Navigating the School System When a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Introduction

In Minnesota, a community of experts, advocates, administrators, educators and parents came together to answer questions that are most frequently asked about dyslexia and reading problems. There are many resources available that provide basic information about what it means to have dyslexia; however, there are few resources that discuss how to navigate the various terms used to describe reading problems and services within the school and community.

This informational paper was developed to support parents and teachers in providing evidence-based supports for students with dyslexia and those who persistently struggle in learning to read. This paper includes a discussion of resources and supports that go beyond the walls of the school, intentionally acknowledging a wider network of resources that are available. Readers will find links to nationally recognized resources for those seeking additional information or clarification.

This informational paper will provide answers to the following questions frequently asked by parents and teachers:

- Why not just call it dyslexia? Why are there so many terms to describe a student with a reading problem?
- What does dyslexia or a struggling reader look like?
- How can I prepare myself to request services and supports for a child who is struggling with reading?
- What services and supports are available through the school and community, and how can we get access to those services?
- What can I do when services are not offered within the school?
- How do I know that what is being offered will work?
    - What should instruction look like (instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity)?
    - What can I do when interventions or special education supports aren't working?

Dyslexia is a specific learning 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 and or auditory processing of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Additional consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA/NICHD, 2002). Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities. Research from the National Center on Learning Disabilities suggests that one in five individuals is affected by dyslexia (NCLD, 2015). For more specific information, read about the **Myths and Truths of Dyslexia** on the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

Dyslexia can co-occur with other specific learning disorders in math, writing and spoken language, as well as other related learning disorders. For more information on specific learning disorders and disabilities read the state of Learning Disabilities on the **National Center for Learning Disabilities website**.

Administrator's View

Labels are limiting. Students don't fit in boxes. What we need are clear descriptions of students needs, resources, training, and staff to provide those services. My concern with labels is that they can lead to lowered expectations.

Parent's View

It is natural and logical to seek a label or a term to describe a challenge or difficulty. Obtaining a diagnosis of dyslexia helps me to realize that I am not alone, the struggle is real, and someone is working on finding solutions.

A label allows me to educate myself and empowers me to advocate effectively for my child. I am able to stop seeing the behavior as intentional or a character flaw. I recognize that a label provides a description which can help with a prescription for next steps.

I found the information provided on how diagnosis helped a student in college helpful, like **How my Diagnosis Improved My College Experience** at the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity.

Why not just call it dyslexia? Why are there so many terms to describe a reading problem?

One of the first challenges parents and teachers may face in supporting struggling students is a dizzying array of terms that mean essentially the same thing: the student cannot read accurately, fluently and with comprehension.

There is often confusion about terms used to label or describe a reading problem. Clinicians and researchers use different terminology than the schools. For example: medical professionals, psychologists and other practitioners outside of the school use the term "dyslexia," "reading disorder," and "specific learning disorder." Schools and educators use the terms "reading difficulty," and " specific learning disability in reading." The preferred terms in a field can change over time, further complicating the issue.

Terminology

We have collected terms you may encounter to describe a student who is struggling to read:

Dyslexia, a widely used term to describe reading and spelling difficulties

Reading Disorder, synonymous with Dyslexia; both are considered **Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) With Impairment in Reading** in DSM-5

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in Reading, used by Special Education

Struggling Reader or **Reading below grade-level**

The variety of terms parents and teachers have to navigate comes from the fact that people in different fields (research, medicine, psychology, education and policy) use terminology specific to their field. For example, the diagnosis of dyslexia typically comes from clinicians working with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition* (*DSM-5*). This is the handbook used by clinical psychologists, health care professionals, school psychologists, school social workers and researcher professionals. It provides a common language for professionals and researchers and establishes consistent and reliable diagnoses. However, schools do not diagnose clinical disorders.

The language used in schools comes from federal and state educational laws. Laws define the criteria under which students have a guaranteed right to services. Compliance with these laws and the mission to educate all students drives school's decision making. Parents will find that the school's primary focus is on determining the need for instructional supports, accommodations and modifications. A student may have dyslexia or a reading disorder and not qualify for school services.

What does dyslexia or a struggling reader look like?

Learn what a reading problem looks like to parents, teachers and community experts.

There are many professions that work on describing and addressing reading problems from different perspectives. As mentioned earlier, each has their own language and ownership for solving reading problems. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop common terminology. Therefore, we have created a tool to help parents navigate the language used.

The table that follows will be useful to parents and teachers identifying and communicating concerns about a child's reading. The table lists characteristics of concerns that are proven indicators of a reading problem, and strengths that the students may possess despite reading difficulties. Included in the table are key words or phrases used by professionals to label the characteristics. To a parent and teacher, the terms used by professionals are less of a concern than the fact that the challenges are real and must be addressed as soon as possible with high quality instruction and supports. Children do not mature out of reading challenges on their own. The last column in the table provides some suggested actions to take. We all need to take action as early as possible to improve the student's long-term reading.

Because students may present with difficulties at different ages, we have formatted this table according to what teachers and parents may see at different ages. You will find redundancy in both characteristics and actions because not all characteristics and actions are age specific. The table provides a list of potential strengths; the number and degree of strengths will likely vary in each student. Use the list of strengths to describe why the reading difficulties are unexpected. Listing a student's strengths with data is an important contrast showing ways student learns and succeeds despite challenges in using print (reading and writing). Document and monitor what you are seeing to provide complete picture of the child over time. (Content adapted from *Overcoming Dyslexia* © 2015, Sally E Shaywitz, M.D. Reproduced with the permission of The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity • Yale School of Medicine.)

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

The Preschool Years

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
▸ Trouble learning common nursery rhymes, such as "Jack and Jill" ▸ Difficulty learning (and remembering) the names of letters and their corresponding sounds in the alphabet ▸ Difficulty recognizing letters in his/her own name ▸ Mispronounces familiar words; persistent "baby talk" ▸ Difficulty recognizing rhyming patterns like cat, bat, rat	Emergent reader Language Delayed At-risk reader Immature learner	▸ Read more about early reading development to help you know what is expected at this age ▸ Gather examples and information on what your child can do compared to what is expected for the age (for more information on what to look for read the page on Screening Tools on the Get Ready to Read website) ▸ Start working at home to build skills in phonemic awareness and sound symbol relationships; be ready to explain how much practice it takes for progress to be seen ▸ Have your child formally screened at school or with a psychologist or speech pathologist to determine: • Differences between the child's listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities and age or grade level expectations • If the child is at-risk and appropriate services

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

Kindergarten and First Grade

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ Makes errors that show no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page—will say, "puppy" instead of "dog" when shown picture labeled dog ▸ Does not understand that words come apart ▸ Complains about how hard reading is, or "disappears" when it is time to read ▸ Has parents with or family history of dyslexia and reading problems ▸ Cannot sound out even simple words like cat, map, nap ▸ Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with the "b" sound **Speaking and Listening** ▸ Uses vague or generic terms for specific things ▸ Needs directions repeated frequently ▸ Relies on body language or non-verbal cues to support communication ▸ Slow to find the word to use in a conversation ▸ Complains that others are better readers ▸ Resists reading and practicing at home	Struggling reader At-risk reader Student in need of interventions Possible dyslexia	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: ▸ Read more about early reading development to help you know what is expected at this age ▸ Ask your child's teacher to describe or provide examples of grade level expectations ▸ Have your child formally screened at school or formally evaluated with a psychologist or speech pathologist to determine differences between the child's listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities and age or grade level standards ▸ Advocate for and accept evidence-based interventions intervention services ▸ Continue working at home to build skills in phonemic awareness and sound symbol relationships. When talking to professionals, be ready to explain how much practice it takes for progress to be seen If all above have been done, move to actions listed at the next grade levels

Kindergarten and First Grade, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Potential Strengths ▸ Curiosity ▸ Creative imagination ▸ Ability to figure things out ▸ Eager embrace of new ideas ▸ Gets the gist of things ▸ Good understanding of new concepts ▸ Larger vocabulary than peers ▸ Talent at building models ▸ Oral language is relatively stronger than phonemic awareness and decoding abilities		Do not let reading problems define your child Look for and support the child's interests and strengths Avoid talking about child's reading struggles with other adults when child can hear you

Second Grade and Up

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ Is very slow in acquiring reading skills; reading is slow and awkward ▸ Has trouble reading unfamiliar words, often making wild guesses because he cannot sound out the word, or same errors over and over ▸ Does not have a strategy for reading new words ▸ Avoids reading out loud ▸ Confuses or reads "saw" for "was", "what" for "that" ▸ Omits small words or parts of words when reading allowed	Struggling reader At-risk reader Student in need of interventions Possible dyslexia	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: – ▸ Closely monitor and make a log of your observations and share the data ▸ Discuss needs and options available for using accessible educational materials (AEM) to make print materials accessible ▸ Request meetings to work with the school to share what is working and how to help your child make progress

Second Grade and Up, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Speaking and Listening ▸ Searches for a specific word, but uses vague language such as "stuff" or "thing" a lot, without naming object ▸ Pauses, hesitates and/or uses lots of "umm's" when speaking ▸ Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying "tornado" for "volcano," substituting "lotion" for "ocean" ▸ Mispronounces of long, unfamiliar, or complicated words ▸ Needs extra time to respond to questions **School and Life** ▸ Frequently misunderstands what was said ▸ Has trouble remembering dates, names, telephone numbers, random lists ▸ Has trouble finishing tests on time because of slow reading or writing ▸ Has great difficulty learning a foreign language ▸ Has messy handwriting and or poor spelling; poor handwriting may mask poor spelling ▸ Practice spelling words do not stick and do not show up in daily writing ▸ Demonstrates low self-esteem that may not be immediately visible ▸ Frequently misses steps in multi-step directions (indicates weaknesses in working memory)	Adults express concerns that the student has poor attention, is being lazy or unmotivated, doesn't work to his potential, or is not trying hard enough In need of intervention In need of an IEP	▸ Participate in meetings to adjust ineffective interventions; make a plan with the school on when to move forward with an evaluation ▸ Know your rights and how to request services so that you know what to do if you disagree with school's course of action ▸ Monitor and notice if your child shows physical or emotional symptoms related to the stress of school and reading ▸ Continue to build skills at home and monitor how much practice is required to see improvement ▸ Seek supports within the community to help you understand, advocate for and support child; this may include obtaining an independent evaluation ▸ Discuss with language specialists if there are concerns about the child's speaking and listening, attention and/or memory If all above have been done, move to actions listed at the next grade levels

Second Grade and Up, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your child	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Potential Strengths ▸ Relatively strong thinking skills: conceptualization, reasoning, imagination, abstraction; gets the "big picture" ▸ Stronger with tasks that are meaningful, rather than rote memorization ▸ Understands most of what is read aloud ▸ Reads and understands overlearned (highly practiced) words in a special area of interest at a high level; for example, reads and understands auto mechanic magazines if hobby is restoring cars ▸ Reading in an area of interest becomes easier and productive as vocabulary is mastered ▸ Stronger listening vocabulary than indicated by reading and writing scores and samples ▸ Excellence in areas not dependent on reading, such as math, computers and visual arts, or excellence in more conceptual (versus factoid-driven) subjects such as philosophy, biology, social studies, neuroscience and creative writing		▸ Continue to build a picture of your child's growth, strengths, weaknesses and what supports are working; add new information from all professionals working with you and your child ▸ Encourage a growth mindset and focus on effort and strategies that lead to success and independent learning ▸ Continue to advocate for use of alternate instructional materials to balance practice in reading with access to subject matter vocabulary subjects ▸ Encourage and support areas of interest and special talents. Balance school with other interests and family time; consider tutoring as needed

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

Young Adults and Adults

What you might see and hear from your young adult	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
Reading ▸ A childhood history of reading and spelling difficulties ▸ While reading skills have developed over time, reading still requires great effort and is done at a slow pace ▸ Rarely reads for pleasure ▸ Slow reading of most materials—books, manuals, subtitles in films ▸ Avoids reading aloud **Speaking and Listening** ▸ Not fluent, often anxious while speaking ▸ Pausing or hesitating often when speaking; using lots of "um's" ▸ Using imprecise language, for example, "stuff" or "things," instead of the proper name of an object ▸ Often mispronounces the names of people and places; trips over words ▸ Difficulty remembering names; confuses names that sound alike ▸ Struggles to retrieve words ▸ Slow response in conversations and/or writing; struggles when put on the spot ▸ Spoken vocabulary is narrower than listening vocabulary ▸ Avoids saying words that might be mispronounced ▸ Oral language difficulties persist	Student is unmotivated, not reaching his her potential, not completing work and should just try harder Student needs a 504 Plan Student needs special education Student has dyslexia, depression, anxiety, attention, or other disorders Student is at-risk of dropping out or not graduating	Continue all the actions listed at earlier ages, plus: ▸ As the child grows older provide opportunities for him or her to self-advocate and actively participate in making decisions about when, how and to what degree supports are provided ▸ Watch for changes in ability to recover from failure and frustration, and attitude towards school and learning ▸ Continue monitoring and supporting a balance between work and special interests ▸ Ensure documentation of disability and need for accommodations, modifications, services, etc. stays current and shows what is working ▸ Begin discussing and planning for post school plans in junior high school, if not earlier ▸ Ensure assistive technology and Accessible Educational Materials are in place and effective

Young Adults and Adults, continued on next page

Signs of Reading Difficulty and Dyslexia

What you might see and hear from your young adult	Terms you may hear from adults about your child	Actions you can take
School and Life ▸ Despite good grades, will often say that she is dumb or is concerned that peers think that she is dumb ▸ Penalized by tests that limit ability to communicate knowledge (ex. multiple choice tests) ▸ Sacrifices social life for studying ▸ Suffers fatigue when reading ▸ Performs rote clerical tasks poorly and struggles to complete tasks on time ▸ Struggles with writing projects and essay tests		
Potential Strengths ▸ Demonstrates persistence in areas of interest ▸ Noticeable improvement when given more time on multiple-choice exams ▸ Noticeable excellence when focused on a highly specialized area such as medicine, law, public policy, finance, architecture, or basic science ▸ Quality thought and elaboration of ideas in writing (spelling poor) ▸ Relatively articulate in the expression of ideas and feelings ▸ Success in areas not dependent on rote memory ▸ Talent for high-level conceptualization, ability to come up with original insights ▸ Big-picture thinking; inclination to think outside of the box ▸ Noticeable resilience, ability to adapt		

The instruction that is proven most effective must be in small groups or one-on-one, intensive, explicit, systematic, structured. In addition, all instruction must be reviewed and monitored continuously to ensure it matches student needs and is effective. For example, students with decoding and spelling needs get phonetically-based and multi-sensory instruction in small groups for the number of minutes as designed. Data on improvement of decoding and spelling is gathered and analyzed to make sure the intervention is leading to improved decoding/spelling skills. For students who have the greatest need in oral language and listening comprehension, intervention is focused on explicit instruction in vocabulary, active listening, morphology, syntax and grammar. Data on tracking growth in oral language and listening comprehension is gathered and analyzed to ensure the intervention is leading to improved language skills. Explicit instruction means that all learning is explained, modeled and practiced so that the student knows exactly what to do. The researchers, teachers and parents will say that the sooner that effective evidence-based interventions are provided in addition to the core instruction that all students get, the more likely the student is to learn to read with minimal difficulty. Students with more severe dyslexia and specific learning disabilities in the area of reading are not going to be "cured," but they will learn to be highly successful with a combination of instructional and technology supports.

By definition, students with dyslexia don't learn to read the same way as everyone else.

Although many children learn to read with the instruction provided in the regular classroom, students with dyslexia and readers two or more grades behind, will not learn to read without additional services.

How can I prepare myself to request services and supports for a child who is struggling with reading?

Getting Started

We have created a checklist of things to do to help you be effective in talking with a teacher or to parents.

1. Describe what you are seeing:
   - **First describe exactly what you see as being the problem.** Create a picture of language development and reading performance over time. Be as specific as you can and include any data or notes from school, community, or other providers that indicate how the student is reading compared to students of the same age. If you need some language to get you started, look at examples in the chart titled "Signs of a Reading Difficulty That Signal a Need for Action" beginning on page 3.

Parent Tip

Keep a log of important documents relating to your child. This will serve as a historical representation of your child's needs, abilities, and responses to interventions.

Purchase a three-ring binder with plastic sleeves and tabbed dividers. Keep examples of typical homework: evaluations, progress monitoring charts, conference notes, report cards. Date, divide, and tab appropriately per subject, school year, and quarter.

Add assessments both formal and informal, progress reports, IEPs or 504 plan, accommodations, progress from outside tutors, etc. Bring it with you to conferences and team meetings.

   - **Document specific thing(s) that seem to be making a difference.** People, supports, resources and places change, so focus on what happens during instruction. If you find an intervention or something that is improving your child's reading, willingness to read, or comprehension, make note of it. The more specific you can be the better.

     For example:

     - After school and tutoring, Jose will read if he can listen to a book.
     - Amy likes to compete against herself, so she wants to see her progress graphs and set goals for herself.
     - Tracing with her finger seems to be more helpful than focusing on what her lips are doing.

Also make notes of what hasn't worked so staff know it has been tried with limited effect:

- She likes using Spelling City, but I don't see that it helps her spelling as much as practicing with a white board or finger paints.

- **Include both the student's strengths and weaknesses.** Too often adults focus on persistent weaknesses. Our children/students pick up on this and take on a failure mindset. Instead we should draw their attention to effective effort and they payoff of persistence in understanding how to learn. Every student has strengths that can become means of engaging them when the going gets tough. Frame every discussion about the student in the form of strengths and weaknesses in reading. Be sure to note ways of compensating for challenging tasks. (To see examples of strengths in students with reading difficulty, review the chart "Signs of a Reading Difficulty That Signal a Need for Action" beginning on page 3.)

  Following is some sample language you can use to start organizing your description:

  > *"I have a concern about* [CHILD'S NAME] *in reading. I first started thinking about it when…*[PROVIDE EXAMPLE AND DATA]. *Now I am seeing* [TEST DATA], [WILLINGNESS TO READ], [TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK] *and* [DESCRIPTION OF WHAT YOU ARE HEARING WHEN STUDENT READS]. *Additionally,* [PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS] *make this difficulty with reading unexpected.*

2. Gather your notes and practice explaining your concerns with another adult or advocate. Get feedback on how clear you are. Ask if you make a logical case with the data you have.

3. Meet with your child's teacher(s), discuss your concerns and share your data. Work together to define the problem and identify what it will take to get the student reading at least one grade level higher. Schools set what they call **SMART** goals. The acronym stands for:

   - **Specific**—target a specific area for improvement.
   - **Measurable**—quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
   - **Attainable**—Can be achieved with instruction or supports.
   - **Results-oriented**—the goal is relevant to what the student has to learn and the results lead student closer to grade-level expectations.
   - **Time-bound**—specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

   We are recommending starting the discussion with what it will take to read at least one grade higher because that seems immediately realistic, reasonable and timely within a school year. Some sample language for you to set reasonable goals for progress:

"So we agree that [CHILD'S NAME] *needs to improve* [NAME SPECIFIC SKILLS SUCH AS DECODING AND SPELLING] *from* [STARTING POINT USING DATA] *to* [ENDING POINT—ABOUT ONE YEAR HIGHER DEPENDING ON TIME OF YEAR]."

Additionally, when you walk away from the meeting you should be clear on where your student's performance is starting and what will be done to achieve the goal (end point). You should be clear on who is responsible for the support and how student progress will be communicated on an on-going basis.

Parent's Tip

Persistence pays off. Some parents stop at the first "no" they encounter. Sometimes "no" means: "I don't know what to do", "I don't have the ability to do it", or "it goes beyond what I am able to do with all the things I am responsible for." There is still a problem that has to be worked on, so give yourself permission to persist in communicating your concerns.

4. When you come across something you don't understand or when what is offered doesn't feel right in your gut, use the resources provided in this paper to further educate yourself.

5. Persist in clearly communicating the problem with the student's teacher to begin to get informal supports, differentiated instruction and evidence-based interventions. If you want to request an evaluation for special education or consideration of special education services, put the request in writing and submit it to the principal. Include all the previous descriptive language of the problem, additional data you have from outside the school and the goals, then add:

   "I would like to request… [NAME WHAT YOU HOPE TO SEE HAPPENING, SUCH AS: A MEETING TO CLARIFY THE INTERVENTION AND PROGRESS DATA OR EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION, ETC.]. *I look forward to hearing from you and talking about this issue. I can be reached at…*[YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]."

6. Advocate for **accessible educational materials** (AEM) and resources which can provide support for the student and help to "even the playing field" for the student. As parents and teachers, we have to focus on the long-term goal—the student needs to have the will and skills to read, as well as all the language and terminology to unlock the meaning of print. Audible books, text readers, or speech to text applications can help. Notes that for students with language comprehension issues, AEM may not provide benefit unless the content is provided at the language level of the student.

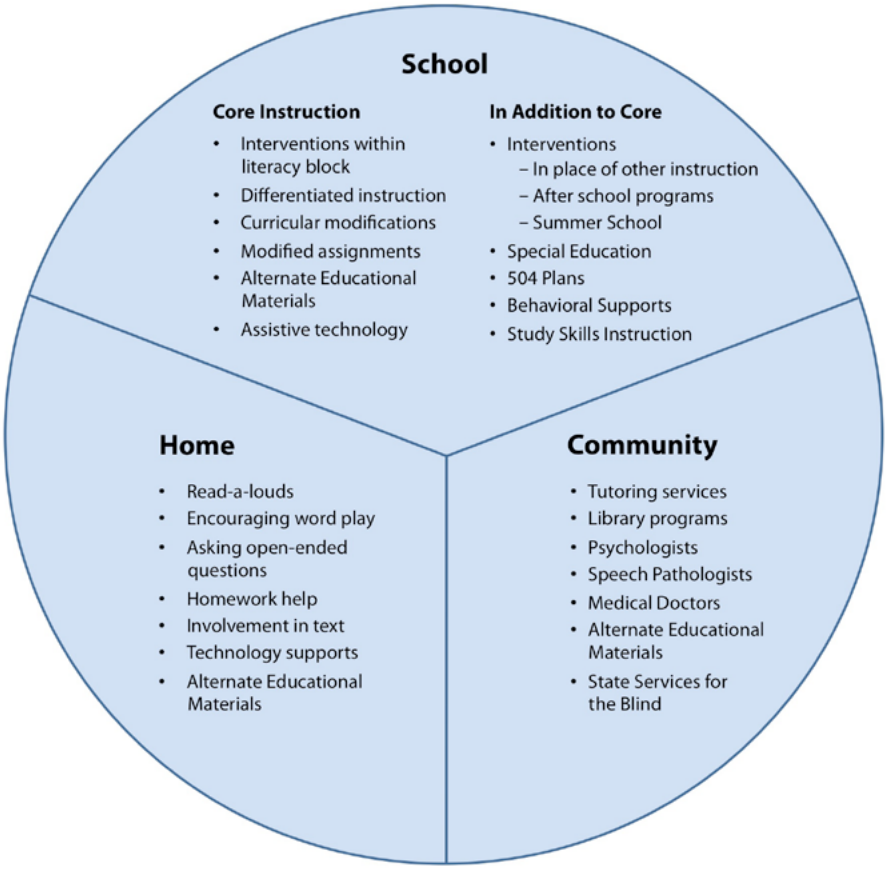
For more information on the importance of accessible educational materials and assistive technology read ***Failure Is Not An Option*** by David Edyburn, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Edyburn's teaching and research interests focus on the use of technology to enhance teaching, learning and performance.

What services and supports are available through the school and community, and how can we get access to those services?

Parents and teachers sometimes have difficulty understanding a path forward when their gut is telling them that something is wrong for the student. Both parents and teachers should know that there are multiple routes and options of support.

The pie chart below provides an overview of a holistic approach to support students who are dyslexic or significantly behind in reading. In the following pages we will describe the supports that can be used starting with school supports.

Holistic Approach to Support Students with Reading Difficulties



Within the school setting there is a continuum of services and supports available. Access to these supports is often gained through a multi-step process. Because this topic is complex, we start by providing a visual of the multi-step process. Starting from the top left with Step one,

we illustrate the ways that a student may be identified as having a need. The next level down, Step two describes three possible outcomes as teachers move forward with interventions and gathering data on the student. In the last step, Step three illustrates options for how students may continue to be supported as they participate in any multitude of school activities.

Steps and Supports Available Within the School Setting

If Suzy is struggling with reading in school, we can identify her need through:

Step 1: Identify

- A parent or teacher describing need and requesting interventions
- A system of screening identifies Suzy as at-risk and in need of intervention
- A parent or teacher requesting an evaluation for a disability
  - Evaluation from the school
  - Evaluation from independent evaluator

Step 2: Monitor and Adjust

- If interventions are working continue to monitor
- If interventions are not working then adjust and or evaluate for a disability
- If there is a disability and if there is a need for supports
  - When the need is about increasing access to grade level materials and learning, then use a 504 Plan to improve access
  - When the need is about access and progress to grade level materials, then use a IEP to improve access and progress

School staff may provide alternate educational materials and technology to improve classroom performance.

Step 3 : Continue supports in all areas of instruction

Advanced courses or gifted services | Core Instruction | Additional instructional opportunities | Special Education and related services

Parent has a right to continue with and seek additional supports through community psychologists, tutors, speech pathologists, etc.

Students may function with supports in many programs. In the following pages, we describe what program options may be available to students who struggle with reading. After a description of the programs, we provide more information on how students are identified as needing that program. We describe these programs and the procedures to access them in general terms; please know that schools may have more specific procedures than presented here. We start with discussing programming at the high end of achievement and ability describing services for students who may have mastered content ideas but struggle with the act of reading and end with students who meet criteria and need Special Education.

Twice Exceptional: Exceedingly Bright and Struggling Students

Twice exceptional or "2e" students are both intellectually gifted and also struggle with a learning disability, such as dyslexia. These students have a profile of advanced content knowledge that lead them to high performance as long as they are not required to read to gain information. Twice exceptional students benefit from "dual differentiation" which includes both appropriate intellectual stimulation as well as supports and accommodations to address reading and learning difficulties.

Twice exceptional students need to be actively engaged and challenged in school through enriched and advanced course taking. Services can vary from meeting with a specialist one or more times per week to taking advanced placement and post-secondary options courses. There are also many options for accessible educational materials and assistive technology supports. These supports allow twice exceptional students to learn and produce high-quality work that is commensurate with their strong cognitive abilities. Without these supports, 2e students are more likely to struggle with social-emotional difficulties, such as anxiety and depression, disengage from school and lack confidence in their intellectual skills and abilities.

Parent's View: A 2e Profile

I suspected my son was intellectually gifted in preschool. He had an advanced vocabulary, strong Lego skills and loved listening to chapter books. I expected that he would love school and excel academically. But he didn't.

In first grade, he struggled to remember vowel sounds and sound out unfamiliar words. I knew something was wrong. The school denied a special education evaluation as he was performing close to grade level. But when his reading struggles, stomach aches and tears continued in second grade, I opted for a private evaluation. It changed our lives. I learned that his IQ was at the 98th percentile, and that he has Dyslexia.

He now participates in gifted programming at school, private tutoring to improve his reading and spelling, and his 504 plan accommodations allow him to demonstrate his strengths without his disability getting in the way. He still has occasional stomach aches, but we have come a long, long way!

How will we know if the student qualifies?

Identifying 2e students can be a challenge as their undiagnosed reading difficulties can mask their intellectual strengths. Conversely, their intellectual strengths may also allow them to compensate so that their reading difficulties go undetected. When considering if a child may be twice exceptional, it is important to look for inconsistencies in performance. 2e students may demonstrate precocious learning or language skills, but then struggle to spell, decode

words, or read fluently. They may excel when answering questions verbally, but their reading and writing skills are well below their performance on verbal tasks.

Both intellectual capacity and dyslexia are inherited to some degree. Therefore, if a child is struggling in school but has intellectually gifted siblings or parents, it may indicate that a child's cognitive potential is being underestimated due to their academic difficulties. Or, if a child has been identified as gifted but resists writing assignments, has an uneven reading profile, or has siblings who also struggle in reading, it may make sense to consider the presence of a learning disability.

For more information on identifying students who are twice exceptional, read **Twice-Exceptional: Students with Both Gifts and Challenges or Disabilities** found on the Idaho State Department of Education's website.

For local resources and support, visit the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented website's section on **Twice Exceptional**.

For more information on supporting students who are gifted and dyslexic, visit the International Dyslexia Association website's section titled **Gifted and Dyslexic**.

Differentiation of Core Instruction

Core instruction is the term used to name the instruction that is delivered to all students in the area of literacy including reading every day. High-quality core instruction includes evidence-based practice in all areas of reading every day. Teachers who use data to make adjustments to the amount of time and targeted practice they provide to learners who are behind are providing interventions within core instruction. This may be just what some struggling readers' need; however, students who have persistent reading difficulties and/or are diagnosed with dyslexia, this high quality instruction taking place during the typical reading block will not be sufficient.

Additionally teachers may include what is called differentiated instruction to not only catch up learners who are behind, but also grow skills for students who have already mastered the content. A teacher using differentiated instruction might change the pace, level or kind of instruction in response to the individual learners needs, styles, or interests. Teachers may vary the content, activities, learning environment or student projects, based on student readiness, interests or level. Student assessment data and progress monitoring are typically used to determine how to differentiate instruction. Differentiation is not an intervention because it does not provide additional targeted practice. The students described in this paper will not close the gap with differentiation alone. To learn more about differentiated instruction, visit the **Reading Rockets** website.

Minnesota Law requires schools to identify and provide interventions for students who are not reading proficiently by grade 3. Excerpts from the law follow.

Minnesota Statute 120B.12.

"...each school district shall identify before the end of kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 students who are not reading at grade level before the end of the current school year. Reading assessments in English, and in the predominant languages of district students where practicable, must identify and evaluate students' areas of academic need related to literacy. The district also must monitor the progress and provide reading instruction appropriate to the specific needs of English learners.

…For each student identified under subdivision 2, the district shall provide reading intervention to accelerate student growth and reach the goal of reading at or above grade level by the end of the current grade and school year. District intervention methods shall encourage family engagement and, where possible, collaboration with appropriate school and community programs. Intervention methods may include, but are not limited to, requiring attendance in summer school, intensified reading instruction that may require that the student be removed from the regular classroom for part of the school day, extended-day programs, or programs that strengthen students' cultural connections."

Interventions for students not making progress with regular instruction

What are interventions?

Intervention, for the purposes of this paper, is defined by the additional practice provided that is intended to alter the rate of skill acquisition. Reading interventions take place in addition to the reading instruction that all students get every day. In Minnesota, the interventions must have evidence that they are effective for helping students learn how to read. By law, schools are to provide at least two interventions that are proven effective (also known as evidence-based or research-based) prior to evaluating the student for special education services.The classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, a reading teacher, literacy coach, or others trained to deliver a specific research-based practice may provide the intervention to small groups of students. Interventions should be specifically designed to meet the instructional needs of the student and not solely dependent on the schedule.

Note: the school district may not use the intervention requirement to deny a student's right to a special education evaluation. if a parent requests an evaluation for special education services, the district must proceed with the special education evaluation without implementing the pre-referral or RtI interventions to provide the parent with a prior written notice explaining its refusal to evaluate the student.

How will the school know if my student needs interventions?

Schools may organize how to identify students for intervention services in two different ways.

One way is based on teacher or parent request. A school that identifies students for interventions in this way may use standardized tests, unit tests, grades, or other indicators of progress in reading. Typically this data is brought to a team of professionals who review the data and recommend interventions that the teachers try within the regular classroom. The teacher is responsible for gathering data and documenting the results of the intervention. If the intervention was not successful, the results are shared with the team. The team uses all the information, old and new, to recommend a better intervention. A request for intervention is covered under Minnesota Statute 125A.56. The following is a selection from the law that provides interventions to students at-risk.

Advocate's Tip

Parents have the right to request an evaluation at any time regardless of where the school is with interventions. Put the request for a special education evaluation into writing and submit it to the school principal. Schools cannot delay your request for an evaluation until interventions are complete. Sometimes parents are told that an evaluation has to wait until interventions are complete. The law permits an evaluation to be conducted while interventions are taking place *as well as* allow them to continue during the evaluation for special education. Student progress in interventions should continue to be communicated regularly.

Minnesota statute 125A.56:

- *Before a [student] is referred for a special education evaluation, the district must conduct and document at least two instructional strategies, alternatives, or interventions using a system of scientific, research-based instruction and intervention in academics or behavior, based on the [student's] needs, while the [student] is in the regular classroom.*
- *The [student's] teacher must document the results.*
- *A special education evaluation team may waive this requirement when it determines the [student's] need for the evaluation is urgent.*
- *This section may not be used to deny a [student's] right to a special education evaluation.*

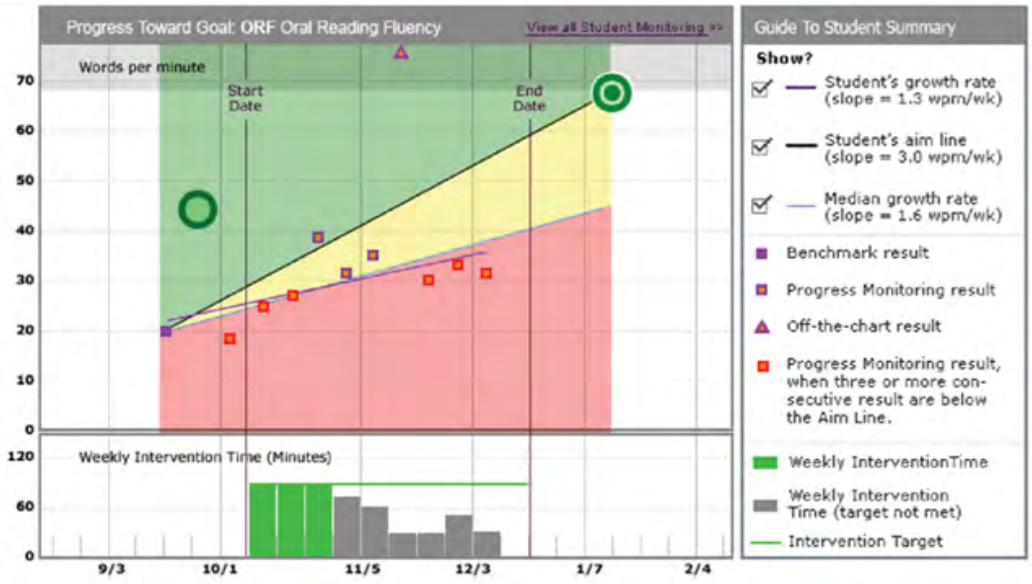
Another way schools organize interventions is through a defined system. This system may be called a Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS). RTI and MTSS takes a school-wide approach to identify students in need of additional instruction and supports. Minnesota law does not currently define a single way to do RTI or MTSS. It is up to each school to define the process. That said, there are common elements that are nationally recognized for how students are identified for and provided interventions:

- All students are given a quick screening to determine their levels of risk in not meeting grade-level reading expectations.
- Using scores on screening, students whose performance is below a target are provided additional assessment to match their needs to an evidence-based intervention available in the school.
- Intervention is delivered by a trained individual.
- Reading interventions are in addition to—and not replacing—the reading instruction that all students receive.
- While interventions are being delivered, students are assessed for progress. This is called progress monitoring data and it is used to determine if the intervention is working.
- Progress monitoring data is reviewed and communicated regularly so interventions can be changed when the student stops improving.

A full description of RTI and MTSS goes beyond the intention of this informational paper. For more explanation follow the link to:

- *Understanding Response to Intervention* on **National Center on Learning Disability's website**.
- *What is RtI?* on **Response to Intervention Network's website**.
- *So What do I do Now? Strategies for Intensifying Intervention when Standard Approaches Don't Work*—see more on the **National Intensive Intervention Center's website**.

Illustrative Example of Progress Monitoring Data Useful for Adjusting Instruction



This image shows progress monitoring data illustrating a child's progress compared to a set goal. When the student is progressing towards the goal, indicated by the circle within the circle at the top right of the graph, the smaller squares show trend towards the goal. There is a second graph at the bottom of the image. This graph uses bars to bars show how many minutes of intervention were received as compared to minutes scheduled. We can see by the bars at the bottom that the student is not receiving the full number of minutes scheduled. Simultaneously we see the student's growth level off. This graph should be used to suggest that the student is not making progress because the intervention is not being delivered as intended. If the square dots showed the same pattern, but all the minutes of intervention were received, then it would suggest that intervention was not effective and lead to an adjustment. (Image used with permission from Wireless Generation.)

What does a (504 plan) provide?

What is a 504 plan?

Section 504 is a federal civil rights law that protects students in K-12 public schools from discrimination on the basis of disability. A 504 plan describes accommodations, accessible educational materials and assistive technologies that must be provided to remove barriers to learning. All school districts that receive federal funding are responsible for the implementation of this law.

How will the school know if my student needs a 504 plan?

A 504 plan protects a student with an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, whether the student receives special education services or not.

Examples of physical or mental impairments that may be covered under Section 504 include: epilepsy, AIDS, allergies, vision impairment, broken limbs, cancer, diabetes, asthma, temporary condition due to accidents or illness, ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, autism, depression, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Examples of major life activities that can be affected by the student's disability include: learning, thinking, concentrating, reading, speaking, walking, breathing, sleeping, caring for oneself, as well as major bodily functions, including brain function, immune system function, or digestive functions. This is not an exhaustive list.

Teacher's Tip

A child that has gaps in reading compared to same age peers and grade level expectations, requires supplemental interventions and supports. Those supports should be provided at the earliest signs of difficulty and monitored regularly. Students performance should not level off or decline if the interventions are effective. In addition to parent's observation of progress when reading with the student, the schools should be routinely assessing student performance at a minimum of every two weeks.

When the data suggests that the student is plateauing or making minimal improvements, the intervention or instruction should be adjusted to intensify the effects by: 1) increasing the amount of time provided for the intervention; 2) increasing the frequency of the intervention; and/or 3) adjusting or changing the approach used for the intervention.

It may be useful for the adults to track the growth on a chart at home and/or school to assure the growth is moving in a positive direction. This is not the child's responsibility.

If you want to know more about 504 plans in Minnesota, please visit the **504 section of the Minnesota Department of Education website**. Information from the **Office of Civil Rights can be obtained by visiting their website and reading their FAQ on 504 plans**.

If you have never heard of a 504 plan, please click on the link to visit the National Center for Learning Disabilities website that provides basic information about **504 Plans**.

For an explanation comparing 504 plans to Individual Educational Programs, please click on the link that will take you to the National Center for Learning Disabilities website **comparing IEPs to 504 Plans**.

Special Education Services

What is special education and how is it different from intervention?

Special education services include specially designed instruction, support and related services provided to students with an identified disability. For every student who needs special education services, a team develops a special document called an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP outlines the unique needs of the student and the specialized goals and objectives that will help the student make educational progress. For more information on Special Education, see the website for **Center for Parent Information and Resources**. For a copy of parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services see the section on **Parental Rights Under IDEA** on the web site at the Center for Parental Information and Resources.

When an evaluation for special education is requested, a team from the public school that includes parents makes a plan for the data to be gathered and evaluated. This data is used to determine if the student is a child with a disability and if the student has a need for specially designed instruction. The evaluation must support both the presence of a disability and the need for specially designed instruction in order to make progress in the general curriculum. This is a higher standard than a 504 plan which requires a team to determine the presence of a disability and the need for accommodations and modifications in order to access the general curriculum.

Sometimes a student is evaluated outside of the school setting and has received a diagnosis of a learning disability such as Dyslexia. Information from such an evaluation should be considered as part of an evaluation conducted in the school setting, but the need for specially designed instruction requires school-based data to meet criteria for special education services to be provided. When a parent brings in evaluation results that come from an independent evaluator, the school is likely to compare the findings with how the student is performing within the school setting. For more information on this topic, visit Learning Disabilities Association of America and read their information sheets on **Qualifying for Special Education Services**.

How do I know if my child will qualify for Special Education?

Public School Districts in Minnesota follow a set of criteria to determine if a student has a specific learning disability in the area of reading as defined in federal and state law. Independent evaluators, such as psychologists, speech pathologists or medical professionals, in instances of comorbid ADHD or other health disabilities, may carry out evaluations which are termed "independent evaluations" because they are conducted independent from the school. Independent evaluators may use Minnesota's criteria, but most likely also use the definition of specific learning disorders in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5), which has a similar set of criteria.

The table on the next page shows the similarities and differences between school evaluation criteria and independent evaluation criteria. The reason to know the difference is that an independent evaluator may determine the student meets the DSM criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder, while the school looks at the data and determines there is not sufficient evidence of educational need as dictated by the state criteria for SLD. The school criteria is more strict than the DSM criteria which is why a student can meet DSM criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder or Dyslexia and not meet State special education criteria for SLD.

More information about the evaluation process may be found in chapters 1 and 10 of the **Manual for Determining the Eligibility of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities** on the Minnesota Department of Education's website.

Educational Model	DSM-5 Definition Used by Clinicians
Criteria for Minnesota Specific Learning Disability (LD/SLD)	**Criteria for a Specific Learning Disorder**
1. Evidence of achievement is below grade level expectations (can be in any of these areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, reading fluency) 1a. Multiple sources of data are used to confirm below grade level achievement (grades, work samples, teacher records, state/district tests, formal/informal tests) 1b. The learning disability cannot be due to vision, hearing, motor impairment, cognitive impairment, emotional disorders, or environmental, cultural, economic influences, limited English proficiency, or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math 2. Profile indicates strengths and weaknesses in basic psychological processes, including but not limited to: organization, planning, sequencing, memory, taking in information and retaining it, visual and auditory processing, verbal/nonverbal expression, transfer of information, motor control for written tasks 3. Gap is unexpected 3a. There is significant difference between ability and achievement 3b. Data from response to intervention model shows student is not making progress with interventions (there are four parts to this criteria)	1. Difficulties learning and using academic skills, as indicated by the presence of at least one of the following symptoms that have persisted for least six months, despite receiving interventions for those difficulties: a) inaccurate or slow effortful word reading, b) difficulty understanding the meaning or what is read, c) difficulties with spelling 2. The child's academic skills are below age level and cause significant difficulty with academic or occupational performance or with activities of daily living as confirmed by a standardized test. 3. The learning difficulties may have shown up while the child was in school, but it wasn't extreme enough to receive additional interventions or supports. A youth or adult may experience a higher degree of difficulties based on the demands of the work or school tasks 4. A learning disability cannot be due to vision, hearing, cognitive impairment, emotional/mental/neurological disorders, psychosocial adversity, or environmental, cultural, economic influences, limited English proficiency, or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math

How can we get access to instructional supports?

Accessible Educational Materials

Students who qualify for accessible instructional materials including textbooks from the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (NIMAC) are only those students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who are identified as blind/visually impaired, have a physical or reading disability and can benefit from text materials which are identical to content used by classroom peers. Accessible educational materials do not reduce the demands of what is to be learned or understanding that is to be demonstrated.

There are three ways a student can access print materials in alternate formats:

1. According to the laws that govern copyright, students must qualify as having a "print disability" to have free access to textbooks and other materials in accessible formats. Students who have been identified as having dyslexia may meet the criteria for a "print disability" and qualify for accessible instructional materials (AEM) regardless of whether they have a 504 Plan or IEP. A competent authority must certify that the individual has a reading disability resulting from organic dysfunction of sufficient severity to prevent reading printed material in a normal manner. Districts have an obligation to provide AEM for students certified as having a "print disability" who need them even if those students do not have a 504 plan or IEP.

2. Students who were identified as having dyslexia and meet the criteria for a 504 Plan will have the 504 team identify the need for accessible instructional materials (AEM). A source for 504 teams to use when making a determination of a print disability is the AEM Navigator, which can be found on the **AEM website**.

Teacher's View

Guiding questions teams should use to determine appropriate devices and supports include:

- What task do we want this student to do that they are unable to do at a level that reflects their skills/abilities?
- What device or support will help with that task? Some examples that have been beneficial to students with dyslexia include but are not limited to:
  - Reading: text to speech AT, access to digital material.
  - Writing: speech to text software, word prediction software.
  - Note taking: audio and video recording devices, mobile devices to take photo of notes on the board and agenda, copies of peers' notes.
  - Math: calculators, hands-on manipulatives, online simulators.

3. Students who have an IEP and a documented print disability have additional protections and access to textbooks in alternate formats from the NIMAC. The NIMAC does not accept textbook requests from family and community members even if the student meets eligibility for AEM.

Families can access libraries of materials, including public domain libraries of digital materials, which can be provided to students. **View a list of Accessible Media Producers on the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials website**.

Educators can requested textbooks from the NIMAC. View more information on district procedures to request and create AEM on the Minnesota Department of Education's **Accessible Educational Materials webpage**.

How can we get access to assistive technology?

Assistive technology (AT) is defined as devices that increase, maintain and support the independence of a person with a disability, and services to support the selection, acquisition and use of those devices. An assistive technology device means 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 functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The devices facilitate the ability of the student to gain or produce evidence of learning.

Assistive technology devices do not reduce the demands of what is to be learned. There is no "one size fits all" form of assistive technology. It is not practical to generate a checklist or disability-based list of AT. Each student's needs must be considered to determine appropriate AT.

Teams need to plan for time to train the student, teachers and family members to use the device. Training increases effective and consistent use of the AT. For more information on assistive technology, you will find a list of additional resources at the end of this paper.

Can the school deny services for a student with a diagnosis? Can they refuse a diagnosis?

Let's first review the process of how a diagnosis may or may not be translated into an identifiable disability and need for special education services within the school environment. When a parent brings an independent diagnosis to the school special education team, either as a request for evaluation or request for special education services and supports, the school must consider the request and the data provided by the parent. There are legal timelines the school has to follow. The school may honor the request and proceed with an evaluation for special education services or respectfully deny the request and provide their reasoning for the denial in a prior written notice form. Schools must provide an explanation of the data they are considering to make the determination that the student is not in need of interventions, 504 plan, or special education services.

For Parents and Teachers

We recommend the following data be included in the review of academic achievement:

- Year to year changes in performance.
- Growth within the school year.
- Growth across short periods of time documenting progress towards a pre-determined goal.

The school must comply with federal and state laws in determining if a student has a disability and needs accommodations, modifications and/or special education services in order to access and make progress in the grade level standards. The criteria or threshold for need is established in law. The school may determine through a review of the evaluation and existing student achievement data that there is not a "need" or that student does not meet legal criteria for special education by law.

In situations where the school-based assessment data indicate the student is performing within grade level expectations, the school may suggest that they do not anticipate that the student will meet criteria for special education services. Parents' have valid concerns when their home experiences is the student struggles with hours and hours of homework, is experiencing increasing emotional and physical side effects, is receiving failing grades and becoming increasingly detached from school. We strongly encourage the parent to communicate all the concerns and data to the school as part of establishing a picture of disability and the need for instructional accommodations and modifications (for more information refer to the section on twice exceptional learners and accessible instructional materials). Parents have the right to simultaneously seek community based supports, including accessible educational materials and technology supports while they work with school staff.

In situations where the data suggests below grade level performance and the services offered are not sufficient to address all the concerns, we strongly encourage the parent communicate the data indicating persistent below grade level academic performance; such as progress monitoring data from interventions, level of proficiency on state accountability tests, or screening results, examples of work and the amount of supports provided to reach the result (see page 11 for examples of what information to gather and organize).

Parents have a right to challenge decisions. These rights are documented in the **Parental Rights And Procedural Safeguards** provided at the school meeting, and also found on the Minnesota Department of Education's website.

What can I do when services are not offered in the school?

If your child does not qualify for school services, he may still benefit from and need additional help to reach his full potential. Families want to find the right instructional supports and should start with reputable organizations and supports that can help select resources to help him. **Learn more about the how to select from options and programs available to students**.

In Minnesota, there are branches of national organizations that can help a parent of a struggling reader or dyslexic get started. From finding a tutor, educational therapist, or after school program that will meet your child's needs from remediation or intervention to homework help, the organizations can help parents find the resources they need:

- International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest Branch
- Minnesota branch of the Learning Disabilities Association of America

Some communities have resources that would not immediately come to mind, so if you live near a college or church or adult literacy center consider asking about services they can provide. If you have sought an independent evaluation, request additional resources and supports from these providers. When you have found a potential provider consider observing a session, interviewing prior clients and asking for what a typical session will look like. We have included a checklist of "look for's" and a section on "buyer beware" to support your selection process.

Buyer beware

There are no silver bullets or cures. In your research, you may come across programs that claim to able to help any student with reading, but be wary of programs or techniques that rely on approaches that have not been shown to be effective. These include:

- Things that don't include practice with reading in a systematic, explicit, multi-sensory phonetic method (some examples include colored lenses, overlays, vision therapy, spinal or cranial realignment therapy, crawling therapy, cognitive improvement therapy, midline crossover exercise therapy, diet related claims).
- Tutoring chains, ad hoc tutors, nannies, or volunteers who are not trained to work with children who have specific instructional needs. Individuals who effectively remediate reading difficulties use evidence-based practices in reading and language development. They have had very specific training and coaching in evidence-based practices.

- Therapies that do not include actual practice with reading. Therapies designed to improve eye coordination, near and far focus, depth perception, etc. may improve students use of their eyes while reading, but they are not a replacement for teaching the necessary components for reading.
- Programs that guarantee an outcome. Read the fine print. Many programs that guarantee results do not apply when the student has an identified reading disorder or disability. If a disability is identified during the tutoring, the guarantee may be disregarded. It is very difficult to know what will work for each child and how long it will take for interventions to begin to close the gap.
- Programs that require very large sums of money upfront before the therapy begins should be a red flag. Proceed with caution if the claims seem too good to be true.

Minnesota has a policy of "open enrollment." This means that, within certain timelines, you may apply for enrollment in a school district outside of the city or area you reside. Open enrollment procedures vary by district, so additional research will be required. For parents of struggling children, this option may provide access to programs or services that are a better fit with the child's needs.

For more information on how to choose a school visit the **Choosing or Changing Schools page** on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

If you want to find information out about local schools, you can review their achievement and growth data for students by visiting the **Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center website** for reviewing school performance.

Specific Learning Disabilities in reading and Dyslexia are lifelong.

With appropriate remediation and support, individuals can combine technology, compensatory strategies, and good instruction to be very successful. They are not likely to ever be "cured."

Indicators of quality instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity

We know that parents and teachers are not always aware of the practices that should be taking place within interventions or tutoring sessions. In the first column we name an area of instruction. Within the named area we provide examples of evidence-based practices. For example within 'Additional Practice' you will see a listing of some of the evidence-based practices that lead to improved performance. You will want to match what is happening with your student to the bulleted list. Ideally, the more things you can observe on the list the greater your confidence will be that the instructor is doing the right things. If you don't see any of the bulleted items, you may wonder if the instruction is evidence-based. Ask the individual if the session you observed was typical. If it was a typical session, you may have an instructor that is not using evidence-based practices. Instructional sessions vary in what they cover, so mark all the appropriate areas for which you observe, and note what is typically provided.

Checklist for Monitoring Quality Interventions

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Additional practice	▸ Modeling, guiding and independent practicing with specific corrective feedback ▸ Gathering and sharing data on student's performance with the student in each session providing specific feedback of what and how to do better ▸ Adjusting the ratio of student to teacher talk in favor of more student than teacher talk ▸ Adjusting the amount and type of practice opportunities throughout the session and across sessions to improve student's accuracy and performance ▸ Mixing opportunities to speak, listen, read and write within sessions to improve the student's application of skills ▸ Including a quick pace and ratio of student talk that is 2:1 over teacher talk ▸ Teaching the student how to become independent in use of strategies and technology		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with listening comprehension and developing vocabulary *Sometimes the instruction for building vocabulary is called **morphology**. Morphology is studying the smallest parts of words that carry meaning (roots, prefixes and suffixes).*	▸ Asking and answering questions relevant to the conversation or text starting at the phrase and working up to extended communications ▸ Practicing active listening (including how to listen differently based on purpose such as following directions, acquiring information from text , learning to interpret inferred meanings, recalling facts and details, finding the main idea or summarizing) ▸ Making meaning and using figurative language (metaphors, similes, alliteration, idioms, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, analogies, etc.) ▸ Maintaining comprehension while listening to accessible instructional materials ▸ Building vocabulary includes specific practice: • Pronouncing words and writing words • Learning the meaning and origin of words • Building networks of related words and identifying how they relate to teach other. This is critical for developing language skills of categorizing, comparing, contrasting and selecting words for specific meaning • Building multiple meanings of words that carry different meanings depending on how they are used • Using word parts (roots, prefixes and suffixes) to build and make sense of unfamiliar words and their meanings. Practice includes reading and spelling words, discussion of possible word meanings given the parts • Building vocabulary and language skills for thinking and communicating thinking (such as what it means to describe versus define, how to compare vs. contrast)		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with hearing the sounds accurately and representing sounds *This is also called **phonemic awareness**.*	▸ Playing with sounds listening for similarities and differences (examples include matching pictures to sounds, making up rhymes, hunting for words that have similar sounds, finding the word that doesn't fit, sorting pictures by sound, etc.) ▸ Hearing and speaking the sounds in beginnings, middle and endings of words (ex. "snatch" is broken down into these sounds /s/ /n/ /a/ /tch/) ▸ Discussing word relationships, inventing words, sorting words, comparing and contrasting meanings and enjoying the sounds of speech		
Help with reading and spelling words *Reading words can also be called **phonics** or **decoding** and spelling can also be called **encoding** or **orthography**.*	▸ Listening for sounds in a word, speaking individual sounds or syllables, writing sounds in a word and reading what has been written ▸ Focusing on patterns not a list or rules to be memorized. Work with spelling patterns, includes creating new words that fit and or break the pattern ▸ Reminding students to use patterns and syllables for sounding out and and spelling words ▸ Working from word lists to sections of text in the same session ▸ Using word parts (roots, prefixes and suffixes) to build and make sense of unfamiliar words and their meanings (also known as morphology). Practice includes reading and spelling words, discussing of possible meanings given the parts,then reading words in sections of text to support comprehension		

What to Look For in a Reading Program

If your child needs:	Are you seeing practices like:	Yes	No
Help with reading comprehension	▸ Modeling (teacher speaks thoughts out loud while reading) to show student how to think and make meaning while reading ▸ Working with making meaning from phrases, sentences, sections of text and extended discourse ▸ Teaching strategies for monitoring when comprehension has broken down and what to do to repair it ▸ Using and evaluating strategies that support comprehension (discussions include how well strategies are working, looking at data to notice when strategies are improving performance, as well as determining how and when to use the strategies effectively) ▸ Identifying and practicing strategies for maintaining comprehension ▸ Techniques and strategies for making pictures or movies in mind while reading ▸ Explicit teaching in use of text structures and text features(headings, captions, diagrams, pictures, bold and italic print, etc.) ▸ Use of graphic organizers or thinking maps (examples look like flow charts or bubbles) showing relationships of ideas ▸ Annotating and questioning within text ▸ Sticky notes, highlighting, summarizing, etc.		

What can you do when interventions or special education supports aren't working?

Defining what is working (agreeing on growth and targets)

It is not uncommon for disagreements to emerge when it comes to establishing how much growth can be expected within a year. This is because students present with individualized needs and varying levels of motivation. Schools, communities and families have varying resources and abilities to provide the types of intensive and sustained supports that are often needed.

While there are cases where students have made exceptional gains in reading in short amounts of time, three or more grades in a few months to a year, this is not the norm for most struggling readers. One group of researchers set out to quantify how much growth could be expected for students with severe reading difficulties. The entire section can be found in the linked paper **Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida**. It will be sufficient to reference some of the key ideas in that paper.

- At best, students receiving remedial reading instruction in special education make one year's growth for each year of instruction, but rarely do they make the substantial improvements (two or three years growth) that are required in order to help them eventually "close the gap" with their same-age peers.
- For older students with dyslexia we do know how to accelerate reading growth in older students with dyslexia, but that it is exceedingly difficult to bring them to grade level standards in all areas of reading skill.
- The instructional conditions in studies that accelerate reading growth in older students are universally more powerful (smaller groups, more instructional time, highly trained teachers) than those typically available to students receiving special education services in our public schools.

We recommend establishing clear targets for growth based on past performance and intensity of supports. Parents who have kept data showing progress across grades and providers will be more prepared to advocate and help establish targets for the next 12 months than those who have not. School staff will also have data indicating trends in student performance across time with more and less intensive instruction. One opportunity that is frequently missed is the impact of use in Accessible Educational Materials (AEM). For students who have the listening comprehension skills to make use of AEM additional growth in language and reading comprehension can be expected. We recommend tracking student progress in three areas to

ensure that growth in component skills leading to overall improvement and access to grade-level reading materials.

- Targets for phonemic awareness, decoding and spelling
- Targets for listening and language comprehension
- Targets for silent reading comprehension

By tracking progress in the three different areas the team can account for growth made with explicit instruction as well as AEM.

Services

Schools retain the right to select, train and coach the evidence-based practices used in school. Although parents cannot dictate the practices used by teachers in the school setting, they can advocate for the faithful delivery of evidence based practices matched to the learner's needs as promised in the instructional plans. We have provided examples of what to look for in the section titled "Indicators of quality instructional practices that are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity," beginning on page 31. The table should help parents and teachers be sure they are delivering the types of instruction proven effective.

Resources

504 Plans

504 plan section of the Minnesota Department of Education website.

Office of Civil Rights FAQ on 504 plans

Basic information about 504 Plans on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Comparison of IEPs and 504 Plans on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Accessible Educational Materials

Accessible Educational Materials on the Minnesota Department of Education website for more information on how educators can request textbooks from the NIMAC, and district procedures to request and create AEM.

National Center on Accessible Educational Materials website provides resources for educators, parents, students, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers, and others interested in learning more about AEM.

Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology Basics on the National Center on Learning Disabilities website.

Center on Technology and Disability for information on how to advocate for, acquire, and implement effective assistive and instructional technology practices, devices, and services.

Failure Is Not An Option by David Edyburn, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, for more information on the importance of accessible educational materials and assistive technology.

Minnesota Star Program at the Minnesota Department of Administration.

PACER Simon Technology Center provides a variety of services including a lending library, training and consultations.

Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT), a community dedicated to identifying, disseminating and implementing quality practices for using AT in schools.

The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity provides information both on dyslexia as well as assistive technology for students with dyslexia.

Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disorders

Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida for basics on dyslexia and information on setting realistic targets.

How my Diagnosis Improved My College Experience at the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

Myths and Truths of Dyslexia on the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website.

National Center for Learning Disabilities website for more information on specific learning disorders and disabilities.

Evaluation

Manual for Determining the Eligibility of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities on the Minnesota Department of Education's website; more information about the evaluation process may be found in chapters 1 and 10.

Parental Rights Under IDEA on the Center for Parental Information and Resources website for parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services.

Goal Setting

Dyslexia: A Brief for Educators, Parents, and Legislators in Florida for basics on dyslexia and information on setting realistic targets.

Screening Tools on the Get Ready to Read website, including reading expectations for age.

SMART goal setting as used in schools.

Interventions and Supports

Options and programs available to students outside of the school system on the National Center on Learning Disabilities website.

Reading Rockets website to learn more about differentiated instruction.

So What do I do Now? Strategies for Intensifying Intervention when Standard Approaches Don't Work on the National Intensive Intervention Center website.

Understanding Response to Intervention on the National Center on Learning Disability website.

What is RtI? on the Response to Intervention Network website.

Parental Rights

Parental Rights Under IDEA on the Center for Parental Information and Resources website for parent and caregiver rights related to requesting an evaluation for special education services.

Parental Rights And Procedural Safeguards on the Minnesota Department of Education's website for more on parental rights to challenge decisions.

Schools

Choosing or Changing Schools on the National Center for Learning Disabilities website.

Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center website for reviewing local school performance and student growth data.

Special Education Sevices

Center for Parent Information and Resources website for more information on Special Education.

Qualifying for Special Education Services on the Learning Disabilities Association of America website.

Twice Exceptional

Gifted and Dyslexic on the International Dyslexia Association website.

Twice-Exceptional: Students with Both Gifts and Challenges or Disabilities on the Idaho State Department of Education's website.

Twice Exceptional for local resources and support on the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented website.

Appendix A

Here we have listed the questions teachers should be addressing in conferences and communications with parents about student needs.

Suggested Teacher Steps: Need for supports for a student who is struggling with reading

1. Screening:
   - Parent, teacher and/or valid measures of data raise concerns about student's performance.
   - Verify data and identify student needs
   - Determine evidence/research based interventions with parent or should we move forward with an evaluation for Special Education?
2. Implement instructional and intervention decisions:
   - Verify needs, data and instructional strategies and interventions to student needs.
   - Plan, document and implement instructional strategies and interventions.
3. Monitoring Progress:
   - Monitor Progress using valid and reliable measures regularly.
   - What is the data indicating?
   - Send progress report summary to parents regularly.
   - Follow established decision guidelines per intervention plan or district guidelines
   - Results of Progress Monitoring may reveal:
     - Measurable and sustained growth in reading skills
     - Measurable but variable rate of growth in reading skills
     - Measurable lack or variable rate of adequate growth in reading skills
4. Question: Modify Interventions? If yes:
   - Review data and gather additional data further describing the learning problem
   - Modify intervention plan, faithfully implement and regularly monitor progress
   - Results of Progress Monitoring may reveal:
     - Measurable and sustained growth in reading skills ~ observe and document performance

- Measurable but variable rate of growth in reading skills ~ continue or modify intervention
- Measurable lack or variable rate of adequate growth in reading skills ~
  - modify or change intervention
  - consider comprehensive evaluation for special education

5. Decision: Modify Intervention or Suspected Disability?
   - Team Decision: Modify or Change Intervention:
     - Review data and gather additional data further describing the learning problem
     - Modify intervention plan, faithfully implement and regularly monitor progress
     - Team Decision: Suspected Disability ~ Comprehensive Evaluation