



# IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIA

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## OVERVIEW

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. Dyslexia 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” ([International Dyslexia Association](#)).

Provided with early intervention, children identified with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia can learn strategies that help them overcome some of these challenges. However, dyslexia persists despite effective classroom instruction. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) reports that as much as [15-20 percent](#) of the U.S. population experiences some degree of mild to more severe characteristics of dyslexia.

The risk factors associated with dyslexia impact critical prerequisite skills that all children must master to be able to read fluently. For state policymakers, the most effective strategy for supporting students with dyslexia and their families is to adopt a model of early intervention through tiered instruction.

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The following fundamental principles highlight the most important components needed for an effective statewide policy on dyslexia.

### **Adopt a policy to screen students in kindergarten through grade 2 (K-2) for the risk factors of dyslexia.**

- Administer the screening annually, during the spring for kindergarten students and at the beginning of the school year for first and second graders.
- Screen for phonological and phonemic awareness, sound symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding skills, rapid naming skills including letter naming and letter sound fluency, encoding skills and oral reading accuracy and fluency.
- Incorporate the screening protocol into a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework.
- Include a process to notify parents of results and inform them of characteristics of dyslexia, appropriate interventions and accommodations recommended for their child.
- Include a process for accepting a diagnosis of dyslexia from an external evaluator and for exempting transfer students who have already been screened for characteristics of dyslexia.

### **Provide students with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia with appropriate interventions.**

- Provide explicit, systematic, sequential and cumulative instruction that adheres to a logical plan in introducing the alphabetic principle.
- Implement evidence-based practices that have been proven effective for students identified with dyslexia or dyslexia characteristics.
- Include multisensory/multimodal structured literacy interventions provided by a trained educator.
- Incorporate the interventions into an (MTSS) framework.



**Provide educators with professional development on identifying and intervening for dyslexia.**

- Require structured literacy training for reading coaches, classroom teachers and school administrators on effective methods of identifying characteristics of dyslexia and using dyslexia-specific instructional strategies.
- Include in the training the integration of phonological and phonemic awareness; phonics, including decoding and encoding; reading fluency, including accuracy; vocabulary, including academic vocabulary; and text comprehension strategies.

**Develop and maintain a statewide dyslexia handbook on state and local LEA websites to provide guidance to districts, parents, educators and stakeholders.**

- Include in the handbook, but do not limit to:
  - Guidelines for teachers and parents on how to identify signs of dyslexia.
  - Instructional strategies that have been shown to improve the academic performance of students with dyslexia.
  - Guidelines on the administration of a universal screener and dyslexia screener, interpretation of the results and appropriate dyslexia-specific intervention provided within an MTSS framework.
  - Descriptions and links or sources for additional resources.
- Review the handbook at least once every three years and update it to reflect current research, as needed.

**Require postsecondary teacher preparation programs to include training on dyslexia and other reading difficulties.**

- Require teacher preparation program coursework for elementary and secondary, general and special education teachers to include:
  - The definition and characteristics of dyslexia.
  - An approved process for identifying dyslexia.
  - Interventions and accommodations for dyslexia and related literacy and learning challenges.
  - Core elements of a response-to-intervention (RtI) framework through universal screening and data analysis.