

Dyslexia FAQ

Dyslexia Identification and Evaluation



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If a parent requests testing because they suspect their child has dyslexia, how should a school respond?

Educators should respond to a parent request for an evaluation for a child suspected of having dyslexia the same way they would respond to any parent request for an evaluation for any suspected Specific Learning Disability (SLD). A school can respond in one of two ways to a parent request for an SLD evaluation, including for dyslexia. If the school agrees with the parent that the child may be a child with a disability, then the school must evaluate the child in accordance with federal and state policy. A Prior Written Notice and Consent for Evaluation form would then be signed by the parent and the team should proceed with the evaluation. If the school does not believe an evaluation is warranted (e.g., [body of evidence](#) confirms that a disability is not suspected), a Prior Written Notice of Special Education Action must be issued to the parents. Please visit page [46 in the CDE Specific Learning Disability Guidelines](#) for more information about responding to a parent request for SLD evaluation. Also explore [section 3.3 in the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#) for specific information about formal and informal data collection for identifying characteristics of dyslexia. Also, be sure to check with local district policies for responding to parent requests for evaluation.

In Colorado, who can identify dyslexia in an educational setting? What might the assessment process look like?

Dyslexia falls within a [Specific Learning Disability \(SLD\)](#) category under IDEA. Specific Learning Disability evaluation and eligibility determination is informed by a comprehensive body of evidence (BoE) compiled by a multidisciplinary



team. Because there is no one test or assessment tool that measures all reading skills, a variety of assessments measuring different discrete skills must be administered by a team of individuals with specific expertise in educational assessment (i.e.: school psychologist; a learning specialist or special education teacher; a speech-language pathologist; and/or a school social worker). Ideally, students found to be at risk following general screening should be administered multiple diagnostic measures to ensure that all identified skills have been assessed at the appropriate grade level. For more comprehensive guidance on assessing for and identifying dyslexia in a school setting, visit [chapter 3 of the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#). [This assessment flow chart](#) from the AIM Institute for Learning and Research provides a helpful view of an assessment process for a suspected reading disability. Also, be sure to consult with the [CDE Guidelines for Specific Learning Disability Eligibility](#) for guidance on the SLD evaluation and eligibility process.

Who should be on the multidisciplinary team for an evaluation for SLD if the suspected disability is dyslexia?

If the suspected disability is dyslexia, a multidisciplinary team is likely to include a school psychologist; a learning specialist or special education teacher; a speech-language pathologist; and a school social worker and possibly a school nurse. The team must also include at least one family member that can speak to the history of learning struggles that may exist in other family members as well as provide perspective about struggles the child might be exhibiting outside of the school setting. If possible, it would benefit the team to include a literacy specialist with expertise in the possible root causes of reading deficits. A team representing various expertise is important to rule out other possible disabilities that may be contributing to reading difficulties. For further discussion about dyslexia evaluation and the multidisciplinary team, visit [section 3.3 in the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#).

If a parent comes with a diagnosis of dyslexia from a private, outside evaluation does that automatically mean they are eligible for an IEP? Does the school/district have to honor the outside evaluation? What if the school/district disagrees with the outside evaluation?

An individual with dyslexia may or may not be eligible for special education services. Eligibility is dependent on whether the criteria and other determinations for Specific Learning Disability (SLD) identification are met. However, there is certainly overlap between students who have had a private clinical diagnosis of dyslexia and those who have been identified as having a specific learning disability and been found eligible for special education—particularly in the SLD area of “Basic Reading Skill” (please visit page 92 in the [SLD Guidelines](#) for information about Basic Reading Skill) A student with the types of deficits that might indicate the existence of dyslexia would be considered for SLD identification if they are exhibiting significant achievement gaps and continue to experience insufficient progress (as compared to age or grade-level norms/ standards) even after receiving research-based, intensive interventions that target the individual student’s area of need(s). See page 62 in the [SLD Guidance](#) for information on how to determine insufficient progress. [CDE has resources](#) to help educators make informed decisions for choosing interventions.

If a parent comes with a [diagnosis of dyslexia](#) from a private, outside evaluation, IDEA requires schools to consider the results of that evaluation if it meets the school’s criteria. The school will still have to conduct its own evaluation to determine eligibility for an IEP. If the school does not believe an evaluation is warranted (e.g., evidence confirms that a disability is not suspected), a Prior Written Notice of Special Education Action must be issued to the parents.



Please visit page [46 in the CDE Specific Learning Disability Guidelines](#) for more information about responding to a parent request for SLD evaluation. [Understood.org has useful guidance](#) on this topic as well.

If a child with dyslexia does not qualify for special education services, the school is required to consider the [student for a 504 plan](#). For more information about the difference between an IEP and a 504 plan, visit [this guidance from Understood.org](#).

What data should be included in a body of evidence for an SLD evaluation if the suspected disability is dyslexia?

When conducting a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) evaluation, eligibility decisions are informed by a comprehensive body of evidence including multiple qualitative and quantitative data. Multidisciplinary IEP teams must follow the guidelines for SLD evaluation when evaluating a student suspected of having dyslexia. However, there is data that must be collected specific to dyslexia. Please visit the [SLD Eligibility Guidelines pages 55-67](#) for information about what must be included in a full and individual evaluation for SLD, as well as [section 3.3 in the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#) for specific information about what data should be collected for a comprehensive dyslexia evaluation.

When would a child with dyslexia need an IEP and when would it be appropriate for a 504?

The following are the two major eligibility criteria that must be met (demonstrated through a body of evidence) to determine a student has a Specific Learning Disability and is eligible for special education services through an IEP:

1. The child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet state approved grade-level standards and exhibits significant academic skill deficit(s) when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or state approved grade-level standards ECEA 2.08(8)(b)(i)

AND

2. The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved, grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified in Section 2.08(8)(b)(i) when using a process based on the child's response to [scientific, research-based intervention](#).

If a child does not qualify for an IEP, they may still qualify for essential accommodations through a [504 plan](#) as a result of dyslexia. For more in-depth information about the differences between an IEP and a 504 plan, [visit this guidance from Understood.org](#).

What happens when a student is already on an IEP, but the parents ask about dyslexia or have an outside diagnosis of dyslexia?

If a parent of a child who already has an IEP requests an evaluation for dyslexia, the IEP team should reconvene and determine if the evaluation includes data addressing all areas of concern. The IEP team will have to determine how a diagnosis from a private evaluation informs the existing IEP. It may be necessary to open a reevaluation to include additional information and change in disability category or add a secondary disability. Regardless of the response, the IEP team must issue Prior Written Notice (PWN) the same way they would in response to any other parent request for evaluation. Please visit page [46 in the CDE Specific Learning Disability Guidelines](#) for more



information about responding to a parent request for SLD evaluation. Check [pages 53-55 in the SLD Guidelines](#) for information about PWN.

What are additional conditions that co-occur for students with dyslexia?

It is not uncommon for students with dyslexia to also be diagnosed with other disorders or conditions. Many parents and teachers are probably aware of the number of students who have been diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. This co-occurrence of two or more different disorders in the same individual is called comorbidity. A more formal definition of comorbidity is when “two or more disorders co-occur more often than we would expect by chance” (Pennington, 2006; Kain, Landerf & Kaufmann, 2008). Comorbidity is another important factor and consideration in the identification and treatment of dyslexia. Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) must be provided for all areas of need determined by the body of evidence, (ADHD, dyscalculia, social-emotional support, developmental language disorder, dysgraphia, etc.) For more information about dyslexia and comorbid disorders, please visit [section 7.4 in the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#).

What might the process look like for English Learners?

Dyslexia occurs in every language that has a written component and is an equal opportunity reading problem. It is not appropriate to simply assume that a student is struggling with reading because they are not a native English speaker or that his or her reading and spelling problems are solely the result of struggles with a new language. Students who are learning English are just as likely to have dyslexia as their native English speaking peers.

Identifying dyslexia in students who are English Learners (ELs) is challenging. Those responsible for assessing English learners for a possible SLD/dyslexia need to have comprehensive knowledge of language development, the acquisition of a second language, early reading development, and reading disorders, as well as a thorough knowledge of assessment tools available to them. A bilingual evaluator who speaks the student’s first language, as well as English, is invaluable to the process. This dual-language ability not only allows the evaluator to administer assessment measures in either language or both languages, but it also enhances the interpretation of results due to his/her knowledge of how the structures and pragmatics of the two languages are similar and different. For example, a student with deficits in phonological awareness and/or rapid naming in their first language will be found to have deficits in phonological awareness in English.

For more information about identifying an SLD in students who are English Learners, visit [section 7.2 in the CDE Dyslexia Handbook](#) and [page 129 in the SLD Eligibility Guidelines](#).

What legislation and legal requirements govern identification and services for students identified with disabilities including dyslexia?

Special education determination and programming is governed by multiple intersecting state and federal policies. Because these policies are law, one does not trump the other. Schools are required to adhere to all legal requirements outlined in state and federal policy protecting the rights of students with disabilities. The following are links to federal and state guidelines for educators in Colorado:



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The [IDEA](#) is a federal law that ensures a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)

[Section 504](#) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits recipients of federal funding, such as a school district, from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. The Colorado Department of Education cannot investigate alleged violations of Section 504, or allegations concerning abuse, retaliation, or a hostile environment based on a disability. To file a complaint related to these concerns, please contact the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at 303-844-5695 or OCR.Denver@ed.gov.

Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA)

Each state must follow the IDEA but may also create additional laws and rules. In Colorado, the [Rules for the Administration of the ECEA](#) outline specific requirements regarding how the IDEA and special education is to be implemented across the state.

The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act)

[The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act \(READ Act\)](#), passed by the Colorado legislature in 2012, focuses on early literacy development for all students and especially for students at risk to not read at grade level by the end of the third grade. The READ Act focuses on literacy development for kindergarteners through third graders. Students are tested for reading skills, and those who are not reading at grade level are provided with scientific, evidenced-based literacy interventions that continue until they reach grade level reading proficiency. Those who demonstrate a Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) are provided with a READ Plan that outlines targeted interventions that are essential to support the student with reaching grade level proficiency in literacy.

English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA)

[Per ELPA](#), local education providers or local education agencies (LEAs), must provide evidence-based English language proficiency, or English language development (ELD) programs for English learners to enable them to develop and acquire English language proficiency while achieving and maintaining grade-level performance in academic content areas. The state and LEAs must enhance all educators' effectiveness in supporting English language development and in enabling English learners to achieve and maintain grade-level performance in academic content areas. Finally, the state must develop the educational approach and goals of LEAs to help ensure that English learners are postsecondary and workforce ready at graduation.