





WISCONSIN'S INFORMATIONAL GUIDEBOOK ON

Dyslexia and Related Conditions

SECOND EDITION

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
Public Instruction
Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

Wisconsin's Guidebook on Dyslexia and Related Conditions

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This guidebook complies with the requirements of 2019 Wisconsin Act 86. The first edition was published in July 2021. This second edition, published in May 2026, includes updated research, expanded guidance, and additional resources. The guidebook was developed in collaboration with the advisory committee established by Act 86 and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI). Committee members provided input throughout the drafting process, and the revised guidebook was available for 30 days of public comment prior to publication. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools) were used to support tasks such as image generation and proofreading. All content was reviewed, edited, and finalized by editors to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and alignment with the guidebook's goals. Further details about the development process, including the names of the co-chairs and committee members, are available at: https://dpi.wi.gov/reading/dyslexiaguidebook

Table of Contents

Guidebook Introduction **1**

Reading **4**

Dyslexia and Related Conditions **11**

Assessing Reading in Schools **20**

Instruction and Intervention Services in Schools **35**

Resources and Services for Students and Parents/Caregivers **56**

References **68**

Appendices **90**

Guidebook Introduction

The goal of Chapter 1 is to introduce the purpose, structure, and development process of this guidebook, written in accordance with 2019 Wisconsin Act 86 (Act 86) to support students, parents/caregivers, and educators. This second edition of the guidebook includes updates related to research and state statutes. While the guidebook focuses on dyslexia and related conditions, it also reflects a broader commitment to supporting the individual strengths and needs of all students. Reading difficulties exist along a continuum, and schools play a key role in supporting every learner. Chapter 1 begins by introducing the guidebook's purpose and organization, followed by an explanation of Act 86, definitions of key vocabulary terms, and an explanation of how to use the guidebook. The chapter concludes with a description of the development process and a preview of Chapter 2.

Chapter 1 Vocabulary

To support clarity and consistency throughout the guidebook, this section defines terms and textual features used across chapters.

Appendices: Refers to supplementary materials that provide additional information and context to support the guidebook's content. Each appendix is labeled with a letter and title for reference within the guidebook. All appendices can be found following the reference list.

English Learner (EL): Refers to students who are in the process of becoming proficient in English. This legal term is defined in federal law and is the one most commonly used by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI).

e.g.: Refers to the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, which means "for example." Writers use this abbreviation to show one or more examples that help explain an idea.

i.e.: Refers to the Latin phrase *id est*, which means "that is." Writers use this abbreviation to clarify or restate something in a different way.

In-text Citations: Refers to how this guidebook gives credit to the people and research behind the ideas shared. When a source is used, the author's name and year of publication appear in parentheses (e.g., WI DPI, 2025). These citations correspond to full entries in the reference list found after Chapter 6.

Multilingual Learner (ML): Refers to students who are developing proficiency in English while also having knowledge of one or more additional languages. Some states and school districts use this term instead of English Learner because it emphasizes students' strengths. In this guidebook, multilingual learner (ML) is used to refer both to students who meet the federal definition of an English Learner and to students who are fluent in English as well as another language.

Reference List: Refers to the section that appears after Chapter 6 and includes complete details for all sources cited in the guidebook. Entries are organized alphabetically by the author's last name to support easy reference.

Wisconsin Statute: Guidebook on Dyslexia and Related Conditions

The statute below outlines the requirements for the development, publication, and ongoing review of Wisconsin's guidebook on dyslexia and related conditions.

Wisconsin Act 86

Wisconsin Act 86 (2019) requires the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) to develop, publish, and regularly review a guidebook related to dyslexia and related conditions. In collaboration with the International Dyslexia Association Wisconsin Branch (WIBIDA) and the Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA), the Department must review the guidebook at least once every three school years and publish any updates on its website for informational purposes. The guidebook must include descriptions of screening tools, evidence-based instructional strategies and interventions, and resources available to students, parents/caregivers, and educators. School districts are also required to provide a link to the guidebook on their websites. The full statute is available at https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/acts/86.

Using This Guidebook

This guidebook supports parents and caregivers, educators, and school and district leaders. Readers may access the full guide or focus on the chapters that are most relevant to their roles or interests. The guidebook includes the following eight sections:

- Chapter 1 introduces the purpose and organization of the guidebook.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of reading.
- Chapter 3 defines dyslexia and related conditions.
- Chapter 4 focuses on reading assessments.
- Chapter 5 shares school-based instruction, interventions, and resources for educators and school leaders.
- Chapter 6 identifies resources and services for students and families.
- The Reference List shares resources cited in the guidebook.
- The Appendices offer supplementary resources.

To support readability and ease of use, Chapters 1-6 follow a consistent structure:

- A brief purpose statement and chapter overview.
- A summary of relevant Wisconsin (WI) statutes.
- Relevant content.
- A concluding summary.

Background and Development of the Guidebook

This section explains how the first and second editions of the guidebook were developed to meet the requirements of 2019 Wisconsin Act 86.

First Edition

To fulfill the requirements of Act 86, the WI DPI convened with an advisory committee in September 2019, co-chaired by representatives from the WIBIDA and WSRA. The committee met through December 2020 to provide input and recommendations.

Second Edition

Act 86 requires the WI DPI to review the guidebook every three years in consultation with WIBIDA and WSRA. This second edition incorporates feedback from the 2025 review. It includes updates to align with 2023 Wisconsin Act 20, to improve readability, integrate current research and resources, and ensure representation of multilingual learners. Because WIBIDA and WSRA serve only in an advisory role, the guidebook does not represent consensus.

Conclusion

Despite differing perspectives, the process of reviewing and updating the guidebook highlighted the value of bringing together individuals with diverse roles, experiences, and expertise to support Wisconsin's learners, families, educators, and school systems. Chapter 1 introduced the purpose, structure, and historical development of this guidebook. Chapter 2 will focus on building a shared understanding of the reading process.

Reading

Reading is closely connected to writing, speaking, listening, and viewing (Clayton et al., 2020; Clinton-Lissell, 2022; Graham et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2024). All these skills work together and strengthen one another. Chapter 2 helps establish a clear understanding of reading and the factors that shape reading development. This begins by defining vocabulary terms to support understanding of reading, then summarizes relevant Wisconsin statutes, next presents models and research that describes the reading process and concludes with a summary.

Chapter 2 Vocabulary

The following terms are provided to support understanding of the content in this chapter:

Background Knowledge: Refers to the information that students have acquired through their lived experiences (National Center on Early Childhood Development, 2022). This includes knowledge specific to understanding written language, such as familiarity with common genres (e.g., biographies, informational texts), features of written text (e.g., headings, diagrams), and text structures (e.g., cause/effect, compare/contrast, sequential) which support meaning making during reading (Hebert et al., 2016).

Oral Language Development: Refers to the process of learning to use spoken words and communicate with them. The process includes learning sounds, word meanings, grammar, and understanding how to use language in different situations and settings. Oral language development may occur in one or more languages and reflects students' cultural background, communication style, and lived experiences. High-quality instruction bridges home and school experiences to support the development of this critical early literacy skill (Emmitt et al., 2014; Foorman et al., 2016; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2012; Kosanovich et al., 2020a; NCECDTL, 2020; Otto, 2006; Wasik & Newman, 2009). Multilingualism can strengthen oral language development and contribute to literacy growth (Giambo & Szecsi, 2015; Hernández et al., 2016).

Phonemic Awareness: Refers to the skills of "identifying, isolating, blending, segmenting, and manipulating (adding, substituting, deleting) phonemes" (WI Act 20, Section 11, 2023).

Phonological Awareness: Refers to the skills of word awareness, rhyme recognition, repetition and creation of alliteration, syllable counting or identification, as well as onset and rime manipulation (WI Act 20, Section 11, 2023).

Phonics: Refers to the "relationships between sounds and words; this includes alphabetic principle, decoding, orthographic knowledge, encoding, and fluency" (WI Act 20, Section 11, 2023).

Reading Comprehension: Refers to the complex cognitive process of constructing and extracting meaning from written texts by actively engaging with what is stated or implied. This process draws on vocabulary, background knowledge, reasoning, word recognition, language processing, working memory, and inference-making to build a coherent mental model that integrates text content with the reader's knowledge and purpose. Reading comprehension also involves applying knowledge and skills to evaluate the message, including analyzing the author's intent, writing choices, and the credibility of information (Snow, 2002; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Kintsch, 1988, 2005; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; International Literacy Association, n.d.).

Reading Fluency: Refers to reading with accuracy, automaticity, and prosody (WI DPI, 2020d).

Reading Models: Refer to research-based frameworks that explain how reading develops by describing how literacy components interact to support the process of reading.

Science-Based Early Reading: Refers to a systematic and explicit approach to teaching foundational reading skills, including phonological awareness (including phonemic awareness), phonics, vocabulary, oral language, reading fluency, vocabulary building to develop lexical and morphological knowledge, comprehension, background knowledge development, and writing (WI Act 20, Section 11, 2023).

Vocabulary Building to Develop Lexical and Morphological Knowledge: Refers to instruction of expressive (words said and produced) and receptive vocabulary (words heard and understood) with the purpose of expanding students' knowledge of words and their meanings (Kosanovich, 2020b, p. 1; UNESCO, 2020).

Writing: Refers to the process applied by students to communicate thoughts and ideas through scribbles, drawings, random letter strings, single letter spellings, invented spelling, sentences, paragraphs, etcetera (Graham et al., 2018).

Wisconsin Statutes: Reading

2023 Wisconsin Act 20 and Wis. Stat. §§ 118.30(1g) (a) and 120.12(13)(b) are the primary statutes related to reading instruction, assessment, and accountability in Wisconsin schools.

2023 Wisconsin Act 20

Wisconsin Act 20 (2023) identifies several components related to reading and establishes requirements for early literacy instruction and assessment in schools.

The law defines science-based early reading instruction as systematic and explicit instruction in phonological awareness (including phonemic awareness), phonics, oral language, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, background knowledge, and writing (WI Act 20, Section 11, 2023).

Standards Wis. Stat. 118.30 (1g) (a) and 120.12 (13)(b)

Wisconsin Statutes §§ 118.30(1g) (a) and 120.12(13)(b) require school districts to adopt English language arts standards that define what students should know and be able to do as readers in each grade level.

What is Reading?

Reading is a complex, interactive process of making meaning from written text. The process integrates foundational skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension with higher level processes including reasoning, analysis, and critical reflection (Johnston & Scanlon, 2020; Paris et al., 1983; Snow, 2002; Kintsch, 1988, 2005). Meaning making is shaped by interconnected cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, developmental, and cultural dimensions that influence how readers think, feel, and engage with text (Goldman, 2024; Snow, 2002; Moje, 2015). In other words, reading extends far beyond sounding out words. Reading represents an active process that engages the reader's mind, emotions, and identity through interaction with text, context, and community. These dimensions operate together to shape how readers construct meaning, connect ideas, and apply understanding in authentic and purposeful ways. Each dimension contributes uniquely to the reading process, as described below:

Cognitive dimensions involve mental processes that support attention, memory, problem solving, and self-regulation during reading. Readers use mental processes to coordinate multiple sources of information, monitor comprehension, and flexibly apply strategies for different purposes to support reading (Cartwright & Palian, 2024).

Linguistic dimensions include what readers know and can do with language. This involves understanding and using the different parts of language systems including phonology (the sounds of language), morphology (word parts that carry meaning such as prefixes), syntax (the way words are arranged to form sentences), semantics (the meaning of words and sentences), and pragmatics (how language is used in different situations). Linguistic dimensions also include metalinguistic awareness, or the ability to think about and talk about how language works. Skilled readers draw on all these elements using multiple language systems or experiences to make meaning, especially in multilingual contexts (Leider & Proctor, 2024).

Social dimensions represent that reading is not something students do alone. Understanding grows when readers talk about what they read with teachers, classmates, and family members. These conversations help students make

connections between different texts and experiences, deepening comprehension and building community around reading (Goldman, 2024; Bloome et al., 2009).

Emotional dimensions focus on how motivation, interest, and feelings affect reading. When students feel connected to what they read, they are more engaged and persistent, which leads to deeper understanding. Instruction that supports students' sense of choice (autonomy), confidence (competence), and connection to others (belonging) helps build positive emotions about reading (Ryan& Deci, 2020; Gabriel & López, 2024, as cited in Goldman, 2024).

Developmental dimensions acknowledge that reading evolves across time and contexts.

Cultural dimensions show that a reader's background, culture, and experiences influence how they understand and relate to texts. (Moje, 2015; Goldman, 2024).

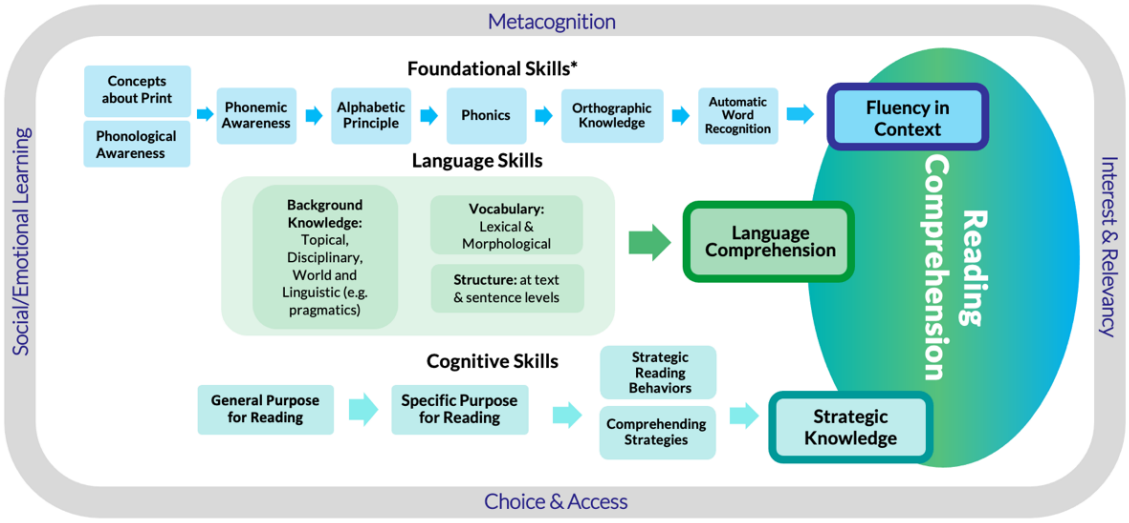
Growth in reading is strengthened when instruction builds on students' cultural and linguistic assets, oral language experiences, and individual strengths. For instructional practices that support reading development, see Chapter 5.

Models of Reading

Researchers have developed models to explain the reading process, and these continue to evolve (see *Appendix A: The Evolution of Reading Models)*. Reflective of reading research, the WI DPI views literacy as developmental, complex, and influenced by interacting factors (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Goldman, 2024; Odegard et al., 2025). Students grow their foundational and language skills across multiple areas simultaneously, and their progress is influenced by a range of factors, including executive functioning skills and motivational constructs. Executive functioning skills such as flexibility, sustained attention, working memory, planning, and response inhibition help learners coordinate the multiple processes required for reading (Cartwright, 2015; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Locascio et al., 2010). Motivational factors, including reading purpose, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, task value, and self-efficacy, play a key role in sustaining engagement, supporting persistence, and making reading meaningful (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016). These ideas are represented in Figure 1, *Wisconsin's Model Representing the Reading Process* (WI DPI, n.d.-h).

Figure 1

Wisconsin's Model Representing the Reading Process



* Sequential and Overlapping Skills

Adapted from Farrall, M. (2012). *Reading assessment: Linking language, literacy, and cognition.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons; McKenna, M. & Stahl, K. (2009). *Assessment for reading instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford.

The sequential appearance of the reading components in this model does not fully represent the dynamic relationships among foundational, language, and cognitive skills. Recognition of the interconnections of these skills in practice is reflected in the following publications:

- *Wisconsin's Model Early Learning Standards* (birth-grade 1) (WI DPI, 2017b).
- *Wisconsin's Standards for English Language Arts* (WI DPI, 2020d).
- *Wisconsin Essential Elements for English Language Arts* (WI DPI, 2022b).
- *Wisconsin's Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning* (WI DPI, n.d.,-n).
- *Wisconsin's Vision for English Language Arts* (WI DPI, n.d.-p).

Recognizing the wide range of linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and social assets that students bring is essential for understanding literacy. By integrating research from neuroscience, cognitive science, linguistics, education, psychology, reading, and sociocultural studies, the WI DPI aims to advance literacy proficiency while centering students' strengths and identities. As research and practice continue to evolve, the literacy model will be refined to reflect new knowledge. The insights gained from its ongoing development can help educators and leaders identify and address historical barriers to equitable literacy outcomes and expand opportunities for all learners.

Reading and the Brain

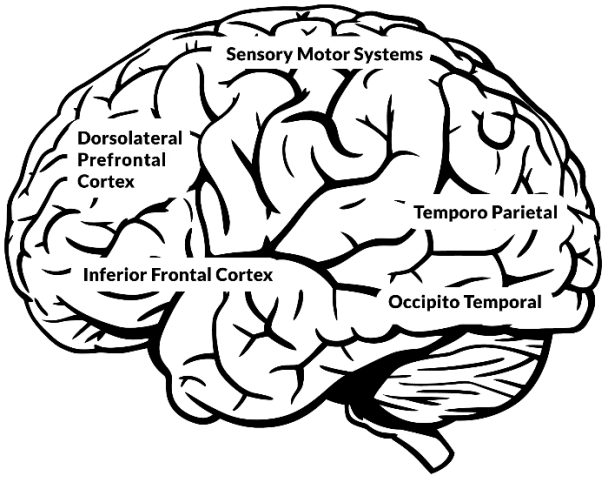
In recent years, there has been growing attention on what brain research can tell us about learning to read. While much of the public conversation has centered on phonics, a closer look at the research reveals that reading is complex, involving

multiple brain regions and interconnected processes. Research shows that reading does not rely on a single part of the brain. Instead, several regions work together to support the process (Haugg et al., 2025; Romeo, 2023). A meta-analysis of 163 brain studies involving more than 3,000 readers found that different reading tasks activate different brain networks, demonstrating the complexity of learning to read (Turker et al., 2025). Turker et al. (2025) found that brain activation changes depending on the following tasks: reading real words compared with nonsense words; reading sentences compared with longer passages; and reading silently compared with reading aloud.

Brain processes for reading also depend on executive functioning. Executive functioning refers to mental skills such as working memory (holding information in mind), inhibitory control (resisting distractions), and cognitive flexibility (adapting strategies when confusion arises). Readers rely on these skills to keep track of ideas, ignore irrelevant information, and adjust their approach when meaning breaks down (Romeo, 2023). Together, these findings show that the reading brain is flexible, distributed, and task-dependent (Turker et al., 2025). Figure 2 shows brain sytems that work together during reading.

Figure 2

Brain Systems Working Together for Reading



Brain research offers insight into reading development, but brain scans cannot diagnose dyslexia and related conditions or guide instruction (Compton-Lilly et al., 2014; Hruby & Goswami, 2011; Johnston & Scanlon, 2021; Worthy et al., 2019). Educators and families should be cautious about simplified claims related to brain science. Some commercial programs promote “brain-based” methods that lack evidence, often referred to as neuromyths (Busso & Pollack, 2015; Leyton & Stentiford, 2025; Strauss, 2002, 2003; Worthy et al., 2019). See Chapter 6 for resources related to being a wise and informed consumer.

Reading difficulties such as dyslexia and related conditions may result from multiple interacting factors, including patterns of thinking, use of language, and opportunities for learning in different contexts (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024; Snowling & Hulme, 2024; Tannock, 2013). What appears to be a reading challenge may also reflect diverse life experiences, growth in more than one language, or differences in access to instruction (Tannock, 2013). In all cases, instruction should affirm student strengths while providing individualized support. Collaboration among families, educators, and researchers leads to a fuller understanding of literacy development, instruction, and intervention. For a more detailed description of brain networks and their functions, see *Appendix B: Research Supporting Brain Regions Related to the Function of Reading*

Conclusion

Chapter 2 emphasized that reading is a complex process shaped by cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural factors. Research shows that reading involves multiple, flexible processes working together to make meaning and an apparent reading difficulty may instead represent a student's unique learning experiences (Haugg et al., 2025; Romeo, 2023; Snowling & Hulme, 2024; Tannock, 2013; Turker et al., 2025). For these reasons, insights from neuroscience, cognitive science, linguistics, psychology, education, and sociocultural studies must continue to be examined to fully understand how reading develops. Literacy instruction and assessment should reflect the full range of factors that support every reader. As Wisconsin continues to refine its model of reading, this work remains grounded in research and centered on the literacies of all students. Chapter 3 builds on these foundations to explore dyslexia and related conditions.

Dyslexia and Related Conditions

The goal of this chapter is to explain how dyslexia and related conditions are understood in both law and research. Dyslexia and related conditions are one of the most studied learning differences, yet definitions vary across education, medicine, research, and policy, creating confusion about how the condition is identified and supported (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020; Odegard et al., 2024; Peterson & Pennington, 2015; Worthy et al., 2021). Current research shows that dyslexia and related conditions do not stem from a single cause but from a combination of factors, including how the brain processes language, genetics, environment, and instruction (Moll, 2022; Romeo, 2023). Historically, many students' literacy strengths and needs have been misunderstood or misidentified. This is particularly true for students with diverse cultural, language, and learning backgrounds, emphasizing the need to recognize the difference between normal developmental differences and signs of a reading disability. Chapter 3 begins by defining vocabulary terms and then summarizes relevant Wisconsin statutes. Finally, the chapter discusses definitions of dyslexia, common characteristics, and related conditions.

Chapter 3 Vocabulary

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): Refers to a category of disability defined by federal law in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to IDEA, a Specific Learning Disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written. It may show up as difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or performing mathematical calculations. Conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia are included under this definition. The law also explains that this category does not include learning challenges that are mainly the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; cognitive disabilities; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages. The criteria used to diagnose a reading difficulty like dyslexia in a private or medical setting may not match the criteria used to determine eligibility for special education under state or federal law. A student may be diagnosed with dyslexia but may or may not be identified as having a disability under special education law. Additional details about SLD are in *Appendix C: Special Education, Section 504, and Dyslexia and Related Conditions*.

Wisconsin Statutes: Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Several Wisconsin statutes address dyslexia and related conditions that mandate specific actions such as early screening, definitions for dyslexia, and research-based and intervention.

2019 Wisconsin Act 86

Wis.Stat. §115.28(56) adopted the following definition of dyslexia, informed by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD):

> *"A specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and 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"* (Wis.Stat. §115.28(56).

In addition to defining dyslexia, Wisconsin Act 86 required the establishment of an advisory committee to assist in developing a state dyslexia guidebook. The legislation also mandated that the guidebook be reviewed and revised at least once every three school years. Furthermore, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) is required to publish the guidebook on its website, and local education agencies (LEAs) must ensure it is accessible through their own websites.

2023 Wisconsin Act 20

Section 16 of 2023 Wisconsin Act 20 keeps the same definition of dyslexia that was established in 2019 Wisconsin Act 86. While the wording in Act 20 is slightly different, the meaning does not change. The only small difference is that the phrase "and the provision of effective classroom instruction" was not included.

What is Meant by Dyslexia and Related Conditions?

Dyslexia and related conditions have been widely studied and discussed, yet remain misunderstood (Norton et al., 2015). This section provides foundational information to support accurate understanding, effective identification, and strength-based decision-making for students with dyslexia and related conditions.

Defining Dyslexia

Families sometimes ask why it matters that experts define dyslexia and related conditions in different ways. These differences affect how students are identified, how schools provide support, and how families understand what their children need. Educators, doctors, and researchers often use the term differently, which can create confusion about services and next steps (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020; Odegard et al., 2024). Wisconsin law includes an official definition (Wis. Stat. §115.28[56]) to promote shared understanding across schools, but this definition does not fully reflect scientific agreement.

National organizations and research studies also describe dyslexia and related conditions differently. For example, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) identifies dyslexia under Specific Learning Disorder and includes how a student responds to instruction as part of a diagnosis (Tannock, 2013). Further, researchers have used a variety of criteria such as cutoff scores, IQ comparisons, or prior diagnoses when identifying a student with dyslexia and related conditions (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024). Johnston and Scanlon (2022) explain that this lack of agreement can lead to misunderstanding and inequity. Historically, some groups of students were more likely to be identified with dyslexia and related conditions than others, and inconsistent definitions can make research findings difficult to apply in classrooms. They note that students who struggle to read words often need similar kinds of effective instruction, whether or not they are labeled dyslexic.

Earlier theories proposed that dyslexia and related conditions were caused by one factor, a weakness in phonological awareness (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012). Current research shows that reading and spelling challenges exist along a continuum, with little meaningful difference between students identified with dyslexia or related conditions and those who demonstrate similar needs but do not receive that label (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024b). Although phonological processing is a strong predictor of reading development, other factors also play important roles, including cognitive, genetic, environmental, and instructional influences (Pennington et al., 2012; Steacy et al., 2023; Savage et al., 2024). Not all students with phonological weaknesses exhibit characteristics of dyslexia or related conditions, and not all individuals with dyslexia and related conditions demonstrate phonological weaknesses (Moll et al., 2013; Snowling et al., 2003; van Bergen et al., 2012).

The way literacy is measured also shapes how dyslexia is defined. A narrow definition of reading focuses mainly on decoding or sounding out words, without considering comprehension, vocabulary, background knowledge, or motivation. When definitions or assessments rely only on decoding, they may misidentify or overlook students whose reading strengths and needs extend beyond word recognition. Brain imaging studies show that reading engages multiple systems in different ways. For example, decoding pseudowords activates phonological networks more strongly than reading familiar words, while silent reading involves different regions than reading aloud (Turker et al., 2025). See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion on the reading process.

Because definitions and assessments influence how reading is understood, it is important to recognize that literacy develops through diverse experiences and languages. Speaking more than one language is a strength, not a barrier, to becoming a proficient reader and writer (Giambo & Szecsi, 2015; Hernández et al., 2016; Kroll & Dussias, 2017; Lü, 2020). Multilingual learners can have dyslexia and related conditions but are not caused by learning or using multiple languages.

Multilingualism supports cognitive flexibility, problem-solving, and metalinguistic awareness, which enhance literacy development (Hernández et al., 2016). Spelling English words using sounds from a home language, for example, is a normal part of multilingual literacy growth, not necessarily a sign of dyslexia (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2017).

When educators and families work together, they can more effectively distinguish the relationship between second-language development and reading development. Viewing multilingualism as an asset ensures that students with dyslexia and related conditions receive accurate, equitable, and timely support through instruction that builds on both language and literacy strengths (Mora et al., 2025; Nash et al., 2025; Zoeller & Briceño, 2022). This inclusive and strengths-based approach to literacy recognizes that children learn to read and write in many ways, including oral storytelling, expression through multiple languages, visual supports, technology, and other forms of communication. Educators who apply inclusive and evidence-based practices are more likely to identify dyslexia accurately and provide effective, affirming instruction for all learners (Kliewer et al., 2004; Love, 2019; Nash et al., 2025).

Defining Related Conditions

Wisconsin Act 86 requires the dyslexia guidebook to address related conditions, though the statute does not provide a formal definition (Wisconsin Act 86, 2019; Wisconsin Act 20, 2023). Drawing on the work of the 2018 Legislative Study Committee, "related conditions" refers to students who experience reading difficulties, even if they do not meet all diagnostic criteria for dyslexia outlined in Act 86. Including related conditions in the guidebook helps ensure that all students with reading challenges receive appropriate support.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

Students with dyslexia, as defined in Wisconsin statute, can show a range of overlapping characteristics that reflect the complexity of this learning difference. These characteristics often co-occur and vary across individuals (Turker et al., 2025). It is also important to note that patterns observed in both research studies and classroom assessments vary depending on the task, which shapes how reading strengths and difficulties appear (Turker et al., 2025). Students who experience reading difficulties often share several characteristics identified in research (Catts & Petscher, 2022; Fletcher et al., 2019; Seidenberg, 2017):

Neurobiological Differences: Students naturally show variation in how the brain develops and functions in relation to reading. Meta-analytic research demonstrates that reading does not rely on a single brain area but rather on a distributed network of occipital, temporal, parietal, and frontal regions that work together to support phonological, orthographic, and semantic processing. In individuals with dyslexia and related conditions, this network may function less efficiently or show altered connectivity patterns, reflecting differences in how

print and language are processed (Turker et al., 2025). These neural differences represent typical variation in brain organization; however, when such differences lead to persistent difficulty with accurate and fluent word recognition despite high-quality instruction, they are associated with the specific learning disability of dyslexia. Cognitive, environmental, and instructional factors also interact with these neural differences, influencing how literacy develops for each learner.

Phonological Processing Difficulties: Students with dyslexia and related conditions may have difficulty rhyming, blending, segmenting, or manipulating sounds, and may confuse similar-sounding words (Erbeli et al., 2022). These phonological weaknesses can affect reading accuracy, fluency, spelling, and decoding. However, not all students with phonological weaknesses develop dyslexia, and not all students with dyslexia show phonological impairments (Moll & Landerl, 2009; Pennington et al., 2012; Wolf & Bowers, 1999) For multilingual learners (MLs), differences in sound awareness may reflect transfer from their home language, which should not automatically be interpreted as dyslexia (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Difficulties with Accurate and Fluent Word Recognition: Students may read slowly, skip or misread words, hesitate during oral reading, and/or struggle with longer and unfamiliar words. Because task context matters, word recognition challenges may be more visible in activities such as reading aloud unfamiliar text than in reading familiar words silently. For MLs, slower or hesitant reading in English may reflect developing proficiency in English rather than a disability, highlighting the need to compare progress to "like peers" (i.e., other ML students with similar linguistic and educational backgrounds).

Challenges with Spelling and Decoding: Students may spell words the way they sound rather than using conventional patterns, or they may omit, or mis-sequence sounds within words. They may also have difficulty sounding out unfamiliar words and struggle to recognize them during reading. Challenges with spelling and decoding experienced by young children may reflect typical development rather than a learning difficulty (Schrodt et al., 2024). For MLs spelling in English may also be influenced by the phonemes and orthographic patterns of their home language, which is a normal part of language transfer and should not automatically be viewed as an indicator of dyslexia and related conditions.

Reading Comprehension Difficulties: Students experience comprehension challenges for a variety of reasons. Some students struggle because inaccurate or nonfluent reading limits meaning making, while others read fluently but have trouble understanding, summarizing, or applying text, especially when tasks require background knowledge, inference, or integration of ideas. Weaknesses in executive functioning such as working memory, attention, and self-monitoring can also hinder comprehension (Cartwright et al., 2020; Cartwright et al., 2024; Tarchi et al., 2021). In addition, task demands influence comprehension; for example, silent reading may require more self-monitoring and integration than listening to

text read aloud. For multilingual learners, comprehension challenges may reflect English vocabulary or unfamiliar cultural references, not dyslexia and related conditions. Recognizing students' knowledge and experiences across languages offers a fuller understanding of their comprehension strengths and needs.

Limited Vocabulary and Background Knowledge: Students may struggle to understand new or academic words and may find it difficult to connect new information to previous learning or lived experiences. For MLs, vocabulary knowledge may be stronger in their home language. Assessing ML students in all the languages they speak can provide a more complete picture of this skill.

Ongoing Reading Difficulties Even After High-quality Instruction: Some students continue to experience reading difficulties despite receiving high-quality, evidence-based instruction. Without early attention to factors such as assessment quality, engagement, reading volume, and background knowledge, these challenges may persist. For multilingual learners, instruction must support both literacy and language development to prevent misattributing difficulties to reading or English proficiency alone.

Unexpected Difficulties in Contrast to Strengths in Other Areas: Students may excel in other subjects yet still struggle with reading. Educators should recognize that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or those with limited educational opportunities may be unfairly "expected" to struggle, leading to over- or under-identification and inadequate support. Bias, unclear criteria, and subjective judgments can all contribute to misidentifying or overlooking students with dyslexia and related conditions (Chapman & Tunmer, 2019; Suhr & Johnson, 2022; Kirby & Snowling, 2022).

Reading difficulties rarely stem from one cause; they reflect multiple interacting factors (Catts et al., 2017; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Lorusso & Toraldo, 2023; Wagner et al., 2022). Further, assessment tasks activate different reading processes, so results should take in account both the task and the student's background and experiences in reading. While scores may suggest a need for further diagnostic assessment, some challenges are typical for young students still developing foundational skills or those without prior formal instruction (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024). See Appendices E–M for research-based considerations and guiding questions to support analyzing patterns in reading behaviors.

- Appendix E: Neurological Differences
- Appendix F: Phonological Processing Difficulties
- Appendix G: Accurate and Fluent Word Recognition Difficulties
- Appendix H: Decoding and Spelling Difficulties
- Appendix I: Reading Comprehension Difficulties
- Appendix J: Atypical Vocabulary Growth and Background Knowledge

- Appendix K: Unexpected Reading Difficulties
- Appendix L: Persistent Difficulties and Limited Reading Experiences
- Appendix M: Co-Occurring Conditions

Research on Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Research on dyslexia and related conditions now recognizes reading difficulties as the result of multiple interacting influences, including cognitive, genetic, environmental, and instructional factors (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012; Pennington et al., 2012). This broader understanding demonstrates the need for comprehensive, individualized, and culturally responsive approaches to literacy assessment and instruction. Narrow or monolingual definitions of reading can lead to misidentification, especially for multilingual learners, whose spelling, decoding, fluency, and comprehension differences may reflect language transfer or limited exposure to English print rather than a reading disability (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). Inclusive, evidence-based practices support accurate identification and equitable literacy instruction for multilingual learners, Black children, and students with disabilities (Beneke et al., 2024; Annamma , 2018; Annamma et al., 2022). Despite advances in research, misconceptions about dyslexia and related conditions persist, sometimes causing a mismatch between instruction and students' strengths and needs in literacy. Table 1 highlights common educational myths about dyslexia and related conditions

Table 1

Common Educational Myths About Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Myth	What Research Says
All students with characteristics of dyslexia share a single cause.	Dyslexia and related conditions involve interacting genetic, cognitive, instructional, and environmental factors (Elliott, 2020; Snowling & Hulme, 2020).
Students with dyslexia write letters or words backward.	Letter reversals are typical in early development and not always signs of dyslexia or related conditions, though persistent reversals may require support (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024a; Hasbrouck, 2020).
Students with dyslexia have vision problems that cause reading difficulties.	Vision problems affects reading, but do not cause dyslexia and related conditions (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009; Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024b; Vellutino & Fletcher, 2007).

Myth	What Research Says
Students with dyslexia automatically receive special education services.	Not all students with dyslexia and related conditions receive or require an individualized education plan (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024b).
Students with dyslexia cannot do well in school.	Dyslexia and related conditions are not linked to intelligence levels, and many students with these characteristics achieve academic success (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024b; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020; Vellutino et al., 2000).
Students with dyslexia cannot learn to read and will not ever become strong readers.	With early, effective, and differentiated literacy instruction, students with dyslexia and related conditions can learn to read and make significant progress (Fletcher et al., 2019; Hasbrouck, 2020; Vellutino et al., 1996).
Students with dyslexia are not trying hard enough.	Students with dyslexia and related conditions often work hard, and misinterpreting their efforts can harm their confidence and well-being (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020).

Table 2 provides a summary of neuromyths that have been discussed in literature.

Table 2

Common Neuromyths About Dyslexia

Myth	What Research Says
Students with dyslexia can be diagnosed by brain images.	Brain imaging cannot diagnose dyslexia (Hruby & Goswami 2011; Smeyers 2016; Worthy et al. 2019).
Students with dyslexia have reading difficulties caused by brain differences.	Brain research shows correlations, not causes, so scan results alone cannot determine dyslexia or related conditions (Pasquinelli, 2012; Theodoridou et al., 2021).
Students with dyslexia have abnormal brains.	Brain differences are normal, and struggling with reading does not mean a student's brain is dysfunctional (Protopapas & Parrila, 2018; Worthy et al., 2019).
Students benefit from any brain research being applied in the classroom.	Educators should use caution when interpreting brain research on dyslexia and related conditions, since brain scans are not evidence-based tools for guiding reading instruction (Howard-Jones, 2014; McCabe & Castel, 2008; Willingham, 2017).

Conclusion

Chapter 3 outlined statutory definitions, current research, and myths about dyslexia and related conditions, emphasizing a strengths-based lens that considers brain processes, task demands, and developmental differences. Understanding dyslexia within cognitive, instructional, social, and cultural contexts helps prevent misidentification and inform effective instruction. Chapter 4 builds on this by introducing assessment tools to identify and monitor dyslexia and related conditions.

Assessing Reading in Schools

This chapter reviews reading assessment requirements and key considerations for supporting students with dyslexia and related conditions under Wisconsin Act 20 and Act 86. Reading assessments provide information about how a student reads, helping educators identify strengths and areas for growth (Afflerbach, 2016). Because assessments capture only a moment in time, results are most meaningful when considered alongside other information, such as family input, classroom observations, and writing samples.

Reading is a complex process of making meaning from text that involves foundational skills, higher-level thinking, and experiences shaped by students' identities, cultures, and languages. In Wisconsin, where systemic inequities contribute to persistent disparities in literacy outcomes, assessment systems must move beyond identifying risk to reveal what students know and can do across settings and over time (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Goldman & Lee, 2023). When used in this way, assessment data informs meaningful instruction that builds on students' strengths. As Johnston and Scanlon (2022) note, effective literacy teaching depends on teachers' understanding of literacy development and their ability to respond to individual learner needs.

Achieving this vision requires collaboration among educators knowledgeable about literacy development and assessment, working in partnership with families. Inaccurate or incomplete assessment decisions such as inappropriate referrals, misinterpretation of data, or reliance on tools not designed for diverse learners can delay intervention and reinforce deficit-based narratives (Valencia, 2010; Forzani et al., 2024; Beneke et al., 2024). Chapter 4 defines key vocabulary, summarizes Wisconsin statutes, explains the purpose of different types of assessments including those required under Act 20, and concludes with implications for instructional planning introduced in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Vocabulary

The following terms are provided to support understanding of the content in this chapter:

Diagnostic Assessment: Refers to an in-depth evaluation used to identify specific areas of strength and need in a student's reading development.

Formative Assessment: Refers to ongoing checks for understanding that inform real-time instructional decisions and help teachers and students identify next steps in learning) Sigman & Mancuso, 2017). See the WI DPI resources : *Instructional Practice Guides for Equitable Teaching and Learning in English Language Arts* (2020a) and *Formative Assessment* (WI DPI, 2020b).

Growth Measure: Refers to ongoing assessment of student progress to evaluate instructional effectiveness and guide adjustments. Required under IDEA and within multi-level systems of support, and now also required for students with personalized reading plans under Act 20 (IDEA, 2004, 20 U.S.C. §1414[d][1][A]; United States Department of Education, 2017; Wisconsin Act 20, 2023).

Reading Readiness Assessment: Refers to a screening or diagnostic tool used to evaluate foundational reading skills and early literacy development (Wis. Stat. §118.016[1][k], 2023).

Reliability: Refers to the consistency of a test in producing similar results over time, indicating that scores reflect actual ability rather than chance (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2019). See *Appendix N: Reliability in Reading Assessment* for more information.

Screening/Universal Screening: Refers to a brief, standardized assessment given to all students to identify those who may be at risk for reading difficulties.

Sensitivity: Refers to how accurately a reading assessment identifies students who truly have a specific condition or characteristic (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024a). A highly sensitive test correctly identifies most students at risk of reading difficulties.

Set for Variability: Refers to a student's ability to self-correct an initial mispronunciation of a decoded word by generating alternative pronunciations, determining whether one matches a known word in their oral vocabulary, and assessing its fit within the sentence context (Barnes et al., 2025; Edwards et al., 2023; Steacy et al., 2023; Savage et al., 2024; Venezky, 1999).

Specificity: Refers to how well a reading assessment identifies students who do not have a specific condition or characteristic (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024a). A test with high specificity correctly recognizes students who are not at risk for reading difficulties.

Summative Assessments: Refers to assessments given after a longer period of instruction, such as a semester or school year. They provide cumulative snapshots of learning and evaluate students' achievement of grade level content standards (WI DPI, 2020b; Sigman & Mancuso, 2017).

Validity: Refers to how well an assessment measures what it intends, providing accurate data for instructional use (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2019). See *Appendix O: Validity in Reading Assessments*.

Wisconsin Statutes: Assessing Reading

State and federal law inform how reading is measured in Wisconsin schools. This includes:

2023 Wisconsin Act 20 (Wis. Stat. § 118.016)

Act 20 requires schools to meet specific assessment requirements listed on DPI's Wisconsin Reads website under *Early Literacy Assessment, Act 20*.

Screeners: For 4K students twice yearly measuring phonemic awareness and letter–sound knowledge; and for 5K–3 students three times measuring phonemic awareness, decoding, alphabet knowledge, letter–sound knowledge, and oral vocabulary. Families must be notified in plain language, including overall and sub-scores, percentile rank (if available), the definition of "at risk," and a description of skills assessed.

Diagnostic Assessments: For 5K–3 students scoring below the 25th percentile or if requested by a teacher/parent. Tools must measure rapid naming, phonological awareness, word recognition, spelling, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and, when appropriate, oral reading fluency and comprehension. Families must be notified in plain language, including scores, percentile rank (if available), at-risk status, and information about dyslexia supports and special education referrals.

Personal Reading Plans (PRPs): For every 5K–3 student identified as at risk through screening or diagnostic assessment. Plans must show each student's strengths and needs from assessments, set up progress-monitoring checkpoints, and share results with families at least every 10 weeks.

Early Literacy Remediation Plans: For each district and independent charter school, a summary of screening and diagnostic practices, explanation of how results are monitored, and policies for communicating assessment data to families must be shared.

Wis. Stat. 118.30(1m) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 20 U.S.C. § 6311)

State and federal law require annual summative reading/English language arts assessments in grades 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11. The assessments must align with Wisconsin Academic Standards, be free from bias, and include accommodations or alternative formats for students with disabilities and English Learners. Results must be shared with families, schools, and the public to support instruction, monitor progress, and ensure accountability.

Strategic Assessment Systems

High-quality literacy instruction depends on a comprehensive assessment system. Wisconsin's Strategic Assessment System (SAS) outlines three main purposes for assessment: formative, interim or benchmark, and summative. The system integrates multiple assessment types, including universal screeners,

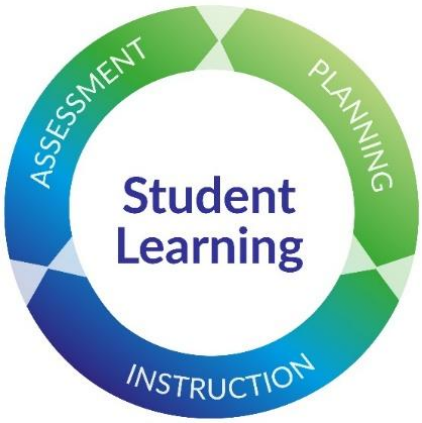
diagnostic tools, and progress monitoring, to provide a a greater understanding about student learning (WI DPI, 2020b). Under Act 20, universal screening, diagnostic assessment, and progress monitoring are required components of literacy assessment. When used collectively, these measures provide educators with data to inform instruction.

Because dyslexia and related conditions often occur alongside other differences (e.g., language experiences, motor development, executive functioning) no single assessment can provide a complete understanding of a student's profile as a reader (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024b; Johnston & Scanlon, 2021; Miciak & Fletcher, 2020). Educators therefore need training to administer and interpret assessments responsibly, since even well-designed tools can cause harm if misused (Bennett, 2011; Gordon & Bridglall, 2006).

Instruction for students with dyslexia and related conditions must align closely with assessment. Screening, diagnostic, and formative assessments identify strengths and needs, guiding instruction and intervention within a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, and teaching. Figure 3 illustrates how each phase informs the next, promoting ongoing improvement in reading outcomes (Connor et al., 2009; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

Figure 3

Assessment and Cycle of Instruction



Reading assessments are never neutral (Elzy-Palmer et al., 2025; Forzani et al., 2024). They reflect values in their design, assumptions about which students are being assessed, and how the results will be interpreted and used. Standardized assessments often treat student groups as if they are uniform, reporting data by broad categories such as race, gender, or economic status, while overlooking the meaningful intersections that shape individual students' learning and performance.

A well-designed reading assessment system clarifies the purpose of each measure and guides decisions based on the best available evidence. Without this clarity, data may be misapplied, leading to unhelpful instructional decisions (Truckenmiller et al., 2024). Because all assessments have limits and scores can vary even when ability does not, a strategic system must anticipate these limits, supplement individual test data with other evidence, and avoid overreliance on a single measure. Overdependence on data from one test can disproportionately limit meaningful instructional opportunities for historically underserved students, including multilingual learners and those with identified disabilities.

In contrast, a comprehensive assessment system balances efficiency and breadth, ensuring that assessments collectively address decoding, language comprehension, vocabulary, and higher-level thinking while supporting fair and accurate decisions for diverse learners (Truckenmiller et al., 2024). These commitments align with *Wisconsin's Framework for Multi-Level Systems of Supports* (WiMLSS), which emphasizes high-quality instruction, effective data use, collaboration, and family and community engagement (WI DPI, 2025e). Within WiMLSS, assessment data guides continuous improvement, shows whose needs are met or unmet, and engages families and students in decision-making. When used in this way, assessments support responsive instruction, affirm student identities, and ensure all learners have opportunities to grow as readers. Table 3 summarizes each assessment type and its role in supporting students with dyslexia and related conditions.

Table 3

Strategic Assessment System

Type	Purpose	Description
Universal Screener	Identify students who may need additional support or further evaluation.	Administered multiple times per year to measure foundational skills and predict difficulties. The results also determine whether diagnostic assessments are required.
Diagnostic	Provide information about specific strengths and areas of need to guide instruction.	Administered as needed for deeper analysis, including for students below the 25th percentile on screeners in 5K–3 or upon teacher or parent request.
Progress Monitoring	Monitor how well students respond to instruction.	Administered weekly or biweekly using brief measures of targeted literacy skills. Results should be reviewed in context to adjust instruction and determine further support.
Formative	Provide ongoing insight into student understanding to guide daily instruction.	Embedded in instruction through observations, checklists, or notes. Provides immediate feedback to adjust teaching in real time and allows

Type	Purpose	Description
		multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning.
Interim/Benchmark	Check progress toward grade-level expectations.	Administered periodically to measure student progress toward grade level standards and inform mid-year adjustments.
Summative	Evaluate student learning for accountability and planning.	Administered at the end of a unit, quarter, semester, or school year, often through standardized tests. Provides cumulative snapshots for program evaluation and long-term planning.

Assessment Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Culturally and linguistically affirming assessments value students' languages, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds, helping educators build on what students know and prevent inequities. From 2012 to 2022, the number of multilingual learners receiving special education increased by 30 percent, placing them at greater risk for restrictive placements, dropping out, or not graduating (Office of Special Education Programs, 2022).

Within Wisconsin's Multi-Level Systems of Supports (WiMLSS), assessments must be valid and responsive for students from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including those who use African American English (AAE), also referred to as Black Language (BL), and multilingual learners. While the WiMLSS does not identify specific assessments, it emphasizes culturally competent data practices and collaborative problem-solving processes that ensure equitable interpretation and use of data. Teams are expected to use aggregated and disaggregated data to identify inequities, apply culturally responsive decision-making, and focus on improving adult practices rather than attributing disparities to students or families. To achieve these goals, educators can:

Affirm Linguistic Systems as Strengths. Speakers of AAE/BL draw on a rule-governed system with its own phonology, syntax, semantics, and rhetorical traditions (Baugh, 1999; Rickford, 2016; Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). Their cross-language knowledge supports and enriches literacy learning. When misinterpreted as "incorrect," however, students' strengths are overlooked, and

harmful patterns of Anti-Black Linguistic Racism are perpetuated (Baker-Bell, 2020). Similarly, multilingual learners use knowledge across languages that strengthen literacy development (Beneke et al., 2024; Love, 2019). Recognizing and supporting home language use is critical; research shows that literacy developed in the home language transfers to English, while the loss of a home language undermines identity, long-term literacy, and school persistence (NCEL, 2022).

Gather Multiple Sources of Evidence. No single assessment can fully capture a student's literacy profile. Most literacy tools are normed on monolingual English speakers, which can obscure the strengths of students who use different linguistic systems (Butvilofsky et al., 2021; Sanfilippo et al., 2020). For multilingual learners, assessment results may reflect a combination of content knowledge and language proficiency, leading to incomplete or inaccurate profiles if assessments are not designed and interpreted with care (Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing, NCTE/IRA, 2009). Educators should consider English language proficiency data, home language literacy, and the quality of instruction received in addition to literacy assessment results. Drawing on multiple measures over time leads to a more accurate understanding of student growth and supports WiMLSS commitment to equitable, data-informed decision-making.

Use Collaborative Expertise to Interpret Data. Accurate understanding of literacy and language data for multilingual learners requires specialized knowledge in language acquisition. Collaborative assessment teams that include bilingual/multilingual teachers, cultural liaisons, special education teachers, and speech-language pathologists working alongside reading teachers and/or reading specialists and classroom teachers, can better distinguish between language differences and reading challenges. This ensures assessments are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive, rather than narrowly focused on English-only skills that risk misidentification (Gersten et al., 2007; International Dyslexia Association, 2023; WI DPI, 2025e; NCEL, 2022).

Interpret Results Within Linguistic & Educational Contexts*:* While multilingual learners (MLs) participate in the same literacy assessments as all students, results must be interpreted within each student's linguistic and educational context. Many screening and diagnostic tools are normed on monolingual English speakers, which may underestimate or misrepresent MLs' skills (Butvilofsky et al., 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017; Sanfilippo et al., 2020). Caution must be taken when analyzing results to avoid inappropriate judgments of multilingual learners. Educators should take a team approach and consider the student's English language proficiency level, the language of literacy instruction, the length of time the student has been learning to read in English and in the home language, any family history of dyslexia, and comparisons to multilingual peers with similar linguistic and educational backgrounds (International Dyslexia Association, 2023). Reviewing progress across languages helps determine whether reading challenges reflect typical language development

or a possible reading-related disability. The *Phonemic Inventories and Cultural and Linguistic Information Across Languages* (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], n.d.). provides guidance for understanding how features of a student's home language may influence reading in English.

Partner with Parents/Caregivers. Connecting learning to students' home cultures creates more meaningful experiences for multilingual learners. Inviting families to share everyday literacy practices such as storytelling, songs, recipes, religious texts, and digital media engages them as partners in learning (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). When family knowledge is valued, reading assessment data can be understood within a richer context, allowing supports to build on each learner's strengths and identities (ASHA, 2022). The *ASHA Scope of Practice* (ASHA, 2022) emphasizes that effective assessment systems must be culturally and linguistically responsive, collaborative, and inclusive of families and caregivers to ensure accurate and ethical interpretation. These same principles apply to reading assessment systems, where communication with families should be clear, translated when needed, and include information about accommodations so results are not misinterpreted as deficits.

Assessment systems based solely around dominant English norms can overlook students' linguistic strengths. For example, a child who says *des* instead of *desk* may be using a recognized feature of African American English or Black Language (AAE/BL), not making a reading error (Macrae et al., 2022; Hendricks & Diehm, 2020). Accurate interpretation requires more than a single score. Effective systems draw on multiple measures over time, build on students' language strengths across languages, and include families' perspectives. When culturally and linguistically relevant assessment practices are used, the data better informs meaningful literacy instruction (ASHA, 2022; Escamilla et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2022). For additional guidance on evaluation of multilingual learners, see *Best Practices When Assessing English Learners* (WI DPI, 2022a).

Assessment Considerations for Students with Disabilities, Including Low-Incidence Disabilities

Reading assessment systems must address the needs of all students with disabilities, including those with low-incidence disabilities. This term refers to conditions that occur less frequently in the general population, such as autism, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hard of hearing, deafblindness, intellectual disability, and traumatic brain injury. Students with these disabilities may demonstrate literacy in ways that traditional assessments do not capture. Specific examples include:

- **Blind/Visually Impaired**: braille versions of assessments, refreshable braille displays, large print, magnification tools, or screen readers.
- **Deaf/Hard of Hearing:** visual phonics, cued speech, sign language, fingerspelling, or tactile sign for students who are deafblind.

- **Motor Differences:** adapted seating/positioning, switch access technology, eye-gaze tools, or adapted books.
- **Complex Communication Needs:** communication devices programmed with literacy tasks, picture symbols, tactile graphics, or alternate choice-making cards.
- **Students who Stutter**: alternative to timed oral reading fluency assessments to avoid unfair penalization.
- **Students with Apraxia of Speech:** assessments that do not rely solely on oral production, recognizing that 50–75% of children with apraxia struggle with reading.

When standard assessments are not accessible, educators should work with specialists to select or adapt tools that provide meaningful information about each student's literacy strengths and needs (Johnston & Scanlon, 2021; Miciak & Fletcher, 2020). Accommodations must be documented in the IEP and explicitly taught to students. The WI DPI cautions that some accommodations (e.g., extended time on an oral reading fluency assessment) provide valuable information but invalidate normative comparisons (WI DPI, 2025d).

Inclusive assessment means that all students, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, are part of state and local testing systems. Most participate in general assessments, while a small number use alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) (NCEO, 2020). Assessment results for students with disabilities are most helpful when gathered through multiple sources, interpreted collaboratively, and used to guide instruction that builds on each learner's communication mode, sensory access, and strengths. For further information, see *Administering Literacy Assessments for Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities and Complex Communication Needs* (WI DPI, 2025d).

Universal Reading Screeners

A universal screener is a brief assessment administered to all students multiple times per year to identify those who may need additional reading support or further evaluation. Screeners measure foundational literacy skills that predict future reading success and help educators monitor growth, guide instruction, and determine whether a diagnostic reading assessment or Personal Reading Plan (PRP) is needed. Although screeners do not diagnose dyslexia and related conditions, they serve as early identification tools that inform prevention and intervention efforts. In Wisconsin, universal screening is required three times per year for students in 5K–grade 3 and twice per year in 4K (Wis. Stat. § 118.016, 2023). Continued screening beyond grade 3 can help monitor ongoing literacy development. Tools that better predict reading difficulties in older students, such as Set for Variability, should be considered. Remember, a single test score should

never be used alone to determine eligibility for interventions or special education services.

Considerations for Multilingual Learners

Statewide 4K–3 screening also applies to multilingual learners (See *Appendix P: Screening Multilingual Students for Dyslexia and Related Conditions*). Act 20 does not specify the screener to be in English. When students receive literacy instruction in another language, screening in that language may be appropriate if an approved assessment is available. Currently, screeners are approved in English and Spanish. Districts serving Spanish-speaking students should establish a clear and consistent process for determining whether to administer the screener in English, Spanish, or both, ensuring alignment with instructional goals and district policy. When screening occurs in more than one language, districts should decide in advance which score will be used to determine PRP eligibility and review data from both languages to guide instruction. This approach supports valid, reliable, and equitable assessment practices. More information is available at https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads/english-learners.

Considerations for Students with Disabilities

For students with disabilities, individualized access to screening tools is essential. Act 20 requires all students in 4K through grade 3, including those with IEPs, to participate in the statewide early literacy screening. When the standard screener is not accessible, alternate formats such as braille, large print, tactile symbols, AAC-compatible tools, or other adapted materials must be used to ensure valid results (WI DPI, 2025d). In rare cases, an IEP team may determine that a student's disability prevents valid screening. In these instances, the team may proceed directly to diagnostic assessment, document the decision in the IEP, and use diagnostic data to guide instruction and develop a Personal Reading Plan (PRP). Additional information is available at dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads/act-20-students-ieps, and Table 4 summarizes the statewide screening schedule, assessed skills, and timing expectations for students in 4K through grade 3.

Table 4

Screening Schedule and Requirements

Grade	Frequency	Skills Measured	Timing Requirements
4K	2 x per year	Phonemic awareness & letter-sound knowledge	Complete the first screening within the first 45 days of the school year. Complete the second screening at least 45 days before the school year ends.

Grade	Frequency	Skills Measured	Timing Requirements
5K-3	3 x per year	Phonemic awareness, decoding, alphabet knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, & oral vocabulary	Complete the first screening within the first 45 days. Complete the mid-year screening at the midpoint of the school year. Complete the end-of-year screening at least 45 days before the school year ends.

Diagnostic Reading Assessments

Diagnostic assessments are used when a student shows persistent reading difficulties and needs a more detailed analysis to guide instruction. These tools examine specific components of literacy and provide in-depth information about a student's reading strengths and areas of need. Educators should use professional judgment and multiple data sources, including a student's learning history, quality of instruction, and access to licensed educators, to interpret results accurately (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Johnston & Scanlon, 2021; Miciak & Fletcher, 2020). Under Wisconsin Act 20 (2023) (Wis. Stat. § 118.016), diagnostic reading assessments are required for students in 5K through grade 3 who score below the 25th percentile on the statewide universal screener or when a teacher or parent requests an evaluation. Each tool must meet Act 20 technical criteria, including a sensitivity rate of at least 70 percent, a specificity rate of at least 80 percent, and a growth measure. Assessments must measure the following areas: alphabet knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, decoding, oral vocabulary, rapid naming, word recognition, spelling, listening comprehension, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Table 5 lists the required timelines for diagnostic reading assessments administered to students in 5K through grade 3.

Table 5

Timing Requirements for Diagnostic Reading Assessments, 5K – 3rd

Timing Requirements	Deadlines
Following fall screener	By the second Friday in November
Following mid-year or spring screener	Within 10 days

Timing Requirements	Deadlines
After a written request from a teacher or parent/caregiver	Within 20 days

Considerations for Multilingual Learners

Diagnostic reading assessments for multilingual learners should reflect literacy development across languages. Act 20 allows assessment in the language of instruction when valid tools are available. Evaluations should consider language proficiency, instructional history, and how skills in one language can support another (Herrera et al., 2022; National Center for English Learning [NCEL], 2022). Reviewing results alongside English language proficiency data helps distinguish reading difficulties from typical language development. Collaboration among educators, language specialists, and families ensures culturally responsive interpretation and that instructional supports and Personal Reading Plans (PRPs) build on students' language strengths (Beneke et al., 2024b; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WI DPI], 2022a). More information is available at https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads/english-learners

Considerations for Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

Students with IEPs participate in the statewide diagnostic reading assessments if they score below the 25th percentile on the universal screener or if a teacher or parent/caregiver requests it (Wis. Stat. § 118.016, 2023). Diagnostic assessments must meet Act 20 criteria for sensitivity, specificity, and growth measurement and should provide accurate, actionable information about a student's reading strengths and needs. When standard tools are not accessible, IEP teams must identify valid alternatives, such as braille, AAC-compatible, tactile, or signed assessments, to ensure equitable access and meaningful results. Progress monitoring tools should be selected with similar care, maintaining weekly, systematic data collection that meets Act 20 expectations. Collaboration among educators, families, and specialists supports accurate interpretation and alignment of PRP with each learner's disability-related needs (WI DPI, 2024). More information is available at https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads/act-20-students-ieps.

Extending Diagnostic Assessments Beyond Act 20

Although Act 20 identifies specific areas to be measured within the diagnostic assessment process, a comprehensive diagnostic assessment also examines both foundational word reading skills and the flexible thinking students use to connect decoding with meaning. This broader approach applies to students at all grade levels, including those beyond third grade.

One essential aspect of this flexibility is *Set for Variability*, which refers to a student's ability to self-correct a mispronounced word by trying out alternative

pronunciations and determining whether one of those attempts matches a known word in spoken language and fits the sentence meaning (Barnes et al., 2025; Savage et al., 2025). For example, when a student reads *pint* so that it rhymes with *mint* and realizes that pronunciation does not make sense, the student may shift the sounds and recognize the word correctly. As Venezky (1999) explained, "the child has to change one or more sound associations and try again" (p. 232).

Research shows that this skill draws on both sound knowledge and word meaning and plays an important role in learning to read. In other words, students use what they know about how words sound and what they mean to adjust their decoding when something they read does not make sense. Kearns et al. (2016) observed that when students who could adjust a mispronounced word by using what they know about sounds and meanings, performed better on other reading tasks. Building on this, Dyson et al. (2017) found that teaching students to notice and correct mispronunciations of irregular words and understand their meanings improved word reading and these gains transfer to new words. Similarly, Steacy et al. (2019) showed that students who successfully corrected a mispronounced word had a 79 percent chance of reading that same irregular word correctly, while students at risk for reading difficulties were less likely to do so. In a later study, Steacy et al. (2023) identified that Set for Variability explained much more of students' reading performance than phonological awareness alone, highlighting its unique contribution beyond sound-based measures. In addition, Savage et al. (2024) highlighted that students with stronger flexibility in correcting mispronunciations made greater progress in reading intervention. These studies show that assessing Set for Variability alongside phonics-based measures gives teachers a fuller picture of how students read and where they may need support (Barnes et al., 2025; Dyson et al., 2017; Kearns et al., 2016; Steacy et al., 2019, 2023).

Parent/Caregiver Communication and Support

Strong partnerships between educators and families are essential for meaningful literacy assessment. Effective systems provide clear, timely communication that highlights student strengths and areas for growth. Information should be shared in plain, accessible language and, when possible, in the family's preferred language. Family input helps educators interpret results and plan relevant instruction. Partnering with families of multilingual learners supports accurate understanding of a students' bilingual development. *Appendix Q: Questions to Guide Conversations About Reading Assessments* offers prompts to support dialogue and strengthen literacy outcomes.

Family Communication Requirements in Wisconsin

Under Wis. Stat. §118.016(4), schools must provide families of 4K–3 students with written screening and diagnostic results that include:

- Include the students' overall score and skill-specific results.

- Report the student's percentile rank (if available).
- Describe the skills measured in plain language.
- Explain what at-risk means and how cut-off scores are used.
- Provide guidance on how results inform instruction and how families can help.
- Under Act 20, if a diagnostic assessment shows a student is at risk, schools must also:
- Provide information on how to make a special education referral under 115.777.
- Describe common characteristics of dyslexia.
- Explain appropriate interventions and accommodations.
- Districts and independent charter schools serving 4K–3 students follow the Act 20 timelines in Table 6. Optional family letter templates are available on WI Reads Resources.

Table 6

Family Communication Requirements, 4K-3rd Grade

Communication Type	Deadline
Screening Results	Within 15 days of scoring
Diagnostic Assessment Results	Within 10 days of scoring
Dyslexia & Related Conditions Information	With diagnostic assessment results or request
Guidance on Special Education Referral	When indicated by diagnostic assessment results, when concerns arise, or upon request

Evaluations, Interventions, and Special Education Criteria

Reading interventions do not require a diagnosis of dyslexia and related conditions. Outside evaluations can be shared with schools and used as one source of data to inform instruction, but a private diagnosis does not guarantee special education eligibility. For special education services, the district must complete its own evaluation. An IEP team determines eligibility based on two factors: 1.) The student meets eligibility criteria under a recognized disability category such as specific learning disability or other health impairment. 2.) The

student requires specially designed instruction. According to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) permits the use of terms such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia in evaluations and IEPs. However, eligibility must still be based on a district-conducted evaluation that meets state and federal requirements. Because identification practices vary across evaluators and contexts (Sadusky et al., 2022), consistent, research-based assessment systems are critical. Such systems should integrate quantitative data, culturally responsive practices, and professional judgment to promote equitable and accurate identification and support.

Conclusion

As described in this chapter, assessment systems must be valid, reliable, and designed to gather multiple sources of information about students' strengths and needs. They must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability-affirming so that differences are recognized as part of the diverse ways children learn, rather than as deficits. Because reading differences are complex, no single test or label can fully capture a student's learning profile. Instead, assessments are most powerful when they are interpreted within a broader process that combines professional judgement, collaboration with families, and ongoing instructional planning. When used in this way, assessments not only identify areas for support, including characteristics of dyslexia and related conditions, but also validate student identities, strengthen partnerships with families, and inform responsive teaching. The next chapter focuses on how assessment results inform instructional planning and intervention to support every reader's growth.

Instruction and Intervention Services in Schools

Chapter 5 focuses on teaching strategies and interventions to support students with dyslexia and related conditions, as required by Wisconsin Act 86. Effective instruction builds on what students know, their values, identities, and experiences (Pearson, 2007; Gabriel & López, 2024). This chapter defines key instructional vocabulary, summarizes Wisconsin statutory requirements, and explains how instructional frameworks support literacy learning. Chapter 5 also outlines twelve evidence-based practices that integrate research, professional expertise, and local contexts to improve literacy outcomes for students with dyslexia and related conditions.

Chapter 5 Vocabulary

The following terms have been defined for understanding the content in Chapter 5:

Differentiation: Refers to intentionally adapting instruction to meet learners' varied backgrounds, languages, and interests through changes in content, process, product, or environment (Hall et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2014).

Executive Functioning in Reading: Refers to the set of mental skills that help students stay focused, remember what they read, and adjust their strategies to make meaning from text (Cartwright, 2019).

Explicit Instruction: Refers to one instructional approach to support learning. Educators lead students toward independence by explaining why the skill/strategy/concept matters and how to apply learning through guided practice and feedback (Scanlon et al., 2024; WI DPI, 2020a).

Intervention: Refers to the systematic use of a technique, practice, or program designed to improve literacy learning (WI DPI, 2023).

Multi-Level Systems of Supports: Refers to a coordinated system that provides different levels of support, including universal instruction and interventions, enrichment, collaboration, and progress monitoring, based on how students respond to instruction.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Refers to developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions (WI DPI, n.d.-i ; Greenberg, 2023).

Systematic Instruction: Refers to intentional teaching of skills/strategies/concepts aligned to grade level standards (WI DPI, 2020a).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Refers to an approach that anticipates and values learner differences through intentional planning and collaboration to ensure access to grade-level learning for all students (WI DPI, 2020c).

Universal Instruction: Refers to the core classroom literacy designed to meet the needs of all students (WI DPI, 2020a).

Wisconsin Statutes: Instruction & Intervention Services in Schools

This section summarizes Wisconsin laws outlining requirements for instruction, intervention, resources, and services for students with dyslexia and related conditions.

2019 Wisconsin Act 86

Under 2019 Wisconsin Act 86 (Wis. Stat. § 115.28[56][b]), the WI DPI must ensure that the *Wisconsin Guidebook for Dyslexia and Related Conditions* includes instructional strategies, interventions, and resources, and be linked on each school district's website.

2023 Wisconsin Act 20

2023 Wisconsin Act 20 (Wis. Stat. § 118.015) establishes requirements for K-3 instruction and intervention in public school districts and independent charter schools:

- ***Training for Teachers & Administrators*** Schools must ensure that educators and administrators receive science-based early reading training. See the Wisconsin Reads webpage for specific requirements.
- ***Instruction & Intervention*** Schools must provide systematic and explicit instruction in comprehension, writing, phonics, phonological and phonemic awareness, fluency, background knowledge, oral language development, and vocabulary (Wis. Stat. § 118.015).
- ***Personal Reading Plans*** Schools must identify students experiencing reading challenges and provide appropriate interventions and supports through a Personal Reading Plan (Wis. Stat. § 118.015). See the Wisconsin Reads webpage for specific requirements and resources.

2015 Act 55 English Language Arts Standards

Wis. Stat. §§ 118.30(1g)(a) and 120.12(13)(b) require school districts to adopt English Language Arts standards and notify families of these standards at the first school board meeting of each school year.

Educator Licensing

Educator licensing requirements are established in Wis. Stat. § 118.19(12) and Wis. Admin. Code PI 34, as outlined on the *DPI Teacher Education, Professional Development, and Licensing* webpage. Additional guidance is available on *DPI's Reading Assignments and Licensure* page, in *Guidance for Providing Interventions*, and in Wis. Stat. § 118.015, which details the *District Reading Specialist Requirement*.

Under PI 34.022, each district must employ a licensed District Reading Specialist (License #5017) to coordinate, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive K–12 reading program, as described in *Appendix R: Licensing for Reading Professionals* and The Role of the Wisconsin District Reading Specialist (Wis. Stat. §§ 118.19[12], 118.015[2–3]; Wis. Admin. Code PI 34.022[6]; WI DPI, 2025c). A Reading Teacher (License #1316) is required for educators who provide direct literacy instruction.

Universal Instruction

Universal instruction refers to standards-based, grade-level teaching provided to all students as part of the district's core curriculum. For students with dyslexia and related conditions, strong universal instruction integrates responsive evidence-based literacy practices, differentiation, and authentic reading and writing experiences aligned to district standards. Effective literacy instruction weaves together foundational skills, academic language, background knowledge, writing, motivation, and relevance to students' cultural and personal assets (Tierney & Pearson, 2024). Barriers to learning can be reduced through differentiation, where teachers adapt content, process, product, or the environment (Hall et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2014).

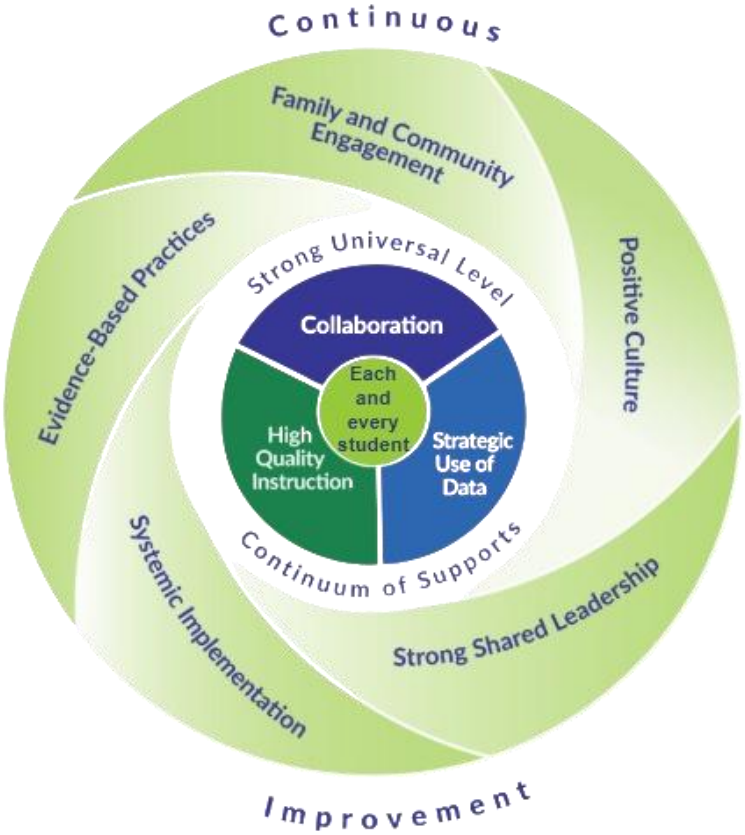
To ensure all learners, including those with dyslexia and related conditions have access to meaningful high-quality instruction, Wisconsin schools draw on three interrelated frameworks: *Wisconsin Multi-Level Systems of Support (WiMLSS)*, *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)*, and *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*. Collectively, these frameworks provide the structure and flexibility needed to support every learner's success.

Multi-Level Systems of Support (WiMLSS)

For Wisconsin schools and districts, implementing a multi-level systems of supports means providing services, practices, and resources for each and every learner based upon responsiveness to effective instruction and intervention. In this system, high quality instruction, strategic use of data, and collaboration interact within a continuum of supports, starting with a strong universal level, to ensure learner success. Figure 4 illustrates WiMLSS.

Figure 4

Wisconsin's Framework for Multi-Level Systems of Support



Schools provide varying types of supports at differing levels of intensity to proactively and responsively adjust to the needs of the whole child.

Supports may include classroom interventions, personalized instruction, and Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) for students who qualify for special education. For information related to students requiring more intensive levels of support through special education or Section 504 see *Appendix C: Special Education, Section 504, and Dyslexia and Related Conditions*.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Together with WiMLSS, complementary frameworks such as UDL and SEL help educators design inclusive and equitable learning environments that address both the academic and social-emotional aspects of literacy learning. UDL promotes proactive planning that anticipates learner variability and removes barriers through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (WI DPI, 2020c). By designing flexible learning experiences from the onset, educators ensure that all students, including those with dyslexia and related conditions, can

access, participate in, and make progress in literacy learning. For more information, visit https://dpi.wi.gov/universal-design-learning

SEL focuses on developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions that contribute to academic success (Greenberg, 2023). This framework is important because research shows that SEL positively impacts reading outcomes (Corcoran et al., 2018). For more on Wisconsin's SEL framework and resources, visit https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/social-emotional-learn

Meeting the Needs of Multilingual Learners (MLs)

Within these same frameworks, multilingual learners (MLs) benefit from explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills and opportunities to develop oral and academic language in English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). Oral narrative skills in both English and the home language contribute to reading outcomes, and maintaining home language proficiency supports English literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006). Effective instruction draws on students' home languages, lived experiences, and literacies (WIDA, 2024; Huang et al., 2020) and integrates the *WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework* (WIDA, 2020). Instruction for MLs should include strategies such as visuals, modeling, and vocabulary scaffolds to make grade-level content accessible while developing English language skills (Brown et al., 2024). When MLs' language needs are intentionally addressed within universal instruction and intervention, students are better supported to become successful readers and writers (Klinger et al., 2008). Partnering with families further strengthens self-efficacy, literacy learning, and engagement across languages and settings.

Specially Designed Instruction for Students with IEPs

Specifically Designed Instruction (SDI) is a type of intensive intervention provided within an equitable MLSS to every student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to meet the student's individualized disability needs. The instructional methodology and/or program to be used with is within the district's discretion to determine based on the following requirements:

- Must enable a student to advance appropriately toward the annual goals in their IEP, be involved and make progress in the general curriculum, participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities, and be educated and participate alongside nondisabled peers;
- Must be based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable; and
- Is provided by appropriately licensed staff, such as a special education teacher or a reading teacher (in the case of SDI for reading).

For more information about requirements as related to SDI, visit https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/specially-designed-instruction. Additional guidance on

supporting K–3 students with IEPs under Act 20 is available at https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads/act-20-students-ieps.

Guiding Questions for Educators and Educational Systems to Consider

When aligned, WiMLSS , UDL, and SEL provide a cohesive framework for designing responsive literacy systems. To ensure these frameworks are implemented effectively, educators and educational leaders can use reflective questions like those in Table 8 to guide decision-making, strengthen collaboration, and align instruction and intervention across settings.

Table 8

Guiding Questions for Continuous Improvement in Literacy Practices

Individual Reflection (Educator Lens)	System Reflection (School/District Lens)
What professional learning, coaching, or mentoring opportunities does my district to support my expertise in teaching reading and writing? Are there opportunities to learn from my peers by watching a lesson? **When and how often do I collaborate within and across grade levels to ensure all students grow as readers/writers?** **Which formative assessments give me relevant information about students? How do I use this information to inform my instruction and create individualized reading plans?** **What have I learned from students and their families about the best ways to support their interests, strengths, needs, and preferred learning methods?** **How do I engage students and families in classroom decisions?**	Do the teachers have scheduled time for grade-level and vertical collaboration to review data and plan reading and writing instruction? When and how often does the district offer professional learning to deepen teachers' expertise in reading instruction? Are coaching, pee mentoring, and peer observation part of our professional learning system? Are formative assessments part of our strategic assessment system and are they used by teachers to make instructional decisions? Are we advocating for teachers to continue their learning through higher education courses, conferences, webinars, and/or book studies? What systems have we developed to support authentic family partnerships?

Evidence-Based Literacy Practices

Reflection leads to informed action. By using data, research, and professional expertise to identify and implement evidence-based practices, educators strengthen literacy instruction (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016; ILA, n.d.; WI DPI, 2020a). This section outlines twelve evidence-based literacy practices and highlights teacher actions, including critical principles for instruction, specific considerations for students with dyslexia and related conditions, and resources to support implementation.

Practice #1: Ensure for Educator Expertise

Educator expertise is a critical factor in improving literacy outcomes for all learners, including students with dyslexia and related conditions. Research consistently shows that the quality of teaching, rather than any single program, has the greatest impact on student achievement (Duke et al., 2018; Konstantopoulos & Sun, 2012; Nye et al., 2004; Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005). Effective teachers integrate knowledge of literacy, language, and assessment to design data-based responsive instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2012; International Literacy Association, 2016). Exemplary teachers intentionally combine explicit skill instruction with meaningful, higher-order literacy experiences that promote engagement and confidence across all grade levels (Duke et al., 2018). Within a Multi-Level Systems of Support (MLSS), educator expertise grows through ongoing collaboration among teachers, specialists, and families to ensure instruction remains evidence-based and inclusive, to meet student needs (Wilmot et al., 2022).

Wisconsin's approved educator preparation programs develop the essential knowledge and skills educators need to support meaningful evidence-based literacy instruction. Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) extend this learning through local professional development. Educators can also access ongoing opportunities for collaboration and professional learning through statewide organizations connected to literacy, such as the following:

- The Greater Madison Writing Project & The UW-Milwaukee Writing Project
- Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted
- Wisconsin Bilingual Association
- Wisconsin Branch of International Dyslexia Association
- Wisconsin Chapter of the Reading League
- Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
- Wisconsin Library Association
- Wisconsin School Psychologists Association

- Wisconsin State Reading Association
- Wisconsin Title 1 Association

At the national level, educators may be interested in organizations including the American Educational Research Association, International Dyslexia Association, International Literacy Association, Literacy Research Association, National Association for Bilingual Education, and National Council of Teachers of English.

Critical Principles for Ensuring Educator Expertise

- Meet Wisconsin licensure requirements by completing an approved preparation program.
- Engage in ongoing professional learning, coaching, and mentoring to strengthen expertise in teaching and assessing literacy.
- Collaborate within and across grade levels to align instruction, promote coherence, and ensure all students grow as readers and writers (Wilmot et al., 2022).
- Learn from students and families to build on their interests, strengths, and preferred ways of learning.
- Engage in continued learning (e.g., advanced coursework, professional book studies, professional conferences).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who:

- Ensure literacy instruction is provided/supported by a licensed reading teacher or specialist.
- Engage in ongoing professional learning related to supporting literacy development.
- Coordinate instruction and interventions with other licensed specialists, families, and support staff to ensure consistency and progress.
- Participate in mentoring, coaching, and professional learning communities to strengthen teaching practices.

Resources to Support Educator Expertise

- Appendix R: Licensing for Reading Professionals
- BadgerLink: Wisconsin's Online Library
- Engaging with Families (WI DPI, n.d.-a)
- Professional Learning Communities Facilitator's Guide for Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School (Dimino et al., 2015)
- Rightful Presence Implementation Guide (National Center on Inclusion Toward Rightful Presence, SWIFT Education Center, 2024)
- WIDA (University of Wisconsin–Madison, n.d.)

- Instructional Practices Guides for Equitable Teaching & Learning in English Language Arts (WI DPI, 2020a)

Practice #2: Use Culturally & Linguistically Sustaining Literacy Practices

Culturally and linguistically sustaining literacy practices are evidence-based approaches that affirm and extend students' cultural and linguistic identities as vital resources for learning (f SWIFT Education Center, 2025; WI DPI, 2020a). When instruction is grounded in these asset-based approaches, students experience belonging, identity affirmation, and equitable access to meaningful literacy learning (Dunham & Oti, 2025; Gabriel & López, 2024; WI DPI, 2020a).

Critical Principles for Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Literacy Practices

- Combine explicit reading instruction with meaningful texts that reflect students' cultures, languages, and experiences (Dunham & Oti, 2025; Gabriel & López, 2024; Scanlon et al., 2024; Snow, 2002).
- Use students' home languages and cultural practices as strengths to build comprehension and vocabulary (Dunham & Oti, 2025; Gottardo et al., 2021; REL Pacific, 2023).
- Partner with families and communities as trusted partners and co-educators, incorporating their languages, stories, and literacy traditions to strengthen connections between home and school learning (Dunham & Oti, 2025; REL Pacific, 2023; Scanlon et al., 2024; WI DPI, 2020a)
- Encourage dialogue, writing, and reflection that explore identity, culture, and multiple perspectives (Gabriel & López, 2024; López, 2024).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Make explicit connections between students' home language(s) or dialect(s) and English print to strengthen sound-symbol and meaning connections (Dunham & Oti, 2025).
- Ensure access to culturally relevant texts in multiple formats, such as audiobooks, bilingual editions, or digital supports as needed for multilingual students to support vocabulary and comprehension (Dunham & Oti, 2025; Scanlon et al., 2024).
- Provide multiple ways for students to express understanding such as oral storytelling, art, or translanguaging (using more than one language to communicate) so they can share meaning when print tasks are challenging (Dunham & Oti, 2025).
- Offer affirming messages and texts that portray dyslexia and related conditions as natural aspects of human variation (Dunham & Oti, 2025).

Resources for Culturally & Linguistically Sustaining Literacy Practices

- *Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Multilingual Learners Using Culturally and Linguistically Aligned Practices* (Brown et al., 2024)
- *Literacy Instruction for ELLs* (Colorín Colorado, 2023)
- *IES Practice Guide: Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades* (Gersten et al., 2007)
- *What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy?* [Infographic] (Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2023)
- *What do Evidence-based Early Literacy & Culturally And Linguistically Sustaining Instruction Mean?* (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2024)
- *Expanding Reading Instruction with Multilingual Learners* (WIDA, 2025)
- *Translanguaging: Teaching at the Intersection of Language and Social Justice* (WIDA, 2020)
- *Equity: Wisconsin's Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practices* (WI DPI, 2017a)

Practice #3: Foster Motivation & Engagement in Literacy Learning

Motivation and engagement are reciprocal factors that are critical to reading development. As students develop in their literacies, so does the complexity of texts, demanding that teachers create engaging experiences and foster intrinsic motivation to support reading achievement (Afflerbach, 2022).

Critical Principles for Fostering Motivation & Engagement in Literacy Learning

- Create rich literacy environments with meaningful materials to engage all learners.
- Ensure classrooms include diverse texts and media that are accessible and organized.
- Model and promote the use of exemplary texts with rich language through read-alouds, book talks, peer discussions, and independent reading.

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Ensure access to a wide range of texts that students can and want to read independently.
- Select high-interest materials that connect to students' lives and identities.
- Encourage choice in reading and writing tasks to build ownership and motivation.
- Support engagement (as relevant) through multimodal materials (print, visual, and digital).
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in conversations about texts.

Resources for Motivation & Engagement in Literacy Learning

- *Motivating Adolescent Learners* (AdLit, n.d.)
- *Cooperative Children's Book Center* (School of Education, University of WI-Madison, n.d.)
- *Reading Interest Inventories* (Dyslexia Help, University of Michigan)
- *Teaching Books for Schools* (free through Badgerlink)

Practice #4: Deliver Systematic & Explicit Literacy Instruction

Systematic and explicit instruction are evidence-based practices that promote literacy development. Systematic instruction involves the intentional teaching of skills and concepts aligned to grade-level standards (WI DPI, 2020a). Explicit instruction represents one example of a structured instructional approach that supports learning. In this model, educators clearly explain and model a skill or strategy, guide students through practice with feedback toward independence (Scanlon et al., 2024; WI DPI, 2020a). When used alongside other evidence-based approaches such as interactive read-alouds, shared reading, and collaborative discussion, explicit instruction helps ensure students receive comprehensive and responsive literacy instruction.

Critical Principles for Systematic and Explicit Literacy Instruction

- Model, guide, and provide authentic practice in meaningful literacy tasks (Duke et al., 2018; International Literacy Association, 2016).
- Integrate frequent review and scaffold instruction toward independence.
- Use formative data to reteach and adjust instruction as needed.

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Model and think aloud using clear, consistent language. For example, say "This word is glove. If I say *gloave*, that doesn't fit. Let's try *gluv* –that makes sense" (Ehri, 2014; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021).
- Use data to differentiate instruction and provide feedback to support each student's learning progress (International Literacy Association, 2016).
- Offer frequent, scaffolded practice to build accuracy and independence.
- Group students purposefully and offer practice that reflects their language, culture, and accessibility needs (Scanlon et al., 2024).
- Use multisensory routines (e.g., sound boxes) as needed to help connect sounds and letters (Hawkins, 2004; Keesey, 2020; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021).

Resources for Systematic & Explicit Literacy Instruction

- IES Practice Guide: Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade & Professional Learning Facilitator Guide (Foorman et al., 2016)
- Evidence-Based Reading Programs (John Hopkins School of Education, n.d.)
- Instructional Planning Resources (WI DPI, n.d.-d)
- Productive Partnerships: Collaborating around Reading (WI DPI, n.d.-f)
- Professional Learning: Wisconsin's 2020 Standards for ELA (WI DPI, n.d.-g)
- Wisconsin Reads (WI DPI, n.d.-o)
- Wisconsin Statutory Requirements (WI DPI, n.d.-j)

Practice #5: Provide Integrated Word-Level Reading Instruction

Effective reading instruction connects word-level skills with comprehension (Clay, 2015; Odegard et al., 2025). When students understand how print, sound, and meaning work together, they can flexibly apply strategies to new and complex texts. Integrated word-level instruction supports decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Barnes et al., 2025; Birsh & Carreker, 2018l Moje, 2018). Moreover, executive functioning skills such as working memory can be taught to support word-learning. These skills help readers attend to letter and sound knowledge, apply phonics patterns, and read phonetically irregular words like *to*, *go*, and *no*.

Critical Principles for Systematic and Explicit Instruction

- Deliver explicit and systematic instruction that connects the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension across a range of texts (Barnes et al., 2025; REL Southeast, 2016).
- Ensure that word-level instruction supports comprehension by linking decoding and spelling to meaning, sentence structure, and text discussion (Moje, 2018; IES, 2023).
- Integrate opportunities for oral language and background knowledge development to strengthen vocabulary and understanding of complex texts (REL Northwest, 2023).
- Foster students' flexibility and set for variability by helping them adjust pronunciations and problem-solve unfamiliar words, building a strong sight vocabulary and confidence as readers (Barnes et al., 2025).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Link word-level instruction with purposeful reading and writing tasks that build connections between sounds, patterns, and meaning (Moje, 2018; REL Southeast, 2016).
- Teach phonological awareness, phonics, and decoding explicitly and systematically, with practice in connected text (REL Southeast, 2016; IES, 2023).
- Engage students in authentic reading and writing activities to build comprehension such as shared and interactive reading and writing (REL Southeast, 2016).
- Use ongoing progress monitoring to guide instruction and connect foundational skills to the understanding of increasingly complex text (Dombek et al., 2016).

Resources for Integrated Word-Level Reading Instruction

- Appendix G: Accurate and Fluent Word Recognition Difficulties
- Persohn, L. (Host). (2025, Jan. 14). *A conversation with Donna Scanlon (*Season 5, No. 6) [Audio podcast episode]. In Classroom Caffeine Podcast series. https://www.classroomcaffeine.com/guests.
- *Reading Foundational Skills* (WI DPI, n.d.-h)

Practice #6: Ensure Opportunities to Read & Write Connected Texts

Daily opportunities to read and write connected text (sentences and paragraphs that form meaningful stories or ideas rather than isolated or made-up words) help students apply foundational skills in authentic and purposeful ways. Reading a variety of texts, including predictable, decodable, and authentic literature, builds fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and confidence while promoting flexible word solving and a love of reading.

Critical Principles for Systematic and Explicit Instruction

- Provide daily opportunities to read and write meaningful, connected text that promote authentic word solving across languages and contexts (Pennell et al., 2024).
- Select texts that match students' strengths, needs, and interests to build stamina, accuracy, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
- Include diverse and culturally affirming texts available in multiple accessible formats such as dual-language or braille to ensure equitable participation for all learners.
- Integrate both teacher- and student-selected texts aligned with instructional goals to promote engagement and ownership in reading and writing.

- Maintain a balanced variety of text types including predictable, decodable, and authentic literature to support all aspects of reading (Pennell et al., 2024)

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Provide guided practice using foundational skills and vocabulary in meaningful texts to develop fluency and comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Perfetti, 1985).
- Guide students in choosing texts and monitoring their comprehension and engagement during independent reading and writing.
- Provide repeated, meaningful practice across varied text types to strengthen fluency, flexibility, and automatic word recognition(Share, 1995; Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

Resources for Reading and Writing Connected Texts

- *IES Practice Guide*: *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers* (Graham et al., 2018)
- *College, Career, and Community Writers Program* (Greater Madison Writing Project, n.d.)
- *Literacy Practices Bank* (WI DPI, n.d.-e)
- *Writing Rich Classrooms: Unit Plans* (WI DPI, n.d.-r)

Practice #7: Build Background Knowledge Through Content-Area Instruction

Building background knowledge through content-area instruction helps students make sense of new information and supports comprehension. Research shows that students make greater reading progress when they engage in knowledge-rich subjects like social studies than spending more time in isolated reading instruction (Tyner & Kabourek, 2021). Purposeful integration of reading, writing, and discussion within content areas allows students to connect ideas, strengthen vocabulary, and apply new understanding (Cervetti, 2020; Smith et al., 2021).

Critical Principles for Building Background Knowledge Through Content-Area Instruction

- Connect new content to students' experiences and background knowledge.
- Integrate reading, writing, and communication to build vocabulary and understanding.
- Provide explicit instruction in academic vocabulary.
- Differentiate using principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Use connected text sets (sentences and paragraphs that form meaningful messages).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Activate or develop background knowledge prior to reading to support comprehension.
- Select expository texts with cohesive text structures (Smith et al., 2021).
- Collaborate with the parents/caregivers, students, and other teachers to connect content learning with students' experiences, interests, and strengths.
- Offer extended time and structured opportunities to discuss and revisit content, supporting knowledge building over time.

Resources for Building Background Knowledge

- *IES Practice Guide: Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* (Baker et al., 2014)
- *Rethinking Text Sets to Support Knowledge Building and Interdisciplinary Learning* (Lupo et al., 2020)
- *Resources for Teachers* (Text Project, n.d.)
- *Unite Books Online Library* (Unite for Literacy, n.d.)
- *Linking Science, Math and Literacy: Multimodal Text Sets* (University of Missouri, 2025)
- *Wisconsin Academic Standards* (WI DPI, n.d.-m)
- *Teacher Resources* (Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies, n.d.)
- *Resources* (Wisconsin Society of Science Teachers, n.d.)
- *WISELearn Resources* (WI DPI, n.d.-q)

Practice #8: Facilitate Collaborative Text-Based Discussions

Collaborative discussions deepen comprehension by engaging students in constructing meaning together through dialogue. Effective discussions move beyond recalling facts to include interpretation, reasoning, and evaluation of ideas, strengthening both comprehension and engagement. Educators guide students to use textual evidence, connect new ideas to prior knowledge, and build shared understanding through purposeful facilitation (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013; Kintsch, 1998).

Critical Principles for Facilitating Collaborative Text-Based Discussions

- Establish and model clear norms and routines for inclusive participation so every student can engage confidently.
- Facilitate structured, text-based discussions that connect to students' background knowledge, experiences, and language resources (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013).

- Ask open-ended questions that prompt interpretation, explanation, and use of textual evidence to construct meaning.
- Model and encourage metacognitive talk (e.g., "I wonder…" "This reminds me of…") to connect ideas within and across texts, promote monitoring, and support inference-making (Kintsch, 1998).
- Incorporate visual supports (e.g., charts, Venn diagrams) to anchor ideas and help students link information across parts of a text (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Preview topics, discussion steps, and expectations with visuals.
- Frontload vocabulary and/or background knowledge needed to support comprehension.
- Provide and practice sentence stems (e.g., "this part makes me think…," I agree with…because…) to support participation and idea sharing.
- Offer think time, turn-and-talks, and/or multimodal responses (oral, written, visual).
- Model how to link ideas across sentences and paragraphs using graphic organizers or highlighted text features.
- Use assistive tools (e.g., highlighting), or small-group formats to support active engagement and comprehension, as supplemental, not to take the place of the child's reading.

Resources for Facilitating Text-Based Discussions

- Literature Studies & Social Emotional Learning (Reading Rockets, n.d.)
- Text Complexity (WI DPI, n.d.-l)
- Middle Grades Literature Study Resources (WI DPI, 2025a)

Practice #9: Support Literacy Through Executive Functioning

Strengthening executive functioning is an evidence-based practice that supports literacy development. Executive functioning skills, including attention, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, are closely connected to word reading and comprehension (Cartwright, 2019; Cartwright & Palian, 2024; Williams, 2022). Students use their working memory while reading to retrieve letter names and sounds, retain phonics patterns and word meanings and to maintain meaning while reading. They remain flexible when trying different sounds in words and ignore distracting information in texts or their environment (Barnes et al., 2025, Hawkins, 2004; Cartwright, 2019). When teachers explicitly teach and reinforce these skills, students become more focused, strategic, and self-regulated readers. Research demonstrates that classroom instruction and activities designed to build executive functions can improve reading and overall academic outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2022; Cartwright & Palian, 2024).

Critical Principles to Support Literacy Through Executive Functioning

- Provide opportunities that strengthen students' attention, self-control, and reflection through routines and supportive feedback (Conners, 2009; Potocki et al., 2017; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Williams, 2022).
- Model flexible thinking and metacognitive strategies such as stopping to ask, "Does this make sense?" to support comprehension (Cervetti, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Cartwright, 2023; Williams, 2022).
- Value bilingualism and cultural knowledge as assets that promote flexible thinking. Invite students to share how they solve problems or understand texts in different ways.

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Establish predictable routines and provide calm, encouraging reminders.
- Offer visual schedules, organizers, and checklists to help students plan and complete tasks. Integrate executive function skill-building into authentic reading and writing activities.
- Scaffold planning and organization by breaking multistep literacy tasks into smaller, clear steps with check-ins along the way (Cartwright, 2015; Williams, 2022).
- Guide students to revise interpretations, suppress distractions, and reflect on understanding by modeling how to recognize when meaning breaks down and adjust thinking.
- Incorporate reading and writing tasks that involve comparing ideas, reasoning about text meaning, and making decisions. Encourage students to explain their thinking and how they figured out their answers.

Resources for Supporting Executive Functioning Skills

- *Executive Functions and Literacy Skills in the Classroom* (Armstrong, 2023)
- *IES Practice Guide: Preparing Young Children for School* (Burchinal et al., 2022)
- *Executive Skills and Reading Comprehension: A Guide for Educators* (Cartwright, 2023)
- *Children with Executive Function Challenges* (Reading Rockets, n.d.)
- *The Importance of Executive Function Skills in Literacy Development* (Williams, 2022)

Practice #10: Differentiate Literacy Instruction

Differentiating literacy instruction means intentionally adapting teaching to meet the strengths and needs of all learners. Educators adjust the content, process, product, or environment to build on each student's strengths, experiences, and skills. This responsive approach, grounded in data and observation, ensures that every student can access instruction, engage meaningfully, and make progress

toward shared literacy goals (Hall et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2014; Dombek et al., 2016; Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2023).

Critical Principles for Differentiating Literacy Instruction

- Use multiple data sources, including assessments, observations, language proficiency and accessibility information, student and teacher interactions, and preferences or needs expressed by students to guide decisions (Dombek et al., 2016).
- Provide individualized feedback and scaffolds that align with students' communication modes (e.g., visual, tactile) and learning profiles (REL Southeast, 2023).
- Maintain high expectations with flexible paths to mastery (IES, 2023).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Adjust grouping and pacing to meet specific learning profiles (Dombek et al., 2016).
- Adapt curriculum, materials, and assessments to match student needs while maintaining grade-level goals (Hall et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2014).
- Offer individualized prompts aligned with each student's communication style.
- Provide additional modeling, practice, feedback, and opportunities to demonstrate learning.

Resources for Differentiated Literacy Instruction

- Supporting Students with Dyslexia: A Guide to Resources for High School and College Success (Harris, 2025)
- Appendix S: Assistive Technology for Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions
- Appendix T: Examples of Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Practice #11: Provide Meaningful Early Intervention Services

Early, focused support helps young children become confident readers and writers. Effective early intervention begins in the earliest stages of language and cognitive development and continues through the primary grades. It ensures that every student, including those with language or reading challenges, receives timely, individualized, and culturally responsive instruction that builds a strong foundation for literacy success (Regional Educational Laboratory [REL] Northwest, 2023; REL Southeast, 2023).

Critical Principles for Providing Meaningful Early Intervention Services

- Provide early, classroom-based intervention that is responsive to the whole child (REL Northwest, 2023; Ehri, 2014).

- Use multiple sources of data to guide instruction, monitor progress, and adjust intensity in collaboration with specialists and families (WI DPI, 2025e)
- Embed practice that connects word reading, language, and meaning (Hawkins, 2004; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Perfetti, 1985).
- Align intervention across school, program, and family contexts (REL Northwest, 2023).

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Provide early identification and developmental monitoring consistent with IDEA Part C services to address potential literacy and language delays (REL Northwest, 2023).
- Provide frequent individualized lessons (Share, 2008; Castles et al., 2018).
- Engage families as partners through regular communication, at-home literacy activities, and community resources that promote language and reading development from birth onward (REL Southeast, 2023).

Resources for Meaningful Early Literacy Intervention

- *National Center on Intensive Intervention (*American Institutes for Research, n.d.)
- *Self-study Guide for Implementing Early Literacy Interventions* (Dombek et al., 2016)
- *Developing Strong Foundational Literacy Skills in Children-It Takes All of Us!* (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2023)
- *What Works Clearinghouse* (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2025)
- *Programs and Practices for Supporting Early Cognitive, Language, and Literacy Development Among Children Ages 0–3* (Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, 2023)
- *IES Practice Guide: Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9* (Vaughn et al., 2022)
- *Literacy Practices Bank* (WI , n.d.)
- *Supporting Readers When They Struggle* (WI DPI, n.d.-k)

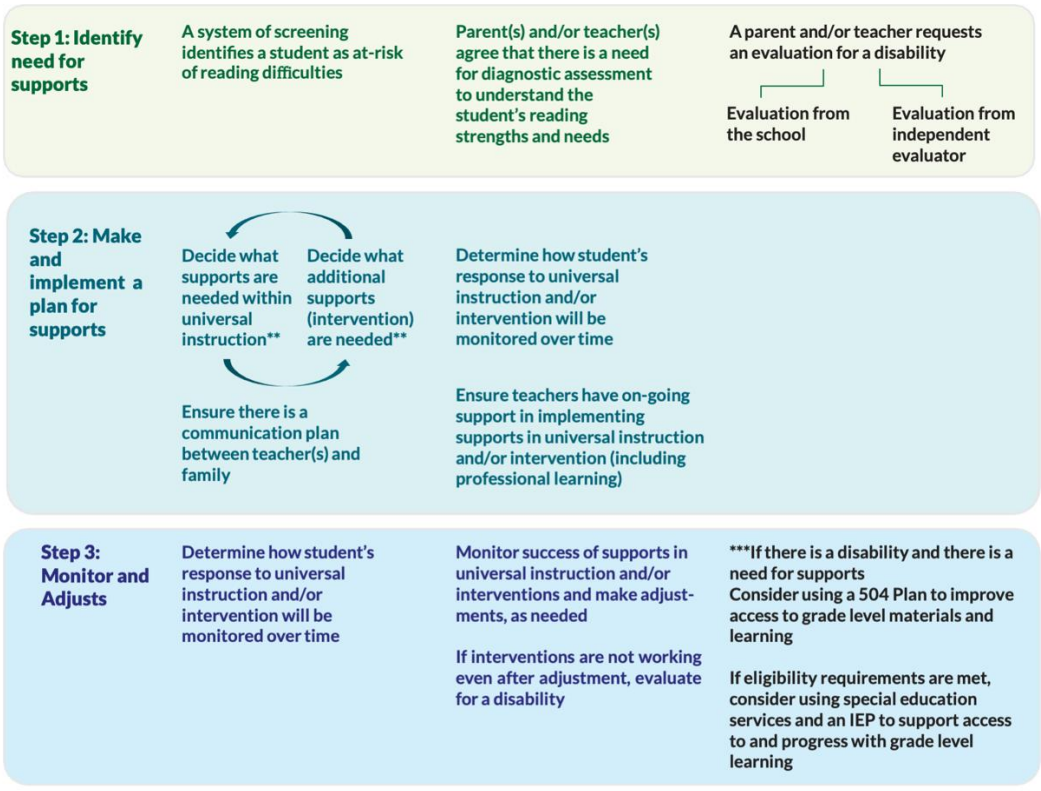
Practice # 12 Intensify Literacy Supports

Effective literacy instruction increases in intensity as students' needs become more complex. Within Multi-Level Systems of Supports, educators use assessment data and knowledge of each child's strengths, needs, and motivations to guide decisions about when and how to provide additional help beyond universal instruction. Instruction becomes most effective when educators and families work together using shared language, consistent strategies, and regular communication about progress. While word-level difficulties are common, students' literacy learning profiles are diverse and multifaceted (Brady, 2019).

Collaboration across settings ensures coherence and continuity of support. Figure 5 illustrates how these layers of support can work together to meet diverse student needs.

Figure 5

Steps and Supports Available Within a School Setting



Schools/districts design systems to meet local needs; therefore, the process outlined in the graphic may look slightly different school to school.

** Wis. Stat. 118.016 requires annual screening for reading readiness in 4K through grade 2. See Appendix B for further information*

***Unless parents and teachers agree not to intervene, Wis. Stat. 121.02 requires reading interventions (kindergarten to grade 4) for students who do meet benchmarks in the reading readiness assessment required by 118.016. These interventions could occur as part of universal instruction and/or intervention.*

**** Specific federal and state requirements exist for special education eligibility. For specific learning disability, interventions and progress monitoring must meet certain criteria. See PI 11.36(6) and Appendix B for more information.*

Parent(s) has a right to continue with and seek additional supports through community psychologists, tutors, speech pathologists, etc.

Critical Principles for Intensifying Literacy Supports

- Use ongoing assessment data to determine and monitor the type, frequency, and intensity of support needed.
- Provide explicit, systematic instruction in small-group or individual settings when appropriate (Connor et al., 2007, 2011).
- Ensure coherence by using shared language, consistent strategies, and coordinated planning across general, intervention, multilingual, and special education programming.
- Incorporate both code-focused and meaning-focused instruction to support word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Fletcher et al., 2019). Note: Instruction focused only on phonics, without fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension is inconsistent with the National Reading Panel (2000) and broader evidence.
- Partner with families to share progress, identify motivators, and bridge home and school literacies.

Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions May Need Teachers Who

- Coordinate support and instructional materials among teachers, specialists, and families using shared language and consistent routines.
- Provide additional support in reading, writing, and spelling with a highly qualified educator or specialist.
- Provide individualized instruction based on strengths and needs.
- Apply new skills and strategies while reading connected texts with teacher feedback (Connor et al., 2007, 2011).

Resources to Support Interventions

- National Center on Intensive Intervention (American Institutes for Research)
- Intervention Reports (Institute of Education Sciences)
- Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade (Kasanovich et al., 2016)
- IES Educator's Guide: Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9 (Vaugh et al., 2022)

Conclusion

Chapter 5 highlights how effective instruction and targeted interventions help students with dyslexia and related conditions succeed. Grounded in Wisconsin statutes and guided by WiMLSS, strong teaching combines explicit instruction, culturally responsive practices, and data-informed decision-making. When educators and families work together to build on student strengths, students grow as confident, capable readers and writers. The next chapter is written for families and provides tools and resources to support literacy at home and in partnership with schools.

Resources and Services for Students and Parents/Caregivers

Chapter 6 shares information about resources and services that support children with dyslexia and related conditions. These resources are available to students, families, and educators, as described in Wisconsin Act 86. The chapter is written for families and provides tools and ideas to support children's literacy development at home and through partnership with their schools. All resources included are informational and free of charge. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) does not endorse any specific websites, products, or technologies. School teams, including learners and families, make individualized, data-informed decisions about reading instruction and supports, as is supported by WI law. This chapter includes information about state laws and family resources, resources for learning about dyslexia and related conditions, ways to support literacy at home and school, ideas for promoting social and emotional wellbeing, and guidance for advocacy and decision-making.

WI Statutes: Family Resources & Services

Wisconsin laws, including 2019 Act 86 and 2023 Act 20, require that families receive clear information and support about reading instruction, assessment, and intervention for students with dyslexia and related conditions.

2019 Wisconsin Act 86 (Wis. Stat. §§ 115.28)

This guidebook required by 2019 WI Act 86 must be published to each Wisconsin school district or independent charter school's website. It is designed to help parents/caregivers:

- understand educational terms related to reading,
- learn how their child's reading needs are identified and supported,
- know what questions to ask and what information to request about their child's progress, and
- understand the instruction and/or interventions educators and educational systems use to support readers with dyslexia or related conditions (see Chapter 5).

2023 Wisconsin Act 20 (Wis. Stat. §§ 118.016)

Act 20 outlines how schools communicate with families of students in grades 4K-3 about reading assessments and interventions.

Table 9

Act 20 Requirements & What They Mean for Families

WI Act 20 Requirement	What Parents/Caregivers Can Expect
Early Literacy Remediation Plan	Districts must post an online plan describing early literacy assessments, interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia and related conditions, progress monitoring, parent communication, and promotion policies.
Assessment Notifications	Parents/caregivers receive screening results within 15 days and diagnostic results within 10 days, in an understandable format and home language when possible.
Family History Survey	Parents/caregivers of students who score below the 25th percentile on the reading screener are offered a short survey to share family literacy and language history.
Personal Reading Plan	Parents/caregivers of 5K-grade 3 students who score below the 25th percentile receive a copy of their child's PRP to sign and return, along with progress updates after every 10 weeks of intervention.

How can I Learn about Dyslexia and Related Conditions?

Under Wis. Stat. §115.28(56), dyslexia and related conditions is defined as a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition, spelling, and decoding, often due to weaknesses in the phonological component of language. This definition comes from the International Dyslexia Association (2002) and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Families do not need to focus on the exact term because what matters most is getting the right help. With the right instruction and support, children with dyslexia and related conditions can learn to read, spell, and write effectively and go on to succeed in school and in life. Partner with your child's teacher, reading teachers/specialists, and school staff to learn more. You can also talk with your child's doctor(s) and learn from state and national organizations.

Resources and Organizations to Learn More About Dyslexia & Related Conditions

- Center for Parent Information and Resources- Resources for families of children with disabilities.
- National Center on Improving Literacy -Resources on a variety of topics including dyslexia, beginning reading, interventions, screening, advocacy, and partnerships.
- Supporting Students with Dyslexia: Resources for High School & College Success (Speech Pathology, 2025) - Organizations, articles, books, and multimedia resources to support high school and college students with dyslexia.
- Wisconsin Branch of the International Dyslexia Association -Information and resources about dyslexia and related conditions.
- Wisconsin Chapter of The Reading League - Articles, websites, and podcasts about reading.
- Wisconsin State Reading Association – Articles, website resources, and podcasts to develop expertise in understanding literacy and literacy instruction.

How Can Literacy Be Supported at Home?

Families play a big role in helping children learn to read and write. The National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL, 2024) shares ways for families to understand their child's reading needs and support learning both at home and at school. The resources below include free books, videos, and tips to make reading fun and build confidence, and strengthen partnerships between families and teachers. Figure 6, *10 Ways to Support Your Child's Literacy Development*, shows easy ways families can help, such as reading together and talking about stories.

Figure 6

10 Ways to Support Your Child's Literacy Development (NCIL, 2024)



Resources to Support Literacy at Home

- How to Build a Home Library for Kids (Hales, 2022)- Article with ideas for setting a reading space for children from infancy through adolescence.
- Helping Your Child Become a Reader (Scanlon et al., 2024) - Printable booklet that answers parents' questions about reading development.
- Reading & Writing (PBS Kids for Parents) - Tips and ideas to inspire children to read and write.
- Reading - (Sesame Workshop) Resources, activities, and videos to help families to support language and literacy.
- Complete Books & Poems Collection (Teaching Books) - Books and poems that include characters who experience challenges with reading.
- Unite For Literacy Online Library (Unite for Literacy) - Free digital books in multiple languages.
- Family Resources to Support Literacy Development & Families & Students (WI DPI, n.d.-c) - Resources for supporting literacy development across all ages.

How Can Parents/ Caregivers Support Their Child with Dyslexia & Related Conditions?

- Families play an important role in helping children with dyslexia and related conditions grow as readers and feel confident in their abilities. Research shows that family and school support makes a big difference in a child's success (Nalavany et al., 2011). This support system can make a positive difference by:
- helping children to accept learning differences, focusing on strengths, and celebrating progress.
- learning about dyslexia and related conditions and recognizing that reading and writing may take more time helps set realistic expectations.
- creating a calm space for literacy activities.
- encouraging organization and time management and advocating for needed school supports.
- Most importantly, families can nurture a love of reading by encouraging their child to read for meaning and enjoyment.

Resources to Support Children with Dyslexia and Related Conditions

- *Supporting Your Child's Reading at Home* (Institute of Education Sciences)- Family activities and short videos with easy steps to build reading skills, connect sounds to letters, and read for understanding.

- *When Your Child Needs Extra Help* (Colorin colorado!)- Ideas to help families find support, work with schools, and understand reading and writing challenges.
- *Reading Buddies TV Show* (PBS) -Television programming to support early reading.
- *Promoting Early Literacy Through Diverse Read-Alouds* (WI DPI, 2025b) -Tips for selecting and adapting text used during shared read-alouds.
- *Supporting Literacy Learning at Home* (WI FACETS) - Interactive modules that help families support literacy at home and strengthen communication with teachers.

Are There Texts that Reflect My Child's Experiences?

Families often ask where they can find books that represent their child's learning journey. Three helpful Wisconsin-based resources include:

- *WISCAT Wisconsin Resource Sharing* (Wisconsin Public Libraries)
- *CCBC Booklists* (Cooperative Children's Book Center)
- *Resources for the Keyword Dyslexia* (Teaching Books)

It's important to provide students with many opportunities to read texts they enjoy and that help them learn about their interests. Students with dyslexia and related conditions can benefit from resources that share examples and characters they can relate to and that can help them become powerful self-advocates. Your local public library is a a great place to find books, use computers and the internet, and learn about community reading programs. Here are some examples:

Books for Children

- *Aaron Slater, Illustrator* (Beaty, 2021)
- *Dyslexia: Talking It Through* (Braithwaite, 2003)
- *Absolutely Almost* (Graff, 2014)
- *All Kinds of Minds: A Young Student's Book about Learning Abilities & Learning Disorders* (Levine, 1992)
- *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 2012)
- *Brilliant Bea: A Story for Kids with Dyslexia and Learning Differences* (Rudolph et al., 2021)
- *Dr. Dyslexia Dude* (Robinson & Robinson, 2019)
- *A Walk in the Words* (Talbott, 2021)
- *Hank Zipzer: The World's Greatest Underachiever series* (Winkler & Oliver, 2005)

Books for Middle Grades and Adolescents

- *Close to Famous* (Bauer, 2012)
- *My Name is Brain Brian* (Betancourt, 1994)
- *The Wild Book* (Engle, 2012)
- *Fish in a Tree* (Hunt, 2017)
- *Two-Minute Drill* (Lupica, 2007)
- *Welcome Back, Maple Mehta-Cohen* (McGovern, 2021)
- *Dr. Dyslexia Dude* (Robinson & Robinson, 2019)
- *Bluefish* (Schmatz, 2011)

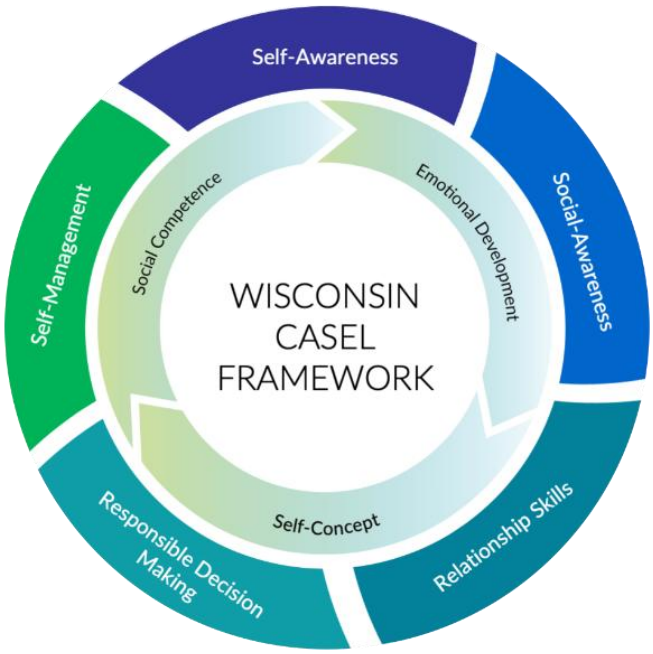
How Can Our Family and the School Support Our Child's Social & Emotional Wellbeing?

Children's social and emotional wellbeing is deeply connected to their reading and writing development. When families and schools work together to support children's social and emotional learning, students grow as readers, writers, and thinkers (Wilmot et al., 2022; Aspen Institute, 2018; UNESCO, 2023; Head Start, 2025). Parents/caregivers can strengthen literacy learning by:

- Creating regular routines for reading, writing, resting, and homework.
- Showing interest in what they enjoy reading, writing, and learning about.
- Visiting the library and enjoying books together to build a love of reading.
- Making reading fun at home and talking about stories you read together.
- Praising effort and celebrating progress in reading and writing.
- Encouraging your child to talk, draw, or write about how they are feeling.
- Sharing with teachers what helps your child feel motivated to read and write.

Figure 7

The Wisconsin CASEL Framework (WI DPI, 2018)



Social and emotional learning (SEL) helps children understand their feelings, build relationships, and set healthy goals. As shown in *Figure 7*, the Wisconsin CASEL Framework illustrates how families and schools can work together to help children recognize emotions, make friends, and act with kindness and responsibility (WI DPI, 2018).

Resources to Support Child Wellbeing

- Emotions and Wellbeing (PBS) - Tips to help children and families understand emotions, express feelings, and support positive mental health.
- Social Emotional Skills (Sesame Workshop) - Videos and activities to support healthy relationships, respecting differences, and building confidence.
- CASEL Fundamentals of SEL - Overview of social emotional learning.
- DPI Social and Emotional Learning for Students and For Parents, Guardians, & Families -Tools for students and parents/caregivers to support wellbeing.
- Eye to Eye- Mentoring program connecting middle and high school students with learning differences such as dyslexia and related conditions.
- Ingluded- Online community for older students and young adults with learning differences.

How Can We Support our Child's Executive Functioning?

Executive functioning skills are "mental skills we use to manage our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to achieve goals" (Cartwright, 2019). These skills include things like managing time, being organized, and attending to tasks. Executive functions also apply to the development of reading comprehension. Many public libraries have games families can play that may support executive functioning skills. Examples:

- Planning- Jenga, checkers or chess, tic-tac-toe
- Organization- 20 questions, Apples to Apples
- Flexible thinking- Word games like Bananagrams or strategy games
- Working memory- Memory, Go Fish
- Inhibition (self-control)- Simon Says or Taboo

Resources

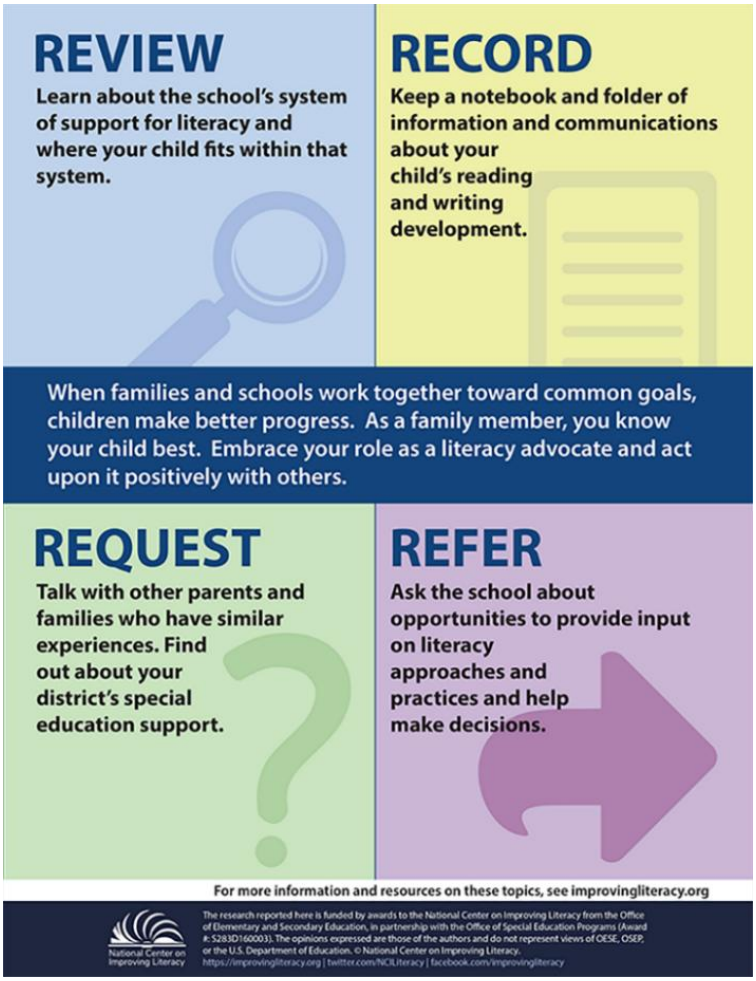
- *Activities Guide: Enhancing & Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence* (Harvard University) –Activities and games to support executive functioning.
- *Executive Function Milestones: Birth-Age 6* (Sesame Workshop) – How children develop executive functioning skills over time.
- *Executive Function Fact Sheet* (Reading Rockets, WETA) – Provides information and strategies to support executive functioning skills in children.

How Can I Advocate for My Child?

Parents and caregivers know their child best. Building a positive relationship with your child's school helps ensure that everyone works together to support your child's learning. You have the right to ask questions, request information about instruction and assessment, and seek additional services when needed. Figure 8, Advocating for Your Child (NCIL, n.d.), illustrates how families and schools can communicate, share information, and problem-solve together to strengthen support for students.

Figure 8

Advocating for Your Child (Christman, 2017)



What Questions Should I Ask?

Partnering with your child's school supports literacy success. These questions can help guide meaningful collaboration:

- Does my child's teacher receive ongoing professional learning within and beyond the school district?
- Does my child receive high-quality literacy instruction from a fully-licensed teacher who completed student teaching supervised by a literacy expert outside their school?
- Does my child's reading teacher have dedicated time for instruction and planning?
- Does my child receive instruction tailored to their specific needs, or is the approach the same for all students?
- If my child receives additional reading support, is it provided one-on-one or in a group?

- How often do sessions occur each week, for how long, and with how many students?
- How often does a licensed teacher listen to my child read and assess their progress?
- Does my child have access to a wide range of reading materials at school?
- What resources or supports are available for families of children with reading difficulties, and how can I access them?
- What strengths, needs, and interests has the school noticed about my child, and what can I do at home to support their literacy growth?
- How can I share what strategies work well to support my child's literacies?

Resources to Support Parent and Child Advocacy

- *Dyslexia Help: Teaching Self-Advocacy to Your Child* (University of Michigan, 2025)
- How to Improve Reading Skills of a Child (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024)
- *How Parents Can be Advocates for Their Children* (Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities, n.d.)
- *Developing Strong Foundational Literacy Skills in Children-It Takes All of Us!* (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2023)
- *Helping Kids Learn at Home* (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, n.d.)
- *Supporting Student Success Through Authentic Partnerships: Reflection from Parents and Caregivers* (Morton, 2017)
- *How Families can Partner with Schools on Literacy Development* (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2024)
- Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative (WSPEI) Supports and strategies for partnerships between home and school.

How Can I Be a Wise and Informed Consumer?

Families of children with dyslexia and related conditions may look for extra help outside of school. It is important to ask questions and make sure the program or service is based on good research. There are no "quick fixes" for learning to read and write, but evidence-based support can make a real difference. Being a wise and informed consumer means choosing resources and approaches that are grounded in research and shown to support literacy development. Additional information can be found in Chapter 2, Table 1: *Educational Myths about Dyslexia.*

Resources to Support Being a Wise and Informed Consumer

- *Practice Guides* (Institute of Education Sciences) - Research-based guides that can help educators and families understand effective educational practices and make informed decisions about literacy programs and instruction.
- *Intervention Reports* (Institute of Education Sciences) - Summaries of research to help educators and families understand the effectiveness of specific literacy interventions.
- *When Educational Promises Are Too Good to Be True* (International Dyslexia Association)- Considerations related to literacy services and programs.
- *Evidence-Based Practices at School: A Guide for Parents* (Reading Rockets) - Guide to help parents/caregivers understand evidence-based literacy instruction.

Conclusion

Chapter 6 provided families with information about Wisconsin statutes that include family communication, ways that families can support their children with dyslexia and related conditions at home, and considerations for partnering with their schools. Productive partnerships between families and schools can recognize the unique strengths, needs, and literacies of each and every child, positively impacting students' literacy experiences and development in school and at home, and set students on a path toward accomplishing their dreams and goals for the future.

Afflerbach, P. (2016). *Reading assessment: Theories, types, and applications* (3rd ed.). International Reading Association.

Afflerbach, P. (2022). Teaching readers (not reading): Moving beyond skills and strategies to reader-focused instruction. Guilford Press.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Evolution of Reading Models

Researchers have developed various models to explain how students learn to read and how interacting skills support reading development. These models reflect an evolving, research-informed understanding of reading rather than fixed explanations.

Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986): Defined reading as the product of decoding (D) and language comprehension (C).

Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1988, 1998): Described comprehension as constructing meaning by integrating text with background knowledge.

Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001): Expanded SVR by identifying multiple strands within word recognition and language comprehension that strengthen the students reading.

Reader-Text-Task Heuristic (Snow & RAND Reading Study Group, 2002): Highlighted how the reader, the text, and the task interact within a sociocultural context to influence comprehension.

Cognitive Foundations Framework (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019): Broadened the SVR (1986) by emphasizing interdependent cognitive components such as background knowledge, inferencing, linguistic knowledge, and foundational skills that support word recognition and language comprehension.

Direct and Indirect Effects Model of Reading (DIER) (Kim, 2020): Proposed that language and cognitive skills interact hierarchically and dynamically, with lower-level abilities supporting higher-level ones that shape word reading, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension.

Active View of Reading (AVR) (Duke & Cartwright, 2021): Expanded reading beyond word recognition and language comprehension to include self-regulation, executive function, and motivation, highlighting bridging processes such as fluency and vocabulary.

Asset-Based Integrated View of Reading (Gabriel & López, 2024): Extended the AVR by integrating Self-Determination Theory and asset-based pedagogy to center students' linguistic and cultural contexts within literacy processes.

Reading & Writing Are Complex Processes (Scanlon et al., 2024): Described reading and writing as mutually supportive, coordinated processes involving word recognition, language, knowledge, and motivation that develop through continual interaction rather than a set order.

Double Helix Theory of Reading and Writing (Wyse & Hacking, 2024): Framed reading and writing as intertwined processes that integrate seven related components including phonics, comprehension, motivation, and grammar, taught together in meaningful, holistic, and human centered ways grounded in children's language and lived experiences.

Cultural Sustenance View of Reading (Nash et al., 2025): Extended the AVR (2021)by integrating cultural and linguistic identities into cognitive and linguistic processes, positioning reading as a culturally grounded, socially mediated act where specific skills such as comprehension, vocabulary, and inference develop through culturally sustaining contexts.

Appendix B

Research Supporting Brain Regions Related to the Function of Reading

This appendix highlights the interacting brain regions that support reading and summarizes how research has described their functions.

Region	Function	Research
Distributed Reading Network	Involves multiple left and right hemisphere regions that work together and are flexibly used depending on the reading task.	Woolnough et al., 2023; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020; Dehaene & Cohen, 2011; Turker et al., 2025
Occipito-Temporal Region	Recognizes visual word forms, supports fluent word recognition, and strengthens orthographic processing.	Dehaene & Cohen, 2011; Jobard et al., 2003; Richlan et al., 2009
Parietal-Temporal Region	Integrates visual and auditory input, maps letters to sounds, and supports phonological decoding.	Pugh et al., 2000; Richlan et al., 2009; Turkeltaub et al., 2003
Inferior Frontal Gyrus	Supports articulation, engages phonological processing, analyzes syntax, and contributes to speech production and verbal working memory.	Poldrack et al., 1999; Costafreda et al., 2006; Woolnough et al., 2023
Middle Temporal Gyrus / Superior Temporal Sulcus	Processes word meanings, retrieves semantic information, and supports sentence-level comprehension and lexical access.	Woolnough et al., 2023; Fedorenko et al., 2020; Snijders et al., 2008
Frontal Operculum	Coordinates phonological and articulatory processes, supports speech planning, and strengthens comprehension of complex syntax.	Woolnough et al., 2023; Friederici, 2011; Hickok & Poeppel, 2007
White Matter Pathways	Connects reading-related regions and facilitates communication between visual, phonological, and semantic systems.	Yeatman et al., 2007; Vandermosten et al., 2012; Lebel et al., 2013
Cerebellum and Right Frontotemporal Regions	Differentiates by hemisphere. The left cerebellum supports semantic access and word processing. The right cerebellum contributes to fluency and speech production, especially during overt reading. Right frontotemporal regions show stronger recruitment in pseudoword reading and overt tasks.	Martin et al., 2015; Eckert et al., 2003; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020

Appendix C

Special Education, Section 504, and Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school districts are responsible for providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students found eligible for special education.

Special education is defined as specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability which is provided at no cost to the student or the student's parent by appropriately licensed staff. It is provided in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings (34 C.F.R § 300.39 and Wis. Stat. § 115.76 (15)). Special education services must enable the student to advance appropriately toward the annual goals in the individualized education program (IEP), to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities, and to be educated and participate with their nondisabled peers (34 C.F.R § 300.320(a)(4)).

In order for a student to receive special education, an evaluation must be conducted by the local education agency (LEA), and the IEP team must meet to determine whether the student meets state disability category criteria and requires specially designed instruction.

If the student qualifies and parent consent is given, an IEP is developed to address the student's unique needs. School districts meet their obligation to provide FAPE to each student with a disability, in part, by developing and implementing each student's IEP.

A student with dyslexia and related conditions who has qualified for special education is able to receive services and support beyond what is provided to all students based on their unique disability-related needs as determined by an IEP team. Wisconsin statute (PI 11.36(6)(a)) defines specific learning disability (SLD).

Criteria used for diagnosing a reading disorder such as dyslexia and related conditions during an outside evaluation do not necessarily correspond with state disability category criteria (such as criteria for specific learning disability or other health impairment). Therefore, a student may be diagnosed with dyslexia but may or may not be determined to be a student with a disability under special education law. This is further explained in 2015 guidance from DPI and the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016).

A student who is suspected of a disability may also be considered for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 regulations require a school district to provide a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) to each qualified student with a disability who is in the school district's jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. Under Section 504, FAPE consists of the provision of appropriate educational services designed to meet the student's individual educational needs as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students are met. As a student with a disability under Section 504, a student with dyslexia would have their specific needs addressed as determined through the 504 plan.

Appendix D

Defining Dyslexia

American Academy of Pediatrics (n.d.): Aligns with Act 86 by identifying dyslexia as a brain-based disorder involving unexpected reading difficulties, but it does not explicitly reference phonological deficits or instructional contexts.

AAP Section on Ophthalmology et al. (2009): Similar to Act 86 in describing core reading challenges and unexpectedness, though it omits vocabulary growth and secondary consequences.

American Psychiatric Association (2013): Recognizes dyslexia as a type of specific learning disorder like Act 86 but does not define it independently or describe phonological or instructional factors.

ICD-10-CM (2016): Consistent with Act 86 in recognizing unexpected reading achievements relative to age and intelligence but focuses on discrepancy rather than phonological causes.

Learning Disabilities Association of America (n.d.): Aligns with Act 86's focus on reading-related difficulties, but broadens the scope to include speech and recall, without detailing neurobiological or phonological components.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004): Includes dyslexia under specific learning disability as Act 86 does but does not provide an independent definition or reference to its neurobiological or instructional context.

International Dyslexia Association (2002): Nearly identical to Act 86, including phonological deficits, neurobiological origin, and instructional needs.

International Dyslexia Association (2025): 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.

IDA Board of Directors (2012): Echoes Act 86's core features like decoding and spelling challenges but excludes mention of reduced reading experience or comprehension consequences.

Mayo Clinic (n.d.): Aligns with Act 86 in describing language-based decoding difficulties but lacks descriptive details on phonological processing and instructional factors.

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (n.d.): Matches Act 86 in identifying brain-based and phonological features and extends definition to include adult-onset dyslexia and genetic research.

University of Michigan (n.d.): Uses the IDA definition also reflected in Act 86 and attributes it to Lyon et al. (2003).

Understood/NCLD (n.d.): Supports Act 86's view of dyslexia as a reading disability affecting fluency and comprehension but does not reference neurobiology or phonology.

Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity (n.d.): Reinforces Act 86's notion of unexpected reading difficulty but uniquely emphasizes strengths and avoids clinical or instructional terminology.

Appendix E

Neurological Differences

Neurological differences refer to variations in how the brain functions or is organized, particularly in areas involved in specific cognitive tasks such as reading. In the context of dyslexia and related conditions, these differences are typically observed through brain imaging focused on examining neural pathways during reading tasks compared to typically developing readers. These variations, especially in regions related to word recognition and language processing, may influence a student's ability to process written language accurately and fluently (Chyl, 2021; Richlan, 2020; Vandermosten et al., 2020; Romeo, 2023).

What to Look For: Students may struggle with reading despite typical performance in other cognitive areas. Teachers and parents/caregivers may notice that reading effort is unusually slow or labored.

Why it Matters for Reading: Brain imaging helps researchers learn how reading develops, but these scans have limits. Reading uses many parts of the brain that work together, including areas that help with seeing, hearing, speaking, and coordinating movement (Turker et al., 2025). Students with dyslexia and related conditions sometimes show differences in how efficiently these areas work together, but scientists are not sure whether those differences cause reading difficulties or result from them (Tannock, 2013). There is no single "brain pattern" that identifies dyslexia (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024). Instead, each child's brain develops in unique ways based on learning experiences, language, and environment.

Considerations:

- What do we notice about how different students approach reading tasks, and how might this reflect their individual learning strengths?
- How can we support the mental skills that help with reading, such as focus, memory, and flexible thinking?
- In what ways do we acknowledge that all behavior, including reading, involves the brain, while recognizing that difficulty with reading does not automatically indicate dyslexia?
- How can we make sure our understanding of brain research is based on credible evidence rather than simplified or popular claims?
- When we use terms like brain-based or neurobiological, how can we ensure they reflect valid and reliable research and do not unintentionally reinforce fixed or deficit-based assumptions?
- How can we make sure reading instruction supports the whole learner, including cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development, rather than focusing on one skill at a time?
- How can we make sure our understanding of brain research is based on credible evidence rather than simplified or popular claims?
- How can educators, specialists, and researchers work together to apply research in ways that meaningfully support students and inform policy and practice?

Appendix F

Phonological Processing Difficulties

Phonological processing, which includes recognizing and manipulating the sounds of spoken language, is foundational for learning to read in alphabetic systems. Difficulties occur when students struggle to perceive, remember, or work with speech sounds, which can make learning sound–symbol relationships and decoding challenging (Compton et al., 2023; National Reading Panel, 2000; Perfetti et al., 2019).

What to Look for: A student experiencing phonological processing difficulties may struggle to rhyme, segment, blend, or manipulate sounds in spoken words; confuse similar-sounding words; mishear parts of words; or demonstrate difficulty remembering sound patterns within words. These challenges may appear during oral language tasks or early reading instruction (Erbeli et al., 2022).

Why it Matters for Reading: Phonological processing plays a critical role in learning to read in alphabetic languages and is consistently identified as a core risk factor for dyslexia and related conditions(Compton et al., 2023; National Reading Panel, 2000; Perfetti et al., 2019). Research across languages shows that phonological skills predict reading success in many alphabetic systems, though their impact varies depending on how consistently a language's spelling represents sounds (Caravolas, 2012, 2022; Landerl et al., 2013; Ziegler et al., 2010). A phonological weakness by itself does not mean a student has dyslexia and related conditions. Other factors such as working memory, language comprehension, and the quality of instruction may also contribute to reading difficulties (Snowling, 2019; Wagner et al., 2022; Catts et al., 2017). These findings support a comprehensive understanding of dyslexia and related conditions as influenced by multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause.

Considerations:

- Does the student struggle with phonological awareness tasks such as rhyming, segmenting, blending, or manipulating sounds?
- Has the student received explicit, systematic instruction in phonological awareness and phonics?
- Could working memory, language comprehension, attention, or other cognitive processes be contributing to the observed difficulty?
- Are there co-occurring challenges (e.g., speech sound disorders, language delays) that may affect phonological tasks?
- Has the student had consistent access to research/evidence-based early language experiences and oral language-rich environments?
- Are differences in exposure to standardized English or other alphabetic languages influencing phonological development?
- Are the phonological difficulties persistent over time and resistant to intervention, or are they improving with targeted support?
- Are decisions being made based on a pattern of observable evidence, rather than on a single measure?

Appendix G

Accurate and Fluent Word Recognition Difficulties

Independent, accurate, fluent, and flexible word-solving skills are essential for reading a wide range of texts with understanding. Difficulties occur when readers cannot automatically identify enough words to read efficiently, which can interfere with comprehension (Spear-Swerling, 2013; Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019; Fletcher et al., 2019).

What to Look For: A student experiencing accurate and fluent word recognition difficulties may read slowly or hesitate when reading aloud; skip, misread, or substitute words; have difficulty self-correcting misread words; show limited ability to apply set for variability; struggle with longer or unfamiliar vocabulary; or read with noticeable effort focused on word solving rather than meaning. For example, a reader who decodes glove as "clove" and does not adjust to make sense in context demonstrates limited flexibility in word solving (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012).

Why it Matters for Reading: Accurate and fluent word recognition allows students to become independent, flexible readers who can apply word-solving strategies across varied texts. Because English is not entirely predictable, readers must monitor and adjust pronunciations using meaning and context; when mispronunciations are not checked, word learning is hindered (Share, 2008). Word solving involves both decoding and set for variability, or the ability to adjust a decoded pronunciation to match a familiar word in oral vocabulary (Ehri, 2014; Venezky, 1999). As readers strengthen this flexibility, they accelerate fluency, independence, and awareness of spelling patterns (Castles et al., 2018). Since students encounter thousands of untaught word families, flexible word-solving supports vocabulary and comprehension growth (Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Share, 1995).

Considerations:

- Could language background, dialect, or limited exposure to print-rich environments be influencing accurate and fluent word solving?
- Does the student consistently read words slowly, inaccurately, or with noticeable effort that interferes with comprehension across multiple texts and settings?
- Are errors limited to unfamiliar or complex words, or do they also occur with high-frequency and familiar words?
- Could the student's background knowledge, interests, motivation, engagement, or confidence in reading be impacting word learning and word solving?
- Are attention, processing speed, or working memory contributing to word-solving challenges?
- Does the student correct a decoded mispronunciation by trying alternate sounds and confirming whether the new attempt matches a known word and makes sense in context?

Appendix H

Decoding and Spelling Difficulties

Spelling and decoding challenges involve difficulty reading words (decoding) and writing words correctly (spelling). Decoding requires sounding out words and using phonics patterns, while spelling involves representing spoken words with letters. Both rely on understanding sounds, letters, and word patterns.

What to Look For: Students may struggle to sound out unfamiliar words, misread similar-looking or irregular words, or apply phonics rules inconsistently (Moats, 2020; Kim & Petscher, 2023). They may read slowly or skip words, especially in longer texts (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). In writing, they often spell words based on how they sound rather than conventional patterns. For example, "said" might be spelled as "sed" (Cunningham, 1990; Ehri, 1997). These errors may persist despite practice, and students may avoid reading and writing or show frustration when their writing does not match their oral skills (Scarborough, 1998; Worthy et al., 2016).

Why it Matters for Reading: Spelling and decoding rely on shared linguistic knowledge. Persistent challenges are common in dyslexia and can affect reading fluency and writing (Kim & Petscher, 2023; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Perfetti, 2007). However, not all difficulties reflect dyslexia. Some result from limited instruction in phonics, morphology, or orthographic patterns (Alexander & Slinger-Constant, 2004; Snowling et al., 2020; Lorusso & Toraldo, 2023). Research continues to explore how spelling and decoding challenges develop across time and contexts (Kemp & Treiman, 2023; Carroll et al., 2025).

Considerations:

- Does the student struggle to sound out unfamiliar words/apply phonics patterns?
- Are spelling errors phonetic (e.g., "sed" for "said") or inconsistent?
- Does the student hesitate, skip words, or read slowly during oral reading?
- Has the student received explicit, systematic instruction in phonics and spelling?
- How has the student responded to instruction over time?
- Are challenges consistent across tasks and settings?
- Does the student show difficulty manipulating sounds in spoken words (phonemic awareness), which may impact both decoding and spelling?
- Has the student had sufficient opportunities to build linguistic awareness, including exposure to patterns in English spelling and morphology?
- Does the student avoid reading/writing tasks and demonstrate frustration during these activities?
- Does the student show a mismatch between their written work and oral language abilities?
- Are confidence and self-perception affecting the student's decoding and spelling?
- Could limited exposure or interrupted schooling explain the difficulty?
- Is the student learning more than one language? How might language transfer or contrastive features impact spelling and decoding?
- Are cultural or linguistic differences being misinterpreted as atypical development?
- Has the assessment of decoding and spelling taken into account the student's full language profile, including dialect, home language, and background knowledge?

Appendix I

Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading comprehension challenges involve difficulty understanding, interpreting, or applying meaning from text, even when reading fluently and accurately. These challenges arise from the interaction among the reader (e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge, inference skills), the text (e.g., complexity, structure, features), and the task (e.g., purpose, question type, cognitive demand) (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Snow, 2002; Kintsch, 2005).

What to Look For: Students may read fluently but struggle to answer questions, summarize ideas, or explain what they have read. They may have trouble inferring, connecting ideas, or applying information. Challenges may vary based on text complexity (e.g., density of information, vocabulary, concepts) or task demands (e.g., recalling details vs. synthesizing information).

Why it Matters: Reading comprehension depends on the interaction of the reader, the text, and the task. Vocabulary, language processing, background knowledge, working memory, and the ability to infer and think critically all play roles (Kintsch, 2005; Snow, 2002). Low comprehension scores may reflect decoding difficulties, limited oral language, or test format rather than true comprehension problems (Keenan et al., 2008; Nation & Snowling, 1997; Farrall, 2012). Some assessments emphasize word matching over meaning, masking a student's actual understanding (Farrall, 2012; Keenan & Meenan, 2014).

Considerations:

- Does the student read fluently but struggle to explain, summarize, or apply what they read?
- Does the student engage in conversations about the texts they read?
- Could difficulties relate to limited vocabulary, background knowledge, or oral language skills?
- Has the student had access to comprehension instruction in a language-rich classroom?
- How much time does the student spend reading independently, and how might reading volume influence comprehension?
- Could executive function skills (e.g., working memory) be affecting understanding?
- Do difficulties occur across all texts or only certain genres, topics, or tasks?
- Is the student's performance affected by the structure of the assessment, such as cloze tasks or multiple-choice questions?
- Has comprehension been assessed through varied methods (e.g., discussion, think-alouds, performance-based tasks?
- Could decoding challenges be limiting comprehension on complex or timed tasks?
- Has the student received explicit instruction in comprehension strategies, including how to monitor understanding and make meaning while reading?
- Are there cultural or linguistic differences that may affect how the student understands or expresses comprehension?
- If the student is an English learner, has the comprehension measure been adjusted to reflect language development?

- Could frustration, low confidence, or lack of engagement be affecting how the student demonstrates understanding?

Appendix J

Atypical Vocabulary Growth and Background Knowledge

Atypical vocabulary growth and background knowledge refer to limited development of word or world knowledge that can affect comprehension, even when decoding is accurate (Kosanovich, 2020b; UNESCO, 2020; Hebert et al., 2016; National Center on Early Childhood Development, 2022). Because oral vocabulary supports meaning making, students with limited vocabularies also have reduced capacity for Set for Variability, the ability to adjust a mispronounced decoded word until it matches a real word that fits the context. A child cannot correct a mispronunciation if the intended word is not already part of their oral vocabulary (Barnes et al., 2025).

What to Look For: Students may decode accurately but fail to recognize or confirm the meaning of words. They may have difficulty explaining unfamiliar words, interpreting figurative language, or connecting ideas to prior knowledge. Students with limited oral vocabularies may not recognize when a decoding attempt produces a nonword, which limits their ability to self-correct through Set for Variability.

Why it Matters for Reading: Vocabulary and background knowledge are critical for comprehension (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Students make meaning by understanding words and connecting them to what they already know. Instruction that develops vocabulary and world knowledge supports comprehension across subjects. Set for Variability also depends on word meaning, as children draw on oral vocabulary to determine whether a decoded word is real and fits the context (Barnes et al., 2025). When vocabulary or knowledge is limited, decoding accuracy may not lead to understanding, and comprehension difficulties may reflect differences in language exposure rather than dyslexia or related conditions.

Considerations:

- Does the student understand key vocabulary words in texts across different subjects?
- Can the student connect new information to prior knowledge or personal experiences?
- Does the student struggle more with comprehension when the topic is unfamiliar or abstract?
- Has the student received instruction that builds both oral and academic vocabulary?
- Has the student had exposure to a variety of texts, concepts, and experiences to build background knowledge?
- Does the student show confusion with figurative language, multiple-meaning words, or domain-specific terms?
- Could limited language exposure or interruptions in schooling explain the vocabulary or knowledge gaps?
- Are there differences between the words the student understands in reading or listening and those used when communicating such as when speaking or writing?
- If the student is multilingual, has support been provided to develop both vocabulary and content knowledge in their first and second languages?
- Are assumptions being made based on vocabulary use without considering the student's cultural or linguistic background?

- Could these challenges be improved with instructional experiences (e.g., readings, field trips), and has the student had the opportunity to respond to such support?

Appendix K

Unexpected Reading Difficulties

In many definitions of dyslexia, reading difficulties are described as unexpected when they occur in students who demonstrate typical cognitive abilities and have had access to effective instruction (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020; Kirk, 1963). Dyslexia can occur in individuals with low, average, or high cognitive abilities.

What to Look For: Students may demonstrate strong thinking and reasoning skills in other areas but continue to experience persistent difficulties with word reading or comprehension. A student might perform well in subjects like math or science, communicate clearly, or appear highly capable in daily interactions, yet still struggle significantly with reading tasks.

Why it Matters for Reading: Historically, the concept of "unexpected" reading difficulties has been used to explain why students with strong cognitive abilities might struggle with reading. This idea, rooted in the early work of Kirk (1963), became central to many definitions of dyslexia in North America (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020). However, unexpectedness is now widely regarded as problematic because it is difficult to clearly define and measure (Wagner, 2008; Elliott, 2020).

Although IQ-based and cognitive discrepancy models were historically popular, current research shows that these methods are unreliable and inequitable. Unexpectedness, especially when determined through IQ scores or cognitive profiles, should no longer be used to diagnose dyslexia or other learning disabilities (Fletcher & Miciak, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2019; McGill, Dombrowski, & Canivez, 2018; Elliott, 2020).

Identifying reading difficulties based on a student's response to instruction and observed need allows educators to focus on the supports required for student success, regardless of background or perceived potential (Vaughn et al., 2024). This approach reflects current evidence and promotes more equitable identification and support.

Considerations

- Does the student demonstrate strengths in oral language, reasoning, or non-reading academic areas like math or science?
- Are assumptions about the student's "potential" or intelligence influencing how their reading difficulties are interpreted?
- Could cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic factors and/or experiences be shaping perceptions of what is "expected" for this student?
- What observable reading behaviors are affecting the student's success?

Appendix L

Persistent Difficulties and Limited Reading Experiences

Some students struggle with reading due to limited early exposure to books, language-rich environments, or high-quality instruction. Others continue to have reading difficulties even after receiving effective, evidence-based teaching. These patterns are both important to recognize because they reflect different instructional needs and require different types of support (Snow et al., 1998; Fletcher et al., 2019; Neuman & Celano, 2012).

What to Look For: Students with limited reading experiences may show delays in vocabulary, background knowledge, or print awareness. They may have trouble identifying letters, understanding how books work, or making connections to text. In contrast, students with persistent difficulties despite high-quality instruction often continue to struggle with decoding, fluency, or comprehension, even when receiving targeted support from skilled educators. Having delays in reading skills does not automatically mean a child has dyslexia. It is important to consider the child's background, experiences, and access to instruction before drawing conclusions.

Why it Matters for Reading: Students with limited early experiences often make significant progress with access to strong, consistent instruction. Students with persistent difficulties may require more intensive, individualized intervention that addresses foundational reading skills directly and systematically. Early identification and understanding of these patterns can prevent long-term challenges and support students in becoming confident, capable readers.

Considerations

- Has the student had consistent access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction?
- Were instructional strategies matched to the student's strengths and needs?
- Are there developmental factors (e.g., language, attention) that might influence a child's development?
- Has the student made progress when provided with research/evidence-based instruction within an intervention?
- Are difficulties persisting even after instructional methods were adjusted and delivered by skilled educators?
- Did the student have access to books, read-alouds, and language-rich interactions in early childhood?
- Were there opportunities to build vocabulary, background knowledge, and print awareness before entering school?
- Could limited access to early education, chronic absenteeism, or frequent school changes have affected learning opportunities?
- Are the student's difficulties improving with increased access to instruction, or are they persistent across time and settings?
- Has the instruction been culturally and linguistically responsive to the student's background?
- Is the student multilingual or bidialectal, and have these language experiences been considered when interpreting reading progress?

Appendix M

Co-Occurring Conditions

Co-occurring conditions refer to additional learning or developmental differences that may occur alongside dyslexia (Vellutino et al., 2004). These may include attention challenges, oral language, writing, motor coordination, or math. Identifying co-occurring conditions helps educators and families better understand the full range of a student's needs and avoid relying on a single explanation for learning difficulties (Fletcher et al., 2019; Hasbrouck, 2020; Seidenberg, 2017).

Students may show signs of dyslexia along with difficulties in other areas. They might:

- Struggle to focus or remember directions (e.g., ADHD)
- Decode words accurately but not understand what they read (language disorder)
- Avoid writing due to slow or tiring handwriting (motor coordination challenges)
- Have difficulty with math facts or multi-step problems (dyscalculia)

These challenges may overlap or interact, making it important to look at patterns across time and settings (Iverson et al., 2005; Snow et al., 2019; Moll et al., 2014; Visser et al., 2020).

Dyslexia is one of several neurodevelopmental conditions that can affect learning from early childhood through adulthood (Moll, 2022). More than half of students with one learning difference meet the criteria for another (Moll, 2022). These overlaps are more common than would happen by chance and can affect how students respond to reading instruction. Understanding co-occurring conditions allows educators to design supports that address the student's full learning profile rather than focusing on a single issue.

Considerations

- Does the student have difficulty remembering instructions, word meanings, or steps in a task while reading or writing? Does the student have difficulty staying focused during reading or writing tasks?
- Does the student often lose their place in text, skip lines, or rush through assignments?
- Are impulsivity, distractibility, or difficulty following multi-step directions interfering with learning?
- Does the student show signs of stress, avoidance, or low confidence related to reading or schoolwork?
- Could emotional factors be affecting the student's motivation, engagement, or reading stamina? Has the student expressed worry about performance in class?
- Does the student struggle with number facts, sequencing, or multi-step problem solving?
- Does the student avoid writing tasks or fatigue easily when using a pencil or typing?
- Are handwriting or fine motor difficulties slowing down reading or writing responses?
- Does the student decode words accurately but struggle to understand or explain what they read?
- Are there difficulties with oral expression, following instructions, or understanding figurative language?
- Has the student needed support with vocabulary, grammar, or listening comprehension?

Appendix N

Reliability in Reading Assessments

Reliability refers to the consistency of test scores across time, items, forms, or raters. In reading assessments, reliable results allow educators to make confident decisions about instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring. Without reliability, scores may fluctuate due to factors unrelated to a student's actual reading ability. The following table summarizes key types of reliability, their meanings, and guiding questions educators can use when selecting and interpreting reading assessments.

Type of Reliability	Definition/Explanation	Guiding Questions
Stability Reliability (Test–Retest)	Refers to the consistency of scores when the same assessment is given to the same students at two different points in time. Stable skills should produce similar results across both administrations.	If this reading assessment is given now and again later, will the students get similar results if their ability has not changed?
Internal Consistency	Refers to how well the items within a single assessment measure the same construct. Items should "hang together" and reflect the same underlying skill.	Do the items in this assessment all measure the same aspect of reading, or do they seem unrelated?
Alternate Form Reliability	Refers to the consistency of scores between two versions of the same assessment, designed to measure the same skills with different items.	If two forms of this assessment are used, will students' scores be consistent?
Inter-Rater Reliability	Refers to the consistency of scores when different examiners score or rate the same student's performance	If two teachers or raters score this assessment, will they agree on the student's performance?

Reference

National Center on Improving Literacy. (2019). *Understanding Literacy Screening: Reliability*. https://www.improvingliteracy.org/resource/understanding-literacy-screening-reliability

Appendix O

Validity in Reading Assessments

Accurate assessment is essential for supporting students with dyslexia and related conditions. For an assessment to be meaningful, it must be valid. Validity refers to whether a test measures what it is intended to measure. Different types of validity show whether an assessment captures the right skills, reflects sound theory, works fairly across groups of students, and avoids harmful consequences. The table below defines key types of validity in reading assessments and provides questions to help educators and families evaluate whether an assessment is appropriate, fair, and useful for instructional decision making.

Validity Type	Definition/Explanation	Guiding Questions
Content Validity	Refers to whether the test fully covers the skills it claims to measure. For example, a comprehension test that only asks vocabulary questions leaves out inference and summarizing.	Does this reading test include all the important skills it says it measures?
Construct Validity	Refers to whether the test truly measures the deeper concept. For example, an oral reading fluency test that scores only words per minute but not expression does not capture full fluency.	Does this reading test capture the whole concept, not just part of it?
Substantive Validity	Refers to whether the test design is grounded in reading theory. For example, comprehension tasks should show how readers build meaning, not just recall details.	Is this test based on how students actually read and make sense of text?
Structural Validity	Refers to whether the test's score structure matches reading theory. For example, if phonics, fluency, and comprehension are scored separately, the groupings should reflect real dimensions of reading.	Do the subtests and scores reflect what we know about how reading develops?
Generalizability	Refers to whether test results are consistent across groups and settings. For example, a test normed mostly on monolingual English speakers may not reflect bilingual students' abilities.	Will this test give fair results for all students in my classroom?
External Validity	Refers to how scores relate to other measures. For example, a phonics test should align with other decoding measures and help predict later reading outcomes.	Do the results from this test line up with other measures of reading, and can they help predict future progress?
Consequential Validity	Refers to the intended and unintended effects of test use. For example, using one screener score to place multilingual students in remedial programs may misrepresent their abilities.	Could using this test in this way unintentionally harm or limit students?

National Center on Improving Literacy. (2019). *Understanding Literacy Screening: Validity*. https://www.improvingliteracy.org/resource/understanding-screening-validity

Appendix P

Screening Multilingual Students for Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Language and Literacy Background

- What language(s) does the child speak, understand, read, or write at home and in school?
- In which language(s) has the child received formal instruction in reading and writing?
- What are the child's experiences with books and print in their home language and in English (e.g., shared reading, environmental print, storytelling)?
- What insights can the family share about the child's language development, strengths, and interests?

Oral Language and Comprehension

- What is the child's current level of oral language proficiency in both English and their home language(s)?
- How are the child's listening comprehension and expressive language abilities being assessed across languages?
- Are classroom interactions, story retelling, or interviews being used to understand how the child uses language to communicate and make meaning?

Instructional Exposure and Content

- Has the child received consistent and sufficient instruction in foundational literacy skills in any language?
- How long has the child been exposed to English instruction, and in what settings (e.g., ESL support, bilingual programs)?
- What instructional practices and materials have been used with the child, and in which language(s)?

Assessment Practices

- Are there any literacy screeners or diagnostic tools available in the child's home language, or tools normed for multilingual learners?
- If no formal tool is available in the child's language, what informal assessments (e.g., writing samples) can provide insight into their literacy knowledge?
- What adaptations to assessments are needed to ensure tasks are culturally and linguistically accessible?
- Is there a plan to gather classroom-based evidence (e.g., writing journals, book browsing behavior, phonological awareness tasks) in both languages?

Collaborative Analysis and Planning

- How will the team ensure results are interpreted through the lens of second language acquisition and not mistaken for reading difficulties?
- Who can support interpretation (e.g., bilingual staff, interpreters, family members) to validate or clarify responses in the child's home language?
- What steps will be taken to avoid over- or under-identification of reading difficulties based on English proficiency?
- What are the next steps for targeted support, instruction, or further evaluation across both languages?

Appendix Q

Questions to Guide Conversations About Reading Assessment

Use the questions in this table to support meaningful conversations that lead to better instruction and support for students with dyslexia and related conditions.

Parents/Caregivers	Educators	Administrators
What types of literacy assessments are used at my child's grade level, and what is the purpose of each one? **How do these assessments help identify both my child's strengths and areas where support may be helpful?** **How will I be informed of my child's results, and how should I interpret the information I receive?** **What do you know about my child's development in areas like phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, and engagement with reading?** **Is my child receiving any additional reading instruction or support, and how is their progress being monitored over time?** **How do the assessments account for my child's language background or learning needs (such as for multilingual learners or students with IEPs/504 plans)?** **How can I support my child's reading development at home, and how can I share what I know about their learning and language background with the school team?**	What literacy assessments am I expected to use at my grade level, and what is the purpose of each (e.g., screening, diagnostic)? How can assessment data help me identify students' strengths and plan meaningful instruction? How do I access and interpret assessment data in ways that guide instruction and support effective communication with families? What do my students' data tell me about their development in areas like phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and reading engagement? How do I review which students are receiving additional support and monitor their progress within our school's MLSS? How do assessment tools and practices reflect the diverse language, cultural, and learning needs of my students? How can I partner with families to support reading development at home and learn more about each student's language background and learning history?	What assessments are required at each grade level, and how are they aligned to statutory requirements (e.g., Act 20)? How does our system use screening data to identify trends, strengths, and needs across student groups and guide responsive supports? How are assessment results communicated clearly and consistently to educators and families? What support is provided for interpretation and next steps? Which student performance trends in foundational literacy skills guide our schoolwide planning? What systems are in place to ensure that students receive timely intervention, and how is progress data collected and reviewed? How are our assessments and instructional decisions responsive to the strengths and needs of diverse learners, including MLs and students with disabilities? How do we support educators in building strong partnerships with families to co-plan literacy supports and ensure culturally responsive practices?

Appendix R

Licensing for Reading Professionals

When considering how best to serve students with dyslexia and related conditions, matching the student with the most highly qualified educator can be a way to accelerate student learning. Educator licensing is one way to measure an educator' s qualifications.

Wisconsin has two licenses unique to reading: reading teacher and reading specialist. Both licenses require a path to licensure (often graduate coursework) beyond initial certification.

- A reading teacher license requires two years of full-time teaching experience. A reading teacher has training beyond initial certification about reading instruction and assessment.
- A reading specialist license requires three years of full-time teaching experience. A reading specialist has training beyond that of a reading teacher, which includes working with adults and building K - 12 systems.

Licensing for Reading Intervention

Both universal instruction and intervention must be taught by appropriately licensed educators. An individual who teaches reading intervention for more than one period per day and/or to students who are not assigned to that teacher for the rest of the day must hold a reading teacher license (more information at https://dpi.wi.gov/licensing/general/what-can-i-teach). A reading teacher license can be added to a teaching license after one has taught full-time for two years and completed an approved path to licensure (such as a preparation program or preparation through a district-sponsored process). The following should be considered:

- At the secondary level, only individuals with a reading license may provide reading intervention. An individual with a license to teach content at the secondary level (such as a license to teach English language arts or mathematics in grades 4 - 12) is not licensed to teach reading or reading intervention; and
- For students with IEPs, specially designed instruction for reading can be delivered by someone who holds a special education and/or a reading teacher license.
- In addition to the appropriate licensure, universal instruction and intervention relies on educator expertise. Educators need on-going professional learning related to grade-level standards, literacy assessments, effective instructional strategies, and use of information from a comprehensive assessment system so they can make responsive teaching decisions unique to each child.

Licensing for Reading Specialist

Wis. Statute 118.015 requires each school district to have a district reading specialist. The duties of a district reading specialist, as defined by statute are:

- Implement a reading curriculum in grades kindergarten to 12;
- Act as a resource person to classroom teachers to implement the reading curriculum;
- Work with administrators to support and implement the reading curriculum;
- Conduct an annual evaluation of the reading curriculum; and
- And coordinate the reading curriculum with other reading programs and support.

Appendix S

Assistive Technology for Students with Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Assistive technology (AT) can support access and participation in reading, writing, and spelling. Not all students with dyslexia or related conditions need or benefit from AT. The use of AT should be individualized and designed to complement, not replace, high-quality literacy instruction. Examples include built-in device settings, web applications, apps, and browser extensions that allow users to adjust displays or enable text-to-speech and speech-to-text features.

E-Reading- Some students with dyslexia and related conditions may find it easier to read when the spacing between lines, between words, or even between the characters within words is increased (Schneps et al., 2013, Dawson et al., 2018). Others may not need these changes. Settings and extensions can help reduce distractions on the screen. Examples of free options include:

- Adjust spacing or shorten lines in Word or Google Docs.
- Use browser extensions (e.g., Readability, Mercury, AT Bar) to change how text appears.
- Change display settings on devices to adjust spacing and make text easier to see.

Accessing texts- For students who have word-level difficulties, technology can allow a student to access content by listening to text instead of (or in addition to) reading it. Here are some examples:

- Audiobooks are recorded books that are narrated by human readers. Audiobooks are increasingly available at school and public libraries. Audiobooks do not display text, so consider limiting the use of these technologies when the goal is learning to read.
- E-books are electronic versions of printed books displayed on a computer or handheld device. Some, but not all, e-books may be read aloud by a computerized (synthesized) voice. Find these at your school or public library or through bookshare.org and uniteforliteracy.com.
- Text-synched audiobooks are audiobooks that are read aloud by the device while the words that are being spoken are highlighted. Some tools that allow for this feature include bookshare.org, uniteforliteracy.com, and Beeline Reader and Voice Dream (available as apps).
- Text-to-speech ATs that read text aloud, including webpages and PDFs include built-in computer settings, such as Microsoft's Narrator or Apple's VoiceOver, as well as extensions such as Read&Write, Speechify, NaturalReader, and Voice Dream Reader.

Text complexity- Technology tools can either decrease the complexity of the text, or define words in accessible ways. Some examples include the extension Snap & Read Universal, Rewordify, an app through Read&Write, and the websites Newsela and Dictionary.com website which includes a synonym complexity slider.

Composing texts- Speech to text, or dictation apps, are often built into computer programs and online word processing applications. These include IOS Dictation, Windows Speech Recognition, Microsoft Office Dictate and Google Docs Voice Typing.

Additional suggestions from Wisconsin educators and families- OpenDyslexic app for adjusting font and Storylineonline.com for picture books read aloud by celebrities.

Appendix T

Example Accommodations for Dyslexia and Related Conditions

Listed below are accommodations to consider for students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia and related conditions. Specific accommodations should be selected based on individual strengths and needs and should not replace instruction and independent engagement in reading and writing.

Reading

- Allow audio books and/or text-to-speech software when the goal is to access text, not learning to read
- Utilize outlines, summaries
- Preview questions and vocabulary
- Allow shared reading or partner reading

Writing

- Grade for content rather than spelling
- Allow students to dictate work to an adult
- Substitute alternative projects for written reports
- Utilize speech-to-text software
- Reduce written work
- Minimize copying
- Accept oral responses, reports, and presentations

Testing

- Provide extra time
- Review directions orally
- Read tests orally
- Allow dictated responses

Homework

- Reduce reading and writing requirements
- Limit time spent on homework
- Provide extra time

Instruction

- Break tasks into small steps
- Give directions in small steps
- Give examples and model behavior
- Emphasize daily review
- Provide copies of lecture notes

Classroom

- Post schedules and maintain routines
- Record assignments on a class calendar
- Use color-coding to organize materials and information
- Coordinate preferential seating
- Avoid requiring students to read aloud in front of a group