



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STUDY COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: MEMBERS OF THE STUDY COMMITTEE ON IDENTIFICATION AND
MANAGEMENT OF DYSLEXIA

FROM: Jessica Ozalp, Senior Staff Attorney, and Julia Norsetter, Staff Attorney

RE: Topics for Committee Discussion

DATE: September 11, 2018

This memorandum summarizes potential topics for committee discussion for the September 18, 2018 meeting of the Study Committee on the Identification and Management of Dyslexia. This committee is directed to review current screening, identification, school intervention, and treatment protocols for dyslexia in K-12 schools, to examine state statutes and regulations relating to literacy outcomes for students with dyslexia, and to evaluate the effects of dyslexia on literacy outcomes in the state. The committee is also directed to consider legislation which may relate to screening for dyslexia, reading instruction and intervention practices, and improving partnerships between parents, educators, counselors, and others.

Various topics summarized below were raised by committee members and presenters during the first two meetings of the committee. This memorandum reflects a non-exhaustive list of issues for consideration within the committee's charge and is intended to prompt discussion.

GUIDEBOOK FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHERS

The committee may wish to discuss whether the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), or another entity, should create a guidebook relating to dyslexia resources in Wisconsin. A discussion relating to a guidebook may include topics such as the composition of the guidebook drafting committee, the intended audience for the guidebook, the scope and content of the guidebook, the format of the guidebook, and distribution or posting of the guidebook.

At least 17 states have resource guides specific to dyslexia. Of the 17, 11 states require the guide by state statute or administrative code. State policy may or may not prescribe for

whom a guidebook should be published and the composition of the group responsible for creating the guide.¹

At the August 29, 2018 meeting, the committee heard from experts from the Minnesota Department of Education regarding the creation of the guidebook, *Navigating the School System When a Child is Struggling with Reading or Dyslexia*. The Minnesota Department of Education collaborated with experts, advocates, administrators, educators, and parents to create a guidebook to support parents and teachers of students with dyslexia in navigating the school system. The publication was developed using a question and answer format, which was guided by questions that the group of experts most frequently received from parents and educators. The questions answered in the guidebook include:

- What does dyslexia or a struggling reader look like?
- What services and supports are available through the school and community, and how can we get access to those services?
- What can I do when services are not offered within the school?
- What can I do when interventions or special education supports are not working?

Other state departments of education have created similar guidebooks, including Arizona, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Texas. The guidebooks vary somewhat in terms of their audience; for example, the New Hampshire guidebook serves as a resource guide for teachers as well as a compliance guide for teachers and school administrators in carrying out the state's dyslexia policy. Minnesota's guidebook serves primarily as a resource guide for parents and teachers.

DYSLEXIA SPECIALIST AT DPI

The committee may wish to discuss whether a dyslexia specialist position should be created at DPI or another entity. If so, the committee may wish to discuss the duties of the dyslexia specialist and any training or other requirements for a qualified candidate.

At least eight states have created a position for a dyslexia specialist at the state or school district level in statute or code.² The positions may be housed in the state department of education (Maine and Minnesota), regional education service centers (Texas), or within local school boards (Virginia). Duties of a dyslexia specialist include:

- Assisting the department of education with general education interventions required by the department's special education rules (Maine).

¹ Statistics provided by Education Commission of the States (ECS).

² Statistics provided by ECS.

- Providing technical assistance for dyslexia and related disorders and serving as the primary source of information and support for schools in addressing the needs of students with dyslexia and related disorders (Minnesota).
- Increasing professional awareness and instructional competencies to meet the educational needs of students with dyslexia or associated risk characteristics (Minnesota).
- Providing school districts with support and resources that are necessary to assist students with dyslexia and the families of students with dyslexia (Texas).
- Advising on dyslexia and related disorders, including appropriate interventions, accommodations, and teaching techniques (Virginia).

While some states leave the requirements for the position to the state department of education, others require certain qualifications by statute or code. Qualifications for a dyslexia specialist may include:

- A background in reading and language difficulties, including dyslexia, and in language and literacy (Maine).
- Certification as a dyslexia therapist, licensed psychologist, licensed speech-language pathologist, or dyslexia training specialist with a minimum of three years of field experience and certain training requirements (Minnesota).
- Licensure as a dyslexia therapist under state statute (Texas).
- Licensure as a reading specialist with a working knowledge of techniques to help students on the continuum of skills with dyslexia, dyslexia characteristics, the basic foundation of the keys to reading, and appropriate interventions (Virginia).

DEFINING THE TERM “DYSLEXIA”

The committee may wish to discuss incorporating a definition of “dyslexia” into state statutes or the administrative code. If the committee determines that a definition would be beneficial, the committee may wish to consider how the definition would interact with special education laws and determine the placement of such a definition in the statutes or code.

A number of states have incorporated a definition of the term “dyslexia” in their state statutes or administrative codes, including Arizona, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, and New Hampshire. By way of example, Minnesota defines the term “dyslexia” to mean:

A specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent recognition of words and by 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 the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. [Minn. Stat. s. 120B.122]

Although definitions differ among states, certain characteristics appear in multiple state definitions, including defining dyslexia as neurological or neurobiological in nature, naming various characteristics of dyslexia, and distinguishing dyslexia from other cognitive deficits. In addition, according to ECS, there are two general trends relating to the placement of definitions within statute or code: (1) some states identify dyslexia as a learning disability and include it in their definitions of learning disabilities; and (2) other states include a specific definition of dyslexia as part of their early identification and intervention requirements.

LITERACY SCREENING ASSESSMENTS

Presenters at the July 9, 2018 meeting emphasized the importance of early screening to identify struggling readers. The committee may wish to discuss Wisconsin's screening requirements and whether any modifications could enhance the effectiveness of screening.

The Wisconsin Legislature enacted universal literacy screening in kindergarten as part of a 2011 education reform package. Initially the law required school districts and charter schools to annually assess each pupil enrolled in kindergarten in the school district or charter school for reading readiness, using a DPI-selected assessment of literacy fundamentals. Under the law, the assessment must evaluate whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. DPI selected Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) as the required screener statewide from 2012 to 2016.

Since 2011, the Legislature has modified the literacy screening requirement twice. The first change was to screen more grades. In the 2013-15 Biennial Budget (2013 Wisconsin Act 20), the requirement to screen kindergartners was expanded to apply to children in 4-year-old kindergarten through first grade in the 2013-14 school year and then to include second grade beginning in the 2014-15 school year.

The second change was flexibility for districts in the choice of screening tools. Since the 2016-17 school year, the school board or operator of a charter school selects the assessment to use to satisfy the literacy screening requirement. This change was made in the 2015-17 biennial budget (2015 Wisconsin Act 55). Accordingly, under current law, each school district or charter school must administer the literacy screener of its choice to students from 4-year-old kindergarten through second grade. The assessment must evaluate phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. [s. 118.016, Stats.]

SCHOOL DISTRICT REPORTS ON READING CURRICULUM AND INTERVENTIONS

Topics for Discussion

At the July 9, 2018 meeting, committee members discussed lack of easily accessible information relating to the reading curriculum or both intervention tools used by a given school district. It was noted that if this information was made publicly available, interested parties including school districts, parents, and DPI could review which intervention tools are used by a given district. This could allow the interested parties to learn about the implementation and efficacy of various curricula and intervention tools.

The committee may wish to consider whether action could be taken to improve compliance with the existing requirement that DPI aggregated district reports on method of reading instruction and reading textbooks. For instance, the committee could recommend legislation adding dedicated position authority to DPI for this task. DPI testified that a 0.5 or 1.0 FTE position would provide sufficient capacity for compliance. The committee could examine whether it would be beneficial to modify the monitoring of struggling reader progress and, if so, how such monitoring should be administered and reported.

Reading Curriculum

State law requires each school board to develop a program of reading goals for the district for grades K-12; make an assessment of reading needs in the district; and make an annual evaluation of the district's reading curriculum. [s. 118.015 (4), Stats.] Each school district board must also develop, adopt, and implement a sequential curriculum plan for certain subjects, including reading. [s. PI 8.01 (2) (k) 2, Wis. Adm. Code.]

Districts are required by law to produce and post on their websites an annual performance report that includes the **method of reading instruction** used in the school district and the **textbook series** used to teach reading in the school district. [s. 115.38 (1) (e), Stats.] Districts must make this report available to parents upon request. At the state level, DPI is required to publish an annual summary of this information and distribute it to the Legislature. [s. 115.38 (3), Stats.] DPI testified that it does not gather this information from the districts or report it due to a lack of staff capacity.

Reading Interventions

When a student's performance on the literacy screening assessment indicates that the student is at risk of reading difficulty, the school must provide interventions or remedial reading services. The interventions or services provided must be scientifically based, and must address all areas in which the student is deficient in a manner consistent with the state standards in reading and language arts. [s. 121.02 (1) (c), Stats.] State law also requires schools to provide the same interventions or services to any K-4 student who: (1) fails to meet the reading objectives specified in the district's reading curriculum plan; or (2) fails to score above the state minimum

performance standard on the third grade statewide reading test.³ However, current law does not require school districts to select particular intervention tools and instead allows school districts to choose interventions that fit the requirements above.

Monitoring Struggling Readers

DPI rules require each school district to identify, diagnose, serve, and monitor each K-4 student who fails to meet district grade level objectives identified in the district's above-described curriculum plans. Identification and diagnosis of reading deficiencies in schools can be performed only by a reading specialist or a licensed professional who earned at least six semester credits in courses dealing with the measurement of reading skills and achievement or the diagnosis of reading difficulties. Once identified, struggling readers receive remedial instruction and their progress is monitored on a regular basis with parental involvement. A district must develop a remedial reading plan, including an assessment of the reading program in place, if more than 20% of a school's or district's students score below state minimum performance standards. DPI makes technical assistance available to such districts. [s. PI 8.01 (2) (c), Wis. Adm. Code.]

SUMMER SCHOOL AND EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE TIME FOR READING INTERVENTIONS

The committee may wish to discuss whether interventions for struggling readers should be offered at times outside of the typical school day, such as during summer school or extended day programs.

At the July 9, 2018 meeting, presenters including teachers and a school district administrator discussed the challenges of finding time to provide interventions to students who are struggling to read. The presenters discussed the fact that, if interventions are provided to a student, then the time allocated for another activity in that student's school day must be reduced. The presenters noted that it is difficult to decide which activities should be reduced to accommodate reading interventions, including academic subjects, math interventions, and free time for physical activity.

EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVES FOR SPOKEN LANGUAGE EXPOSURE

During the committee's July 9, 2018 meeting, presenters suggested that exposure to spoken language early in a child's life lays a foundation for better reading outcomes, thereby reducing the number of children who develop dyslexia or who require reading interventions.

³ If performance on the statewide reading test is the triggering condition, interventions and services are only required if: (1) a teacher in the school district determines based on other objective evidence that the test performance accurately reflects the student's reading ability; or (2) a teacher in the school district and the student's parent or guardian agree that the test performance accurately reflects the student's reading ability. [s. 121.02 (1) (c), Stats.]

The committee may wish to discuss early learning initiatives for spoken language exposure and oral language development before children enter kindergarten. Such programs are typically extracurricular activities developed locally and not at the state level.

There are some community-based programs focusing on oral language as an early step in the development of proficient readers. Illinois's "Jumpstart" is an example of a program administered by a corps of volunteers, primarily in preschool settings with children from low-income communities. The program involves a full school year using a unique, focused curriculum implemented with trained college students and community volunteers dedicating six to eight hours of time per week to read to children and do social activities that develop essential language, literacy, social, and initiative skills. The Jumpstart program features a curriculum that is designed to focus specifically on building the key skills that research shows are critical in supporting children's language, literacy, and social-emotional development. A small-scale research study indicated that Jumpstart children exceeded comparison children in gains in school readiness and literacy skills. Among the literacy measures, Jumpstart children's fall to spring growth was especially great in vocabulary and phonological awareness.

FUNDING FOR READ TO LEAD GRANTS

The committee may wish to discuss allocating general purpose revenue funds or a revenue stream to the Read to Lead Development Fund. In 2011, the Legislature created the fund for grants to support literacy and early childhood development programs. The Legislature did not fund this program in the 2015-17 budget. The fund is administered by the Read to Lead Development Council, composed of 20 members. The council has not solicited private funding such as donations, gifts, bequests, or contributions.

FUNDING FOR READING SPECIALISTS UNDER CURRENT S. 118.015, STATS.

The committee heard testimony that many districts share a part-time reading specialist due to lack of resources to employ one full-time. The committee may wish to discuss allocating funds to be used for employing reading specialists.

Current law requires each school district to employ a certified reading specialist to develop and coordinate a comprehensive reading curriculum for all grades. At the discretion of the state superintendent, a school district may contract with other districts or cooperative educational service agencies to employ such a specialist on a cooperative basis. [s. 118.015, Stats.]

TEACHER TRAINING AND LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS

Committee members have expressed the intention to examine teacher training and licensure requirements in Wisconsin. Subject to specific statutory limitations, the state superintendent of public instruction is authorized to establish attainment and examination standards for teachers and to promulgate rules regulating teacher licensing. [s. 115.28 (7), Stats.] The superintendent is also authorized to set standards for and approve teacher preparation

programs. Procedures for teacher licensing are controlled by DPI administrative rules. [ch. PI 34, Wis. Adm. Code.] Chapter PI 34 provides requirements for three stages of licenses for teachers: (1) a provisional educator license; (2) a lifetime educator license; and (3) a master educator license. Chapter PI 34 also provides standards for approved programs at higher educational institutions that prepare teachers. By law, no such program can receive state approval unless it includes at least one full semester of student teaching. [s. 118.19 (3) (a), Stats.]

Generally, an applicant for teacher licensure in Wisconsin must possess a bachelor's degree and must have completed an approved teacher preparation program, although there are some limited exceptions to these requirements for teaching specific subjects. [s. 118.19 (3) (a), Stats.]

Foundations of Reading test

To obtain a license to teach in **grades K- 5** or in **special education**, or as a **reading teacher** or **reading specialist**, an applicant must pass the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT). The statute sets the minimum passing score. [s. 118.19 (14), Stats.]

Elementary Level Reading or Language Arts License

State law requires that any applicant for a license to teach **reading or language arts** in pre-K or grades K-6 must successfully complete instruction preparing the applicant to teach reading and language arts using appropriate instructional methods, including phonics. The phonics instruction need not be provided as a separate course. "Phonics" is defined in this law to mean a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups, and syllables. [s. 118.19 (12), Stat.]

Reading Teacher or Reading Specialist

DPI administrative rules set forth requirements to work in the schools as a reading specialist, meaning "to direct early childhood through adolescence reading programs or to work with reading teachers, classroom teachers, administrators, and others as a resource teacher in reading." [s. PI 34.070, Wis. Adm. Code.] The reading specialist position is under the administrator subchapter, requiring a master's degree and at least six semesters of successful teaching experience.

The rules also specify certain requirements a teacher must meet to add a "supplementary area" to his or her teaching license. One of these supplementary areas is reading, meaning "a specific assignment to teach reading in prekindergarten through 12th grade." [s. PI 34.082 (2), Wis. Adm. Code.] It requires an institutional endorsement for a reading teacher license, completion of an approved program, two years of regular classroom teaching experience, proficiency in teaching reading, and completion of a clinical program that meets requirements. [Id.]

Under DPI rules, a reading teacher license is required for the following:

- An assignment to teach reading for more than one class per day.

- An assignment to teach reading in a Title 1 reading program.
- An assignment to teach in a reading recovery program, if not part of a self-contained classroom.

A reading teacher license is **not** required for the following:

- An assignment to teach reading that is part of a regular self-contained classroom.
- An assignment to teach reading that is integrated as part of content courses (i.e., reading in the content area).

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at the Legislative Council staff offices.

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