

DYSLEXIA RESOURCE GUIDE FOR GEORGIA FAMILIES

What is dyslexia? The definition of dyslexia adopted by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) states: “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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities. People with dyslexia have many strengths, but also have unexpected trouble learning to read. These difficulties are not related to a person's intelligence or motivation. Families, early childhood teachers, and kindergarten teachers are often the first to notice children having difficulty with reading skills or learning at school. It is important to pay attention to potential signs that a child may have dyslexia.

According to the [Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act](#) (H.B. 307), “characteristics of dyslexia’ means persistent weaknesses in one or more areas of foundational reading skills and inadequate response to targeted intervention that indicates a need for more intensive intervention.” The following table provides examples of signs that may indicate a child is at risk for dyslexia. While any one sign does not necessarily mean your child has dyslexia, it is important to talk with your child's teachers if you have concerns. Children with characteristics of dyslexia can learn to read with the right instruction, especially when that instruction is provided as early as possible.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

Characteristics of dyslexia include persistent difficulties with:

- Phonological awareness tasks (for example, rhyming, phoneme segmentation, blending, letter naming fluency)
- Learning letter names and letter sounds
- Learning sound-symbol association
- Phonological memory (for example, non-word repetition)
- Word recognition fluency
- Spelling
- Oral vocabulary



Responding appropriately to dyslexia risk involves systematic, explicit, cumulative instruction. This approach is based on the science of reading, as defined by the [Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act](#). Most importantly, instruction and intervention should be matched to the child's need, regardless of the child's identification or diagnosis. Ongoing monitoring of the child's response to increasingly intensive instructional support is critical.

How does my child get screened for characteristics of dyslexia in Georgia?

The [Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act](#) requires Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to administer a universal reading and dyslexia screener from the [approved list of tools](#) at least three times per year. The approved universal screening tools meet legislative requirements as both reading and dyslexia screening tools. Screening helps schools identify students who are significantly at risk of not attaining grade level proficiency in reading and provide them with additional intervention support, which is documented using a [Tiered Reading Support Plan](#).

If a child has been determined to be significantly at risk of not attaining grade level reading proficiency and has not made adequate progress toward grade level reading despite receiving evidence-based reading interventions and supplemental instructional services and supports, additional quantitative (e.g., [diagnostic assessments](#)) and qualitative data are collected. These data are examined together with universal reading and dyslexia screener data to determine whether the child may have characteristics of dyslexia. Parents are invited to play an active role in the process of examining all available data, and they may have additional information about the child that is important for the school team to consider.

Parents of children in kindergarten through 3rd grade who are identified at any time during the school year as having characteristics of dyslexia are notified in writing no later than 15 school days after the identification. The notification describes the qualitative and quantitative data used to make the identification (see [Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric](#)), as well as the child's rate of progress toward grade level reading with prior intervention support. In addition, the notification includes a description of proposed changes or additions to intervention that are designed to ensure the child becomes proficient in foundational literacy skills.

Children who are suspected of having characteristics of dyslexia but ultimately found to be having difficulty with reading for other reasons, based on all qualitative and quantitative data available, will still receive support. In this case, their Tiered Reading Support Plan should be reviewed and updated as needed to ensure that the intervention support they receive targets their identified needs, and progress monitoring should continue. If the child continues to struggle despite appropriate intervention, the school team may decide to refer the student for an evaluation to determine whether they may have a disability and require special education.



What will change at school if my child is identified as having characteristics of dyslexia?

If your child is identified as having characteristics of dyslexia (see [Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process \(Flowchart\)](#)), the school will provide your child with a [Characteristics of Dyslexia Support Plan](#) describing the intensive interventions targeting specific reading skills that your child will receive to help support their reading development. Children with characteristics of dyslexia often continue to learn in the same classroom they were in before but may also receive extra support individually or in small groups. You will be informed in writing of your child's progress toward grade level reading. You will also be provided information and resources related to dyslexia, along with strategies to use at home to help your child succeed in reading. You have the right to elect, in writing, that your child not receive the interventions outlined in their Characteristics of Dyslexia Support Plan.

Many children with characteristics of dyslexia, and even children with a formal dyslexia diagnosis, will not require special education services if they receive early identification and support. If they are still having difficulties after receiving evidence-based instruction and intensive intervention, a request for a formal special education evaluation should be made. If the child needs Special Education Services, the local educational agency will follow the requirements as outlined in [160-4-7.03](#) (Child Find Procedures). In the instance that the child will need other modifications, the local education agency will follow the requirements for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Additional information about a 504 Plan can be found on the [GaDOE website](#).

Identifying Dyslexia as a Specific Learning Disability

School districts have a responsibility to identify and evaluate children who need special education. This is referred to as [Child Find](#). Either a parent of a child or a public agency may initiate a request for an evaluation to determine if the child is a child with a disability. If the district has reason to believe a child has a disability, then the district must engage in an evaluation. Families can start the special education evaluation process by sending a written request for an evaluation to their child's teacher and/or principal. Visit the GaDOE Special Education website to find the [Special Education Implementation Manual](#). Parent to Parent of Georgia also has an [Evaluation and Re-Evaluation Fact Sheet](#) for parents, which outlines the steps involved in starting the special education evaluation process.

In some cases, special education may be deemed necessary for the child because their needs cannot be met in the general education setting. In these cases, dyslexia is categorized as a [Specific Learning Disability](#) (SLD). Once a child is identified as a student who has a Specific Learning Disability, such as dyslexia, and who needs specially designed instruction, that instruction is formalized and legally guaranteed through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). At least annually, and more often if needed, the school-based Student Support Team (SST) or IEP Team reviews the student's progress and revises the specially designed instruction as needed.



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 and implement an IEP. However, a diagnosis is not required for your child to receive additional support in reading.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities provides information for parents and educators in [5 Questions Parents and Educators Can Ask to Start Conversations About Using Terms Like Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, and Dysgraphia](#).

Accommodations

Children who are eligible for Special Education services often benefit from instructional and assessment accommodations. Accommodations should be considered based on what the child requires to access the general curriculum. Any appropriate accommodations should be written into a child's 504 Plan or IEP. Instructional accommodations may include the method of instruction, how the child is expected to respond to instruction, how the child participates in classroom activities, and the kinds of instructional materials used. Assessment accommodation examples may include providing extended time, allowing for breaks, having an adult read the test questions aloud, and/or taking the test in an alternate location. Assessment accommodations should only be included if they are also an instructional accommodation. Not all instructional accommodations are appropriate for assessment 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](#).

Considerations for English Learners

Districts use a variety of data sources to design instruction for children who are English Learners (ELs). Schools consider universal reading and dyslexia screening results, other qualitative and quantitative data, and other sources of information on students' language and literacy development. Some of these data, such as information from the [WIDA ACCESS](#) language proficiency assessments, are required by federal and state laws. WIDA ACCESS is used to determine the English language proficiency levels and language progress of ELs in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Below are examples of additional considerations for understanding the language and literacy needs of ELs and guiding instruction:

- Is there a history in the family of academic and/or language difficulties?
- Is there a history of dyslexia or reading difficulties in the family?



- Did the student exhibit language delays in their primary language?
- Is the child currently experiencing trouble communicating effectively in the home setting when compared to similar age family members and/or peers?
- If the student attended school in another country, is there a history of academic concerns in the country of origin?

Additional information about supporting ELs' literacy journey can be found in the [Considerations for English Learners at Risk for Characteristics of Dyslexia](#) resource.

My child is struggling. How do I help them at home?

It is the school's job to provide a free and appropriate public education to your child, and you and your family are important partners with your child's school. You can ask your child's teachers for ideas for what you can do at home, consistent with what the school is teaching your child. You can also refer to the resources found in Georgia's [Parent Resources: Supporting Your Child's Reading Development](#) guide.

What should I tell my child about dyslexia?

Every family will take a different approach to talking with their child about dyslexia. It can be inspiring for kids and adults to hear examples of successful people who have dyslexia. You can read about 12 famous people with dyslexia [here](#). Staying positive is important. You can say, "Our brains are like muscles, and we need to practice using them to help them grow. I love you, I am here to help, and so are your teachers."

Or, you could say, "You know how you've been having a hard time in school? I'm going to talk to your teachers about that. We all learn differently. We're going to find out how you learn best." Or, "Dyslexia means your brain can have a hard time matching letters with sounds. Your teacher is going to work with you on the things that you've been having a hard time with, and we can try some of those same things at home together too."

Where can I go to learn more about dyslexia and Georgia schools?

As always, your first and best resource is your child's school. Our educators in Georgia are being trained in the best instructional strategies to support all students. Other great resources are the Georgia Chapter of the [International Dyslexia Association](#), [Decoding Dyslexia Georgia](#), and [Understood.org](#). You can also visit the [GaDOE Dyslexia webpage](#) for the most up-to-date guidance and resources about dyslexia supports in Georgia schools. If you need a little more support from a parent/caregiver who has been through the process of working with their child's school, consider reaching out to [Parent to Parent of Georgia](#). You may also find this [list of Books about Dyslexia for Children and Adults](#) helpful.

