

# WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

## Position Statement on Dyslexia



Dyslexia is a term used to describe students who are experiencing difficulty with literacy skills (including reading and spelling). According to the International Dyslexia Association, *“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.”*

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIA**

- Difficulty reading single words in isolation (out of the context in sentence/paragraphs)
- Particular difficulty with decoding nonsense/made-up words
- Oral reading is slow and/or inaccurate
- Difficulty with recalling sounds
- Difficulty reading function words (a, and, the)
- Poor spelling skills
- Difficulty with rapid, automatic naming of letters, sounds, numbers, etc.
- Comprehension of connected text may be stronger than reading words in isolation
- Listening comprehension may be better than reading comprehension
- May coexist with difficulties in language, working memory, attention, processing speed, and other areas of development

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Who uses the term dyslexia?** The term dyslexia is often used by clinical professionals to describe individuals who have specific phonological difficulties with literacy skills. Principals, teachers, psychologists, reading interventionists and other educational personnel are knowledgeable about dyslexia, though students who experience significant difficulties with literacy skills in schools may be identified as having Specific Learning Disabilities in the areas of reading and/or writing. The Nebraska Department of Education Rule 51 verification category for Specific Learning Disability includes conditions such as dyslexia.

**Does Westside screen and evaluate for dyslexia?** There is no one test for dyslexia. As outlined in *The Nebraska Reading Improvement Act*, an approved reading screener is required 3 times per year for Kindergarten through third grade. Westside utilizes a variety of screening and assessment tools to identify students with indicators of poor reading skills or dyslexia. In early grades, this includes measures of phonemic awareness, phonics, and rapid automatic naming tasks. In older grades, this includes reading orally, and measuring the rate and accuracy of their reading. After screening, students identified as at-risk may receive enhanced reading instruction. If students do not adequately respond to this supplemental intervention, then they may be evaluated for additional markers of dyslexia or reading disabilities through the use of diagnostics and standardized achievement tests.

**How are students displaying symptoms of dyslexia supported in schools?** As mentioned above, students displaying indicators of poor reading skills may be provided enhanced reading instruction, including supplemental intervention or instructional time, or instruction delivered by specially trained personnel, through the MTSS process. Students may also be supported through the general education curriculum if determined eligible for Section 504 Plan accommodations. Some students may also be eligible for special education services.

**Do students with dyslexia qualify for special education?** It depends. A clinical dyslexia diagnosis is neither required nor automatically guarantees an Individualized Education Program (IEP). If a student already has a clinical diagnosis of dyslexia, the school team will consider this information when reviewing the Nebraska Rule 51 criteria for eligibility for special services as a student with a Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading. Eligibility, educational impact of this diagnosis, and the need for specialized instruction will determine if a student meets verification criteria for special education. Parent(s)/guardian(s) are included in the school-team's decision making processes about ways in which to support our learners with dyslexia.

### **COMMON MYTHS ABOUT DYSLEXIA**

*Myth: Students who reverse letters and words when they read and write have dyslexia.*

**Reversal of letters and words are part of the typical developmental process for most students and is irrelevant to the diagnosis of dyslexia. Students with dyslexia have trouble naming letters/words, not writing them. Further, mirror writing is common in young children, whether they have dyslexia or not. If the reversal of letters and words continues and is impacting the acquisition of literacy skills, this may warrant further discussion about the student's progress and phonological skills.**

*Myth: Students with dyslexia will not learn how to read.*

**Students who struggle in reading and receive evidence-based intervention have a better chance of learning to read proficiently. There are a number of evidence-based interventions which improve literacy skills for students with Specific Learning Disabilities, including dyslexia. NDE states, "Competent intervention can lessen the impact of dyslexia and help the student overcome and manage the most debilitating symptoms."**

*Myth: There is one specific test for diagnosing dyslexia.*

**Specific Learning Disabilities are identified based upon information from multiple sources which may include: response to instruction/intervention, observations, interviews, curriculum-based measures and norm-referenced assessments for academics and/or language.**

*Myth: There is one specific treatment for dyslexia based upon a student's profile from a series of commercialized tests.*

**In alignment with current research, structured literacy techniques are evident in classrooms. Westside also provides a variety of interventions to address reading needs. Interventions are chosen based upon a student's individual literacy skills and deficits. A team reviews a student's performance and matches an appropriate intervention(s); the student's progress is closely monitored, with instructional changes made in response to their growth across time.**

Myth: *Eye training (vision therapy) will improve literacy outcomes for children with dyslexia.*

**Researchers have found no correlation between vision therapy and increased reading achievement for students with Specific Learning Disabilities. Vision therapy may improve tracking, but does not show evidence of improving the phonological characteristics of dyslexia.**

### **STUDENT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN WESTSIDE**

When a parent has questions about their child's literacy development, they are encouraged to discuss these concerns with the classroom teacher(s) or building principal.

All students receive high-quality, multimodal, structured literacy instruction within the general education setting in all components of literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. All elementary students' literacy skills are screened three times each year in the fall, winter, and spring, with additional monitoring for those at-risk.

Through the district Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, screening data is used to identify students in need of further reading intervention and support. The literacy needs of the student determines the intensity and type of intervention provided. A multisensory approach (multimodal: hear it, see it, say it, write it) is incorporated into most interventions in an effort to maximize learning. Parents are notified when their child has a need for these intervention services. These early intervention efforts are implemented to reduce the gap between a student's performance and the expected achievement for that grade.

If specific interventions have been provided with fidelity across time with limited success, the team may determine an individualized evaluation for special education is necessary. For additional information or questions about this process, please contact the building school psychologist.

### **HOME, SCHOOL, AGENCY COLLABORATION**

Westside values the opportunity to collaborate with families and their chosen independent outside dyslexia/reading specialists. Whether through ongoing meetings between school staff, families and outside providers, or communicating about content or curriculum, maintaining open dialogue and working toward shared goals is key to student success. Please contact your school principal for more information.

As a parent of a child with dyslexia, you may find the following suggestions helpful: • Learn about dyslexia. • Talk with your child about dyslexia. • Embrace your child's natural intelligence. • Provide positive feedback and encouragement. • Collaborate with educators. • Read aloud daily! • Encourage reading and writing, including independent reading time. • Assist with homework. • Monitor self-esteem.

#### **Resources:**

- Nebraska Department of Education's Dyslexia Guide: Technical Assistance for Providing Support for Students April 2021
- Legislature of Nebraska. Legislative Bill 1052. One hundred fifth legislation, 2nd session.
- Structured Literacy: Effective Instruction for Students with Dyslexia and Related Reading Difficulties
- Structured Literacy: An Introductory Guide, (IDA)
- International Dyslexia Association, DyslexiaIDA.org (Free Dyslexia screener available on IDA website)