

Understanding Dyslexia in Connecticut

Connecticut State Department of Education | September 2026

★ Purpose of this Document

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is releasing a series of guidance documents to strengthen shared understanding and provide clear, accessible information about dyslexia and related processes cross families, educators, and other interest holders. Understanding Dyslexia in Connecticut is the first document in this series and is designed to establish a shared and accurate understanding of what dyslexia is and is not, including its characteristics, the different ways it may present, common misconceptions, and how it may affect reading development.

Future guidance documents will address universal screening and the use of data, early warning signs, Child Find and adequate progress, comprehensive evaluations, and special education eligibility.

★ Connecticut's Definition of Dyslexia

Connecticut's Working Definition of Dyslexia

Dyslexia impacts reading, specifically decoding and accurate and/or fluent word recognition and spelling. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and is unexpected and/or inconsistent with a student's other abilities, often despite the provision of appropriate instruction. Dyslexia usually results from a significant deficit in phonological processing—a persistent difficulty in the awareness of and ability to manipulate the individual sounds of spoken language.

Understanding Connecticut's Definition in Plain Language

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that affects word reading and spelling. A person may have difficulty reading words accurately, reading them smoothly and with ease, spelling, or a combination of these. Dyslexia is not caused by low intelligence, lack of effort, or poor motivation. The pattern and degree of difficulty differ from person to person and may continue even when instruction is effective for peers.

★ Current Research and Evolving Understanding of Dyslexia

Connecticut's definition of dyslexia is research-informed and provides the foundation for this resource and CSDE guidance. The information below reflects more recent developments in the research base that further describe the varied ways dyslexia may develop and present across individuals. These concepts are also reflected in the 2025 International Dyslexia Association definition.

- Difficulties occur along a continuum of severity rather than in fixed categories.
- Word reading and spelling difficulties may involve accuracy, automaticity, or both.
- Dyslexia is multifactorial, meaning that genetic, neurobiological, environmental, and other influences may interact across a person's development.

- Word reading difficulties may look different across languages because written language systems represent sounds and meaningful word parts in different ways.
- Phonological processing difficulties and morphological processing difficulties are common, but they are not present in every person with dyslexia.
- Oral language development may provide important information about later literacy risk.
- Identification and targeted instruction are important at any age, while early language and literacy support is especially effective.

★ How Reading and Spelling Difficulties Associated with Dyslexia May Present Across the Stages of Development

Reading and spelling difficulties associated with dyslexia may look different as learners develop and as academic demands increase. The examples below illustrate some of the ways these difficulties may present at different stages of development.

Prekindergarten–Grade 2 (PK–2)

Examples may include:

- Difficulty learning rhymes or noticing and working with sounds in spoken words.
- A history of speech or language delays.
- Difficulty learning letter names and letter–sound relationships.
- Slow or inaccurate early decoding and spelling.
- Difficulty blending sounds to read words or separating words into sounds to spell them.
- Slow growth in foundational reading skills despite explicit instruction.
- Stronger understanding when information is presented orally than when the child must read it independently.

Grades 3–5 Examples may include:

- Difficulty recognizing familiar words quickly and accurately.
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar or multisyllabic words.
- Persistent difficulty with spelling.
- Slow or choppy oral reading of sentences or passages.
- Reduced reading stamina, especially with longer text.
- Written work that may not reflect the student's oral knowledge or ideas.

Grades 6–12 Examples may include:

- Slow or effortful reading, even when accuracy has improved.
- Persistent spelling difficulty.
- Difficulty reading unfamiliar, multisyllabic, or content-area words.
- Difficulty keeping pace with increasing reading and writing demands.
- Reduced reading and writing stamina.
- Reading and writing tasks that may require considerably more time or effort.
- A continued need for targeted instruction, accommodations, assistive technology, or a combination of supports.

★ **Note:** No single characteristic, number of characteristics, or combination of characteristics determines whether a student should be referred for an evaluation or is eligible for special education.

When concerns arise: Caregivers and educators should share what they are noticing about a learner's reading and spelling. These examples can help guide conversations about a learner's strengths and needs. If there is reason to suspect that a student has a disability that is affecting the student's education or progress, the school or caregiver should make a timely referral for evaluation.

★ Common Misconceptions: What to Know

- Dyslexia is not simply reversing letters or reading words backward. Reversals can occur in many beginning readers and do not, by themselves, indicate dyslexia.
- Dyslexia is not caused by low intelligence. People with dyslexia have a wide range of cognitive abilities.
- Dyslexia is not caused by laziness, poor motivation, or lack of effort.
- Dyslexia is not a vision problem, although vision concerns should be addressed when present.
- Learning more than one language does not cause dyslexia, and difficulty learning English does not, by itself, mean that a student has dyslexia.
- Dyslexia does not look the same in every learner.
- A student does not need to fail for years before concerns are addressed.
- Strong listening comprehension or verbal reasoning does not rule out dyslexia.
- Improved word reading accuracy does not necessarily mean that dyslexia has resolved. Reading may remain slow or effortful, and spelling may continue to be difficult.

★ Variability and Continuum of Presentation

Dyslexia occurs along a continuum. This means that word-reading and spelling difficulties vary in degree and do not fall into clear, fixed categories. A learner may show one pattern of strengths and needs while another learner shows a different pattern.

- One learner may have greater difficulty with decoding accuracy.
- Another may read accurately but slowly and with considerable effort.
- Another may continue to have significant spelling difficulty even after word-reading accuracy improves.
- Phonological processing, morphological processing, and oral-language skills may help explain the learner's profile, but these related skills are not affected in the same way for every learner.

Instruction, intervention, accommodations, assistive technology, and progress monitoring should therefore be based on the learner's present levels of performance, not on a label, a single score, or grade level alone.

★ How Dyslexia Connects to Reading Development

Reading develops through the interaction of oral language, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Children learn oral language through interaction and exposure, but they must be taught how written language represents spoken language.

- Phonological awareness helps children notice and manipulate the sounds in spoken words.
- Knowledge of sound-symbol relationships supports decoding and spelling.
- With instruction and practice, readers build accurate and automatic recognition of words.
- As word reading becomes more automatic, readers can devote more attention to understanding text.
- When word reading remains slow, inaccurate, or effortful, comprehension and learning from text may be affected even when oral-language comprehension is strong.
- Reduced reading and writing experience over time can affect vocabulary, background knowledge, written expression, and academic access.

★ Sharing Information About Reading and Spelling

Ongoing communication between caregivers and educators can help build a fuller understanding of a learner's reading and spelling strengths, needs, and progress. Information may be shared during parent-teacher conferences, regular communication, intervention check-ins, or other school conversations.

Caregivers may share:

- What they notice about reading and spelling at home.
- The learner's strengths, interests, and areas of confidence.
- Tasks that seem especially easy, difficult, or frustrating.
- Supports or strategies that appear helpful.

Educators may share:

- What they notice about the learner's reading and spelling at school.
- The reading and spelling instruction the learner is receiving.
- Areas in which the learner is making progress or continuing to have difficulty.
- Assessment or progress-monitoring information that helps explain the learner's performance.

Together, caregivers and educators can:

- Identify areas of strength and concern.
- Look for patterns across home and school.
- Discuss how the learner is responding to instruction and support.
- Continue to share information as the learner's needs and progress change over time.

★ Key Message

Dyslexia can affect how accurately and easily a person reads words and spells. These difficulties may look different from one learner to another and can continue over time. Recognizing signs of dyslexia can help caregivers and educators better understand a learner's strengths and needs, but these signs alone do not determine special education eligibility. With effective instruction, appropriate support, and collaboration between families and schools, learners with dyslexia can make meaningful progress and succeed.

★ Sources of Information

- [Connecticut State Department of Education dyslexia and specific learning disability guidance](#)
- [International Dyslexia Association, 2025 Definition of Dyslexia and accompanying explanation](#)
- [Odegard, Understanding the Revised IDA Definition of Dyslexia: A Companion Guide](#)
- [National Center on Improving Literacy, Understanding the New IDA Dyslexia Definition](#)
- [CT-DAC Dyslexia Continuum Visual](#)