



Just What I Need!

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)/Dyslexia Professional Learning Opportunities: A Guide for Educators and Families



A collaboration between SERC and the CSDE

www.ctserc.org/dyslexia

SERC's specific learning disabilities (**SLD**)/**Dyslexia Initiative** supports the professional learning needs of Connecticut educators responsible for teaching students with learning difficulties, family members concerned about their children's success in school, and older students interested in knowing more about their learning strengths and challenges to advocate more effectively for their needs.

SERC's collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has resulted in a comprehensive array of professional learning opportunities for teachers, administrators, student support services professionals (e.g., school psychologists, speech and language pathologists), paraeducators, families, and older students. These learning options encompass training and technical assistance and address the foundations of reading acquisition, reading difficulties and reading disability, identification of SLD/Dyslexia, and evidence-based structured literacy instructional practices.

This document is a companion guide to **SERC's SLD/Dyslexia** Initiative brochure. It is intended to assist professionals, families, and older students in selecting learning opportunities appropriate for their needs based on:

- topic area(s) of interest;
- prior knowledge and the depth of content (i.e., beginner, intermediate, or advanced);
- the learning format (i.e., online courses/modules vs. person-to-person), and
- required resources (i.e., time commitment, financial).

Note: Most SERC SLD/Dyslexia learning opportunities are offered at no cost.



Specific SLD/Dyslexia Professional Learning Opportunities

Individuals are encouraged to choose professional learning opportunities based on several factors. These include their current knowledge base about structured reading instruction, the types of students they work with (e.g., grade level(s); types of abilities and disabilities), their current teaching practices, the time available to them for learning, opportunities for self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues, and motivation to make changes in their practice.

District or school-level administrators are also encouraged to consider the above factors in selecting professional learning appropriate for their staff. Administrators can create a customized multi-year professional learning plan using SERC's learning opportunities that can be utilized:

- during staff meetings (separating the content into smaller units);
- as a focus of study for a professional learning community (PLC);
- within various meeting structures (e.g., grade-level teams, content-area teams, department teams, etc.);
- at parent meetings or presentations; and/or
- on school or district-wide professional development days.

Similarly, administrators may find SERC's training materials useful:

- to complement their school-wide teacher evaluation and support system; and/or
- for independent study related to a teacher's student learning objectives (SLOs).



Regardless of the professional learning venue or purpose for engaging in SERC's ***SLD/Dyslexia Initiative*** professional learning opportunities, administrators need to ensure their staff has sufficient time to dialogue about the content with colleagues and contextualize the learning to their students or setting. Opportunities for application of learning are also necessary to change instructional practices, with coaching and support as needed.

1. Begin with SERC's SLD/Dyslexia Initiative web page

Click on any title to learn more about the content of the training, the presenters, and the learner outcomes.

Alternatively, click on either the Professional Learning or Families and Students tab. A number of articles, fact sheets, and tools related to SLD/Dyslexia are available from professional organizations, research journals, university centers, and parent and advocacy groups. Additionally, this site shares information about related learning opportunities offered by organizations and agencies other than SERC to keep educators and families aware of the scope of trainings available in Connecticut.

2. Select a Content Level

SERC's professional learning opportunities are divided into three levels to assist administrators, teachers, and families in choosing content that will support an individual's knowledge base and challenge new learning.

- ***Overview Learning*** introduces basic content and increases knowledge of general SLD/Dyslexia principles. It is appropriate for educators, paraeducators, families, and older students. Included in this category are SERC's archived webinars and Connecticut's SLD/Dyslexia Assessment Resource Guide (2016).
- ***In-Depth Learning*** presents more comprehensive content that supports application of essential SLD/Dyslexia concepts to practice. These learning opportunities provide systematic instruction on structured literacy approaches, focus on the needs of groups of learners (e.g., secondary students), and explore the comprehensive evaluation process. Case studies are used in many of these trainings, which have been designed for certified educators who have a fundamental knowledge of SLD/Dyslexia.
- ***Advanced Topics*** focus on expanded learning for certified staff and specialists with more extensive knowledge of language, literacy, or SLD/Dyslexia or individuals interested in learning about specific subgroups of students or more complex educational scenarios. Topics planned for 2016-17 include English learners (ELs), gifted students with SLD/Dyslexia, and differentiating SLD/Dyslexia from speech and language impairment (SLI). These professional learning opportunities enhance job-embedded application of SLD/Dyslexia constructs to practice.

3. Select a Learning Format

- **Online Learning.** The majority of SERC's SLD/Dyslexia professional learning opportunities are offered online and in accessible formats in individual learning modules or comprehensive online courses. These provide universal access to all Connecticut educators and families; individuals can listen to and/or read the information being presented at their own pace, pausing to re-read content, reflect on new learning, and consider how to apply it to practice.

The time required to complete one of SERC's online learning experiences varies relative to the scope of the information; the time range is from one hour to two full days. The actual time needed to complete an online learning experience is person-specific, dependent on the prior knowledge of the learner and the individual's learning style.

Additional resources are included in these online learning opportunities; these can be accessed during the course or downloaded for subsequent reference.

- **In-Person Learning.** Some **SLD/Dyslexia Initiative** professional learning opportunities are available in traditional face-to-face sessions that offer staff training on specific content to targeted school or district-level teams or full-staff learning experiences. Training sessions are customized to include a broad or narrow content focus relative to the staff's level of knowledge of SLD/Dyslexia identification and/or instruction.
- **Technical Assistance.** Following engagement in a professional learning opportunity, additional technical assistance from SERC consultants can be arranged to support individual educators or teams, guiding their application of new learning practices to their population of students. Technical assistance is job-embedded and customized to address a focused area, for a specified time range, and with an individualized type of support, including coaching. Technical assistance is available following either an online or in-person learning experience.

Do you have a topic of interest related to SLD/Dyslexia that you would like to suggest to SERC and CSDE? To share your ideas or for additional information about the professional learning opportunities offered through SERC's **SLD/Dyslexia Initiative**, please contact Donna Merritt, Ph.D., at merritt@ctserc.org or at 860-632-1485, ext. 337.



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