



Iowa Dyslexia Task Force

Executive Summary

November 15, 2019

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force

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Executive Summary

The Iowa Dyslexia Task Force calls for stakeholders across the state to take immediate and transformative action to support students with characteristics of dyslexia, their families, and their teachers. The Task Force brought together a diverse group of K-12 teachers and school leaders, higher education faculty, professionals in diagnosing and supporting students with dyslexia, parents of children with dyslexia, and individuals with dyslexia themselves. As a team, we spent a year researching and debating to arrive at the conclusions and recommendations in this report.

Right now, in Iowa there are not enough educators in our schools who understand dyslexia and have the skills and knowledge to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. Consequently, students with characteristics of dyslexia are struggling academically, emotionally, and socially; families are struggling financially and emotionally to meet student needs; and teachers are struggling to support students because they lack the necessary resources and professional learning opportunities to grow their skills and knowledge.

To address challenges faced in Iowa, we offer recommendations for the key stakeholder groups: the Iowa Legislature, the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, pre-service programs in institutes of higher education, and school districts. Recommendations are grouped below by stakeholders. Recommendations to the Legislature are listed in order of priority; recommendations to other stakeholders are not ordered by priority.

Recommendations to the Iowa Legislature

1. In the 2020 session, the Legislature should direct the Board of Educational Examiners to create an advanced endorsement as described in Level IV of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, with guidance and oversight from and requirements defined by the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Reading Research Center. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
2. In the 2020 session, the Legislature should establish a standing board, composed of the roles subsumed under the current Dyslexia Task Force, plus an elementary core literacy teacher, to guide, facilitate, and oversee the implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and provide leadership for future recommendations. The Board shall report annually, by November 15 of each year, to the Legislature. The Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant should serve as chair of the board. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
3. In the 2020 session, the Legislature should require school boards to assure all licensed educators have completed the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module by July 1, 2021, with any new educators in subsequent years being required to have completed this module by the end of their first year of service. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
4. By July 1, 2020, the Legislature should provide funding to each AEA to hire a staff member to be trained and serve as a Dyslexia Consultant. The Dyslexia Consultant will facilitate implementation of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework and provide professional learning opportunities to teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
5. In the 2020 session, the Legislature should amend Iowa Code to replace the current definition with the International Dyslexia Association definition of dyslexia. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

Recommendations to the Iowa Department of Education

6. By July 2020, the Iowa Department of Education should issue written dyslexia-specific guidance to Iowa schools so that schools may provide a consistent response to dyslexia. The guidance should explain that the term “dyslexia” can be used by Iowa schools and detail how Iowa schools should respond when educators or families suspect dyslexia or when dyslexia is confirmed by a diagnostician. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
7. By July 2020, the Iowa Department of Education should hire a Dyslexia Consultant to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
8. By December 2020, the Iowa Department of Education should work collaboratively with the Dyslexia Board and the Iowa Reading Research Center to create and maintain publicly accessible information for all stakeholders concerning dyslexia and the education of students with characteristics of dyslexia in Iowa. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
9. By July 2021, the Iowa Department of Education should, in collaboration with the Dyslexia Board, provide a recommended process for informal diagnostic assessment following universal screening for further identifying student needs. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
10. By July 2021, the Iowa Department of Education should issue guidance for what should be included in effective instruction for all students and interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia, within a multi-tiered system of supports. The guidance should be in alignment with the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework; include a tool to guide the selection of intervention programs and assistive technology; and include a tool for districts to engage in a rigorous self-assessment of the quality of the explicit, systematic instruction and assistive technology they offer. (Approved with a vote of twelve in favor and one opposed.)
11. By September 2021, the Iowa Department of Education should collaborate with the AEA system and the Dyslexia Board to develop and implement an action plan for the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework developed by the Dyslexia Task Force for educators to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
12. By September 2021, the Iowa Department of Education should work with the Dyslexia Board to establish a leveled recognition program designed to validate and recognize the level of expertise around dyslexia developed in a district. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
13. By July 2022, the Iowa Department of Education should work with the Dyslexia Board to establish a leveled recognition program designed to validate and recognize educator and education leader preparation programs’ alignment to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
14. Over time, the Iowa Department of Education should consider providing additional guidance to Iowa schools as recommended by the Dyslexia Board. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

Recommendations to Area Education Agencies

15. Area Education Agencies should train all AEA staff who will support implementation of the statewide Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, including having them complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module by July 2020. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
16. Each AEA will be allotted and expected to fill one seat in the endorsement pilot program; at least one qualified staff person per AEA shall apply to the program and complete the training. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

17. By September 2021, Area Education Agencies should collaborate with the Iowa Department of Education and the Dyslexia Board to develop and implement an action plan for the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework developed by the Dyslexia Task Force for educators to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

Recommendations to Pre-service Education Programs

18. By September 2021, pre-service education programs should have an action plan to provide differentiated training on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions aligned to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework developed by the Dyslexia Task Force. This differentiated training must include completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
19. Pre-service education programs may apply to offer training toward the new endorsement at the conclusion of the endorsement pilot project. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

Recommendations to School Districts

20. By July 2021, school boards should assure all licensed educators have completed the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module; any new educators in subsequent years should be required to have completed this module by the end of their first year of service. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)
21. By school year 2022-23, districts should engage in regular, rigorous self-assessments of the quality of explicit, systematic instruction they offer, guided by a tool to be developed by the Iowa Department of Education in collaboration with the new Dyslexia Board. Self-assessments should take place at least once every three years. (Approved with a vote of twelve in favor and one opposed.)
22. By August 2025, districts should ensure educators, paraprofessionals, administrators, and school board members take part in the professional learning opportunities as guided by the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework action plan. (Approved unanimously by the Task Force.)

The report that follows outlines the challenges we identified, the solutions we agreed to, and our specific recommendations for action by stakeholder group.