

Characteristics of Dyslexia and Dyslexia Differences and Implications

Characteristics of Dyslexia

Identification

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-1-229, local education agencies (LEAs) must have procedures for screening for characteristics of dyslexia as part of the universal screening process. Parents, teachers, or counselors can also request screening for students, such as for those who do not flag on the universal screener assessment but for whom other risk indicators exist. See T.C.A. § 49-1-229(d).

Seven areas, commonly associated with dyslexia, are outlined:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Alphabet knowledge
- Sound symbol recognition
- Decoding skills
- Encoding skills
- Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN)

For students who flag for risk in reading based off the universal reading screener (URS), additional survey-level assessments should be administered, as needed, to determine if the student's reading profile exhibits characteristics of dyslexia, or foundational literacy skills deficits that affect learning to read at the word level (i.e., not comprehension specific). Characteristics of dyslexia is not an identified learning disability. Identification of a student with characteristics of dyslexia does not trigger an LEA's Child Find obligation unless additional data indicates the student has a suspected disability or the student is referred for an initial evaluation for special education or an evaluation for a Section 504 plan.

Student Support Plans

All students identified with characteristics of dyslexia must be served with a dyslexia-specific intervention in Tier II or Tier III of the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) framework. See T.C.A. § 49-1-229(c)(3). Students with characteristics of dyslexia should have a student intervention plan (SIP) outlining their targeted areas of need, their intervention, and their progress monitoring. See T.C.A. § 49-1-229(c)(4). While ALL students who are identified with characteristics of dyslexia must be provided with dyslexia-specific intervention, some of these students will also meet defined criteria for a specific type of SIP called an individualized learning plan for characteristics of dyslexia (ILP-D). See [State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-22-.02\(1\)](#).

Dyslexia

Identification

Dyslexia, by accepted definition, is a specific learning disability. See [International Dyslexia Association \(2002\)](#). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), dyslexia is not a defined eligibility category by itself; rather dyslexia falls under the federal and state disability category of specific learning disability (SLD) in basic reading and/or reading fluency. Tennessee makes explicit mention of dyslexia in its adopted definition of specific learning disability. See [State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-09-.03\(13\)\(a\)](#).

Under the IDEA, students must be referred for an evaluation when the student has a suspected disability that causes an adverse educational impact. See 34 C.F.R. § 300.111(c). If the IEP team agrees a disability is suspected, a comprehensive evaluation is performed to determine if the student meets the two-prong eligibility for special education services.

- 1) The student is identified with a qualifying disability
- 2) The student's disability has an adverse impact on educational performance, and the student requires specialized instruction that cannot be provided through general education alone

A student who meets eligibility under the IDEA is served through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and protected by the IDEA procedural safeguards.

A student with dyslexia might alternatively be served through a Section 504 Plan. For example, a student with dyslexia may not need specialized instruction to benefit from the general education curriculum but may need accommodations to access the general education curriculum. An evaluation by the Section 504 team would determine eligibility. See the department's "[Dyslexia and Section 504: Evaluation and Eligibility](#)" resource for detailed information on dyslexia and Section 504 support.

Student Support Plans

Students with a specific learning disability in basic reading and/or reading fluency who are eligible under IDEA will receive supports and services as determined by the student's IEP team and documented in the student's IEP. A student's IEP outlines programming, including direct and related services, classroom accommodations and modifications. Students with an IEP for specific learning disabilities in basic reading and/or reading fluency (dyslexia) are entitled to reasonable accommodations within the classroom and testing setting as well. All IEP supports and services should be determined by the team, individualized to the student based on current and valid data, and necessary to provide the student a free and appropriate public education.

