Frequently Asked Questions About Dyslexia
What is it and how do we respond to parents?

Question: **What is Dyslexia?**

Answer: "**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." (International Dyslexia Association [IDA], 2014)

Simplified: Dyslexia is a language-based condition in which individuals have difficulty learning to read fluently with accurate comprehension and poor spelling despite a normal or above-average intelligence. (U.S. House of Representatives, 2014)

Students with dyslexia may qualify for special education services under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) classification.

Question: **What is a Specific Learning Disability?**

Answer: The definition of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) under IDEA 2004 reads as follows:

"The term 'specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, **dyslexia**, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

Question: **Is Dyslexia Common?**

Answer: Utah State Board of Education (USBE) 2016-2017 data shows that 11% of students in Utah public schools are eligible to receive special education services within one of the 13 qualifying categories. Students will dyslexia may qualify under the specific learning disability (SLD) classification. According to USBE data, 47.3% of students with disabilities in Utah qualify under SLD.

Question: **What are the characteristics and indicators of dyslexia?**

Answer: Students with **dyslexia** share the following common characteristics:
(Hulme and Snowling, 2016)

*   lack of phonological awareness
*   slow acquisition of letter names and sounds
*   poor spelling
*   poor ability to rhyme
*   a family history of dyslexia or reading failure

Indicators among students with **dyslexia**:
(Utah State Board of Education Dyslexia Handbook, 2017)

*   slow reading rate
*   inaccurate word reading
*   inadequate comprehension
*   difficulty with written and/or spoken language

Question: **What challenges can students with dyslexia face?**

Answer: Refer to the *Dyslexia Handbook*, Appendix B pages 55-56 for information about the challenges a student with dyslexia may demonstrate in preschool through high school.

Question: **Can gifted students have dyslexia?**

Answer: Yes. Some students with dyslexia may also be gifted in their intelligence. These students are referred to as "twice exceptional." Twice exceptional students may have gifted abilities in some academic areas and significant learning disabilities in other areas.

Question: **Can students who are learning English have dyslexia?**

Answer: Yes. **Dyslexia** is not specific to the English language. It is difficult to determine whether or not the student who is learning English is struggling with reading and spelling or may have dyslexia. According to the Utah State Board of Education Dyslexia Handbook, 2017, "The IEP team should be prepared to accurately and appropriately assess and intervene with culturally diverse students using nondiscriminatory assessments and practices to distinguish between second language-development and learning disabilities."

If there is a concern, please contact the Jordan School District ALS Department.

Question: **Can coexisting disabilities occur along with dyslexia?**

Answer: Yes. The most common coexisting disabilities are Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, and ADHD. It is important to understand the characteristics of these disabilities because many characteristic overlap and may lead to a misdiagnosis or lack of diagnosis and needed interventions.

Dysgraphia is a neurologically-based specific learning disability affecting written expression. Students with dysgraphia often have poor handwriting, spelling and difficulty expressing their thoughts on paper. Both fine motor and language processing skills are slow for students with dysgraphia. Students with dysgraphia will generally have concerns in the areas of; handwriting, grammar, visual-spatial, fine motor, language processing, and in organizing their writing.

Students with dysgraphia generally benefit from accommodations when writing such as typing and speech to text software. These students need explicit instruction in handwriting, spelling, and written expression. Students with dysgraphia may also have dyslexia or other disabilities. A student whose only disability is dysgraphia will learn to read without difficulty.

Dyscalculia is a neurologically-based specific learning disorder that affects a student's number sense. Students with dyscalculia may have difficulty with counting, learning math facts, memory of numbers, understanding place value, and multi-step mathematical problems.

Students with dyscalculia need explicit and systematic instruction in number sense, automaticity, and mathematical calculations.

ADHD is a neurological-based condition characterized by inattention, distractibility, hyperactivity and/or impulsivity. There are three types of ADHD:

> **ADHD – Hyperactive Impulsive:** Students may have the need to move constantly and struggle with impulse control.

> **ADHD - Predominantly Inattentive:** Students may have difficulty paying attention and are easily distracted, but do not have issues with impulsivity of hyperactivity.

> **ADHD – Combined:** Students with combined meet the criteria for both types above.

Students with ADHD may appear to have difficulties when learning to read due to an inability to stay focused. Students with ADHD are typically able to read well as ADHD is no a learning disability.

Students with dyslexia may show symptoms of inattention during instruction as reading is difficult for them. It is important to understand the cause of the inattentiveness to ensure effective, targeted interventions are implemented to meet the student's individual needs.

Question: How can we help students with the social and emotional impact of dyslexia?

Answer:
- Encourage students to participate in activities that they excel in so that they have the opportunity to have success and feel successful.
- Share examples of others who are successful that have struggled with Dyslexia.
    - http://dyslex-ia.yale.edu/success-stories/
    - http://thepowerofdyslexia.com/famous-dyslexics/

Teach students to be resilient:
- Give students the opportunity to shine. Look for opportunities for students to do things within the classroom or school that builds confidence.
- Focus on progress, no matter how small!
- Teach students to make and set attainable goals to show that they can do hard things.
- Celebrate their achievements and success.
- Teach students to self-advocate what works best for them, they are a key player in the success to their education.
- Allow students to give input on their strengths and weaknesses and help self-advocate for their needs.

Work with Teachers:
- Make an appointment with the classroom teacher at the beginning of the school year to discuss what the needs will be for the student with dyslexia. This should be a face to face meeting.

Involve Parents:
- Parents may feel frustrated with lack of progress.
- Encourage and anticipate frequent communication with parents through meetings, emails, phone calls, etc.
- Invite school and district personnel that can help develop an appropriate plan to assist in student's education, so that parents can feel confident that their child's needs are being met.

Question: **What does tiered reading instruction in a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework look like for students with characteristics of dyslexia?**

Answer: Students with characteristics of dyslexia who have not made progress should receive instruction and interventions that address the specific phonological deficits identified through targeted assessments. Tiered reading instruction in an MTSS Framework can be provided by general education teachers, special education teachers or paraprofessionals who are trained in the intervention.

Universal (Tier 1) – grade level core instruction and differentiated instruction.

Tier 1 Reading Instruction should include rich, universal instruction for all students in the general education classroom with explicit instruction, clear learning goals, and a clear explanation of the skills being presented.

Targeted (Tier 2) – supplemental instruction and supports systematically delivered in addition to, and aligned with, the grade-level core including adapted strategies, increased frequency, intensity, and/or time.

Tier 2 Reading Instruction should consist of targeted, skill-based, small-group interventions delivered to those students needing additional instruction of the curriculum which was previously taught. This instruction focuses on areas of weakness and is delivered with an explicit and systematic approach.

Intensive (Tier 3) – individually-responsive instruction and supports delivered in addition to, and aligned with, the grade-level core. (May be provided in small group or an individual format).   Tier 3 supports are provided in addition to, not in place of, Tier 1 instruction.

Tier 3 Reading Instruction consists of targeted, explicit, and systematic intervention in the essential seven areas of reading: phonological awareness, phonics and the "alphabetic principle", fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language and writing strategies.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions should include instruction in developing strong phonics decoding skills and numerous sight word vocabulary practice opportunities.

Research states that the largest improvements in reading often occur in the first 15 to 20 hours of instruction. This is said to be used as a starting point to determine if students are making adequate progress in reading.

- If delivered daily for 30 minutes a day for 6 weeks (15 hours) to 8 weeks (20 hours).
- If delivered three times a week for 30 minutes a day for 10 weeks (14 hours) to 13.5 weeks (20 hours).
- Interventions need to occur regularly and over an extended time

Question: **What Universal Screening Process can be used to identify students with reading disorders?**

Answer:
Step 1 – LEAs should administer in grades K-12 nationally normed, skills-based universal screeners such as DIBELS and KEEP.

Step 2 – Compare the universal screener results to other classroom-based assessments. (Standards-based assessments, grades, formative assessments, summative assessments, classroom performance, teacher observation, etc.)

Step – 3 – Students identified as "at-risk" based on multiple sources of data should be administered diagnostic assessments for reading and must explicitly measure characteristics of dyslexia including: phonemic and phonological awareness, sound symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding skills, rapid naming, and encoding skills.

Note – Diagnostic testing identifies areas of weakness to implement an educational intervention plan and should not be confused with a medical diagnosis. The USBE Rules (2016) State, "The screening of a student by a teacher or specialist to determine appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum implementation shall not be considered to be an evaluation for eligibility for special education and related services. Results of screenings should be considered by the LEA for Child Find purposes" (p.23).

**On pgs. 18 – 23 in the *Dyslexia Handbook* is a chart for understanding the various assessments available to screen for areas of weakness in reading, writing, and spoken language. Included is a definition and example of each skill area and how a student with dyslexia may present in each area.

Question: **What universal screening tools can be used to assess reading skills?**

Answer: The following tools can be used for screening a student's reading ability:
- KEEP – Kindergarten Entry and Exit Profile
  (https://schools.utah.gov/assessment/assessments?mid=1173&tid=4)
- Early Literacy Program
  (https://schools.utah.gov/curr/elaelementary?mid=1124&tid=5)

DIBELS – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills is the statewide <u>assessment</u> for Utah.

- For older students who do not receive DIBELS screening there are other diagnostic assessments that can be used.
  - CTOPP-2 – Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing – Second Edition
  - CARI – DIBELS Content Area Reading Indicator

Question: **What should be considered when identifying the area(s) of weakness in reading proficiency?**

Answer:
Subgroups of Reading Disorders

Word Level (decoding)
> This occurs at the level of recognizing and decoding single words. It is associated with phonological processing. **Dyslexia** occurs here, and impacts fluency and comprehension. Students with phonological deficits, generally have problems with orthographic coding.
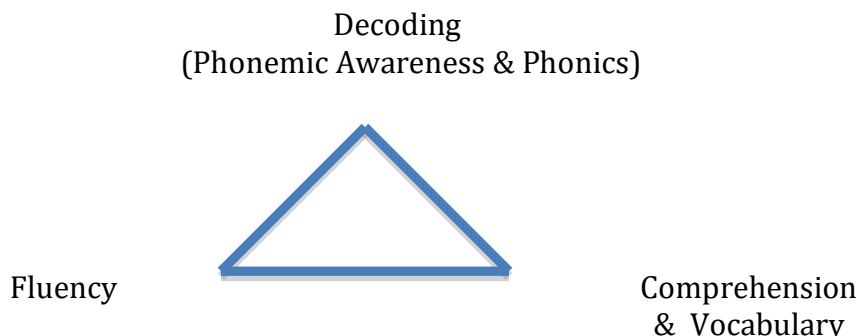
Fluency
> This occurs when children, who are accurate word readers, have a rate deficit. It is related to rapid automatized naming and may include children with attention deficits. Poor word reading mastery will produce a slow rate, but fluency is not the primary difficulty.

Comprehension
> This reading disorder represents a general language comprehension limitation. Students with decoding and fluency deficits will likely have difficulties with comprehension, but that is not likely to be the primary difficulty.

Fundamental Components of Reading Proficiency

Basic Reading Skills

Decoding
(Phonemic Awareness & Phonics)

Fluency   Comprehension
                                                              & Vocabulary

Question: Are students evaluated for dyslexia in the Jordan School District?

Answer: Under IDEA, schools do not give a medical diagnosis for any disability. However, students are evaluated to determine if they may be eligible for special education services under one of the 13 IDEA disability categories. Dyslexia is included in the category of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD).   Jordan School District has a referral process when the school team believes that a student may be at-risk. Interventions are implemented and the results of the interventions are closely monitored . If the intervention data indicates that a concern persists, then the school team looks at the referring conditions and performs a comprehensive evaluation, which may include academic, behavioral, language, and cognitive testing.

Question: What assessments should be given?

Answer: There is no single test that can be used for dyslexia. A battery of tests should be determined as a team and administered by an examiner or team of examiners. The following is a list of tests that **may be given** to indicate whether or not a student has difficulties in reading, suggestive of dyslexia.

The assessments may be administered by the following:
      R = Special Education Teacher
      G = School Psychologist
      S = Speech/Language Pathologist

Cognitive Tests:

(G)   WISC-V
(G,R)   Woodcock Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities - IV

Comprehensive Academic Tests:

    (R,G)   Woodcock Johnson IV Achievement Test
                Basic Reading Skills:
                        Letter-Word Identification
                        Word Attack
                Reading Fluency:
                        Oral Reading
                        Sentence Reading Fluency
                Reading Comprehension:
                        Passage Comprehension
                        Reading Recall
                        Reading Vocabulary
                Written Expression:
                        Spelling
                        Writing Samples
                        Sentence Writing Fluency
                        Editing

Diagnostic Assessments:

(R,S,G)   CTOPP-2   phonemic/phonological awareness and rapid naming
(R,S,G)   GORT 5   reading fluency

Speech/Language Assessments:

    (S)   CELF-5:
                CORE tests
                Subtests for Receptive & Expressive Indexes
    (S)   Phonological Awareness Test 2 (PAT 2)

Other Assessments with Specific Areas of Focus: (Available for Checkout at ASB in the Guidance Office)

(R,S,G)   KTEA-3   phonemic/phonological awareness and rapid naming
(R,S,G)   RAN/RAS   rapid naming
(R,G)   TOWRE   word reading fluency
(G)   NEPSY II   phonological processing, speed naming, list memory,
                                    auditory attention, and executive functioning
(G)   BRIEF   executive functioning
(G)   DKEFS   executive functioning

Question: **How is test data analyzed?**

Answer: Pamela S. Plant, Ph.D., NCSP (2011)
1.   Look at your composite scores. Particularly note those that are below 90. Also note any single subtest scores below 90. Look for outliers.
2.   Make sure the basic reading tasks have been assessed. Recognize the shortcomings of whatever tests you've used and recognize that you may have to get additional information from multiple sources.
3.   If the student is having problems with reading at the word level (basic reading skills), check the cognitive processes that are specifically associated with **dyslexia**, along with spelling. (And likewise, check the cognitive processes associated with fluency and/or comprehension difficulties.)
4.   Look at the cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Are the cognitive strengths/weaknesses consistent with the academic strengths/weaknesses? If not, consider false negatives or positives. (The student may lack task familiarity or mastery.)
5.   Ask yourself:
   a.   What is the problem? (What aspect of reading is problematic?)
   b.   Why is it happening? (What are the cognitive weaknesses?)
   c.   What should we do about it? (What does the student need?)
   d.   Where/how should it be done? (Eligibility decisions.)

Question: **What is done in special education classroom for students with dyslexia?**

Answer: Students receive special education for a variety of academic as well as behavioral needs. A student with a Specific Learning Disability, including dyslexia, needs explicit and systematic instruction in the areas of reading acquisition. This includes instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Teachers identify the area of reading that is causing the breakdown in learning to occur (e.g., word recognition/decoding), are able to target and provide specialized instruction in the area(s) of weakness, and monitor student progress.

Question: **Can the school team indicate to a parent that a student has characteristics of dyslexia?**

Answer: School evaluations determine if a student is eligible for special educational services under one of the 13 disability categories. Dyslexia is included in the category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Schools do not provide a medical diagnosis for any disability.   However, school teams may inform parents that a student has characteristics of dyslexia (*Dyslexia Handbook*, Appendix B). It is important to remember that a diagnosis of dyslexia is not required to receive services in Utah public schools. This is true for services in general education, tiered supports, and services under IDEA or a 504 plan.

Question: Can a school team recommend that parents research dyslexia?

Answer: A school team can recommend any evidence-based resources to a parent that they think will help to improve understanding of their child's needs, such as the *Dyslexia Handbook*.

Question: Can the school team use the term "dyslexia" in the student's IEP?

Answer: When a student had been evaluated and identified with a specific learning disability (SLD) in the area of reading, writing, or math; or has been identified with dyslexia from an outside agency, that information can be included in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) to help ensure that the student receives services specific to his/her needs.

Question: What type of goals are typically included in an IEP for students with characteristics be associated with dyslexia?

Answer: When writing an IEP for a student with a SLD in the area of reading, teams should consider the seven components of literacy (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language, and writing). Explicit, structured, systematic, reading intervention should always be the priority in helping a student with a SLD in reading, even when the student is in a secondary school.

Question: What are the essential seven areas of literacy?

Answer: The essential seven areas of literacy are:
- Phonemic awareness: ability to manipulate phonemes by isolating sounds and blending them
- Phonics: using knowledge of the relationship between phonemes and printed letters to read and spell
- Fluency: reading of text with adequate rate, accuracy, and expression
- Vocabulary: meanings of words
- Comprehension: getting meaning from text
- Oral language: understanding spoken language
- Writing: ability to communicate in written form

Question: What are the components of structured literacy?

Answer: Components of structured literacy are:
- Phonology: study of sound structure in words
- Phonics: Match letters to sounds in both visual to auditory and auditory to visual
- Syllable instruction: teaching 6 syllable types (closed, vce, open, vowel pair or diphthong, consonant-le, and r-controlled)
- Morphology: study of base words, roots, prefixes and suffixes
- Syntax: grammar, sentence variation, and mechanics
- Semantics: comprehension

Question: **What should structured literacy programs include?**

Answer: Structured Literacy programs should:
- Be systematic and cumulative
- Include explicit instruction
- Include diagnostic teaching

Question: **What types of accommodations may be appropriate for students with dyslexia?**

Answer: **Accommodations for students with dyslexia may include:**
- Providing extra time on assignments and tests
- Only having students read aloud if they volunteer
- Letting them respond to tests orally, having large spaces for answers, or circling
- Providing copies of class notes or allowing recordings of lectures
- Using speech-to-text and text-to-speech software
- Using audiobooks
- Using spell check
- Using apps that take pictures of worksheets
- Reducing homework

See Appendix F for accommodations by area of need

Question: **What resources are available for school teams when students have characteristics or a diagnosis of dyslexia?**

Answer: *The Dyslexia Handbook* gives vital information that can help school teams. The appendices in the handbook includes the following:

Appendix A – Glossary of Dyslexia Terms
Appendix B – Characteristics of Dyslexia by Age Group
Appendix C – Dyslexia Screening and the Use of DIBELS Next
Appendix D – Diagnostic Assessments – there is a list of tests used to identify the underlying cognitive areas of weakness associated with Dyslexia.
Appendix E – Transition Planning – for Students With and Without IEPs – for students starting at age 14 for the formal transition plan.
Appendix F – Accommodations – classroom, teaching techniques, classwork and test taking, for Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia
Appendix G – Assistive Technology
Appendix H – Assistive Technology Consideration Support Document for LEAs
Appendix I – Essential Components of Structured Literacy Interventions
Appendix J – Educator Resources by Topic
Appendix K – Family Resources