c)(1)); and those children who simply need intense short-term interventions may continue to receive those interventions. OSERS reminds SEAs and LEAs about previous guidance regarding the use of MTSS, including RTI, and timely evaluations,[1] specifically that a parent may request an initial evaluation at any time to determine if a child is a child with a disability under IDEA (34 CFR §300.301(b)), and the use of MTSS, such as RTI, may not be used to delay or deny a full and individual evaluation under 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311 of a child suspected of having a disability.

In determining whether a child has a disability under the IDEA, including a specific learning disability, and is eligible to receive special education and related services because of that disability, the LEA must conduct a comprehensive evaluation under §300.304, which requires the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child. This information, which includes information provided by the parent, may assist in determining: 1) whether the child is a child with a disability; and 2) the content of the child's IEP to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum. 34 CFR §300.304(b)(1). Therefore, information about the child's learning difficulties, including the presenting difficulties related to reading, mathematics, or writing, is important in determining the nature and extent of the child's disability and educational needs. In addition, other criteria are applicable in determining whether a child has a specific learning disability. For example, the team determining eligibility considers whether the child is not achieving adequately for the child's age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or the relevant State standards in areas related to reading, mathematics, and written expression. The team also must determine that the child's underachievement is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or mathematics. 34 CFR §300.309(a)(1) and (b). Section 300.311 contains requirements for specific documentation of the child's eligibility determination as a child with a specific learning disability, and includes documentation of the information described above. Therefore, there could be situations where the child's parents and the team of qualified professionals responsible for determining whether the child has a specific learning disability would find it helpful to include information about the specific condition (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia) in documenting how that condition relates to the child's eligibility determination. 34 CFR §§300.306(a)(1), (c)(1) and 300.308.

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[1] *See* OSEP Memo 11-07 (January 21, 2011) available at: www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/osep11-07rtimemo.pdf Under 34 CFR §300.307(a)(2)-(3), as part of their criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, States must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention, and may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures in making this determination.

Stakeholders also requested that SEAs and LEAs have policies in place that allow for the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia on a child's IEP, if a child's comprehensive evaluation supports use of these terms. There is nothing in the IDEA or our implementing regulations that prohibits the inclusion of the condition that is the basis for the child's disability determination in the child's IEP. In addition, the IEP must address the child's needs resulting from the child's disability to enable the child to advance appropriately towards attaining his or her annual IEP goals and to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum. 34 CFR §§300.320(a)(1), (2), and (4). Therefore, if a child's dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia is the condition that forms the basis for the determination that a child has a specific learning disability, OSERS believes that there could be situations where an IEP Team could determine that personnel responsible for IEP implementation would need to know about the condition underlying the child's disability (e.g., that a child has a weakness in decoding skills as a result of the child's dyslexia). Under 34 CFR §300.323(d), a child's IEP must be accessible to the regular education teacher and any other school personnel responsible for its implementation, and these personnel must be informed of their specific responsibilities related to implementing the IEP and the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP. Therefore, OSERS reiterates that there is nothing in the IDEA or our implementing regulations that would prohibit IEP Teams from referencing or using dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia in a child's IEP.

Stakeholders requested that OSERS provide SEAs and LEAs with a comprehensive guide to commonly used accommodations[2] in the classroom for students with specific learning disabilities, including dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. The IDEA does not dictate the services or accommodations to be provided to individual children based solely on the disability category in which the child has been classified, or the specific condition underlying the child's disability classification. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funds a large network of technical assistance centers that develop materials and resources to support States, school districts, schools, and teachers to improve the provision of services to children with disabilities, including materials on the use of accommodations. The U.S. Department of Education does not mandate the use of, or endorse the content of, these products, services, materials, and/or resources; however, States and LEAs may wish to seek assistance from entities such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention at: http://www.intensiveintervention.org, the Center for Parent Information and Resources available at: http://www.parentcenterhub.org, and the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials available at: http://aem.cast.org/. For a complete list of OSEP-funded technical assistance centers please see: http://ccrs.osepideasthatwork.org/.

In implementing the IDEA requirements discussed above, OSERS encourages SEAs and LEAs to consider situations where it would be appropriate to use the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia to describe and address the child's unique, identified needs through evaluation, eligibility, and IEP documents. OSERS further encourages States to review their policies,

[2] Although the IDEA uses the term "accommodations" primarily in the assessment context, OSERS understands the request to refer to the various components of a free appropriate public education, including special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications or supports for school personnel, as well as accommodations for students taking assessments.

procedures, and practices to ensure that they do not prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility, and IEP documents. Finally, in ensuring the provision of free appropriate public education, OSERS encourages SEAs to remind their LEAs of the importance of addressing the unique educational needs of children with specific learning disabilities resulting from dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia during IEP Team meetings and other meetings with parents under IDEA.

I hope this clarification is helpful to both parents and practitioners in ensuring a high-quality education for children with specific learning disabilities, including children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. If you have additional questions or comments, please email them to sld@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michael K. Yudin

Appendix B: Senate Study Committee Recommendations

GEORGIA STATE SENATE
SENATE RESEARCH OFFICE

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Atlanta, GA 30334

ELIZABETH HOLCOMB
DIRECTOR

FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON DYSLEXIA (SR 761)

Committee Members

Senator Fran Millar - Chair
District 40

Senator Matt Brass
District 48

Senator Gloria Butler
District 55

Dr. Gary McGiboney
Department of Education

Dr. Leslie Stuart
Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Prepared by the Senate Research Office, 2018

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STUDY COMMITTEE FOCUS, CREATION, & DUTIES

The Senate Study Committee on Dyslexia (the "Committee") was created with the adoption of Senate Resolution 761 during the 2018 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly.[1] The Committee was charged with undertaking a study of community-based solutions to better identify and meet the needs of dyslexic students in Georgia through early diagnosis, early remediation, and evidence based solutions. Senate Resolution 761 expressed the sense of the Senate that Georgia should keep current with other states' policy trends on dyslexia, the most common learning disability, affecting approximately one in five individuals and approximately 80 percent of all individuals with a learning disability.

Senator Fran Millar of the 40th served as Chair of the Committee. The other legislative members included Senator Matt Brass of the 28th and Senator Gloria Butler of the 55th. The Governor appointees included: Dr. Gary McGiboney, Deputy Superintendent of External Affairs and Policy at the Georgia Department of Education; and Dr. Leslie Stuart, licensed clinical psychologist and former board member for the International Dyslexia Association, Georgia Chapter.

The following legislative staff members were assigned to this Committee: Natalie Heath of the Senate Budget and Evaluation Office; Elisabeth Fletcher of the Senate Press Office; Elizabeth Holcomb of the Senate Research Office; and Donna Nealey, Legislative Assistant to Senator Millar and Committee Secretary for the Senate Higher Education Committee.

[1] *See* SR 761: http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20172018/SR/761.

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY AND DISCUSSION

Background on Federal IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) enumerates 13 learning disability categories or conditions that make students eligible to receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP):

- Autism;
- Deaf-blindness;
- Deafness;
- Hearing Impairment;
- Emotional and Behavioral Disorder;
- Intellectual Disabilities;
- Orthopedic Impairment;
- Other Health Impairment;
- Significant Development Delay;
- Specific Learning Disability;
- Speech-Language Impairment;
- Traumatic Brain Injury; and
- Visual Impairment and Blindness.

The list of qualifying conditions includes a specific learning disability (SLD), which is defined under IDEA and its implementing regulations to include dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia:[2]

> Specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to students who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

However, IDEA does not provide a definition for dyslexia, nor does it dictate the services or accommodations to be provided to individual children based solely on the disability category in which the child has been classified, or the specific condition underlying the child's disability classification. These limitations of IDEA were detailed in a Dear Colleague Letter issued by OSEP in 2015. As a result, states have adopted their own dyslexia laws, definitions, and universal screening programs. These initiatives were examined by the Committee during this study.

Meeting 1 – August 17, 2018

At the first meeting, background information and an overview of the issues to be studied were provided by:

- Caitlyn Dooley, PhD: Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE).

[2] 34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10).

- Jennifer Lindstrom, PhD: Associate Professor in Special Education and Adjunct Professor, Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Georgia.
- Leslie Stuart, PsyD: Licensed Clinical Psychologist and former board member for the International Dyslexia Association, Georgia Chapter.

Chairman Millar provided introductory remarks and explained that Georgia has fallen behind when it comes to dyslexia screening and training policies in schools. After reviewing research provided by SREB, he realized that Georgia is the only state in the southeast that does not have a comprehensive program for dyslexia.

Dr. Stuart shared her expertise with the rest of the Committee and provided testimony on definitions, clinical approaches, and the misnomers associated with detecting dyslexia (e.g. reading words backwards). It is estimated that 20 percent of the population has dyslexia, 80 percent of children with learning disabilities have problems with reading, and a reading disorder alone can affect learning in most academic subjects. Dr. Stuart stressed the importance of early identification and explained that the earlier parents and teachers become aware of a child's difficulty and seek intervention, the greater the chance for that child to become a fluent reader. In short, the earlier we detect, the better the prognosis and impact of fluency.

Dr. Dooley spoke on dyslexia identification and services in Georgia on behalf of Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). State-wide intervention programs span from birth to K-12, including programs such as Babies Can't Wait, Children First, Georgia PINES, Early Intervention Program (EIP) for grades K-5, and Remeical Education Program (REP) for grades 6-12. Dr. Dooley indicated that workforce and training gaps exist in special education programs in preschool, Pre-K, and grades K-12.

GaDOE defines dyslexia in accordance with the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) as follows:

> "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. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."

As explained by Dr. Dooley, GaDOE plays a key role in providing general supervision across the state for local school districts to improve educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities while ensuring that the requirements of IDEA are met. GaDOE's Division for Special Education Services and Supports is mandated by law to monitor compliance with IDEA, federal regulations, and rules promulgated by the State Board of Education. The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) specifically requires "a continuous review procedure designed to compare present functioning against specific standards, and to yield a profile showing areas of conformance as well as those in which new procedures, training, or other methods of improvement may be needed in order to comply with specific standards.[3]

[3] *See* http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Georgia%27s-Continuous-Improvement-Monitoring-Process-%28GCIMP%29.aspx.

Meeting 2 – September 14, 2018

Testimony was provided by the following individuals:

- Susan Adams: Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Support Services, Georgia Department of Early Childcare and Learning (DECAL).
- Dr. Marti Venn: Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University System of Georgia (USG).
- Ms. Ashley Jones: Director of Government Relations, USG.
- Stephen Pruitt: President of Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).
- Samantha Durrance: Policy Analyst, SREB.

Ms. Adams of DECAL provided information on dyslexia identification and services in Georgia. This included an extension list of red flags of learning disabilities in general, as well as those specific to dyslexia such large discrepancies in language, receptive, cognitive processing, and motor.

Dr. Venn of USG explained to the committee that 24 of its institutions have teacher training and preparation. Of these, 15 institutions offer a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, 6 institutions offer a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Special Education, 10 institutions offer a Bachelor of Science in Special Education, and 6 institutions offer a Master of Arts in Special Education. Teacher education curriculum includes a mandatory introductory course on special education and a survey introductory course that covers a broad range of disabilities and characteristics including dyslexia under the category of learning disabilities, definitions, IDEA eligibility, special education services and IEPs.

As Chairman Millar indicated at Meeting 1, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) served as a tremendous resource to the Committee throughout this study in terms of providing policy briefs on the implementation of dyslexia screening and training programs in other states. The following publications are available in the Appendix:

- *Appendix A:* Dyslexia Policies in SREB States: Addressing the Needs of Struggling Young Readers (Policy Brief, January 2018).
- *Appendix B:* Dyslexia Policies in SREB States (Executive Summary, January 2018).
- *Appendix C:* Reading and Dyslexia Screening Components and Instruments in SREB States (Table, October 2018).

Ms. Durrance of SREB opened with facts on promising practices in dyslexia, noting that evidence-based reading instruction and intervention is the most researched topic in learning. Other promising practices include screening to identify all at-risk readers, teacher training for dyslexia, and leveraging funds to support students with dyslexia. Ms. Durance went on to provide a survey of state screening programs and laws relating to dyslexia, which can be found in the Appendix. While no state currently screens pre-K students for reading difficulties or dyslexia, a majority of SREB states not meeting a benchmark on a universal screening must be screened for dyslexia at least once in grades K-3.

Meeting 3 – October 19, 2018

A third meeting was held on October 19, 2018, when the Committee received testimony from the following individuals: Phil Jacobs of Coxe Curry & Associates; Brenda Fitzgerald, Ed. S, CDP, Curriculum and Instruction Specialist at the Georgia Educational Training Agency; Penney McRoy, Director Educator in the Preparation Division of the Georgia Professional Standards

Commission; Comer Yates and Sondra Mims of the Atlanta Speech School; and Dr. Sally Shaywtiz, MD, Audrey G. Ratner Professor in Learning Development, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity at Yale University.

Ms. Fitzgerald presented on "Addressing Reading, Writing, and Spelling, and the Needs of the Dyslexia Learner." This included a description of seven intentional, practical steps to addressing the dyslexia issues in Georgia. The Atlanta Speech School presented on "Attacking Dyslexia for All of Our Children," stressing the importance of not leaving economically disadvantaged youth behind in this effort to address dyslexia.

Dr. Shaywitz provided a special presentation titled "Dyslexia: Aligning Education with 21st Century Science; We Know More, We Must Act Now." This presentation highlighted her research in dyslexia, which represents the longest longitudinal study of dyslexia in the United States. Dr. Shaywitz explained to the Committee how she defines dyslexia, "as an unexpected difficulty in learning to read. Dyslexia takes away an individual's ability to read quickly and automatically, and to retrieve spoken words easily, but it does not dampen their creativity and ingenuity."[4]

Meeting 4 – December 12, 2018

The Committee met a final time, at the Capitol in Atlanta, Georgia, to discuss findings, recommendations, and adopt a final report. Chairman Millar was joined by the rest of the Committee in Room 307 of the Coverdell Legislative Office Building, where this report was approved by unanimous vote.

[4] For more information on Dr. Shaywitz's research and publications, please visit https://dyslexia.yale.edu/the-center/our-leadership/#!.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Post-Secondary Curriculum

The University System of Georgia should develop and offer a dyslexia and language disorders course of study for college and university students studying to become public or private school teachers. Curriculum should include coursework specific to identifying the early "red flags" for dyslexia. Such signs may include but are not limited to a history of language delays in speaking and understanding, difficulty learning letters and associated sounds, difficulty rhyming, word retrieval problems, and difficulty learning calendar facts such as days of a week and months.

Screening in Schools and Approved Screeners

Mandated screening for all kindergarten students should be implemented across the state. In addition, include all students kindergarten through 2nd grade, including K-2nd grade students transferring to a new school from another school or from another state who have not been screened, should be screened by teachers and/or student support staff (e.g., school nurse, school psychologist, speech and language pathologist, etc.) for phonological and phonemic awareness; sound symbol recognition; alphabet knowledge; decoding skills; encoding skills, and language skills, including expressive and receptive language, using a screener approved by the Georgia Department of Education and funded by the state.

Statewide Guidance, Teacher Training, and Evaluation

The Georgia Department of Education should, with assistance from experts in both the fields of dyslexia and language, create an informational handbook that includes information about dyslexia, reading, and language disorders and how they interconnect. In addition, the Department should develop required teacher training on dyslexia and other related language disorders.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission should create a Dyslexia Endorsement for teachers and other education staff members that would enable them to recognize and appropriately respond to dyslexia and language disorders, such as difficulty with expressive and/or receptive language ability. Such Dyslexia Endorsement may include universal screening measures to identify those at risk for dyslexia and provide public guidance as well as training opportunities for teachers and other school personnel. These screening measures should be based on empirical data obtained through direct teacher-student contact and exercises including an examination of reading and math readiness as well as receptive and expressive language processing errors. It should also establish measures to assess the fidelity of the teacher training and implementation under the Dyslexia Endorsement.

Over the course of this study, terms and definitions played an important role in understanding the complexity of the issue at hand. Therefore, any statewide guidance should use a universal definition for dyslexia.

Respectfully Submitted,

FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON DYSLEXIA

Honorable Fran Millar, Chair

Senator, District 40

Appendix C: Senate Bill 48 (2019)

Senate Bill 48

By: Senators Martin of the 9th, Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, Brass of the 28th, Unterman of the 45th, Sims of the 12th and others

AS PASSED

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

To amend Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to elementary and secondary education, so as to provide for identification of and support for students in kindergarten through grade three with characteristics of dyslexia; to provide for definitions; to require the State Board of Education to develop policies for the identification and assistance of students with dyslexia; to require the Department of Education to make a dyslexia informational handbook available to local school systems; to provide for certain information in the dyslexia informational handbook; to provide for ongoing professional development opportunities relating to dyslexia for teachers; to provide for a pilot program to demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of early reading assistance programs for students with risk factors for dyslexia; to provide for a report; to provide for screening for all kindergarten students; to provide for referral for screening for students in grades one through three through response-to-intervention programs; to provide for data collection; to provide for a teaching endorsement in dyslexia; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to elementary and secondary education, is amended in Part 3 of Article 6, relating to educational programs, by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-159.6.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) 'Aphasia' means a condition characterized by either partial or total loss of the ability to communicate verbally or through written words. A person with aphasia may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, recognizing the names of objects, or understanding what other people have said. The condition may be temporary or permanent and shall not include speech problems caused by loss of muscle control.

(2) 'Dyscalculia' means the inability to understand the meaning of numbers, the basic operations of addition and subtraction, or the complex operations of multiplication and division or to apply math principles to solve practical or abstract problems.

(3) 'Dysgraphia' means difficulty in automatically remembering and mastering the sequence of muscle motor movements needed to accurately write letters or numbers.

(4) 'Dyslexia' means a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

(5) 'Other disorders' means aphasia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia.

(6) 'Parent' means a parent, legal agent, legal guardian, or kinship caregiver.

(7) 'Phonemic awareness' means the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of a sequence of individual sounds and the ability to manipulate individual sounds when speaking.

(8) 'Qualified dyslexia screening tool' means an assessment that measures a student's ability to demonstrate phonological awareness skills, phonemic decoding efficiency skills, sight word reading efficiency skills, rapid automatic naming skills, and accuracy of word reading on grade-level text.

(b) No later than July 1, 2020, the State Board of Education shall develop policies for referring students in kindergarten and grades one through three for screening who have been identified through the response-to-intervention process as having characteristics of dyslexia, other disorders, or both. Such policies shall include but are not limited to:

(1) The definition and characteristics of dyslexia and related disorders;

(2) A list of approved qualified dyslexia screening tools that address the following components:

(A) Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness;

(B) Sound symbol recognition;

(C) Alphabet knowledge;

(D) Decoding skills;

(E) Encoding skills; and

(F) Rapid naming;

(3) The process for referring students in kindergarten and grades one through three for screening in collaboration with the local school system's response-to-intervention programs;

(4) A process for parents to provide informed consent for use of a qualified dyslexia screening tool and notification of the results of the screening;

(5) A process for parents to decline dyslexia screening for their child;

(6) A process for providing the parents of students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia with information and resource material regarding dyslexia; and

(7) A process for monitoring the student's progress after the positive identification of characteristics of dyslexia.

(c) No later than December 1, 2019, the Department of Education shall make available a dyslexia informational handbook that includes guidance, technical assistance, and training to assist all local school systems in the implementation of evidence based practices for instructing students with characteristics of dyslexia. Such handbook shall include, but not be limited to, the following information for local school systems screening students in kindergarten and grades one through three who have been identified through the response-to-intervention process as having characteristics of dyslexia:

(1) Evidence based practices designed specifically for students with characteristics of dyslexia;

(2) Characteristics of targeted instruction for dyslexia;

(3) Guidance on developing instructional plans for students with characteristics of dyslexia;

(4) Best practices toward meaning-centered reading and writing;

(5) Developmentally appropriate curricula and engaging instructional materials and practices;

(6) Structured multisensory approaches to teach language and reading skills; and

(7) Suggested training programs.

(d) The Department of Education shall collaborate with the Professional Standards Commission to improve and update professional development opportunities for teachers specifically relating to dyslexia. The training shall focus on:

(1) Development and ongoing implementation of training and coaching for teachers regarding dyslexia and other disorders;

(2) Identifying high-quality trainers to provide support to local school systems utilizing a coaching model to develop school level dyslexia experts;

(3) Developing awareness training modules for all instructional staff to include information about dyslexia;

(4) Evidence based interventions, structured multisensory approaches to teach language and reading skills, and accommodations for students with characteristics of dyslexia and other disorders; and

(5) School and school system policies and procedures related to the response-to-intervention framework addressing reading, writing, mathematics, and behavior. Teachers shall be notified annually of any changes in policy, procedures, and specific instructional methodologies.

(e)(1) Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, the State School Superintendent shall establish a three-year pilot program to demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of early reading assistance programs for students with risk factors for dyslexia. The State School Superintendent shall select at least three local school systems, preferably at least one of which is located in an urban setting, one of which is located in a suburban setting, and one of which is located in a rural setting. The State School Superintendent shall consult with recognized organizations that specialize in structured literacy programs for the instruction of students with characteristics of dyslexia in establishing and operating the pilot program.

(2) To be considered by the State School Superintendent to be in the pilot program, a local school system shall submit a proposal to the Department of Education that:

(A) Identifies a method of screening students for low phonemic awareness, rapid automatic naming skills, and characteristics of dyslexia;

(B) Provides for the enrollment of students with characteristics of dyslexia in an International Dyslexia Association (IDA) approved reading program staffed by teachers trained in structured literacy programs as outlined in IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards; and

(C) Includes a methodology for evaluating the effects of the reading program on the student's identified characteristics.

(3) Local school systems selected to participate in the pilot program shall screen all kindergarten students for characteristics of dyslexia and may screen kindergarten students for other disorders. Further, such participating local school systems shall screen students in grades one through three for characteristics of dyslexia, and may screen such students for other disorders, who have been identified through the response-to-intervention process. Participating local school systems shall also provide appropriate reading intervention services for such students and administer assessments to ascertain whether the intervention services improve such students' language processing and reading skills.

(4) Each local school system chosen to participate in the pilot program shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws and require the parent of students suspected of having characteristics of dyslexia to indicate in writing that the parent voluntarily and knowingly consents to the student's participation in the pilot program for the provision of reading intervention services. Each participating local school system shall provide to the parents

136 of students suspected of having characteristics of dyslexia information about dyslexia and
137 recommended interventions.
138 (5) Each participating local school system shall report to the Department of Education
139 data about the operation and results of the pilot program, as required by the department's
140 guidelines and procedures.
141 (6) Not later than December 1 of the third school year in which the pilot program is
142 operating, the State School Superintendent shall submit a report to the House Education
143 Committee and the Senate Committee on Education and Youth that contains the
144 superintendent's evaluation of the results of the pilot program and any legislative
145 recommendations regarding the identification of and interventions for students with
146 characteristics of dyslexia, including recommendations regarding screening of all
147 kindergarten students.
148 (7) This subsection shall be subject to appropriations by the General Assembly.
149 (f)(1) Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, local school systems shall screen all
150 kindergarten students for characteristics of dyslexia and may screen kindergarten students
151 for other disorders. Further, local school systems shall screen students in grades one
152 through three for characteristics of dyslexia, and may screen such students for other
153 disorders, who have been identified through the response-to-intervention process.
154 Screening shall be conducted in accordance with the policies developed by the State
155 Board of Education pursuant to subsection (b) of this Code section and the dyslexia
156 informational handbook produced by the Department of Education pursuant to
157 subsection (c) of this Code section, including policies and information developed relating
158 to universal screening of kindergarten students for characteristics of dyslexia.
159 (2) By June 30 of each year, local school systems shall provide the following data to the
160 Department of Education:
161 (A) The number of students in kindergarten through grade three who were identified
162 as having characteristics of dyslexia through screening;
163 (B) The number of students in kindergarten through grade three who were screened for
164 characteristics of dyslexia in a school year;
165 (C) The number of students in kindergarten through grade three who were newly
166 identified as having characteristics of dyslexia in a school year;
167 (D) The process or tool used to evaluate student progress;
168 (E) The number of students in kindergarten through grade three who were participating
169 in interventions within the school setting and the number participating in interventions
170 outside the school setting; and
171 (F) The number of trained school system personnel or licensed professionals used to
172 administer the qualified dyslexia screening tool.

(3) This subsection shall be subject to appropriations by the General Assembly."

SECTION 2.

Said chapter is further amended in Subpart 1 of Part 6 of Article 6, relating to certificated professional personnel in elementary and secondary education, by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-208.

(a) No later than December 30, 2019, the Professional Standards Commission shall create a dyslexia endorsement for teachers trained in appropriately recognizing and responding to students with characteristics of dyslexia and language disorders, such as difficulty with expressive or receptive language.

(b) The requirements to receive such dyslexia endorsement may include training on the use of universal screening measures to identify those at risk for dyslexia, providing guidance to parents, and providing training or guidance to other teachers and school personnel.

(c) The Professional Standards Commission shall establish measures to assess the fidelity of teacher training and implementation for teachers who receive the dyslexia endorsement."

SECTION 3.

Said chapter is further amended in Subpart 1 of Part 6 of Article 6, relating to certificated professional personnel in elementary and secondary education, by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-208.1.

The Professional Standards Commission shall include in its standards for teacher preparation programs for elementary and secondary education instruction on:

(1) The definition and characteristics of dyslexia and other disorders;

(2) Evidence based interventions and accommodations for students with characteristics of dyslexia and other disorders; and

(3) Core elements of a response-to-intervention framework addressing reading, writing, mathematics, and behavior, including:

(A) Universal screening;

(B) Scientific, research based interventions;

(C) Progress monitoring of the effectiveness of interventions on student performance;

(D) Data based decision-making procedures related to:

(i) Determining intervention effectiveness on student performance; and

(ii) Determining the need to continue, alter, or discontinue interventions or conduct further evaluation of student needs; and

(E) Application and implementation of response-to-intervention and dyslexia instructional practices in the classroom setting."

SECTION 4.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.

Appendix D: Dyslexia Board Rule (2022)

Code: IGD

160-4-2-.39 DYSLEXIA IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT

(1) **DEFINITIONS.**

(a) **Aphasia** – a condition characterized by either partial or total loss of the ability to communicate verbally or through written words. A person with aphasia may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, recognizing the names of objects, or understanding what other people have said. The condition may be temporary or permanent and shall not include speech problems caused by loss of muscle control.

(b) **Dyscalculia** – the inability to understand the meaning of numbers, the basic operations of addition and subtraction, or the complex operations of multiplication and division or to apply math principles to solve practical or abstract problems.

(c) **Dysgraphia** – difficulty in automatically remembering and mastering the sequence of muscle motor movements needed to accurately write letters or numbers.

(d) **Dyslexia** – a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

(e) **Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook (Handbook) -** an informational handbook, developed by the Georgia Department of Education, that includes guidance, technical assistance, and training to assist all local educational agencies (LEA) in the implementation of evidence-based practices for instructing students with characteristics of Dyslexia.

(f) **Other Disorders** – aphasia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia.

(g) **Parent** – parent, legal agent, legal guardian, or kinship caregiver.

(h) **Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tool –** an assessment that measures a student's ability to demonstrate phonological awareness skills, phonemic decoding efficiency skills, sight word reading efficiency skills, rapid automatic naming skills, and accuracy of word reading on grade-level text.

(i) **Universal Screening** – the administration of an assessment to all students in a grade level to identify students who may be at risk for low learning outcomes.

(2) **REQUIREMENTS.**

(a) **Universal Screening**

1. Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, LEAs shall, at a minimum, annually conduct a Universal Screening of all students in kindergarten through grade 3 for characteristics of Dyslexia and may screen students for Other Disorders.

(i) The following students should be exempted from the Universal Screening of all students in kindergarten through grade 3 for characteristics of Dyslexia and Other Disorders:

(I) A student who transfers from another school or system in Georgia who had a Universal Screening in the current school year; or

(II) A student from another state who enrolls for the first time in Georgia in kindergarten through grade 3 and presents documentation that he or she had the Universal Screening or a similar screening in the current school year.

(III) A student whose intellectual disability precludes the presence of dyslexia.

2. This Universal Screening must be conducted utilizing a Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tool. The Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tool(s) must include, at a minimum, the following components:

(i) Phonological and phonemic awareness;

(ii) Sound symbol recognition;

(iii) Alphabet knowledge;

(iv) Decoding skills;

(v) Rapid naming or reading fluency for students with some reading ability; and

(vi) Encoding skills.

3. A list of Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tools that were approved by the State Board of Education and meet these minimum requirements is available in the Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook. LEAs may use any of the Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tools in the Handbook to conduct their Universal Screening.

(i) If an LEA chooses a screening tool that is not included in the Handbook, the LEA must submit that tool to the State Board of Education for review and approval prior to use in the Universal Screening.

(b) **Interventions and Supports**

1. If the Universal Screening data and additional information support that the student has characteristics of Dyslexia or Other Disorders, the LEA will begin or continue academic intervention.

2. Upon the start of academic intervention for students who have characteristics of Dyslexia or Other Disorders, the LEA must monitor the student's progress at least once per month, or more often as determined by school personnel.

3. LEAs should refer to the Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook for guidance, technical assistance, and resources to assist with their implementation of evidence-based practices for instructing students with characteristics of Dyslexia. The Handbook includes, at a minimum:

(i) Evidence based practices designed specifically for students with characteristics of Dyslexia;

(ii) Characteristics of targeted instruction for Dyslexia;

(iii) Guidance on developing instructional plans for students with characteristics of Dyslexia;

(iv) Best practices toward meaning-centered reading and writing; and

(v) Suggested training programs.

(c) **Parental Consent and Support**

1. LEAs must notify Parents of the Universal Screening prior to the implementation of the screening.

2. Parental consent is not required for the administration of the Universal Screening.

3. If the LEA determines that additional screening is necessary for a student who exhibits characteristics of Dyslexia or Other Disorders, parental consent must be obtained prior to the administration of the additional screening. The parental consent or refusal documentation shall remain on file as a part of the student's education record.

4. For students who exhibit characteristics of Dyslexia or Other Disorders, LEAs must provide Parents with resources, information, and materials regarding Dyslexia (e.g., Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook and the International Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Handbook).

(d) **Reporting**

1. Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, by June 30 of each year, LEAs shall provide the following data to the Georgia Department of Education:

(i) The number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 who were identified as having characteristics of Dyslexia;

(ii) The number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 who participate in additional screening for characteristics of Dyslexia in a school year;

(iii) The number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 who were newly identified as having characteristics of Dyslexia in a school year;

(iv) The process or tool used to evaluate student progress;

(v) The number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 who participated in interventions; and

(vi) The number of trained LEA personnel or licensed professionals used to administer the Qualified Dyslexia Screening Tool.

Authority O.C.G.A. § 20-2-159.6.

Adopted: August 25, 2022 **Effective:** September 14, 2022

GaDOE

Georgia Department of Education