



**Kindergarten to Grade 3 Dyslexia  
Toolkit: A Guide and Resource**

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**Kentucky Department of Education**

## Introduction

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) developed the Kindergarten to Grade 3 Dyslexia Toolkit in response to The [Ready to Read Act \(House Bill 187, 2018\)](#). This toolkit provides educators and families with a useful resource to better meet the needs of students with dyslexia or those who display characteristics of dyslexia. This toolkit is intended to increase educators' knowledge of the characteristics of dyslexia; appropriate teaching strategies to use when instructing students with dyslexia; and a process for identifying individual learning needs.

Dyslexia is a barrier to learning to read. Reading is an essential life skill – the basis for all other learning – which impacts success throughout school and beyond. Therefore, it is imperative teachers and families are equipped with appropriate tools to recognize the signs of dyslexia and the practices necessary to bridge this learning difficulty. Knowing dyslexia affects at least 1 in 10 people, schools need to be prepared to offer additional support and appropriate interventions for students with dyslexia to be successful (Dyslexia Help). Teachers need training to better recognize characteristics of dyslexia and use structured, multisensory approaches to teach and assist students to develop language and reading skills.

*Having dyslexia makes reading, and sometimes other skills, more difficult to acquire, but having dyslexia is not necessarily a barrier to success. In fact, many individuals with dyslexia have not only been successful, they have changed the world.*

*International Dyslexia Association  
Success Stories*

Identifying characteristics of dyslexia at an early age is key, and employing frequent formative assessment is essential for monitoring continued student success. Formative assessment enables teachers to better identify students who are not reading on grade level, provide additional interventions and supports, and monitor student progress toward meeting grade-level goals. Along with strong, daily core instruction, effective intervention is essential for struggling readers. Helping struggling readers reach grade-level expectations is not as simple as providing more of the same type of instruction. These students need high-quality interventions that are evidence-based and designed specifically for their needs.

The KDE is pleased to offer this dyslexia toolkit to assist in building an understanding of dyslexia, early recognition of dyslexia characteristics and considerations for evidence-based instructional practices. It is important to note this is not an all-inclusive document, rather a tool to assist with the implementation of processes to better serve students with dyslexia.

## Definition and Characteristics

*Dyslexia: dys – difficulty with; lexia – language. Difficulty with language.*

Dyslexia, as defined in KRS 158.307, “means a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate 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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

### Who can have dyslexia?

Dyslexia occurs in individuals of all backgrounds and intellectual levels and can be hereditary. The proportion of boys and girls with dyslexia is about equal. It is unclear as to the exact cause of dyslexia, but research shows the brain of a person with dyslexia develops and functions differently than the brain of a person without dyslexia. When students with dyslexia receive appropriate instruction, they can learn and be successful.

### Common Characteristics

It is imperative to be able to recognize the characteristics of dyslexia. According to the International Dyslexia Association (2017) and Dyslexia Help at the University of Michigan, general difficulties experienced by people with dyslexia may include the following:

- Difficulty learning letters and their sounds
- Difficulty remembering words
- Spoken language difficulties, but good understanding (comprehension) of oral language
- Reversal of letters and numerical sequences
- Flipping letters and numbers and/or writing them backward past the age of 7 or 8
- Not seeing or acknowledging punctuation in written text
- Difficulty reading different styles of type
- Omission of words while reading
- Difficulty writing
- Confusion about directions in space or time
- Inconsistencies between potential and performance
- Difficulty telling time
- Memorizing number facts and correctly doing math operations
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Difficulty learning to speak
- Difficulty spelling
- Difficulty learning a foreign language

Specific signs for elementary age children may include:

- Difficulty with remembering simple sequencing
- Difficulty understanding the rhyming of words Trouble recognizing words that begin with the same sound (bird, baby and big all start with the *b*)
- Trouble easily clapping hands to rhythm of a song
- Difficulty with word retrieval
- Trouble remembering names, places and people
- Difficulty remembering spoken directions

For additional characteristics, see [International Dyslexia Association](#).

Making assumptions about a child's reading difficulties based on a reading comprehension test or struggling phonological awareness is not a basis for determining dyslexia. Assessment of dyslexia should be situated coherently within a more general approach to the assessment and instruction of reading and literacy skills. Mistakenly referring to any and all reading problems as "dyslexia" (a label which should be restricted to cases of inherent and persistent phonological decoding difficulty) could result in ignoring other causes of reading difficulty that deserve equal attention, such as poor language skills, limited vocabulary, weak executive function, visual or cognitive impairment or limited prior knowledge (e.g., content knowledge). These problems all create reading difficulty, but do not qualify as dyslexia. However, they must be addressed if a child is to develop as a reader.

### **Evidence-based Systematic and Cumulative Instruction for Students with Dyslexia**

According to the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Congress asked NICHD and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to form [the National Reading Panel](#) (NRP) in 1997. The teachers, administrators and reading research scientists of the NRP evaluated existing research about reading and, based on the evidence, determined what methods work best for teaching children to read.

The NRP emphasized the importance of providing students with reading instruction supported by scientifically-based research consisting of five key components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. While students with dyslexia may benefit from this instruction as described by the NRP for typical developing readers, they are not likely to overcome reading difficulties without receiving reading instruction specifically designed for dyslexia. In order for a student with dyslexia to achieve the goal of reading efficiently, appropriate reading, writing and spelling instruction should be offered in a one-on-one or small group setting.

Systematic and cumulative instructional components specifically designed for dyslexia include:

- Phonemic awareness – Instruction on phonemic awareness enables students to detect, segment, blend and manipulate sounds in spoken language. A phoneme, the smallest unit of sound in a given language, is distinct from other sounds in the language. Once students have developed phonemic awareness, they must learn how to associate the phonemes to symbols or printed letters. Explicit instruction on phonemic awareness and sound-symbol association helps children learn to both read and spell.
- Systematic phonics instruction – Phonics teaches students about the relationship between phonemes and printed letters. Words carry meaning because they are made of sounds and sounds are written with letters in the right sequence. Students with this understanding can blend sounds associated with letters into words and can separate words into component sounds for spelling and writing. Phonological memory must be strong in order for readers to remember sequences of unfamiliar sounds, store sound sequences in short-term memory and recall words from short-term memory.
- Language structure instruction – Language study encompasses morphology (the study of meaningful units of language such as prefixes, suffixes and roots), semantics (ways that language conveys meaning), syntax (sentence structure) and pragmatics (how to use language in a particular context).
- Linguistics instruction – Linguistics instruction should be directed toward proficiency and fluency with the patterns of language so that words and sentences are the carriers of meaning. Reading fluently improves students' abilities to recognize new words, read with greater accuracy and expression, and better comprehend what they read.
- Process-oriented instruction – The procedures or strategies for decoding, encoding, word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension must be taught explicitly and directly so that students learn the skills needed to become independent readers.

### **Instructional Approaches for Students with Dyslexia**

The following instructional approaches are components of multisensory, systematic, specific language-based reading programs that are specifically designed for dyslexia:

- Explicit, direct instruction that is systematic (structured), sequential and cumulative. Instruction is organized and presented in a way that follows a logical sequential plan, fits the nature of language (alphabetic principle) with no assumption of prior skills or language knowledge, and maximizes student engagement. This instruction proceeds at a rate commensurate with students' needs, ability level and demonstration of progress;
- Individualized instruction that meets the specific learning needs of each individual student in a small group setting using a reading curriculum that matches each student's individual ability level;
- Intensive, highly concentrated instruction that maximizes student engagement, uses specialized methods and materials, and produces results;
- Meaning-based instruction that is directed toward purposeful reading and writing, with an emphasis on comprehension and composition; and

- Multisensory instruction that incorporates the simultaneous use of two or more sensory pathways (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile) during teacher presentations and student practice.

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) provides information related to K-3 programs that have demonstrated strong to moderate evidence for effectiveness in teaching alphabets, reading fluency, early reading/writing, literacy achievement and functional abilities for students with disabilities, such as, but not limited to, dyslexia. These are listed in order of strength of positive outcomes and the grade level examined is indicated in parentheses, as well as the current research available for these programs. To access this information, visit the [WWC website](#).

### **Best Practices Toward Meaning-Centered Reading and Writing**

Guided reading, read-alouds, discussion and verbal memory-related performance, small group work, sustained reading practice, writing about reading and free writing may facilitate meaning-centered literacy skills. It should be kept in mind that reading and writing is to communicate meaning. A reader reads to determine the intentions of the author. A successful reader, whether of informational texts, narrative stories, essays expressing opinions, arguments, world literature or poetry, requires the reader to be able to make some sense of the text.

The importance of this insight for struggling readers is that students with dyslexia can become so distracted by the phonological decoding challenges of reading that they forget the purpose of the exercise. Readers with dyslexia also may have difficulties with language comprehension, such as limited vocabulary and a restricted repertoire of easily recognized grammatical patterns.

Some students come to kindergarten with these language development issues and it is a mistake to wait until grade 4 to begin serious attention on comprehension, believing that decoding must be mastered entirely before meaning can be addressed in reading. Decoding instruction often can be incorporated with meaning-centered activities. For instance, learning rhyme patterns can lead to the writing of rhymed poetry for Valentine’s Day or Mother’s Day cards. Enjoyable and meaningful experiences with texts, centered on reading and writing for meaning, provides students greater motivation and determination to persist during decoding instruction and intervention.

### **Classroom Strategies for Students with Dyslexia**

To support the success of students with dyslexia, teachers can implement strategies to accommodate their academic needs and address the challenges students face across all learning environments. The following examples offer strategies for providing support involving materials, instruction and student performance. For a comprehensive list of these strategies, see [International Dyslexia Association’s guidance for the classroom](#).

- Clarify or simplify written directions.

- Present the work in small amounts.
- Highlight essential information.
- Block out extraneous stimuli on a page.
- Use explicit teaching procedures.
- Repeat directions.
- Use balanced presentations and activities.
- Use graphic organizers.
- Change response mode for assessment of learning.
- Encourage students to use multisensory techniques, such as subvocalization.
- Allow students to use an instrument (pencil, index card, window card) to alleviate tracking issues.

### **Dyslexia Screening and Reading Assessments**

Dyslexia manifests as a phonological processing difficulty and can be identified by difficulty in rapidly matching letters and sounds while sounding out alphabetic texts. This is due to poor decoding skills (i.e., the ability to rapidly and accurately recognize word forms in printed text).

Therefore, to screen for dyslexia, a reading assessment should measure decoding ability, as opposed to language comprehension or other secondary symptoms such as general reading ability, mental fatigue or demotivation. These all can result from dyslexia, but they also can result from other causes and thus are not definitive indicators of dyslexia.

Since these types of reading difficulties associated with dyslexia can grow in a snowball effect from decoding difficulty leading to poor reading fluency, spelling, vocabulary and eventually comprehension issues, it is important that screenings and interventions are implemented early in a child's school experience.

#### **Universal Screeners**

Universal screening is defined in the KDE's "A Guide to the Kentucky System of Interventions," as a process through which all students and their educational performance are examined in order to ensure that all have an equal opportunity for support for high-end learning. Universal screenings help determine which students need diagnostic assessments for instruction or behavior that will provide the school implementation team and the student intervention team with information to guide decision-making.

Universal screenings are administered at the beginning of the year to evaluate student progress and determine which students need further diagnostic assessment. Kentucky schools are using a variety of assessments as universal screeners. Universal screeners are administered, scored and interpreted in a short time frame to allow for timely decision-making.

Educational research shows that when students are provided intervention or additional direct instruction as early as kindergarten when their learning gap is small, they are more likely to catch up and not require an identification for a specific learning disability. Therefore, early screening and Response to Intervention (RtI) are critical components for student success (International Dyslexia Association, 2017).

When school teams interpret universal screening results, they should keep in mind that reading diagnostic assessments have components targeting decoding difficulties that also include components such as oral language comprehension difficulties. A child may have more than one of these issues, but when considering dyslexia, it is decoding difficulties that are most significant.

If a child has poor decoding ability (determined by universal screener or teacher or parent observation), it is useful to further assess for the following decoding sub processes:

- [Phonological awareness](#) and [phonemic awareness](#)
- Sound symbol recognition
- Alphabet knowledge
- [Decoding skills](#)
- [Encoding skills](#)
- Rapid naming

These essentially are the components taught through Phonemic Awareness and Phonics instruction, two of the “Five Pillars of Reading” that make up a standard early reading curriculum (the other three being fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; National Reading Panel, 2001). These phonemic and decoding subskills are assessed adequately by most reading inventory assessments and are in use by schools with a trained reading interventionist or reading specialist on staff.

## TYPICAL SCREENING MEASURE COMPONENTS

ACCORDING TO THE INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION

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Kindergarten measures are most successful when they include assessment of phonological awareness, including phoneme segmentation, blending, onset and [rime](#); rapid automatic naming, including naming fluency; letter association; and phonological memory, including non-word repetition (Catts, et al. 2015, Jenkins & Johnson, 2008).

# 1

First-grade measures should include: phoneme awareness, specifically phoneme segmentation, blending and manipulation tasks; letter naming fluency; letter sound association; phonological memory, including non-word repetition; oral vocabulary; and word recognition fluency (i.e., accuracy and rate) (Compton, et al., 2010; Jenkins & Johnson, 2008).

# 2

The Center for Response to Intervention Screening Briefs indicate that in 2nd grade, screening assessment should include word identification, oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Word identification assessments should include real and nonsense words.

### Screening vs. Evaluation

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 300.302 states the screening of a student by a teacher or specialist to determine appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum implementation shall not be considered to be an evaluation for eligibility for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Federal Register includes a response to a public comment requesting clarification on the difference between screening and evaluation and recommended federal regulations include specific examples of what constitutes screening, including testing instruments that are appropriate to be used for screening to determine appropriate instructional strategies (Volume

71, Number 156 page 46639). The discussion of the comments states an “evaluation” as used in the Act refers to an individual assessment for eligibility for special education and related services consistent with the evaluation procedures in § 300.301 – § 300.311. “Screening,” as used in § 300.302, refers to a process that a teacher or specialist uses to determine appropriate instructional strategies. Screening is typically a relative and quick process that can be used with groups of children because such screening is not considered an evaluation under § 300.301 – § 300.311 to determine eligibility for special education services; parental consent is not required.

## **Tiered Interventions and Supports**

Students who consistently struggle with grade-level reading skills are required to be provided with targeted, tiered intervention supports. [Kentucky’s System of Interventions](#) (KSI) framework provides a systematic, comprehensive multi-tiered system of supports to address academic and behavioral needs for all students, preschool through grade 12. The KSI framework emphasizes optimizing instruction through targeted accelerated learning and the development of teacher expertise and responsiveness to the needs of all learners. What is effective for every learner, including those students identified with or displaying characteristics of dyslexia, is a systematic and ongoing assessment of their academic and behavioral needs and using the data in collaborative conversations with parents/guardians and educators in the interest of preparing students to be transition ready. It is important to consider that intervention programming is not a plan that helps a student qualify for special education services.

Tiered interventions are provided to assist students who are struggling with academic or behavior goals and are not performing at grade level standards with their peers. Intervention programming provides the structures needed for closing achievement gaps, aiming to help the student experience growth and achievement. Instruction through the three tiers should be a flexible and fluid process based on student assessment data to provide continuous progress so students are successful. The KDE’s “KSI RtI Guidance Document” describes the three tiers as follows:

### **Tier 1: Universal/Core Instruction**

Tier I is the highly effective, culturally responsive, evidence-based core or universal instruction, provided to all students, including those with or displaying characteristics of dyslexia, in the general education classroom. General education teachers implement evidence-based curriculum and/or strategies with fidelity for both academic and behavioral instruction. About 80 percent of students will succeed with evidence-based curriculum, appropriate instructional practices and differentiation to teach academic and behavioral content.

## **Tier 2: Targeted Instruction**

Tier 2 provides Tier 1 core/universal instruction in addition to academic and behavioral interventions for any students, including those with or displaying characteristics of dyslexia, not making adequate progress or who have exceeded the standards. Students in Tier 2 receive increasingly targeted academic or behavioral instruction matched to their needs based on results of continuous progress monitoring. Instruction in Tier 2 can involve small groups of students or individualized intervention strategies focused on the targeted area/s.

For students with learning/behavioral difficulties or other instructional needs, Tier 2 is intended to address needs and provide support to be successful in Tier 1. For students with high abilities and others exceeding advanced expectations, Tier 2 is designed to provide further challenges that are differentiated for pace, content and complexity.

## **Tier 3: Intensive Instruction**

Tier 3 provides Tier 1 core instruction in addition to interventions for students, including those with or displaying characteristics of dyslexia, not making adequate progress in the curriculum and Tier 2. Tier 3 interventions are more intensive to the student's individual academic or behavioral needs and the student's progress is monitored more frequently.

For students with learning/behavioral difficulties or other instructional needs, Tier 3 is intended to provide more intense, individualized instruction based on student needs and address concerns that have continued even with the support of instruction in Tiers 1 and 2. For students with high abilities and others exceeding advanced expectations, Tier 3 is designed to provide intensive instruction and/or highly individualized challenges.

## **Managing the Intervention Program**

In order to help each individual child reach proficiency, especially with regard to reading difficulties, a system of intervention is critical. Schools should have a plan for RtI in place that allows for early detection of learning difficulties, allocating resources and time to plan, and a data collection and monitoring system for data-informed decisions.

For more information and resources for implementation of the tiered systems of support, see Appendix B.

## **Instructional Plans for Students with Dyslexia**

When designing instructional plans for students with dyslexia, a student's instructional team may design a combination of instruction and accommodations to meet the needs for each student. Identifying the individual strengths and challenges of each student to select specific interventions provides the opportunity for academic achievement. A student with dyslexia may

fully participate in classroom instruction and demonstrate their learning when appropriate accommodations have been identified.

In the classroom setting, teachers should consider the method of instruction, the format of the assignment, how the lesson is presented, and the quantity of reading, writing and practice items within an assignment. When determining assignments, they should reflect on the purpose of the assignment, the best format for presenting the content, the steps required to completing the assignment, and what strategies would be helpful in order for ALL students to be successful.

In October 2015, the United States Department of Education's (USED) Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued a Dear Colleague Letter that provided dyslexia guidance. In the letter, the OSERS noted it received feedback from stakeholders who believed state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) were reluctant to reference or use dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility determinations or in developing the individualized education program (IEP) under the IDEA. The purpose of the letter was to clarify that there is nothing in the IDEA to prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations or IEP documents.

Under the IDEA and its implementing regulations, "specific learning disability" (SLD) is defined, in part, as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, *dyslexia* and developmental aphasia" (20 U.S.C. §1401(30) and 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10)).

In determining whether a child has a disability under the IDEA, including a specific learning disability, and is eligible to receive special education and related services because of that disability, the LEA must conduct a comprehensive evaluation under §300.304, which requires the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the child.

The [Dear Colleague Letter](#) may be accessed via the following link:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf>

### **Kentucky Administrative Regulations**

In Kentucky, a specific learning disability is defined as a disorder that adversely affects the ability to acquire, comprehend or apply reading, mathematical, writing, reasoning, listening or speaking skills to the extent that specially designed instruction is required to benefit from education. The SLD may include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, developmental aphasia and perceptual/motor disabilities. The term does not include deficits that are the result of other primary determinant or disabling factors such as vision, hearing, motor impairment, intellectual (mental) disability, emotional-behavioral disability, environmental or economic disadvantaged, cultural factors, limited English proficiency or lack of relevant research-based instruction in the deficit area (707 KAR 1:002 Section 1 (59)).

### **Parent Notification of Referral:** 707 KAR 1:340, Sections 3 and 5

When a decision is made for a written referral as part of a special education comprehensive evaluation, parents must be notified and written permission obtained.

### **Planning and Conducting a Comprehensive Evaluation:** 707 KAR 1:300

The SLD eligibility determination process is a systematic approach that schools use to determine whether a student does or does not have an SLD as defined in the state regulations.

The Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) is responsible for planning and conducting a comprehensive evaluation that must include a variety of technically-sound assessment tools, interventions and observations to gather relevant academic information about the student, including information provided by the parent. It is not permissible to use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether the child has an SLD.

When all evaluation data have been collected, the ARC must follow procedural safeguards for prior written notice for an ARC to review the data and determine eligibility.

### **Determining Eligibility:** 707 KAR 1:310

Within 60 school days of receipt of signed written parental consent, the ARC must meet to review all the data and make an eligibility determination using the Learning Disability (LD) tables accessible via the KDE or a non-standard score method when standardized normative measures of ability and achievement are invalid or not available.

All components of required documentation for specific learning disability eligibility must be considered. (See Required Components, beginning on page 6).

### **Developing the Individual Education Program (IEP):** 707 KAR 1:320

Once eligibility has been determined, the ARC shall develop a standards-based individual education program for the student. The "[Guidance Document for Individual Education Program \(IEP\) Development](#)" provides instructions and examples for the ARC members on how to write standards-based IEPs.

**Exclusionary Factors:** 707 KAR 1:310, Section 2(8)

SLD eligibility determination requires that the following be ruled out as the primary cause(s) of the student's learning deficits:

- Visual disability
- Hearing disability
- Motor disability
- Intellectual (mental) disability
- Emotional-behavioral disability
- Cultural factors
- Environmental or economic disadvantage
- Limited English proficiency

It is important to note that while dyslexia may adversely affect a student's educational performance in many ways, a medical diagnosis of dyslexia does not automatically mean the student should have an IEP. Kentucky requires academic performance to be evaluated for an adverse effect by an ARC to determine eligibility for special education services.

Additional guidance for developing and implementing appropriate IEPs and SLD guidance may be found on the [KDE website](#).

**Specially-Designed Instruction**

Specially-designed instruction (SDI) ensures that, when appropriate, schools will adapt the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a child with a disability and ensure the child can access the general curriculum (707 KAR 1:002). In its simplest form, SDI is what the teacher does through instructional practices.

SDI incorporates specific strategies that build on the individual student's strengths, while addressing specific areas for academic, behavioral or social improvement. Some examples of SDI may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Explicit instruction
- Meaning strategies
- Auditory strategies including language structure
- Grapho-phonic strategies
- Visual strategies including word recognition and visual memory for words
- Multi-sensory instruction
- Scaffolding

- Decoding strategies
- Visual/verbal clues
- Audio books/reader programs
- Modeling
- Small group instruction
- Drill/repetition for mastery
- Time delay
- Auditory bombardment

### **Supplementary Aids and Services**

Supplementary Aids and Services (SAS) are aids, services and other supports provided in regular education classes or other education-related settings to enable a child with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate for that student. SAS, in its simplest form, is what the student will use to access the curriculum. It can include:

- Oral/visual presentation of materials above independent reading level
- Kinesthetic cues
- Graphic organizers
- Digitized materials
- Highlighted materials
- Tracking guides
- Extended time
- Sentence strips

### **Accommodations**

Accommodations are practices, supports or services “that change the way students access information and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities; they do not change academic standards or expectations” (“Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia,” 2018). An accommodation is not intended to change content or give students an unfair advantage, rather they offer various approaches for students to access information and demonstrate their knowledge.

### **Section 504 Plan**

Section 504 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1975 that prohibits discrimination based upon a disability. Section 504 is an anti-discrimination, civil rights statute that requires the needs of students with disabilities to be met as adequately as the needs of the non-disabled are met.

“An individual with a disability means any person who: (i) has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity; (ii) has a record of such an impairment; or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment” [34 C.F.R. §104.3(j)(1)].

In order to qualify for a Section 504 plan, the student must have a disability, long-term illness, or various disorder that “substantially” reduces or lessens a student’s ability to access learning in the educational setting because of a learning-, behavior- or health-related condition.

Anyone can make a referral, such as parents or a doctor. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has stated in a staff memorandum that “the school district must also have reason to believe that the child is in need of services under Section 504 due to a disability” (OCR Memorandum, April 29, 1993). Therefore, a school district does not have to refer or evaluate a child under Section 504 solely upon parental demand. Placement decisions must be made by a group of people who are knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, placement options, least-restrictive environment requirements and comparable facilities [34 C.F.R. §104.35(c)(3)].

When determining whether a student is eligible for a 504 Plan, formalized assessments are not required. However, schools must review a variety of sources, including grades over a period of time, observations, health records, discipline reports and any other pertinent sources of data. A single source of data such as a doctor’s note should not be used as the only determinant factor for a 504 Plan.

The 504 plan addresses the unique learning needs of students with disabilities and provides reasonable accommodations. These accommodations ensure students have equal access to school programs and activities to meet their learning needs. A 504 plan for dyslexia may include assessment accommodations that address the needs of the individual student.

There are various options for presenting materials and instructions that do not always require students to read standard print materials. Options include:

- Verbal instructions
- Repeating instructions
- Instructions or materials in recorded audio format (e.g., Storyline Online is an online free source of books read aloud by celebrated actors)
- Larger print
- Fewer items per page
- Visual prompts (e.g., arrows, highlighted text)
- Speech-to-text software

Students also should be allowed alternate ways for demonstrating what they know. Some choices for response accommodations are:

- Answering verbally (e.g., to a scribe, to a recorder, directly to the teacher)
- Marking answers in a test booklet rather than on a separate sheet
- Point to the answer choice

Another consideration for accommodations is in classroom setting. Distractions should be eliminated as much as possible. Considerations include:

- Use of individual or small groups
- Reducing visual distractions
- Furniture configuration (e.g., direction facing, proximity to teacher)

This is not a comprehensive list of accommodations, but rather a beginning point for meeting the specific needs of individual students. Just as dyslexia is not a term for all kinds of reading difficulty, interventions for dyslexia are not all-purpose solutions for any and all kinds of reading difficulty. It is imperative that assessment has distinguished the actual cause of a student's reading difficulty before an intervention is dedicated. Once the nature of the reading problem is known, appropriate interventions can be selected to meet the needs of the individual student.

## Professional Learning

In the [KDE's Professional Learning Guidance document \(2014\)](#), professional learning is defined as learning that "occurs among collegial groups of administrators and school staff who are united in their commitment to student learning. They share a vision, work and learn collaboratively, visit and review other classrooms and participate in decision making. The benefits to the educators and students include a reduced isolation of educators, better informed and committed educators and academic gains for students."

Effective professional learning is focused on individual improvement, school improvement and program implementation. Professional learning differs from professional development in the sense that professional learning is ongoing and focused on a single topic, skill or strategy that is chosen out of a desire or need to improve practice.

Ultimately when educators' knowledge, skills and dispositions change, they have a broader collection of strategies to use in their teaching practice. When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results. When student results improve, the cycle repeats for continuous improvement.

This toolkit offers suggestions of topics, organizations and resources that can be useful professional learning and quality materials selection tools for educators and parents.

## Professional Learning Activities and Resources

### **KDE: Professional Learning Plans**

When planning professional learning, whether an individual growth plan or district-wide professional development plan, the KDE offers a [seven-step guide](#) from the “Guidance for Professional Learning” document that can help plan, implement and evaluate professional learning needs.

### **The International Dyslexia Association (IDA)**

The IDA is an association dedicated to, “creating a future for all individuals who struggle with dyslexia and other related reading differences so that they may have richer, more robust lives and access to the tools and resources they need.” Its website, <https://dyslexiaida.org/>, hosts a variety of resources and information available to parents and educators.

### **Understood.org**

[Understood.org](#) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower parents and offer resources so they can make effective choices that move their children to success. It offers well-researched and practical information that’s easy to apply to everyday life and learning. Sample topics include: multisensory approaches to reading and math, teaching methods, improving reading fluency, tips for improving reading comprehension and classroom accommodations.

### **“What Works, An Introductory Teacher Guide for Early Language and Emergent Literacy Instruction,” Based on the National Literacy Panel Report (NELP, 2008)**

This book describes ways teachers can use the research effectively for early childhood instruction, assessment, curriculum choices and parental support for young children’s language and literacy learning.

### **“Overcoming Dyslexia: What Does it Take?”**

This one-hour [webinar](#) by the International Dyslexia Association is an example of professional learning that is available through reputable associations. This webinar features an internationally respected reading teacher and educator, Patricia Mathes, Ph.D. The webinar:

- Explains the basic components of effective instruction;
- Explains how the nature of this instruction changes with each tier of instruction; and
- Provides the critical information schools need to ensure that scientifically sound instruction is provided to students who struggle to read at every tier of instruction.

### **“Dyslexia in the Classroom: What Every Teacher Needs to Know”**

This [handbook](#), developed as a free resource by the International Dyslexia Association, helps open the door for all educators to have a better understanding of dyslexia and help every child reach his or her fullest potential. The handbook offers resources on topics such as:

- Signs and symptoms of dyslexia; and
- Classroom strategies, tips, tools.

### **“Implementing Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Settings”**

As educators move toward implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) in early childhood settings, they face many questions about the steps they should take to ensure effective implementation. In this [Reading Rockets webinar](#), four nationally recognized experts in RtI provide guidance on establishing multi-tiered systems of support for young children, with an overview of the essential components of RtI, new instructional strategies, emerging approaches to measurement and the supports needed for success.

### **“Explaining Phonics Instruction: An Educator’s Guide”**

The International Literacy Association released this [literacy leadership brief](#) in 2018 as a guide for further discussion of instructing the essential reading skill of phonics. The guide offers educators an overview of phonics instruction and thinking about when and how phonics is taught. This also is a helpful brief for parents.

### **Reading Rockets: “Launching Young Readers”**

The Kentucky Educational Television (KET) Network [offers a series](#) through PBS called “Launching Young Readers” that, “examines how children learn to read, why so many struggle and how adults can help them.” Each episode in the series is about 30 minutes long with topics helpful for educators and parents.

### **Dyslexia Help: University of Michigan**

[Dyslexia Help](#) is a [website](#) designed to help users understand and learn about dyslexia and language disabilities. Its goal is to help individuals with dyslexia, as well as parents and other professionals. Its resources are organized and easily searchable. The “Tools” tab offers a wide selection of resources that are grouped by type and by age.

### **The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity: Parent Resources**

This [center at Yale](#) has a large number of resources for parents available [online](#) under the categories “What Parents Can Do, School Strategies and Stories from Parents.” Articles and videos share insight into dyslexia, strategies for moving forward and supports. There also are many educator resources parents could utilize.

### **EdReports.org**

When making decisions about purchasing materials, [EdReports](#) is a resource for helping to inform the selection of high-quality instructional materials. They reviewed nearly 500 reports, putting materials and resources through a rigorous vetting process and organized for easy access for educators.

### **What Works Clearinghouse**

The U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#) (WWC) reviews studies that provide evidence for the effectiveness of different programs, methods and interventions. Based on its review, the WWC gives an overall rating for each item to assist in materials and programs selection.

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## Appendix A: Glossary

**504 Plan** – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. In the educational setting this means that schools must allow certain accommodations based on a diagnosed condition that meets these qualifications. A 504 plan is part of regular education-related services, not special education.

**Accommodations** – Practices, supports or services provided to help a student access the curriculum and validly demonstrate learning. Accommodations are provided to support equitable access during instruction and assessments for students with disabilities and are intended to lessen the impact of the student’s disability on his or her educational achievement. Accommodations are individualized and based on a student’s needs.

**Age Equivalent (AE)** – References the age at which an individual seems to be performing. This is usually indicated on test results from the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement or the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

**Assistive Technology (AT)** – Software, hardware, devices or services that increase, maintain or improve the functional skills and abilities of students with disabilities. An Assistive Technology Evaluation may be requested by staff or parents as part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) planning process. Identified services or devices are specified in the Supplemental Aids and Services section of the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

**Assistive Technology Device** – Any item, piece of equipment or product system – whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified or customized – that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not mean a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of such a device.

**Comprehension** – The ability to understand what one is reading.

**Decoding** – The ability to sound out letters and words. As readers learn which symbols (letters) are associated with certain sounds, they can start to make sense of printed words and translate them to speech. Decoding or “sounding out” a new word is sometimes called “word attack.”

**Diagnostic Assessment** – An assessment often administered one-on-one, focused on gathering information about selected areas or domain of knowledge. It can provide educators with information about student needs in order to plan tailored instruction or intervention.

**Differentiated Instruction** – An approach to teaching that provides different avenues for learning in terms of varying the content, process and product based on a student's readiness, interest and learning profile.

**Dyscalculia** – A mathematical disability in which a person has unexpected difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts, such as time, measurement and spatial reasoning.

**Dysgraphia** – A lack of hand-eye coordination that may be causing poor handwriting. It refers to messages getting scrambled on route between the brain and the hand, making it difficult for the student to visualize what they want to print and what they are printing.

**Dyslexia** – A disability that is neurological 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 (*National Institutes of Health and International Association of Dyslexia*).

**Encoding** – Using individual sounds to build and write words.

**Fluency** – The ability to read sentences correctly and quickly, without having to stop and decode every word. This leap in processing enables readers to focus on the meaning of a passage of text. Fluency is key to reading comprehension.

**Formative Assessment** – A wide variety of methods teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs and academic progress during a lesson, unit or course. Formative assessments help teachers identify concepts that students are struggling to understand, skills they are having difficulty acquiring, or learning standards they have not yet achieved so that adjustments can be made to lessons, instructional techniques, and academic support.

The general goal of formative assessment is to collect detailed information that can be used to improve instruction and student learning while it is happening. What makes an assessment formative is not the design of a test, technique or self-evaluation, per se, but the way it is used—i.e., to inform in-process teaching and learning modifications.

**Independent Education Evaluation (IEE)** – An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the school district.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** – A federal law that requires schools to serve the education needs of eligible students with disabilities in the least-restrictive environment through an individualized education program reasonably calculated to enable the student to make appropriate progress in light of the student’s circumstances.

**Individual Education Program (IEP)** – A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised in accordance with 707 KAR 1:320.

**Intervention** – Evidence-based, systematic and explicit instruction that targets a specific area of need. It is provided in addition to core instruction and is intentionally designed to increase performance in relation to a specific, measurable goal. Interventions must be based on valid and current performance data, delivered with fidelity and require ongoing progress monitoring.

**Letter-Sound Correspondence** – The relationship between a letter or letter combination and a single sound. For example, the letter “j” and the letter combination “dge” both make the sound heard in the beginning of the word “jump.” An understanding of letter-sound correspondence (also called grapheme-phoneme correspondence) is essential for decoding a new word.

**Multisensory Approach** – A way to teach reading and spelling that engages the senses of sight, sound, motion and touch. Multisensory approaches emphasize how a letter or word looks and sounds. Instruction includes what a person’s lips and tongue need to do to produce particular sounds and what arms and hands need to do to write each letter of the alphabet.

**Phoneme** – The smallest units of sound that are used to form words. For example, *peek* has three phonemes: /p/, /ē/, and /k/.

**Phonemic Awareness** – Noticing and identifying individual sounds in spoken words. Readers who are aware of the different phonemes in a word can start putting them together (“b-a-t” becomes *bat*). This is called phonemic blending. Readers can also move in the opposite direction and break a word into different phonemes (pulling apart *bat* into “b-a-t”). This is called phonemic segmentation.

**Phonics** – The relationship between letters and the sounds they make. This knowledge is essential to a reader’s ability to sound out or decode and to spell or encode words.

**Phonological Awareness** – Identifying the sounds of words and word parts. Readers who have this awareness can find words that rhyme (*cat and hat; wavy and gravy*) and identify words that start with similar sounds (*dancing and dogs*).

**Phonological Processing** – Distinguishing between different sounds within words. Children who struggle with this may leave out key sounds (saying *boom* instead of *broom*) or substitute some

sounds for others (saying *tat* instead of *cat*). Difficulties with phonological processing are common in young children, but continuing difficulties can present many challenges by the 2nd or 3rd grade.

**Prognosis** – An estimate of the course and outcome of a disease/disorder, which represents a performance profile at the time of diagnosis but is rooted over time. For example, a speech-language pathologist may state in an initial evaluation that "the prognosis for attaining these objectives is fair."

**Rapid Automatic Naming** – A skill requiring fast and effective retrieval from information about phonology from long-term memory and being able to use the information effectively. Examples include quickly naming a list of objects, letters or numbers.

**Response to Intervention (RtI)** – A scientific, research-based approach developed to provide a collaborative problem-solving framework to address the learning needs of students who are not achieving at a rate with their peers, using grade-specific benchmarks. Student outcome data is the determining factor for either increasing or changing the research-based instruction or intervention being used to help the student achieve academically. RtI is a multi-step process, with systematic monitoring and is routinely implemented prior to assessing a student for special education services.

**Rime** – Word parts that refer to a spelling pattern. Rimes begin with a vowel sound and end before the next vowel sound (not a silent vowel). Example: **cat, hat, bat, sat.**

**Sight Words** – Words that are memorized or easily recognized without being decoded in a sound-by-sound manner. These tend to be high-frequency words. During reading instruction, words that do not follow basic rules of phonology ("exception words") are usually explicitly taught as sight words. Examples include "there" and "again." These can be particularly difficult for a young child with reading difficulties or dyslexia.

**Specially Designed Instruction** – Adapting as appropriate in content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child with a disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum included in the *Kentucky Academic Standards, 704 KAR 3:303* or 704 Chapter 8.

**Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** – A disorder that adversely affects the ability to acquire, comprehend or apply reading, mathematical, writing, reasoning, listening or speaking skills to the extent that specially designed instruction is required to benefit from education. The SLD may include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, developmental aphasia and perceptual/motor disabilities. The term does not include deficits that are the result of other primary determinant

or disabling factors such as vision, hearing, motor impairment, mental disability, emotional-behavioral disability, environmental or economic disadvantaged, cultural factors, limited English proficiency (LEP) or lack of relevant research-based instruction in deficit area.

**Syntax** – Rules regarding combining words to make grammatically correct sentences. For example, the sentence "I went to work this morning" is correct, while "Went to work I did this morning" does not follow the English rules of syntax.

**Vocabulary** – Refers to the words a reader knows. Listening vocabulary refers to the words a person knows when hearing them in oral speech. Speaking vocabulary refers to the words a person uses when he or she speaks. Reading vocabulary refers to the words a person knows when seeing them in print. Writing vocabulary refers to the words a person uses in writing.

**Word Recognition** – The ability to read words by sight or without having to sound them out. Word recognition – having “sight words” – helps a beginning reader become a fluent reader.

**Word Study Approach** – An approach to early literacy instruction that focuses on learning word patterns over simple memorization to create a meaningful and cohesive approach.

## Appendix B: Response to Intervention Resources

Resources for how to implement the tiers of instruction and intervention in a classroom and how to evaluate a school intervention program:

[Center on Response to Intervention](#): Resources to establish a system to provide intervention through universal screening, interventions and monitor student progress.

Kentucky System of Intervention (KSI). [KSI RtI Guidance Document](#).

[National Center on Intensive Intervention](#): Forms and resources available for implementation and fidelity; data and assessment; data use and planning; instructional strategies and parent engagement.

[RTI Action Network](#): Fidelity forms, progress monitoring and support for implementation.