

## **It's Okay to Say Dyslexia**

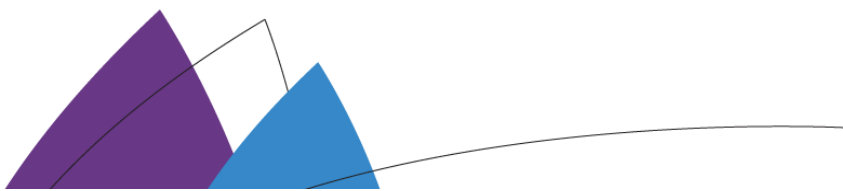
Dyslexia represents the **largest subgroup and the majority of students** who experience difficulties learning to read. The specific, identifiable signs and symptoms are important to recognize and address in the school setting. In October 2015, The US Department of Education issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) designed to clarify that there is nothing in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia (specific learning disability in Math), and dysgraphia (specific learning disability in writing) in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents completed by schools. These terms come under the definition of the school-based, special education criteria of "Specific Learning Disability."

Students with dyslexia present with varying degrees of severity. Dyslexia may or may not impact a student to a degree requiring identification through special education. **All educators** need to be able to recognize the signs and symptoms and have skills and strategies in evidenced-based practices to support the unique needs of students with dyslexia. Early identification of the signs and symptoms is critical so students can receive appropriate instruction to prevent reading deficits and provide additional supports when deficits are present. **A formal diagnosis of dyslexia is not required to receive instruction and/or interventions to target the needs of students with such symptoms.** It **is** appropriate to share resources with families and to talk about the signs and symptoms of dyslexia noticed when working with students.

## **What is Dyslexia?**

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) along with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) adopted the following definition of dyslexia which is also endorsed by the Colorado Department of Education:

*"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological 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 of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include*



*problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”*The Colorado Department of Education's Literacy Office in partnership with the CO Dyslexia Focus Group have created a [Dyslexia Fact Sheet](#) that provides an overview of dyslexia for Colorado educators and parents focusing on what dyslexia is, how it impacts students and what to look for.

## **Signs, Symptoms and Look fors**

*At each age level there are signs and symptoms of dyslexia that are more common. A student does not need to have all of these descriptors to be considered for further dyslexia screening. See below.*

### **At any age:**

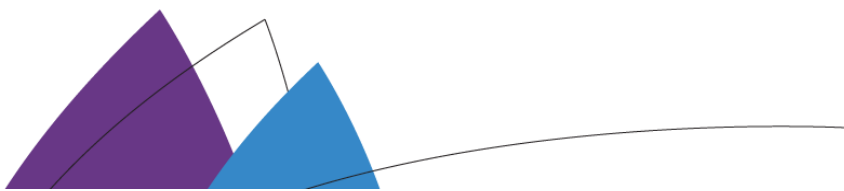
- Family history of dyslexia or learning challenges
- Student scored below benchmark on universal screening measure
- Student is performing poorly in the classroom
- Student progress monitoring data shows slow or poor rate of improvement
- Signs of poor self-esteem, depression, anger, anxiety and difficulties with school work
- Strengths in many areas with an unexpected weakness with reading skills

### **Early Childhood:**

- Late learning to talk
- Difficulty pronouncing words
- Difficulty acquiring vocabulary or using age appropriate grammar
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty with word retrieval or naming problems
- Difficulty learning the alphabet, nursery rhymes, or songs

### **Kindergarten:**

- Late learning to talk or slow to learn new words
- Trouble pronouncing speech sounds (such as /th/, /r/, /l/, and /w/)
- Mixing up the sounds and syllables in long words (says “aminal” for “animal”)
- Avoids letters or confuses them
- Cannot recall sounds of letters
- Unable to break words into separate speech sounds (cat has 3 sounds /c/ /ă/ /t/)



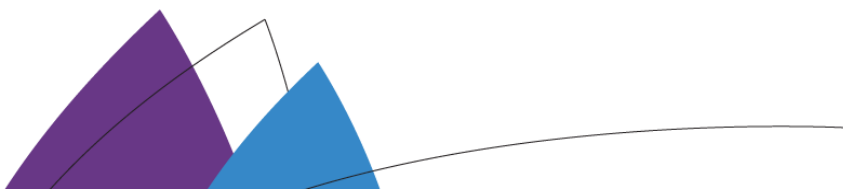
- Cannot identify or create words that rhyme
- Doesn't know letters in own name
- Confused about the meanings of the words—who, what, where, when
- Disinterested in books, read aloud or word play activities

### **Grades K-1:**

- Difficulty remembering the names of letters and recalling them quickly
- Difficulty learning sound-letter correspondence
- Difficulty with phonemic awareness tasks (such as blending or breaking words into separate speech sounds, flash = /f/, /l/, /ă/, /sh/)
- Difficulty learning to recognize common words automatically (family names, names on signs or objects, high frequency words)
- Reading errors show no connection to the sounds of the letters (reads “rabbit” as “bunny”)
- Poor spelling (omitting sounds, substituting sounds, adding sounds, transposal of sounds)
- Difficulty remembering sequences (days of the week, months, ABCs)
- Poor handwriting

### **Grades 2-3:**

- Frequently misreads common high frequency words (when, went, they, their, been, to, does, said, what) and/or function words (articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, particles, determiners) even after practice
- No strategies for word attack; makes wild guesses at words; relies heavily on the context or pictures in a story to “read”
- Difficulty decoding words, often making single sound errors, omitting syllables, or skipping over prefixes and suffixes
- Mispronunciation of long, unfamiliar words
- Loses place and skips over words while reading
- Use of imprecise language (says “stuff”)
- Persistent reversals and transpositions of letters, numbers, and words with similar visual appearance (such as b & d, 6 & 9, was & saw)
- Spells phonetically without applying spelling rules or patterns
- Poor spelling (omitting sounds, substituting sounds, adding sounds, transposal of sounds)
- Spelling the same word different ways on the same page



- Slow, choppy, and/or inaccurate oral reading that lacks appropriate expression
- Comprehension problems arising from poor word recognition
- Beginning to avoid reading and writing tasks
- Difficulty with math facts

### **Grades 4-6:**

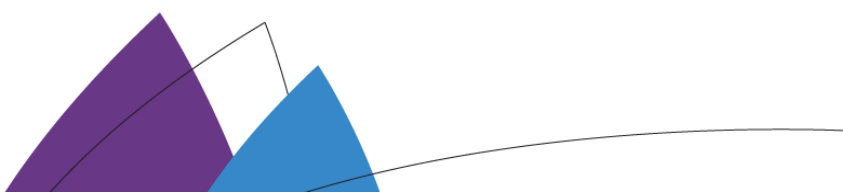
- Slow on oral reading fluency tests
- Inaccurate reading of real and nonsense word lists (pem, loit, sadge)
- Poor spelling (omitting sounds, substituting sounds, adding sounds, transposal of sounds)
- Poor handwriting and written expression
- Avoidance of reading
- Weak in reading strategies
- Weak reading comprehension compared to listening comprehension

### **Grades 7-12:**

- Slow and laborious reading
- Poor spelling (omitting sounds, substituting sounds, adding sounds, transposal of sounds)
- Difficulty with note-taking
- Overwhelmed by multiple assignments
- Cannot work fast enough to cope
- Lack of effective strategies for studying
- Difficulty with homework completion
- Difficulty with organization
- Comprehension and vocabulary deficits due to lack of practice
- Writes poorly and with great effort
- Difficulties learning a foreign language
- Difficulties with math computations
- Difficulties with understanding graphs in math

### **What teachers can share with parents:**

- Dyslexia prevalence is significant (15-20%). National Institutes of Health, Fast Facts CDE
- In a class of 30 students = 4-5 students could have dyslexia.
- Students with dyslexia have many strengths. They are smart, able and talented.



- Schools do not diagnose dyslexia, but are responsible for recognizing signs, symptoms and characteristics displayed by students and providing accommodations, strategies and instruction to address student needs.
- Dyslexia occurs in varying degrees of severity and may or may not require Special Education services.
- Schools have teachers and specialists who understand reading deficits including dyslexia and implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support to address deficits.
- A diagnosis is not required to address the needs of students who have signs of dyslexia.
- Resources are available for families seeking more information on the [Jeffco dyslexia website](#).
- Additional information can be found on the Colorado Department of Education [website](#).

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The following is an example conversational template a teacher may use when sharing information regarding signs and symptoms of dyslexia with a parent:

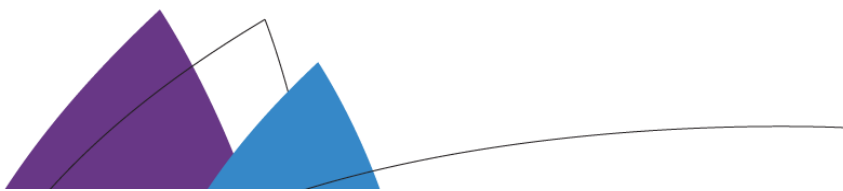
“ \_\_\_\_\_ has been showing difficulty with reading/writing skills. As we have worked with him/her we have noticed \_\_\_\_\_ which are common signs or symptoms of dyslexia. We have been addressing your child’s needs by (shares strategies, intervention/instructional work, accommodations) \_\_\_\_\_. Strengths we also notice are \_\_\_\_\_. Next steps we would like to take are \_\_\_\_\_.”

The following is an example of conversation that may occur if the parent brings up questions regarding dyslexia:

Parent: Do you think my child has dyslexia?

Educator: What signs have you noticed that makes you wonder?

Parent responds (Parent gives examples of what they are noticing, such as letter/number reversals)



Educator: Letter and number reversals are normal until age 9. I have noticed other symptoms, however. Let's look at the symptoms for your child's age.

Educator: Here are some strategies I am using in the classroom and some results I am seeing. Let me talk with the literacy specialist and discuss next steps.

