

Specific Learning Disability

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors that alter brain functioning in a way which affects one or more processes related to learning.¹ While all children can exhibit symptoms that can indicate a learning disability, children with a **specific learning disability (SLD)** have symptoms that do not disappear as they grow older.² Learning disabilities and intelligence are NOT related.³ The majority of students who receive special education services are served under the SLD category.⁴

79,403

children across the state's 200+ school districts have been diagnosed with a SLD.⁵

Approximately 34%

of Georgia's students receiving special education services have a SLD.⁶

What is dyslexia?⁷

Dyslexia, which is recognized as a SLD, is considered a language-based learning disability. Children with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with reading, as well as other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia impacts academic success for students in traditional instructional environments. Additionally, in its more severe cases, dyslexia can also qualify them for special education, special accommodations, or extra support services.

Symptoms to Look For⁸

Children with dyslexia often show difficulty with the following:



Early Literacy Challenges

- Rhyming
- Identifying the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in words
- Reading and writing their own name



Reading Challenges

- Learning the sounds that correspond with letters
- Sounding out words
- Differentiating similar looking letters or words
- Reading accurately (may leave out parts of words or add sounds)
- Text comprehension



Writing Challenges

- Spelling
- Correct use of capitalization and punctuation
- Legible handwriting and spacing

Screening for Dyslexia in Georgia's Children

In 2022, Georgia's State Board of Education approved a new rule which supports K-3rd grade students who have characteristics of dyslexia through timely and effective screenings and referrals, as well as increased access to resources for children and parents.⁹ This rule can be found [here](#).

Common Characteristics of Dyslexia¹⁰

Age Group	Potential Difficulties
Kindergarten through 2nd grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading errors aren't connected to the sounds of the letters on the page (e.g., will say "puppy" instead of the written word "dog" when there is an illustrated page with a dog)• Expresses how hard it is to read or disengages when it is time to read• A familial history of reading trouble• Unable to sound out simple words like cat, map, nap
2nd grade and higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very slow to acquire reading skills; reading may be slow and awkward• Avoidance of reading; gaps in vocabulary as a result• Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying "tornado" for "volcano"• Mispronunciation of long, unfamiliar, or complicated words

Dyslexia and Co-Existing Conditions^{11, 12}

Dyslexia often overlaps with other distinct conditions. For example, children diagnosed with dyslexia may also be diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), struggle with peer relationships, or experience poor self-image. Therefore, comprehensive diagnosis and treatment plans are crucial to support children with dyslexia.

Policy Recommendations

- Shore up Child Find prior to the age of 6 and ensure that speech-language interventions are in place early.
- Provide training for ALL new teachers through the schools of education, relating to identifying dyslexia/reading problems and knowing how to teach students reading skills.
- Embrace the Cox Campus' "Read Right from the Start" program that provides instruction to existing teachers and educators on how to teach reading.
- Expand early screening by building the expertise of educators and healthcare professionals to detect the early signs of a learning disability.
- Work with the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy to ensure that the dyslexia piloted legislation from 2019 is well-implemented and well-evaluated.

Suggested citation: Voices for Georgia's Children. (2023). Fact Sheet: Dyslexia. Voices for Georgia's Children. <https://adobe.ly/3RiYXMI>.

- 1 Learning Disabilities Association of America. "New to LD." Accessed November 1, 2023. <https://ldaamerica.org/support/new-to-ld/>.
- 2 Learning Disabilities Association of America. "Symptoms of Learning Disabilities." Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://ldaamerica.org/info/what-to-expect-when-your-child-has-a-learning-disability-identification-and-diagnosis/>.
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- 4 Learning Disabilities Association of America. "New to LD." Accessed November 1, 2023. <https://ldaamerica.org/support/new-to-ld/>.
- 5 Georgia Department of Education. FY23 SWD Federal Child Count, Ages 3-21 by Disability Area. Accessed October 27, 2023. https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Federal%20Data%20Reports%202/FY23%20Child%20Find%20and%20Environ/4_A_FY23%20Child%20Count_Disability.pdf.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 International Dyslexia Association. "Dyslexia Basics." Accessed November 1, 2023. <https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/>.
- 8 Georgia Department of Education. Foundational Reading Skill Development and Dyslexia: Serving All Students (Extended). Accessed October 27, 2023. https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Eligibility%20Areas/LD%20and%20Dyslexia/Foundational%20Reading%20Skill%20Development%20and%20Dyslexia_Extended.pdf.
- 9 Georgia Department of Education. 160-4-2-.39 Dyslexia Identifications and Support. Accessed October 30, 2022. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/SBOE%20Rules/160-4-2-.39.pdf>.
- 10 International Dyslexia Association. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and Dyslexia. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://dyslexiaida.org/attention-deficithyperactivity-disorder-adhd-and-dyslexia/>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 International Dyslexia Association. Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dyslexiaida.org/social-emotional/>.