



Dyslexia . . . an AEA System Response

One of the new laws created during the 2014 legislative session focused on dyslexia. The legislation defined this as an educational diagnosis and so was added to Iowa Education Code. Dyslexia is defined as 'a specific and significant impairment in the development of reading, including but not limited to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that is not solely accounted for by intellectual disability, sensory disability or impairment or lack of appropriate instruction.

THE LEGISLATION:

- Amends the existing requirement to assist students exhibiting a substantial deficiency in reading to "include but not limited to strategies that formally address dyslexia, when appropriate."
- Requires the Iowa Reading Research Center, in collaboration with Iowa's Area Education Agencies and the Department of Education, to develop and offer school districts at no cost, professional development services for elementary teachers "in the use of evidence-based strategies to improve the literacy skills of all students."

Reading is known as the gateway skill to all learning. Reading success leads directly to success in other subjects such as social studies, math, and science. Literacy was at the center of legislation passed in 2012 and Iowa's education system has been focused to ensure that our students are skilled readers. The law provides:...

- Universal screening in reading for students in kindergarten through third grade.
- Progress monitoring for students who exhibit a substantial deficiency in reading.
- Intensive instruction – including 90 minutes daily of scientific, research-based reading instruction – for students who exhibit a substantial deficiency in reading.
- Notice to parents that a student has a substantial deficiency in reading, and notice of subsequent progress.
- Provision of an evidence-based summer reading program for students who exhibit a substantial deficiency in reading (Effective May 1, 2017).
- Retention of any student who is not proficient in reading by the end of the third grade, did not attend the summer reading program, and does not qualify for a good cause exemption from the retention requirement (Effective May 1, 2017).
- The Iowa Department of Education has purchased a state license for a universal screening and progress monitoring tool called FAST (Formative Assessment System for Teachers). This is available to all Iowa schools. If a school chooses not to use FAST for universal screening and progress monitoring, they must choose another from the department's approved list of tools.

Iowa's Area Education Agencies support literacy

because reading is a foundation skill. There has been intense focus on teaching literacy strategies, such as decoding, comprehension and fluency. Trainings are also offered by the AEA's on how to use the universal screening and progress monitoring tools.

A teacher may also bring concerns about a child's reading performance to an AEA staff member. Learners who struggle to learn to read, including those with dyslexia, are required to receive appropriate service, regardless of their educational label. Iowa's educational system is designed to intervene early for all learners who are not on track to be proficient readers. With the implementation of Chapter 62 rules, all learners in grades K-3 will receive a reading screening three times a year.

For those learners who receive early intervention and continue to struggle despite that intervention, special education services may be required to remediate their reading difficulties. Because of this, learners with dyslexia can more quickly be identified as at-risk readers and be provided with intensive reading services earlier than in a traditional system where learners are allowed to struggle for years before receiving special education services.

Although we do not label children with a diagnosis of dyslexia, we do serve learners with dyslexia in our special education programs. As a non-categorical state, we fulfill Child Find duties and serve learners with specific learning disabilities, including dyslexia. Schools diagnose learners as eligible individuals and provide specially designed instruction designed to meet their unique needs as a result of their disability, including learners who may be labeled with a specific learning disability in other states.

A parental request for an evaluation is always considered and provided a written response. All available information is considered when determining if a disability is suspected, including outside evaluation reports provided by parents. In order to suspect a disability, the information available suggests that the child's performance might be explained because the child is an eligible individual. Suspicion of disability does not require a decision regarding eligibility. It simply indicates the child might be an eligible individual.

