

# Questions and Answers about Dyslexia for Parents

This FAQ provides information about dyslexia and how Portland Public Schools will be providing support and guidance to families and teachers in meeting the needs of students with dyslexia.

## 1. What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a significant reading disability in people with normal intelligence. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Students with dyslexia often experience difficulties with both oral and written and other language skills, such as writing, and pronouncing words and writing.

## 2. What causes dyslexia?

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a person with dyslexia develops and functions. Dyslexia has been found to be hereditary. Moreover, most people with dyslexia have been found to have difficulty with identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods, individuals with dyslexia can learn successfully.

## 3. What are the effects of dyslexia?

The impact of dyslexia is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the effectiveness of instruction or remediation. The core difficulty is with reading words and this is related to difficulty with processing and manipulating sounds. Some individuals with dyslexia manage to learn early reading and spelling tasks, especially with excellent instruction, but later experience their most challenging problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

## 4. What are the requirements of Dyslexia legislation - Senate Bill 1003 (ORS 326.726)?

Senate Bill 1003 carries forward the dyslexia-related training requirements first passed by the Oregon Legislature in 2015. The bill has three requirements for districts: to train a Dyslexia Advisor for each school with a Kindergarten or 1st grade classroom, to universally screen for risk factors of dyslexia in kindergarten (or first grade, if that is the child's first year of school) and notify parents of the results.

## 5. How is Portland Public Schools in compliance with Senate Bill 1003?

**Training Requirement:** More than 100 teachers completed the trainings in all 58 schools with Kindergarten or first grade classrooms and have at least one fully trained Dyslexia Advisor. Due to some staffing changes in the spring and summer of 2019, four buildings will need to train an additional staff member, which will occur in the Winter of 2020.

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**Screening Requirement:** The screening requirements first applied to the 2018-19 school year. Portland Public Schools will continue to use the DIBELS test with Kindergarteners three times a year to measure phonological awareness, blending, rapid naming skills, and letter/sound correspondences. If a student shows risk factors for reading difficulties, including dyslexia, parents will be notified. Discussions with parents will take into account family history, including any difficulty in learning to read.

### **6. What does it mean if my child is identified as high risk on the screener?**

There could be several different reasons why a child gets identified as high risk on the screener including a deficit skill in one of the 5 Essential Reading Components; Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency. This could be a result of lack of instruction or understanding within one or more of these components which will result in a high risk result on the screener. In order to determine the specific lagging skill, diagnostic assessments may be administered to further understand the deficit. Once the deficit skill is determined, then tiered level of interventions that are specific to the identified deficit will be administered over a 4-6 week time period.

### **7. How can I support my child if they are struggling with reading and who should I contact with my concerns?**

- Make an appointment to speak with your child's teacher either at your child's parent/teacher conference or another time.
- Ask about the specific reading skill your child is working on and ask about things you may be able to do at home

### **8. My student is no longer in Kindergarten, but I think they should be screened. Who should I contact?**

Contact your child's teacher to express these concerns. The teacher will work with the school principal and school team to determine the next steps for supporting the student with reading difficulties.

### **9. If my child is multilingual and/or in a dual language program and is struggling with reading, should I be concerned?**

- Dyslexia exists all over the world and in all languages.
- Dyslexia is often missed in bilingual children because people assume they're simply struggling with a new language.
- Experts also don't all agree on how speaking two languages affects kids with dyslexia.

### **10. How do we screen for learning difficulties including dyslexia?**

Our current process for screening for learning difficulties including dyslexia is through the use of our universal screener, DIBELS as it assesses the measures that are successful in identifying a student's areas of need. The areas are: phonological awareness which includes phoneme segmentation, blending, letter naming fluency, and letter sound association.