

2025-2026 Dyslexia Informational Handbook

Guidance from the Georgia Department of Education



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Statement of Collaboration from GADOE

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

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.

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. 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.

*Information gathered from the GADOE Dyslexia Manual

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
<p>A child should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> produce rhyming words <input type="checkbox"/> divide words into syllables <input type="checkbox"/> divide sentences into words <input type="checkbox"/> discriminate rhyming words <input type="checkbox"/> divide words into phonemes <input type="checkbox"/> delete roots, syllables, and phonemes <i>e.g., Say "cowboy." "Now say it again, but don't say boy."</i> <input type="checkbox"/> substitute a phoneme to a new word <i>e.g., Say "f-u-n" What is that? Now say it again but change /f/ to /s/."</i> <input type="checkbox"/> identify a phoneme by its position in a word (beginning, middle, end) 	<p>A child should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> write words <input type="checkbox"/> write sentences <input type="checkbox"/> blend sounds together <input type="checkbox"/> decode nonsense words <input type="checkbox"/> segment words into syllables <input type="checkbox"/> identify sounds and letters (<i>sound/symbol relationships</i>) <input type="checkbox"/> begin to decode (<i>vc, vcv, words, words with blends, words with consonant digraphs, magic e words, etc.</i>) 	<p>A child should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> spell well <input type="checkbox"/> have appropriate handwriting <input type="checkbox"/> enjoy reading and writing <input type="checkbox"/> have appropriate or strong written expression <input type="checkbox"/> have appropriate or strong reading strategies <input type="checkbox"/> recall words quickly without much repetition <input type="checkbox"/> comprehend reading material at or above grade level <input type="checkbox"/> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 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) <input type="checkbox"/> Does not understand that words come apart <input type="checkbox"/> Complains about how hard reading is, or disengages when it is time to read <input type="checkbox"/> A familial history of reading problems <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot sound out simple words like <i>cat, map, nap</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with /b/. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The ability to figure things out <input type="checkbox"/> Eager embrace of new ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Gets "the gist" of things <input type="checkbox"/> A good understanding of new concepts <input type="checkbox"/> A large vocabulary for the age group <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent comprehension of stories read aloud (i.e., listening comprehension)

Age Group	Potential Difficulties	Potential Strengths
Grades 2+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ 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.

5 Myths and Facts About Dyslexia

Myth: "Dyslexia affects more boys than girls."



Fact: It affects girls and boys equally. Boys are more likely to be referred by schools for diagnosis.

Myth: "Dyslexia is something children will outgrow."



Fact: Children with dyslexia continue to face challenges as they grow

Myth: "Dyslexia only affects people who speak english."



Fact: Dyslexia occurs in every language, even the ones that don't use an alphabet script

Myth: "Dyslexia is just a problem of visual perception."



Fact: Studies show that dyslexics have difficulty at the phoneme level.

Myth: "A person with Dyslexia can't be a good reader."



Fact: With intense systematic instruction, a person with dyslexia can become a good strong reader.

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 Rope⁶



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.](#)

Dodge County has elected to use McGraw Hill: Wonders

	Overall	Research Alignment	Explicit, Systematic, Cumulative, and Diagnostic Instruction	Standards Alignment, Assessment Plan, Clear Intersection of Reading and Writing	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Phonics and Word Study	Text Reading and Fluency	Vocabulary	Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension	Recommendation Note: This recommendation is based on evidence ranking and resource accessibility.
McGraw Hill: Wonders	EVIDENT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Strongly Recommend

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

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:

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

- [Structured Literacy Brief from IDA](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse](#)
 - o 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 evidencebased practices to carry out this particular recommendation as well as ways to address potential obstacles.
 - o 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](#)
 - o Under "IRIS Resource Topics" click on the "Reading, Literacy, and Language Arts" link for research summaries and curriculum descriptions.
- [Florida Center for Reading Research](#)
 - o 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/>

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Resources that Dodge County Schools use to address Reading and supports the research found with the Science of Reading

[UFLI](#)
[Reading Simplified](#)
[McGraw Hill Reading Wonders](#)
[Secret Stories](#)
[Accelerated Reader and other Renaissance Products](#)
[Max Scholar](#)
[IXL](#)

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.

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.

Figure 4.1: Multi-Level Prevention System

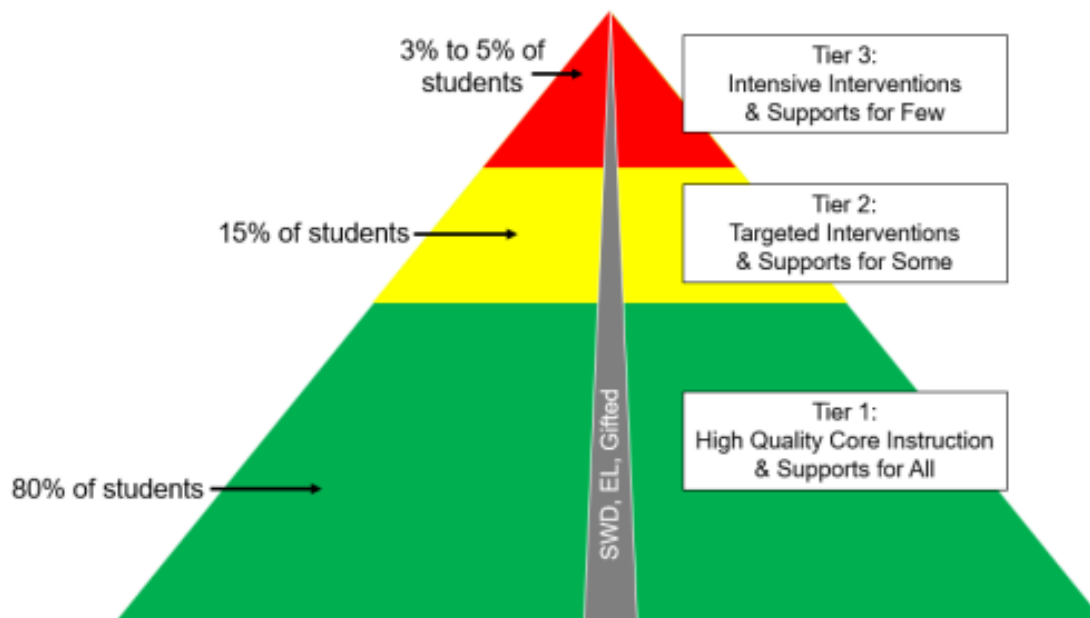


Table 4.1: Identifying and Addressing Reading Difficulties Across the Tiers

	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

More information about how Dodge County implements MTSS can be found on our website: <https://www.dodge.k12.ga.us/departments/mtss>

Section 5: Universal Screening Process

Reading and Dyslexia Screening

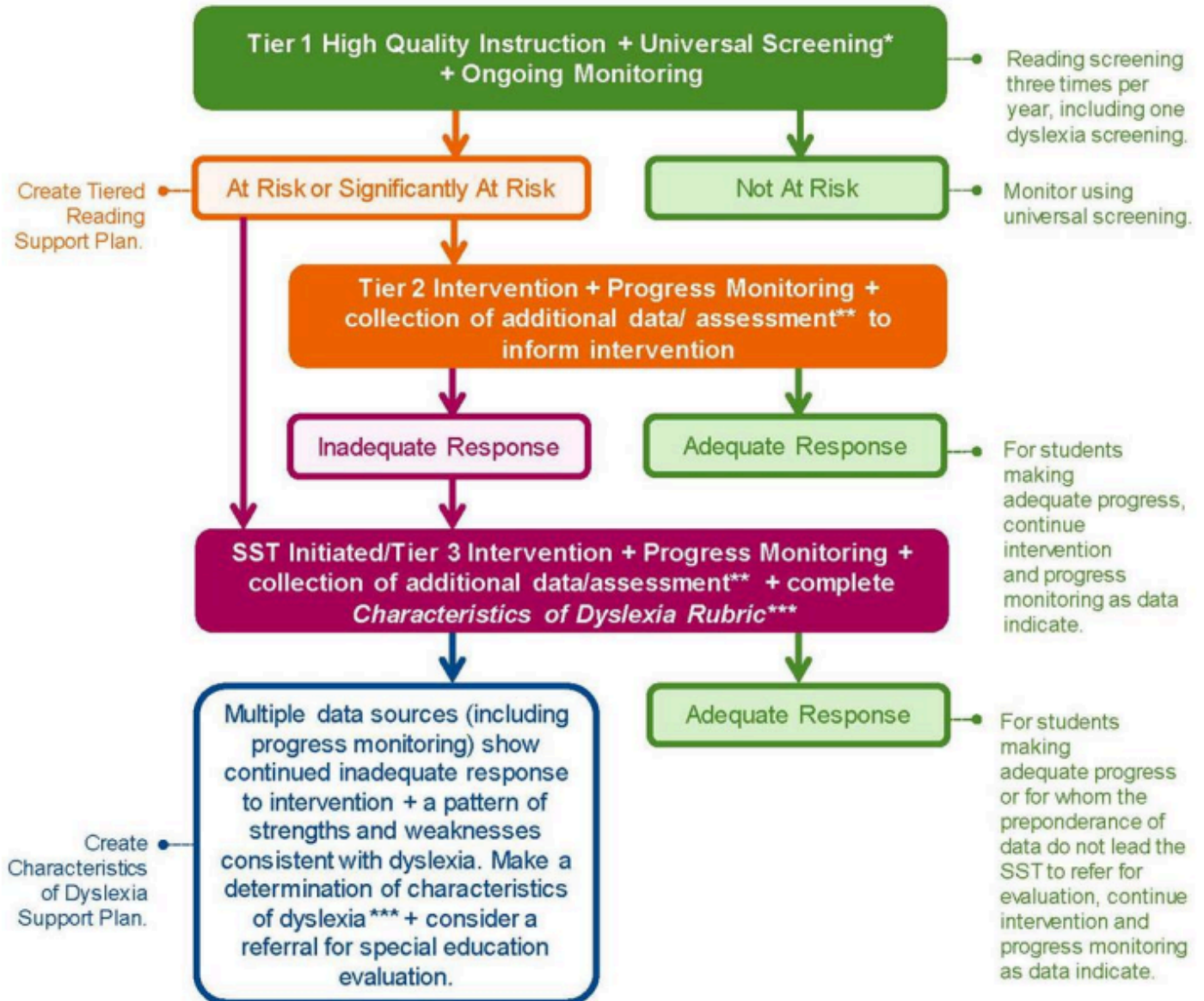
Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, local educational agencies must administer a universal reading screener to all students in kindergarten through grade 3; one of those screeners must be a dyslexia screener (see Figure 5.1). Parental consent is not necessary for administering an assessment that 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 instruction (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.

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.

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.*

Dodge County Schools has approved to use [AMIRA](#).

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 cutscore.

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 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.

Section 7: Instructional Support for Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

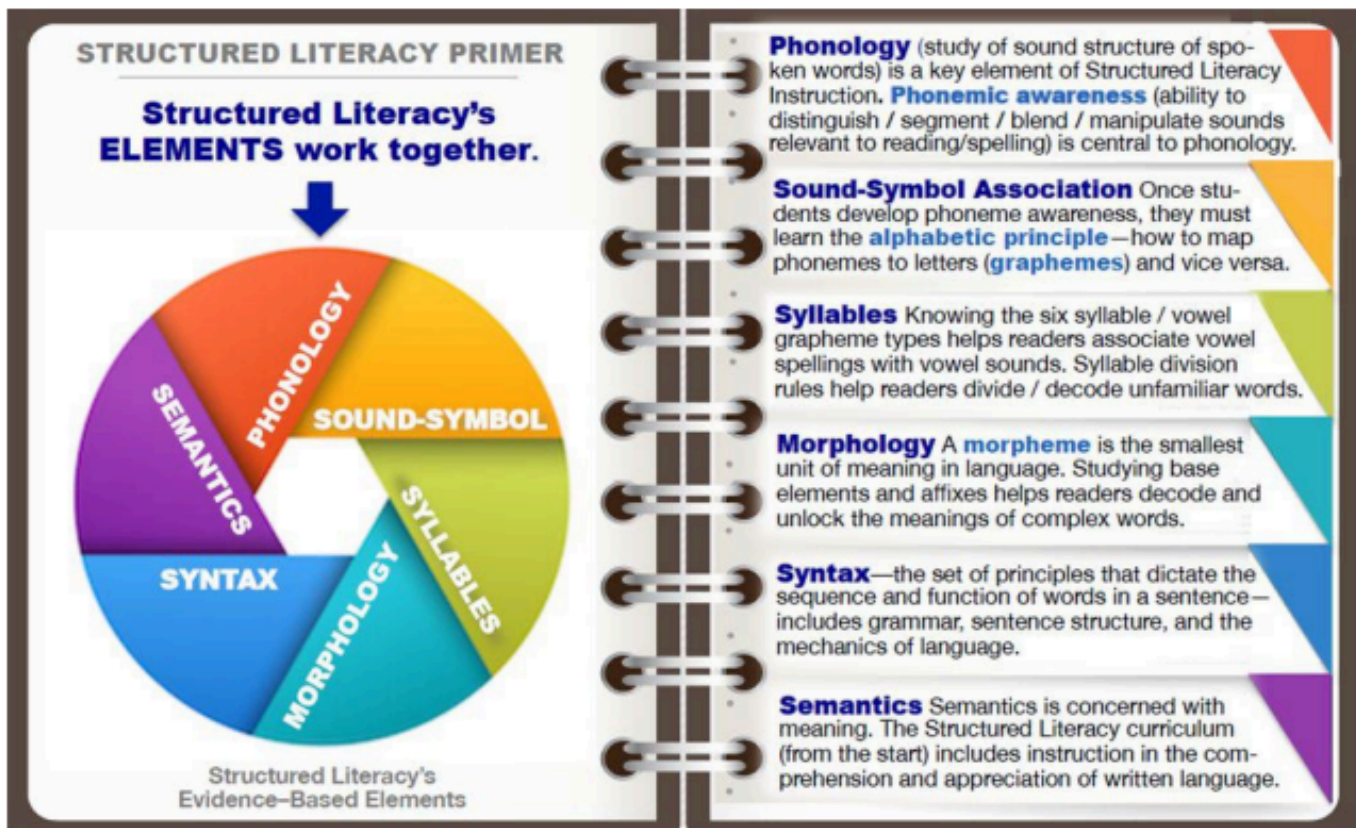
What is Structured Literacy?

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 Literacy⁸



Figures 7.2: Teaching Principles of Structured Literacy⁹

STRUCTURED LITERACY PRIMER

These **PRINCIPLES** guide how Structured Literacy's elements are taught.



Structured Literacy's Evidence-Based Teaching Principles

Systematic & Cumulative
Structured Literacy teaching is systematic and cumulative. **Systematic** means that organization of material follows the logical order of language. The sequence begins with the easiest and most basic concepts and elements and progresses methodically to the more difficult. **Cumulative** means each step is based on concepts previously learned.

Explicit Structured Literacy instruction requires direct teaching of concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction and does not assume students deduce concepts. (While **multisensory teaching** lacks the extensive research that validates Structured Literacy's other teaching principles, decades of clinical results support efficacy of simultaneous association of auditory, visual, kinesthetic-motor modalities for enhancing memory and learning in students with dyslexia.)

Diagnostic Teachers must be adept at individualizing instruction (even within groups) based on careful and continuous assessment, both **informal** (e.g., observation) and **formal** (e.g., with standardized measures). Content must be mastered to the degree of automaticity needed to free attention and cognitive resources for comprehension and oral/written expression.

A tool to evaluate reading programs can be found <https://www.thereadingleague.org/curriculumevaluation-guidelines/>.

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

All Dodge County teachers in Pre K through 5th grade have been required to complete 10 Dyslexia courses through the Georgia Literacy Academy if they do not hold any certification or endorsements in Dyslexia or Reading. More information can be found here:

<https://www.dodge.k12.ga.us/staff/georgia-literacy-academy-course-manual>



Rollins Center
for Language & Literacy

COX Campus
www.coxcampus.org

A Program of the Atlanta Speech School

Appendix Items can be found on the GADOE Dyslexia manual [here](#), and attached in this document.

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)

