



*The intent of this document is to provide stakeholders accurate information regarding the evaluation, identification and education of students with dyslexia within North Carolina public schools.*

## **What is dyslexia?**

Barnes, 2007). Dyslexia literally means difficulty (dys) with words (lex) and is widely considered to be a reading disability at the word level involving the ability to map sounds onto letters in order to read and spell words accurately and automatically.

Definitions of dyslexia vary, but all propose that dyslexia is a learning disability that primarily impacts the areas of reading, spelling and writing. The International Dyslexia Association and the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development define dyslexia as follows:

*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*

Session Law 2017-127 (House Bill 149) requires that the State Board of Education include a definition of dyslexia in policy. In August 2017, this definition was added to the *North Carolina Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities*. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004) as well as the *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities*, includes dyslexia as one example of conditions under the definition of Specific Learning Disability.

## **What is the prevalence of learning disabilities and dyslexia?**

An estimated 40% of the population is likely to have academic achievement problems related to inadequate reading skills. However, not all of these students are likely to be identified as having a learning disability.

Nationally, 38% of all public-school students receiving special education services are identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (IDEA Part B Child Count, Ages 6-21)



There is nothing within NC policies or guidance, or within IDEA, that prohibits the use of the term dyslexia in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents (Yudin, 2015).

However, not all students who experience difficulty in learning to read will require special education. A diagnosis of dyslexia alone is insufficient to find a student eligible for special education services. The school team must establish all criteria required for eligibility determination to find the student eligible for special education under IDEA, including that the disability has an adverse effect on educational performance and there is an educational need for special education.

### What are the indicators of dyslexia?

Myth: Students with dyslexia see words and letters backwards.

Fact: Symptoms sometimes include flipping or reversing letters. But reversing letters isn't always a sign of dyslexia. Young children who don't have dyslexia often do this too. Nor is it the only problem associated with dyslexia. People with dyslexia may have trouble with a number of skills, including writing, spelling, speaking and socializing (Lapkin, 2015).

This myth stems from early visual theories of dyslexia, but it has since become clear that difficulties in specific language skills, especially phonological awareness, form the basis of dyslexia. This myth can be difficult to dispel because some children with dyslexia do show letter reversals when they write. However, some typically developing children also make letter reversals, particularly when learning to read. (MacDonald, K., 2017)

These reversal errors may persist as a result of poorly formed phonological and orthographic representations. In other words, the connection between the visual form of the grapheme and the sound of the letter is not firm. The letter and sound pair must be









When evaluating for dyslexia, it is important to be aware of the strong heritability of literacy problems. Dyslexia runs in families and is common among siblings.

The data obtained from these assessments can help determine the instructional focus that will increase overall academic or behavioral competency and achieve the greatest student learning gains. Questions that should be answered when the assessment is complete include:

Does the student recognize and name letters?

Does the student have phonological awareness skills at the word, syllable, and sound (phoneme) level? Can they isolate, segment, blend, substitute, add, delete, and manipulate sounds in words?

Does the student have sound-symbol correspondence for both reading and spelling?

Does the student know the six syllable types and can he/she apply them to decoding unknown and multisyllabic words?

Does the student recognize and use morphological patterns?

Is the student able to read fluently with accuracy and automaticity?



A medical diagnosis and an educational diagnosis are two different things. In order to be determined eligible to receive special education and related services, the student must meet the criteria for one or more of the qualifying disability areas specified in the IDEA. In addition to having a disability, the student must require special education and related services in order to be eligible. Some students, even those with a medical diagnosis of a disability, may not meet the eligibility requirements for special education under the IDEA, if they do not have unique educational needs as a result of the disability that requires special education.

?

Myth: The use of the term dyslexia is prohibited from use within a student's IEP.

Fact: There are no legal restrictions to use of the term dyslexia within







Myth: Dyslexia can be cured or helped by special balancing exercises, fish-oils, dyslexia fonts, color overlays, vision therapy, or sensory integration therapy.

Fact: None of these remedies have been found to be effective based on scientific evidence. The best intervention for dyslexia is instruction in reading and spelling using evidence-based practices.

It is important to know what research supports as effective instructional approaches for students with dyslexia. In addition to the International Dyslexia Association, the following research organizations actively work to help us understand dyslexia and how to help students who struggle to read (<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/Pages/ldrc.aspx>):

[Florida Learning Disabilities Research Center](#)

[Colorado Learning Disabilities Research Center](#)

[Texas Center for Learning Disabilities](#)

For further information regarding NCSIP and the RRtCP course, contact Paula Crawford, Project Director, at [paula.crawford@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:paula.crawford@dpi.nc.gov)





Spear-Swerling, L. (2018). Structured Literacy and Typical Reading Practices Understanding Differences to Create Instructional Opportunities. TEACHING Exceptional Children, Vol. XX, No. X, pp. 1-11. Retrieved from Reading Rockets.

Yudin, M. K. (2015, October 23). . Retrieved from US Department of Education:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/index.html?exp=0#memos>