

# Specific Learning Disability/Dyslexia Public Act 14-39

## Frequently Asked Questions

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322672#Elig>

### 1. What is “Dyslexia?”

#### CSDE Working Definition of Dyslexia\*

Dyslexia is included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) as a specific learning disability (SLD). Dyslexia impacts reading, specifically decoding and accurate and/or fluent word recognition and spelling. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and is unexpected and/or inconsistent with a student’s other abilities often despite the provision of appropriate instruction. Dyslexia results from a significant deficit in phonological processing (i.e., a persistent difficulty in the awareness of and ability to manipulate the individual sounds of spoken language).

Typically, students with dyslexia have strengths and cognitive abilities in areas such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, problem solving, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and social communication (e.g., conversation). Early identification and appropriate instruction targeting the underlying phonological processing deficits that characterize dyslexia may minimize its educational impact.

#### **Essential Clarifications**

- ✓ Dyslexia is not **primarily** the result of visual, hearing, or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; a lack of appropriate instruction; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency.
- ✓ Early identification of the characteristics of dyslexia is critical, leading to focused, evidence-based interventions, accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success.
- ✓ Without targeted, systematic and explicit instruction/interventions along with accommodations (e.g., accessible educational materials in content area subjects), students with dyslexia may have:
  - reduced reading experiences that may impact the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge,
  - difficulty with written expression, and/or
  - difficulty learning a second language.
- ✓ Students with dyslexia may demonstrate additional behavioral and/or emotional reactions to their difficulty with learning to read.

\*This working definition was developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) with input from an external stakeholder workgroup and is based on a review of applicable literature, the IDEA, and current definitions in use by other states, organizations and legislation.

## **2. Who can identify a child with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD)/Dyslexia?**

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), upon completion of the administration of assessments and other evaluation measures, a group of qualified professionals and the parent of the child (planning and placement team (PPT) in Connecticut) determines whether the child is a child with a disability and the educational needs of the child. IDEA requires that professionals who administer assessment tools and strategies to assist in the identification of a child as having SLD/Dyslexia must be trained and knowledgeable regarding such assessments. As defined in IDEA 2004, a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) includes conditions such as dyslexia. Definitions of dyslexia vary, but all propose that dyslexia is a learning disability that impacts the area of reading. Since the PPT must provide assessments in all areas of suspected disability, for a child who is suspected of having SLD/Dyslexia, professionals with expertise in reading would be critical team members, as well as those with considerable knowledge in other areas of concern (e.g., language, mathematics, writing). While other professionals with a more clinical background may specialize in identifying and providing remediation for individuals with dyslexia, IDEA does not indicate that there is one type of professional who is uniquely qualified to provide such identification.

## **3. What is an appropriate evaluation for a child suspected of having SLD/Dyslexia?**

To help ensure that an evaluation is appropriate (i.e., consistent with the requirements of IDEA), the PPT must first gather input from multiple sources (e.g., families, general education classroom, curriculum-based measures, standardized assessments, student records, observations) and include a review of existing evaluation data to determine what additional data, if any, are needed to identify a learning disability, a student's need for special education, and write an IEP. Included in this review must be any evaluative data gathered during a scientific research-based intervention process as well as other academic and behavioral data that can be used to rule out that the student's learning difficulties are due to a lack of appropriate instruction. In Connecticut this process is called Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI).

When planning the evaluation, the PPT must: 1) use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student, including information provided by the parents; 2) not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether the student is a student with a disability; 3) use technically sound (i.e., valid and reliable) instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors in addition to physical or developmental factors; 4) use assessments that are tailored to assess areas of specific educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a general intelligence quotient; 5) assess a student in all areas related to the suspected disability; and 6) use measures that are sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of a student's special, education and related service needs. When determining whether a student has a learning disability, the PPT must ensure the student is observed in her or his learning environment, including the general education classroom, to document the student's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.

Dyslexia is a distinct type of learning disability associated with reading difficulties in accurate and fluent single word decoding skills associated with poor phonological processing and rapid naming abilities. Therefore, in addition to other areas of concern, assessment of children suspected of having SLD/Dyslexia should address the five critical components of reading recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

#### 4. Is a child identified with SLD/Dyslexia automatically eligible for special education services?

A child identified with SLD/Dyslexia may or may not be eligible for special education services. A child is not considered to be eligible for special education under IDEA 2004 unless the child has a disability and, as a result, needs special education and related services. Therefore, in addition to meeting the criteria for a learning disability, in order for a student to be eligible for services under IDEA 2004, the PPT must determine that the student's learning difficulties require specially designed instruction. Some students with SLD/Dyslexia may need accommodations or related services in order to benefit from the same instruction as their peers; however, they may not need specialized instruction and, therefore, would not be eligible for special education services.

#### 5. What is appropriate specialized instruction for a student with SLD/Dyslexia?

As with any child who is receiving special education services, all instruction must be individualized. Each child will have a different profile of strengths and areas of concern, thus there is no one best method of instruction or intervention for each child with SLD/Dyslexia. However, there is a great deal of evidence-based research supporting structured language programs as successful approaches for working with students with SLD/Dyslexia. These instructional approaches differ in specific techniques and materials, but they all include structured, explicit, systematic, cumulative instruction designed to promote understanding, memory, recall, and use of spoken and written language. They also have multiple components that focus on such areas of instruction as phonological skills, phonics and word analysis, spelling, word recognition and oral reading fluency, grammar and syntax, text comprehension, writing, and study skills.

CSDE has developed a SLD/Dyslexia Workgroup that will compile evidence-based practices for the screening, identification, and instruction of students with SLD/Dyslexia. In the meantime, a *Matrix of Multisensory Structured Language Programs* by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) can be found at: <http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/MSL2007finalR1.pdf>. Further information from the *What Works Clearinghouse/Literacy* can be accessed at: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Topic.aspx?sid=8>. The IDA also has developed *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* (2010) at <http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/KPS3-1-12.pdf>.

#### References:

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health.

**If you have additional questions regarding SLD/Dyslexia, please contact:**

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**For additional information and resources, go to the Specific Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia Initiative on the SERC website:**

[http://ctserc.org/s/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=150:specific-learning-disabilitiesdyslexia-initiative&Itemid=110&layout=default](http://ctserc.org/s/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=150:specific-learning-disabilitiesdyslexia-initiative&Itemid=110&layout=default)