

Iowa Dyslexia Handbook



Department of Education

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Administration

McKenzie Snow, Director

PK-12 Learning Division

Tina Wahlert, Division Administrator

Bureau of Academics and Learner Supports

Tom Wood, Bureau Chief

Wanda Steuri, Dyslexia and Science of Reading Consultant

It is the policy of the Iowa Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, sex, disability, religion, age, political party affiliation, or actual or potential parental, family or marital status in its programs, activities, or employment practices as required by the Iowa Code sections 216.9 and 256.10(2), Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d-2000e), the Equal Pay Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 206, et seq.), Title IX (Educational Amendments, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 – 1688), Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101, et seq.). If you have questions or complaints related to compliance with this policy by the Iowa Department of Education, please contact the legal counsel for the Iowa Department of Education, Grimes State Office Building, 400 E. 14th Street, Des Moines, IA 50319-0146, telephone number: 515-281-5295, or the Director of the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, Cesar E. Chavez Memorial Building, 1244 Speer Boulevard, Suite 310, Denver, CO 80204-3582, telephone number: 303-844-5695, TDD number: 800-877-8339, email: OCR.Denver@ed.gov

Table of Contents

Introduction to the Dyslexia Handbook	4
How to Use the Dyslexia Handbook	4
Purpose	4
Iowa Dyslexia Legislation	5
General Dyslexia Information.....	6
What Is Dyslexia?.....	7
Types of Reading Difficulty.....	8
Possible Characteristics of Dyslexia.....	8
Dyslexia Is Not	10
Co-Occurring Diagnoses	10
Twice Exceptional	11
Possible Impacts to Student’s Well-Being	11
Resilience.....	12
English Learners	13
Student Support Information.....	14
Parallel Paths of Support.....	16
Required Screening.....	16
Pursuing a Formal Diagnosis of Dyslexia	16
Iowa Educational Supports Explained	18
Legal Documents	20
Individual Education Program (IEP) teams focus on answering two questions:	21
Additional Information.....	22
Assistive Technology.....	22
Parent Information & Resources	24
Where to Start?	25
How to Help a Child Live and Thrive with Dyslexia	26
Required Family Involvement.....	26
Required Dyslexia Related Supports Beyond Third Grade	27
Tips from Other Parents	27
What Can Be Done at Home?	28
Helpful Resources	28
Educator Information and Resources.....	30
Instruction.....	31
Required Training for Iowa Educators	32

What If a Student Shows the Characteristics of Dyslexia?	33
Tips for Interacting with a Student With the Characteristics of Dyslexia	34
Determining Supports and Accommodations	34
Common Accommodations for Students with the Characteristics of Dyslexia.....	35
MTSS for Iowa Educators	36
Appendices	37
Frequently Asked Questions	37
Glossary	39
Acknowledgements	40
References	40

Introduction to the Dyslexia Handbook

How to Use the Dyslexia Handbook

This handbook is a source for parents, caregivers, and educators. To allow all users to access the information they desire, we have provided links to outside sources that contain more information.

When you see the box below, there will be a resource link to click on that will take you to another website or document. The links in the resource boxes will provide further information about the topic.



Iowa Department of Education | [Website Homepage](#)

Purpose

This handbook provides information about dyslexia and literacy for educators, students, families, and community members.

The purpose of this handbook is to:

- Establish a consistent understanding of dyslexia.
- Share common characteristics of dyslexia.
- Learn about evidence-based approaches to help students with the characteristics of dyslexia.
- Guide parents, caregivers, and educators to support students with the characteristics of dyslexia.
- Link to additional resources that support students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Throughout this handbook, you will notice the phrase “students with the characteristics of dyslexia.” This phrase encompasses students who have the characteristics of dyslexia but no formal diagnosis and those who have been formally diagnosed with dyslexia.

Dyslexia Task Force



Iowa Department of Education | [Dyslexia Webpage](#)

History

The Iowa Dyslexia Task Force met in 2018–19 and was comprised of parents, educators, and policymakers. They studied dyslexia in Iowa, identified problems faced by families and educators, and made recommendations for improvement. This handbook was a part of their vision.

Vision

Every student in Iowa will attend a school where educators understand dyslexia and provide explicit, systematic reading instruction as part of universal instruction and

specialized interventions. Students will have access to appropriate accommodations and assistive technology to support learning.

Now

The Task Force report was issued in November 2019. Iowa has formed the Iowa Dyslexia Board to oversee the implementation of the Task Force report and summary.



Dyslexia Task Force | [Executive Summary](#)



Dyslexia Task Force | [Full Report](#)



Iowa Department of Education | [Dyslexia Board](#)

Iowa Dyslexia Legislation

Iowa legislation is regularly revised, so reviewing current legislation is encouraged. To date, dyslexia legislation in Iowa addresses educator preparation programs, licensure and endorsement requirements, dyslexia specialist programming, early literacy implementation, and special education programming. In addition, Iowa legislation has:

- Created a dyslexia task force
- Created a new Dyslexia Specialist teaching endorsement.
- Required the formation of a state dyslexia board.
- Required the Department of Education to hire a Dyslexia Specialist.
- Required specific dyslexia training for AEA, school district personnel, and preservice educators.
- Provided a definition of dyslexia.

This handbook provides additional information regarding legislative efforts regarding students with dyslexia characteristics and support services. Legislation related to specific topics is included in the appropriate sub-section.

General Dyslexia Information

This section of the handbook provides information about dyslexia to build knowledge and increase familiarity with common characteristics and struggles encountered by families and students.

It is recommended that parents and caregivers review this section prior to beginning the Parent Section.

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia presents as an unexpected difficulty for reading in those with the intelligence to be a more proficient reader. (41)

Per Iowa Legislation, dyslexia means:

a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin, is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities, and may include difficulties that 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, as well as secondary consequences such as problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (40)

Who Is at Risk of Dyslexia

It is important to remember that dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellect levels. Even the brightest children can struggle to read. In the past, many incorrectly associated dyslexia with boys. Research has now shown that it occurs almost equally in boys and girls. (41)

Dyslexia tends to run in families. Many parents who have experienced unexpected reading difficulties often have children with similar struggles. (12)

How Common Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is more common than many realize. According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) 80% of people with learning disabilities have dyslexia. The AAP states that dyslexia affects 5-20% of all people. The variance in prevalence statistics is due to the fact that dyslexia exists on a continuum (ranging from mild, moderate, severe and profound), and researchers may use different cutoffs for diagnosis. (48)

Types of Reading Difficulty

Research has identified three main types of reading difficulty. Each type can occur alone or overlap. These include challenges with phonological awareness/word reading accuracy, reading fluency/naming speed, and reading/language comprehension. Some of these difficulties can develop as secondary deficits when a student has dyslexia.

Types of Reading Difficulty	What are the types of reading difficulty?	What can they look like?
Phonological Awareness or Word Reading Accuracy	This is the activity in the brain that allows a person to “understand, distinguish and recall sounds at the sentence, word, syllable, and including phoneme level.” (41)	When someone struggles with Phonological Awareness, it can impact their ability to decode or sound out words when they are reading, making it difficult for them to read accurately.
Reading Fluency / Naming Speed	Fluency is how “accurately, rapidly, and with expression” a person can read a text. Naming speed is a person's ability to quickly name visual stimuli, such as letters, numbers, colors, or objects. (41)	When someone struggles with reading fluency, it can present as a slow reading pace, trouble understanding what they are reading, and a lack of expression while reading.
Reading / Language Comprehension	This impacts one's ability to understand what they have read. These difficulties can occur independently or in combination with the other reading difficulties.	When someone struggles with reading/language comprehension, they may have trouble remembering what they have read or heard, have difficulty with word meanings, tying together information they have heard or read, and making inferences. (45)

Possible Characteristics of Dyslexia

Dyslexia can present in many ways, at varying ages, and in different settings. Its characteristics can be evident at a young age, before children enter school.

It is important to note that not all students who display these characteristics have dyslexia. Formal testing of reading, language, and writing skills is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia; however, a diagnosis is not required to receive appropriate support in school.

Presentation of Dyslexia by Age or Grade Level

Age/Grade-Level	This can look like:
Birth–Age 5 (Preschool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A family history of reading difficulties • Mispronunciation of familiar words • Trouble learning common nursery rhymes • Struggles to recognize letters in their own name • Difficulty recognizing patterns like <i>cat</i>, <i>bat</i>, <i>rat</i> • Challenges in learning and remembering the names of letters in the alphabet
Kindergarten–1st Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A family history of reading difficulties • Reading errors that show no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page • Difficulty understanding words can be broken into smaller units of sound • Complaints about how hard reading is and “disappearing” when it is time to read • An inability to sound out even simple words like <i>cat</i>, <i>nap</i>, or <i>map</i> • Difficulty associating letters with sounds
2nd Grade–High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and awkward reading • Slow acquisition of reading skills • Trouble sounding out new words • Avoidance of reading out loud • A need for extra time to respond to questions • Confusion of words that sound alike, such as <i>lotion</i> and <i>ocean</i> • Poor spelling • Pauses, hesitations, or frequent use of “um” while speaking • Messy handwriting • Low self-esteem
Young Adults & Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A childhood history of reading and spelling difficulties • Reading that seems to require a great effort and is done at a slow pace • Rarely reading for pleasure • Avoidance of reading out loud • Trouble remembering the names of people and places and confusion with names that sound alike • Having a smaller spoken vocabulary than listening vocabulary • Struggles when put on the spot in conversations • Avoidance of words that might be mispronounced

(36)

Dyslexia Is Not ...

Dyslexia is related to reading difficulties, not difficulties that arise from intellectual functioning. There are multitudes of misconceptions surrounding dyslexia. Educators and families must be able to differentiate between fact and myth. Below is a list of common misconceptions.

- Dyslexia is **not a visual problem**.
- Dyslexic **does not mean that a child will never read well**.
- Dyslexia is **not a specific brain weakness but a neurological difficulty with phonemic awareness and processing skills**.
- Dyslexia is **not something that has to be addressed by a certain age**.
- Dyslexia **does not affect intelligence and is not associated with a low IQ**.
- Dyslexia is **not caused by laziness**.
- Dyslexia is **not something that can be cured**.
- Dyslexia is **not a reason to hold your student back a grade**.

As a parent, caregiver, or educator, please understand that working with a child who is presenting characteristics of dyslexia can create trying and frustrating experiences for all involved. Supporting a student with the characteristics of dyslexia can feel overwhelming, but there are many support systems available.

A diagnosis of dyslexia does not mean that a student cannot learn and excel in school. All children have strengths, and many students with the characteristics of dyslexia display strengths in non-reading-related areas. Parents, caregivers, and educators should look for students' strengths and encourage growth in these areas.

Co-Occurring Diagnoses

Some children diagnosed with dyslexia may also experience related challenges that can compound or be related to dyslexia. The following is a list of some of the most common of these compounding disabilities:

Challenge	Explanation
Dyscalculia	Dyscalculia is a learning disability that causes difficulty in mathematical calculations.
Dysgraphia	Dysgraphia is a learning disability that causes difficulty producing legible letters and words or coherent written sentences and paragraphs. (1)
Dysnomia	Dysnomia is a learning disability that causes difficulty in recalling words.
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	ADHD is not a learning disability but can compound the learning disabilities that an individual already has. Dyslexia and ADHD often overlap but are not disorders that are related. Individuals with ADHD struggle with inattention, distractibility, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. (25)

Challenge	Explanation
Processing Speed	Processing speed is the rate at which the brain can receive, process, and respond to information. While it is not a learning or attention issue on its own, it can contribute to learning disorders like dyslexia. (9)

Twice Exceptional

Students who are twice exceptional, sometimes referred to as 2e, have both an “exceptional ability and a disability.” (2) Approximately 2–5% of school-age children are twice exceptional. When a student with the characteristics of dyslexia shows an exceptional ability in another area, they might be identified as twice exceptional. Their giftedness could be identified in areas such as math, music, or science. Although they show these exceptional abilities, they will still face learning or developmental challenges due to their dyslexic characteristics.

Because of the strengths and challenges these students often present, they can be difficult to identify and support. Schools should identify both the giftedness and the deficits for twice exceptional students. When a child's giftedness or disability is missed, it can have emotional and behavioral consequences. (2)

The National Association for Gifted Children recognizes three types of students who could be identified as twice exceptional:

- Identified gifted students who have a learning disability
- Students with a learning disability whose giftedness has not been identified
- Unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average, or above average, school achievement (12)

Students who fall under the twice exceptional category need instruction that strengthens their gifts and talents while providing high-quality instruction and accommodations that will support their areas of need. For students with the characteristics of dyslexia who are twice exceptional, a structured literacy approach may be used. This would include a variety of stimuli, technology, and multiple sensory modes. Parents and caregivers can also nurture their student's strengths outside of school to help them develop their gifts. (12)

Possible Impacts to Student's Well-Being

The impact of dyslexia varies from person to person and depends on the severity of the condition and the effectiveness of instruction or remediation. Dyslexia and other reading difficulties can significantly impact an individual's well-being.

How Can the Characteristics of Dyslexia Affect a Student?

Researchers found that preschoolers who started school happy and well-adjusted began to display negative emotional well-being symptoms once early reading instruction was ineffective. Students can experience these symptoms when they become increasingly frustrated with the reading process, watching their peers surpass them.

Many students become frustrated because of their inability to succeed. They often try extraordinarily hard to achieve success but are unable. In time, the frustration students with the characteristics of dyslexia may experience can often make them reluctant to attempt

reading and writing. These experiences can be painful for the student. When children continue to feel unable to achieve success, it can have lasting impacts on them. (13)

Students with the characteristics of dyslexia can feel and experience many emotions throughout the day

- **Anger - Frustration** is frequently associated with anger. Students may display anger towards their teachers, parents, or other family members. It is common for students to hold back their anger during the school day, only to vent on their family members when they return home.
- **Anxiety** - This is the most commonly reported emotional symptom by children and adults with dyslexia. When frightened, it is normal to avoid the very thing that scares you. When reading or writing causes fear and anxiety, students can begin avoiding the experience entirely.
- **Depression** - Students with the characteristics of dyslexia can sometimes turn their anger inwards instead of showing their feelings to the outside world. By holding onto their anger, and possibly also because of their poor self-image, they can experience depression.
- **Poor Self-Image** - The first few years of school can have a lasting impact on a student's self-image. Students who continue to feel unsuccessful in school can feel powerless and unskilled.
- **Social Insecurities** - The characteristics of dyslexia can impact relationships with peers and family members.



International Dyslexia Association | [Student's Well-Being and Dyslexia](#)

Resilience

What Is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to overcome severe hardship when others do not.



The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity | [Parent Stories](#), [Student Stories](#), and [Success Stories](#)

How does resilience relate to students with the characteristics of dyslexia?

Students with the characteristics of dyslexia can build resilience with the help of strong and emotionally supportive adults.

Parents and caregivers must remember that the most common factor for developing resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a parent, caregiver, or other adult. (3)

It is notable, too, that resilience can be built and improved at any age.



Scanlon Center for School Mental Health | [Nurturing Healthy Minds – In and Out of the Classroom](#)

English Learners

In general terms, an English Learner (EL) is a student who is learning the English language and has a first language other than English or in addition to English. ELs are among the fastest-growing populations in our schools. ELs comprise about 10 percent of the student population nationwide, and Iowa, at nearly seven percent, is catching up. (49)

Goals for ELs include the following:

- Acquire English proficiency in all four domains of language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing
- Be successful in the age-appropriate content classroom setting where English is the language of instruction
- Actively participate in their classroom, school, and community activities and beyond

English Learners and Dyslexia

Dyslexia affects people worldwide, regardless of their culture or language spoken. The occurrence of dyslexia for multilingual students (those who speak more than one language) is the same as in students who speak one language. It requires insight and expertise to determine the needs of ELs who potentially have learning disabilities. Therefore, Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams should include language specialists who understand second language acquisition when making this determination, ensuring the appropriate consideration and support for the whole student. Including language specialists on the IEP team reduces the over- or under-identification of ELs for special education services. Language specialists can assist in providing insightful information, such as how the alphabet and grammar of the first language compare to English, the transfer of literacy across languages, and other cultural and linguistic considerations.

The Iowa Department of Education believes that all students can be successful. Educators and schools should be systematic in their Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process to ensure that all ELs receive language support services as well as any interventions or special education services they need. As schools move into the MTSS process, it is important to consider screening materials that have reduced language complexity and do not require fluency in English as a gatekeeper to obtaining accurate results. Instruments that have visual or verbal components may be helpful. Scores should accurately identify a learning disability rather than reflect a student's emerging English language skills or limited access to formal education.

In addition to conducting a parent interview to learn more about the child's educational history and development, the [Raising the Bar for Dyslexia Screening for Multilingual and Bidialectal Learners—Webinar Summary](#) poses several questions for consideration:

1. What does the Home Language Survey tell us about the student's language background?
2. What do informal assessments tell us about the student's prior and current instruction?

3. What does the English language proficiency assessment tell us about the student's current level of language development?
4. How can we interpret the student's language assessment score and use this knowledge for instruction?
5. What should we consider when selecting and using screening and progress monitoring assessments for ELs? (34)



U.S. Department of Education | [EL Toolkit](#)

Student Support Information

The work of the Iowa Dyslexia Task Force has shaped the direction of dyslexia supports, training, and resources available to educators and families in Iowa schools.

This section of the handbook describes the specific supports, regulations, and resources that could impact a student with the characteristics of dyslexia in Iowa.

Evaluation Terminology

Before sharing information about the support available to students with characteristics of dyslexia, it is important to note that educators in Iowa do not diagnose dyslexia or any other condition. Another important note is that a diagnosis is not required for schools to provide instructional services or specialized support for students with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia.

A diagnosis of dyslexia is typically provided by a clinical provider within the office of a Licensed Psychologist (PhD) or clinic.

Commonly Used Terms

As caregivers support their student, there can be confusion surrounding terms used by schools and clinicians. The chart below explains the differences in commonly used terms within schools and clinical providers. This will help families and educators understand the information shared with them and communicate their student's needs effectively.

Evaluation Terminology

Term	School Evaluation Methods	Clinical Evaluation Methods
Screener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered by the teacher in the classroom Used to identify students who may be at risk of developing reading difficulties Followed by a diagnostic assessment if risks are identified Does not drive instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered by a clinical professional Used to determine if a student is at risk for a cognitive or learning disability Sometimes used as part of a comprehensive assessment to determine what skills might need a more in-depth assessment Does not diagnose, but may rule out other concerns

Term	School Evaluation Methods	Clinical Evaluation Methods
Diagnostic Assessment (Schools might call this a phonics or word-reading survey.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered by school personnel or AEA specialists Designed as a flexible process to gather targeted information Used to identify areas where instruction is lacking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered by a clinical professional Designed as a formal process for possible diagnosis Followed by a formal report specifying a diagnosis and recommendations including patterns of strengths and weaknesses
Evidence-Based Reading Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researched instructional methods in reading validated by data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researched instructional methods in reading validated by data
Progress Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled frequent, regular checks of learning growth Designed to provide feedback to determine if instruction is meeting a student's needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled frequent, regular checks of learning growth Are not typically completed in a clinical setting but when provided to the school, may provide valuable information for the diagnostic process
Formative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments FOR learning Used by teachers and students as part of instruction Used to provide feedback for adjustments to ongoing teaching and learning Allows students to practice with clear learning targets, examples and models of strong and weak work, regular descriptive feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are not typically completed in the clinical setting but when provided by the school, may be used by a diagnostic professional as part of the comprehensive evaluation
Summative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments OF learning, such as the Iowa State Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) Given at a point in time to measure and monitor student learning Used to provide feedback to educators, students, parents, and community members Used to adjust instructional programs, report student progress, identify and place students, and grade students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed to indicate a student's skills Used to help provide a diagnosis Used to determine recommendations <p>Note: Most diagnostic evaluations would be considered summative assessments as they are an assessment of skills at a particular point in time.</p>



Parallel Paths of Support

Caregivers and school personnel are equally invested in supporting a student who has been identified as having difficulty learning to read. Frequently, this difficulty is initially recognized in school literacy screening results; although it can show up prior to this.

The visual below demonstrates the parallel paths that might occur with the caregivers and educators when dyslexia is suspected. Additional information about this support is included below the visual.



Required Screening

Iowa Early Literacy legislation ([Iowa Code 279.68](#)) requires schools assess all students for reading in kindergarten through third grade using an approved reading assessment, referred to as a universal screener. The universal screening process allows schools to identify students at risk for reading concerns so that they can provide early intervention. In most cases, universal screening will identify students with the characteristics of dyslexia who require intervention.

Pursuing a Formal Diagnosis of Dyslexia

It is important to know that neither Iowa schools nor AEAs diagnose dyslexia or any other condition. Dyslexia is typically diagnosed by a private professional with appropriate credentialing. The professionals who assess for dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities have extensive evaluation training as part of a graduate degree in education, reading, speech language pathology, school psychology, psychology, or neuropsychology.

Educators, while not responsible for diagnosing dyslexia, are responsible for ensuring students receive evidenced-based Tier 1 instruction, appropriate interventions, and the disability-related services — 504 supports or special education programming — they may need.

Questions for an Upcoming Evaluation

Once a family decides to pursue a formal evaluation for their student to determine whether or not they will receive a diagnosis of dyslexia, there are important questions to consider as well as a number of questions to ask the private evaluators to ensure educated decisions are made for the student. Iowa's Area Education Agencies (AEAs) have prepared a series of questions that parents can use to prepare for their child's dyslexia evaluation.

Questions for Caregivers:

- What specific questions about my student's reading skills do I want this person and the evaluation to answer?
- What do I already know about my student's reading, language, and writing skills?
- What additional information am I seeking?

Questions to Ask the Clinical Evaluator:

- What experiences do you have evaluating children with significant reading difficulties?
- What specific training do you have in reading and reading difficulties?
- What do you charge for a reading/writing evaluation?
- If appropriate, do you provide a diagnosis?
- Please describe the evaluation process, including timelines.
- What assessments do you use? How do you use these instruments in the diagnosis process?
- If I give my permission, will you contact school staff regarding how my student functions in the classroom setting, insight from instructional staff, or assessment data that may be available?
- If I give my permission, will you contact my student's teacher(s)/school to obtain information or data about my student from them?
- How long after the evaluation will you meet with us to explain the results?
- Do you provide a written report as part of your evaluation? What will be included in that report?
- Will you meet with my student's teacher(s)/school and explain the results? Is that included in your fee? If not, what would be the additional fee?
- Can you provide me with a list of references from parents who have hired you to test their child?

If the best route is to pursue formal evaluation, consider the following information.

- Independent private evaluations can cost \$1,000 or more. Many parents find that contacting their insurance company first is helpful. Some companies do not cover either educational or neuropsychological testing or may cover it only if completed in certain types of facilities. Some employer cafeteria plans will reimburse for this evaluation.
- Reviewing lists compiled by local organizations may help families find the professional that best fits their family's needs.
- Once a family selects a professional with whom to work, they will begin sharing pertinent background information. This often involves answering questions and

questionnaires regarding concerns for the student and the need for the evaluation. Some of this information will be gathered from the student's school team.

- At the appointment, the student will be given tests that can take a significant amount of time to administer. These tests measure phonological awareness, reading comprehension, rapid naming, spelling, writing, math, attention and memory.
- The professional will then score the tests and determine whether the child will receive a formal dyslexia diagnosis. Please remember that if a student is diagnosed with dyslexia, it does not automatically qualify them for special education services. A student's family will need to work with the school-based team to determine whether or not they should begin the special education assessment process. The professional who made the diagnosis will typically provide recommendations to support the student. (15)

Diagnosed with dyslexia?

What Does a Diagnosis of Dyslexia by a private provider Mean for a Child at Their School?

If a professional diagnoses a student with dyslexia, a list of recommendations and support is typically provided to assist the student. A formal diagnosis does not automatically require or guarantee special education services.

The child's guardian should contact the student's teacher to begin work with the school-based team to determine if the student is eligible for additional support in school.

Iowa has specific requirements for this process and the necessary steps. Building a relationship with the student's school-based team is integral to this process.

Iowa Educational Supports Explained

Teachers routinely provide support to all students within their classrooms. All students in Iowa schools can receive additional support through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

MTSS in Iowa addresses the needs of every student to improve outcomes using data driven decisions and evidence-based practices in instruction. The MTSS framework identifies instructional needs and monitors the impact of instruction for all learners.

What Is MTSS?

MTSS is the acronym for Multi-Tiered System of Supports. Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in Iowa addresses the needs of every student to improve outcomes using data-driven decisions and evidence-based practices in instruction. The MTSS framework identifies instructional needs and monitors the impact of instruction for all learners. (20)

MTSS is a framework that uses data-based decision-making for continuous improvement to enhance all learners' academic and social-emotional-behavioral health outcomes, preparing them for their future at every step of their educational journey.

This tiered framework focuses resources where they are most needed, removes barriers, uses evidence-based practices to support all learners, and targets supplemental and intensive interventions. MTSS is also a critical framework for systems, using continuous

improvement processes to identify system-level needs at the educator, classroom, school, or district levels.

Iowa's MTSS Framework

Iowa's MTSS framework includes interwoven processes and protocols that identify, evaluate, deliver, and adjust instruction for all students, not just those at risk for reading difficulty or with dyslexia. MTSS works to meet the needs of all students by creating systems and supports, school and district-wide, that will ensure adequate resources are available to provide tiered support to all students.

Iowa's MTSS is made up of five components:

- evidence-based curriculum and instruction is provided at the universal level for all students;
- universal screening is completed with all students;
- evidence-based instructional interventions at the targeted and intensive levels are provided to each student who needs them;
- progress monitoring occurs for learners scoring below expectations and
- data-based decision-making is throughout the school/district system. (20)



Iowa Department of Education | [Iowa's Dyslexia Related MTSS Information](#)

School Psychologist Testing

School psychologists may conduct an evaluation that includes academic achievement testing and an assessment of the critical underlying language skills that are closely linked to dyslexia. If a profile emerges that shows characteristics of readers with dyslexia and it will serve the student's interest in the best possible way, a 504 or IEP might be developed.

Questions to Ask the Student's Teacher:

- I suspect my student has dyslexia. What do you notice about my student's reading strengths and weaknesses?
- What additional support is available for my student in their areas of weakness?
- What can I do at home to support my student's instruction in the classroom?
- What additional resources can I review to understand dyslexia better?
- What type of communication plan can we set up so that I can receive regular updates on my student's reading progress?
- Will my student be evaluated further to see if he or she needs an IEP?

The Role of a Dyslexia Specialist

Iowa families now have a critical tool to address dyslexia. Approved Iowa institutions of higher education now offer a dyslexia specialist endorsement. Educators with this endorsement can support teachers and families by offering research-based instructional methods.

Students with the characteristics of dyslexia often have difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor spelling, and decoding abilities. Students who show characteristics of dyslexia and do not receive proper instruction will likely have problems with reading comprehension throughout school. The instructional methods provided by Dyslexia Specialists address these difficulties. (21)



Iowa Department of Education | [Dyslexia Endorsement Information](#)

Legal Documents

What Is a 504 Plan?

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) prohibits schools from discriminating against students with disabilities. It sets minimum standards for providing related services and aides to students with disabilities that substantially limit a major life activity. All accredited Iowa schools must comply with Section 504, which applies to preschool, elementary, secondary, private and adult education.

- For questions related to seeking an evaluation for Section 504, contact the local school. Additional information about 504 at the Office of Civil Rights, Protecting Students with Disabilities Frequently Asked Questions.
- 504 Plans provide students with a list of appropriate accommodations to help students with disabilities access general education content and environments. Accommodations may be adaptations or changes in the classroom, how school tasks are presented, or both.

Students with the characteristics of dyslexia would qualify for a 504 plan if the condition substantially limits a major life activity. For most students with the characteristics of dyslexia this would include such things as speaking, learning and working. It is important to note that a student may have a disability and be eligible for a 504 even if the student earns good grades.



International Dyslexia Association | [Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia](#)



U.S. Department of Education | [Protecting Students with Disabilities](#)

What Is an IEP?

Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are created for eligible students with disabilities. An IEP outlines a student's unique needs, annual goals, and the special education services and supports determined necessary by the IEP team to ensure a free, appropriate public education, often abbreviated as FAPE.

Dyslexia is a condition under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) category of Specific Learning Disability. Not all students with the characteristics of dyslexia need special education services. A student qualifies for special education if dyslexia impacts one or more of the **performance domains** in their educational environment and results in the student needing specifically tailored instruction.

Iowa uses a non-categorical model for special education. This means an evaluation is focused on a student's needs and whether they are eligible for special education rather than whether the student falls into disability categories. This does not mean schools cannot talk about a student's dyslexia diagnosis or characteristics of dyslexia. Evaluation teams are expected to be skilled and knowledgeable regarding all special education disability categories. Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 teams can and should openly discuss and document concerns regarding dyslexia or the characteristics of dyslexia in supporting a student's educational plan. Iowa's Dyslexia Specialists are available to support this communication.

Individual Education Program (IEP) teams focus on answering two questions:

1. Does the student have a suspected disability?
2. Does the suspected disability mean the student needs educational support, Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), or both?

Do You Need More Information About IEPs?

Contact the local school first. For additional support, please contact the local AEAs and express the desire to seek an evaluation for special education.

- If a student has an IEP, they are part of the special education program at the school.
- Special education involves specially designed instruction tailored to each child's unique needs and is provided at no cost to parents.
- Iowa uses a non-categorical model for special education. This means an evaluation is focused on students' needs and whether they are eligible for special education rather than whether students fall into disability categories. This does not mean schools cannot talk about a student's dyslexia diagnosis/characteristics of dyslexia.

Evaluation teams are expected to be skilled and knowledgeable regarding all special education disability categories.



U.S. Department of Education | [Protecting Students with Disabilities](#)

Additional Information

Accommodations and Modifications

Both accommodations and modifications strategically support students. However, there are significant differences between the two terms. It is crucial for parents, caregivers, educators, and students to know the difference and understand that the formal decision to implement accommodations or modifications rests on the student's IEP team.

What Is the Difference?

The International Dyslexia Association provides helpful information on differentiating between accommodations and modifications.

Accommodations	Modifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on providing equal access to the entire school experience for students • Can be provided to any student to support instruction or assessment • Allow students to access the information shared in the classroom and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities • May not change the expectations or standards for academic achievements. <p>If a student has a 504 Plan, sample accommodations are below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Dyslexia Association Sample Accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly impact what the student is expected to learn and often occur as modifications to curriculum content, assignments, and assessments • May require a lower level of reading ability or skills to complete the given assignment • May teach at a lower level of the required grade-level concepts and information • Can occur during instruction or assessments

(10)

Assistive Technology

What Is It? How Will It Help a Student?

According to the Iowa Reading Research Center:

Assistive technology includes devices, software, or equipment purposefully chosen to help children with reading disabilities complete academic and everyday tasks.

Assistive technology facilitates students' full participation in academic instruction and allows them to demonstrate their learning in equitable ways. (24)

Many schools offer assistive technology services. If the student will benefit from using assistive technology in school, it is best to check with the local school.

Parent Tip

Assistive technology can benefit those with dyslexia who are trying to keep up with learning content or completing homework assignments. Standard features of assistive technology include speech-to-text, text-to-speech, annotation tools, text simplification, and more.



U.S. Department of Education | [Protecting Students with Disabilities](#)



Iowa Reading Research Center | [Assistive Technology for Families](#)

Parent Information & Resources

The Iowa Department of Education, its schools, educators, and teams want to ensure that caregivers are provided with helpful resources to aid in supporting a student who has the characteristics of dyslexia. Some may be just beginning this process, needing a large amount of information at once. At the same time, others may be further along in their journey and are looking for precise information to address current concerns. This handbook is designed to be user-friendly to support this journey.

This section will contain specific parent and caregiver information to reference anytime.

Where to Start?

WHAT STRENGTHS

does your child exhibit?

	RESILIENCE Students learn to persevere through challenges and setbacks surrounding reading creating significant resilience. Students with the characteristics of dyslexia may know how to adapt and keep trying.		STRONG THINKING SKILLS Those with the characteristics of dyslexia can have strengths when conceptualizing, reasoning, imagining, and thinking abstractly.
CURIOUS Many children are often extremely curious and engaged with a wide variety of topics that interest them. They love to know things deeply.		EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE Many students with the characteristics of dyslexia display exceptional empathy and warmth.	
	MATURE BEYOND THEIR YEARS Some students have learned to process information differently, often making them more mature than their peers.		CREATIVE Many students with the characteristics of dyslexia are extremely creative, often thinking "out of the box". They think of options and ideas that others might not.
ABILITY TO SOLVE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS Students with the characteristics of dyslexia often think creatively giving them the ability to solve practical problems with ease.		STRONG LISTENING COMPREHENSION Some students that struggle to read yet they have a strong ability to understand what is read to them. They have honed in on this strength, providing them with a great ability to comprehend information provided orally.	
	LARGE VOCABULARY Some children with the characteristics of dyslexia have a large vocabulary for their age and in comparison to their peers.		ENJOY SUBJECTS NOT DEPENDENT ON READING Many individuals enjoy learning in subjects that they excel in, areas such as: solving puzzles, building models, Science, Social Studies, Math, Art, Philosophy, and PE.

How to Help a Child Live and Thrive with Dyslexia

Although every child indeed has strengths, like most learning disabilities, students with the characteristics of dyslexia often experience hidden impacts. These students can experience social and emotional impacts from their reading struggles. Though considered a reading disorder, dyslexia can also affect a child's social and communication skills.

If a child has characteristics of dyslexia, they may feel frustrated or embarrassed if asked to do things — like reading out loud — that are difficult for them, especially during class or when other students are present. However, the problems can often go beyond school. Dyslexia's impact on day-to-day activities — playing board games, following directions, or even reading clocks accurately — can cause kids to feel self-conscious and avoidant.

Helping the student understand their learning disorder and become their own advocate can provide them with the tools they need to manage their characteristics of dyslexia — both academically and emotionally. (36)

Start with Talking About It...

To help a student navigate the ups and downs of their reading difficulties, caregivers must speak honestly with them about the characteristics of dyslexia. If children understand what dyslexia is, they can more often separate their reading difficulties from their self-worth.

Conversation Starters:

To help build a student's self-image and help them understand dyslexia, the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity offers the following tips to get the conversations started:

- Let the student know that there is a reason they have trouble reading. They are often relieved to learn that there is a name to explain their difficulties. It is an obstacle, not impossible.
- In a positive tone, share the facts about dyslexia, highlighting the student's individual strengths.
- Reinforce that they will learn to read. There are many supports out there that will help them.
- Keep the conversation going. Remind the student of the things they do well and continue to support those things.
- If the student does not have a hobby or an area where they can have positive experiences, it is important to help them find one. They need an area in which they can feel victorious and develop confidence. Let their strengths define them, not their weakness. (42)

Required Family Involvement

Schools are required to engage families when their student is identified as persistently at risk in reading. They are required to provide parents with a written description of the following:

- Reading services currently provided.
- Proposed supplemental instructional services and supports. Suggested strategies for helping the student at home.
- Regular updates regarding student progress toward reading proficiency.

Schools must collaborate with families to create a parent contract outlining these reading interventions. ([Iowa Administrative Code \(IAC\) 281-62.4\(4\)](#))

Note: Caregivers may request a specific reading program. Schools must carefully consider the requests, but the district will choose the reading program based on each case. (17)

Required Dyslexia Related Supports Beyond Third Grade

Students persistently at risk in reading at the end of third grade must continue receiving intensive reading instruction until grade-level proficiency is met.

Interventions may be implemented as part of a MTSS, the school's required supplemental intervention system, or both. ([IAC 281-62.10\(1\)](#)) ([IAC 281 281-41.312](#))

Additionally, schools are required to address student needs through:

- Differentiated instruction.
- Supplemental interventions.
- Support tailored to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Parents should contact their local school with questions about interventions and whether their student may have a disability.

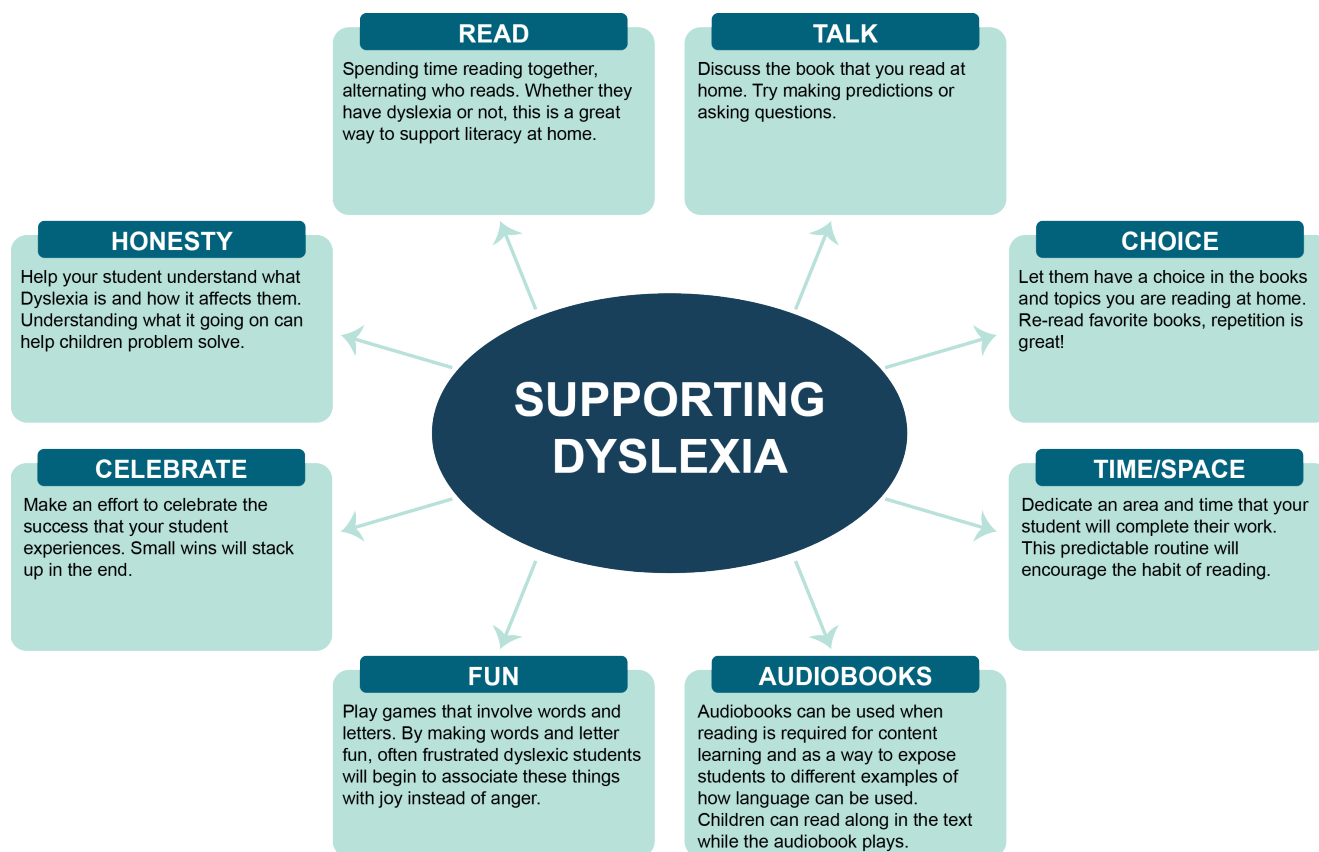
Tips from Other Parents

Countless parents have been through similar experiences. Read the tips below to gain insight from other parents.

- **Listen:** It can be difficult for any student to express their feelings. Feeling heard has a major impact on the student's well-being.
- **Encourage:** It can take many reminders for the student to learn that they are not "dumb" or "lazy". Encouragement will help them realize they are not defined by their characteristics of dyslexia.
- **Be Intentional:** Choose words wisely when experiencing frustrating situations. Try to avoid being discouraging.
- **Celebrate:** Recognize the student's unique strengths. Rewarding progress, not perfection, is important for those with the characteristics of dyslexia.
- **Set Achievable Goals:** Setting realistic goals can be hard for students with the characteristics of dyslexia as they often strive for perfection. Help them set a goal they can achieve and experience success.
- **Relax with Spelling:** Allow and encourage the student to keep trying even if they do not know how to spell a word. There are many spelling supports available that can help the student.
- **Slow is Okay:** Remind the student that reading slowly is acceptable. It is far more important for them to understand what they read than to read quickly.
- **Be Honest:** Share the things with which you struggle. This can help the student to feel less lonely and help them realize that everyone experiences difficulties. (13 & 43)

What Can Be Done at Home?

As a parent of a student with the characteristics of dyslexia, it can be challenging to make reading fun and engaging. The tips below may provide caregivers with ideas that can be incorporated into a reading routine at home.



Helpful Resources

Local Supports

Parents can use the following resources at any time. These organizations exist to provide localized support to Iowa families.



[ASK Resource Center](#) | As one of its projects, ASK serves as the Iowa's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). They provide objective advocacy, information, resources and impartial training for parents and children. They work in partnership with professionals to establish and meet high expectations for children with disabilities.



[Iowa Area Education Agencies \(AEAs\)](#) | Iowa's AEAs partner with local school districts to help all children learn to read. They provide professional learning and support schools in early intervention efforts. Educators and families may contact their local AEA staff if they have questions about eligibility for special education services.



[Iowa Reading Research Center](#) | The IRRC aims to improve the literacy proficiency of preschool through twelfth-grade students. In addition to a broad range of literacy resources, they provide dyslexia-specific resources. The IRRC offers free assistive technology consultation for families of children with dyslexia and other reading disabilities. It is a part of the University of Iowa College of Education and operates in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Education. There are many great resources available for caregivers with the [Caregivers Resources Hub](#).

Additional Helpful Resources



[Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview Module](#) | Families in Iowa with a student with dyslexia may complete the module to gain a basic understanding of this disability. The knowledge gained may be helpful in advocating for the student at school and providing a common starting point in knowledge for families and educators who have completed the module.



[Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity](#) | Renowned experts in the field of dyslexia lead this center. Their site contains immense amounts of information for families and educators alike.

[Preparing for your first meeting at school.](#)

[What to do if you suspect your child has dyslexia?](#)



[Dyslexia Help-The University of Michigan](#) | This website contains specific dyslexia related information for families.

[Dyslexia Glossary](#): This is a helpful resource to find definitions of dyslexia-related terms.

Educator Information and Resources

This section focuses on educator-related dyslexia supports, dyslexia training, and classroom-specific dyslexia information.

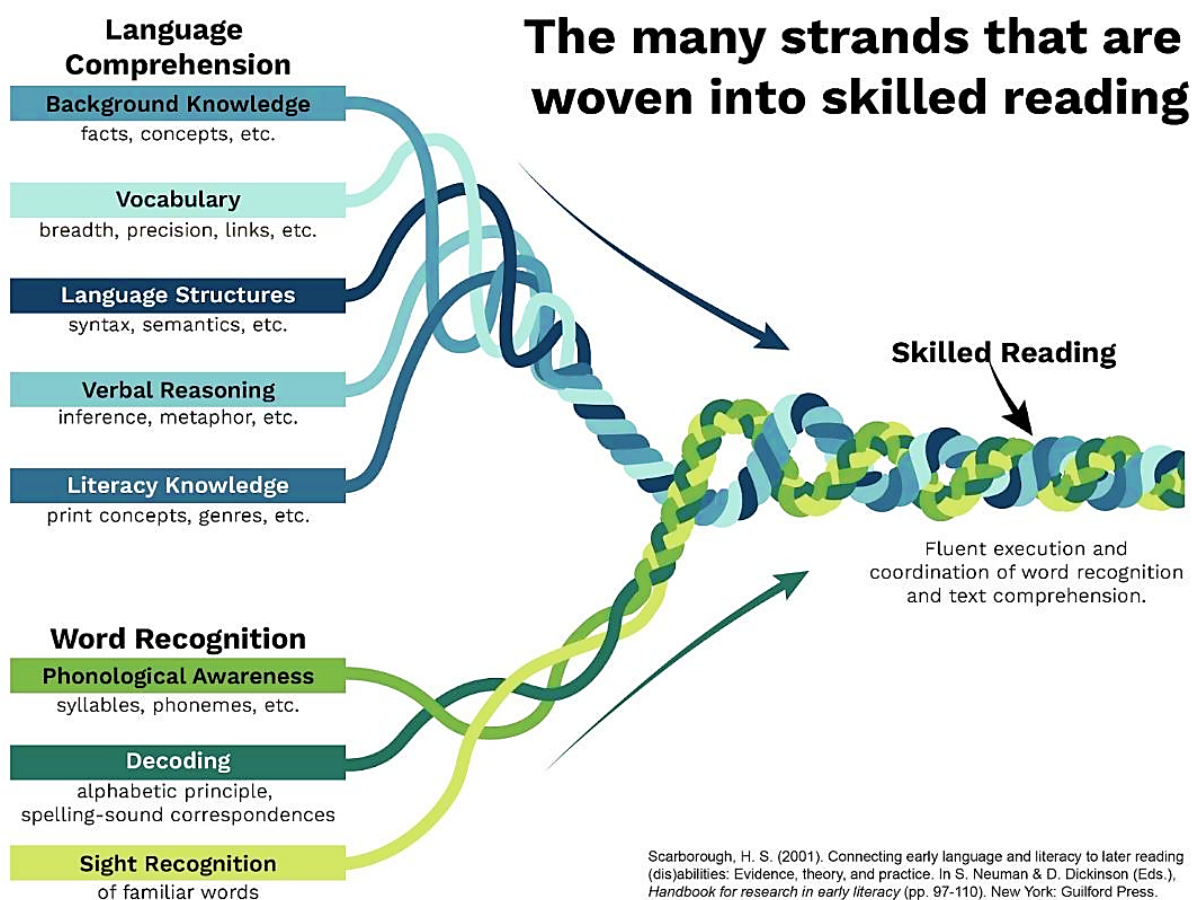
Instruction

Science of Reading

The Science of Reading explains how individuals learn to read and how educators can maximize student literacy outcomes.

The Iowa Department of Education supports the Science of Reading. The adopted model for the Science of Reading is Scarborough's Rope.

Scarborough's Rope



Iowa Department of Education | [Science of Reading](#)

Instructing Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

Explicit and systematic literacy instruction are the most effective strategies that address dyslexia and characteristics of dyslexia. The International Dyslexia Association refers to this instruction as Structured Literacy. Explicit and systematic literacy instruction is necessary across all tiers of MTSS and is essential for learning foundational skills. (10)

Research repeatedly shows that explicit and systematic literacy instruction:

- Is essential for reducing the risk of reading concerns.
- Is the most effective set of strategies for addressing dyslexia or the characteristics of dyslexia.

Schools are required to provide explicit and systematic literacy instruction for students with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia who are persistently at risk. (17)



International Dyslexia Association | [What is Structured Literacy?](#)



Iowa Department of Education | [Iowa's Dyslexia Related MTSS Information](#)

Required Training for Iowa Educators

In-service teachers and other educators in Iowa are required to complete the Dyslexia Overview module to refresh and enhance their knowledge of this disability. The base of knowledge provided by the module will help them recognize when students might be exhibiting the characteristics of dyslexia. The module also covers the essential elements of a supportive learning environment for students identified with dyslexia.



Iowa Reading Research Center | [Dyslexia Overview Module](#)

The following educational personnel are required to complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview Module by 7/1/2024 or within one year of employment after 7/1/2024. This module takes approximately one hour and is free for any Iowa resident. This is a one-time requirement for educators, including:

- Any person employed by an AEA who holds a license, certificate, statement of recognition, or authorization other than coaching
 - School district personnel with the following endorsements:
 - PK-K teacher, prekindergarten-kindergarten classroom (103)
 - PK-K early childhood special education (262)
 - Elementary special education (260; 263; 264)
 - Prekindergarten through grade 3 (100; 106)
 - Birth-grade 3 inclusive settings (1001)
 - Dyslexia specialist (1761)
 - English as a second language (104)
 - School district practitioners and paraprofessionals assigned as:
 - Title I teachers (102; 148; 176)
 - Title I paraprofessionals under ESSA
- (17)



Iowa Department of Education | [Endorsement List](#)

Recommended Training

Iowa Reading Research Center offers the following training courses to educators in Iowa.



Iowa Reading Research Center | [Understanding & Observing the Literacy Skills Associated with Dyslexia Module](#)



Iowa Reading Research Center | [Teaching Students to Map Phonemes to Graphemes Module](#)

(26 & 28)

What If a Student Shows the Characteristics of Dyslexia?

Iowa Educators are an integral part of the support team for students with the characteristics of dyslexia. Classroom teachers spend significant time directly supporting students throughout their school experience. The information they gather, based on instruction and behavior, is crucial to ensuring students are receiving the support they need. As such, the classroom teacher might be one of the first people to recognize that a student may be showing characteristics of dyslexia.

It is vital that teachers feel empowered to take the appropriate steps to help support their students. Upon noticing that a student is displaying the characteristics of dyslexia, the teacher can:

- Find time to have a thoughtful discussion with the student's family to share the concern. It is acceptable to mention that characteristics of dyslexia are being displayed. However, remember, educators cannot diagnose dyslexia. Sharing concerns and mentioning the characteristics of dyslexia does not obligate the school or district to provide services. Many families will ask for resources during these discussions. This handbook is a great resource to share with families since it contains a plethora of information about the characteristics of dyslexia. This is an excellent opportunity to remind the family that the school will support their student with all of their educational needs.
- Be a critical support during the evaluation process. Classroom teachers are often asked to fill out questionnaires or answer questions directly from the professional who is conducting the official assessment.
- Work with the school team and the student's family to ensure the student has the necessary support within the classroom. This could mean assisting with the start of the special education evaluation process.
- Keep in mind that a formal dyslexia diagnosis does not automatically qualify a student for special education services. The school-based team will be responsible

for determining if the student qualifies for a 504, IEP, or traditional classroom support. Formal evaluations will have recommendations for the school based on the student's specific needs. It is important to review the recommendations with the entire school-based team to make sure everyone on the student's team understands how to support the student. (6)

Tips for Interacting with a Student With the Characteristics of Dyslexia

When children feel genuinely supported and encouraged by someone in their lives, they are more likely to experience success. Teachers have a unique opportunity to provide this support and encouragement. When engaging with students with the characteristics of dyslexia, please keep these tips in mind.

- Help students express their emotions and truly listen to what they are feeling. Students with the characteristics of dyslexia can have trouble expressing their feelings, even though they frequently experience depression, anxiety, and anger.
- Reward for growth as students with the characteristics of dyslexia may have trouble meeting grade-level standards for instructional assignments and assessments. Although grades are important, students with the characteristics of dyslexia may become discouraged if high grades are the only way to achieve success in the classroom.
- Strive to use appropriate language in all interactions in order to avoid discouraging the student. Working with students with the characteristics of dyslexia can be frustrating for teachers and families. Avoiding words and phrases like “lazy” or “you aren’t even trying” during frustrating interactions.
- Help students with the characteristics of dyslexia experience success by aiding them with setting achievable goals. If a goal the student wants to set is too large, as it often is, they may never achieve it. However, a teacher may thoughtfully guide them towards setting a smaller, yet achievable goal, and their success may help improve their self-image and willingness to continue to work towards new goals. (6)



Decoding Dyslexia Iowa | [Dyslexia In the Classroom: What Every Teacher Needs to Know](#)

Determining Supports and Accommodations

A four-step process can be used to select, implement, and evaluate supports and accommodations. This process is adapted from the collaborative inquiry process in MTSS (20) and the analysis of a student's needs for assistive technology in the special education process in the SETT framework. (47)

The teacher and the decision-making team should follow these guidelines when making decisions about supports and accommodations:

- Support for learning and performance or accommodations do not change or reduce the expectations of the standards.
- Supports and accommodations facilitate instruction and assessment by reducing barriers to learning and performance.
- Student's need for specific support or accommodations is a data-based decision.

- Students will need the same support or accommodations for classroom instruction and assessment, including statewide and district-wide assessments.
- Students' willingness to use the support or accommodation for instruction and assessment (38).

Common Accommodations for Students with the Characteristics of Dyslexia

Educators can support each student's unique needs by implementing the appropriate accommodations best suited for the student. When providing accommodations to students, there are four basic types that may be used during instruction and assessment: presentation, response, setting and timing/pacing. Below are examples of some of the accommodations a teacher might provide to their students with the characteristics of dyslexia. Please keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive list; there are many more accommodations available. A school-based team is the best resource for more information.

1. Presentation - Allowing the student to access instructional materials in ways that consider the student's weakness in accessing print. This can look like:
 - a. Verbal instructions
 - b. Larger print
 - c. Visual prompts or cues
 - d. Calculators
 - e. Speech-to-text or text-to-speech software
 - f. Grammar or spelling checker
2. Response - Providing the student an alternative way to complete the given activity and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This can look like:
 - a. Marking answers in a textbook
 - b. Dictating answers to a scribe or using an audio-recorder
 - c. Pointing to response choices
 - d. Typing choices
3. Setting - Offering the student a change in location to complete a test or assignment. This could look like:
 - a. Working individually or in a small group
 - b. Reducing distractions by providing a separate desk or location in the classroom
 - c. Providing them with a separate room to work without distractions
4. Timing/Pacing - Changing the amount of time the student is allowed to complete the test or assignment. This could look like:
 - a. Allowing students extra time to complete their test or assessment (10)

Understanding potential accommodations is essential, but **teaching students how to use the tools they can access is equally important**. Students need to understand how to use an allowed tool to be able to use them effectively. Depending on the accommodation and the student, this can take varying amounts of time and support. **Educators should be willing to continue supporting the student with using the accommodation until they can use it effectively.**

MTSS for Iowa Educators

Educators are expected to understand and implement the MTSS process within your classroom. The following pages, resources, and links will provide a solid understanding of Iowa's expectations and available tools. The [Supplemental and Intensive Tiers Guide and Website](#) are great tools to bookmark.

The Supplemental and Intensive Tiers guide and Iowa's MTSS framework are based on the following Beliefs and Guiding Principles:

- Some learners need and will benefit from receiving additional support.
- All children can learn and achieve grade-level standards, local behavioral expectations, and skills for learning.
- Data should be used efficiently to inform intervention decisions, including identification, monitoring, and adjusting.
- Student learning should focus on the [Iowa Academic Standards](#), local behavioral expectations, skills for learning, and developmentally appropriate goals that promote independence.
- Evidence-based practices and fidelity of implementation should be prioritized.
- Collaboration amongst a team of educators, administrators, families/caregivers, and the learner is essential.
- All learners, regardless of student group or status, are general education students first.



Iowa Department of Education | [Supplemental and Intensive Tiers Website](#)

Appendices

Frequently Asked Questions

The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity has created a thorough bank of questions for parents, educators, and communities. The table below contains excerpts from their Frequently Asked Questions page. (42)

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader. It is most commonly due to a difficulty in phonological processing (the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken language), which affects the ability of an individual to speak, read, spell, and, often, learn a second language.

How common is dyslexia?

According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) 80% of people with learning disabilities have dyslexia. The AAP states that dyslexia affects 5-20% of all people.

Can people with dyslexia learn to read?

Most children and adults with dyslexia can learn to read—but with more effort than their peers. The typical child can learn to read “fluently,” meaning reading is automatic, fast, and pleasurable. By contrast, many dyslexic children remain “manual” readers who read slowly and with great effort.

Can dyslexia be cured?

Dyslexia can’t be “cured”—it is lifelong. But with early screening, early diagnosis, early evidence-based reading intervention and appropriate accommodations, dyslexic individuals can become highly successful students and adults. See [a list of accommodations](#).

Are schools required to provide accommodations to students with dyslexia?

If the student qualifies for an IEP (Individualized Education Program) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the IEP recommends accommodations, then the school must provide them. If the student does not qualify for an IEP, he or she may still be eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See more information on the [laws covering dyslexia](#).

Can students with dyslexia perform well in school?

Many dyslexic students perform very well in school. They are usually highly motivated and work extremely hard. In many cases they have been identified early and have received evidence-based interventions and accommodations, such as extra time on tests, which allows them to demonstrate their knowledge. Dyslexic students have completed rigorous programs at highly selective colleges and graduate and professional schools.

Can wearing glasses or different fonts help those with dyslexia learn to read?

At its core, dyslexia is a problem accessing the sound of spoken language. It is not a visual disorder. Early screening, early diagnosis, early evidence-based reading intervention, and appropriate accommodations are needed to help dyslexic individuals.



The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity | [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

The International Dyslexia Association is another great source of answers for commonly asked questions.

Is dyslexia inherited? Is this my fault?

Since dyslexia is usually inherited, this means that one or both parents may have had similar school problems. Whether parents have experienced dyslexia or not, they may deny the existence of dyslexia and believe that if their student buckled down, they could succeed. When faced with a student who is having learning difficulties, a parent who lived through similar experiences may relive their failures and frustrations through their student's school experience. This brings back powerful and terrifying emotions, which can have an impact on their relationship with the child and their ability to work with school personnel. (13).



International Dyslexia Association | [Dyslexia Basics](#)

Glossary

- **504 plan:** A 504 plan is a legal document created for a child who has a confirmed or suspected disability to ensure they receive accommodations critical to their academic success. (27)
- **Accommodations:** Accommodations are supports or services provided to assist a student access the general curriculum and demonstrate learning. (22)
- **Area Education Agency (AEA):** The state of Iowa is divided into nine AEAs. Each AEA provides local school districts with support and assistance. (22)
- **Assistive Technology (AT):** Assistive technology refers to devices, software, or equipment that help children with reading disabilities complete academic and everyday tasks. Examples include applications for assisting with handwriting, reading text aloud, or allowing children to write using their voice. (27)
- **Decoding:** Decoding involves applying knowledge of sound-spelling correspondences to convert the graphemes in a word to the sounds they represent and then blending the sounds together to read the word. (27)
- **English Learner (EL):** “English learner” is a federally defined category that describes students who may not display an educational benefit from instruction when it is delivered in English. This category includes multiple defining criteria (e.g., the student’s native language is not English and/or they were not born in the United States). (27)
- **Individualized Education Plan (IEP):** According to the Iowa Department of Education, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is “a written statement for each individual with a disability, developed in accordance with Iowa’s administrative rules of special education, that describes the special education and support and related services that the individual will receive.” (27)
- **Iowa Department of Education:** The education agency in the state of Iowa. (22)
- **Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC):** “The Iowa Reading Research Center strives to improve the literacy skills of all students through research with students, professional learning for educators, and technical assistance for school districts.” (27)
- **Local Education Agency (LEA):** The local school district. (22)
- **Modifications:** Supports provided to students that change the instructional content and knowledge that a student is required to obtain. (10)
- **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** “A framework that uses data-based decision-making for continuous improvement to enhance academic and social-emotional-behavioral health outcomes for all learners, in order to prepare them for their future at every step of their educational journey.” (16)
- **Phonemic Awareness:** “The ability to hear and manipulate individual speech sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.” (30)
- **Phonics:** Phonics is instruction that focuses on the relationship between phonemes, the individual sounds of spoken language, and graphemes, the letters and letter combinations that represent those sounds. (27)
- **Phonological Awareness:** Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and distinguish the different sounds in spoken language and understand how those sounds can be combined to create language. It includes identifying and manipulating larger units of speech sounds—such as rhymes, syllables, and onset-rime—as well as individual units of sound by isolating, identifying, segmenting, adding, deleting, and substituting sounds in words. (27)

- **Reading Comprehension:** “An understanding of the information read within a text.” (7)
- **Reading Fluency:** “A measure of the accuracy and speed (or rate) of reading.” (7)
- **Speech Language Pathologist (SLP):** An expert in communication who can assess, diagnose, and treat individuals with communication and swallowing disorders. (22)
- **Science of Reading (SoR):** A vast body of research from multiple fields (i.e., education, linguistics, psychology, neuroscience) and derives from multiple studies that explain how individuals learn to read and the practices most effective in maximizing student literacy outcomes. (19)
- **Special Education:** Supports and services provided to eligible individuals to address their unique needs. (22)

Acknowledgements

The Iowa Dyslexia Board would like to acknowledge the [Iowa Dyslexia Task Force](#). The recommendations made in the [Dyslexia Task Force Report](#) was the impetus for improved instructional outcomes for students with dyslexia in Iowa.

References

- (1) American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Disorders of reading and writing*. <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/written-language-disorders/disorders-of-reading-and-writing/>
- (2) Arky, B. (2023, November 6). *Twice-Exceptional Kids: Both Gifted and Challenged*. Child Mind Institute. <https://childmind.org/article/twice-exceptional-kids-both-gifted-and-challenged/>
- (3) Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (n.d.). *A Guide to Resilience*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-resilience/>
- (4) Cooley, M. (2024, January 22). *Reading disabilities: Signs, types, and tips to help students succeed*. 95 Percent Group. <https://www.95percentgroup.com/insights/reading-disorders/>
- (5) Decoding Dyslexia Iowa. (2024, July 11). *Iowa Dyslexia Laws*. <https://www.decodingdyslexiaiowa.org/iowa-dyslexia-laws/>
- (6) Decoding Dyslexia Iowa. (n.d.). *Educator FAQ*. <https://www.decodingdyslexiaiowa.org/educator-faq/>
- (7) Dyslexia Help at the University of Michigan. (n.d.) *Dyslexia Glossary*. <https://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/parents/learn-about-dyslexia/dyslexia-definitions>
- (8) Dyslexia Help at the University of Michigan. (n.d.-a). *Dyslexia Myths and Facts*. <https://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/dyslexics/learn-about-dyslexia/what-is-dyslexia/dyslexia-myths-and-facts>
- (9) Dyslexia Support South. (n.d.) *Slower Processing Abilities*. <https://www.dyslexiasupportsouth.org.nz/school-toolkit/specific-learning-difficulties-and-processing-disorders/slower-processing-abilities/>
- (10) International Dyslexia Association. (n.d.). *Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia*. <https://dyslexiaida.org/accommodations-for-students-with-dyslexia/>
- (11) International Dyslexia Association. (2020, April 1). *Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and Dyslexia*. <https://dyslexiaida.org/attention-deficithyperactivity-disorder-adhd-and-dyslexia/>
- (12) International Dyslexia Association. (2020, March 10). *Dyslexia Basics*. <https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/>

- (13) International Dyslexia Association. (n.d.-a). *Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia*. <https://dyslexiaida.org/social-emotional/>
- (14) International Dyslexia Association. (n.d.-b) *What is Structured Literacy?* <https://app.box.com/s/2yqu2ke21mxs0hz9l77owdlorgvtesyq>
- (15) Iowa Area Education Agencies. (n.d.). *Information for Families*. <https://sites.google.com/a/heartlandaea.org/dyslexia-resources/for-parents?authuser=0>
- (16) Iowa Area Education Agencies. (2023, March). *Supplemental and Intensive Tiers Guide*. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rXVZyE3PJf_JO-y3SsAa6zbDoUHX2iE24LGaWSNRzZI/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.96z8hxe1plab
- (17) Iowa Department of Education. (n.d.). *Dyslexia*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/special-education/programs-services/dyslexia>
- (18) Iowa Department of Education. (n.d.-a). *Early Intervention Terms and Acronyms*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/7064/download?inline=>
- (19) Iowa Department of Education. (n.d.-b). *Literacy Instruction*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/standards/instruction/literacy#science-of-reading>
- (20) Iowa Department of Education. (2016). *Multi-tiered system of supports*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/student-services/integrated-supports/mtss>
- (21) Iowa Department of Education. (2023, November 28). *This endorsement literally can help thousands of students with their reading*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/headline-story/2023-11-28/endorsement-can-help-literally-thousands-students-their-reading>
- (22) Iowa Department of Education. (n.d.-c). *Special Education Terms and Acronyms*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/7065/download?inline=>
- (23) Iowa Dyslexia Task Force, Tilly, D., Anderson, L., Blitvich, H., Conrad, A. L., Etscheidt, S., Grieving, K., Hoksbergen, E., Klopstad, E., Lewis, C., Lorimor-Easley, N. Orton, K., Reed, D., & Schmidt, K. (2019). *Dyslexia Task Force Report*. <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/5194/download?inline>
- (24) Iowa Reading Research Center - the University of Iowa. (n.d.). *Caregivers Resource Hub*. <https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/caregivers-resource-hub>
- (25) Iowa Reading Research Center - the University of Iowa. (n.d.-a). *Dyslexia and families*. <https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/resources/dyslexia/dyslexia-and-families>
- (26) Iowa Reading Research Center - the University of Iowa. (n.d.-b). *Dyslexia Overview Module*. <https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/professional-services/elearning/dyslexia-overview-module>
- (27) Iowa Reading Research Center - the University of Iowa. (n.d.-c). *Home*. <https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/>
- (28) Iowa Reading Research Center - the University of Iowa. (n.d.-d). *Teaching Students to Map Phonemes to Graphemes*. https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/sites/irrc.education.uiowa.edu/files/2023-04/working_with_schools_and_aea.pdf
- (29) Iowa Reading Research Center. - the University of Iowa. (n.d.-e). *Working with Schools and Area Education Agencies on Providing Your Child Assistive Technology*. Iowa Reading Research Center| https://irrc.education.uiowa.edu/sites/irrc.education.uiowa.edu/files/2023-04/working_with_schools_and_aea.pdf

- (30) Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2022, December 29). *Tiered*. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/leading-mtss/tiered-instruction.html>
- (31) Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education and Early Education and Care. (n.d.) *Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines*. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/dyslexia-guidelines.pdf>
- (32) Moats, L., & Tolman, C. (n.d.). *Types of Reading Disability*. Reading Rockets. <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/struggling-readers/articles/types-reading-disability>
- (33) Novak Education Consulting, Rodriguez Educational Consulting Agency (RECA), University of Connecticut, HILL for Literacy, Hehir, A., Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, Meyer, R., Meyer, R., Meyer, R., Hattie, Meyer, R., Gordon, Lane, Oakes, Cantwell, Royer, Harlacher, Turse, Albrecht, . . . Borgmeier. (n.d.). *MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT: a Blueprint for Massachusetts Educators*. In *MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT: A Blueprint for Massachusetts Educators*. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/mtss/blueprint.pdf>
- (34) Regional Education Laboratory Northeast & Islands, Stai, C., Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Rinaldi, C., & Sacco, D. (2022). *Raising the Bar for Dyslexia Screening for Multilingual and Bidialectal Learners—Webinar Summary*. In *Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines [Webinar Summary]*. <https://ies.ed.gov/rel-northeast-islands/2025/01/webinar-summary-0>
- (35) Scanlon Center for School Mental Health. (n.d.) *Nurturing Healthy Minds - In and Out of the Classroom*. <https://scsmh.education.uiowa.edu/>
- (36) Shaywitz, S., MD, & Shaywitz, J., MD. (2008). *Overcoming Dyslexia* (2020 Edition): Second Edition, Completely Revised and Updated. Vintage.
- (37) Sheldon-Dean, H. (2023, February 23). *Complete Guide to Dyslexia*. Child Mind Institute. https://childmind.org/guide/parents-guide-to-dyslexia/#block_a8b11ff2-e33b-4c89-a202-
- (38) Shyyan, V., Thurlow, M., Christensen, L., Lazarus, S., Paul, J., & Touchette, B. (2016). CCSSO accessibility manual: *How to select, administer, and evaluate use of accessibility supports for instruction and assessment of all students*. Washington, DC: CCSSO. http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Publications/CCSSO_Accessibility_Manual
- (39) The International Dyslexia Association. (2013). *Dyslexia in the Classroom: What Every Teacher Needs to Know*. <https://ctserc.org/documents/resources/Dyslexia-In-The-Classroom-What-Teachers-Need-to-Know.pdf>
- (40) The Iowa Legislature. (2020, June 17) *Senate File 2356*. <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ba=SF2356&ga=88>
- (41) The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity- Yale School of Medicine. (2022). *Dyslexia FAQ*. <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/dyslexia/dyslexia-faq/>
- (42) The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity- Yale School of Medicine. (n.d.). <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/resources/parents/what-parents-can-do/ten-things-to-help-your-struggling-reader/>
- (43) The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity- Yale School of Medicine. (n.d.-a). *What is Dyslexia?* <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/>
- (44) U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. <https://www.ed.gov/essa>

- (45) Vierstra, G., MA. (n.d.). *Types of reading disabilities*. Understood. <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/types-of-reading-disabilities>
- (46) Wright, C. M., & Miller, C. M. (2018). Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) *Revising the definition of formative assessment*. <https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Revising%20the%20Definition%20of%20Formative%20Assessment.pdf>
- (47) Zabala, J. S. (2005). *SETT scaffold for consideration of AT needs*. https://www.joyzabala.com/files/ugd/70c4a3_835f41dea13543e78e8cd2c457270052.pdf
- (48) Decoding Dyslexia Iowa (2024) <https://www.decodingdyslexiaiowa.org/what-is-dyslexia-faq/>
- (49) Iowa Department of Education, English Learners (2024) <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/standards/specialized-instruction/english-learners>