

Dyslexia Legislation

In June 2016, Governor Jay Nixon signed two pieces of legislation relating to dyslexia: House Bill 2379 and Senate Bill 638. The statutes address screening, professional development, classroom supports and evidence-based reading instruction for dyslexia in all public and charter schools in Missouri.

Implementation is to begin in 2018-2019 and continue in subsequent school years. In accordance with the statutes, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education created the role of Director-Dyslexia Specialist and Kim Stuckey has been employed in the position. In addition, the legislation created a Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia (Task Force).

The Task Force is comprised of twenty-one members described in RSMo 633.420.1. The description of Task Force members includes a speech-language pathologist with training and experience in early literacy development and effective research-based intervention techniques for dyslexia recommended by the Missouri Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSHA). MSHA recommended Eva Trumbower, M.S., CCC-SLP to the legislature and she has been appointed to serve on the Task Force.

In summary, the charge of the Task Force is to make recommendations for a statewide system for identification, intervention, and delivery of supports for students with dyslexia, including the development of resource materials and professional development activities. The recommendations and resource materials developed by the task force will include identification of valid and reliable screening and evaluation assessments and protocols and the appropriate personnel to administer such assessments as part of an ongoing reading progress monitoring system, multi-tiered system of supports, and special education eligibility determinations in schools; recommendation for evidence-based reading instructional interventions; and development and implementation of preservice and inservice professional development activities to address dyslexia identification and intervention.

The statutes define dyslexia as a disorder that is “neurological in origin, characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition, and poor spelling and decoding abilities that typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language, often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction and of which secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.” The statutes also define dyslexia screening, related disorders, and support. As specified in the definition, the core issue with dyslexia is a deficit in the phonological component of language, an area of expertise for speech-language pathologists (SLPs). Structured literacy instruction contains several elements within the knowledge and skill base of SLPs including phonemic awareness, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction is a characteristic of effective intervention and is consistent with the manner of instruction in structured literacy and of that employed by SLPs in intervention.

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on October 18, 2016, to address meetings and processes. On November 30, 2016, the Task Force heard testimony from interested citizens relative to screening classroom support, and professional development. On December 1, 2016, the Task Force convened to discuss recommendations for screening, classroom instruction and supports, and professional development. The third meeting of Task Force was held on February 10, 2017, in Jefferson City for the purpose of hearing public testimony focused on classroom instruction, intervention, and implementation of evidence-based reading and instructional programs with general discussion of

testimony following. A meeting will be scheduled for March and/or April 2017 in Jefferson City for additional testimony relative to preservice and inservice professional development for dyslexia.

SLPs interested in the statutes, this area of practice, or aspects of implementation are encouraged to read the statutes: RSMo. 167.950 and 663.420 respectively as follows

<http://www.moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/stathtml/16700009501.html>

<http://www.moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/stathtml/63300004201.html>

and to attend or testify at public hearing. You may contact the MSHA Task Force representative, Eva Trumbower, via email at trumbower1901@gmail.com with subject line reading Dyslexia Task Force, Patricia Jones, MSHA VP for School Services, or Ashley Fields, MSHA VP for Legislative Affairs if you have comment or questions.