

## What is the purpose of this guide?

The purpose of this resource is to provide basic guidelines on the identification and instruction of students with characteristics of dyslexia in Louisiana. This information may serve as a guide for families, teachers, and school systems. This resource summarizes large sections from policy and state law.

## How does Louisiana address the needs of students with dyslexia?

The following protections and laws are in place in Louisiana to meet the needs of students with dyslexia:

- A. The [Individuals with Disabilities Act \(IDEA\)](#) and [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) are two fundamental federal guides for identification and intervention of K-12 public school students with disabilities. These laws require school districts to provide a free, appropriate public education to each qualified child with a disability regardless of the nature or severity of the child's disability.
- B. The Louisiana Dyslexia Law (RS 17:7(11)) and regulatory policy, [Bulletin 1903: Louisiana Handbook for Students with Dyslexia](#), provide specific guidance on how students with characteristics of dyslexia should be identified, evaluated, and educationally supported.
  - Bulletin 1903 is the state dyslexia policy approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to provide guidance on regulations and implementation of the Louisiana Dyslexia Law.
  - Bulletin 1903 was developed by a group of parents, advocates, and educators as a reference to improve understanding of regulations and guidelines that support students with characteristics of dyslexia in Louisiana.
- C. Several other IDEA-related policies include [Bulletin 1706 – Regulations for Implementation of the Children with Exceptionalities Act](#), [Bulletin 1508 – Pupil Appraisal Handbook](#), and [Bulletin 1530 – IEP Handbook](#).

## What is dyslexia?

Louisiana state law defines *dyslexia* as "an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader, most commonly caused by a difficulty in phonological processing, which affects the ability of an individual to speak, read, and spell." "Phonological processing" means the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken and written language.

## What are the characteristics of dyslexia?

In accordance with Bulletin 741: *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators*, all students enrolled in kindergarten through third grade shall be administered an early literacy screener within the first 30 days of the school year. Through the outlined screening process, students demonstrating deficits in both categories of screening are considered to have characteristics of dyslexia:

### Required Screenings:

- Students in kindergarten and fall semester of first grade shall be screened with an early literacy instrument to measure:
  - Phonemic awareness,
  - Letter naming fluency, and
  - Letter sound recognition.
- Students in spring semester of first grade through third grade shall be screened with an early literacy instrument to measure:
  - Decoding skills for blending and reading real and nonsense words accurately; and
  - Oral reading fluency rate and accuracy in connected text.

\* Note: Screening for second and third grade students can begin with real words and scaffold back to nonsense words if deficits are evident and further screening would be helpful in making a determination of necessary support.

### Additional Screenings:

- A score that indicates deficits shall result in additional screening to include:
  - Kindergarten and fall semester of first grade students:
  - phonological awareness such as rhyming and syllable manipulation; and/or
  - rapid automatic naming skills such as colors, objects, and numbers.
- Spring semester of first grade through third grade students
  - phonological/phonemic awareness such as syllable manipulation, phoneme segmentation, or phoneme manipulation;
  - rapid automatic naming skills such as colors, objects, letters, and/ or numbers;
  - encoding skills using spontaneous spelling;
  - oral and written language skills.

A student demonstrating deficits after additional screening is considered to have characteristics of dyslexia and shall be provided appropriate structured language and literacy interventions.

Screening is not limited to students in kindergarten through third grade and may be administered at any grade level if a student exhibits impediments to a successful school experience.

## What is the referral process for a student suspected of having dyslexia?

Each school should establish a committee that can oversee the referral, assessment, and education of students who may have dyslexia. This committee should be led by a chairperson responsible for gathering information, maintaining records, scheduling meetings, monitoring progress, distributing relevant information, and overseeing implementation of state dyslexia regulations. The school should also ensure that teachers and screening specialists are well-trained in dyslexia and related dyslexia policies.

- **Step 1:** A student is identified as showing possible signs of dyslexia or as being at risk for dyslexia by a concerned parent/guardian, educator, or advocate. Some students may be identified as “at risk” for dyslexia as a result of the required literacy screener that is administered at least once in kindergarten through third grade and additional screening as outlined in Bulletin 1903.
- **Step 2:** The concerned individual refers the student to the school building level committee (SBLC). The SBLC may also be called the Section 504 Committee, Dyslexia Committee, or another name for the student assistance team. This committee consists of persons knowledgeable about the referred student, dyslexia and other disabilities, assessment options, and educational programming options. This written or verbal report initiates the referral process.
- **Step 3:** SBLC committee members collect and review available student data. Additional screenings are conducted and interventions should be implemented and/or reviewed as a part of the screening process. However, such screening should not unnecessarily delay the evaluation and eligibility determination process.
- **Step 4:** Students suspected of possible characteristics of dyslexia should be referred to either the Dyslexia/Section 504 committee for an evaluation or to the Pupil Appraisal Team for a special education evaluation. The SBLC and the parents/guardians determine which evaluation referral is most appropriate.

*Note:* Based on a review of information, including grades, screening results, interventions, observational records, and other forms of data, the committee may determine that an evaluation is not warranted at the current time. In such cases, interventions and strategies should be implemented or continued and/or the SBLC may make other recommendations as appropriate. The SBLC may determine that the child’s needs may be met without further strategies or interventions for the present time.

## How are students suspected of having dyslexia evaluated and determined eligible for educational services?

The Louisiana Dyslexia Law requires screening of certain students for characteristics of dyslexia and related disorders and evaluation of any student suspected of having a disability as described in the previous section. Such evaluations help to determine the child’s need for specialized instruction and related services.

### Step 1: Screening

Every public school student in grades kindergarten through third should be screened at least once for the existence of impediments to a successful school experience, unless objected to by his or her parents/guardians. Such impairments include:

- A. dyslexia and related disorders;
- B. attention deficit disorder;
- C. social and environmental factors that may put a child “at risk”.

At any time outside of grade-level screenings, students may also be screened if referred to the SBLC and the committee deems such screening to be appropriate.

## Step 2: Evaluation

The SBLC and parents/guardians determine whether an evaluation through the **Dyslexia/Section 504 Committee** or the **Pupil Appraisal Committee** is most appropriate to address the child’s educational needs. The most common way to evaluate is described below.

- A. Dyslexia/Section 504 Committee Evaluations
  1. Students who are not referred for a special education evaluation are evaluated in accordance with guidelines described in Bulletin 1903.
  2. Informed parental consent for a 504 evaluation is required and all rights must be explained to parents/guardians.
  3. The school district must complete the evaluation within 60 operational days from the time parental consent is obtained.
  4. Upon completion of a 504 evaluation, a written notice of findings shall be provided to the parents/guardians. All parental rights and procedural safeguards should be followed as described in the bulletin.
- B. Special Education Evaluations
  1. If a student is referred for a special education evaluation, parental consent for the evaluation is requested.
  2. If parent/guardian grants permission, the committee conducts an evaluation and determines whether the student is eligible for special education services. Specific evaluation procedures are described in [Bulletin 1508 – Pupil Appraisal Handbook](#).
  3. Students with dyslexia who qualify for special education services are typically identified as a student with a *Specific Learning Disability* and educational needs are addressed through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
  4. Some students identified with other primary impairments such as *Speech-Language Impairment* or *Other Health Impairment* may receive specialized instructional services and/or accommodations to address characteristics of dyslexia if deemed appropriate by their IEP placement committee.

## How can the student qualify or become eligible for dyslexia services?

A student is determined to have *characteristics of dyslexia* if the evaluation committee agrees the following criteria are met:

- The student consistently struggles or has difficulty attaining expected academic progress, despite receiving instruction in a high quality curriculum with the implementation of additional instructional intervention strategies within the framework of a multi-tiered system of support.

- A student demonstrating deficits after additional screening, as outlined in the above screening process, is considered to have characteristics of dyslexia and shall be provided appropriate structured language and literacy interventions.
- Screening is not limited to students in kindergarten through third grade and may be administered at any grade level if a student exhibits impediments to a successful school experience.

### What are Section 504 accommodations?

Children with disabilities such as dyslexia may also qualify for services under Section 504. This law is intended to provide services designed to meet the individual educational needs of students with disabilities as adequately as those without disabilities.

Students are determined to be eligible for Section 504 if they have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. Eligibility is determined by an individual 504 evaluation team that includes the 504 coordinator, teachers of the student, and the students' parent or guardian. These services are typically documented on an Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP). Each school has a Section 504 Chairperson who can assist and oversee this process.

### What educational services are available if a student has dyslexia and has been identified as IDEA eligible?

Students identified with a disability under IDEA are entitled to special education and related services through an Individual Education Program (IEP) as described in [Bulletin 1530 – IEP Handbook](#).

### What educational services are available if a student has dyslexia and is not an IDEA eligible student?

Students identified as having *characteristics of dyslexia* but not characteristics of an IDEA disability are entitled to remediation in an educational program that meets requirements of the Louisiana Dyslexia Law. Bulletin 1903 requires school districts to:

- A. Routinely provide remediation in a Multisensory Structured Language and Literacy Program within the regular school day.
- B. Multisensory structured language and literacy programs may be administered in regular classroom setting, separate classroom setting, individual or small group instruction, any additional accommodations that are developed by the SBLC, or a combination of these options as long as all components, content, and delivery methods are followed.
- C. The multisensory structured language and literacy program should consist of specific content components and instructional methods as described in Bulletin 1903.
- D. Multisensory structured language and literacy programs should do the following:
  1. Contain instruction in phonological awareness, phoneme-grapheme association, phonics, syllables, linguistics, meaning, and reading fluency.

2. Integrate all aspects of language-based instruction including receptive, expressive, oral and written language, and handwriting.
  3. Use instructional methods that are explicit, systematic, sequential, cumulative, individualized, diagnostic, demonstrate automaticity of performance, simultaneously multisensory, and follow the synthetic to analytic phonics instructional process.
  4. Allow for adequate practice opportunities to develop automaticity of performance.
- E. Progress monitoring data should be maintained on students receiving instruction in a multisensory structured language and literacy program.
- F. Students' participation in multisensory structured language and literacy programming should be periodically reviewed to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the program for the student.