



Iowa Dyslexia Task Force

Report to the Legislature

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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.

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Introduction

Across Iowa, students with the characteristics of dyslexia, their families, and their teachers face many challenges, including lack of resources, lack of consistency in services across the state, and misinformation. The number of professionals in the system who understand explicit, systematic literacy instruction and its appropriate role, both in the instruction that all students receive (“universal instruction”) and in the targeted interventions that should be provided for students with characteristics of dyslexia, is insufficient.

In 2018, the Iowa Legislature set forth Senate File 2360, calling for experts and practitioners across Iowa to come together to address how to better support students with characteristics of dyslexia in our schools. To meet this charge, the Iowa Dyslexia Task Force convened regularly for a year to study research-based practices, craft and administer a survey to identify current perceptions and practices in Iowa, and develop recommendations for action.

Vision for Education of Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

Our Task Force outlined a vision for public education that supports all students, while attending to the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. Our vision is as follows:

Every student in Iowa will attend a school where educators understand what dyslexia is and provide explicit, systematic reading instruction as both a part of universal instruction and in specialized interventions, and where every student has access to appropriate accommodations and assistive technology to support learning.

In this report, we offer short-term and long-term improvements necessary to achieve our vision for a system with the following characteristics:

- staff in buildings with intensive training and established skills in supporting students with characteristics of dyslexia
- expert AEA staff with dyslexia-specific skills and at least three years of classroom experience who provide leadership, training, and ongoing professional development and support for educators and education leaders, to advance learning and the practice of explicit, systematic literacy instruction
- higher education programs that provide differentiated training for pre-service educators that emphasizes the components of explicit, systematic literacy instruction and provide opportunities for hands-on experience using these practices
- teachers, trainers, and providers with the new endorsement in every school across the state who provide expertise, offer professional learning opportunities, and support systems change

We believe we can achieve this vision by taking immediate steps and working across the system to design and implement long-term changes that will grow the capacity of our educators.

Chapter One: Dyslexia in Iowa

Dyslexia is a common neurologically-based language processing disorder. Instruction and intervention for dyslexia involve high quality, explicit, systematic reading instruction. Estimates of the prevalence of dyslexia range from 5% of the population to 17.5%.¹ The discrepancies stem from differences in operationally defining what constitutes as "dyslexia" and data collection procedures. Dyslexia has a genetic component but is also affected by other factors, including the type and intensity of reading instruction individuals receive. People with dyslexia have a wide variety of challenges with using and understanding language effectively. Most often, these problems include characteristics such as:

- difficulty remembering sounds or using sounds to write or read words;
- difficulty recognizing single letters, groups of letters, or words;
- difficulty naming letters or numbers quickly and easily.

When the characteristics of dyslexia are not identified and/or these problems go unchecked, they often develop into issues in reading connected text, building vocabulary, and poor reading comprehension. Because of these challenges, people with characteristics of dyslexia often struggle to learn to read, despite receiving the reading instruction typically provided in American schools. Without appropriate intervention, children who experience these initial challenges often develop problems like anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem. This is, in part, because of their lack of success in doing what so many other children seem to be doing effortlessly.

The instruction and intervention for dyslexia involve intensive, explicit reading instruction focused on phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluent text reading. To access curriculum, students with the characteristics of dyslexia often need accommodations and assistive technology. When sufficiently intensive, explicit, and systematic instruction is implemented, it can prevent severe reading problems for learners, including those with characteristics of dyslexia.² The National Reading Panel also found the research is clear that explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness improves early literacy outcomes and that explicit, systematic instruction in phonics should be part of routine classroom instruction.³ Explicit instruction provides teacher modeling and scaffolds ample guided practice and independent practice for students, which ensure material is mastered and becomes automatic. This explicit literacy instruction presents literacy skills and concepts systematically in a logical, sequential way from simple to more complex. The intensity, frequency, and duration of explicit, systematic literacy instruction required for remediation depends on the severity of dyslexia and the profile of strengths/weaknesses of the individual learner.

Reflections on Dyslexia from Iowa Families and Teachers

To check and confirm insights about current practices and concerns in Iowa, the Dyslexia Task Force (1) conducted an original survey, and (2) invited public comments at every public meeting and through a link on the Iowa Department of Education website. The survey garnered 4,184 responses and the Department of Education website received 47 public comments. The Task Force reviewed responses to the survey's multiple choice and constructed response questions; quotations in this report were selected as representative and relevant from among the survey responses and public comments. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations included in this report were selected from the survey responses and public comments. (See Appendices C and D for more detail on the methods and findings.)

¹ Phillips and Odegard (2017) estimate between 3.2% to 8.5%; Peterson & Pennington (2015) report 7%; and Shaywitz (1998) estimates between 5% and 17.5%.

² Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, Chen, & Denckla (1996); Torgesen (1999)

³ Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, et al., (2000)

Dyslexia deeply impacts families.

The Dyslexia Task Force survey responses and public comments offered to the Dyslexia Task Force reveal that parents and families often feel frustrated as they attempt to secure services for their children. The narrative analysis yielded three themes from among parents who responded to the survey.

Personal and Private Advocacy and Expenses. Many parents reported paying “out-of-pocket” for assessments and evaluations, private non-school-based instruction, or tutoring: “Because the public schools do not provide trained structured language remediation, and also because he would not have been far enough ‘behind’ in time to get remediation in a timely manner, we paid thousands of dollars out of pocket to remediate his disability.”

Parents and families are often told that schools in Iowa do not test for dyslexia, because it is considered a medical diagnosis. However, when they seek out evaluations, many insurance companies will deny coverage, stating that dyslexia is the school’s responsibility. This leaves families to pay for a several thousand-dollar evaluation to try to get guidance on how best to help their child. For some families, the cost becomes prohibitive and they are left without access to the services they need. Families presented the personal costs experienced, such as the “struggles” and “emotional” costs to families, as well as the effects on their children: “I felt completely alone,” “a very frustrating process,” “I have watched my child struggle with reading for years,” “my child was in tears every single morning.”

“Because the public schools do not provide trained structured language remediation, and also because he would not have been far enough ‘behind’ in time to get remediation in a timely manner, we paid thousands of dollars out of pocket to remediate his disability.”

- Iowa parent of a student with characteristics of dyslexia

School Resistance and Reluctance: Denying Dyslexia. Many parents were concerned with the failure to diagnose or accept a diagnosis of dyslexia. Parents commented they were

“not sure our district actually believes in dyslexia. Whenever I bring up dyslexia and intervention specific to it, I am shut down. School personnel do not want to discuss it.” Another parent reported that they “battled” to ensure access to high quality intervention and instruction. Parents described the schools’ response to an outside diagnosis of dyslexia with words such as “shocked,” “ignored,” “not welcomed,” “dismissed,” and they shared that the diagnosis did not play a role in “IEP or educational planning” and did not “change teaching strategies.”

Educator Expertise. Many parents do not believe educators have the necessary expertise to support students with characteristics of dyslexia and they feel that this leads to ineffective instruction and interventions. They reported that teachers lack “awareness for identifying children with Dyslexia and appropriate intervention,” “lack ... knowledge on how to teach necessary methods of instruction,” and “don’t have the appropriate training to provide the necessary specialized instruction.” Parents reported, “The school is not using effective curriculum to help children with Dyslexia, even after they are diagnosed/identified. More of the same instruction is not beneficial for them;” “I was told they treat all kids the same no matter what disability they have.” They noted a “lack of structured, explicit approach to building reading/writing/spelling proficiency” and the “lack of trained teachers that can provide structured literacy with fidelity.”

Dyslexia deeply impacts teachers.

Teachers also reported a sense of frustration in meeting the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. The narrative analysis yielded three themes from among educators who responded to the survey.

Insufficient Knowledge and Professional Development. Educators shared that their preparation programs did not provide sufficient information on “how to recognize symptoms of dyslexia,” how to “instruct” and “accommodate students with dyslexia,” or “direct instructional strategies with reasons why these strategies are effective.” A teacher also described the need for “resources for interventions, training for interventions, identification guides for dyslexic students.” Teachers reported a “lack of training for teachers to use researched based techniques for dyslexia,” the “lack of knowledge about matching interventions to reader’s needs rather than a one size fits all,” and the need to “be aware of the best practices for instructing students with dyslexia.”

“We are not able to use that word with parents... I wish that we could openly talk about dyslexia more so that many students could get the right instruction/intervention and the help they need.”

- Iowa teacher

Narrow or Limited Instructional Options Available.

The limited instructional options for students with characteristics of dyslexia were frequently highlighted with comments such as:

- “We have students identified with dyslexia that are not getting instruction they need...seems like a one size fits all approach when talking about our students with learning disabilities.”
- “The programs that we use at our school do not help students with dyslexia.”
- “The problem in our school is no one is trained in teaching any of the programs specializing in dyslexia.”

Reluctance or Resistance within Schools to Acknowledge Dyslexia. In the Task Force survey, a teacher shared, “we are not able to use that word with parents... I wish that we could openly talk about dyslexia more so that many students could get the right instruction/intervention and the help they need.”

Key Challenges and Solutions

Everyone in Iowa’s education system has a role to play as we work in earnest to address the impact of dyslexia on students, families, and current and future educators. Iowa’s system must build the capacity of all educators to provide high quality literacy instruction to all learners, as well as to provide intensive interventions for students with more severe forms of dyslexia. The Task Force has identified several key challenges in our system. We offer solutions to address these challenges below.

Challenge: Use of the Term “Dyslexia”

The Task Force found that the current definition in Iowa Code does not accurately describe what dyslexia is, which has important implications for whether and how educators feel they can discuss dyslexia openly with families and with other professionals.

The Dyslexia Task Force survey revealed a number of common misconceptions that persist in Iowa about dyslexia, even though they have been disproven by thorough research. Dyslexia is not a reflection of an individual’s overall intelligence, of laziness, or of problems with people’s vision. Dyslexia is also not a product of environmental, cultural, or economic factors. Individuals with dyslexia do not

routinely see words on the page differently than individuals without dyslexia.⁴ People with dyslexia do not generally benefit from colored overlays or glasses.⁵ However, a high proportion (45%), of respondents to the Dyslexia Task Force survey, had the inaccurate belief that dyslexia is caused by visual deficits. Additionally, while most respondents accurately knew that dyslexia is equally common among girls and boys, and reading more at home is **not** the most effective intervention for dyslexia (56% and 67% respectively), the survey results indicate that incorrect beliefs about dyslexia still persist. About one-third of respondents incorrectly believed that reading at home is the best intervention and that colored overlays are a big help for people with dyslexia.

The definition of dyslexia in Iowa Code does not provide enough precision to address these misconceptions and contributes to inconsistencies across the system. Dyslexia is currently defined in Iowa Code as “a specific and significant impairment in the development of reading, including but not limited to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, that is not solely accounted for by intellectual disability, sensory disability or impairment, or lack of appropriate instruction.”⁶

In addition to the need for more precision in the accepted definition of dyslexia, there is consternation in many school settings around even using the word dyslexia. Some educators believe it is inappropriate to use the word dyslexia in the school setting. When asked if they could use the term “dyslexia” when talking with colleagues or parents, among all administrators, AEA staff, and educators who responded to the Dyslexia Task Force survey, 29% felt that they (probably) could not (see Appendix C). Educators reported “dyslexia is a word we are not allowed to use” and “we don’t even discuss the possibility of dyslexia at our school.” Other educators commented:

- “Dyslexia is never discussed by the AEA team. They constantly remind us that we cannot diagnose dyslexia and should be very cautious even mentioning this to a parent.”
- “The term dyslexia seems like a bad word. I don’t feel supported in being able to use the term. I would love to create a culture where we aren’t afraid to have tough conversations about specific disabilities.”

The lack of a common understanding about how dyslexia can be discussed at school can negatively impact the services and supports students receive and can also harm the family-school relationship. Families and students need a clear set of expectations when they engage with schools and AEAs.

⁴ International Dyslexia Association (2017). *Dyslexia Basics*.

⁵ Cowen (2018)

⁶ Iowa Code § 279.68(2d3a) (2019)

Solutions: Change Code and Issue Guidance

The Task Force recommends changing the definition in Iowa Code. Amending the current definition to the definition offered by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) will ensure we have a clearer understanding of dyslexia across the state of Iowa:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”⁷

By providing concrete and specific language, the IDA definition, which also has been adopted in state code by New Jersey, Ohio, and Utah,⁸ promotes a better understanding of what dyslexia is and how it impacts students. This definition clearly states that dyslexia is a neurologically-based language processing disorder that impacts the ability of students to learn the architecture of language and impedes vocabulary growth, background knowledge, and reading comprehension. The definition also clearly states that dyslexia is often unexpected in relation to an individual’s general intellectual ability and function. The challenges it presents persist despite the provision of classroom instruction that is effective for the neuro-typical learner; different instructional strategies are necessary and impactful for students with characteristics of dyslexia.

The Task Force further recommends that the Iowa Department of Education provide dyslexia-specific guidance to address how and when to use the term “dyslexia.” Official guidance from the Iowa Department of Education will clarify for all stakeholders what is and is not acceptable use and what implications may arise out of addressing or not addressing dyslexia.

Challenge: Lack of Consistency in Addressing Dyslexia

The Task Force found that there is a lack of consistency and clear responses to dyslexia across districts and AEAs in Iowa. Students in some districts may receive intensive supports while those in neighboring districts find their families paying out of pocket for tutoring and other services. AEAs offer varying amounts and types of support for educators, students, and families, resulting in different and sometimes inequitable experiences for students. The Task Force survey found several specific inconsistencies including availability, selection, and use of the following:

- diagnostic processes to design interventions,
- effective instruction and interventions, and
- effective intervention programs and assistive technologies.

⁷ International Dyslexia Association (n.d.). *Definition of Dyslexia*.

⁸ International Dyslexia Association (n.d.). *Definition of Dyslexia*.

Diagnostic Processes

Iowa has invested in a universal screener to identify the potential risk for reading difficulties in the early elementary grades (k-3). While the current screener (FAST™) identifies students with reading challenges, including some of whom have characteristics of dyslexia, it was not designed to identify dyslexia specifically. As a screener, it was designed to identify that there may be a problem; it is not designed to diagnose specific student needs for instruction. Without additional diagnostic assessment of student needs, intervention selection can be haphazard, instead of being specifically targeted to the student's identified skill weaknesses. Students with the characteristics of dyslexia need this next step in diagnostic assessment to benefit maximally from intensive instruction.

The analysis of narrative responses to the Dyslexia Task Force survey confirmed that parents, educators, AEA personnel, and administrators saw the need to expand the diagnostic processes to better understand the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. Parents commented: "The screening identifies if our kids are behind, but doesn't necessarily identify if the cause is Dyslexia. If the cause is Dyslexia the intervention should be more intense than for a child who is struggling a little with learning to read." Teachers commented on the "lack of follow up and more formal assessment beyond state assessments," and AEA personnel commented that they would like to see "more assessment available to determine a student's skills with phonological awareness." Administrators saw the need to make sure "we are using the correct diagnostic materials for identifying areas to target intervention. Teachers could use further training on interventions that align to evidence-based instruction to increase their effectiveness and confidence."

Effective Instructional Practices

Although all Iowa schools are required to teach and assess the Iowa Core Standards, the teaching methods used for teaching are left up to individual district choice without guidelines or requirements for what kinds of literacy instruction and interventions are most effective. In 2019, the Iowa Reading Research Center conducted a survey of Iowa elementary schools. Survey results revealed that schools were using a wide variety of instructional approaches, but the approach to core literacy instruction reported by approximately 51% of respondents was not consistent with providing students explicit, systematic instruction.⁹

In the Dyslexia Task Force survey, narrative responses indicated that many administrators, AEA personnel, teachers, and parents were often dissatisfied with the supports and services offered to students with characteristics of dyslexia. Administrators reported a "lack of knowledge on how to respond instructionally to students with dyslexia" and "not enough understanding of interventions to support students with dyslexia."

AEA personnel similarly noted, "I think there is a surface level awareness of dyslexia. There is no specific method in which teachers determine interventions... If a child might have it, there's no specific steps to figure it out/help support the child with methods designed for dyslexia." Educators echoed these concerns stating, "I find there is not enough done to identify students with dyslexia and then support them." Parents expressed similar dissatisfaction with school supports and services noting, "The school is not using effective curriculum to help children with Dyslexia, even after they are diagnosed/identified. More of the same instruction is not beneficial for them."

⁹ Reed, Meginnis, Park, Gibbs, & Linn (2019). For the complete results, see the *Early Literacy Survey of Iowa Elementary Schools: Statewide Results* from the Iowa Reading Research Center, University of Iowa College of Education. This can be accessed at https://iowareadingresearch.org/sites/iowareadingresearch.org/files/early_literacy_survey_of_iowa_elementary_schools_statewide_results.pdf.

Assistive Technologies and Appropriate Accommodations

Assistive technologies (AT) should be individualized based on student needs and aimed at ensuring equal access to curriculum and content. To determine what AT is appropriate, educators and parents work together to identify what skills the student struggles with and what AT could assist the student in accessing the curriculum. However, educator knowledge about accommodations and assistive technology varies greatly across the state, as does the availability of assistive technology. In the Dyslexia Task Force survey, few respondents indicated that their school or AEA had a formal evaluation process for accommodations (21% Administrators, 15% AEA, and 8% Educators). Additionally, less than half had access to site licenses for assistive technology (36% Administrators, 26% AEA, 15% Educators) and even though 59% of parent respondents to the survey who have children with dyslexia said that their child uses AT, very few schools have a budget for AT. As a result, many schools offer students “boilerplate” options or no AT at all.

In addition, even though assistive technology is not routinely integrated into Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans, when AT is offered to students with reading challenges, it is primarily (and sometimes only) available to students with IEPs or 504 plans. This leaves many children with characteristics of dyslexia without access to the technologies that could help them. When children have IEPs or 504 plans, family members often take on the role of ensuring 504 and IEP plans are communicated and followed, and parents are sometimes even asked to provide a list of accommodations and assistive technologies or purchase them on their own. Lack of training around AT and accommodations leads to many teachers not fully understanding the need for accommodations and sometimes choosing to disregard the accommodation or technology when it is made available.

Solutions: Issue Guidance and Tools

The Iowa Department of Education should collaborate with the new Dyslexia Board to craft and share a recommended process for diagnostic assessment following universal screening for further identifying student needs. Early screening and identification are critical to effective intervention for children with characteristics of dyslexia. For children who are identified through the current screening process as potentially having a reading problem, additional diagnostics, for planning instruction, are warranted. Effective diagnostic processes for students identified through a screening process include:

- assessing family history of dyslexia/reading concerns;
- assessing specific area(s) of reading concern (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics and word reading, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension); and
- investigating the instruction previously received.

The Iowa Department of Education should collaborate with the new Dyslexia Board to issue dyslexia-specific guidance for what should be included in effective instruction for all students and interventions for students with the characteristics of dyslexia, within a multi-tiered system of supports. The guidance should include a tool to guide the selection of intervention programs and assistive technologies and a tool for districts to engage in self-assessment. The guidance should be aligned with the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework. By providing consistent processes across the state, the Iowa Department of Education guidance will ensure that reading instruction for all students includes explicit, systematic literacy instruction and that students with characteristics of dyslexia are provided intensive supports when needed. The tool to guide the selection of interventions and assistive technology will support teachers and AEA staff to make more informed decisions about AT and accommodations that best meet student needs. By providing districts with a rigorous self-assessment tool, the Iowa Department of Education will help districts and educators to better understand their strengths and identify how they can improve the quality of the explicit, systematic instruction and assistive technology they offer.

Challenge: Inadequacy of Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Pre-service Preparation

In the Dyslexia Task Force survey, personnel from the institutes of higher education (IHEs), AEA personnel, administrators, educators, and parents all reported that pre-service preparation should be enhanced and expanded to ensure educators can successfully meet the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. While representatives of the IHEs reported satisfaction with the current inclusion of dyslexia content in endorsement programs, representatives also identified the need for “improvement,” “more instruction and practice,” and “more methods courses in direct, systematic/explicit teaching of reading.” IHE representatives reported that although the Iowa Reading Research Center’s Dyslexia Overview module is being completed by future educators, the pre-service programs “need coursework” since the “overview does not provide enough training for the beginning educator.”

Administrators noted that, “We have entire districts - and by extension - groups of kids without access to effective models of literacy instruction and intervention.” AEA personnel recognized their own training could have been enhanced and that they would have benefited from any or additional training in assessment and diagnosis to learn about the characteristics of dyslexia and research-based screening methods.

Educators similarly wished their pre-service preparation had included “more direct practice,” and more training in “understanding assessments and building instruction based on the assessments.”

Parents commented that, “Colleges need to start teaching the signs and symptoms of dyslexia to teachers, especially elementary teachers. Time is valuable... Teachers need to be taught the signs of dyslexia and that it can be diagnosed at a young age.”

Professional development

In addition, the majority of respondents to the Dyslexia Task Force survey including parents, teachers, AEA personnel, and administrators confirmed the need for expanded professional development for teachers to assist in meeting the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia.

AEAs, the primary source of teacher professional development in Iowa, have varying levels of expertise and knowledge about dyslexia and offer varying amounts and types of professional development opportunities around dyslexia, resulting in significant equity issues for teachers -- and ultimately for students -- in different areas of the state. Right now, most AEAs in Iowa do not have a staff member with the expertise and knowledge or time to deliver the professional learning necessary to support the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework.

Administrators voiced the “lack of training for our teachers and resources for students,” the lack of “training opportunities” with reasonable costs, the “delay in providing classes to train teachers,” and the need to “provide supports to districts with professional development.” When asked what contributed to the lack of professional development, administrators identified “time,” “cost,” “scheduling,” “convenience,” and “access to people with expertise.”

AEA personnel also noted that teachers had “limited access to tools, interventions, and training.” AEA respondents also reported their own lack of training “in ways in which we can support the schools” and needing “more training to make instructional recommendations to schools.”

Teachers commonly acknowledged the need for expanded professional development opportunities addressing dyslexia. This is evident in the teacher feedback from the Dyslexia Task Force survey, “I do not have enough background on best practice and there has not been professional development for the

staff since I have joined.” When educators do receive professional development addressing dyslexia the majority of the training does include explicit, systematic literacy instruction, but just 30% of all educators who responded to the survey indicated that they received training on dyslexia through professional development (41% of Reading Specialists, 46% of Special Education, and 23% of General Education teachers). Additionally, 27% of those who received training had to pay for it personally. Total expenses on professional development for these teachers ranged from less than \$50 to over \$5,000. While most (58%) spent between \$50 and \$500, and nearly 10% spent over \$5,000 personally.

The cumulative consequences of these system limitations are that educators struggle to provide explicit, systematic literacy instruction and many students are not receiving the support they need in school. Families find themselves paying out-of-pocket for private tutoring and other resources.

Solutions: Expanded Pre-service Preparation and a Professional Learning Framework

The Task Force recommends that a Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework be implemented across the system, addressing the roles of pre-service education providers, districts, educators, AEs, and the Iowa Department of Education. Action plans for enacting the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework should be crafted and implemented collaboratively across the system.

Teaching literacy effectively requires a complex set of dispositions, knowledge, and skills. While not every teacher in K-12 education needs this intensive level of knowledge and skills about teaching literacy to students with characteristics of dyslexia, all educators need some understanding. The Dyslexia Task Force developed a Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework to articulate the dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed across the system. The development of this framework is anchored in the International Dyslexia Association’s Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading that detail the skills all teachers of reading need.¹⁰ Development of the Framework was guided by four principles:

1. improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia requires key professional dispositions;
2. improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia is a shared responsibility;
3. the knowledge and skills needed to improve services to students with characteristics of dyslexia is differentiated across professional assignments; and
4. pre-service and in-service professionals must represent the acquisition of necessary dispositions, knowledge, and skills in applied and authentic ways.

The proposed framework establishes the expertise expected of educators at five levels of the system, including the following:

1. PK-12 teachers in non-core content classes; these teachers will enhance the learning of all students in all subject areas, understand the impact of dyslexia on learners, and know how to make content area instruction accessible to these students through accommodations and/or modifications.
2. Teachers responsible for literacy instruction in PK-12 core content classes; these teachers will understand the principles and practices of explicit, systematic literacy instruction that benefit all students, including students with characteristics of dyslexia.

¹⁰ International Dyslexia Association (2018).

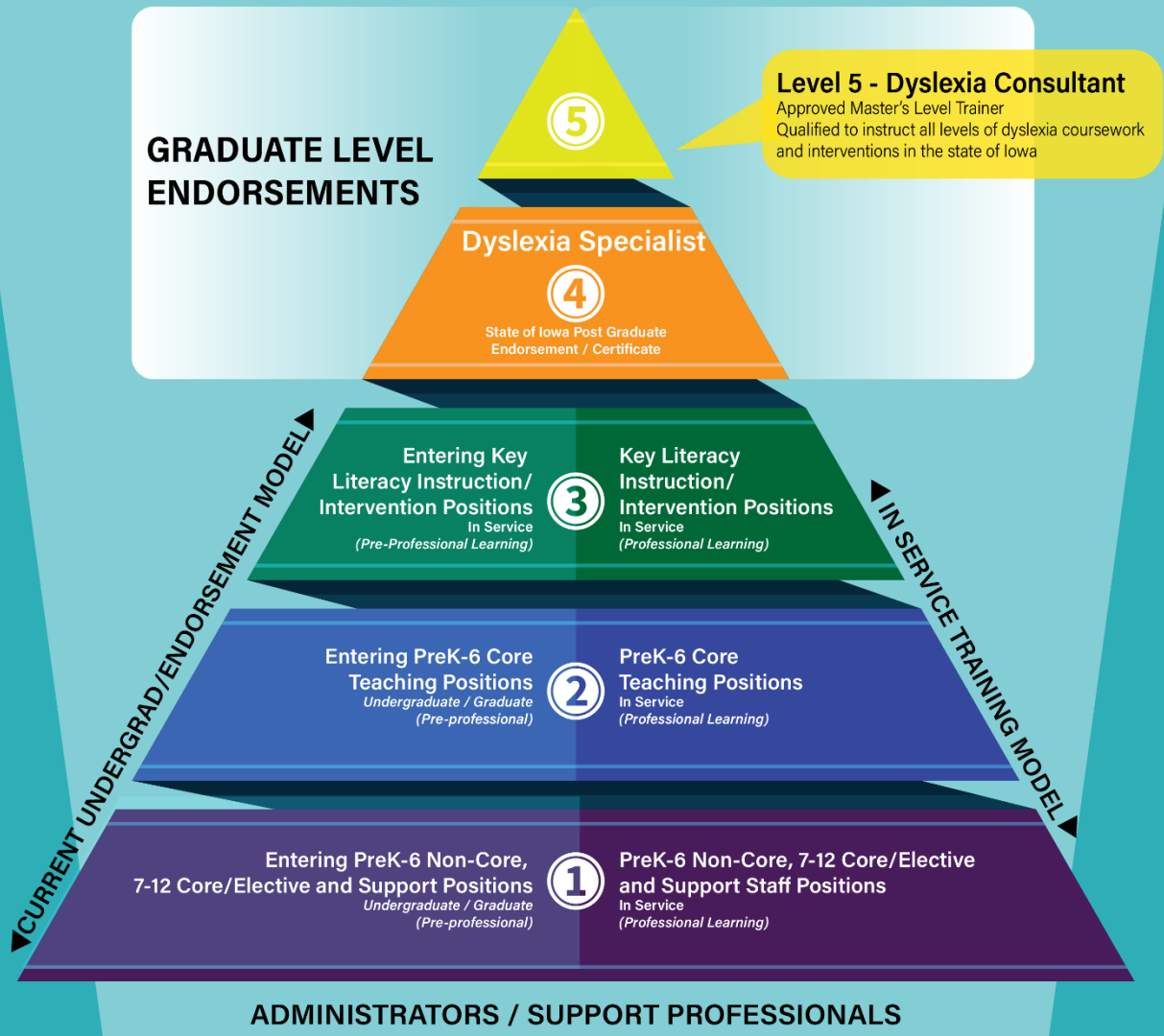
3. Teachers who have endorsements to teach students with significant literacy needs or special education students; these teachers will have specialized knowledge and skills to provide intensive intervention that incorporates evidence-based practices.
4. Specialists at the school-level with a new graduate-level endorsement; these specialists will coordinate the screening, assessment, instruction, and progress monitoring of students with characteristics of dyslexia.
5. Dyslexia consultants in each district, at the Iowa Department of Education, and at each Area Education Agency; these consultants will facilitate the implementation of the Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework and provide professional learning opportunities to teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators. AEA dyslexia consultants are encouraged to teach students with characteristics of dyslexia as they train other teachers.

School administrators and other support personnel provide the foundation to improve school practices for students with characteristics of dyslexia; they also must understand the impact of dyslexia on learners and know how to develop educational approaches to improve student learning.

The professionals who share the responsibility of improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia are identified in the Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework depicted in the following graphic (see Appendix B for greater detail).

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Professional Learning Framework

This framework is intended to be a continuum of learning supported at every level by legislators, administrators, school boards, AEAs and Iowa's institutes of higher education.



The Task Force recommends that all licensed educators and all AEA staff complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module and that staff in the AEAs all receive training appropriate to their role to ensure students with characteristics of dyslexia receive intensive interventions and assistive technology. School districts should create and support professional learning opportunities for educators and education leaders. By ensuring that all educators and education leaders complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module and take part in professional learning opportunities as guided by the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, we can create common understandings across the state and build a foundation of shared knowledge.

The Task Force recommends that the Legislature provide funding for 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. The new Dyslexia Board should outline minimum qualifications for these new AEA positions. As leaders in providing professional development, resources, and support services to districts, AEAs will play a central role in the implementation of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework. It is imperative that AEAs hire a staff person to support both the knowledge and skill of their trainers and the provision of training to districts.

The Task Force recommends that the Iowa Department of Education should hire a Dyslexia Consultant to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and manage ongoing systems growth. The Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant will facilitate and support the new Dyslexia Board; craft Iowa Department of Education guidance as described by the Dyslexia Task Force; work with the Dyslexia Board, AEAs, and pre-service education programs to implement the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework; and coordinate with statewide systems and programs. This investment will ensure that the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations are implemented with fidelity and that stakeholders have support as they develop and implement action plans to shore up the system.

The Task Force recommends that two leveled recognition programs should be established to validate and recognize expertise in dyslexia: one for districts and one for pre-service education programs. School districts and institutes of higher education who have been providing high quality instruction to students with characteristics of dyslexia and preparing pre-service educators should be recognized for what they are doing, not only for the local morale boost but also to publicize across the state places here in Iowa where we are getting the job done. This will ensure that as pre-service educators are deciding where to get their training, they can find which programs or institutions provide dyslexia-specific coursework or learning opportunities. In addition, a recognition program would provide information about what is possible and what works across the state for parents, families, and school boards as they work to understand best practices and what to do next.

Challenge: Lack of System-wide Expertise

The number of educators in Iowa who have expertise in dyslexia and deep understanding of how to best deliver explicit, systematic literacy instruction is seriously limited. While it is required by state statute, it is unclear if teachers who receive an Iowa reading endorsement are being required to understand explicit, systematic instruction and how to best support students with characteristics of dyslexia. The current Reading Endorsement calls for programming to differentiate instruction to meet the specific and unique needs of learners, including students with characteristics of dyslexia. Yet, of the 403 teachers with the Reading Endorsement (either K-8; 5-12; or K-12), who responded to the Dyslexia Task Force survey, 66% indicated that their educational training did not include dyslexia-specific content and 89% reported that they need additional dyslexia training. This was further reflected through ratings of confidence in working with students who have dyslexia, where 35% rated themselves as “not confident at all” to “slightly confident” and 37% were only “moderately confident” in their abilities to work with students with dyslexia.

Figure 1. Survey Data from Teachers with Reading Endorsements

How confident do you feel in your ability to teach/support a student with dyslexia?

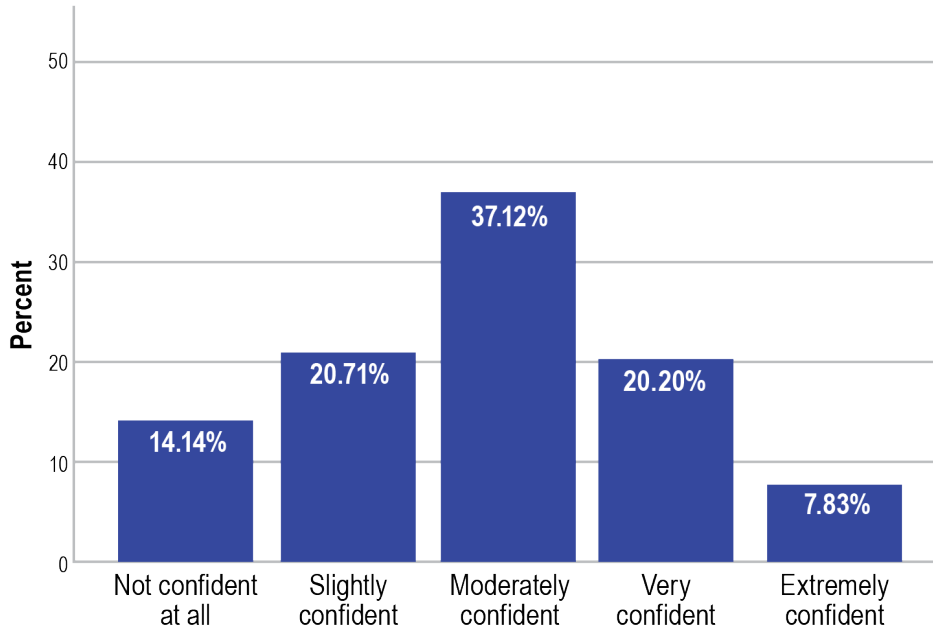
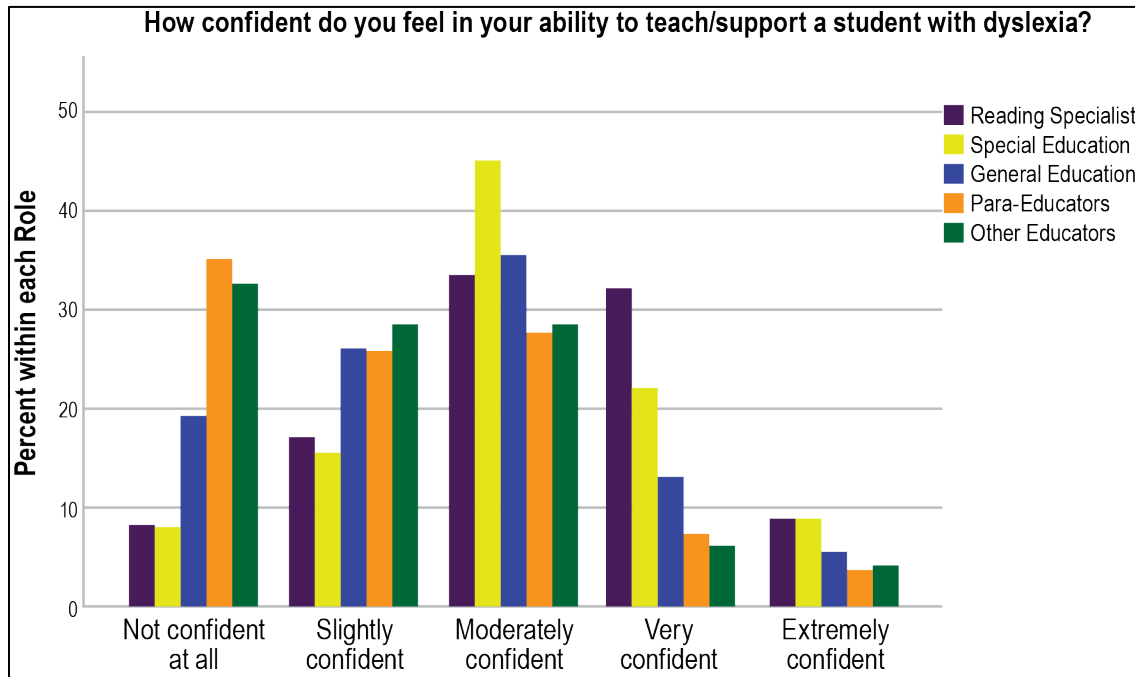


Figure 2. Survey Data from Teachers



Solution: Create an Advanced Endorsement

The Task Force recommends that 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 to create and support expertise and skill development across Iowa to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. This endorsement will help ensure consistency and quality, as well as create incentives for investments in human capital. It will be available to educators who have been practicing a minimum of three years and will prepare educators to work with students with characteristics of dyslexia and to support teachers, administrators, and education leaders across the state through professional learning and sharing of best practices. The Iowa Reading Research Center and Iowa Department of Education will collaboratively design the endorsement, with input from pre-service programs across Iowa, then pilot with a small cohort of educators. ***Once the pilot yields improvements in the endorsement training, multiple IHEs may apply to offer the endorsement training.*** Over time, the preparation system will grow the capacity to consistently provide high quality training toward the endorsement. ***In addition, the AEA Dyslexia Consultants should take part in the endorsement pilot project.***

Challenge: Sustainable and continuous change

Impacting system-wide change at the magnitude described above will take a focused, concerted effort over the next five to ten years. During that time, needs will shift and the knowledge base will grow as new research findings become available. Practices across districts, AEAs, and education systems (such as institutions of higher education and the Iowa Department of Education) vary greatly. Districts and AEAs will need guidance and ongoing support to implement the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and to continue moving towards a system that supports all students.

The issues discussed by the Dyslexia Task Force were many and complex. Early in our work together, the Task Force agreed to a set of core values to guide our work. These included supporting and respecting all members and their opinions; looking for ways to collaborate when disagreements occurred; basing recommendations on research and evidence; and crafting recommendations that are strategic, feasible, concrete, and bold. We worked with the explicit, shared belief that all students are able to learn to read when provided highly effective literacy instruction, and approached our work as representatives with the intention of serving the greater good through our individual and collaborative work on the Task Force. While we made significant progress towards addressing these many challenges, substantial work remains. The Task Force was able to establish collaborative partnerships and a shared vision between key stakeholders in our educational system. We need a concrete way for this collaboration to continue and grow in order to realize change.

We further need a way for Iowa stakeholders, including families, educators, and those providing professional learning, to access information about best practices to support students with characteristics of dyslexia over time.

Solutions: Establish a Dyslexia Board and Institute Accountability

The Task Force recommends that 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.

A Dyslexia Board will monitor what is happening across Iowa concerning students with characteristics of dyslexia and the ability of the system to address their needs. The Board will ensure that the Dyslexia Task Force's recommendations are implemented with fidelity and that future actions are rooted in the

core values of the Task Force. As needs shift and new challenges arise, the Dyslexia Board can support transformation. Under the leadership of the Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant, the Dyslexia Board will offer suggestions for guidance to be issued by the Iowa Department of Education as change continues, update public information as necessary, and continue to delve into the complex and evolving issues surrounding dyslexia.

Specifically, the Board should work with the Iowa Department of Education and AEAs to support the implementation of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework and put into place leveled recognition programs to highlight districts and pre-service education programs who have developed and nurtured expertise around dyslexia.

The Board should work with the Iowa Department of Education to craft guidance to schools for the elements to be included in effective reading instruction and interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia. It further should work with IDE to craft tools and processes that help districts implement diagnostic assessment for students who are identified as potentially needing intervention by the current screener, select intervention programs and assistive technology, and engage in rigorous self-assessment of the quality of explicit, systematic instruction and assistive technology they offer.

The Board should offer suggestions for additional guidance to be issued by the Iowa Department of Education if needs change across the state.

The Board should work with the Iowa Department of Education 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.

The Board should report on progress annually to the Legislature. This provides a measure of accountability that the system in Iowa currently lacks.

Summary

Iowans have an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of dyslexia and appropriate responses to dyslexia; create an advanced endorsement and training program, implement the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework; and charter a Dyslexia Board to support ongoing transformation. With these advances, we can grow a system where teachers and educators are supported and well-resourced to provide the services and instruction to support students with characteristics of dyslexia, so that students and families thrive.

Chapter Two: Recommendations for Action by Key Stakeholder Groups

The Task Force was charged with developing recommendations by stakeholder group, including the Iowa Legislature, the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, Institutions of Higher Education, and School Districts. We have crafted an overview of the role and actions each stakeholder group will have in creating a system where students with characteristics of dyslexia, their families, and educators thrive. We also include an overview of the new Dyslexia Board whose work will guide ongoing and systemic growth. It is key that all stakeholders take action in order to ensure that Iowa's education system works cohesively and collaboratively to support all students.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for the Iowa Legislature

The Iowa Legislature will make transformative and important changes to how we understand dyslexia in Iowa; create a system to support new and essential learning opportunities for all Iowa educators; and put into place the mechanisms to monitor ongoing growth that will create and sustain a system where each and every student succeeds.

With its ability to ensure that change happens across the system, the Iowa Legislature plays a key role in transforming Iowa's services for students with characteristics of dyslexia. Amending the Iowa definition of dyslexia and making sure that all Iowa educators complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module will move stakeholders towards a deeper understanding of dyslexia and address many of the misconceptions held across the state. By ensuring expertise in Iowa's AEAs and pathways for educators to gain an advanced endorsement as described in the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, the Legislature sets in place necessary resources to lead to more meaningful and consistent supports for students across the state. By empowering the new Dyslexia Board, the Legislature will create a means of ongoing growth and a way to monitor and adapt implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations.

These recommendations are listed in order of priority as ranked by the Dyslexia Task Force members.

Recommendations

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- In the 2020 session, the Legislature should amend Iowa Code to replace the current definition with the International Dyslexia Association definition of dyslexia.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for the Iowa Department of Education

The Iowa Department of Education will oversee and facilitate efforts to increase educator knowledge of dyslexia and how to support students with characteristics of dyslexia: to create and support shared understanding and response to dyslexia across the state, to provide guidance on best practices, to support system-wide growth by hiring a Dyslexia Consultant, and to provide information to pilot the new endorsement.

The Iowa Department of Education plays a key role in creating and maintaining systems across Iowa to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. To oversee and facilitate this work the Iowa Department of Education will hire a Dyslexia Consultant who will chair the new Dyslexia Board that monitors implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and oversees ongoing transformation. To ensure the Dyslexia Consultant has the knowledge and background to support system-wide growth, the Dyslexia Task Force will provide recommendations for a job description. The Iowa Department of Education will support ongoing learning about dyslexia and educator response to families of students with dyslexia and offer tools to incentivize change across the state. In addition, the Iowa Department of Education will support the design and implementation of the new endorsement that will expand expertise across Iowa districts and AEAs. Lastly, the Iowa Department of Education will craft and implement a process to recognize best practices and growth in districts and IHEs. The recognition program will highlight districts and IHEs who are advancing their knowledge of dyslexia and supports for students with characteristics of dyslexia. The program will spotlight what is happening in Iowa and what is possible in supports for students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Recommendations

- 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.
- 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. This would include chairing the new Dyslexia Board and overseeing its annual reporting to the Legislature.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- By September 2021, the Iowa Department of Education should collaborate with the Area Education Agency system and the Dyslexia Board to develop and implement an action plan for the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework developed by the Dyslexia Task Force.
- 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.
- 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.
- Over time, the Iowa Department of Education should consider providing additional guidance to Iowa schools as recommended by the Dyslexia Board.

In addition to these recommendations, and in order to support recommendations for other stakeholders, the Iowa Department of Education should undertake activities to support system-wide growth, including:

- The Iowa Department of Education should work with the Iowa Reading Research Center to provide guidance, oversight, and requirements for a new advanced endorsement as described in Level IV of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for Area Education Agencies

Area Education Agencies will grow and sustain expertise across the state to support students with the characteristics of dyslexia by engaging in ongoing skill development for all AEA staff, hiring a Dyslexia Consultant, participating in the new advanced endorsement opportunity, providing professional learning opportunities for educators, and supporting services to students and their families.

As the central provider of technical assistance and professional development to school districts, Iowa's Area Education Agencies play a key role in creating coherent and effective support systems for students and educators across Iowa. It is imperative that all AEA staff complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module to ensure that they have a basic foundational knowledge of dyslexia.

In addition, to ensure skills and expertise across the state, each AEA needs a full-time Dyslexia Consultant who has deep knowledge about dyslexia; expertise in explicit, systematic literacy instruction; and experience working with students with the characteristics of dyslexia. The Dyslexia Board will provide a recommended job description. To continue growth, each AEA will have at least one staff person participate in the first cohort of the new endorsement pilot program. With this internal capacity, AEAs will work in close collaboration with the Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant and the Dyslexia Board to implement an action plan for the Dyslexia Professional Learning Network.

AEAs will support school districts by sharing the availability of assistive technologies; best practices for identifying which technologies might support which students; and training teachers, staff, and students on how to use available assistive technologies. By sharing best practices and implementing new professional learning opportunities across the state, AEAs will support a system where students with characteristics of dyslexia thrive and teachers and educators have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support them.

Recommendations

- By July 1, 2020, with funding from the Legislature, each AEA should 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.
- Area Education Agencies should train all AEA staff who will support implementation of the statewide Professional Learning Framework, including having them complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module by July 2020.
- 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.
- 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.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for Pre-service Education Programs

Pre-service education programs will provide opportunities for their personnel to gain the knowledge and skills to provide services to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. They will grow the expertise of current educators by helping to create and support a new endorsement as described in the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework.

Pre-service education programs play an important role in ensuring that Iowa's system includes professionals with the knowledge, skills, and expertise to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. Given this important role, it is key that they work closely and collaboratively with the Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant and the new Dyslexia Board to ensure that programs provide opportunities for pre-service educators to learn about dyslexia and develop skills to provide services to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. To do this, pre-service programs will collaborate on an action plan to implement the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, including creating tools and processes for institutions of higher education to assess their current programs and provide new and additional opportunities as necessary.

To ensure all educators have a basic understanding of dyslexia, pre-service programs will require all students to complete the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module. Pre-service programs will also provide differentiated learning opportunities for all educators, based on their expected roles with students; special education teachers, teachers with a reading endorsement, and teachers in grades K-5, should complete specific coursework in explicit, systematic literacy instruction.

In addition, pre-service education programs may also apply to support the ongoing learning of current educators by offering coursework to complete the new advanced endorsement. This would ensure that educators across the state have the opportunity to develop deep expertise in dyslexia.

Recommendations

- 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.
- Pre-service education programs may apply to offer training toward the new endorsement at the conclusion of the endorsement pilot project.

In addition to these recommendations, and in order to support recommendations to other stakeholders, pre-service education programs should undertake activities to support system-wide growth, including:

- When available, consider applying for recognition from the Iowa Department of Education's leveled recognition program designed to validate and recognize educator and education leader preparation programs' alignment to the Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for School Districts

School districts will provide intensive supports to students with the characteristics of dyslexia, including explicit, systematic literacy instruction and access to assistive technologies. Districts will prioritize and encourage staff and teachers to engage in professional learning opportunities to grow capacity around dyslexia and work closely with Area Education Agencies to implement professional learning.

It is in the school districts that the rubber hits the road. Comprised of educators working directly with students and education leaders supporting learning in Iowa's classrooms, school districts play a vital role in ensuring that students with characteristics of dyslexia receive the services and supports they need. Districts must ensure students with the characteristics of dyslexia are provided explicit, systematic literacy instruction and the assistive technology they need to support their learning. In order to make this happen, districts need to prioritize learning opportunities for all educators aligned to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework that grow expertise at the appropriate levels across the system. Districts should also support ongoing growth by working closely with the Dyslexia Board, encouraging staff to take part in the new endorsement, and sharing and following the guidance offered by the Iowa Department of Education. As districts grow their own supports for students with characteristics of dyslexia, they can apply for recognition that will highlight and encourage best practices across the state and honor the work and expertise they develop.

Recommendations

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

In addition to these recommendations, and in order to support recommendations to other stakeholders, school districts should undertake activities to support system-wide growth, including:

- Districts should adhere to the dyslexia-specific guidance to be issued by the Iowa Department of Education by July 1, 2020, and any additional guidance issued later, including allowing the use of the term "dyslexia" and responding appropriately when educators or families suspect dyslexia or when dyslexia is confirmed by a diagnostician.
- Districts should encourage qualified staff members to apply to be in the first or second cohort of the proposed new endorsement pilot training program and/or to obtain the endorsement once the training program is widely available.
- Once it is available, districts should incorporate the recommendations of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework into their professional development plans for teachers and administrators.
- Once the leveled recognition program is established, districts implementing supports for students with dyslexia should apply to receive validation and recognition of their expertise in dyslexia.

Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations for a New Dyslexia Board

A new Dyslexia Board will ensure that Iowa continues to work towards creating a system where all students, including those with the characteristics of dyslexia, have the resources and supports to succeed in Iowa's schools and beyond.

The Task Force recommends creating a new Dyslexia Board that will work to ensure that the Dyslexia Task Force's recommendations are implemented with fidelity, that outcomes are monitored, and goals and action plans are adjusted as necessary. It is key that this Board work closely with the Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant, Area Education Agencies, pre-service programs, and districts to support ongoing work to create and maintain a system of excellence in serving students with characteristics of dyslexia. The Board will ensure that research into best practices, new science and findings, and additional resources are available to stakeholders across the system. Ultimately, the Board will monitor the progress of system changes, consider unresolved and new issues, adjust plans as necessary, and advise stakeholders on next steps. The Dyslexia Board will guide, facilitate, and oversee the implementation of the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and provide leadership for future recommendations. The Board should be chaired by the Iowa Department of Education Dyslexia Consultant.

Actions

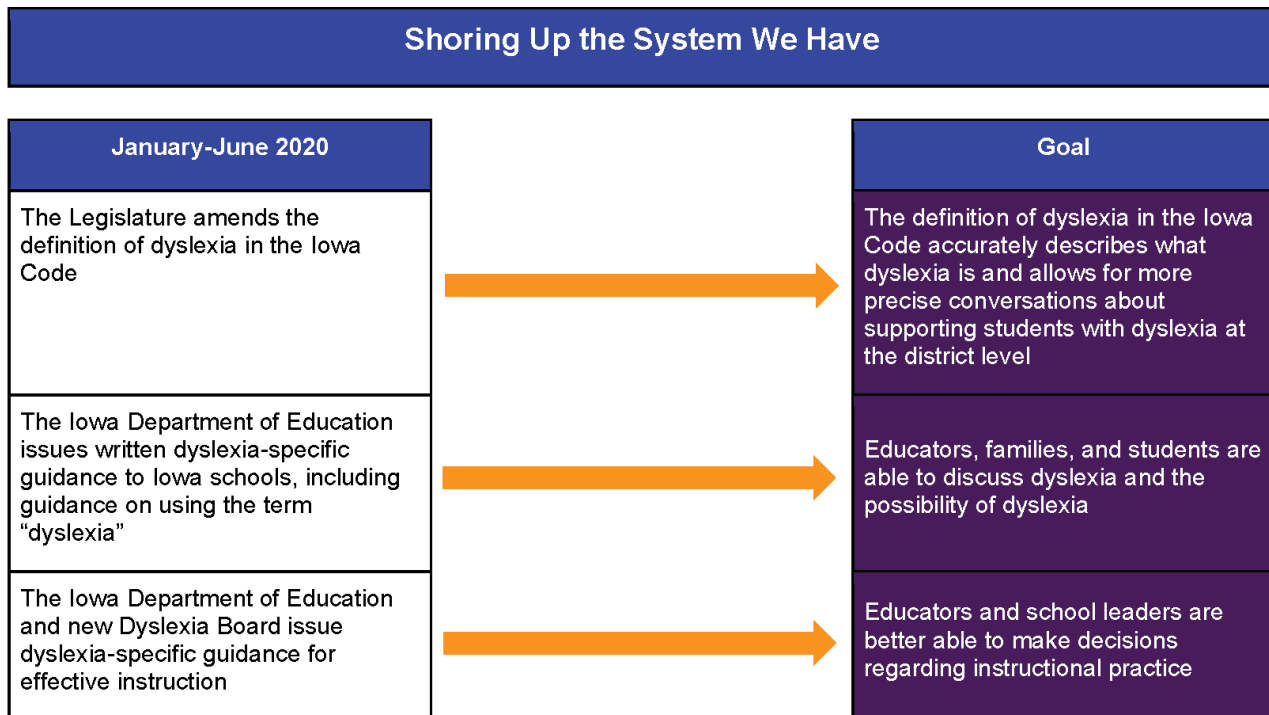
- The Dyslexia Board will report annually, by November 15 of each year, to the Legislature.
- By December 2020, the Dyslexia Board should work collaboratively with the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Reading Research Center to create and maintain publicly-accessible information for all stakeholders concerning dyslexia and the education of students with dyslexia in Iowa.
- By July 2021, the Dyslexia Board, in collaboration with 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 explicit, systematic instruction and assistive technology.
- As the Dyslexia Board determines additional needs, it should consider recommending additional guidance for the Iowa Department of Education to submit to Iowa schools.
- By July 2021, the Dyslexia Board, in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Education, should provide a recommended process for informal diagnostic assessment following universal screening for further identifying student needs.
- By September 2021, the Dyslexia Board should collaborate with the Iowa Department of Education and the Area Education Agency system to develop and implement an action plan for the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework developed by the Dyslexia Task Force.
- By September 2021, the Dyslexia Board should work with the Iowa Department of Education to establish a leveled recognition program designed to validate and recognize the level of expertise around dyslexia developed in a district.
- By July 2022, the Dyslexia Board should work with the Iowa Department of Education to establish a leveled recognition program designed to validate and recognize educator and education leader preparation programs' alignment to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework.

Timeline – Dyslexia Task Force Recommendations

It will take time to scale-up system-level improvements to fully support students with characteristics of dyslexia in every classroom statewide. To achieve our vision by 2030, it is vital that we immediately begin the process of building capacity across the education system.

The Task Force recommendations are designed to ultimately ensure that universal literacy instruction supports all students and that students with characteristics of dyslexia receive the additional intervention and accommodations they need. This timeline is provided to demonstrate the steps it will take to build the capacity of the system to make this a reality and to provide the supports and accountability to ensure these steps are taken.

The strategy entails investing in the capacity of general education teachers and dyslexia specialists, administrators, teacher educators, and professional developers. It further entails the actions to be taken by each stakeholder and the milestone dates by which we can expect to see outcomes needed to move the system toward achieving our vision.



Dyslexia Task Force Report

Growing Toward the System We Want: An Advanced Endorsement, Expanded Preservice Preparation, and a Professional Learning Framework









January-June 2020	School Year 2020-21	School Year 2021-22	School Year 2022-23	School Year 2023-24	School Year 2024-25	GOAL: 2030
The Legislature approves a new endorsement as described in Level IV of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework (the Framework is outlined in Appendix B of the Task Force report)	BOEE ¹ begins writing detailed parameters for the endorsement IDE ² and IRRC ³ begin crafting a pilot endorsement training program, seeking input from other IHEs ⁴	First cohort of 40 people starts the 2-year pilot training	Second cohort of 40 people starts the 2-year pilot training Multiple IHEs are approved to offer endorsement training programs	100 people start an endorsement training program in multiple IHEs	100 additional dyslexia experts are available to IHEs, AEAs, and districts	500 additional dyslexia experts with an endorsement are available to IHEs, AEAs, ⁵ and districts; every IHE, AEA, and district will have a staff person with an Explicit Systematic Literacy Endorsement
	IHEs develop a plan to implement the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework	IHEs begin implementation of their Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework Action Plan components IHEs require all pre-service candidates to complete IRRC Dyslexia Overview module	IHEs continue implementation of their Dyslexia Professional Learning Action Plan components			Teacher and administrator candidates and other professionals trained in Iowa IHEs are fully prepared to support students with dyslexia, according to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework
		The IDE establishes a recognition program for IHEs	IHEs apply for recognition	An initial cohort of IHEs are recognized for program alignment to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework	A second cohort of IHEs are recognized for program alignment to the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework	The dyslexia professional learning framework is fully implemented across the state
The Legislature approves funding for 9 AEA Dyslexia Consultants All AEA staff involved in implementing the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework complete the IRRC Dyslexia Overview module	Each AEA hires a Dyslexia Consultant, who provides support to districts and AEA staff	Dyslexia Consultants continue providing training to districts and AEA staff Each AEA sends at least one person through the 2-year endorsement pilot training program	All AEA pilot cohort participants receive their state endorsement Additional AEA staff start the 2-year endorsement training program			AEA staff understand dyslexia and how to serve students with dyslexia AEAs are staffed with specially-trained Dyslexia Consultants

Dyslexia Task Force Report

January-June 2020	School Year 2020-21	School Year 2021-22	School Year 2022-23	School Year 2023-24	School Year 2024-25	GOAL: 2030
	AEAs collaborate to develop and implement their Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework Action Plan components	AEAs continue implementation of their Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework Action Plan components	→		The dyslexia professional learning framework is fully implemented across the state	
The Legislature requires school boards to assure all educators have completed the IRRC Dyslexia Overview module	Districts require all licensed educators complete IRRC Dyslexia Overview module	25 district staff take part the 2-year endorsement training	→ 25 additional district staff take part in the 2-year endorsement training	→ District staff take part in the 100 new slots for the endorsement training program	→	Every district will be fully resourced to provide explicit, systematic literacy instruction as part of Universal Literacy Instruction and to provide more intensive support to students who need it
	The IDE and new Dyslexia Board recommend a process for informal diagnostic assessment and intensified instruction following universal screening IDE issues a tool to guide selection of intervention programs and assistive technology IDE issues a tool for districts to engage in rigorous self-assessment of the quality of instruction and assistive technology	Districts take part in the professional learning opportunities as guided by the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework, including training on informal diagnostic assessment Districts select intervention programs and assistive technology Districts engage in self-assessments	→		→	Every district will be fully resourced to provide explicit, systematic literacy instruction as part of Universal Literacy Instruction Districts ensure intensified interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia
		The IDE establishes a leveled recognition program to recognize district expertise in dyslexia; districts are recognized	Funding is requested of the legislature to support districts that are working toward recognition Districts are recognized for their level of expertise in dyslexia	→		

Dyslexia Task Force Report

Supporting Change Along the Way

January-June 2020	School Year 2020-21	School Year 2021-22	School Year 2022-23	School Year 2023-24	School Year 2024-25	Goal 2030	
The Legislature establishes a standing Dyslexia Board	The Board works with the IDE, AEA's, and IHEs to develop an implementation plan for the multi-year, statewide professional learning framework	Board meets regularly to oversee implementation of recommendations and to track and study outcomes					The Dyslexia Task Force's recommendations are implemented with fidelity, actions are rooted in the core values of the Task Force and stakeholder needs, and implementation plans shift as new challenges arise and new information is discovered
	The Board establishes mechanisms to track implementation of recommendations and outcomes for students with dyslexia						
	The Board reports to the Legislature annually						
The IDE appoints a Dyslexia Consultant	The IDE Dyslexia Consultant works with the AEA Consultants and decision makers across the state					There is consistency of high-quality practice to support students with characteristics of dyslexia across the state of Iowa	
The IDE, IRRC, and Dyslexia Board create publicly-accessible information concerning dyslexia and the education of students with characteristics of dyslexia in Iowa	The IDE issues guidance to schools as needed					Everyone in the system has access to high quality, timely information on the latest information about serving students with characteristics of dyslexia	
	Information on dyslexia and educating students with characteristics of dyslexia is updated						

ⁱ BOEE=Board of Educational Examiners
ⁱⁱ IDE=Iowa Department of Education
ⁱⁱⁱ IRRC=Iowa Reading Research Center
^{iv} IHE=Institute of Higher Education
^v AEA=Area Education Agency

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Appendices

Appendix A: Task Force Information

The Iowa Dyslexia Task Force convened in October 2018 as requested by Senate File 2360 in order to craft and offer recommendations to best support students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Legislative Charge¹¹

Senate File 2360

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A DYSLEXIA RESPONSE TASK FORCE AND REPORT. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

Section 1. DYSLEXIA RESPONSE TASK FORCE AND REPORT.

1. The department of education shall establish a dyslexia task force. The task force shall consist of the following members:
 - a. The director of the department of education or the director's designee.
 - b. A representative of the Iowa Reading Research Center.
 - c. A representative of an area education agency.
 - d. One school administrator.
 - e. One reading specialist.
 - f. One special education teacher.
 - g. Two representatives of decoding dyslexia who are parents of children with dyslexia.
 - h. One representative of decoding dyslexia who is an individual with dyslexia.
 - i. One provider certified in a structured literacy reading program.
 - j. One psychologist or speech language pathologist licensed in the state of Iowa with experience in diagnosing dyslexia.
 - k. A representative of an institution of higher education in Iowa with documented expertise in dyslexia and reading instruction.

2. The director of the department of education or the director's designee shall convene the task force. The department of education shall provide staffing services for the task force.

3. The task force shall submit a report regarding its findings and recommendations relating to dyslexia response to the governor and the general assembly no later than November 15, 2019. When making such recommendations, the task force shall consider but not be limited to student screening, interventions, teacher preparation and professional development, classroom accommodations, and assistive technology. The report shall include all of the following:
 - a. An overview of the symptoms and effects of dyslexia.
 - b. An overview of current practices relating to dyslexia response in Iowa schools.
 - c. A description of current concerns relating to dyslexia response identified by the members of the task force.
 - d. Recommendations of any proposed legislation or rulemaking or any additional personnel or funding needed to address the needs of Iowa students with dyslexia.

¹¹ An act providing for a dyslexia response task force (2018).

- e. Recommendations relating to dyslexia response for specific stakeholder groups, including but not limited to parents, educators, administrators, school boards, and institutions of higher education.
- f. A suggested timeline for implementation of the task.

Task Force Chair Person

David Tilly, Iowa Department of Education
Department of Education Director's Designee

Task Force Members and Roles

Lonna Anderson, Ottumwa Community School District
Representative of an Area Education Agency until July 2019, then School Administrator

Helen Blitvich, Decoding Dyslexia
Representative of Decoding Dyslexia who is an Individual with Dyslexia

Amy L Conrad, University of Iowa Psychologist
Psychologist or Speech Language Pathologist Licensed in the State of Iowa with Experience in Diagnosing Dyslexia

Susan Etscheidt, University of Northern Iowa
Representative of an Institution of Higher Education in Iowa with Documented Expertise in Dyslexia and Reading Instruction

Katie Greving, Decoding Dyslexia
Representative of Decoding Dyslexia who is a Parent of Children with Dyslexia

Elizabeth Hoksbergen, Apples of Gold Center for Learning, Inc.
Provider Certified in a Structured Literacy Reading Program

Erin Klopstad, Nevada Community School District
Reading Specialist

Cindy Lewis, Pleasant Valley Community School District
School Administrator

Nina Lorimor-Easley, True Potential Education
Representative of Decoding Dyslexia who is a Parent of Children with Dyslexia

Kristin Orton, Heartland Area Education Agency
Representative of an Area Education Agency

Deborah Reed, Iowa Reading Research Center
Representative of the Iowa Reading Research Center

Kim Schmidt, Odebolt Arthur Battle Creek Ida Grove Community School District
Special Education Teacher

Appendix B: Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework

Teaching literacy effectively requires a complex set of dispositions, knowledge, and skills. While not every teacher in K-12 education needs this intensive level of knowledge and skills about teaching literacy to students with characteristics of dyslexia, all educators need some understanding. The development of the Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Professional Development Framework was guided by four principles:

- 1) improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia requires key professional *dispositions*,
- 2) improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia is a *shared responsibility*,
- 3) the knowledge and skills needed to improve services to students with characteristics of dyslexia is *differentiated* across professional assignments, and
- 4) pre-service and in-service professionals must represent the acquisition of necessary dispositions, knowledge, and skills in *applied and authentic* ways.

The proposed framework establishes the expertise expected of educators at five levels of the system, including the following:

1. PK-12 teachers in non-core content classes; these teachers will enhance the learning of all students in all subject areas, understand the impact of dyslexia on learners, and know how to make content area instruction accessible to these students through accommodations and/or modifications.
2. Teachers responsible for literacy instruction in PK-12 core content classes; these teachers will understand the principles and practices of explicit, systematic literacy instruction that benefit all students, including students with characteristics of dyslexia.
3. Teachers who have endorsements to teach students with significant literacy needs or special education students; these teachers will have specialized knowledge and skills to provide intensive intervention that incorporates evidence-based practices.
4. Specialists at the school-level with a new graduate-level endorsement; these specialists will coordinate the screening, assessment, instruction, and progress monitoring of students with characteristics of dyslexia.
5. Dyslexia consultants in each district, at the Iowa Department of Education, and at each Area Education Agency; these consultants will facilitate the implementation of the Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework and provide professional learning opportunities to teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators. AEA dyslexia consultants are encouraged to teach students with characteristics of dyslexia as they train other teachers.

School administrators and other support personnel provide the foundation to improving school practices for students with characteristics of dyslexia; they also must understand the impact of dyslexia on learners and know how to develop educational approaches to improve student learning.

The professionals who share the responsibility of improving services to students with characteristics of dyslexia are identified in the Iowa Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework depicted in the graphic in the body of the report.

Dispositions

Professional teaching dispositions are defined as those professional attitudes, values and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students,

families, colleagues, and communities. Professional teaching dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, and honesty.¹²

Foundational Dispositions

- All children can learn to read and write
- Effective instruction is essential to student learning
- Teachers have a responsibility to provide effective instruction

Supporting Dispositions

- Believe that all children (including those with characteristics of dyslexia), when provided with explicit, systematic literacy instruction, will improve proficiency in language and literacy
- Adopt a differentiated, diagnostic-prescriptive, adaptive/interactive teaching pedagogy for high-level, individual student engagement
- Establish inclusive educational settings to support students with characteristics of dyslexia who have diverse cognitive-linguistic profiles
- Utilize research and data-based knowledge to inform best practice and guide decision-making for students with characteristics of dyslexia
- Develop relationships with families based on mutual respect and actively engage families and children in all aspects of the educational process
- Set high (yet realistic) expectations for all children regardless of individual learning challenges
- Embrace diverse, effective motivational strategies for each individual learner
- Communicate and collaborate with professionals to develop highly-effective educational programs for students with characteristics of dyslexia, delivered with fidelity
- Engage in professional self-reflection to improve practice for students who have characteristics of dyslexia
- Seek opportunities for professional development to stay abreast of current science, enhance personal competence, and facilitate student success/achievement
- Show an openness, a responsibility, and dedication toward improving literacy instruction for students with characteristics of dyslexia
- Demonstrate a high level of professional competence and integrity

The tables that follow describe each professional level, the focus of the professional development, and the expectations for demonstrating successful completion at both the pre-service and in-service levels. The selection of applicable knowledge and practice standards will be developed in consultation with representatives from each level.

¹² National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2013).

Foundational Level: Administrators / Support Professionals

Future and current Administrators, AEA Consultants, School Psychologists, Speech-Language Pathologists, Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, At-Risk Coordinators

Area of Instructional Focus:

Basic understanding of the neurobiological nature, cognitive-linguistic correlates, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; understanding of key components necessary to develop programs and support students with characteristics of dyslexia effectively; understanding of statistics relating to literacy levels, economic impact, and social/emotional factors for students with unidentified or unaddressed dyslexia; understanding of legal requirements of schools regarding dyslexia diagnosis in relation to IDEA

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Pre-Professional/Pre-Service

- In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendation #3, all educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- As demonstrated in authentic portfolio and practice:* Authentic portfolio might include school improvement plans, professional development goals & staff development plans, community involvement activities, district report card, student data profiles & reports, school climate surveys, building-level study teams, conference attendance/presentations, parent advisory council minutes, school website, skills video, lesson plans, progress reports, intervention plan and evaluation; comprehensive student assessment, artifacts from IEP and 504 plan meetings, coaching cycle plan and outcomes, professional development artifacts, consultation and communication logs.

Professional/In-Service Learning

In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendations:

- All educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- AEAs 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.
- AEAs should collaborate with the IDE 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.

Level I: PK-12 Teachers in Non-core Content Areas

Areas of Instructional Focus

Basic understanding of the neurobiological nature, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; basic skills in implementing accommodations appropriate for students with characteristics of dyslexia; basic understanding of a dyslexia-friendly learning environment; skilled in the use and integration of assistive technology

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Pre-Professional/Pre-Service

- In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendation #3, all educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- As demonstrated in authentic portfolio and practice:* Authentic portfolio might include consultation/communication log, cooperating teacher/supervisor/principal evaluations, sample letters home [para], class handouts, tests or assessment, student work samples, sample unit plan, sample lesson plans, picture gallery, coaching documents, letters from students, parents, colleagues, sportsfolio [PE], class presentations with technology, student blog entries, team tools, dropboxes, e-portfolios, podcasts [IT].

Professional/In-Service Learning

In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendations:

- All educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview.
- 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 IDE in collaboration with the new Dyslexia Board. Self-assessments should take place at least once every three years.

Level II: PK – 12 Teachers in Core Content Areas

Areas of Instructional Focus:

Basic understanding of the neurobiological nature, cognitive-linguistic correlates, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; basic skills in implementing accommodations appropriate for students with characteristics of dyslexia; skilled in creating a dyslexia-friendly learning environment; skilled in the use and integration of assistive technology

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Pre-Professional/Pre-Service

- In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendation #3, all educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- As demonstrated in authentic portfolio and practice:* Authentic portfolio might include student learning goals, assessment plans, instructional design, integration of assistive technology, instructional decision-making, reflection, lesson plans, alignment with standards, student products, syllabi, teaching strategies and evaluation, differentiating instruction, planned modifications/accommodations, student learning assessments, displays or showcases of high student achievement, sample math problems, sample assignments, readings, projects, classroom pictures.

Professional/In-Service Learning

In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendations:

- All educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- 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 IDE in collaboration with the new Dyslexia Board. Self-assessments should take place at least once every three years.

Level III: PK – 12 Literacy Interventionists, Title I, Special Education Teachers, and Reading Specialists

Areas of Instructional Focus:

Solid understanding of the neurobiological nature, cognitive-linguistic correlates, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; basic skills in administering informal measures related to reading difficulties; basic knowledge of explicit, systematic literacy instruction; basic skills in crafting and implementing IEP goals and 504 plans and accommodations appropriate for students with characteristics of dyslexia; skilled in creating a dyslexia-friendly learning environment; skilled in the use and integration of assistive technology

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Pre-Professional/Pre-Service

- In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendation #3, all educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- As demonstrated in authentic portfolio and practice:* Authentic portfolio might include teaching philosophy, student assessment protocol, lesson design, teacher planning documents (lesson plan, accommodation plan), teaching strategies, teaching/learning video, student products, progress monitoring, behavioral assessment and support planning, delivery, & goal monitoring, IEP, 504 artifacts.

Professional/In-Service Learning

In accordance with Iowa Dyslexia Task Force recommendations:

- All educators will be required to show completion of the Iowa Reading Research Center Dyslexia Overview module.
- 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 IDE in collaboration with the new Dyslexia Board. Self-assessments should take place at least once every three years.
- All special education teachers, reading endorsement teachers, and elementary teachers must have coursework on intensive, explicit reading instruction designed to remediate children with characteristics of dyslexia.

Level IV: Dyslexia Specialist

Areas of Instructional Focus:

Strong understanding of the neurobiological nature, cognitive-linguistic correlates, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; skilled in administering informal and formal assessments related to dyslexia; skilled in delivery of explicit, systematic literacy intervention; skilled in crafting IEP goals and 504 plans for students with characteristics of dyslexia; skilled in the design and implementation of accommodations and modifications; competent in creating a dyslexia-friendly learning environment; skilled in the use and integration of assistive technology

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Professional/In-Service Learning

- Authentic portfolio will be aligned with the requirements for and responsibilities of the new advanced endorsement.

Level V: Dyslexia Consultant

Areas of Instructional Focus:

Deep understanding of the neurobiological nature, cognitive-linguistic correlates, developmental indicators, compensatory behaviors, potential psychological factors, and co-occurring disorders of dyslexia; expert in training others to administer informal and formal assessments related to dyslexia; expert in delivery and supervision of explicit, systematic literacy intervention; expert in crafting IEP goals and 504 plans for students with characteristics of dyslexia; highly skilled in training educators in the design and delivery of accommodations and modifications; highly competent in training educators how to create a dyslexia-friendly learning environment; skilled in training educators how to integrate assistive technology; highly skilled as a trainer and consultant to support those serving students with characteristics of dyslexia in Iowa schools

Demonstration of Dispositions, Knowledge and Skills

Professional/In-Service Learning

- Authentic portfolio might include various artifacts related to facilitating the implementation of the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework and providing professional learning opportunities to teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators.

The pre-service options identified in the Dyslexia Professional Learning Framework are congruent with current state requirements addressing educator preparation.¹³

¹³ Standards for practitioner and administrator preparation programs (2019); Issuance of teacher license and endorsements (2019).

Appendix C: Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Survey: Summary Results

In response to the charges set forth for the Task Force, one action was to obtain information on the state of dyslexia in Iowa from key stakeholders. Targeted stakeholders included:

- Directors of Higher Education Programs
- Administrators (e.g., superintendents, principals, vice principals, directors, instructional coaches)
- Area Education Agency Staff (e.g., consultants, school psychologists, speech/language pathologists, social workers)
- Educators (e.g., general education, reading specialists, special education, para educators)
- Parents and Children

Methods

The Task Force worked as a large group to identify what necessary demographics (no personally-identifying information) and dyslexia-specific information was needed related to the following areas:

- Basic Knowledge of Dyslexia
- Dyslexia-Specific Information in Pre-Service Training for teachers in Iowa Colleges/Universities
- Dyslexia-Specific Information in Professional Development for teachers in Iowa Schools
- Screening
- Intervention
- Accommodations/Assistive Technology

A sub-group of the Task Force then took the list and developed questions for each stakeholder group that addressed the needed information in each topic. Care was taken to create questions that could be asked in parallel across the different stakeholder groups (e.g., all stakeholders were asked “How satisfied are you with your school(s)/agency’s support of the screening process for dyslexia?” Additionally, a balance of forced choice and open-text questions were developed. The rough draft of these questions was edited within the sub-group and then a first draft was distributed to the larger Task Force for feedback. After two rounds of feedback and editing, the final version of questions was approved by the full Task Force.

The final questions were entered into a Qualtrics™ platform that could be accessed via the internet. All members of the Task Force and volunteers from each stakeholder group completed the survey in draft-mode to identify any potential issues. Problems were identified and resolved in an iterative process over two weeks. After identified issues were corrected, the survey link was activated (April 2019). To access appropriate stakeholders, the web link was distributed to:

- Directors of Education Programs at Iowa Colleges/Universities
- Superintendents to share with their staff (with a cover letter describing the survey)
- AEA Special Education Directors to share with their staff
- LEAs were asked to share it widely with parents
- On the Iowa Dyslexia Task Force public website
- On websites and social media networks of Decoding Dyslexia – Iowa

Responses

Responses to the survey were collected through June 2019. All responses were downloaded to an Excel file. Invalid responses (n = 510 documented log-ins without accompanying data) were deleted. The remaining responses (n = 4,184) were coded by stakeholder group and uploaded into separate

SPSS files. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize all forced choice responses. A narrative analysis was conducted for the open-ended responses and emergent themes were identified.

While attempts were made to ensure all stakeholders were able to access the survey, there were some limitations that affected responses. Some districts did not send the survey link out to their staff, responses were not mandatory (so not all who received the survey responded), the survey was sent out at the end of the school year (a busy time for staff and families), access to a secure internet may have limited the access of some, some respondents did not answer all of the questions. Despite these potential issues, a large number of responses were obtained (particularly for Educators, Parents, and Children). The results of the survey should be interpreted with these potential response biases in mind.

Of the valid responses collected and analyzed, the following were obtained for each stakeholder group:

- Directors of Higher Education Programs
 - 38 Responses (57.9% Female; 65.8% White; 52.6% not Hispanic/Latino)
- Administrators (e.g., superintendents, principals, vice principals)
 - 90 Responses (Roughly 40% did not respond to demographic questions, of those who responded 37.8% Female; 61.1% White; 55.6% not Hispanic/Latino)
- Area Education Agency Staff (e.g., school psychologists, speech/language pathologists)
 - 312 Responses (64.7% Female; 72.4% White; 67.6% not Hispanic/Latino)
- Educators (e.g., general education, special education, para educators)
 - 956 Responses (59.2% Female; 66.7% White; 54.7% not Hispanic/Latino)
 - General Education = 469
 - Reading Specialists = 167
 - Special Education = 153
 - Para Educators = 87
 - Other = 80
- Parents and Children
 - 1,341 Parent Responses (60.4% Female; 68.5% White; 63% not Hispanic/Latino)
 - 427 (31.8%) had at least 1 child with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia
 - 353 Child Responses (42.2% Female; 93.5% White; 96.3% not Hispanic/Latino)
 - 236 (66.9%) had a formal diagnosis of dyslexia
 - Mean age = 11.25 (range 4 – 21 years old)
- Other
 - An additional 1,094 responses were recorded that did not identify with any of the above stakeholder groups. These participants only responded to the initial questions on understanding of dyslexia and did not provide any demographic information.

In addition to the quantitative results, an analysis of the narrative comments from both the Dyslexia Task Force Web Site and the Task Force survey was conducted (see Appendix D).

Relevant Results

What is the current understanding of dyslexia within Iowa?

The existence of dyslexia in Iowa's Code and laws has not translated to consistent understanding among Iowa school administrators, AEAs, educators, education program directors, or families with children in need of reading assistance. In a Dyslexia Task Force (DTF) survey sent to these key stakeholders, 3,090 individuals responded to questions about dyslexia in Iowa's schools and higher education training programs. When asked about what type of deficiency causes dyslexia, the majority of respondents accurately identified phonological deficits. Yet, a high proportion of respondents still had the inaccurate belief that dyslexia is caused by visual deficits.

Table 1. Dyslexia is usually caused by what kind of deficiency? (Percent within each group)

	Phonological (<i>Correct Response</i>)	Visual	Spelling	Auditory
Higher Education Directors	68%	27%	0%	5%
Administration	47%	46%	2%	4%
AEA	72%	26%	1%	2%
Educators [All]	39%	56%	3%	3%
Reading Specialists*	48%	49%	2%	1%
Special Education*	52%	46%	1%	1%
General Education*	34%	61%	3%	3%
Parents	46%	43%	6%	4%

*This indicates a sub-group of the total educator group.

Additionally, while over half of respondents knew that dyslexia is equally common among girls and boys (52%) and that reading more at home is not the most effective intervention for dyslexia (60%), many still held the incorrect belief that colored overlays are a big help for people with dyslexia (30%).

When asked if they could use the term “dyslexia” when talking with colleagues or parents, 29% responded that they (probably) could not (17% Administrators, 30% AEA, and 30% Educators [34% Reading Specialists, 24% Special Education, and 28% General Education]). Most respondents did not know if they could use the term (31% Administrators, 23% AEA, and 28% Educators [30% Reading Specialists, 24% Special Education, and 28% General Education]).

Several educators noted the reluctance and resistance within schools to discuss the needs of students with dyslexia: “dyslexia is a word we are not allowed to use,” “we don’t even discuss the possibility of dyslexia at our school,” and “we are not able to use that word with parents.... I wish we could openly talk about dyslexia more so that many students could get the right instruction/intervention and the help they need.” Other educators commented: “Dyslexia is never discussed by the AEA team. They constantly remind us that we cannot diagnose dyslexia and should be very cautious even mentioning this to a parent” and “the term dyslexia seems like a bad word. I don’t feel supported in being able to use the term. I would love to create a culture where we aren’t afraid to have tough conversations about specific disabilities.”

Table 2. Are you able to use the term "dyslexia" with parents and colleagues?

	Definitely or Probably Yes	Might or Might Not	Definitely or Probably Not
Administration	53%	31%	17%
AEA	47%	23%	30%
Educators [All]	42%	28%	30%

	Definitely or Probably Yes	Might or Might Not	Definitely or Probably Not
Reading Specialists*	37%	30%	34%
Special Education*	53%	24%	24%
General Education*	44%	28%	28%

*This indicates a sub-group of the total educator group.

Screening

When asked about dyslexia-specific screening in Iowa schools, few said it was being done (21% Administrators, 45% AEA, and 8% Educators). When asked if Iowa schools should be screening for dyslexia, Administrators (46%) and AEA (38%) were in some agreement, while Iowa Educators were strongly supportive (78%). AEA respondents reported: “we are not trained in what to use to screen dyslexia”, “dyslexia is not specifically targeted”, “would like to see more assessment available to determine a student’s skills with phonological awareness,” and “I don’t feel that there is a structured screening process”. Educators shared concerns: “there is only time to screen a few of the students who struggle the most” and “lack of follow up and more formal assessment beyond state assessments.” Parents voiced similar concerns: “I believe that we are missing MANY kids. The ones who get screened are those with educated parents or persistent teachers.”

Intervention

Narrative analysis of the survey indicated dissatisfaction with intervention options according to AEA staff and educators. AEA respondents noted the insufficiency of intervention options available to schools, reporting a “one size fits all” approach and interventions “not specific to dyslexia” and not “individualized.” The educators described the lack of coordinated assessment and services: “It seems as though there is not a streamlined pathway to screening, evaluation, and support for students who may have or are diagnosed with dyslexia.” They identified the need for “resources for interventions, training for interventions, identification guides for dyslexic students.” The limited instructional options for students with dyslexia were frequently highlighted, including comments such as “We have students identified with dyslexia that are not getting instruction they need. Teachers in the district have not been trained on what best practice is for dyslexia instruction ... seems like a one size fits all approach when talking about our students with learning disabilities.”

Parents reported, “I was told they treat all kids the same no matter what disability they have” and “the school is not using effective curriculum to help children with Dyslexia, even after they are diagnosed/identified. More of the same instruction is not beneficial for them.” Other parents commented: “I don’t believe that my school uses Dyslexia interventions. It has never been discussed with me when problem solving for my child’s reading and spelling struggles” and “Schools do not use an evidence based structured literacy approach to teaching our dyslexic children how to read. Administrators and teachers are not trained to recognize nor remediate dyslexia. I chose to remediate my own sons dyslexia because I knew the school couldn’t and wouldn’t.”

Accommodations and Assistive Technology

In the DTF survey, few respondents indicated that their school or AEA had a formal evaluation process for accommodations (21% Administrators, 15% AEA, and 8% Educators). Additionally, less than half had access to site licenses for assistive technology (36% Administrators, 26% AEA, 15% Educators). Yet, 59% of parents, who had at least one child with dyslexia, reported that their child(ren) used

assistive technology. Among those families, 35% had to personally purchase the assistive technology for their child(ren). Despite the need for assistive technology in the classroom, only 13% of Reading Specialists and 14% of General Education teachers were trained on assistive technology. (Nearly half [46%] of Special Education teachers were trained.) This was further reflected in the results that showed only 38% of Educators who responded felt comfortable using assistive technology in the classroom. (This statistic was driven by the comfort of Special Education teachers [70% comfortable] while Reading Specialists [24%], General Education teachers [34%], and Para-Educators [37%] were less likely to endorse being comfortable using assistive technology with their students.)

Educator Preparation

DTF survey results indicated that only 16% of college/university programs had a dyslexia-specific course, though 68% reported that there was at least some dyslexia-specific content within other courses. Of Iowa Educators, only 12% reported that their training included dyslexia-specific content (this was close to 20% for Reading Specialists and Special Education teachers). Forty percent of Educators did not feel confident in their ability to teach students with dyslexia and 67% wanted more dyslexia-specific training (this was at 76% for Reading Specialists). Among parents who had at least one child diagnosed with dyslexia, less than 1% rated their teachers as “extremely knowledgeable” about dyslexia, while 44% rated them as “not knowledgeable at all.” Parents reported teachers’ lack of knowledge as a roadblock to providing effective services. Specifically, parents reported, “lack of teacher awareness for identifying children with Dyslexia and appropriate intervention,” and “lack of knowledge on how to teach necessary methods of instruction.”

In addition to parent results, educators acknowledged that they did not receive adequate training to meet the needs of students with dyslexia. Numerous teachers reported that they wished their training had included “more information on specific strategies when working with students with dyslexia,” “more direct practice & creating interventions that meet my students needs,” and “information about what dyslexia is and how my students will be affected. How to teach these students. What curriculum is best to remediate these students,” and “what we can do as teachers to help students with dyslexia. How do we help students get identified and help. What accommodations can I make as a classroom teacher.” Special educators also reported a lack of preparation. Specifically special educators reported, “I had some general training for students with a variety of strengths and needs, but not specifically for students with dyslexia,” and “I wish I had learned how prevalent dyslexia is, how students are diagnosed with it and how to better help students overcome their reading challenges.”

In-service Professional Development

When asked about professional development, AEA staff were more likely to have received dyslexia-specific content (46% versus 23% of Administrators and 22% of Educators). As stated previously, 67% of Iowa Educators wanted more training specific to dyslexia. Face-to-face and onsite methods were preferred as were incentives of a stipend, continuing education/licensure credits, and endorsements.

Administrators commented on the “lack of training for our teachers and resources for students,” the lack of “training opportunities” with reasonable costs, and the “delay in providing classes to train teachers and provide supports to district with professional development.” Administrators identified several factors contributing to the lack of professional development, including “time,” “cost,” “scheduling,” “convenience,” and “access to people with expertise.”

AEA personnel identified the need for professional development: “I feel that it has not been adequately addressed through our professional development, resources and assessments available, making sure all staff have the same training and information, and in working with districts to implement research based strategies for children with dyslexia.”

Many educators reported lack of training and professional development opportunities was a significant roadblock to providing evidence-based interventions to students with dyslexia. Those educators noted,

“Teachers have to seek out training independently, potentially pay for it on our own, and not have permission to take the day off to get the training unless taking a personal day.” The teachers’ “lack of professional capital” in addressing student needs was due to “no training from the district on best practice.”

Parent Experiences

Of public comments (n = 47) accepted on the Task Force web page through July of 2019, responses fell into one of four different categories:

- **Personal and Private Advocacy and Expenses:** “lots of personal advocacy, cost for doctor visits and travel, and multiple requests for information.”
- **School Resistance & Reluctance - Denying Dyslexia:** “Dyslexia is a common learning disability but because we can’t talk about it at public school, it is a very isolating experience.”
- **Dyslexia Screening:** “to have all incoming K-2 students in a district be screened for dyslexia.”
- **Educator Preparation:** “trained dyslexia specialists at every school” and “mandatory teacher education in dyslexia.”

Personal and Private Advocacy and Expenses. Among Iowa parents whose child has been identified as needing extra reading assistance who responded to the DTF survey (n = 1,341), 32% had at least one child with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. Fifty-seven percent of these parents reported that their child was receiving reading instruction through the school, while 65% were receiving tutoring outside of the school (either in place of or in addition to instruction in the school). Among those who responded to questions about personal costs (n = 202), 4% spent \$0 each year, 14% spent \$1 - \$1,000 each year, 45% spent \$1,000 - \$5,000 each year, and 37% spent over \$5,000 each year to cover the costs of their child(ren)’s tutoring. 38% of these families had gone into debt to pay for these services. Additionally, 73% had paid to attend local or national conferences or take certification classes to better understand dyslexia and be able to advocate for their child(ren). Parents reported, “My child was diagnosed with dyslexia and the school does not give any support for (dyslexia). I pay over \$6,000 for private tutor;” and “It took us taking him to Iowa City and bring him to an outside tutor on our own to get a formal Dysgraphia diagnosis for them to finally recognize that he indeed needed assistance.”

School Resistance & Reluctance. Many parents, who responded to the DTF survey, had been told that they should read more at home (46%), just wait for their child to outgrow it (34%), or that the school doesn’t deal with dyslexia (27%). Several parents reported a reluctance by school personnel to acknowledge the need for assessment and interventions: “the school needs to be more proactive in early school years ... we have now wasted 2 years of my son’s education because of their resistance;” “not sure our district actually believes in dyslexia. Whenever I bring up dyslexia and intervention specific to it, I am shut down. School personnel do not want to discuss it.”

Dyslexia Screening. Parents reported dissatisfaction with the screening processes by schools: “Dyslexia was not tested. My child went several years without being diagnosed. This was very hard on my child and us as parents. I don’t feel the school is doing enough to help;” “I don’t think there is a system put in place to assess a student to see if this could be part of their struggles.”

Educator Preparation. An analysis of the comments from the Dyslexia Task Force website also addressed the need for teacher preparation programs to include dyslexia-specific content. Respondents stated that “universities and colleges in Iowa need to educate teachers about dyslexia,” “work with our universities that are teaching our future teachers that dyslexia is a real thing and how to teach kids with it,” and that the training be “mandatory.” Representative quotes included: “Colleges need to start teaching the signs and symptoms of dyslexia to teachers, especially elementary teachers. Time is valuable... Teachers need to be taught the signs of dyslexia and that it can be diagnosed at a young age;” and “We have to fix this broken system and make sure at the very least our special education teachers are equipped with knowledge, training, and resources to offer to dyslexic learners. Our general ed teachers need education on learning the indicators and signs of dyslexic learner’s starting in early elementary school grades (kindergarten).”

Appendix D: Analysis of Iowa Dyslexia Task Force Survey Narrative Comments and Public Comments

This Appendix provides a summary of the narrative analysis of public comment collected via the Dyslexia Task Force website, as well as the responses to open-ended questions on the Dyslexia Task Force survey. The sampling was voluntary due to the nature of the public comments and the targeted survey population. There were 47 public comments and 4,144 comments on the survey (not every respondent answered every open-ended question; the number of *comments* refers to the number of unique answers to open-ended questions). The analysis was confined by time constraints and a narrow purpose.

Stakeholder	# of comments
Educator	1,767
Parents	1,398
AEA	744
Administrators	172
Institutes of Higher Education	16
Public comment (role not identified)	47

The analysis of the narrative comments was conducted by a subcommittee of the Task Force. An interpretive content analysis was the method employed. This iterative process involved segmenting each narrative comment into initial codes, which were further refined to categories and themes through inductive analysis and a constant-comparative examination. Overall themes were reported for the public comment analysis, while themes for the survey data were organized by survey question and by respondent.

Public Comment Respondents

The analysis of the public comments on the Dyslexia Task Force website revealed several issues and concerns. First, respondents reported that in order to secure necessary services for children with dyslexia, many relied on personal and private advocacy at their own expense: “There is no real help within the school system so we have to pay for private tutoring.” Others reported their needs were addressed “after lots of personal advocacy, cost for doctor visits and travel, and multiple requests for information.”

Second, commentators reported reluctance and resistance by schools to recognize dyslexia and the need for services: “Despite multiple meetings with the school, they repeatedly state that diagnosis does not change intervention.” One respondent noted, “Dyslexia is a common learning disability but because we can’t talk about it at public school, it is a very isolating experience.”

Third, respondents offered recommendations to change services for students with dyslexia, including:

- “to have all incoming K-2 students in a district be screened for dyslexia,”
- “to get the scientifically proven methods that have been shown to work for ALL kids in front of the kids at all levels of all schools and help move dyslexia from a school disability into a learning difference,”

- for the “Iowa State Department of Education to give a lot more guidance to schools on how to address dyslexia in the school system,” and
- for “trained dyslexia specialists at every school” and “mandatory teacher education in dyslexia.”

Survey Narrative Responses

The narrative comments from the Dyslexia Task Force survey were also analyzed by question and were organized by respondents. The respondents included individuals from Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), practicing administrators, Area Education Agency (AEA) personnel, educators, and parents.

IHEs. The survey respondents from the Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) identified several concerns associated with their programs’ current requirements for dyslexia, including the insufficiency of current content, noting that pre-service educators are not prepared, needing more “instruction and practice” in “direct, systematic, and explicit teaching of reading.”

Administrators. School administrators surveyed identified several areas of dissatisfaction with reading interventions in their schools, including teachers’ “lack of knowledge on how to respond instructionally to students with dyslexia,” a “lack of training” and professional development, and “the absence of state guidance, clarity and support.” These administrators identified several significant roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction to students with dyslexia, including “training,” “time,” and “cost” factors, and the lack of personnel “to implement supplemental supports” due to insufficient “time and staffing.”

AEA Personnel. Survey responses from AEA personnel identified similar concerns and barriers, including both the AEA staffs’ and the teachers’ lack of knowledge and lack of resources:

“I feel that it has not been adequately addressed through our professional development, resources and assessments available, making sure all staff have the same training and information, and in working with districts to implement research based strategies for children with dyslexia.”

“I am not sure we understand the resources and how to match them with students. Students with dyslexia may need a specific approach - I need more training to make instructional recommendations to schools.”

These AEA respondents noted that the range of intervention options for students with dyslexia is often “one-size,” “limited,” and “not individualized.” The biggest roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction to students with dyslexia included “lack of resources, knowledge and time” as well as “lack of understanding” and “staffing needs; lack of teachers.”

Educators. The survey responses from educators revealed several themes that informed the recommendations from the Dyslexia Task Force. Educators identified several sources of dissatisfaction with current school-based supports and services; these are described below and included:

- 1) insufficient knowledge and professional development;
- 2) no, narrow, or limited instructional options available;
- 3) reluctance or resistance to acknowledge dyslexia;
- 4) lack of state guidance; and
- 5) roadblocks to getting effective instruction.

Insufficient knowledge and professional development

Educators describe several areas where dyslexia-specific knowledge and professional development are needed. They described a lack of coordinated assessment and services. Specifically, educators reported, “It seems as though there is not a streamlined pathway to screening, evaluation, and support for students who may have or are diagnosed with dyslexia.”

No, narrow or limited instructional options available

Educators identified the need for “resources for interventions, training for interventions, identification guides for dyslexic students.” Educators noted that dyslexia was not introduced in pre-service preparation, were “not required by my college or by my school district.” One teacher proposed, “it needs to be a semester-long class for every educator K - 12.” The limited instructional options for students with dyslexia were frequently highlighted, including comments such as, “We have students identified with dyslexia that are not getting instruction they need. Teachers in the district have not been trained on what best practice is for dyslexia instruction...seems like a one size fits all approach when talking about our students with learning disabilities.”

Reluctance or resistance to acknowledge dyslexia

Educators also noted the reluctance and resistance within schools to improve services to students with dyslexia. Specifically, educators noted:

- “dyslexia is a word we are not allowed to use,”
- “we don't even discuss the possibility of dyslexia at our school,”
- “we are not able to use that word with parents...I wish we could openly talk about dyslexia more so that many students could get the right instruction/intervention and the help they need.”

One educator indicated: “We do not address Dyslexia within our schools and teachers have limited to [no] background knowledge in this area, nor does our district provide any. Students are getting identified for special education, rather than being tested for Dyslexia and then they are not making any growth in special education due to not knowing or using the right interventions.” Other educators commented:

- “Dyslexia is never discussed by the AEA team. They constantly remind us that we cannot diagnose dyslexia and should be very cautious even mentioning this to a parent;”
- “... the term dyslexia seems like a bad word. I don't feel supported in being able to use the term. I would love to create a culture where we aren't afraid to have tough conversations about specific disabilities;” and
- many had similar conclusions such as, “I feel we do nothing to help students with dyslexia.”

Lack of state guidance

Educators also identified the need for state-level guidance. Specifically, educators indicated, “I feel like since schools / AEA (don't) diagnose dyslexia it gets passed off as not a school issue or something that is not in our jurisdiction, which is unfortunate for our students. There is not enough support (financial and pedagogical) at the state level, which trickles down to not enough support at the district level” and “there is no guidance.”

Roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction

The educator respondents also identified several roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction to students with dyslexia. These included:

- 1) identifying students needing explicit, systematic literacy approaches;
- 2) professional development; and
- 3) time and resources.

The teachers reported that a “lack of screening” and “identification” were barriers, which would inform instruction. Specifically, teachers noted, “We, as educators, are not trained to know how to spot dyslexia so therefore we don’t who has it and who does not. We cannot give instruction if we don’t know the problem exists.” Another stated, “teachers need more info to understand it and how to help.”

Other educators discussed the lack of professional development as a roadblock, stating, “We, as a staff, don’t know enough about dyslexia. Therefore, we don’t know what works for these children and what doesn’t.” The teachers also reported the “lack of training for teachers to use researched based techniques for dyslexia,” the “lack of knowledge about matching interventions to reader’s needs rather than a one size fits all,” and the need to “be aware of the best practices for instructing students with dyslexia.” The educators described how their own training to support students with dyslexia could have been enhanced. Comments included the need for:

- “more screening,”
- “more direct practice and creating interventions that meet my students’ needs,”
- “more training on how to recognize symptoms of dyslexia,”
- more training on how to “instruct” and “accommodate students with dyslexia,” and
- “information about direct instruction strategies with reasons why these strategies are effective for students.”

Lastly, several teacher respondents identified “time” and “resources” as barriers, noting, “We also don’t have time in our schedule to provide the intensive instruction needed to support kids,” “funding and training for all teachers, not just special education and interventionists,” and “time, resources, professional support, parent support.”

Parents. The parents who responded to the survey also identified points of dissatisfaction with current school-based supports. One parent provided a summary of the various sources of dissatisfaction, “Lack of early intervention, lack of adequate amount of teachers/staff to work with dyslexic students, lack of training for the teachers and staff to understand and appropriately teach dyslexic students, lack of appropriate materials and amount of time to work with dyslexic students.” From the total of parent responses, several themes were identified that informed the recommendations from the Dyslexia Task Force. These are described below and included:

- 1) failure to diagnose or accept diagnosis,
- 2) lack of early intervention,
- 3) absent or ineffective curricula, and
- 4) roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction.

Failure to diagnose or accept diagnosis

The first source of dissatisfaction was the failure to diagnose or accept diagnosis. Some examples of comments included:

- “Dyslexia was not tested. My child went several years without being diagnosed. This was very hard on my child and us as parents. I don’t feel the school is doing enough to help;”
- “educators will not even say that there is a possibility that my child could have Dyslexia;”
- “zero screening and ZERO support for dyslexia;”
- “I don’t think there is a system put in place to assess a student to see if this could be part of their struggles;” and
- “not sure our district actually believes in dyslexia. Whenever I bring up dyslexia and intervention specific to it, I am shut down. School personnel do not want to discuss it.”

When specifically asked about the school's response to their child's dyslexia diagnosis, some parents reported positive actions by the school, creating IEPs, 504 plans, and accommodations. Other parents described the response as "shocked," "ignored," "not welcomed," "dismissed," and that the diagnosis did not play a role in "IEP or educational planning," did not "change teaching strategies."

Failure to diagnose or accept diagnosis

A second source of dissatisfaction was the lack of early intervention. Parents reported the "lack of early identification and intervention" with comments such as:

- "the school needs to be more proactive in early school years....we have now wasted 2 years of my son's education because of their resistance;"
- "my daughter slipped through the cracks until 6th grade because the reading services and screening were awful!!!!;" and
- "schools wait too long to recognize that dyslexia is the issue, have the student assessed and diagnosed and implement a plan. Early recognition and intervention is so vital. Waiting until 3rd, 4th, 5th grade is so detrimental to the student not only academically, but socially and emotionally. Their self esteem takes a huge hit when there is failure to recognize the issue early on (by Kindergarten) and immediately start intervention."

Absent or ineffective curricula

A third source of dissatisfaction was the absence or ineffectiveness of curricula. Parents reported:

- "the school is not using effective curriculum to help children with Dyslexia, even after they are diagnosed/identified. More of the same instruction is not beneficial for them;"
- "I was told they treat all kids the same no matter what disability they have;"
- "lack of structured, explicit approach to building reading/writing/spelling proficiency," and the "lack of trained teachers that can provide structured literacy with fidelity;"
- "lack of early intervention, lack of adequate amount of teachers/staff to work with dyslexic students, lack of training for the teachers and staff to understand and appropriately teach dyslexic students, lack of appropriate materials and amount of time to work with dyslexic students."

Roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction

Lastly, parents identified numerous roadblocks to getting evidence-based instruction to students with dyslexia. These included:

- 1) teacher training as indicated by comments such as, "teacher training, direct resources in classrooms, individualized services in the classroom setting, and cost of highly trained interventionists;" "lack of knowledge regarding dyslexia among the teachers;"
- 2) ineffective curriculum as indicated by comments such as, "lack of teacher awareness for identifying children with Dyslexia and appropriate intervention;" "lack of knowledge on how to teach necessary methods of instruction;" "the roadblock is not getting the instruction, it's getting appropriate instruction. Dyslexia is different for almost every person;" and
- 3) costs and funding as stated by parents such as, "money for training for the teachers;" "not enough time, money, and employees to work with the kids the way they need to be worked with;" and "limited staff available to provide the additional resources needed to provide instruction."