



Dyslexia Implementation Guide

Technical Support for Assessment Specialists

TABLE OF CONTENTS



BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW	1
WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?	2
THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT SPECIALISTS	4
School Psychologists	4
Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs).....	5
Literacy Coaches / Reading Interventionists.....	5
DYSLEXIA AND NEMTSS	7
NeMTSS Essential Elements.....	7
Infrastructure and Shared Leadership.....	8
Layered Continuum of Supports	9
Tier 1 Core Instruction for All Students	9
Tier 2 Targeted Instruction for Some Students.....	9
Tier 3 Intensive Instruction for Individual Students	9
Data-Based Decision-Making	11
Part A Kindergarten to Third Grade Educators and the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act...	11
Part B Educators Serving Upper-Level Elementary Students	15
Part C Secondary Educators (Middle and High School).....	16
Progress Monitoring	17
Communication and Collaboration.....	18
Special Considerations.....	19
Students with Twice-Exceptional (2E) Characteristics	19
English Language Learners	20
DYSLEXIA PROFILE ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS.....	21
INSTRUCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	27
DYSLEXIA AND SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY.....	31
CONCLUSION	33
Selected References	33
APPENDIX.....	34



BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

The [Nebraska Reading Improvement Act](#) establishes statewide expectations for evidence-based literacy instruction, early identification of reading difficulties, and the use of data to guide instructional decision-making. The Act emphasizes structured literacy practices and requires schools to implement systems that support students with reading difficulties, including those who demonstrate the characteristics of dyslexia. Furthermore, [Nebraska Revised Statute 79-11,156](#) requires that students identified with the characteristics of dyslexia receive evidence based structured literacy and prohibits school districts from requiring a medical diagnosis to receive this instruction.

In response to this legislation, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) published the [Dyslexia Guide: Technical Assistance for Providing Support for Students](#). This guide provides foundational information regarding the characteristics of dyslexia, evidence-based instruction, and the role of schools in addressing dyslexia within general and special education systems. The guide clarifies that while schools do not make medical diagnoses, they are responsible for identifying and addressing instructional needs associated with dyslexia through appropriate educational frameworks. Dyslexia is not a medical condition requiring a distinct medical diagnosis. Dyslexia is identified through the evaluation of reading, language, and related cognitive processes.

Multidisciplinary school teams use the same types of data, tools, and criteria as clinical evaluators to identify dyslexia as part of a Specific Learning Disability under [Nebraska Rule 51](#). Therefore, school-based evaluations are sufficient and appropriate for identifying dyslexia.

The purpose of this document is to serve as a **supplemental resource for assessment specialists, including school psychologists**. It is designed to clarify the role of assessment specialists in supporting students with the characteristics of dyslexia across tiers of instruction, eligibility decision-making, and intervention planning. This guidance aims to promote consistency, alignment with state expectations, and effective collaboration among multidisciplinary teams.

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Dyslexia is a common, neurobiological difference affecting reading, spelling, and writing, occurring in roughly 1 in 10 people.

- Dyslexia is the most common learning disability. It accounts for 80% of all learning disabilities.
- Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence. There is no data to support that individuals with dyslexia are more or less intelligent than the general population.
- Dyslexia is highly hereditary. If one parent has dyslexia, there is a 50% chance their child will have it.
- Dyslexia is not a vision issue. It's primarily caused by a difference in the way the brain processes language.
- Dyslexia is more than letter reversals. It can impact oral language, word reading, spelling, and emotional well-being along a continuum. Dyslexia can be mild, moderate, or severe and will affect each individual differently.
- It is often accompanied by other conditions. About 40% of people with dyslexia also have ADHD.
- Early intervention is crucial. With early identification and intervention, children with dyslexia can become successful readers.
- Dyslexia can not be "cured" but it can be remediated with structured literacy instruction delivered by a well-trained practitioner with appropriate provision of time in intervention.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) adopted and supports the following definition:



“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 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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”



In October 2025, the following definition was adopted by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) board and reflects current research and national consensus regarding dyslexia as a language-based learning difficulty rather than a visual or perceptual disorder. This definition was also adopted by the Nebraska Dyslexia Association (NDA). More information about the recent revisions to this definition can be found [here](#).

“

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual’s peers.

The causes of dyslexia are complex and involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences that interact throughout development. Underlying difficulties with phonological and morphological processing are common but not universal, and early oral language weaknesses often foreshadow literacy challenges. Secondary consequences include reading comprehension problems and reduced reading and writing experience that can impede growth in language, knowledge, written expression, and overall academic achievement. Psychological well-being and employment opportunities also may be affected. Although identification and targeted instruction are important at any age, language and literacy support before and during the early years of education is particularly effective.”

”

Dyslexia falls within the broader category of specific learning disability (SLD), which includes difficulties in reading, writing, mathematics, oral expression, and listening comprehension. However, not all students identified with SLD have dyslexia. Rather, as included in the definition above, dyslexia presents in a distinct pattern of difficulty that is commonly associated with, but not limited to weaknesses in phonological processing and related cognitive-linguistic skills that support skilled reading. Distinguishing dyslexia from the broader SLD category provides a more precise understanding of the factors underlying reading difficulties and helps guide the implementation of targeted, evidence-based interventions.



THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT SPECIALISTS

Assessment specialists, including school psychologists, speech language pathologists (SLPs), and literacy coaches play a critical role in supporting all students, including those with the characteristics of dyslexia. Effective instruction and intervention are driven by the assessment of students' needs. Assessment specialists offer expertise that can contribute to a well-rounded understanding of a student's reading profile in order to inform instruction and intervention decision making.



SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists play a critical role in the identification, support, and progress monitoring of students with characteristics of dyslexia. Consistent with guidance from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), this role includes:

- Supporting universal screening and early identification efforts
- Assisting teams in interpreting assessment data related to reading and language skills
- Collaborating with educators to align assessment findings with evidence-based instruction
- Supporting problem-solving teams within multi-tiered systems of support
- Facilitating clear, accurate communication with families regarding student needs and instructional planning

Although dyslexia is not a stand-alone special education eligibility category in Nebraska, school psychologists contribute specialized expertise that helps teams understand dyslexia as a **reading profile** and ensure that instructional and intervention decisions are data-driven and aligned with student needs. This is consistent with the [Nebraska School Psychologists Association \(NSPA\) guidance](#) related to the school psychologist's role in dyslexia assessments.



SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS (SLPS)

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) play a critical role in the identification and understanding of dyslexia due to their strong foundation in language processing. Dyslexia is a language-based learning difficulty, and SLPs contribute specialized expertise related to phonological, linguistic, and expressive-receptive language skills that are central to reading development.

Within school-based assessment frameworks, SLPs support dyslexia identification by:

- Evaluating phonological awareness, including skills such as blending, segmenting, and manipulating sounds
- Assessing phonological processing, including memory for verbal information and rapid retrieval of language-based symbols
- Examining expressive and receptive language skills that may impact decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension
- Contributing to the interpretation of rapid automatized naming (RAN) and verbal working memory data
- Identifying language patterns that are commonly associated with dyslexia, such as weaknesses in sound-symbol relationships and linguistic organization

These data help teams distinguish dyslexia from other sources of reading difficulty and inform targeted instructional and intervention planning.

SLPs assist teams by:

- Linking assessment findings to evidence-based reading and language interventions
- Helping teams understand how language weaknesses affect reading development
- Supporting differentiation between dyslexia and other language or learning concerns
- Ensuring assessment practices are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate

The speech-language pathologist's expertise in language development and processing is essential to understanding dyslexia as a reading profile. Through assessment, collaboration, and intervention support, SLPs help ensure that dyslexia-related needs are accurately identified and addressed within both general and special education frameworks.



LITERACY COACHES / READING INTERVENTIONISTS

Literacy Coaches/Reading Interventionists play a critical role in the identification and support of students with characteristics of dyslexia by contributing deep expertise in reading instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring. While literacy coaches do not conduct formal special education evaluations, their instructional knowledge and data analysis are essential to understanding how students respond to evidence-based literacy instruction.

Literacy coaches support dyslexia assessment by:

- Supporting the implementation and interpretation of universal screening and diagnostic reading assessments

- Analyzing student performance in phonological awareness, letter sound correspondence, decoding, fluency, spelling, vocabulary, and reading comprehension
- Helping teams identify patterns of reading difficulty that are consistent with dyslexia
- Reviewing instructional history to determine whether students have received appropriate, evidence-based reading instruction
- Assisting in the selection and implementation of structured literacy interventions aligned to student needs

These data help teams determine whether reading difficulties are persistent and resistant to typical instruction—key considerations when evaluating dyslexia-related concerns.

As members of multidisciplinary teams, literacy coaches provide essential context regarding instruction and intervention. Their contributions help teams differentiate between a lack of appropriate instruction and a learning difficulty consistent with dyslexia.

Literacy coaches support teams by:

- Connecting assessment findings to instructional decision-making
- Providing insight into intervention fidelity, intensity, and duration
- Collaborating with school psychologists and SLPs to align instructional data with cognitive and language assessment results
- Supporting documentation of instructional response within eligibility and problem-solving processes

Within multi-tiered systems of support, literacy coaches play a key role in early identification and prevention by:

- Supporting high-quality Tier 1 literacy instruction
- Assisting with targeted Tier 2 and intensive Tier 3 reading interventions
- Monitoring student progress and supporting data-based instructional adjustments
- Coaching educators on implementation of dyslexia-aligned instructional practices

Their work ensures that students with characteristics of dyslexia receive timely, appropriate instruction before and during formal evaluation processes.

Literacy coaches often support teams in communicating with families about reading instruction and intervention. By explaining instructional approaches and progress data in accessible language, they help families understand how reading difficulties are being addressed and how instruction is tailored to student needs.

Literacy coaches play a vital role in dyslexia assessment by providing instructional insight, analyzing reading data, and supporting evidence-based intervention. Their expertise strengthens multidisciplinary decision-making and ensures that assessment findings are directly linked to effective literacy instruction.

Assessment specialists across Nebraska have an opportunity to collectively contribute to the assessment and identification of appropriate instructional supports, interventions, and accommodations through the comprehensive identification of students' needs.



DYSLEXIA AND NEMTSS

[Nebraska's Multi-Tiered System of Support \(NeMTSS\)](#) is the preferred framework through which schools address educational needs. State legislation and guidance emphasize the use of evidence-based reading instruction and intervention within this framework, including instruction that proactively addresses learning challenges related to dyslexia. Assessment specialists play a critical role in the MTSS process.

The following information is provided to help assessment specialists implement specific actions characteristic of a proactive approach to address student needs (as it relates to dyslexia) within their MTSS.

NEMTSS ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

School districts that use NeMTSS are familiar with the “NeMTSS Essential Elements,” or the pillars that help create the continuous improvement framework needed to meet each student’s educational needs. These elements are:

- **Infrastructure and Shared Leadership**
- **Layered Continuum of Support**
- **Data-Based Decision-Making**
- **Communication and Collaboration**

Districts utilize their NeMTSS framework to systematically organize their efforts when addressing any educational need, including those related to dyslexia.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP

This requires shared leadership among multiple educators. As noted above, assessment specialists can meaningfully contribute to the educational success of each student, including those with the characteristics of dyslexia. It is important that districts and schools identify and include these individuals in the problem solving process.

Each district that uses NeMTSS also utilizes a continuous improvement plan that is reviewed annually. This plan is unique to each district and focuses on improving student outcomes. One component of this plan is professional learning opportunities for educators. When districts choose to improve student reading outcomes as part of their continuous improvement plan, it is important that educators receive professional learning opportunities that are effective in developing skills in teaching reading well, especially the science of reading, structured literacy, evidence-based reading interventions, and data-based decision-making designed to remediate dyslexia-related reading deficits.



LAYERED CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

NeMTSS organizes support into tiers that correspond directly to how schools should respond to students with reading difficulties and dyslexia.



Tier 1 | Core Instruction for All Students

Tier 1 (core instruction for all students) is the foundation where all student learning takes place. This level of support provides students with high-quality, evidence-based core instruction aligned to Nebraska's Content Area Standards. Universal design for learning (UDL) is utilized throughout the curriculum, and educators continuously improve their instructional practices by participating in collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., professional learning communities). It is here where students at-risk for dyslexia are quickly identified using a universal screening process (more about this in the “Data-Based Decision-Making” section on page 11).



Tier 2 | Targeted Instruction for Some Students

Tier 2 (targeted instruction for some students) is an interconnected component of a layered support system, aligned with tier one core instruction and content, that supports students by improving their learning potential with targeted instruction on pre-identified learning difficulties (typically discovered using the universal screening process from tier one). For students identified with reading difficulties, this layered support uses small-group instruction with evidence-based reading interventions designed to improve reading skills. Once students are identified as having a potential learning need, tier two supports should be readily available for them to access with little difficulty.

A key component of tier two reading instruction is aligning the intervention with the identified learning need. For students with the characteristics of dyslexia, interventions designed to improve reading skills like letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, and word recognition are preferable over those focused solely on reading fluency or comprehension related skills. It is important that educators are careful when selecting interventions for their students as many evidence-based programs focus on different reading skills. Aligning interventions to student needs and with tier one content provide the best opportunity for improving student reading outcomes.

A certified educator with expertise in reading instruction and evidence-based interventions should offer instruction at tier two.



Tier 3 | Intensive Instruction for Individual Students

Tier 3 (intensive instruction for individual students) is an interconnected component of a layered system designed to help individual students succeed when tier one and two supports are insufficient for their learning needs. Here, teachers are given more instructional time to help students learn, practice, and gain essential skills. For those students with the characteristics of dyslexia, more instruction and time is provided to help them learn skills like

letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, and word recognition, among others. Student performance data is monitored frequently (i.e., at least bi-weekly), and considerable attention is given to the student's rate of progress.

Instruction at tier three should be provided by a certified educator with expertise in reading instruction and evidence-based intervention. Due to the nature of this layered support and intensive focus on reading, educators supporting students at tier three may require additional training and support that is beyond what is offered to most educators in their building or district. For those supporting students with characteristics of dyslexia, training in the science of reading and [data-based individualization \(DBI\)](#) may prove useful to help support these teachers and learning environment.

Important: When using NeMTSS, tier three instruction and special education services are not synonymous phrases. Students receiving tier three support are given intense instruction on specific educational skills that are missing or well-below grade-level standards. Their educational progress is monitored frequently, and any student can receive this support should their performance data suggest it.

DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Data-driven problem solving is the heart of NeMTSS. It provides a structure for identifying struggling readers and adjusting their instructional support. This includes the important processes of universal screening for reading difficulties and progress monitoring within each tier of educational support. In some cases, additional assessments may be needed to inform data-based decisions. See the “Dyslexia Profile Assessment Considerations” section below for more information.



Part A of this section includes information pertinent to K-3 educators as defined by the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act. Part B includes information for elementary educators outside the scope of the act. Part C is for secondary educators (middle and high school).



Part A | Kindergarten to Third Grade Educators and the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act

The Nebraska Reading Improvement Act requires districts to implement specific educational practices designed to improve student reading outcomes in grades K-3. The NDE outlines specific guidance for districts to help them meet the requirements from that policy. This includes information about [approved reading screeners](#), [reading plan guidance](#), and reporting requirements. This and more information is on the [NebraskaREADS website](#).

It is important for districts to thoroughly investigate the uniqueness of their chosen screener and, specifically, how it measures reading skills related to dyslexia. *Each screener measures reading ability uniquely different from its counterparts.* Districts should be mindful of what each composite or sub-score represents when evaluating reading screener data. When considering the identification and intervention of students with characteristics of dyslexia, districts need to know whether their screener assesses any of the following reading or related skills:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonological memory
- Sound-letter identification
- Alphabetic principle
- Rapid automatic naming
- Word recognition fluency (real or nonsense words)
- Oral reading fluency
- Spelling (use/application of phonology, morphology, and orthography)

Knowing the unique features of the chosen screener allows educators to align instructional support with identified needs. Additional information about universal screening and the decision-making process for intervention can be found using the [NDE Dyslexia Guide](#).

An Individualized Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP) is written for students in grades K-3 who perform below benchmark (i.e., below the reading screener’s cutoff score). Since the purpose of

the IRIP is to provide supplemental instruction to struggling readers, districts using NeMTSS have typically embedded their IRIP process within their tier two or tier three levels of continuous support. Choosing interventions to include in the IRIP should be based on the screening data and other pertinent information used to identify reading deficits. When a student is suspected of having reading difficulties characteristic of dyslexia, the interventions chosen should address the foundational reading skills needed to remediate those difficulties.

DIBELS 8

All public school districts are required to use [DIBELS 8th Edition](#) (DIBELS 8) as their NDE-approved reading screener by the 2027-2028 school year. DIBELS 8 can be administered using print copies or digitally, and either mode of delivery is acceptable to meet state requirements. An [FAQ](#) with more information regarding this statewide change can be found on the NebraskaREADS website.

DIBELS 8 is an evidence-based reading assessment that quickly assesses multiple reading skills in students. It can quickly detect at-risk reading levels in struggling learners (i.e., screening) and be used as a progress monitoring tool for evaluating student growth. DIBELS 8 offers six subtests that measure reading skills: Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), Word Reading Fluency (WRF), Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), and Maze. These subtests align with four of the “[Big Five Ideas in Reading](#)”.

Big Idea in Reading	LNF	PSF	NWF	WRF	ORF	Maze
Phonemic awareness		x				
Alphabetic principle			x	x	x	
Accuracy and fluency with text				x	x	x
Vocabulary						
Comprehension					x	x

The composite score, which combines the student’s performance across grade-level subtests, is typically used during screening to measure overall reading performance. To meet state requirements, the composite score determines whether a student needs an IRIP — but analyzing subtest differences more closely helps align interventions and additional support to that student’s specific needs.

Several DIBELS 8 subtests also align with reading subskills associated with risk for dyslexia and other reading difficulties. As noted above, struggling readers with characteristics of dyslexia typically perform below expectation on foundational reading abilities like rapid naming, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and word reading. The following DIBELS 8 subtests align with these reading skills, offering educators insight into where students need the most support.

	Rapid Naming Ability	Phonological Awareness	Alphabetic Principle	Word Reading
LNF	x			
PSF		x		
NWF			x	
WRF				x
ORF				x

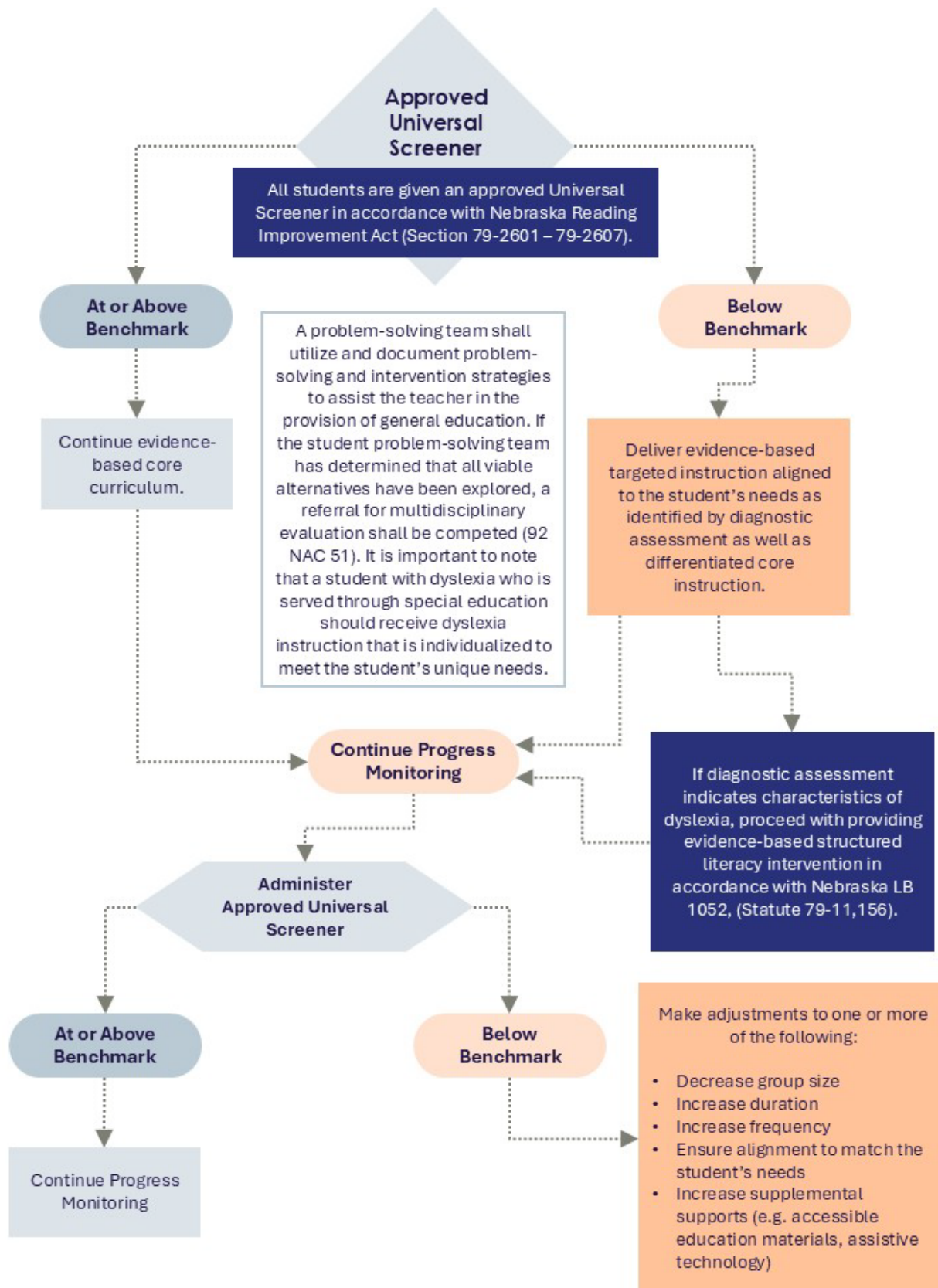
For each grade level, student performance from screening can be measured using three general categories. (More information regarding the calculation of these categories can be found in the [DIBELS 8th Edition Administration and Scoring Guide](#).)

Category	Description	Color Code
Met benchmark goal	Students are performing at benchmark levels and are at <i>minimal risk</i> and on track for meeting grade-level proficiency goals.	■ Green
Between the risk cut score and benchmark goal	Students performing between the benchmark and risk cut score are at <i>some risk</i> for not meeting proficiency goals.	■ Yellow
Below the risk cut score	Students performing well-below benchmark and are at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia.	■ Red

In general, any K-3 student performing below the benchmark goal should receive an IRIP. Students meeting exemption criteria do not need one, and more information about those unique circumstances can be found by reading the “[Frequently Asked Questions](#)” on the NebraskaREADS website.

The following flowchart from the [NDE Dyslexia Guide](#) may also be helpful for educators and their decision-making process:

FLOWCHART 1 | SEE APPENDIX ON PAGE 34 FOR FULL TEXT DESCRIPTION



Annually, the NDE will formally communicate the [decision rules](#) (i.e., cut scores) that educators must use to determine whether a student needs an IRIP. Schools should frequently reference this information to ensure their current decision-making process aligns with the state requirements.

It is important to remember that the use of DIBELS 8 is **not** a diagnostic assessment of reading ability. Additional assessments may be needed to identify a student’s strengths and weaknesses when reading (see the “Dyslexia Profile Assessment Considerations” section for more information).

Aligning DIBELS 8 Results with Intervention

A well-written IRIP will align the student’s reading intervention with their DIBELS 8 results and any other pertinent information from their reading profile. It is important for educators to work diligently and align any supplemental reading instruction with the data profile of the student. Misaligning assessment and intervention will likely create an ineffective plan and frustrate students, families, and educators.

As noted previously, a closer look at the subtests aligned with characteristics of dyslexia may prove useful when writing an effective IRIP. For example, if a kindergarten student struggles recognizing letters (e.g., LNF), a sensible intervention would include direct instruction on improving the identification and naming of letters correctly. It is not sensible to give that same student a word-reading intervention when an early literacy skill (e.g., rapid naming ability of letters) is well-below benchmark.

Readers with characteristics of dyslexia typically struggle with word-level reading skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, etc.). Though they may also struggle with reading fluency and comprehension, the hallmark of their reading difficulty lies at the word level. Remembering this can help educators choose effective interventions. For example, assume a third grade student scores an overall composite score well-below benchmark (e.g., below the risk cut score) and has a significant weakness in alphabetic principle and decoding (e.g., NWF). Rather than targeting oral reading fluency or reading comprehension alone, a more effective intervention would address alphabetic principle, decoding, and reading connected text (e.g., reading fluency). Focusing on improving the identified weakness—in this case, alphabetic principle and decoding—will have a better chance of helping the student gain the necessary skills to read well versus using misaligned interventions or strategies.



Part B | Educators Serving Upper-Level Elementary Students

The Nebraska Reading Improvement Act was designed to identify reading difficulties early in the child’s learning experience and intervene accordingly with appropriate evidence-based interventions (i.e., early identification and intervention for reading difficulties.) Though the policy does not require elementary students in grades 4, 5, or 6 (if applicable) to be screened three times a year for reading difficulties, schools and districts using NeMTSS still may use a screening system to identify struggling learners and provide appropriate learning opportunities to help them.

Universal Screening

Universal screening is still a viable option to identify gaps in foundational reading skills as many evidence-based reading screeners are capable of assessing students above grade three. Districts

may use the same assessment procedures (i.e., screening three times per academic year) with upper-elementary students. Should any of their students demonstrate reading difficulties, schools can use the same assessment-to-intervention procedure to help students improve their reading skills. Even when the literacy curriculum may emphasize reading comprehension skills, upper-level elementary educators should remain mindful of foundational reading skills (phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, etc.) when problem-solving reading difficulties in their students.

Upper-level elementary educators also use Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Student Assistance Teams (SAT) to guide their efforts in providing good remedial reading instruction for students. Considerations on how to improve these processes to help students with characteristics of dyslexia are explored further in Part C.



Part C | Secondary Educators (Middle and High School)

In general, students entering middle and high school are reading-to-learn. The expectation is that they can read well enough to comprehend different content areas (ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.) and perform well on assessments. For struggling readers—especially those not receiving help with their learning difficulties—the learning environment can be challenging. However, secondary schools can position themselves to help these learners by using effective data-based decisions.

Universal Screening Systems

Universal screening systems are typically used at this level to proactively identify struggling learners. These systems analyze different data sources like attendance, overall academic performance (state assessment results, classroom grades), and other related data (e.g., office referrals) to help identify students who might need additional intervention or support to succeed. Secondary schools using NeMTSS create these “early warning systems” and the decision-rules representing at-risk levels of performance. Schools can use this system to quickly identify struggling readers and adjust their class schedule to include supplemental reading instruction.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional learning communities (PLCs) enable educators to evaluate student learning and refine their teaching to help students learn well. Typically, these communities allow for grade-level and content-level discussions about student performance, learning, and assessment. Enhancing these communities to recognize characteristics of dyslexia may prove useful in quickly identifying struggling readers. Characteristics of dyslexia in middle and high school readers include (but are not limited to):

- Difficulty with the volume of reading and written work
- Frustration with the amount of time required and energy expended for reading
- Difficulty reading fluently (e.g., reading is slow, inaccurate, and/or without expression)
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words in sentences using knowledge of phonics
- Difficulty with written assignments
- Tendency to avoid reading (particularly for pleasure)
- Difficulty learning a foreign language

Frequent discussions about student learning—a hallmark of the professional learning community—allow educators to quickly recognize and address reading needs in students.

Student Assistance Team (SAT)

A Student Assistance Team (SAT) consists of multiple educators who implement an intervention plan to help a student learn essential skills or knowledge that have not been acquired. A SAT plan is typically created after student outcome data suggests that tier one and two supports are ineffective. When a secondary student is suspected of having reading difficulties related to dyslexia, the SAT process can be enhanced to better serve the student's needs.

First, schools should collect data that helps the SAT team identify the student's reading needs. Class grades, perceptual data from teachers (especially from their professional learning community conversations), prior statewide assessment data, and other relevant data sources (e.g., educational history) can provide useful information to help the SAT team create a good intervention plan.

Second, the intervention chosen by the SAT team should align with the identified reading needs. Similar to the thinking process with IRIPs, matching interventions with data gives the best opportunity for improving reading outcomes. If a student is on a SAT plan due to having characteristics of dyslexia, it is sensible to have an intervention focused on remediating those difficulties. Misaligning student needs and interventions can create a frustrating and ineffective learning environment and should be avoided.

Third, the SAT plan typically includes accommodations. These can be very helpful for the student, particularly those with characteristics of dyslexia. SAT teams should be mindful of the accommodations they select and ensure that they are properly implemented across the student's class schedule. An exhaustive list of accommodations appropriate for those with dyslexia can be found within the [NDE Dyslexia Guide](#).

Progress Monitoring

It is important that schools continue to monitor students for common risk factors for dyslexia in kindergarten and beyond. If regular progress monitoring reflects difficulties with reading, it is appropriate to investigate further by layering educational supports using the school's MTSS. Schools should be aware that a student may have reached middle school or high school without ever being screened, evaluated, or identified. However, the student may have dyslexia or a related disorder. One goal of ongoing monitoring is to identify these students regardless of their grade level. Therefore, it is important to remember that the identification and intervention for reading difficulties—particularly those related to dyslexia—can be considered at any time kindergarten-high school.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

It is impossible to appropriately address student needs without clear communication and collaboration between stakeholders. Any reading plan developed within a school's MTSS requires it. Thus, it is important for schools to streamline their communication efforts and provide opportunities for collaborative discussions.



Schools utilizing the NeMTSS framework ensure that communication is:

- Anchored in the purpose of NeMTSS: student success
- Timely
- Clear and concise, avoiding jargon wherever possible
- Two-way—with ample opportunities for stakeholder input to gather feedback
- Interpreted/translated as needed.

As noted throughout this document, collaboration among educators, including assessment specialists, is an important action that districts take to effectively implement any reading improvement strategy or plan. District and building leaders should frequently evaluate the collaboration efforts happening in their system and seek additional ways to improve them. Extending collaborative efforts with state (NDE) and regional (ESU) supports are also good ways to enhance existing supports.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Students with Twice-Exceptional (2E) Characteristics

Students who are twice-exceptional may not initially appear to be at risk for dyslexia or other reading difficulties. Twice exceptional, or 2E, is a term used to describe students who are both intellectually gifted (high ability learner) and have a learning disability, which may include students with dyslexia. Parents and teachers may fail to notice either giftedness or dyslexia in a student as the dyslexia may mask giftedness or the giftedness may mask dyslexia. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) identifies the following [common characteristics](#) of students who are 2E:

- Superior oral vocabulary
- Advanced ideas and opinions
- High levels of creativity and problem-solving ability
- Extremely curious, imaginative, and questioning
- Discrepant verbal and performance skills
- Clear peaks and valleys in cognitive test profile
- Wide range of interests not related to school
- Specific talent or consuming interest area
- Sophisticated sense of humor

Students with a 2E reading profile make up a highly diverse group of learners. While they do not form a simple, homogenous group, there are indicators that tend to be typical of many children who are both gifted and who also have characteristics of dyslexia. Cognitive and affective indicators may include strengths such as extreme curiosity and questioning, high levels of problem-solving and reasoning skills, and advanced ideas/opinions which they are uninhibited about expressing. Cognitive and affective challenges students with a 2E profile may exhibit include discrepant verbal and performance abilities, deficient or extremely uneven academic skills, and auditory and/or visual processing problems which may cause them to respond or work slowly or appear to think slowly.

Due to the diversity of students with a 2E reading profile, identifying reading difficulties can be challenging. Often the reading challenges mask the giftedness, emphasizing barriers to learning instead of the potential that the learner has due to the gifted attributes. Conversely, the giftedness may mask the reading challenges. For example, young readers who are 2E may compensate for phonological weaknesses by correctly answering grade appropriate comprehension questions. However, as the child ages, the transition from “learning-to-read” to “reading-to-learn” may expose reading difficulties that were “hidden” from previous assessments and educator judgments.

If a high-ability learner is suspected of having reading difficulties, it is best practice to screen them within the school’s MTSS assessment system, even if the student is receiving high grades. Imperative to this assessment is the objective analysis of the student’s reading skills. Schools should use prudence when assessing students with 2E characteristics by using data-driven problem-solving strategies.

English Language Learners

Students who are English Language Learners (ELL) may display reading difficulties, including those characteristic of dyslexia. However, unlike other student groups, an important question must be asked prior to determining an appropriate intervention or learning plan—*is the student’s reading difficulty primarily a result from a potential disability or lack of proficiency in the English language?*

Schools using NeMTSS will have learning structures to support students with ELL needs. This includes instruction with a certified ELL teacher, frequent assessments related to student proficiency in the acquisition of the English language, and on-going progress monitoring. Though the primary focus is learning the English language, students with ELL needs are included in various learning opportunities within the school’s MTSS structure. A student exits their school’s language instruction educational program only after attaining English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding at a level sufficient to participate successfully in the classroom. (More information and guidance on supporting students with ELL needs can be found on [NDE’s English Learner Programs](#) page.)

When a student with ELL needs is flagged for needing remediation in reading, educators should collaborate and mutually agree to a learning plan tailored to meet the student’s needs while remaining sensitive to their reading profile and educational history. It is not uncommon for educators to experience some level of ambiguity during this process. Thus, it is important that clear communication with frequent progress monitoring occurs to help guide the student’s educational team toward a good solution. Additional guidance related to English Learners and dyslexia can be found [here](#).

A good data-driven problem-solving team will “parse out” the ambiguity and agree to a plan that, most importantly, benefits the student. They will also quickly adapt the student’s plan when new information is available. This can only happen with clear communication, data-driven problem-solving, and frequent collaboration opportunities among educators.



DYSLEXIA PROFILE ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Dyslexia is not a medical condition requiring a distinct medical diagnosis. According to Nebraska Revised Statute 79-11,156, each student who is identified as "exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia shall receive evidence-based structured literacy instruction implemented with fidelity... A school district shall not require a student who exhibits characteristics of dyslexia to obtain a medical diagnosis to receive intervention pursuant to this section" It is identified through the evaluation of reading, language, and related cognitive processes. Multidisciplinary school teams use the same types of data, tools, and criteria as clinical evaluators to identify dyslexia as part of a Specific Learning Disability under [Nebraska Rule 51](#). Therefore, school-based evaluations are sufficient and appropriate for identifying dyslexia.

If a student is suspected of having the characteristics of dyslexia, assessment specialists can play an integral role in providing meaningful information about the student's reading profile to inform instructional/intervention decisions. Oftentimes, this occurs through the context of the NeMTSS data-based decision-making process when the team determines more information is needed to inform the provision of tiered interventions. This information can also be considered through a comprehensive evaluation for special education if the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) determines that information about the student's reading profile would be helpful in informing the team's decisions around eligibility and/or special education programming.

Considering a student's dyslexia profile allows teams to synthesize assessment data to better understand a student's pattern of strengths and needs. This approach supports instructional planning and intervention alignment, regardless of whether a student is ultimately found eligible for special education services. The following table outlines areas of assessment that may be used to identify a dyslexia profile:

Table 1: Dyslexia Profile Assessment Considerations¹

Area of Assessment	Assessment Tools²	Indicators of Dyslexia
Background Information Developmental history, family history of dyslexia, speech/language delays, attendance, prior interventions, and response to instruction.	Parent/Teacher Interviews; Developmental History Questionnaires; Educational Records Review; Attendance Records	May have a family history of dyslexia
Oral Language Skills Listening comprehension, expressive language, vocabulary, and syntax.	CELF-5; CASL-2; OWLS-II; TOLD-P:5; CUBED-3	Average to above average oral language
Word Recognition Accuracy and speed of reading real words in isolation.	WJ-V Letter-Word Identification; WIAT-4 Word Reading; TOWRE-2 Sight Word Efficiency; DIBELS 8 Oral Reading Fluency (ORF); DIBELS 8 Word Reading Fluency (WRF); CUBED-3	Deficits in word recognition
Decoding Ability to read unfamiliar or nonsense words using phonics skills.	WJ-V Word Attack; WIAT-4 Pseudoword Decoding; TOWRE-2 Phonemic Decoding; PAT-2: NU; DIBELS 8 Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF); CORE Phonics Survey; CUBED-3; Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Deficits in decoding skills
Spelling Ability to encode sounds into written words; often the most severe weakness.	WIAT-4 Spelling; WJIV Spelling; TWS-6; Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Deficits in encoding skills
Phonological Processing Awareness, memory, and manipulation of speech sounds.	CTOPP-2; LAC-3; DIBELS 8 Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF); CORE Phoneme Segmentation Test; Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST); CUBED-3	Deficits in phonological awareness and/or memory

¹ Adapted from: <https://dyslexiaida.org/testing-and-evaluation/>

² It is recommended to check with the publisher for the most recent/current edition

Area of Assessment	Assessment Tools ²	Indicators of Dyslexia
Morphological Awareness Ability to parse complex multi-syllabic words by their respective affixes and roots; application of advanced spelling rules for suffixes.	Woodcock-Johnson V (Selected Linguistic Subtests)	Deficits in morphological awareness
Orthographic Processing Ability to retrieve irregular sight words.	WIAT-4 Orthographic Fluency subtest	Deficits in orthographic processing
Automaticity / Fluency Speed of naming and processing; impacts reading fluency.	CTOPP-2 Rapid Naming; RAN/RAS; DIBELS 8 Oral Reading Fluency (ORF); Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	May demonstrate deficits in automaticity/fluency
Reading Comprehension Understanding text read independently.	WIAT-4 Reading Comprehension; WJ-V Passage Comprehension; DIBELS 8 Maze; CUBED-3; Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Reading comprehension may be limited secondary to word reading/fluency deficits
Listening Comprehension Understanding spoken language without decoding demands.	WIAT-4 Listening Comprehension; WJ-V Oral Comprehension; Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Average to above-average listening comprehension
Vocabulary Knowledge Breadth and depth of word knowledge affecting comprehension.	PPVT-5; EVT-3; WJ-V Oral Vocabulary	May be limited secondary to reduced independent reading
Written Expression Writing fluency, organization, spelling, and grammar.	WIAT-4 Written Expression; WJ-V Writing Samples; TOWL-4; Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Written expression may be limited secondary to encoding and/or RAN/RAS deficits

Although students with dyslexia demonstrate a characteristic pattern of strengths and weaknesses, each student has a unique profile that can inform appropriate instructional supports, interventions, and/or accommodations. For students with the characteristics of dyslexia, a family history of reading or spelling difficulties is common, reflecting the genetic basis of dyslexia, and

many individuals have a history of early speech or language delays despite normal prenatal and birth histories. In early childhood and the primary grades, difficulties often emerge in phonological skills such as rhyming, blending sounds, learning the alphabet, linking letters to sounds, and learning spelling rules, particularly for irregular words. Listening comprehension is typically stronger than reading comprehension, with students often able to understand stories read aloud but struggling to read the same material independently. As academic demands increase in the middle and secondary grades, individuals with dyslexia frequently become reluctant readers and exhibit slow, effortful, word-by-word reading, marked difficulty with unfamiliar or nonsense words, and persistent, severe spelling weaknesses. Written expression is often non-fluent, with reduced speed, quality, and quantity of output. Oral language skills are generally age-appropriate at higher levels; however, subtle weaknesses may appear in pronunciation, grammatical complexity, or vocabulary use. Listening comprehension typically remains superior to performance on timed reading comprehension tasks, and vocabulary knowledge may be weaker due to reduced independent reading, even when underlying language comprehension is intact.

Assessment specialists should ensure that assessment practices are culturally and linguistically responsive, technically sound, and clearly linked to instructional decision-making.

The following flowchart outlines the decision-making process to further distinguish a student with the characteristics of dyslexia:

FLOWCHART 2 | SEE APPENDIX ON PAGE 35 FOR FULL TEXT DESCRIPTION

Step One

Does the student demonstrate one or more primary reading characteristics of dyslexia, in addition to a spelling deficit?

NO

The student does not demonstrate the characteristics of dyslexia; consider other explanations

YES

Step Two
Investigate the Underlying Cause

Primary reading characteristics include:

- Difficulty reading real words in isolation
- Difficulty accurately decoding nonsense words
- Slow and inaccurate (labored) oral reading; difficulties with reading fluency (rate and accuracy)
- Difficulty with written spelling

If the student demonstrates characteristics of dyslexia, investigate the underlying cause. If the student does not have the reading and spelling characteristics of dyslexia, the student does not have dyslexia.

Step Two

Are the reading and spelling difficulties the result of a phonological, orthographic, or morphological processing deficit?

NO

Dyslexia is unlikely; consider other explanations for the reading and spelling difficulties

YES

The student's profile appears consistent with dyslexia.

Step Three
Assessment

Assess:

Phonological processing

- Phonological awareness
- Phonological memory
- Rapid automatic naming

Orthographic processing

- Orthographic knowledge
- Orthographic mapping/word-specific knowledge

Morphological processing

- Morpheme awareness
- Knowledge of affixes and roots
- Morphological analysis in reading and spelling

Remember: "It's not the score, it's the skill."

When a child demonstrates the reading and spelling characteristics of dyslexia, underlying language and literacy processes may explain those difficulties and should be investigated more closely:

- **"Unpack" composite scores.**
Review subtests to examine underlying skills. For example, when assessing phonological processing consider elision, blending, segmenting words and nonwords subtests individually. Phonological, orthographic, and morphological skills are each only as strong as the weakest area.
- **Determine whether scores reflect instruction or intervention.**
Review early literacy data (K and 1st grade benchmarks, or other early reading assessment) and consider instruction/intervention history. Average scores following intensive support may still indicate an underlying deficit.
- **Analyze patterns in spelling.**
Examine spelling for evidence of underlying processing weaknesses (phonological, orthographic, morphological). A pattern of weak phonological awareness will almost always be apparent. Look for patterns such as sound omissions, sequencing errors, or atypical sound-symbol correspondences.

Step Three

Are there secondary characteristics of dyslexia evident in reading comprehension and written expression?

PROCEED

Step Five
Assessment

Assess:

- Reading comprehension
- Written expression

Remember:

- Assessing reading comprehension reveals the impact of **weak reading rate and accuracy**.
- The impact on reading comprehension and written expression **varies widely across students**.
- Degree of impact is influenced by:
 - Cognitive abilities
 - Background knowledge
 - Oral language
 - Previous instruction/intervention
 - Age/grade expectations
 - Attention factors
- Secondary characteristics **do not determine dyslexia identification, but inform instructional planning**.

Step Four

Does the student have strengths that can serve as instructional assets? Are there coexisting factors that may affect identification or response to intervention?

END

Assess (formally or informally):

- Oral language (listening comprehension, oral expression, vocabulary)
- Attention
- Mathematics (calculation and reasoning)
- Handwriting
- Behavior/emotional factors
- Other areas as needed

Remember:

- Information about other developmental factors **improves the accuracy and quality of a dyslexia assessment**.
- Identifying a contributing deficit is necessary to match interventions effectively and fully understand the student's learning profile.
- Some students may require:
 - Oral language intervention alongside dyslexia instruction
 - Math or written expression support
 - Attention/ADHD-related supports
- Effective dyslexia identification and intervention improve when contributing factors are identified, understood, and addressed, and when student strengths and assets are used to support learning.



INSTRUCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

If, as a result of additional assessments, a child is found to have the characteristics of dyslexia, the Nebraska Dyslexia Statute states that the child shall be provided systematic, sequential, and multisensory instruction. Consequently, the instructional sequence should be logical, with the less complex foundational skills taught before the more complex. Instruction should also include cumulative repeated practice combined with active engagement, multiple opportunities for student response, and immediate corrective feedback.

Furthermore, research highlights the importance of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling for improving reading achievement (e.g., Shanahan, 2021). The phonics instruction should include sound-symbol correspondences, orthography, syllables, morphology, and syntax (e.g., Kearns & Whaley, 2018). In addition to foundational skills, instruction focused on text reading fluency, including repeated oral reading of challenging text, comprehension strategies, and written language instruction (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, text structure, composition) has been found to positively impact reading comprehension (e.g., Al Otaiba et al., 2022). Another key variable in accelerating reading gains for students with characteristics of dyslexia is the amount of intervention time, with more minutes of instruction associated with greater improvement (e.g., Hall et al., 2022). More information about instructional considerations for students with the characteristics of dyslexia can be found in the [Dyslexia Guide: Technical Assistance for Providing Support for Students](#).

It should be noted, however, that each student's needs should be informed by the results of any assessments conducted. Each student's reading profile provides essential information about the types of instructional support, intervention, and/or accommodations needed to address areas of deficit. The profiles presented below are intended to provide examples of this. Individual students may exhibit characteristics across multiple profiles, and professional judgement should be used to integrate features from more than one profile when determining instructional needs and

intervention intensity. Additional diagnostic data may be needed to determine a student's precise instructional entry point within specific instructional components (e.g., phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling). *The following profiles are not exhaustive of all of the ways in which dyslexia may present.*

Example Profile 1: Phonological Dyslexia

Assessment Pattern and Characteristics:

Students with a classic dyslexia profile typically demonstrate average to above-average cognitive ability and age-appropriate oral language skills. Assessment reveals significant weaknesses in phonological processing, decoding, word recognition, spelling, and reading fluency. Listening comprehension is generally average or above-average.

Severity Considerations:

Severity may range from mild to moderate and is influenced by the magnitude of decoding and spelling deficits, the number of affected word-level domains, and the student's response to prior instruction and intervention.

Instructional Focus:

Instruction should consist of explicit, systematic, and multisensory structured literacy targeting phonology, phonics, orthography, syllable patterns, and morphology. Instruction should follow a logical sequence from less complex to more complex skills and include cumulative review, repeated practice, high rates of active engagement, and immediate corrective feedback. Explicit sequential spelling instruction and oral repeated reading fluency practice are essential components.

Common Accommodations:

Common accommodations might include extended time, access to audiobooks or text-to-speech, reduced copying demands, and spelling accommodations on content-area assessments and writing.

Example Profile 2: Dyslexia with Co-existing ADHD

Assessment Pattern and Characteristics:

This profile includes the core characteristics of dyslexia along with elevated concerns related to attention, impulse control, and executive functioning. Performance may be variable across tasks, and rate of progress may be inconsistent despite appropriate instruction.

Severity Considerations:

Severity is often moderate to severe, as attentional and self-regulatory challenges can reduce instructional efficiency and slow skill acquisition, even when core reading deficits are similar to those of peers with dyslexia alone.

Instructional Focus:

Instruction should include all components of structured literacy but be delivered in shorter, clearly defined instructional segments. High levels of active responding, multisensory techniques, frequent opportunities for practice, and immediate feedback are critical. Explicit instruction in self-monitoring and task engagement strategies may further support learning.

Common Accommodations:

Accommodations may include preferential seating, chunked assignments, movement breaks, extended time, and alternative response formats such as oral responses or technology-based writing.

Example Profile 3: Dyslexia with Language Weaknesses (DLD/SLI)

Assessment Pattern and Characteristics:

Students with this profile demonstrate deficits in decoding, word recognition, and spelling in combination with broader oral language weaknesses, including vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension.

Severity Considerations:

Severity is frequently high due to the involvement of multiple language and literacy domains. Difficulties in comprehension are not solely attributable to word-level reading deficits, increasing overall instructional need.

Instructional Focus:

Intervention should integrate structured literacy instruction with explicit oral language instruction. This includes systematic instruction in vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehension strategies, alongside the development of phonological and orthographic skills. Instruction should be intensive, cumulative, and carefully scaffolded.

Common Accommodations:

Accommodations may include vocabulary pre-teaching, visual supports, simplified directions, and access to audio-supported instructional materials.

Example Profile 4: Dyslexia with Written Expression Difficulties (Dysgraphia)

Assessment Pattern and Characteristics:

This profile reflects core dyslexia characteristics accompanied by significant difficulties in written expression, including severe spelling weakness, slow or effortful handwriting, and reduced writing fluency and organization.

Severity Considerations:

Severity is typically moderate to severe, particularly when transcription demands substantially interfere with academic performance and demonstration of knowledge.

Instructional Focus:

Instruction should combine structured literacy with explicit spelling instruction and direct teaching of handwriting and writing fluency. Writing instruction should emphasize sentence construction, paragraph organization, and planning strategies while gradually increasing writing demands.

Common Accommodations:

Common accommodations include keyboarding or speech-to-text, reduced writing volume without reducing cognitive demand, graphic organizers, and extended time.



DYSLEXIA AND SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

State Definition: 92 NAC 51-006.04K1

“

To qualify for special education services in the category of specific learning disability, the child must have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The category includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The category does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disabilities; of behavioral disorders; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

”

The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and subsequent regulations published in 2006 have significantly changed the identification process for students suspected of having specific learning disabilities. Rather than using a discrepancy model contrasting intellectual and achievement test results, multi-disciplinary teams are now encouraged to consider a variety of methods to identify specific learning disabilities, including response-to-intervention (RTI)/Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that incorporates deeply implemented problem solving, cognitive processing approaches, and the determination of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses. All three methodologies are currently utilized by IEP teams in Nebraska to identify the presence of SLD. More information about Nebraska’s SLD eligibility guidelines can be found [here](#).

Dyslexia may be understood as a specific reading profile that falls within the broader category of SLD in basic reading skills and/or reading fluency. Not all students with SLD have dyslexia, and not all students with characteristics of dyslexia will demonstrate an adverse impact on their education and/or require special education services. However, accurate identification of dyslexia is essential for providing evidence-based instruction and appropriate accommodations (such as a Section 504 plan), regardless of special education eligibility. Understanding dyslexia as a reading profile helps teams differentiate between instructional need and disability determination while maintaining compliance with eligibility criteria.

Assessment specialists play a key role in helping teams navigate these distinctions and communicate them clearly to families.

CONCLUSION

This supplemental guidance is intended to support assessment specialists in navigating dyslexia-related practices within Nebraska’s educational framework. By aligning assessment, intervention, identification, and eligibility practices with state guidance and research-based principles, assessment specialists can play a critical role in improving outcomes for students with dyslexia and strengthening collaboration with educators and families.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Al Otaiba, S., McMaster, K., Wanzek, J., & Zaru, M. W. (2022). What we know and need to know about literacy interventions for elementary students with reading difficulties and disabilities, including dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 58(2), 313–332.
- Hall, C., Dahl-Leonard, K., Cho, E., Solari, E. J., Capin, P., Conner, C. L., & Kehoe, K. F. (2023). Forty years of reading intervention research for elementary students with or at risk for dyslexia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 58(2), 285–312.
- Ives, C., Biancarosa, G., Fien, H., & Kennedy, P. (2019). *Dyslexia screening and DIBELS 8th Edition* [White paper]. University of Oregon.
<https://dibels.uoregon.edu/sites/default/files/2021-06/DIBELS%208th%20Edition%20Dyslexia%20White%20Paper.pdf>
- Kearns, D. M., & Whaley, V. M. (2018). Helping students with dyslexia read long words: Using syllables and morphemes. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 51(3), 212–225.
- Shanahan, T. (2021). A review of the evidence on tier 1 instruction for readers with dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 58(2), 268–284.
- Texas Education Agency. (2024). *The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures concerning dyslexia and related disorders* (2024 update). Texas State Board of Education.
<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/texas-dyslexia-handbook.pdf>
- University of Oregon. (2023). *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS®)*, 8th Edition: Administration and scoring guide (2023 ed.).
https://dibels.uoregon.edu/sites/default/files/2024-01/dibels8_admin_scoring_guide.pdf

APPENDIX

FLOWCHART 1 TEXT DESCRIPTION

Approved Universal Screener Decision Process

See original flowchart on page 14.

A problem-solving team shall utilize and document problem-solving and intervention strategies to assist the teacher in the provision of general education. If the student problem-solving team has determined that all viable alternatives have been explored, a referral for multidisciplinary evaluation shall be completed (92 NAC 51). It is important to note that a student with dyslexia who is served through special education should receive dyslexia instruction that is individualized to meet the student's unique needs.

1. **Step 1: Administer the Approved Universal Screener**

All students are given an approved Universal Screener in accordance with Nebraska Reading Improvement Act (Section 79-2601–79-2607).

2. **Step 2: Initial Result**

- If the student is **At or Above Benchmark**:
 - Continue evidence-based core curriculum.
- If the student is **Below Benchmark**:
 - Deliver evidence-based targeted instruction aligned to the student's needs as identified by diagnostic assessment, as well as differentiated core instruction.
 - If diagnostic assessment indicates characteristics of dyslexia, proceed with providing evidence-based structured literacy intervention in accordance with Nebraska LB 1052 (Statute 79-11,156).
- Continue progress monitoring.

3. **Step 3: Administer Approved Universal Screener**

- If the student is **At or Above Benchmark**:
 - Continue progress monitoring.
- If the student is **Below Benchmark**:
 - Make adjustments to one or more of the following:
 - Decrease group size
 - Increase duration
 - Increase frequency
 - Ensure the intervention matches the student's needs
 - Increase supplemental supports (e.g., accessible educational materials, assistive technology)

FLOWCHART 2 TEXT DESCRIPTION

Distinguishing Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia

See original flowchart on page 25.

STEP ONE

Question: Does the student demonstrate one or more primary reading characteristics of dyslexia, in addition to a spelling deficit?

Primary reading characteristics include:

- Difficulty reading real words in isolation
- Difficulty accurately decoding nonsense words
- Slow and inaccurate (labored) oral reading; difficulties with reading fluency (rate and accuracy)
- Difficulty with written spelling

If the student demonstrates characteristics of dyslexia, investigate the underlying cause. If the student does not have the reading and spelling characteristics of dyslexia, the student does not have dyslexia.

If YES:

- Investigate the underlying cause.
- Proceed to **STEP TWO**.

If NO:

- The student does not demonstrate the characteristics of dyslexia; consider other explanations.
- End.

STEP TWO

Question: Are the reading and spelling difficulties the result of a phonological, orthographic, or morphological processing deficit?

Assess:

- Phonological processing
 - Phonological awareness
 - Phonological memory
 - Rapid automatic naming
- Orthographic processing
 - Orthographic knowledge
 - Orthographic mapping/word-specific knowledge
- Morphological processing
 - Morpheme awareness

- Knowledge of affixes and roots
- Morphological analysis in reading and spelling

Remember: “It’s not the score, it’s the skill.”

When a child demonstrates the reading and spelling characteristics of dyslexia, underlying language and literacy processes may explain those difficulties and should be investigated more closely:

- **“Unpack” composite scores.**
Review subtests to examine underlying skills. For example, when assessing phonological processing consider elision, blending, segmenting words and nonwords subtests individually. Phonological, orthographic, and morphological skills are each only as strong as the weakest area.
- **Determine whether scores reflect instruction or intervention.**
Review early literacy data (K and 1st grade benchmarks, or other early reading assessment) and consider instruction/intervention history. Average scores following intensive support may still indicate an underlying deficit.
- **Analyze patterns in spelling.**
Examine spelling for evidence of underlying processing weaknesses (phonological, orthographic, morphological). A pattern of weak phonological awareness will almost always be apparent. Look for patterns such as sound omissions, sequencing errors, or atypical sound-symbol correspondences.

If YES:

- The student's profile is consistent with dyslexia
- Proceed to **STEP THREE**.

If NO:

- Dyslexia is unlikely; consider other explanations for the reading and spelling difficulties.
- End.

STEP THREE

Question: Are there secondary characteristics of dyslexia evident in reading comprehension and written expression?

Assess:

- Reading comprehension
- Written expression

Remember:

- Assessing reading comprehension reveals the impact of **weak reading accuracy and fluency**.

- The impact on reading comprehension and written expression **varies widely across students.**
- Degree of impact is influenced by:
 - Cognitive abilities
 - Background knowledge
 - Oral language
 - Previous instruction/intervention
 - Age/grade expectations
 - Attention factors
- Secondary characteristics **do not determine dyslexia identification, but inform instructional planning.**

Proceed to **STEP FOUR.**

STEP FOUR

Question: Does the student have strengths that can serve as instructional assets? Are there coexisting factors that may affect identification or response to intervention?

Assess (formally or informally):

- Oral language (listening comprehension, oral expression, vocabulary)
- Attention
- Mathematics (calculation and reasoning)
- Handwriting
- Behavior/emotional factors
- Other areas as needed

Remember:

- Information about other developmental factors **improves the accuracy and quality of dyslexia assessment.**
- Identifying a contributing deficit is necessary to match interventions effectively and fully understand the student's learning profile.
- Some students may require:
 - Oral language intervention alongside dyslexia instruction
 - Math or written expression support
 - Attention/ADHD-related supports
- Effective dyslexia identification and intervention improves when contributing factors are identified, understood, and addressed, and when student strengths are used to support learning.

End

This guide was developed by the
Nebraska Department of Education
in partnership with:



**George Toman, Ph.D., NeMTSS System Consultant | Dr. Pam Shanahan Bazis, University of
Nebraska Lincoln | Nebraska School Psychologist Association Executive Board: Jessica
Shepard, Tessa Petereit, Vern Davis**