Dyslexia Informational Handbook

Guidance for Local School Systems

Contents

FOREWORD

"I don't 'suffer' from dyslexia, I live with it and work with it. I suffer from the ignorance of people who think they know what I can and cannot do."
                                        - (Erica Cook, Learning Ally member)

"Dyslexia has turned my daughter into the hardest working person I know."
                                        - (Amanda, parent of a child with dyslexia)

These powerful words reflect the real experiences of individuals and families living with dyslexia. Their voices remind us that while dyslexia presents challenges, it also reveals strength, resilience, and determination. As the research on dyslexia becomes clearer, educators are learning how to better support these learners. In Georgia, the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act (House Bill 307, 2025), was written in response to the concerns of parents, medical professionals, and educators who want to ensure schools more systematically support students with dyslexia. Educators can take individual action, but they will need system-wide supports in place as well.

This handbook describes what dyslexia is and what it looks and sounds like when a child is experiencing difficulties in learning to read. It addresses how to screen for characteristics of dyslexia and how to systematically improve reading instruction, while ensuring each and every child has access to individualized supports if the system is not meeting their needs.

The Georgia Department of Education's primary function is preparing all students for life; therefore, we are dedicated to providing the services and supports educators need to serve students. This Handbook is just one support. We will continue to modify the Handbook as we learn more, as schools improve processes for system-wide foundational literacy instruction, and as additional research emerges.

We express our gratitude to the many parents, educators, advocacy organizations, and researchers who contributed to the development of this Handbook and continue to work on behalf of Georgia's students.

Sincerely,
Richard Woods
State School Superintendent

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Statement of Collaboration

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) recognizes that collaboration is a commitment to work together as partners toward common goals. To ensure collaboration, GaDOE worked in partnership with states and organizations who have undertaken extensive measures 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

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

History and Purpose

An increase in public awareness of dyslexia and the need to better identify and address reading difficulties, including dyslexia, led the Georgia Senate to pass Senate Resolution 761 in the 2018 legislative session. The resolution created a Senate Study Committee on Dyslexia, which met in fall 2018 to undertake "a study of community-based solutions to better identify and meet the needs of dyslexic students in Georgia through early diagnosis, early remediation, and evidence-based solutions." The committee's final report was issued in late 2018 and included recommendations for screening, statewide guidance, and preservice and in-service training for teachers to improve the identification of students with reading difficulties.

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 the first edition of this informational handbook. The requirements within the Georgia Early Literacy Act (H.B. 538) in 2023 included universal reading screening for K-3 students, but this screening was separate from the dyslexia screening requirement in S.B. 48.

In April 2025, Georgia House Bill 307 (the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act) was signed into law. The purpose of HB 307 was to merge and clarify early literacy and dyslexia requirements put in place by S.B. 48 and the Georgia Early Literacy Act. H.B. 307 continued the requirement that the Georgia Department of Education publish a dyslexia informational handbook to assist schools in the implementation of evidence-based practices for identifying and instructing students with characteristics of dyslexia.

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 originally developed by the Dyslexia Task Force, comprised of representatives who have experience in the area of dyslexia, and is revised periodically with input and feedback from key stakeholder groups. The Dyslexia Resource Guide for Georgia Families is a supplemental resource designed to support caregivers and parents.

Visit the GaDOE Dyslexia webpage at https://gadoe.org/learning/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.[1]

Common Characteristics of Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a language-based condition, not a vision-based condition. 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. Dyslexia is not due to poor instruction or a lack of effort on the part of the student. It does not go away, but individuals with dyslexia can learn to read well when provided with evidence-based instruction and interventions.

A formal diagnosis of dyslexia is not required for students to receive extra support in reading. Screening for characteristics of dyslexia is a proactive way to identify and address skill deficits through appropriate interventions and ensure that students receive the support they need to reach grade-level reading proficiency. Screening results that reflect possible characteristics of dyslexia do not necessarily mean that a student has dyslexia; nor can dyslexia be diagnosed through screening alone.[2] In Georgia, characteristics of dyslexia are defined by the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act as "persistent weaknesses in one or more areas of foundational reading skills and an inadequate response to targeted intervention that indicates a need for more intensive intervention." Students may be identified as having characteristics of dyslexia by a school committee review of data, including universal reading and dyslexia screening results, classroom observations, and progress monitoring data that show a lack of response to intervention supports.

Students with characteristics of dyslexia share some common traits, 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 multiple disabilities or learning differences, including twice exceptionality (i.e., gifted and dyslexia). Symptoms of other learning differences 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.

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[1] International Dyslexia Association Definition of Dyslexia
[2] International Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Basics

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**
A child should be able to: ☐ produce rhyming words ☐ divide words into syllables ☐ divide sentences into words ☐ discriminate rhyming words ☐ divide words into phonemes ☐ delete roots, syllables, and phonemes *e.g., Say "cowboy." "Now say it again, but don't say boy."* ☐ substitute a phoneme to a new word *e.g., Say "f-u-n" What is that? Now say it again but change /f/ to /s/."* ☐ identify a phoneme by its position in a word (beginning, middle, end)	A child should be able to: ☐ write words ☐ write sentences ☐ blend sounds together ☐ decode nonsense words ☐ segment words into syllables ☐ identify sounds and letters *(sound/symbol relationships)* ☐ begin to decode *(vc, vcv, words, words with blends, words with consonant digraphs, magic e words, etc.)*	A child should be able to: ☐ spell well ☐ have appropriate handwriting ☐ enjoy reading and writing ☐ have appropriate or strong written expression ☐ have appropriate or strong reading strategies ☐ recall words quickly without much repetition ☐ comprehend reading material at or above grade level ☐ 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	☐ 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) ☐ Does not understand that words come apart ☐ Complains about how hard reading is, or disengages when it is time to read ☐ A familial history of reading problems ☐ Cannot sound out simple words like *cat, map, nap* ☐ Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with /b/.	☐ The ability to figure things out ☐ Eager embrace of new ideas ☐ Gets "the gist" of things ☐ A good understanding of new concepts ☐ A large vocabulary for the age group ☐ Excellent comprehension of stories read aloud (i.e., listening comprehension)

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[3] Adapted from The Schenck School, Red Flag Checklist

[4] Taken from The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, Signs of Dyslexia

Age Group	Potential Difficulties	Potential Strengths
Grades 2+	☐ 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	☐ 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. This is one of many misconceptions that surround the term dyslexia. See Figure 2.1 for some other common misconceptions associated with dyslexia.

Figure 2.1: Common Misconceptions About Dyslexia[5]

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[5] *Source. Australian Dyslexia Association*

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).

Georgia has recently undergone several developments that impact policy and practice statewide. The first was Senate Bill 48 (2019), which established a three-year dyslexia screening pilot program and mandated universal dyslexia screening beginning in 2024-25. In the 2023 legislative session, state legislators passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (House Bill 538). This legislation primarily focused on reforming the state's approach to early literacy for students in kindergarten through third grade. It included requirements for the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) aligned to the science of reading, universal reading screening three times a year, tiered intervention plans for struggling readers, and notification to parents about their child's reading progress and any support needs.

Early implementation of S.B. 48 and the Georgia Early Literacy Act led state leaders to recognize a need to merge and clarify the content of the two bills. In 2025, Georgia passed House Bill 307, the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act (GELDA). GELDA streamlined the requirements of H.B. 538 and S.B. 48, defined characteristics of dyslexia, and outlined the process for identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia. The bill also prohibited the use of the three-cueing systems model to teach word reading, required that students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia receive evidence-based intervention through a dyslexia support plan, and continued requirements for the development and distribution of materials on dyslexia and related disorders.

Per state law, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) are defined as, "…those aligned with the science of reading, teaching foundational literacy skills, and aligned with grade-appropriate English language arts and reading standards approved by the Georgia State Board of Education." GELDA explicitly states that high-quality instructional materials shall not feature or promote the use of the three-cueing system (also known as "MSV"). The current list of SBOE-approved HQIMs can be found in the High-Quality Instructional Materials resources located on Georgia Inspire.

The Aligning State Literacy Policies and Practices guidance document provides key connections and information to support school districts in effectively and efficiently implementing these expectations, with the ultimate goal of increasing literacy outcomes for Georgia's students.

What is the Science of Reading?

According to the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act, "'science of reading' means the body of research that identifies evidence-based approaches for 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 on what matters and what works in literacy instruction, organized around models that describe how and why. Until recently, this large body of research was not included in many teacher training programs and was not used to develop many of the common reading curricula in schools. This is beginning to change.

In Figure 3.1, Dr. Hollis Scarborough (2001) illustrates skilled reading as 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 Rope[5]

Scarborough's Reading Rope

Language Comprehension (LC)
- **Background Knowledge** facts, concepts, etc.
- **Vocabulary** breadth, precision, links, etc.
- **Language Structures** syntax, semantics, etc.
- **Verbal Reasoning** inference, metaphor, etc.
- **Literacy Knowledge** print concepts, genres, etc.

INCREASINGLY STRATEGIC

Skilled Reading (RC)

Word Recognition (D)
- **Phonological Awareness** syllables, phonemes, etc.
- **Decoding** alphabetic principle, letter-sound correspondences
- **Sight Recognition** of familiar words

INCREASINGLY AUTOMATIC

$$LC \times D = RC$$ Fluent word recognition and comprehension.

This interpretation of the Reading Rope incorporates Gough & Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading.

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[5] Image used with permission from Really Great Reading

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 instructional materials aligned to the science of reading that instruct students in foundational literacy skills and grade-appropriate English language arts and reading standards. Instructional materials that feature or promote the use of the three-cueing system shall not constitute high-quality instructional materials.

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

- Structured Literacy Brief from IDA
- What Works Clearinghouse
    - 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 evidence-based practices to carry out this particular recommendation as well as ways to address potential obstacles.
    - 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
    - Under "IRIS Resource Topics" click on the "Reading, Literacy, and Language Arts" link for research summaries and curriculum descriptions.
- Florida Center for Reading Research
    - 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.
- National Center on Improving Literacy

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/

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.

Figure 4.1: Multi-Level Prevention System
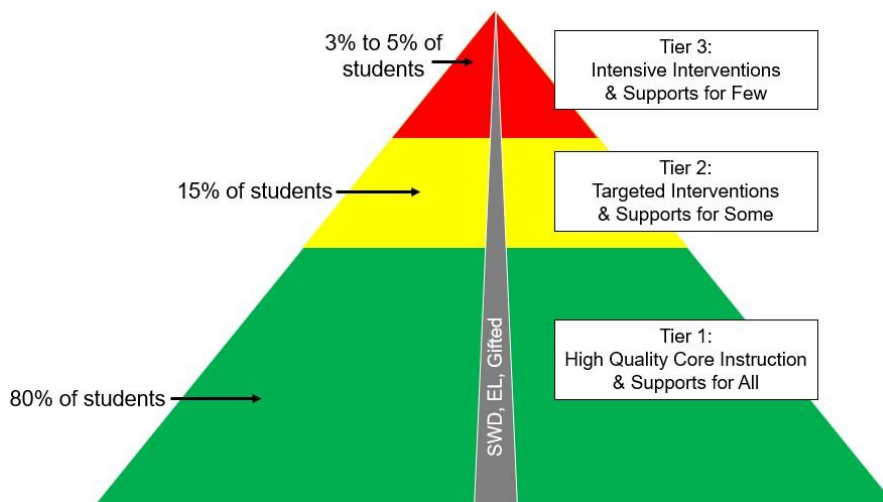
With strong core curricula and high-quality reading instruction, it is possible to meet the needs of many students who have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia or who may have characteristics of dyslexia in the general education environment. Some students are successful with Tier 1 instruction, while others will require additional interventions and supports. These interventions and supports are determined according to the needs of each student and 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 a need 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.

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 intended 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	• District curriculum, high-quality instructional materials aligned with state or district standards • Differentiated instruction • Evidence-based practices such as explicit and systematic teaching of foundational literacy skills	• 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	• Intensive, individualized intervention and support using evidence-based practices that address the 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.

SECTION 5: READING AND DYSLEXIA SCREENING PROCESS
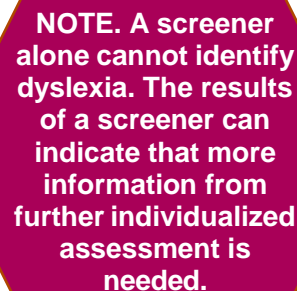
Essential Components of an Effective Screener for Reading Difficulties

Universal screening in foundational reading skills helps identify students who are at risk of reading difficulties and may need intervention. Personnel administering the dyslexia screener need to be trained to administer the assessment tool. According to the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act (H.B. 307), a universal reading screener must include the following components:

1. Phonological awareness
2. Phonemic awareness;
3. Sound symbol recognition;
4. Alphabet knowledge;
5. Phonics;
6. Oral reading fluency;
7. Spelling;
8. Vocabulary;
9. Reading comprehension; and
10. Rapid automatized naming.

NOTE. A screener alone cannot identify dyslexia. The results of a screener can indicate that more information from further individualized assessment is needed.

GELDA requires that the Department review and approve universal reading screening tools every three years beginning in 2027. The list of approved universal reading screening tools and the free universal reading screener must be published annually by July 15 of each year. The current list of approved screening tools can be found in the Literacy resource repository on GaDOE Inspire.

Universal Reading and Dyslexia Screening

Local educational agencies must administer an approved universal reading and dyslexia screener to all students in kindergarten through grade 3 three times per year (see Figure 5.1). GELDA requires that the initial screening occur within 30 school days of the start of the year. Parental consent is not necessary for administering an assessment that is administered to all students.

If the universal screening data and additional information—such as classroom performance and academic history— indicate that a student is significantly at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency, the student must receive intensive reading intervention until they are no longer considered at risk. A Tiered Reading Support Plan (TRSP) must be created for the student to describe the evidence-based reading intervention services the student will receive to support them in reaching grade-level proficiency in foundational literacy skills. The local educational agency must notify the parent or guardian of the student within 15 school days of the determination that a student is significantly at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency. The parent notification must include:

- That the student has been determined to be significantly at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency;
- That a tiered reading intervention plan will be implemented by an educator at the student's school;

- Results of the student's performance on the universal reading screeners administered to date and other data used to make such determination;
- A description of the current services provided to the student;
- A description of proposed evidence-based reading interventions and supplemental instructional services and supports to be provided to the student to ensure the student becomes proficient in foundational literacy skills;
- Notification that the parent or guardian will be informed in writing of the student's progress toward grade-level reading; and
- Strategies for parents and guardians to use at home to help their child succeed in reading.

Considerations for Interpretation of Universal Screening Data

After every universal screening, screening data and additional school-level data should be 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?
- Are the core curriculum and high-quality instruction differentiated to meet the needs of a wide range of learners?
- Are 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 strengths and challenges. 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 cut-score.

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 help a multidisciplinary team determine whether a student is displaying characteristics of dyslexia (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Identifying Characteristics of Dyslexia

In Georgia, characteristics of dyslexia are defined by the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act as "persistent weaknesses in one or more areas of foundational reading skills and an inadequate response to targeted intervention that indicates a need for more intensive intervention." If a student who is significantly at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency does not demonstrate adequate progress with the evidence-based intervention(s) provided as described in the student's Tiered Reading Support Plan, the evidence-based intervention(s) should be intensified (see Table 4.1) and the student should be referred to the Student Support Team (SST). The SST will consider all available data for the student and complete the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric to determine whether the student has characteristics of dyslexia. The team may also collect

additional information (e.g., diagnostic assessments) to inform changes to the interventions provided to the student and/or completion of the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric. Parental consent must be obtained prior to the administration of diagnostic assessments.

Completion of the Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric requires universal screening data and other quantitative and qualitative data. If the SST determines that a student has characteristics of dyslexia, the team should ensure that the student's intervention is aligned to their specific needs and document this intervention in a Characteristics of Dyslexia Support Plan (CDSP). The student should continue to receive evidence-based intervention support until they demonstrate grade-level reading proficiency. If the student continues to demonstrate an inadequate response to intervention or the SST suspects that the student may be a student with a disability who requires specialized educational services, the SST may refer the student for an educational evaluation upon consent of the student's parent. 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.

If the SST determines that a student does not have characteristics of dyslexia but requires ongoing Tier 3 intervention, the student's TRSP should be revised to ensure that it aligns to the student's specific instructional needs. The student should continue to receive evidence-based intervention support until they demonstrate grade-level reading proficiency.

If the SST determines that a student does not have characteristics of dyslexia and is making adequate progress toward grade-level reading proficiency with current interventions, the student should continue to receive the level of intervention support required to meet their needs until the student demonstrates grade-level reading proficiency.

Figure 5.1, the Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process, explains the process and procedures for determining whether a student is significantly at risk of not attaining grade-level reading proficiency and/or has characteristics of dyslexia. A Section 504 referral or special education evaluation may be requested by a parent/guardian at any point within the process. A student may also be referred for a comprehensive evaluation if data show that they continue to struggle with one or more components of reading despite the provision of evidence-based intervention and the school team suspects that the child may have a learning disability.

Developing Support Plans for Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

The format of a Characteristics of Dyslexia Support Plan (CDSP) is very similar to that of a Tiered Reading Support Plan (TRSP). Both are templates used to clearly document the intervention support a student is receiving. Since students who have a CDSP have already demonstrated a lack of adequate progress with targeted intervention, the interventions described in the CDSP must be more intensive than those in the student's TRSP prior to the student being identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. Interventions can be made more intensive by increasing the frequency and/or duration of intervention sessions and/or decreasing the intervention group size. These specifics should also be indicated in the CDSP.

Interventions documented in a CDSP must be evidence-based and individualized to the student's specific instructional needs, as identified by universal screening, diagnostic assessment, and other data. (See the Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Supports column in Figure 4.1.) The CDSP documents the skill(s) targeted by intervention and intervention strategy or program name. It also describes the dyslexia-specific intervention practices that will be used to help the student reach grade-level reading proficiency. Dyslexia-specific

intervention practices are explicit and systematic and should provide ample opportunity for practice and review. The school team creating the CDSP will describe how the student's progress will be monitored and indicate how frequently this will occur.

Notification Requirements for Characteristics of Dyslexia

The Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act (GELDA) outlines detailed written notification requirements for parents when a student has been identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. This notification, due within 15 school days of the identification, must include:

- That the student has been identified as having characteristics of dyslexia;
- That a support plan for students with characteristics of dyslexia will be implemented by the student's teacher;
- A description of the qualitative and quantitative data used for identification, including progress toward grade-level reading proficiency with prior intervention support;
- A description of proposed changes or additions to the current evidence-based interventions and supports;
- Notification that the student's progress will be reported to the parents in writing;
- Information and resources about dyslexia;
- Information and resources regarding strategies to support at literacy at home; and
- Notification of the right to elect in writing that the student not receive the support plan and proposed interventions and supports.

Parent Resources: GELDA requires LEAs to provide parents of students exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia or other disorders with resources, information, and materials regarding dyslexia, such as the Dyslexia Informational Handbook and the IDA Dyslexia Handbook.

Figure 5.1: Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process[6]

This flowchart incorporates requirements from the Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act (H.B. 307). All components must be implemented with fidelity.

Tier 1 high quality instruction + differentiation + ongoing monitoring

+

Universal reading and dyslexia screener 3 times per year* + other data*

Other data may include classroom assessments and observations.

Create *Tiered Reading Support Plan.*

Significantly at risk of not attaining grade level reading proficiency

Not At Risk

Monitor using universal reading and dyslexia screening.

On a case-by-case basis, if data indicates an immediate need for intensive, individualized intervention, proceed to Tier 3.

Tier 2 intervention + progress monitoring + collection of additional data** to inform intervention

Inadequate Response

Adequate Response

For students making adequate progress, continue intervention and progress monitoring as data indicate.

The *Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric* requires progress monitoring and other data in addition to screening data.

Tier 3 intervention + progress monitoring + collection of additional qualitative and quantitative data** + complete *Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric* + initiate SST

Multiple data sources (including progress monitoring) show continued inadequate response to intervention and a pattern of strengths and weaknesses consistent with dyslexia.

The student is determined to have characteristics of dyslexia. Create a *Characteristics of Dyslexia Support Plan.*

The student does not have characteristics of dyslexia but requires ongoing Tier 3 intervention. Revise student's *Tiered Reading Support Plan.*

Adequate Response

For students making adequate progress, continue intervention and progress monitoring as data indicate.

The student receives ongoing Tier 3 intervention. Consider a referral for a special education evaluation if the student shows inadequate response to intervention.

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[6] The full flowchart document can be found in the Georgia Inspire Literacy & Dyslexia resource repository and by clicking here.

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 for Special Education Eligibility

In some cases, special education may be necessary for a child because their needs cannot be met in the general education setting. 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.

When a student continues to have difficulty with reading as discovered through the reading and dyslexia screening process (see Figure 5.1) despite implementation of a robust Tier 1 reading program and evidence-based intervention supports, the school's Student Support Team (SST) will examine student data and consider a referral for special education evaluation (see the final steps 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.

What Should be Included in a Special Education Evaluation?

A comprehensive evaluation consisting of multiple assessments is critical to support the identification of dyslexia (a specific learning disability in reading). According to the International Dyslexia Association, the following areas should be considered:

- 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 a 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.

On October 23, 2015, the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued a [Dear Colleague letter](#) noting that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) definition of "specific learning disability" explicitly includes dyslexia. The purpose of this letter is to clarify that there is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents.

SECTION 7: INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIA
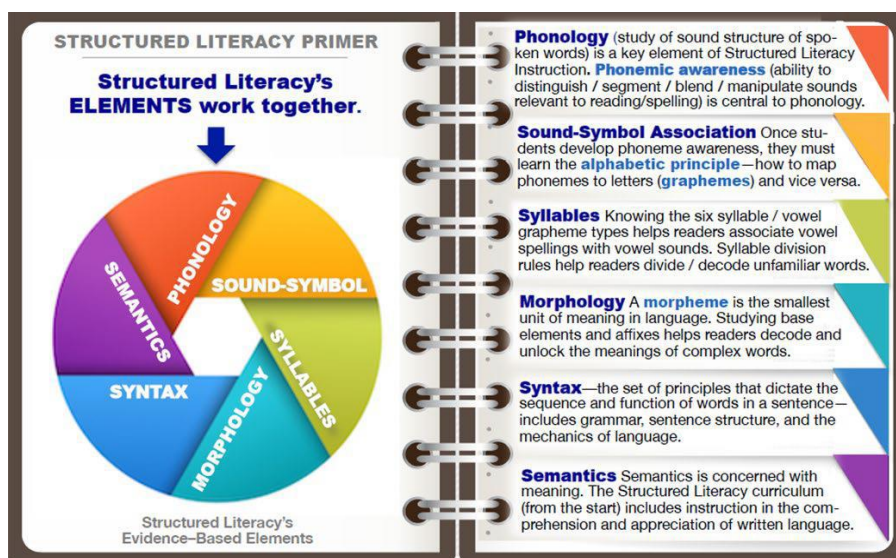
What is Structured Literacy?

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.

The Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act defines structured literacy as "an evidence-based approach to teaching oral and written language aligned to the science of reading founded on the science of how children learn to read and characterized by explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic instruction in phonology, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics." The legislation also noted that "an approach to teaching oral and written language that features or promotes the three-cueing system shall not constitute structured literacy." The three-cueing system means any model for teaching students word reading based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues. Such models are also referred to as "MSV." Instruction may include visual information and strategies which improve background and experiential knowledge, add context, and increase oral language and vocabulary to support comprehension, but shall not be used to teach word reading.
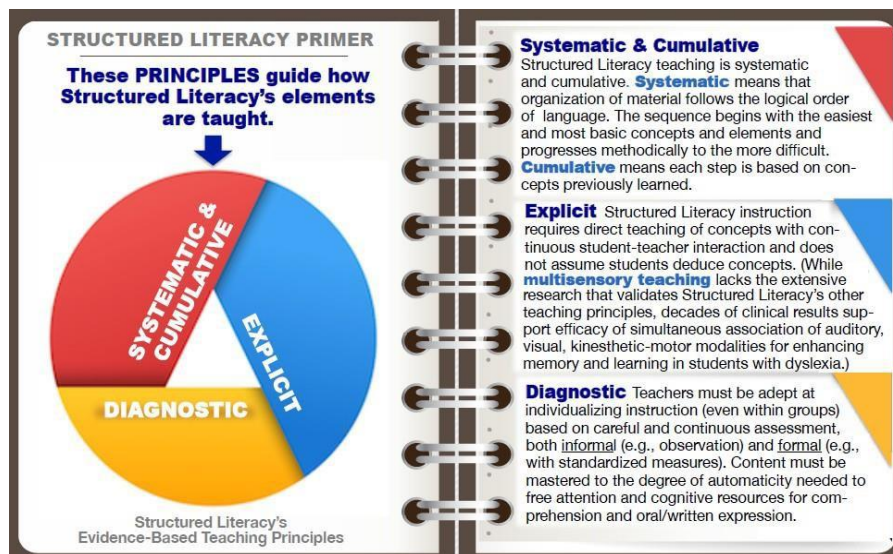
Instructional Principles of Structured Literacy

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 Literacy[7]

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[7] Source: International Dyslexia Association. For more information, see Structured Literacy: An Introductory Guide.

Figures 7.2: Teaching Principles of Structured Literacy[8]

STRUCTURED LITERACY PRIMER

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

SYSTEMATIC & CUMULATIVE

EXPLICIT

DIAGNOSTIC

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 at https://www.thereadingleague.org/curriculum-evaluation-guidelines/.

Note: HB 307 states that no local school system or public school shall use a program of foundational skills instruction for students in kindergarten through third grade that is based on any curriculum, instructional materials, instructional practices, or interventions that utilize the three-cueing systems model for teaching word reading.

Local school systems and public schools shall ensure that all instructional materials used to teach students in kindergarten through third grade:

- Are high-quality instructional materials; and
- Do not utilize the three-cueing system model for teaching word reading.
- Instruction may include visual information and strategies which improve background and experiential knowledge, add context, and increase oral language and vocabulary to support comprehension, but shall not be used to teach word reading.

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[8] Source: International Dyslexia Association. For more information, see Structured Literacy: An Introductory Guide.

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.

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

S.B. 48 required the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) to 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." GaPSC and GaDOE 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. A current list of dyslexia endorsement providers can be found using the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's GaPSC-approved Educator Preparation Providers and Programs search tool. For information about the Dyslexia Endorsement, contact the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

SECTION 9: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT

The Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act requires that all kindergarten through third grade teachers complete a training program on the science of reading, structured literacy, and foundational literacy skills. 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.)**

Georgia Literacy Academy

In partnership with the Rollin's Center's Cox Campus, GaDOE launched the Georgia Literacy Academy in October 2023 to provide educators with training in the science of reading. The Rollins Center's Cox Campus coursework embedded into the Georgia Literacy Academy has received accreditation by the International Dyslexia Association. The online modules are free and available to all districts and educators in Georgia, and they meet GELDA's professional learning requirement.

Training Programs Accredited by the International Dyslexia Association

GaDOE is using the list of Independent Training Programs accredited by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) as vetted literacy training. This approved list includes evidence-based training such as Orton-Gillingham, AIM Institute, LETRS (Lexia Learning), and Wilson Language Training (WLT). For the full list of approved training programs, visit the IDA's Independent Teacher Training Programs Accredited by IDA webpage.

Other Professional Learning Resources

- AIM Institute for Learning and Research
- The Center for Effective Reading Instruction (CERI)
- Dyslexia Training Institute
- 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