

“Say Dyslexia” Bill (Public Chapter 1058) Additional Information for Districts

During the 2016 Legislation Session, the general assembly passed the “Say Dyslexia” bill ([Public Chapter 1058 of the Acts of 2016](#)) which requires school districts to screen for characteristics of dyslexia through their existing Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) procedures and to provide “dyslexia-specific tiered interventions” for students that demonstrate a need.

In addition, the legislation requires the department to convene a dyslexia advisory council to provide input and feedback on matters related to dyslexia. The council will meet throughout each school year and will report on their work to increase dyslexia screening and identification. This report will be shared with districts, stakeholders and the general assembly. In the meantime we want to provide the following information to assist school districts in initial implementation efforts:

- Dyslexia is a term used to describe a learning profile that includes deficits in phonological awareness (i.e., ability to analyze and manipulate sounds in language). Individuals with dyslexia have difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and have poor spelling and decoding skills. **The “Say Dyslexia” bill requires school districts to specifically address these needs through screening and alignment of appropriate interventions.** Although the term “dyslexia” may not have been used to describe these intervention needs previously, many districts have already been identifying these characteristics and providing appropriate intervention through their existing RTI² practices.
- **The “Say Dyslexia” bill addresses the need to identify and intervene appropriately for students with the characteristics of dyslexia but *does not* identify dyslexia as a separate disability category under Tennessee’s special education rules and regulations.** Students with the characteristics of dyslexia, who receive targeted intervention in their area of deficit and who make insufficient progress, may be identified under the existing standard as having a specific learning disability (found [here](#)). Although dyslexia is most often associated with deficits in basic reading, related deficits in reading fluency and/or written expression may also exist.
- **Districts should evaluate their existing universal screening procedures to ensure that they explicitly measure characteristics of dyslexia** to include: phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding skills, encoding skills, and rapid naming. Many of the screening procedures employed by districts across the state already address these skills. School districts are encouraged to compare their screeners against the rubric that was used to identify universal screening

procedures in the department's Request for Proposal (RFP) process, which can be found [here](#). Students who are identified as at risk in the area of reading through the school's universal screening process may require additional assessment to further measure characteristics of dyslexia. The Phonological Awareness Skills Screener (PASS) and The Phonics and Word Reading Survey (PWRS) are informal survey level assessments that can be accessed [here](#).

- **Districts should evaluate their existing intervention resources** to ensure they include interventions that are multi-sensory in nature and target phonological awareness, sound-symbol associations, syllable structure, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Again, many districts already employ these intervention practices. School districts may refer to the tools used in the department's intervention peer review process to assist in their review of existing resources and/or the selection of new intervention programs. Through the peer review process, vendors and products were evaluated independently by multiple reviewers, and after compiling all evaluation data, **the department created an intervention product guide ([here](#)), which identifies each vendor and product as having "met" or "not met" the evaluated categories.** This is not an exhaustive list as not all vendors submitted their intervention products for review. Also, please note that districts are not required to purchase or use interventions evaluated through this process. School districts may apply the same rubric ([here](#)) in their review of additional resources.
- Additional information regarding dyslexia, including characteristics of dyslexia, alignment of interventions, and resources for parents can be found in the **department's dyslexia guidance document for parents and educators [here](#).**

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