

Revising Local Literacy Plans to Include “Efforts to Identify Students with Dyslexia”¹

Early identification of struggling readers is one of five requirements described in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.12](#). Minnesota’s reading intervention law requires that each district “annually report a summary of the district’s efforts to screen and identify students with dyslexia.” Establishing a singular screening process is the most cost-efficient and effective means of ensuring students get the evidence-based literacy instruction needed for all struggling readers to be on track for proficient performance.

Scores from screening DO NOT identify which students have dyslexia (see page 2 for a description of critical features of dyslexia).² However, an effective screening process is a first step in identifying students who:

- 1) Are not making adequate progress toward reaching grade-level expectations of proficiency.
- 2) Need additional systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, decoding/encoding, morphology, fluency and comprehension to achieve grade-level expectations.

A combination of screening, evidence-based core instruction and progress data provides the greatest predictive accuracy within a cost-efficient system.

Note: Screening and intervention do not replace formal evaluation when there is a suspicion of disability and when specially designed instruction and accommodations are necessary to continue developing reading skills. See Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.56 for requirements for evaluation.

A combination of screening and progress data after a period of evidence-based instruction provides the greatest predictive accuracy for supporting students who are likely to have dyslexia.

“Efforts to screen and identify students with dyslexia” requires districts to amend their data interpretation and documentation procedures.

The goal is not to duplicate screening efforts but to find students and match their needs with more intensive evidence-based practices so students can make progress in meeting proficiency expectations.

¹ NOTE: This guidance is provided to specifically address district response to students with dyslexia. The reading intervention law and Local Literacy Plans include more than is addressed in this document.

² See also [Navigating the School System When a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Early Identification

While indicators of dyslexia are known, students with limited exposure to print and language cannot accurately and efficiently be distinguished from students with dyslexia using only scores from screeners. Struggling readers may score the same on screeners but respond differently to instruction. Students with limited exposure to English or literacy skills will respond positively to additional minutes of evidence-based core literacy instruction.

Students with indicators of dyslexia will not respond to more of the same evidence-based instruction that may work for other students. The core difficulty for a student with dyslexia is a problem with isolating, identifying and manipulating sounds (phonological awareness) and processing language on a neurobiological level with strengths in other areas³.

The core difficulty presents as **persistent difficulty** with recognition and manipulation of sounds that affects reading fluency, spelling and writing. Persistent struggle despite high-quality and evidence-based core instruction is necessary not only to establish risk but also to match the intervention methods that are necessary to alter the growth rate and level of reading proficiency.

Unlike students who are learning English or who have had limited exposure to literacy instruction, students with dyslexia will not respond to the same evidence-based instruction delivered within core.

There is no evidence that students at-risk ever “grow out of” dyslexia or “mature into” reading proficiently.

Students who are presenting with indicators of dyslexia will need more explicit, systematic, phonemic, phonetic, multi-sensory, intensive evidence-based practice with word sounds and word recognition to make progress meeting proficiency.

Note for District and School Implementation and Leadership Teams

The following are vulnerable points for implementing effective screening. Districts must ensure:

1. There is a data system where teachers record both screening results and additional data for problem solving (see indicators in Table 1).
2. All staff are recording and using both screening and indicators when matching data to student needs.
3. Teachers carry out interventions with fidelity (providing full minutes of the intervention as designed).
4. **Staff designing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan have access to screening, progress monitoring, and indicators of dyslexia so they do not have to rediscover what is already known.**

³ Note: Students who are dyslexic typically have noticeable strengths in oral communication abilities compared to weaknesses involving text. For that reason, if a student displays strong reasoning and complex thinking skills but unexpected weakness in reading, writing and spelling, this is a red flag.

The following steps are recommended for identifying learners likely to have dyslexia and to benefit from the specific practices effective for students with dyslexia:

- Identify ALL students at-risk (*at multiple points in the year when there is time to intervene--fall, winter, spring*).
- Provide intervention **in addition to effective core** instruction (*matched to indicators and needs*).
- Document results of response to interventions (*document growth and level with progress monitoring over time*)
- Evaluate for a disability (section 504 or special education services) if students' progress is flat or peaks then stagnates.

Note: There is evidence that indicates a portion of students with dyslexia will make progress with interventions and need them to be sustained for a number of years in order to close the achievement gap and become proficient. Students with this pattern of performance will learn to compensate but read more slowly and use supports that are not necessary for students who do not have dyslexia to maintain proficiency and progress in reading and writing. Some students may make enough progress to not qualify for special education supports. However, with persistently low performance they may meet criteria for Section 504. The school will need to use the indicator and progress date to establish appropriate 504 supports which may include extended time for reading tasks, smaller chunks of reading at a time, access to alternate forms of text and other technology supports for writing. For more information see [Navigating the School System When a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Identification of students with characteristics consistent with dyslexia begins with screening efforts. **Table 1: Indicators of Dyslexia** (p. 4-6) provides a summary of indicators that districts can evaluate and monitor over time. These indicators can be screened using a variety of tools, many of which schools are using already. The measurement types included in the "Common Standardized Measure" column corresponds to the coding of common assessments prepopulated within the Read Well Data and Plan Submission web-based application. For a list of assessments reported by Minnesota schools, including what they measure, see the Assessment Plan Reference. [\[Add link\]](#)

Table 1: Evidence-based Indicators for Dyslexia to be Included in Identifying Students for Intervention

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Common Standardized Measure</i>	<i>Typical Grade(s) for Screening</i> (F) Fall, (S) Spring, (W) Winter	<i>Instructionally Meaningful Observation and Interview Data</i>
Poor Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic Awareness Initial Sound Fluency Phoneme Blending Word Segmentation	Pre-K and K: (F,W,S) K (F,W) K (W,S) and K (W,S) and 1 (F,W)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mishears letters or sounds. Difficulty with rhyming. Difficulty with manipulating phonemes, sequencing, and/or holding letter sounds in mind long enough to decode or spell words.
Poor Decoding	Letter-Sound Fluency Nonsense Words Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)	K (W,S) K (W,S) and 1 (F,W,S) 2 (F) 1 (F,W,S) 3 (F, W, S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deletes or mixes up or misses extremely common high-frequency and sight words (was/ saw, left/felt,) skips words like is, the, a, on, etc., inconsistently omits suffix endings (-s, -ed, or -ly). Decodes a word on one page but not on next; one day it is there, next it is not. Relies on contextual clues to read, guesses at words based on the first few letters. Accuracy of decoding improves but rate remains persistently lower than benchmark.⁴ Student complains of physical illness or presents with behavioral issues during reading time; either task avoidance or signs of stress.

⁴ Overreliance on speed of decoding will impede growth of students with dyslexia. A student who reads accurately but slowly and with limited prosody may still comprehend. Emphasizing speed at the expense of comprehension or compensatory strategies is very detrimental and may lead to an increased gap in reading skills. A student who is increasing accuracy and spelling but persistently slow in speed is a perfect candidate for assistive technology supports to compensate for slow reading.

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Poor Spelling (Encoding)	Spelling Inventory	1 (F,W,S); 3(F,W,S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty reproducing letter forms (not a motor coordination problem). • Difficulty recalling the correct sequence of letters in words and/or matching letters, words, objects in different sequences as they get more complex. • Student complains of physical illness or presents with behavioral issues during writing time; either task avoidance or signs of stress. • Error analysis shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not all sounds are represented within a word. ○ Misspellings of words are inconsistent within the same document. ○ Oral stories have greater depth and detail than print, student self-limits to words that can be spelled correctly.
Poor Orthographic Memory and Recall	Rapid Automatic Naming Letter Name Fluency Letter-Sound Fluency (onset sounds, first sound) High Frequency/Sight Words	Pre K and K (F,W) K (F,W) K (W,S); 1 (F,W) K (S); 1 (F,W,S); and 2 (F,W,S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student has difficulty following 2-3 step directions. Needs directions repeated or written down. • Difficulty naming classmates weeks and months into the school year. • Difficulty calling up the right word despite describing its meaning. • Student’s descriptions indicate “she/he knows it one moment but not the next.” • Difficulty simultaneously decoding and retrieving word meanings. • Poor recall of sound symbol associations.

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Family History			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows lack of interest in reading simple books or talking about books. • Reports or comments that close family or relatives struggled with learning to read or in school (evidence that dyslexia runs in families). • Records indicate the student repeated pre-school or earlier grade. Parents say that student was recommended to repeat a grade. • Parent has sent the student to summer school, interventions, or clinic for additional tutoring.

Guidance for Matching Students with Indicators of Dyslexia to the Appropriate Interventions

Intervention Guidance

There are some excellent resources to help schools and districts begin designing instruction for use within the general classroom and supplemental intervention time. The following short guides provide evidence-based practices proven effective for struggling readers who may go on to be identified with dyslexia. Installing and implementing these practices before students are formally identified is likely to increase the proficiency of not only dyslexic readers but readers who just need more intentional practice.

Informational papers to be used in selecting and installing the right practices:

Context of Intervention

- **Instructional Grouping Practices: Evidence-based guidance on how to group students for reading instruction**
https://www.texasgateway.org/sites/default/files/resources/documents/7Brief_GroupingPractices.pdf
- **Intensive Interventions for Students Struggling in Reading and Mathematics** This paper includes guidance on how to intensify instruction for students who do not initially respond.
<http://www.center-on-instruction.org/files/Intensive%20Interventions%20for%20Students%20Struggling%20in%20Reading%20%26%20Math.pdf>

Content of Instruction

- **Instructional Considerations for Students with Dyslexia**
https://www.texasgateway.org/sites/default/files/resources/documents/10Brief_DyslexiaConsiderations.pdf
- **Phonological Awareness: An Essential Component of Reading Instruction**
https://www.texasgateway.org/sites/default/files/resources/documents/1Brief_PhonologicalAwareness.pdf
- **Phonemic Awareness: The Single Sound Challenge**
https://www.texasgateway.org/sites/default/files/resources/documents/2Brief_PhonemicAwareness.pdf
- **Effective Phonics and Word Study Instruction**
https://www.texasgateway.org/sites/default/files/resources/documents/3Brief_PhonicsandWordStudy.pdf

Sustained Professional Development with Coaching and Fidelity Measures

- Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) Training
<http://www.voyagersopris.com/professional-development/leters/overview>
- Orton-Gillingham-based **staff development** and **instructional resources** that include:
 - Assessment and identification of secure and insecure skills.
 - Developmental milestones.
 - Pacing and error correction procedures.
 - Scope and sequence (when sounds, letters, blends, word parts, syntax, and semantics).

- Multi-sensory practice (see it, say it, write it, read it).
- Coaching and fidelity checks.

Training programs in Minnesota included: <https://dyslexiaida.org/accredited-teaching-training-programs/>.

- Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) Word Identification Strategy and Word Mapping Strategy. <http://www.ecsu.k12.mn.us/programs/services/E12ProfessionalDevelopment/literacySIM.html>
- X-Treme Reading Workshop <http://sim.kucrl.org/products/details/xtreme-reading>

Sites and Books with illustrated lesson ideas:

Reading: Sample Lessons and Activities: Instructional support for Intensive Intervention <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/reading-sample-lessons-activities>

- Berninger, V. and Wolf, B. (2009). Helping Students with Dyslexia and Dysgraphia Make Connections: Differentiated Instruction Lesson Plans in Reading and Writing. Paul. H. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore, MD.
- Henry, M. (2010). Unlocking Literacy: Effective Decoding and Spelling Progress Monitoring Instruction (2nd Ed). Paul. H. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore, MD.

Progress Monitoring

By monitoring students’ response to instruction and intervention, teachers are able to make adjustments to ensure consistent positive progress. When students fail to respond to instructional efforts over time, there is a need for more intensive evaluation, which may include processes for qualification for special education services or diagnosis of dyslexia by health professionals.

Prior to starting intervention the team responsible for monitoring the progress and response of students in intervention should have an instructional goal and established expectation for weekly growth. Many standardized, valid and reliable, and developmentally appropriate progress monitoring measures include guidance on goal setting and expectations of growth.

Students identified and matched with reading interventions need to have data on their progress charted bi-weekly. No later than six weeks after beginning intervention their growth and level of performance should be reviewed by the team. Results will indicate one of the next three instructional steps:

- Students performing at or above the goal should have the goal adjusted upwards and continue until they are ready to be exited from interventions because they can continue to make progress within core instruction.
- Students growing toward the goal should be maintained in the intervention.
- Students whose growth falls below the projected rate and goal should have the team review the intervention, its fidelity, and the options for intensifying or changing it (for more specifics on how

to intensify interventions see [Intensive Interventions for Students Struggling in Reading and Mathematics](#)).

Progress monitoring data is only effective when it is used. There is evidence that teams are gathering progress monitoring data but not consistently using it in problem solving or intervention planning meetings. For specific training and process guides in establishing and running effective data-based meetings, see the following resource:

Tools to Support Intensive Intervention Data Meetings: You will find meeting protocols which are intended to support data team meetings for students receiving intensive intervention. The documents are split into three sections: pre-meeting, initial meeting, and progress monitoring meetings

<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/tools-support-intensive-intervention-data-meetings>

Progress Monitoring Students Receiving Specially Designed Instruction

The staff responsible for developing the specially designed instruction will double down on efforts to increase accuracy and efficiency of decoding skills while providing accommodations to account for slow and labored growth in speed of reading. Accommodations and technology supports provide continued access to materials to increase and sustain grade-level comprehension skills. Building accuracy/mastery in word recognition and reading with prosody is more important than speed of passage reading. Students who fit the profile of a student with dyslexia and on IEP's will likely have adjusted expectations of growth based on previous trends. The more significant the risk and difficulty, the more intensive the services will need to be and the longer it will take to progress to becoming a proficient reader. **IEP services should be at least if not more intense and extensive on the IEP as they were prior to identification.** It is unreasonable to expect the student to meet the expectations of access and progress with less service.

Students with documented higher abilities in comprehension and reasoning must be allowed to access content at their ability level regardless of their decoding ability. It is important that teams make available the technology supports most useful for the student so the student can "read" at his/her interest and comprehension level. Limiting students to leveled text outside of intervention is not only ill-advised, but will adversely impact their vocabulary growth and ability to make progress in all content areas.

Collaborators and Supporters

The following guidance was prepared by the Minnesota Department of Education and the Dyslexia Institute of Minnesota with endorsements and support from (add organizations and supporters here).

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Dyslexia Institute of Minnesota/The Reading Center

www.thereadingcenter.org

International Dyslexia Association—Upper Midwest Branch

umw.dyslexiaida.org