

DYSLEXIA GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

September 8, 2015

The purpose of this Dyslexia Guidance Document is to provide a resource to our public school districts and families, and it does not constitute legal advice. It was developed in collaboration with representatives from Woodford County Special Education Association, Knox-Warren Special Education District, Tazewell-Mason Counties Special Education Association, Morton District 709, Washington District 51, Washington District 52, and Children's Dyslexia Center. The information in this document was adapted from the International Dyslexia Association, www.aida.org.

"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." (Definition from International Dyslexia Association)

Before referring a student for a comprehensive evaluation, a school may choose to track a student's progress with a brief screening test and identify whether the student is progressing at a "benchmark" level that predicts success in reading. If a student is below the locally determined /designated benchmark, the school may provide targeted researched-based interventions before determining whether the student needs a comprehensive evaluation that would lead to a designation of special education eligibility. Some students simply need more structured and systematic instruction to get back on track; they do not have learning disabilities. For those students and even for those with dyslexia, putting the emphasis on preventive or early intervention is best practice. These practices of teaching first, and then determining who needs diagnostic testing based on response to instruction, are encouraged by federal policies known as Response to Intervention (RTI).

Best practice suggests assessments with multiple methods collected over multiple points in time, which is highly sensitive to change, or student growth. Therefore, these assessments provide the opportunity to guide educational decisions as well as document the need for changes in instruction often referred to as "data-based-decision-making". Based on data collection through the RTI process, students may be recommended for additional individualized diagnostic assessments in order to provide more intensive instructional supports. Results from the RTI process shall be considered per IDEA as part of the eligibility for learning disabilities, which includes dyslexia. Parents should know, however, that at any point they have the right to request a comprehensive evaluation under the IDEA law, whether or not the student is receiving instruction under an RTI model.

A comprehensive evaluation may include intellectual and academic achievement testing, as well as an assessment of the critical underlying language skills that are closely linked to dyslexia. These include receptive (listening) and expressive language skills, phonological skills including phonemic awareness, and a student's ability to rapidly name letters. A student's ability to read lists of words in isolation, as well as words in context, may also be assessed. If a profile emerges that is characteristic of readers with

dyslexia, an individualized intervention plan may be developed, which should include appropriate accommodations. In public schools assessments are completed by a multi-disciplinary team of educational professionals, which may include: School Psychologists, Speech/Language Pathologists, Reading Specialists, and Special Education Teachers.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) define the rights of students with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities. These individuals are legally entitled to special services to help them overcome and accommodate their learning problems. Such services include education programs designed to meet the needs of these students. The Acts also protect people with dyslexia against unfair and illegal discrimination.

Early identification and intervention is the key to helping individuals with dyslexia achieve in school and in life. In the public school, most students with dyslexia require instruction from a teacher or interventionist trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach. It is important for these individuals to be taught by a systematic and explicit method that involves several senses (hearing, seeing, touching) at the same time. Many students with dyslexia need targeted, individualized instruction in order to make expected progress. In addition, students with dyslexia often need additional structured practice and immediate, corrective feedback to develop automatic word recognition skills.

Schools can implement academic accommodations and modifications to help students with dyslexia succeed. For example, a student with dyslexia can be given extra time to complete tasks, support with taking notes, and work assignments that are modified appropriately. Teachers can provide auditory testing or allow students with dyslexia to use alternative means of assessment. Students may benefit from assistive technology including accessible instructional materials such as audiobooks, text-to-speech software and word processing programs. It is important to note that accommodations and modifications should be reflective of each student's individual needs based on their specific learning issues.