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The Dyslexia Disparity: An Examination of Inequities in the Identification and Intervention of Early Learners of Color

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THE DYSLEXIA DISPARITY: AN EXAMINATION OF INEQUITIES IN THE
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION OF EARLY LEARNERS OF COLOR

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A DISSERTATION

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THE DYSLEXIA DISPARITY: AN EXAMINATION OF INEQUITIES IN THE
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION OF BLACK EARLY LEARNERS

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Although Black students are overrepresented in the special education (SPED) population within the educational system in the United States, the number of Black students identified with dyslexia can be concluded to be significantly lower (Annamma et al., 2018; Farkas et al., 2020; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). With experts positing that dyslexia affects as many as one in five persons, attention to this matter is needed especially regarding the youngest Black students (Hyles & Hoyles, 2010; Moats & Dakin, 2017). The characteristics of dyslexia are manifested in neurological processes surrounding reading abilities, thought processes, and motor skills (Moats & Dakin, 2017). This study attempts to offer awareness of the lack of identification and remediation for Black students affected by dyslexia and how this lack of identification and remediation occurs. Employing a case study approach, the research study focuses on one urban area school district, its processes and protocols, and the knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions of its school- and district-level personnel involving dyslexia. Issues surrounding race, economics, and class in relationship to how urban area schools with marginalized populations advocate for dyslexia are also explored.

Keywords: dyslexia, Black early learners, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), urban education, approaches to reading and literacy

DEDICATION

My beautiful black butterflies, Kennedy, William, and Joshua, and all of the other beautiful black butterflies that flutter against the forces of gravity each day to fulfill their purposes and achieve new heights, never stop flying.

Mother, even in death, you are still the wind beneath my wings. I am eternally grateful because "I'm everything I am because you loved me."

When I say, "Marco," you say, "Polo!" Marcus, you have been the best friend a sister could ever wish for in this life. Thank you, friend.

Dave, I am forever grateful for our journey and growth. "There's a ribbon in the sky for our love!"

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALSDE   Alabama State Department of Education

CEC   Council for Exceptional Children

CRT   Critical Race Theory

DEC   Division for Early Childhood

DISCRIT   Dis/ability Critical Race Theory

DIEBELS   Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

FAPE   free appropriate public education

IDEA   Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP   individualized education plan

LEA   local education agency

PLC   professional learning community

PST   Problem Solving Team

RtI   Response to Instruction

SLD   specific learning dis/ability

SPED   special education

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Opening Vignette

Fred was a six-year-old boy who experienced a typical birth and met all

developmental milestones normally. He attended an accredited preschool regulated by

state and federal guidelines. He performed well and began reading around age four.

Fred's mother read to him most evenings without fail, which provided a foundation for

the importance of literacy in the home. Alicia, Fred's mother, was proud of her son and

reveled in his learning but was concerned about some behaviors exhibited by Fred.

Regularly, he was confused by commands that included concepts such as before and

after, up and down, and forward and backward. Although he read fluently, he often

skipped prepositions, especially the following: of, to, in, for, on, by, at, into, and from.

However, his elimination of these words did not appear to affect Fred's comprehension

and overall understanding of concepts. His mother recognized that young children

frequently skipped words, ignored letter sounds, and sometimes left out entire lines of

text when reading. Fred's mother had his senses examined to ensure that there were no

hearing or visual impairments. The results of this testing caused no alarm because Fred's

hearing and vision were within the normal range.

After success in preschool, Fred enrolled in an urban area public school. His

kindergarten class was led by one of the school's best teachers. Ms. Anderson had

advanced degrees and over 20 years of experience teaching early learners like Fred. He performed well and attained honor roll status. He was placed in the high-level reading group and won top honors in several school-wide competitions.

Fred's reading and writing skills progressed as he matriculated into first grade. Occasionally, Alicia would notice shifts in Fred's handwriting. Some days, his printing was barely legible and at other times, Fred's writing was impeccable. Alicia knew or was reassured that legibility issues were typical for a first-grade child. As Fred's mother continued to pay close attention to his progress, she noticed that sometimes numbers and letters were written backward, slanted incorrectly, and jumbled together improperly. Again, she was told that these actions were often typical of young learners. In the afternoons, most days after school, Fred complained of headaches. But she attributed this trait to heredity as she (during childhood) often suffered from tension headaches after a long day of learning and concentration.

Upon entering second grade, Fred continued to perform as an honor student. Although Alicia kept noticing some inconsistencies in Fred's overall achievement versus interval performance, reading and writing were not problematic for the young learner. His creative writing assignments showed imagination and depth of thought but lacked structure, syntax, and movement. Alicia knew or was told and read about how young learners were expected to show a lack of structure and syntax as they developed and learned the conventions of writing. Fred continued to be a fluent reader but often had difficulty blending letter sounds. This inability was puzzling to Alicia because, when asked, Fred could, without hesitation, identify individual letter sounds. Again, she knew that such tasks as learning to blend sounds could be difficult for young children who are

developing and learning the conventions of language. At this point, Alicia began to confer with Fred's teacher who did not express concern. His teacher seemed shocked by Alicia's questioning and was often dismissive. Fred was, after all, a straight "A" student and his Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (University of Oregon, 2018) scores were at the top of his grade level.

Fred was thriving until he was not. As the onset of third grade came closer, Alicia observed Fred's growing difficulty to blend letter sounds, chunk word parts, and read fluently. His command of multisyllabic words, morphemes, word tenses, and spelling became jumbled and increasingly awkward. Interestingly, Alicia noticed that once Fred was told a word in correction or assistance, he deposited that word into a mental bank and remembered it perfectly for future use. It seemed that Fred treated every word, large or small as if it were a "sight word."

After extensive personal research and exhaustive deliberation, Alicia decided to have Fred tested for dyslexia. She found the process of finding a testing facility to be a daunting and dubious task at best. Surprisingly, Fred's school did not offer to test for dyslexia. His teachers had not seen a need for him to be tested for anything other than the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program. Outside of school, learning facilities and specialized tutoring programs offered testing for dyslexia but at exorbitant prices. Finding someone to assess Fred for dyslexia was stressful, exhausting, and prolonged.

After being placed on the waiting list of a local foundation, Fred was finally tested in the autumn of his third-grade year. With an official diagnosis of dyslexia and detailed testing results, Alicia contacted Fred's school counselor for direction and assistance in formulating a plan to ensure his continued academic success before his

learning difficulties became insurmountable. To Alicia's dismay, the counselor did not understand Fred's need for a plan and responded to the request by asking, "He should have grown out of that by now, right?" This response was indicative of the attitudes and understandings of his teachers and other education professionals within the school. These events marked the beginning of an ongoing, repetitive, and agonizing battle Alicia would endure to ensure her son's academic success.

Fred's difficulties with phonetics in contrast to his marked intelligence left teachers and staff perplexed. He excelled in mathematics and continued his honor roll status earning an occasional grade of B in addition to multiple A grades. Alicia chose to create a 504 Plan for Fred to address his difficulties. Because Fred had also been selected to participate in the TAG program, Alicia knew SPED, and an individualized education program (IEP), was not the right choice. Fred was a young Black boy, and young Black boys that entered special education (SPED) rarely had their needs met appropriately, let alone tested out of such programs. Alicia knew that typically, Black children in SPED were adversely affected, both socially and emotionally. Academically, they did not grow and continued their entire school careers in a program that mediocrely addressed their learning challenges. Alicia knew that SPED was not the proper placement for her son.

The 504 Plan created by Fred's mother and the school counselor was simplistic and ineffective. Alicia was new to the topic of dyslexia and expected the education professionals at Fred's school to know more and be trained to address the needs of all learners. The counselor was not knowledgeable about dyslexia at all. She thought he should have aged out of his dis/ability. Fred's teachers neither denied nor accepted his dis/ability. They did not indicate their knowledge or ignorance of dyslexia which alarmed

Alicia greatly. They simply complied with passive resistance as they only knew one thing for sure, following a 504 Plan was unavoidable. They were bound by federal law and its subsequent regulations.

Fourth grade began and proceeded in much the same manner as third grade. Fred's teachers were perplexed about how to meet his needs. They were accustomed to accommodating and modifying to one extreme or another, but not both for one child. They did not understand the need to accommodate a child in the talented and gifted (TAG) program who showed immense intelligence and ability. Sometimes, accommodations were skipped, overlooked, and forgotten. At other times, accommodations were oversimplified and did not match Fred's capabilities.

The conundrum of meeting Fred's needs according to his intelligence and dis/ability proved too much for some of his teachers. Comments made by his fourth-grade reading teacher showed her lack of understanding and unwillingness to learn. In a parent-teacher conference, she told Fred's mother that "this is a SPED issue and that is where students with dyslexia belong." The principal also attempted to encourage Fred's placement in SPED by falsely claiming that certain accommodations were not allowed under a 504 Plan. These attitudes of resistance and willful ignorance were not lost on Fred and, in turn, took a toll on his emotional well-being and self-esteem.

Battles between Alicia and the school ensued throughout his first year after diagnosis and subsequent years. District-level personnel, specialists, central office administrators, and entire grade-level teams gathered to help devise plans of action for Fred. And even with the combined efforts of so many educational experts, little to nothing was done to remediate or support Fred's learning difficulties. Throughout his

schooling, Fred would vacillate between well-meaning teachers, resistant and resentful educators, unknowledgeable tutors, mediocre instructional specialists, shifting school protocols, and ineffective resources. This vignette is the story of a young Black boy diagnosed with dyslexia educated in an urban area school.

Background

A Record of Dyslexia

The presence of dyslexia is matched by human existence but has long been overlooked by society. Since its first record of occurrence, dyslexia has been defined in many ways depending on the research and discoveries of various doctors and psychologists. Early documentation of this condition ranges back more than 140 years with Adolph Kussmaul in 1887 (Howell, 2019). This German medical professor was the first to identify the reading and spelling characteristics of dyslexia (Kirby, 2020). Further studies conducted in the late 19th century by British physician and eye surgeon, William Pringle Morgan, provided an understanding of dyslexia as a congenital deficiency as opposed to an ocular issue (Howell, 2019; Kirby, 2020). On the heels of Morgan was James Hinshelwood, a Scottish ophthalmologist. Hinshelwood greatly contributed to this field of study by dedicating 25 years to research and publishing seminal works on "Cognitive Word-Blindness" (Howell, 2019, p. n.d.). It is important to note that Morgan's and Hinshelwood's descriptions of dyslexia differ from Kussmaul's. Kussmaul described an acquired form of dyslexia which is the result of brain injury or damage in adults while Morgan's explanation is developmental and considered to be neurological unfolding in children over a period during which literacy skills are normally learned

(Howell, 2019). Developmental dyslexia, or simply dyslexia, is the type that this research study attempts to address.

In addition to Morgan's and Hinshelwood's account of dyslexia is the work of Samuel Orton of the Orton-Gillingham Approach in the 1920s. Orton classified dyslexia as a "problem with how children were thinking, rather than a disease, injury, or other physical defect of the brain" (Kirby, 2020, p. 478). These joint conceptualizations in tandem with the requirement of compulsory education situated dyslexia as a developmental disorder in children and subsequently became the responsibility of educational psychology. However, despite this recorded evidence, continued debates surrounding the existence of dyslexia, its effects, and how to properly instruct students experiencing the dis/ability continued to plague the education community. As a result, dyslexia in children has long been denied, avoided, and ignored until recent years.

Dyslexia and Education

The United States' educational system's attempts to serve young children with dyslexia have been fraught with considerable evasiveness, ambiguity, and doubt. Hanford (2020), an education reporter who has extensively covered the topic of dyslexia in the United States, noted that this issue is evidenced by a long-time refusal of public schools to use the term dyslexia when addressing issues with reading proficiency for students. Historically, concepts like dyslexia that place medical or biological emphasis on reading problems were evaded and rejected by the education sector (Howell, 2019). In addition, the costs incurred by schools to educate students with special needs or dis/abilities have also been linked with the avoidance of the term. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, the cost to educate one special needs student can add up to twice as much as a regular education student (Hanford, 2017). Therefore, teachers were admonished for suggesting or implicating that a student may be experiencing the characteristics of such dis/abilities as dyslexia. According to Howell (2019), doing so would place the financial burden of identification and intervention (of students with dyslexia) directly on the local education agency (LEA).

Further avoidance of the term, dyslexia, is evidenced in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) which is used by the education sector within their SPED department. The DSM-IV did not include the term, dyslexia until 1994 and soon thereafter the disorder was absolved into the broader category of specific learning disorder (SLD) (Howell, 2019). SLD is defined as a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involving the use of language (spoken or written) (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

> Avoiding the word was such a problem in schools across the country that in 2015 the U.S. Department of Education issued a special letter reminding schools that not only can they use the word dyslexia, but they should also use the word if it can help them tailor an appropriate education plan for a student. (Hanford, 2017)

Several advocacy groups and programs like the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, and Decoding Dyslexia have worked with parents, educators, researchers, and persons experiencing dyslexia to develop similar and generally accepted definitions for the disorder. Dyslexia, in most cases, is defined as a neurological processing disorder that is characterized by issues in reading linked to phonological awareness (Moats & Dakin, 2017; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). It is identified as a reading dis/ability, but all reading difficulties are not dyslexia (Stein, 2018). Dyslexia was also found to be familial meaning that a student with dyslexia

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will have one or more close relatives (i.e., parents, siblings) also experiencing dyslexia (Kilpatrick, 2018; Stein, 2018; Thompson et al., 2015). Even with this generally accepted definition for dyslexia, many varying ideas, perceptions, and beliefs persist which undoubtedly creates diverging implications concerning how dyslexia is addressed in schools across the nation and more directly within each state (Hanford, 2020; Howell, 2019).

The United States' teacher preparation programs are also encumbered by considerable dissonance surrounding a lack of teacher knowledge of dyslexia and a definitive answer to which approach/es to early reading instruction is best (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Hanford, 2017). General education teachers are typically required to take only one survey course in SPED during pre-service training (Gonzalez & Brown, 2019). This minimal requirement does not provide the comprehensive knowledge needed to effectively recognize the behavioral, cognitive, and biological characteristics of students with dyslexia. Evidenced by the history of the Reading Wars in the United States, there was and continues to be a highly politicized fracture centered around teaching children to read (i.e., whole language versus phonics) (Hanford, 2020; Howell, 2019). This along with an avoidance of the term and unwillingness to acknowledge its existence in public schools thwarted any early efforts to proficiently address the needs of students experiencing dyslexia (Hanford, 2020; Howell, 2019).

Statement of Problem

Early Identification and Intervention

When confronting the challenges of learning difficulties, teachers are advised that early intervention is integral to academic success (Shanahan, 2018). Dyslexia "is found to be genetic in nature and runs strongly in families" (Thorwarth, 2014, p. 52) and can be concluded to be existent at birth. Moats and Dakin (2017) described dyslexia as a language-based learning dis/ability evidenced in students who experience difficulties in spelling, reading fluency, and word recognition. Even with an understanding of dyslexia and the importance of early intervention, education professionals can find the identification of dyslexia in early learners extremely difficult. The common characteristics of language development regarding early learners are perplexingly akin to the markers experienced by students with dyslexia. Correctly distinguishing such learning behaviors in young children, like miscues, inverted writing, and overregulation, as the characteristics of dyslexia or typical language development can be daunting for any teacher-novice or veteran. As stated by Dr. Sally Shaywitz (co-director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity), "most students who are diagnosed with dyslexia aren't identified until at least third grade" (Hanford, 2017). In the past, little to no training was made available to pre-service or in-service teachers regarding dyslexia, its effects on student learning, or its identifying characteristics (Hanford, 2017; Thorwarth, 2014). According to reports from Hanford (2017), "public schools often lack staff with the appropriate training to help" students identified with dyslexia.

When successfully identified, students with learning difficulties in reading (e.g., dyslexia) are often placed in SPED and labeled as having a specific learning dis/ability

(SLD). "In most states, though a student receives the designation of SLD, parents, and teachers may not be informed of the specific nature of the academic weakness; dyslexia may not be identified as the cause of the designation" (Phillips & Odegard, 2017, p. 357). This blanketed labeling of SLD is deeply problematic, as it ignores the specificity of various learning differences that require different plans for remediation and intervention (Stein, 2018). In the case of dyslexia, specific interventions including systematic multisensory and explicit instruction implemented by trained dyslexia specialists and certified teachers have been deemed most effective (Johnston, 2019; Peterson et al., 2017). When students are herded into a general category of SLD, the instruction needed to remediate, and grow is less likely to occur because the origin of the reading difficulty has not been determined (Stein, 2018). This miscategorization can result in a complexity of issues affecting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students (Johnston, 2019).

Educator Perceptions, Knowledge, and Training

There are many formally educated professionals-including teachers of English, reading, writing, literature, and even SPED instructors, who cannot provide a simple definition for dyslexia (Gonzalez & Brown, 2019). Education professionals most closely responsible for fostering literacy and reading proficiency in students appear to be unaware of what dyslexia is, how dyslexia affects learning, or how it may present in students although it is reported to affect as many as one in five people worldwide (Moats & Dakin, 2017). From research presented by Washburn et al. (2017), it was concluded that novice and experienced teachers hold many misconceptions about dyslexia and how

it affects students' ability to read. Imagine the number of students who, year after year, go unidentified, improperly instructed, misdiagnosed, and unjustifiably passed on as lazy, too slow to learn, or simply ignored.

Misinformation coupled with mislabeling like Kussmaul's use of the term "word blindness" may have had some bearing on the misconceptions associated with dyslexia today (Kirby, 2020). Some educators continue to interpret dyslexia as an ocular issue if persons with the condition cannot see words properly or view letters and numbers backward or upside-down (Kirby, 2020; Washburn et al., 2017). Another misconception surrounding dyslexia involves perceived intelligence in regard to reading ability. Typically, it is understood that if a child is intelligent, they are a good reader, and if they are a good reader, a child is intelligent (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). Studies conducted by Ferrer et al. (2010) reported on the unexpected nature of this learning difficulty in direct contrast to students' apparent intelligence. Such misunderstandings have caused learners to be labeled as indolent, indifferent, inattentive, and unteachable (Hanford, 2017; Howell, 2019). This kind of confusion coupled with a lack of training has placed both students and teachers at a disadvantage when dealing with the effects of dyslexia (Hanford, 2017).

Intersectionality of Race, Class, and Economics

According to Welsh and Swain (2020), a plethora of social, political, and economic issues plague urban area schools and adversely affect the academic success of their students. Schools in urban areas are typically populated with a high concentration of students of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native) deriving from families fraught with

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immense economic challenges (Massey et al., 2014). According to Welsh and Swain (2020), urban area schools are defined in multifaceted ways determined by the challenges they face like worn-down buildings and facilities, racial segregation, poverty, low achievement scores, educational inequality, overcrowding, and a lack of appropriate personnel.

The disparities that afflict students of urban education can be concluded to extend to every aspect of the teaching and learning process not excluding students with dis/abilities and special needs. Research has long indicated that Black students in the United States are overrepresented in the SPED population within schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Massey, Warrington & Holmes, 2014; Annamma et al., 2018; Farkas et al., 2020). Sullivan and Bal (2013) reported that although weakened by socioeconomic status (impoverishment), race remained a significant predictor of SPED status with Black students significantly more likely to be identified as SLD. In cases of students possibly experiencing dyslexia, the SPED category of SLD was used to address student needs. This trend of labeling is particularly important to note as historically only students from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds were able to attain the recognition and support needed to specifically address dyslexia (Hanford, 2020; Kirby, 2020; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). Other learners, like Black early learners attending urban area schools, were left to rely on federal, state, and local (e.g., public school) advocacy (Johnston, 2019). This occurrence is problematic as schools have not been equipped with the knowledge, personnel, or protocols and procedures appropriate to address the needs of students experiencing dyslexia (Gonzalez & Brown, 2018).

If identified with a reading dis/ability (including dyslexia), students within urban area schools are typically labeled as SLD and provided with an IEP to serve their specialized learning needs (Farkas et al., 2020; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). This plan of action is not always best for students with a learning dis/ability like dyslexia. SLD is a general identification label for any learning dis/ability in reading or mathematics (Phillips & Odegard, 2017). Even with assessment results to guide prescribed modifications and accommodations, a large portion of knowledge concerning a child's precise needs is potentially lost using this process (Phillips & Odegard, 2017; Thorwarth, 2014). With respect to dyslexia, the peculiarity of this learning difference requires specificity in knowledge and action (Gonzalez & Brown, 2019; Johnston, 2019; Thorwarth, 2014). Furthermore, the sociological challenges of urban education and the overgeneralization of their students in SPED further complicate the process of academic remediation for students of color with dyslexia (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Farkas et al., 2020).

Students with dyslexia who are fortunate enough to have their needs addressed usually derive from homes and communities of wealth, privilege, and Whiteness (Sandman-Hurley, 2020). This circumstance can be understood when considering the history of dyslexia in the United States and how the public education sector has long neglected students experiencing dyslexia due to the exorbitant spending per pupil cost as noted in reports by Hanford (2017). Families who seek services outside of the public-school sector have the resources and privilege needed to provide their children with dyslexia-specific instruction and support (Hanford, 2017; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). Families who are not privileged are dependent upon the services of the LEA and their employees (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2019; Lindstrom, 2018). Young Black children and their

families facing racial disparities are often caught in the intersectionality involving racial, social, and economic issues (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Massey et al., 2014). This means that young Black students with dyslexia who rely on a FAPE are very easily overlooked and underserved within public schools (Annamma et al., 2018).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that surround inequities involving young Black students regarding dyslexia. It is important to note that the focus of this study is specifically on young Black learners. However, the intersectionality involving race and socioeconomic factors that pertain to Black early learners is also applicable to other groups (e.g., marginalized, impoverished, people of color) involving dyslexia. To fully investigate the identified factors, this study examined several areas concerning the topic: (a) school- and district-level personnel (i.e., teachers, specialists, administrators, directors); (b) school- and district-level processes and protocols; and (c) the interdependent relationship between the components of personnel, processes, and protocols. This study's intent is also to explore the elements within the educational context of urban area schools-institutions that typically serve low-income students and students of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native). This issue is important to understand as urban schools typically face issues of disparity surrounding race, class, culture, and economics (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Welsh & Swain, 2020).

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to examine, explore, and investigate various factors involving young Black learners concerning dyslexia who are enrolled in an urban area school located in Central Alabama.

1. How do urban area school and district personnel describe their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions concerning dyslexia and early learners?

2. How do school and district personnel describe the processes and protocols implemented to identify and intervene on behalf of early learners at risk for and identified with dyslexia?

3. How do the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of school- and district-level personnel shape the processes and/or protocols utilized to identify early learners with dyslexia and implement interventions?

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the social and historical constructions of power that affect all human endeavors (Jones & Duckworth, 2021; Kincheloe et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). With its roots stemming from the field of law and the Civil Rights Movement, CRT posits that "racism and white supremacy" are defining elements of American (United States') society and permeate every aspect of human life (Bodenheimer, 2021; Jones & Duckworth, 2021). CRT is undergirded by the understanding that race is a social construction and has no tangible bearing on a person's intellect, morality, or behaviors (Jones & Duckworth, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Regardless, this social construction continues to be used as a basis for white supremacy in the United States solidifying the necessity for critical theories (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Education is one of the most important of human endeavors and fortuitously CRT has had one of its greatest impacts on this field (Bodenheimer, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT places a critical eye on the methods by which race, class, and economics intersect to create inferior educational outcomes for students of color (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Jones & Duckworth, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Young Black students, particularly students concentrated in urban area schools and served within a SPED program, have educational experiences filled with prejudice, discrimination, and inadequacies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Because of the highlighted issues, the application of CRT in educational research continues to be imperative for improvements in education transformation (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Jones & Duckworth, 2021).

Through the lens of education, CRT examines how people of color are adversely affected by mainstream implementations of curriculum, instruction, assessment, funding, and even desegregation (Jones & Duckworth, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The application of CRT in education brought a critical eye to the structures and practices used to educate children of color (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017).

Figure 1

CRT, Intersectionality of -isms, & DisCrit
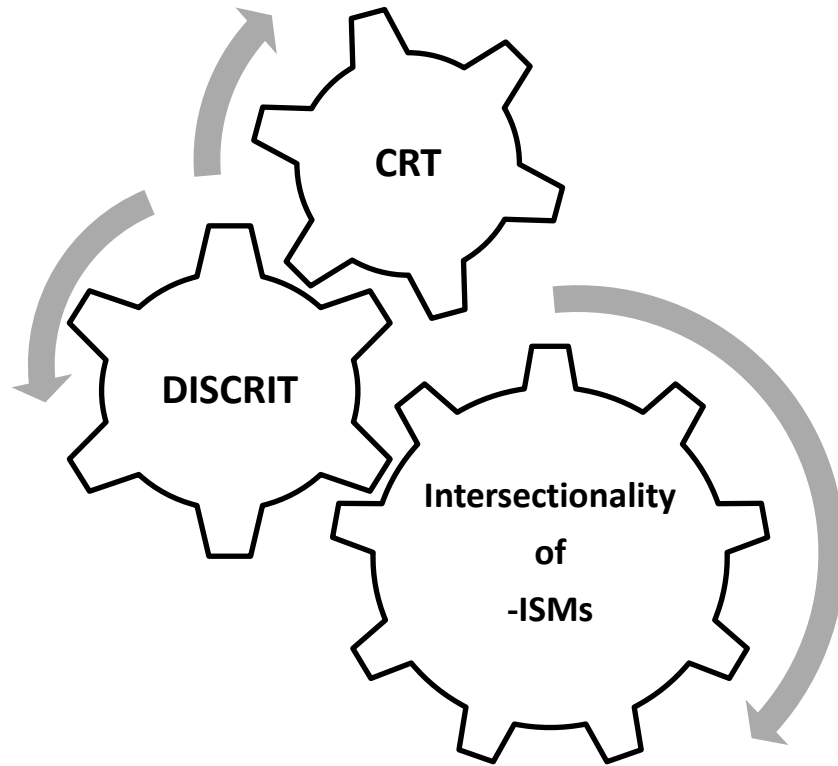
As outlined by Ladson-Billings (1998), the fundamental of CRT can be explained through the following five tenets:

1. Official school curriculums were created to uphold a master narrative that is exclusionary of the realities and contributions regarding people of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native);

2. Instruction is taught from a deficit perspective where teachers constantly concentrate on a perceived lack of ability in their students;

3. Assessments are utilized to legitimize poor learning and academic achievement on the part of students of color instead of analyzing the use of mediocre curriculums and inappropriate instructional practices;

4. CRT also purports that a lack of school funding and desegregation are the results of systemic racism. Complex structures were designed to continually maintain sub-standard housing perpetuating the existence of undesirable communities; and

5. Desegregation was found to benefit White children as opposed to its obvious intention of equality. As special programs were made available in schools, often they would go to White children because their Black counterparts were subjected to increased oppressive actions (e.g., suspension, expulsion).

Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit)

Employing the basic tenets of CRT as applied to education, Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) aims to **"**deconstruct ableism" in conjunction with other -isms (e.g., classism, racism, sexism) and "reconstruct," in students with dis/abilities, an approach to learning that is "strengths-based and affirming" (Annamma et al., 2018; Rausch et al., 2021). To understand the functionality and applicability of DisCrit in education, it is important to understand why it is necessary (See Figure 1). The disparities involving race, class, and economics combine to create conditions that undergird the need for the frameworks of CRT and DisCrit (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Table 1

The Seven Tenets of Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit)

TENET	EXPLANATION
DisCrit places special attention on how racism and ableism blend to uphold notions of normalcy.	Intelligence and race are NOT inherently connected. All people of color, because of their "color," are not intellectually inferior.
DisCrit troubles singular notions of identity (e.g.., race, class, gender, dis/ability) and promotes multidimensional identities.	There is NOT only one way to be a person of color, dis/abled, a woman, a man, etc.
DisCrit recognizes the impacts of labeling (e.g., dis/abled, race, gender) which "others" and places students outside of the dominant cultural normative.	Dominant cultural norms are NOT representative of the only acceptable or correct "way of being."
DisCrit provides a platform for counter-narratives in research.	There is more than one story, and it is important to allow participants to tell their stories regardless of dis/ability. Dis/ability does not always equate to vulnerability. All perspectives are valuable and important to this work.
DisCrit reflects on the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how they have been used separately and jointly to deny the rights of certain students.	Throughout history, law and public policy (i.e., Alabama Literacy Act) have been used to maintain privilege and dominance over students labeled by race and dis/ability.
DisCrit identifies Whiteness and ability as property and acknowledges that gains for students with dis/abilities are a result of a union with the dominant culture.	Assimilation and association with Whiteness equal goodness. This convergence brings about the most benefit to students of color with dis/abilities.
DisCrit upholds all forms of resistance and necessitates activism.	There can be no positive effect on learning and growth for students of color with dis/abilities without disruption and correction.

(Annamma et al., 2018, p. 55-62)

Although legal mandates are in place to protect the rights of students with dis/abilities, the services provided to students of color with dis/abilities are dependent upon the understanding and ethical commitment of school and district personnel (Annamma et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). All too often covert and overt ideas about race and ability converge to create a culture of ableism that perpetuates deficit-oriented teaching practices. DisCrit attempts to address the systems in place (i.e., SPED services, general education, racism, sexism, classism, economics) that converge together to create unfavorable and deficit-laden outcomes for students of color with dis/abilities (Rausch et al., 2021). The application of this theory in urban area schools has the potential to be life-changing for students who are struggling socially and academically (Migliarini & Annamma, 2019).

For this research study, I have chosen to utilize the seven tenets of DisCrit as compiled by Annamma et al. (2018). The tenets describe the principles and core beliefs of this theoretical framework. DisCrit recognizes the conjoined complications of race, gender, class, economics, and dis/ability (See Table 1). As applied to education, this theoretical framework acts to unsettle normative systems that disadvantage students through low expectations, deficit models, and the revocation of student rights (Migliarini & Annamma, 2019; Rausch et al., 2021).

Delimitations of Study

The delimitations of this study were inadvertently outlined by its targeted focus, purpose, population, and research methodology. The focus of this study is on the examination of processes and protocols utilized by one urban area public school district

in Central Alabama to address the needs of young Black students with dyslexia. This case study also sought to pinpoint the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of urban area public school personnel connected to young Black learners who are or may be experiencing dyslexia. This study was restricted to the selected factors (i.e., processes, protocols, school personnel) in association with the urban education context as it relates to race, society, and economics in education.

This study did not include the roles of parents, students, or their knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs about the processes utilized by urban area schools to identify and intervene on behalf of early learners of color experiencing dyslexia. This study did not attempt to examine or investigate validity claims surrounding the existence of dyslexia or allegations associated with the science of reading, whole language, or any other instructional approaches concerning dyslexia. Furthermore, this study did not attempt to highlight the experiences of White, dominant, privileged, or other ethnic groups and communities concerning the topic of dyslexia.

Significance of Study

The effectiveness of urban area schools in meeting the needs of all learners is too often hinged on the political agendas of people in power, the race and social class of the people being served, and the economic status of the surrounding community (Annamma et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Migliarini & Annamma, 2019). This study is significant as it aims to examine the disparities in how Black children at risk for and with dyslexia are advocated for in an urban area school district (Sandman-Hurley, 2020). An examination of the disparities and inequities in urban education can offer meaningful data

on the implications of these adversities. Significant findings can create a space for powerful discussions surrounding the awareness and advocacy of young Black learners experiencing dyslexia through culture. Discussions coupled with action can tend change for students of color because "beyond equal treatment" is "the need to redress past inequities" (Bodenheimer, 2021; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

When young Black students are misdiagnosed and misidentified with dyslexia, the trickle-down effects can be devastating for generations. Not only do Black students slip through the proverbial cracks of the educational system, but they are often doomed to the indirect effects of an inadequate education (Sandman-Hurley, 2020). The pile of devastation left is riddled with lost learning, diminished economic earning potential, poor self-esteem, functional illiteracy, and squandered potential (Brodenheimer, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The significance of this study rests in the direct awareness of how race, society, and economics affect dyslexia advocacy for young Black learners.

Definitions of Terms

Accommodations:

> instructional or test adaptations. They allow a student to demonstrate what s/he knows without fundamentally changing the target objective or skill being taught in the classroom or measured in testing situations. Accommodations do not reduce learning or performance expectations. Instead, accommodations change the manner or settings in which information is presented or the way students respond (Crawford, 2013).

Advocacy: in relation to dyslexia, refers to individuals, groups, and organizations that support the needs of people with dyslexia and other specific reading dis/abilities to

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improve policy, raise awareness, and increase access to the resources and tools needed to

live a fulfilling and robust life (Douce, 2020).

Dyslexia:

> a specific learning dis/ability [SLD] that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition 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. (IDA Editorial Contributors, 2018)

Dyslexia-specific intervention:

> evidence-based, specialized reading, writing, and spelling instruction that is multisensory equipping students to simultaneously use multiple senses (vision, hearing, touch, and movement). Dyslexia-specific intervention employs direct instruction of systematic and cumulative content. The sequence must begin with the easiest and most basic elements and progress methodically to more difficult material. Each step must also be based on prior learning. Concepts must be systematically reviewed to strengthen memory. Components of dyslexia-specific intervention include instruction targeting phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable structure, morphology, syntax, and semantics. (Public School Governance: Regulations Governing Public Schools, 2015)

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA):

> a law that makes available a free appropriate public education [FAPE] to eligible children with dis/abilities throughout the nation and ensures special education [SPED] and related services to children with dis/abilities and developmental delays and governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with dis/abilities. (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): as dictated by law (IDEA), an extremely specific

and detailed written plan created by a parent/caregiver, general education teacher, school

psychologist, and a SPED representative to provide individualized SPED and related

services to meet a child's unique needs at no cost to the student or their family. States

receive additional funding for students with IEPs (Understood Team, 2019).

Modifications: "instructional or test adaptations that allow a student to demonstrate what

s/he knows or can do, but the target skill is also reduced in some way" (Crawford, 2013).

Privilege: "unearned advantages that are highly valued but restricted to certain groups

and oppresses certain other groups" (National Association of School Psychologists,

2016).

Problem Solving Team (PST): "a model to guide general education intervention services

for all students who have academic and/or behavioral difficulties" (Public School

Governance: Regulations Governing Public Schools, 2015).

Response to Instruction (RtI):

> integrates core instruction, assessment, and intervention within a multi-
> tiered system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior
> problems. Through the implementation of RtI, schools identify and
> monitor students at-risk, use problem-solving and data-based decision
> making to provide research-based interventions and adjust the intensity of
> interventions based on the student's response. (Alabama State Department
> of Education, 2009)

Section 504/Plan: as dictated by law (OCR and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973), is a plan

(written or oral) created by a parent/caregiver, all general education teachers, and a

school principal to provide services and changes to a student's learning environment to

enable learning alongside the student's peers at no cost to the students or their families.

States do not receive additional funding for students with dis/abilities not listed under the

SPED umbrella, but the federal government can take funding away from programs

(including schools) that do not meet their legal duty to serve children with dis/abilities.

IDEA funds cannot be used to serve students with 504 plans (Understood Team, 2019).

Special education (SPED): services provided to students (at no cost to the student or their families) who qualify as having a dis/ability or requiring additional services to access the general education curriculum under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). This sector of education can best be described as a range of services that are provided in different ways and in different settings (Understood Team, 2019).

Urban education: a complex way of describing a method of schooling that embodies deficit perspectives for the process by which diverse students in large, highly populated inner-city areas are educated (Welsh & Swain, 2020).

Organization of Study

This research study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 included a history of dyslexia, issues surrounding the identification and remediation of dyslexia in young Black learners, and educator knowledge and perceptions surrounding dyslexia, race, class, and economics. Chapter 1 also outlined the purpose of the research study as well as the theoretical frameworks, delimitations, and key terms. Chapter 2 reviewed current and applicable literature related to urban education, historical foundations of the United States' educational system, early literacy and language development and instruction, and overall understanding of dyslexia. Chapter 3 detailed the plan for this research study by detailing the methodology plan. Included in this chapter were the philosophical assumptions, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, credibility of the research study, data collection and analysis procedures, and participant selection guidelines. Chapter 4 described the results of the research study through the analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews, nonparticipant observations, and school and district documents. Chapter 5 discussed the

implications and possible applications for this research study. Also provided in chapter 5 are possibilities for future research.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of issues related to urban area schools and the complexities involved in addressing the needs of Black early learners at-risk for and identified with dyslexia. A brief background and history of dyslexia are provided as well as a general description of this topic concerning education. A statement of the current issues is included with respect to early childhood education and people of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native). Key terms were identified, and accompanying definitions were provided. Essential research questions were provided along with a description of the chosen theoretical frameworks for this study, CRT as applied to education and DisCrit. Chapter 1 also detailed the purpose, significance, challenges, and delimitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systems of Education

Historical Foundations in Education

The history of education in the United States and the world at large is fraught with the inequities of many people—particularly women, people of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native), and other marginalized populations (e.g., poor, lower classes, non-privileged) (White, n.d.). Initially, education was afforded to only upper-class White males of power and privilege (Shaughnessy & Code, 2016). However, after centuries of this norm, because of the efforts of progressives like Robert Owens and the boom of industrialism, education was offered to poor, working-class Whites and immigrants (Wolfe, 2002). The education of the poor, immigrants, and the working-class benefited industrialists who needed workers who could read, write, and compute (Massey et al., 2014). Even though schooling for all people was promising for overall society and investments in the early education of children was socially progressive, rich capitalist profits and national unity were initially the main motivating factors for formal education in the United States (Massey et al., 2014; Wolfe, 2002).

As evidenced in the past, free, compulsory education did not come without flaws. Textbooks used in schools depicted Native Americans and certain immigrant groups negatively, and curriculums were ethnocentric in efforts to uphold and reinforce

American (United States') values (Shaughnessy & Code, 2016). Access to education, as insidious and intolerant as it may have been, was even farther out of reach for people of color.

Due to a legacy of slavery and incessant racism, Black people were even less apt to be formally educated, especially in southern states where the business of agriculture was more prevalent. By the end of the Civil War in the United States, deep-seated racism worked to keep Black people from attaining a free and equal public education (Anderson, 1988). Attempts to provide free, compulsory education to children of color were spearheaded by education and civil rights advocates of color like Josephine Silone Yates and Alice Dugged Cary. Campaigns for early learning centers and kindergartens in Black communities organized by "Negro" mothers were an oasis for language and literacy development (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). Despite these efforts, the education of Blacks in the South and urban areas focused on moral virtue and manual skills as evidenced by the "Hampton Ideal." This philosophy of education did little to provide Black people with an equal opportunity for education and only served to subordinate Black people and uphold ideals of racial inferiority. The General Education Board (1880-1925), through philanthropic donations, also worked to improve educational opportunities for Blacks in the South (Anderson, 1988). However, continuing injustices, dimwitted racism, and rampant corruption cultivated and continued the long-term results of a separate and unequal educational experience for Black children in the United States. As the fight for equality in the Black community waged on in the United States, barriers were broken and access to education improved. However, the remnants of classism, ethnocentrism, racism,

and sexism continued to affect children's educational opportunities and the amount of

learning that occurred in schools (Shaughnessy & Code, 2016).

Figure 2

Systems of Education

Traditional Education	• **Structured by POWER**
	  • Monolithic/Homogenized Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessments
	  • Polictical/Social/Economic Advantage
	  • Traditional & Standardized
	• **Characterized by RANKING**
	  • Meritocratic, Competitive & Individualistic

Urban Education	• **Framed by INEQUITIES**
	  • Funding, Resources & Support
	  • Accountability Measures
	  • Segregation & Racism
	• **Characterized by LIABILITIES**
	  • Apathy & Low Expectations
	  • Deficits & Failures
	  • Overcrowding

Urban Education

Communities are typically defined by their physical and social conditions

(National Geographic, 2012). Several attributes involving political, social, economic, and

cultural demographics intersect to create an educational context distinctly different from

more affluent groups (Brodenheimer, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Hoyles & Hoyles,

2010; Welsh & Swain, 2020). Geographically, urban communities are highly developed,

densely packed with human structures, and include suburbs, towns, and cities. Its

inhabitants rely on nonagricultural jobs which rely on technology and industry. Racism

and "white flight" have led to starkly contrasting demographics in this type of area with

more people of color living closer to the inner-city (National Geographic, 2012).

According to de Brey et al. (2019), approximately 45% of public-school educators who teach predominately students of color are White (p. 11). This statistic is important because according to Beneke and Cheatham (2020), despite genuine efforts, White, non-disabled educators consistently persist in contributions to educational inequities through racism and ableism (p. 246). This occurrence may translate to a lack in the proper identification and remediation of Black students at-risk for and identified with dyslexia. This occurrence happens through lowered expectations, poor instructional methods, and watered-down curricula (Annamma et al., 2018; White, n.d.). Therefore, "the assumption is that most human endeavors, especially in education are political, and that we must accept this and understand these issues and deal with the biases and issues inherent in the political nature of things" (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2012; White, n.d.).

Ladson-Billings (2012) asserted that "Black students face prejudice, discrimination, and inadequate resources" during schooling. Further, White (n.d.) described urban education as beset with "impositions, deficit approaches and even racist mindset in dealing with teaching and learning tied particularly to ethnicity, race, gender, ability, and choice" (p. 7). The intersection of disparities often converges into troubling issues for urban schools which lead to lowered expectations, a curriculum that lacks rigor, poor academic achievement, and failing standards (See Figure 2). As communities of color are overwhelmed with the effects of poverty, segregation, and overcrowding, their schools continually report larger achievement gaps in comparison to their more affluent counterparts (Farkas et al., 2020; National Geographic, 2012; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). Research from Farkas et al. (2020) reported that greater achievement gaps correlated with a greater Black and Hispanic student overrepresentation in SPED. This

correlation could clarify how the misidentification and subsequent remediation for students of color at risk for and identified with dyslexia are carried out.

Social Justice and Equity in Education

The need for equity and social justice in education is not new and has been researched, explored, and addressed by various scholars and researchers for decades. When applying the theoretical frameworks of CRT and DisCrit to this research study, an exploration of social justice in education is necessary. The attainment of equity and social justice in education requires many considerations like diversity, multiculturalism, culturally sustaining/relevant practice, and disruption (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Souto-Manning, 2013). Teaching for social justice requires rejection of discrimination, and deficit perspectives while adopting social action and criticality (Nieto, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2013). Nieto (2006) defined social justice in education as the following:

1. challenging stereotypes, misconceptions, and untruths that support and perpetuate discrimination based on race, class, and economics;

2. providing all students with resources needed to effectively learn and grow to their full potential; and

3. drawing on the home knowledge, talents, and strengths that each student brings into the classroom; and

4. creating an environment for learning that supports and promotes critical thinking as well as work for social change. (p. 2)

Students living and learning in communities and schools often termed as marginalized, disenfranchised, or impoverished are greatly harmed by disparities and require an educational experience grounded in social justice, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and instructional relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The need for criticality in educating young Black students with learning difficulties is essential (Nieto, 2006). With the knowledge that dyslexia and literacy are intertwined, it is reasonable to conclude that dyslexia advocacy is social justice agency.

Early Literacy and Language Development

Early literacy and language development are critical to young learners' academic success. Otto (2018) described five aspects or components of language development in children as being phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphemic, and pragmatic (p. 3). Phonological development refers to the processes by which children gain knowledge about sound-symbol relationships in language (Chall, 1989). Semantic development involves knowledge of word labels that connect specific concepts and understandings. Syntactic development in children encompasses grammar rules and the combinations of words used in a language. Morphemic development refers to knowledge of word structures while pragmatic development is practical. This component of language development encompasses a child's knowledge of how to use language in a way that is appropriate in different settings and situations (Hayes et al., 1987; Ninio & Snow, 1999; Otto, 2018; Snow et al., 2001).

To foster the growth and development of the five language components, it is best for young children to be engaged by enriching experiences with oral and written

language, provided ample practice opportunities, and lead with proper instruction (Cassano & Dougherty, 2018; Otto, 2018). Pivotal studies have long indicated that specific experiences in language learning during preschool years are significant to early literacy and language development successes (Cassano & Dougherty, 2018). Hart and Risley (1995) found that early experiences matter greatly for the development of vocabulary and language skills. In 2005, Pan et al. reported that the quality of early experiences matters greatly over the quantity of input regardless of socioeconomic status. This research informs us that the use of varied sentence structures, word types, and language complexity matters more than the number of words used. In 1986, Tomasello and Farrar observed that early language experiences that are relevant to children's activities, curiosities, and interests are far more significant to the development of language skills and vocabulary than input involving surrounding arbitrary conversations (Cassano & Dougherty, 2018). As these elements are combined and championed by teachers and other adults in preschools a solid foundation for future learning gains is built (Otto, 2018).

When students are faced with learning difficulties during formative years (between birth and age 8), it is important that they are identified and remediated appropriately, effectively, and efficiently. Another pivotal study in early literacy conducted by Connie Juel in 1988 involved longitudinal research on the schooling and intervention of early learners involving phonological awareness. Research results directly pointed to the importance of early language development, literacy, and remediation. Of the poor readers followed, without remediation, most (88%) continued to be poor readers through fourth grade (Cassano & Dougherty, 2018). Greater importance on the early

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identification and intervention of learning difficulties like dyslexia in young children is emboldened by such statistics.

Early literacy and language development are essential and early identification of learning difficulties is key to a strong academic foundation for learning. The best methods for fostering and implementing academic success in students lie in the effective instructional and identification practices of educators who work directly with students. In 2017, Peterson et al. discerned that there is a need for teachers to further understand dyslexia and how to assess students for dyslexia. Because the development of language and literacy in early learners and the characteristics of dyslexia can appear similar, early identification can become muddled and complicated (Thorwarth, 2014). The proper identification of students with dyslexia in the early years requires not only an understanding of dyslexia but an intimate understanding of how language and literacy develop in young children (Gonzalez & Brown, 2018).

Approaches to Young Children Reading

What is dyslexia? How is it addressed within the field of education? The answer to these questions greatly depends upon whom you ask. Varying understandings and ideas surrounding the origins and existence of dyslexia within the education community are prevalent (Hanford, 2017; Howell, 2019). These variances have further implications on how to accommodate for and address the various learning disparities associated with this dis/ability (Thorwarth, 2014). Discrepancies in educator knowledge are often determined by an amalgamation of factors: federal and state laws; state department and school district policies; budgeting, and the knowledge, experiences, and philosophies of

school personnel (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2018). However, most educators and reputable education entities will list the following as the absolute essentials of reading instruction: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness.

The pendulum of instructional approaches and theories utilized to teach reading swings wide and far-ranging from isolated and explicit to integrated and relevant. Table 2 provides a brief overview of a small sampling of approaches used to teaching reading to young children. The table provides a basic description of each approach and an example of a scholar or theorist whose work aligns with the basic tenets or practices encompassing the approach. It is important to note that this table does not provide an exhaustive listing of scholars in connection with the sample of instructional methods and only serves as a model for reference. Also included in the table are features of the instructional approach detailing whether a program following this method would be skills or meaning-based, have writing and reading components and if it can be considered a full or partial program in meeting all areas of reading instruction (i.e., fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, phonemic awareness, and phonics).

Some educators are staunch followers of the new resurgence in the 'science of reading' that subscribes to a structured literacy approach to phonetics (e.g., phonemic awareness, orthography, morphology). Some examples of programs that use this method are *Saxon Phonics*, *LETRS*, and *REWARDS*. Another group of educators is devoted to the whole language approach which follows a belief that like language, learning to read is a natural process involving print-rich experiences supported by the teaching of cues and strategies (Goodman, 2004). Further, other educators fall within the spectrum of these two differing sects by using various principles of both approaches. These educators and

teachers adopt and use a myriad of methods and strategies in varying degrees and ways to optimize students' learning outcomes (Otto, 2018). Not only are these approaches and theories applicable to reading instruction but are also apropos to the topic of dyslexia, early learners, and heavily influence educator attitudes, perceptions, and approaches to language development and early literacy.

The Science of Reading Approach

The science of reading, or a phonics approach to reading, derives its findings based on the research of neuroscientists, psychologists, educators, and other research professionals, especially cognitive scientists (Elliot, 2020). Educators embracing ideas and understandings about this approach believe reading ability and the lack thereof are derived from the brain (Seidenberg, 2013). According to Schwartz and Sparks (2019), learning to read is counter-intuitive and requires guidance to help children "crack the code" (p. 1). Structured phonetic literacy practices are considered the only sure way to successfully teach students to read. This method employs explicit instruction by directly teaching such fundamentals as encoding, decoding, and blending of letter sounds. These phonetic fundamentals are often taught in isolation by using drill techniques (i.e., repetition, substitution, transformation, replacement). This approach is purported by some to be the best solution for students with dyslexia (Chall, 1989).

Table 2

Approaches to Teaching Young Children to Read

Approach	Description	Scholar	Skills-Based	Meaning-Based	Reading Component	Writing Component	Complete Program	Partial Program
Disciplinary	based on the content area and learning purpose	Harold Herber		X	X	X	X	
Guided Reading	based on the instructional needs of children, differentiated	Lev Vygotsky		X	X			X
Linguistic	based on predictable text, patterns	Noam Chomsky	X		X			X
Multisensory	based on the use of multiple senses	Samuel T. Orton & Anna Gillingham		X	X	X	X	
Phonics	based on phonemic, phonological, and morphological awareness of children	Jeanne Chall	X		X			X
Sight Word	based on children's discovery of word meaning	Edward Dolch	X		X			X

Whole Language Approach

Whole language is an approach that relies heavily on the learned experiences and background knowledge of students to develop reading ability, which is literacy (Goodman, 2004). Educators supporting these ideas purport that reading ability comes naturally and within culture, much like how language occurs (Vygotsky, 1962). Print rich environments are employed along with the lived and experiences language used by

children. Writing and other integrative techniques are used to teach the skills, concepts,

and patterns of language. Whole language uses a backward approach to decoding by

beginning with a whole word and breaking it down into letters and syllables. This

strategy is used in the context of reading and writing as the focus of learning is on

encoding and not only decoding. The whole language approach is least likely to be

recommended for use with students experiencing dyslexia (Elliot, 2020; Seidenberg,

2013).

Dyslexia

Evolving Definitions and the Persistence of Myths

Developing a generally accepted definition for dyslexia that details the specificity

and unique characteristics of dyslexia has presented formidable challenges for scholars,

advocacy groups, and education entities (Howell, 2019). Differences in definitions derive

from discrepancies surrounding the origins of dyslexia, how it affects learning, and its

hereditary nature. The International Dyslexia Association (2018) defined dyslexia as the

following:

> a specific learning dis/ability [SLD] that is neurobiological in origin. It
> results from a deficit in the phonological component of language and is
> unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities. Other results of this
> dis/ability present in difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition
> characterized by poor spelling and decoding abilities (IDEA, 2018).

Stein (2018) defined dyslexia as a "hereditary temporal processing defect, associated with

impaired magnocellular neuronal development, which impacts selectively on the ability

to learn to read, leaving oral and non-verbal reasoning powers intact" (p. 9). Only as

recently as 2020 did the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) define

dyslexia as

>a learning challenge that is neurological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition 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 delivery 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. (ALSDE, 2020)

Differing definitions originating from various authorities foster oppositional views, alternate plans for remediation, and misunderstandings about the distinguishing characteristics of dyslexia when compared to other reading issues (Hanford, 2017; Howell, 2019; Zirkel, 2020). Although discrepancies in defining dyslexia exist, a similar thread runs through most definitions. Dyslexia is a learning difference marked by phonological difficulties and processing variances that usually result in secondary consequences including, but not limited to, poor spelling, reduced reading rates, impaired comprehension, and faulty word recognition (IDA Editorial Contributors, 2018).

As more emphasis and research is placed on the topic of dyslexia in Alabama and across the United States, authorities are providing more in-depth information, supported by studies in various sciences (Youman & Mathers, 2013, 2018). Stein (2018) in *What is developmental dyslexia?* stated that dyslexia is marked by (a) pathophysiology, (b) issues with sequencing, (c) phonological awareness difficulties, (d) discrepancies in reading ability compared to general intelligence, and (e) neurological (e.g., temporal) processing differences. Even with a growing body of research and evidence of dyslexia's effects on learning, myths and misconceptions about it continue to persist in both the education sector and the lay community (Green, 2015; Hanford, 2017, 2020). Green (2015) identified five persistent myths associated with dyslexia: (a) the reversing of letters and

numbers, (b) problems with vision, (c) low intelligence, (d) laziness, and (e) an inability

to overcome learning difficulties. Misgivings surrounding a consistent definition for

dyslexia and the persistence of myths surrounding dyslexia harkens to the necessity for

increased knowledge of teachers, specialists, and other educators. There is an imperative

need for explicit pre-service and in-service training on not only dyslexia but early

literacy, language development in young children, and proper reading instruction

(Gonzalez & Brown, 2019; Johnston, 2019; Thorwarth, 2014).

Teacher Knowledge, Perceptions, and Understanding

The need for increased awareness and training for education professionals along

with improved practices in the identification of students with dyslexia is vital (Johnston,

2019; Poulsen, 2018; Thorwarth, 2014). Providing appropriate and explicitly designed

instruction for students with dyslexia is critical to their academic success (Al Otaiba et

al., 2018). Dr. Sally Shaywitz (2015); physician, author, and leader in the field of

dyslexia; stated at a U.S. Senate field hearing, "With dyslexia, we don't have a

knowledge gap; we have an action gap." This statement directly points to an apparent

problem within our United States' educational system. Furthermore, this matter greatly

affects students facing issues of disparity regarding race, poverty, and class, in addition to

learning difficulties (Annamma et al., 2018; Brodenheimer, 2021; Ladson-Billings,

1998).

Although a teacher cannot diagnose dyslexia, within the school setting, they are a

child's best chance for early identification (Douce, 2020). As identified by Colenbrander

et al. (2020), when teachers have an extensive understanding of dyslexia and how it

affects children's early language and literacy development, they are better equipped to intervene on behalf of their students. A study conducted by Gonzalez and Brown in 2018 indicated that most early childhood educators viewed dyslexia as a visual processing problem. This issue is problematic as these types of beliefs are rooted in misinformation and poor educator training (Gonzalez & Brown, 2019; Thorwarth, 2014). Also indicated in this study was evidence that most teacher-participants did not understand that dyslexia is a phonological processing disorder. In addition, the study signified that when teachers have some training and awareness of dyslexia, they are more apt to look for such indicators as delayed speech and semantics, difficulties with rhyming words or morphemes, mispronunciations of familiar words, and issues with letter recognition or phonological development (Gonzalez & Brown, 2018).

Early identification of dyslexia is not only important for remediation measures. From investigations conducted by Hanford (2017), it was discovered that students who are not identified with dyslexia in their early years are not likely to be identified beyond grade school. Washburn et al. (2017) indicated that grade-level certification was a significant predictor as secondary educators have greater misconceptions about dyslexia and how it affects student learning. This statement further solidifies the importance of quality literacy instruction as secondary teachers are more likely to have only had one course in content-area literacy if any (Washburn et al., 2017). Thorwarth (2014) cited that less than 30% of opportunities to receive dyslexia training happened in undergraduate or graduate studies. Because pre-service teacher preparation does not ensure proper knowledge of dyslexia, in-service professional development on issues related to reading

difficulties and instruction is necessary to increase early identification (Gonzalez &

Brown, 2019; Poulsen, 2018; Thorwarth, 2014).

Legislation and Policy

Legislation and policy specifically addressing dyslexia only recently showed up in

Alabama Administrative Code. In 2015, revisions were made to public school

governance on instructional services to include the following: (1) a definition for

dyslexia, (2) guidance on the proper implementation of identification and intervention

measures (RtI), and (3) provisions for professional development opportunities for

teachers regarding dyslexia (Public School Governance: Regulations Governing Public

Schools, 2015). In addition to the updated education code, the ALSDE (2016) also

released the *Alabama Dyslexia Resource Guide*. This guide provides information and

resources on the RtI process, dyslexia-specific screening, accommodations and

interventions, teaching strategies, and assistive technology. The updates to the education

code were initially helpful and appeared to bring at the very least a renewed or novel

awareness of the plight of children with dyslexia (Youman & Mathers, 2018; Zirkel,

2020).

Alabama Literacy Act

The Alabama Literacy Act (HB 388) was passed into legislation on April 22,

2021 (Alabama Literacy Act, 2019). This act is targeted toward early learners

(kindergarten through third grade) and their teachers. This law intends to exact a plan for

the correction of reading difficulties in young students by the end of their third-grade year

or before. If reading proficiency is not achieved by the end of third grade, a student is retained unless a good cause exemption is provided as outlined by this act. Funding for the act is provided by the state of Alabama for use with the state department of education and local school districts. Resources are slated for salaries (e.g., specialists, coaches), professional development, summer programs, curricula, administration efforts, and targeted plans like the Alabama Reading Initiative.

According to The Alabama Literacy Act (Alabama Literacy Act, 2019), its implementation is guided by a literacy task force overseen by the state superintendent. Plans for the implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act were completed in June of 2020. This literacy act's implementation is based on the fundamentals of the science of reading. While there are various definitions for the science of reading, a conglomerate of disciplines maintains (cognitive, neuroscience, psychology, etc.) that the young brain reveals how reading occurs and, at times, has difficulty doing so (ALSDE, 2020; Elliot, 2020). This implication is significant considering that the most widely accepted definition of dyslexia directly supports neuroscience.

Ostensibly, one goal of The Alabama Literacy Act is to address the lack of identification and intervention of students with dyslexia (ALSDE, 2020). The law assumes that reading instruction targeted at children with dyslexia can be used with all students to successfully teach the fundamentals of reading (Alabama Literacy Act, 2019). The Alabama Literacy Act mandates the use of programs that are embedded in the science of reading approach and included within the programs are targeted dyslexia screeners (ALSDE, 2020).

This method of instruction is entrenched in a phonics approach and the programs used are heavily ladened with the daily use of rote activities and monotonous drills. The heavy use of such programs without proper training or further research could cause other key components of reading instruction like comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary to be overlooked or under-addressed (Dewitz & Graves, 2021). However, the incorporation of phonics and phonemic awareness in the early years are two essential elements of effective reading instruction (Chall, 1989). Concerns and issues surrounding the enactment of the Alabama Literacy Act arose during and after its passing into law. Despite considerable pushback from education professionals and advocacy groups like the Alabama Education Association (AEA), this act's implementation began in the Fall of the 2021-2022 school year. At the time of implementation, consideration to delay the retention portion of this law was continuing to be deliberated (Crain, 2021).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

"Dis/ability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). When students are identified with learning difficulties like dyslexia, federal laws are in place to guide state departments of education which then guide local school districts or LEA processes and procedures. These guidelines are in place so that students are provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, 2021). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students who continue to struggle academically (whose difficulties cannot be explained by cultural and/or environmental factors) must be evaluated for SLD of which

dyslexia falls under this umbrella (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). IDEA is a SPED law that provides protections and rights to children with dis/abilities and their families (Understood Team, 2019).

Initially passed in 1975, IDEA provides safeguards and services to students with dis/abilities from birth to graduation (up to age 21) and their families (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Procedural safeguards ensure that families are involved through every step of the identification and intervention processes (Understood Team, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Services covered under IDEA include the following 13 categories: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual dis/ability, multiple dis/abilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (e.g., ADHD), SLD (e.g., dyslexia), speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (e.g., blindness) (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). It is important to note that not all students with dis/abilities will qualify for services; only students who need SPED to make significant gains (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation

Separate from IDEA is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Governed by the Office of Civil Rights and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, this federal civil rights law ensures students with dis/abilities are safe from discrimination by public schools that receive federal funding including any college, trade school, and private institution of learning (Whittaker, 2019). Students with dis/abilities (including learning, reading, communicating, and thinking) that limit a major life activity are guaranteed equal access

to learning and school activities (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). The application of Section 504 differs from IDEA in that it applies to students beginning in kindergarten and does not require a separate school program for implementation (Understood Team, 2019).

It is important to note that Section 504 is instrumental in providing a FAPE by ensuring that students with dis/abilities are provided with an education comparable to students without dis/abilities. This assurance can be stipulated through regular or SPED. This guarantee must be done with the development of a plan devised by a group of various people who are familiar with a student's needs and agree on prescribed services for that student. Written plans are not mandated but can be created using an IEP (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, 2021).

Special Needs and Dis/ability in Early Childhood/Education

Provisions under IDEA protect the rights of early learners by providing early intervention services up to age three (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). Children who may qualify for services must present difficulties in one or more of the following five areas: physical, cognitive, social/emotional, adaptive, and communication skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). States use different means and methods to determine eligibility; however, developmental delay and other health impairments are generally used as relevant factors for the qualification of early learners, preschoolers, toddlers, and infants (Morin & Gryta, 2019). Though children under the age of three are not likely to be diagnosed with dyslexia, delays in development may be apparent in children at risk for dyslexia making this law an important safety measure for children and their families

(Division for Early Childhood [DEC] of the Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2021).

Implementation of IDEA and Section 504

School-age early learners at risk for and identified with dyslexia benefit from regulations under IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students identified under IDEA are typically served through SPED with an IEP, but Section 504 plans may also be used to meet student needs as well (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, 2021). The chosen plan for a child will differ depending on individual student needs and learning differences or dis/abilities. IEP eligibility under SPED dictates that a child must have one or more of 13 dis/abilities listed under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2019; Understood Team, 2019). The dis/ability must affect a child's educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). A child must need specialized instruction to make progress (Understood Team, 2019).

> Section 504 Plans, as dictated by law is a plan (written or oral) created by a parent/caregiver, all general education teachers, and a school principal in order to provide services and changes to a student's learning environment to enable learning alongside the student's peers at no cost to the students or their families. (Understood Team, 2019)

Though IEPs and Section 504 Plans are used to secure better learning outcomes for students with dis/abilities, they differ greatly in design and implementation (Understood, 2019) (See Figure 3). Typically, Section 504 Plans are a list of specific accommodations that do not change standards, skills, or testing constructs (Crawford, 2013; Whittaker, 2019). Accommodations are adaptations that do not fundamentally

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change the learning objective but do amend the manner or setting in which information is presented (Crawford, 2013). IEPs ordinarily are more extensive than Section 504 Plans and heavily modify and accommodate a child's educational process (Understood Team, 2019). Modifications are also adaptations; however, these adaptations profoundly change targeted skills and testing constructs for students. Modifications typically lower performance expectations to meet student needs by reducing the number of items required or the complexity of a task (Crawford, 2013).

Provisions in both IDEA and Section 504 require a team (consisting of the student, parents/guardians, specialists, and education professionals) to determine the best plan of action for a student. Regardless of how individual districts and schools address student needs, stipulations in federal legislation guarantee the implementation of services (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). States do not receive additional funding for students with dis/abilities and learning differences under Section 504 but do receive funding for students with IEPs (Understood Team, 2019). Also, IDEA funds cannot be utilized to serve students under Section 504. Regardless of differences in funding allowances, the federal government can withhold aid from programs (schools) that do not meet their legal duty to serve all children with dis/abilities (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019).

Figure 3

IDEA & Section 504 Comparison

Individualized Education Plan	Section 504 Plan
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (IDEA)	Rehabilitation Act of 1973
CONSENT Parental consent is required for testing.	NOTICE Parental notice is required for evaluation.
ACCOMMODATIONS & MODIFICATIONS Set learning goals and services in which the school provides are using standard.	ACCOMMODATIONS Set of supports and services and who will provide them are utilized.
SPECIFIC Disabilitiy (13)	ANY Disability
Team consists of parent, general education teacher, special education teacher, specialist, district representative (school or district administrator).	Team consists of parent, general education teacher/special education teacher, school administrator.
Funding provided to schools. Services provided at no cost to families.	No funding provided to schools. Services provided at no cost to families.
Disputes resolved through mediation, due process, resolution session, civil lawsuit, state complaint, lawsuit.	Disputes resolved through mediation, alternative dispute resolution, impartial hearing, OCR complaint, lawsuit

Dyslexia Protocols and Advocacy

Even though federal regulations are in place to prevent discrimination against and ensure equity in learning for students with dis/abilities, individual states often interpret and implement legislation differently (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2018). Until recent years, dyslexia has been overlooked and ignored in myriad school districts across the United States (Hanford, 2017). As increased attention was placed on the needs of students with dyslexia from parents and advocacy groups like the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, the state education code began to change (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2018). Decoding Dyslexia, another advocacy group, called for (1) a universal definition of dyslexia in state code, (2) mandatory teacher training on dyslexia, (3) mandatory early screening, (4) mandatory remediation programs, and (5) access to appropriate "assistive technologies" (Ward-Lonergan & Duthie, 2018). Youman and Mather (2018) reported that because of the efforts of advocacy groups and parents across the nation, at least 42 states have laws and updated codes that define dyslexia and provide guidelines for providing evidence-based interventions.

Because education is largely governed by individual states, there was no consensus surrounding dyslexia or the wording and implementation of state codes (Ward-Lonergan & Duthie, 2018; Youman & Mather, 2013, 2018). This governance meant that each state would make fundamental determinations about how their districts would come to understand and address dyslexia. In 2017, Phillips and Odegard recommended better implementation plans and procedures of current laws to ensure the intended impact regarding dyslexia (p. 366). Alabama amended its state education code in the Fall of 2015

to include a definition for dyslexia, the promise for available dyslexia-specific training for teachers, screening measures for students, and possible interventions for remediation. This state education code also includes information describing dyslexia-specific intervention, interventionists, the creation of an advisory council, and a tenuous plan for the identification of students with learning differences (Public School Governance: Regulations Governing Public Schools, 2015).

A review of state laws on dyslexia was conducted in 2020 by Zirkel. An overview of 10 categories was analyzed: task force, state education agency (SEA), SEA guidance, professional development, LEA staff, pilot projects, identification, intervention, and reporting (Zirkel, 2020). From this analysis, Zirkel (2020) determined that Alabama has created a strong task force and implemented explicit interventions to address the needs of students with dyslexia. However, in three of the remaining five categories, the state has (1) not addressed teacher preparation, (2) does not employ a dedicated state-level director for dyslexia, and (3) not created a pilot project for implementation within LEAs. Alabama does provide some (but not comprehensive) teacher assistance, awareness PD (upon request), guidance for identification measures, and annual reporting (Zirkel, 2020). Zirkel (2020) recommended intercessions at the state level to improve the processes used to meet the needs of students with dyslexia.

Identification

Every school in Alabama is required to have at least one problem-solving team (PST) per schools (*Alabama Department of Education*, 2009). This team is charged with providing guidance and review in following the response to instruction (RtI) framework

(ALSDE, 2020). This framework involves the use of school screenings and progress monitoring data to assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate instruction and evidence-based interventions for all students including young learners who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia (ALSDE, 2009). It

> integrates core instruction, assessment, and intervention within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems (*Alabama Department of Education*, 2009). Through the implementation of RtI, schools are to identify and monitor students at-risk, use problem-solving and data-based decision making to provide research-based interventions and adjust the intensity of interventions based on the student's response. (*Alabama Department of Education*, 2009)

MTSS in early childhood is a method of instruction and support that is segmented into the following three categories: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (DEC of the CEC, 2021). The instructional practices used by teachers should be research-based, standards-based, and developmentally appropriate (ALSDE, 2020). Tier 1 instruction is general and universal. Tier 2 uses practices that are more targeted and intensive while Tier 3 instruction is highly individualized (DEC of the CEC, 2021). The premise is that most students will fall into the Tier 1 category with the smallest number of students needing instruction in the Tier 3 category. Differentiating instruction is an essential feature of MTSS. Teachers are expected to provide students with the support and instruction needed in various areas depending on individual student needs (DEC, NAEYC & NHSA, 2013). For example, a student may need Tier 1 support for social-emotional needs but simultaneously receive Tier 2 instruction for walking.

The RtI process can be problematic as it requires teaching first and then the determination for diagnostic testing is based on the student's RtI. This process can unnecessarily delay identification and provides instruction that may or may not be helpful

to a student with dyslexia (ALSDE, 2020). Particularly in urban area schools where achievement gaps are particularly high, there is an increase in the probability of misidentification (Odegard et al., 2020; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). Odegard et al. (2020) stated,

> The likelihood that a student who struggles with reading and spelling will be missed by their school and not classified as having dyslexia as the number of students in the student's school who also struggle to read and spell increases. (p. 376)

In addition, "African American and Hispanic students were less likely than Caucasian students to be classified as having dyslexia" (Odegard et al., 2020, p. 376; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). There are also challenges associated with screening procedures and/or interpretations of screening results in congruence with the RtI process further complicating identification measures (Phillips & Odegard, 2017; Zirkel, 2020).

Intervention

Intervention and remediation efforts vary widely from district to district within Alabama depending on resources, funding, and personnel (Zirkel, 2020; ALSDE, 2020). Students identified with dyslexia should receive dyslexia-specific interventions (DEC, 2014). This specific instruction uses a multisensory, systematic, and direct approach (DEC, 2014; ALSDE, 2020). Specialists and teachers are to teach students specific methods using students' senses-hearing, seeing, and touch-simultaneously to improve learning and achieve academic success (Peterson et al., 2017). There is no one program slated for the remediation of students with dyslexia-only a multisensory approach. However, some school districts select and mandate the use of specific programs (like *REWARDS*, *READ 180*, and *LETRS*). Without proper training and knowledge of how

dyslexia impacts learning, teachers cannot differentiate instruction appropriately

(Division of Early Childhood, 2014; Gonzalez & Brown, 2019). Schools are also in need

of district-level and school personnel that are specifically trained to provide instruction

and teacher assistance concerning dyslexia (Al Otaiba et al., 2018). This occurrence is

especially true for urban area schools who, as research states, have greater difficulty with

identification and remediation processes, appropriate staffing, and adequate resources

(Odegard et al., 2020; Sandman-Hurley, 2020).

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) is one of 17 divisions of the Council for

Exceptional Children (CEC). This professional organization provides clarity regarding

rights and services appropriate for young children with dis/abilities and/or experiencing

developmental delays. Established in 1973, DEC is a membership-based organization that

"promotes policy and advances evidence-based practices" (DEC of the CEC, 2021). DEC

(2021) stated that its overall goal is to help improve the "educational success of

individuals with dis/abilities and/or gifts and talents."

Division for Early Childhood and Multitiered Systems of Support

In reference to the RtI process used by Alabama public schools, DEC provides an

MTSS Framework for Early Care and Education. Existing (kindergarten through third

grade) and developing (birth through age three) frameworks are not always consistent or

aligned; therefore, DEC has provided a position statement for guidance and

implementation when using MTSS (DEC, 2021). Written for educators and parents, the

MTSS Framework for Early Care and Education provides context for its use by outlining core principles related to teaching and learning in the early years.

Outlined in DEC's position statement on MTSS are the following examples of such principles: (a) all children can learn and achieve, (b) all children should have access to the general curriculum, and (3) instruction should include a focus on academic, social-emotional, and other developmental milestones. The framework also addresses five misconceptions that can be associated with the RtI process and/or an MTSS framework. The identification of misconceptions helps dispel fallacies related to emerging bilingual children, the need to go through RtI or MTSS before SPED referral, and only academic skills are the focus when using an MTSS framework (DEC, 2021). The third element of this framework offers a list and description of key practices (i.e., differentiated goals and outcomes, tiered instruction, universal screening) to utilize while implementing with young children. Finally, this position statement also includes a host of tables, figures, and examples for the development of new and reconstruction of existing MTSS frameworks and their proper application with young learners (DEC, 2021).

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature relevant to the development of this study. The current literature review included established understandings and definitions for dyslexia, existing structures and systems for education in the United States, and issues surrounding early language development and literacy and instructional practices. Also provided in Chapter 2 was an evaluation of current federal and state legislation, education code, and implementations in schools for students with learning difficulties with an

emphasis on dyslexia. Literature examining teacher knowledge and understanding of dyslexia was also examined to determine current issues surrounding the education of students of color experiencing dyslexia.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

There is an understanding that community, culture, and economics are associated

with academic achievement and outcomes (Bodenheimer, 2020). This knowledge is

important to recognize when examining the practices of a group involving the education

of its members (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The exploration of issues involving access to

adequate resources, proper identification methods, knowledge of education professionals,

and necessary supports is imperative to determine how effectively students of color,

specifically Black early learners, with dyslexia are identified and matriculated through

compulsory school (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). Hoyles &

Hoyles (2010), in their research on race and dyslexia, stated that

> though neurological and present worldwide, dyslexia is experienced
> through culture and within the realm of dis/abilities, is followed by racism,
> and because of this understanding, it is clear that more research on young
> Black students affected by dyslexia is needed.

With an understanding of this research and its recommendations, a case study

design was employed to examine how dyslexia is addressed in an urban education

context involving early childhood educators, administrators, and other key personnel.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined qualitative research as an explanatory method

that is used to derive meaning from experiences and events which naturally occur in the

real world (p. 15). The epistemological, axiological, and ontological perspectives and

theoretical frameworks utilized in this study are appropriate for use with qualitative

research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ultimate goals of this study were to examine the selected phenomenon and construct knowledge about how this phenomenon occurs through the perceptions and understandings of the chosen research study participants. Questions developed for this research study also determined the type of research methodology used as the inquiry design follows an interpretive technique (Stake, 2010).

Research Questions

The research questions developed and chosen by a researcher are foundational for a research study. The questions asked guide the entire research study and should focus on what occurs naturally to uncover issues or complexities about a topic that are not readily understood (Stake, 2010). The following questions were formulated to examine, explore, and investigate various processes, procedures, and protocols used to serve young Black learners regarding dyslexia who are enrolled in an urban area school located in Central Alabama.

1. How do urban area school and district personnel describe their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions concerning dyslexia and early learners?

2. How do school and district personnel describe the processes and protocols implemented to identify and intervene on behalf of early learners at-risk for and identified with dyslexia?

3. How do the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of school- and district-level personnel shape the processes and/or protocols utilized to identify early learners with dyslexia and implement interventions?

Philosophical Assumptions

This research study was based upon the principles of two critical theories. As such, critical theories highlight how the values of researchers and research study participants impact the world (Spencer et al., 2014). Utilizing CRT and DisCrit as interpretive frameworks for the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology, the following statements apply to this study:

1. Ontology beliefs are based on how individuals perceive the nature of reality. This study assumes that reality is based on privilege, oppression, and ableism. This reality is constructed in our society's protected classes: race, ethnicity, class, gender, mental abilities, sexual orientations, etcetera. This study affirms that the nature of reality is subject to an individual's personal and societal conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985);

2. Epistemology focuses on the nature and origin of knowledge and information This study assumes that reality and knowledge are understood and acquired through the involvement of social structures like freedom, oppression, power, and control. This study maintains that the acquisition of knowledge is based on the social, contextual, and cultural development of an individual (Yin, 2011); and

3. Axiology refers to the roles of values. This study assumes that values are diverse and depend on the standpoint of differing communities. However, when considering equity and diversity are valued contemporary concepts in the education community, this study asserts that a greater privilege to education based on race, class, economics, and ableism is subversive to the essence of education. (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Case Study

The topic of dyslexia in Alabama schools has gained prominence in the last five to six years, as evidenced in education code and state legislation (Youman & Mather, 2018). A quality case study or any qualitative research design is considered significant when it focuses on issue(s) of national importance and centers on circumstances that are atypical but also of public interest (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) stated that case study research is appropriate when (a) the researcher's main research questions begin with "why" or "how," (b) the researcher has little to no control over behavioral occurrences, and (c) the researcher's study focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. As I intended to examine the processes and procedures used to identify and intervene on behalf of young Black students with dyslexia in urban area schools, a case study design fit entirely. The goal of this research study was to examine the phenomena and develop awareness about how this contemporary phenomenon (i.e., identification and intervention methods for students with dyslexia) are conducted in a real-world context (i.e., urban area public school).

When considering how race, class, and economics can and have shaped the educational outcomes for young Black students especially young learners with dyslexia in an urban education context, I chose to examine the processes used to serve these students and the perceptions of the educators that carry out those processes. With consideration for the research study topic and its components, I chose to utilize a case study approach to examine this issue. Case study design is characterized by the research study "questions, amount of control, the desired end product," and the existence of a bounded system (Merriam, 1988, p. 9; Yin, 1984). The research questions I have created, the school learning environment, the intended outcome, and urban area school chosen for

this study all fit a case study design. Another consideration when choosing a case study design was the characteristics of the research study. In a combination of qualities and attributes from the research provided by Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Helmstadter (1970), this research study aims to provide a description of the phenomenon, provide for improvements for practice, illuminate meaning, and build knowledge (Merriam, 1988). With the intents and purposes of case study design in consideration, it is appropriate and fitting to use this methodology as it applies to my investigation of the chosen topic.

Participant Selection

For this research study, a purposive selection was used to choose participants. In 2018, Creswell and Poth (2018) explained how the use of purposeful sampling can provide different perspectives of an issue, process, or event. I chose to utilize typical sampling as this form of participant selection "reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). This selection method is appropriate as it utilizes a small sample that logically and normally reflects the organization (school district) under examination (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2011). A total of seven participants were selected, including two school-based administrators (one facilitator and one principal), one SPED teacher leader, one early childhood or general education teacher, one reading specialist, one SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist, and one early childhood education SPED teacher. This number of participants was needed to garner a range of perspectives surrounding how young Black learners with dyslexia are provided services in an urban area school district (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

At the time of data collection, all participants were employed in one urban area school district serving a majority population identified as Black students deriving from families living at or below the poverty line which established the chosen sample as appropriate for this research study. It was important to select a school district in an urban area because of the population this institution served. The participants working in the urban area district were also selected for their various roles and levels in working with Black early learners involving literacy and language development.

The participant interviews, observations, and all documentation (including field notes, and paperwork examples and samples) were voided of identity. Pseudonyms for identifying names of persons, schools, and district were assigned to maintain confidentiality. It is important to note that students were not directly involved in this study but were a part of teacher observations. As such, parental consent was not needed or obtained for children present during direct observations. All documentation involving participants was conducted with authorization from school- and district-level gatekeepers in addition to the university's Internal Review Board (IRB) (UAB Office of Research, 2022).

Data Sources and Collection

"Qualitative researchers seek data that represent personal experience in particular situations" (Stake, 2010, p. 88). Because the aim of this research study was to examine processes and knowledge and garner how they work to provide services for students with dyslexia, the sources of data for this case study were semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and documentation. The researcher interviewed all seven participants to

determine demographics, professional experience, knowledge, and perceptions (including law, policy, and legislation) about dyslexia, expertise in early literacy and language development, and involvement in school- and district-level processes used to address dyslexia. Two early childhood education teachers (one general and one SPED) were directly observed. The direct observations were conducted to provide a demonstration of how Black early learners are provided literacy and language development instruction, especially for young children experiencing developmental delays and/or the characteristics of dyslexia. Direct observations of teachers adhering to school- and district-level procedures involving dyslexia (e.g., instruction, lessons, collecting data, assessing) were included to further understand the phenomena under examination. A collection of documents about the school- and district-level procedures and implementations for dyslexia were provided by one reading specialist, one early childhood education or general education teacher, and one lead teacher. All documents were blank and void of identifying markers upon collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews used in case study research are appropriate as the interviewer (researcher) becomes the instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1988). When a researcher observes and interacts with the group under examination during an interview, knowledge is constructed between the two parties: the interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with participants to garner in-depth understandings and perspectives of each participant as well as to ensure maximum authenticity. Using semi-

structured, one-on-one interviews allowed participants to not only provide insight on the selected topic but "corroboratory evidence" (Yin, 1984). All interviews were conducted at the interviewee's worksite to provide convenience and ensure comfort during the data collection process. Interviews were also utilized to discover more information and descriptions about the phenomenon within limited time constraints where multiple observations could not be conducted (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Direct Observations

Observations are used in case study research to see who, what, where, how, and why a phenomenon occurs (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018; Spradley, 1980). Observations of instruction in the early childhood classrooms, general education and SPED intervention settings were collected to document how literacy and language development instruction with MTSS were implemented. As the sole researcher (and primary investigator), I was a "nonparticipant observer" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) or "observer as participant" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As this type of observer, I did not participate with the group under study and only collected data without any direct involvement. The teacher and students were aware of my observation activities and as a result, the actions and routines were highly controlled by the group under observation (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Observations were recorded using an observation protocol divided into two categories of field notes: descriptive and reflective (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Documentation

Because the phenomena of interest involved an understanding and implementation of federal and state laws, state education code, and school- and district-level policies, an amalgamation of paperwork documenting enactment and compliance of these processes was collected. The collection of documents in case study research provides an additional layer of context and aid researchers in uncovering meaning and developing insights into the research under investigation (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2011). Documentation collected were considered "public records" as they are defined by their purpose for record keeping within the selected school district (Merriam, 1988; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Applicable documentation was collected to offer another tier of evidence to the data collected from observations and interviews. The documents collected from the three participants included but are not limited to dyslexia screenings, teacher checklists, and student instructional reading plans.

Data Analysis

Data collected from artifacts, interviews, and observations were analyzed to uncover patterns and themes in a way most appropriate for the case study. First, I transcribed the interviews of all seven participants using an online transcription company entitled Landmark Associates, Inc. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2011). I analyzed the transcriptions and coded them for possible categories and themes (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2011). To amalgamate themes from the interview responses, I made notes to identify patterns from the interview responses and labeled them using numeric codes (1, 2, 3, 4). The direct observations were analyzed in an exact manner as the interviews through a

process of compiling and disassembling (Yin, 2011). The reflective portion of the field notes was evaluated for repeated and differing categories and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Documentation was evaluated as evidence for the phenomena under examination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2011). All procedures for data analysis were conducted in an ethical and credible manner as to (a) protect the participants involved in this study, (b) establish credibility, and (c) maintain ethical standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; UAB Office of Research, 2022).

Establishing Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, I used the following methods: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, and (c) peer briefing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation is a method by which researchers validate data collected through verification and comparison with other data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2013). I used data source triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) by initially collecting data from seven diverse sources, including one principal, one program director, one teacher leader, one early childhood education or general education teacher, one reading specialist, one early childhood or one SPED teacher, and one dyslexia interventionist and SPED teacher. In addition to the data collected from interviews, I compiled additional data from direct observations and documentation. Triangulation occurs among participants and with the existing literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Member checking is a second method I employed to shore up the credibility of my findings (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2011). Member checks refer to the process by which

researchers take data interpretations back to participants to ensure the analyses fit the participants' intentions. These checks may be a "restating, summarizing, or paraphrasing of the information received from a respondent" (Noori, 2021, p. 31). Member checks were completed by allowing interviewees to review findings from their interview responses. The final credibility strategy I utilized to validate my findings was a collaborative interpretation of data results. This process required analysis of the data collected with a second colleague unassociated with the study. Conferring with a second education professional can provide differing and/or expanding perspectives of the data collected (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2011). Member checks and collaborative interpretations of data results were congruent with the initial findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles and procedures outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th ed.) and the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed to ethically conduct research involving human subjects. APA seeks to do the following through the promotion of ethical and humane practices: (a) increase scientific and professional knowledge of human behavior and people's understandings of themselves and others, (b) utilize this knowledge for the improvement of the human condition, (c) foster personal and lifelong commitments to act ethically, and (d) encourage ethical behavior by students, supervisees, employees, and colleagues as well as consult others concerning ethical problems (APA, 2017; Yin, 2011). Similarly, the IRB, under the auspices of the university, helps to protect the rights and welfare of human participants through its internal review process for research studies (Yin, 2011).

Following the requirements of the IRB and in keeping with APA practices, I completed the following procedures to ensure ethical standards: (a) obtained permission to conduct research for publication and/or public use before the research process began; (b) sought permission to conduct research through the submission of a review application, consent form, letter of invitation, data collection documents; (c) completed the necessary documents as the principal investigator; (d) completed the mandatory training on conducting research ethically; and (e) stored all collected data (i.e., observations, documentation, interviews) containing identifying information in a locked filing system for a period up to five years. The principles outlined by APA and practices prescribed by the IRB were adhered to with every research endeavor to fidelity (Yin, 2011; UAB Office of Research, 2022).

Role of the Researcher

This research process was deeply valuable for me, personally and professionally. However, it was important to bracket my subjective experiences and feelings about this topic when I conducted this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2011). Bracketing requires a constant and cyclical process of introspection, checks and balances by the researcher to contain emotions, temper the influence of past experiences, and disrupt cognitive bias. This process serves to limit the distortion or truncation of the data collection and analysis processes (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Also, because qualitative research designs are more flexible than most other research, it was important that I followed all ethical guidelines provided by my professional associations and university. Full disclosure of my personal and professional experiences was necessary for

maintaining clear expectations for the research study and provided transparency

regarding interpretations of the data collected (Yin, 2011).

I am an education professional and began my career as a public-school educator

in 1997. Much of my experiences were spent in urban area schools working as a

classroom teacher and librarian of young children and secondary students. Therefore, my

knowledge and understanding of the school culture central to this research were familiar

and one in which I was well versed. My personal experience with dyslexia were from the

perspective of a parent. One of my children is affected by dyslexia. His educational

experiences were formed in the urban education context. These personal and professional

experiences converged to create a passion for this work; however, that passion was

tempered by my professional and ethical standards (Yin, 2011).

Limitations of Study

Limitations in research may be defined as factors that constrain the applicability

of a study's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The constraints surrounding a qualitative

research study are distinctive in that they typically lack transferability to an extent, use

small samples, can be prone to researcher bias, and utilize unconventional research

designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2011). It is important to note that transferability of

this study is applicable to the site, educational context, and group of people examined.

Even with consideration for the following limitations, the results and findings of this

study were important in bringing awareness and advocacy to the intersectionality of

urban area schools, Black early learners, dyslexia, and overall academic achievement.

Research Study Design

This case study was bound to one school district and utilized a small meaningful, typical sample of seven participants. Because of these constraints, the results derived added to the literature but were restricted to the characteristics and perspectives of one urban area school district located in Central Alabama and its personnel. This qualitative case study design might impose restrictions on the transferability of this study's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the overarching phenomena related to dyslexia and Black early learners is otherwise applicable.

Researcher Lens

My personal and professional experiences with this topic and membership in the group under examination led to the susceptibility to researcher bias. I have a personal investment in the topic as a Black educator with experience in urban education and as a mother of a Black child identified with dyslexia. The use of established credibility checks and full disclosure aided to keep the collection and analysis of data reliable and dependable (Yin, 2011).

Time Constraints

Time restrictions narrowed the volume of data I was able to collect. The RtI process used by the school district and the timeline for data collection were incongruent. This left me to rely heavily on interviews and documentation for data regarding the phenomena under examination. Though observations were secondary to interviews and

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documentation, the information and perspectives provided by participants proved

sufficient (Yin, 2011).

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined and detailed the methodological approach of the research

study. Chapter 3 also explained philosophical assumptions, the role of the researcher,

limitations of the study, ethical considerations, and credibility safeguards for this study.

Explanations were given about possible constraints for this study and what protections

were planned to conduct proper research. Also detailed in this chapter were the protocols

and procedures for sampling, collection, and analysis of data, as well as a description of

the overall research design. Descriptions were given detailing how and why participants

will be selected. An explanation of the selected research design was provided with

reasoning as well as detailed plans of the data collection process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the components of
identification and remediation involving inequities related to Black early learners with or
at-risk for dyslexia in an urban area school setting. The following phenomenon was
investigated to better understand how this process happens: (a) school and district-level
personnel (i.e., teachers, specialists, administrators, directors); (b) school and district-
level processes and protocols; and (c) the interdependent relationship between educators'
knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about dyslexia and the processes, and
protocols used to identify Black early learners experiencing dyslexia. This research study
was important as it provided awareness and insight into a myriad of issues surrounding
the lack of identification and remediation services for young Black learners at-risk for
and experiencing dyslexia.

Theoretical Frameworks

This research study utilized two theoretical frameworks: CRT and DisCrit. Each
framework applied the lenses of criticality and deconstruction to facilitate the eradication
of -isms (e.g., racism, classism, ableism, sexism) as applied to the education of typically
marginalized groups in the United States (Jones & Duckworth, 2021; Ladson-Billings,

1995; Migliarini & Annamma, 2019). The phenomenon under investigation involved young Black learners, their educators, and an urban area school district. As outlined in CRT and DisCrit, these communities of people are especially subject to the negative effects of racism, classism, and ableism (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The following core tenets of CRT and DisCrit were used to examine and analyze the research data collected: (a) participant responses, (b) classroom observations, and (c) school/district documentation.

Additionally, the data collected was analyzed using the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology as applicable to typically marginalized groups in the United States. Ontological assumptions within this research study affirmed that reality is subject to an individual's personal and societal conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Epistemological assumptions for this research study maintained that the acquisition of knowledge is based on an individual's social, contextual, and cultural development (Dixon & Rousseau Alexander, 2017; Yin, 2011). The axiology used in this research study asserted that an individual's educational privilege is based on race, class, economics, and ableism (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995). These frameworks and philosophical assumptions were intricate in the analysis of the data collected as each philosophical view undergirded the analysis of the data collected to examine the phenomenon under investigation.

Site/Context

The school system chosen for this research study is in an urban area. The school district is comprised of four schools, one central office building, and one preschool

facility. An overwhelming majority of students enrolled in this district are Black (97.16%). This site was chosen because it is representative of the educational context held in an urban school. Data was collected from all seven participants within this one site. Two elementary schools, the preschool facility, and the central office were visited by the researcher to collect data through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents.

Participants

Participants in this study were seven educators working in an urban area school district in Central Alabama. The participants held various positions ranging from school-based administrators and specialists to classroom teachers all working within the same school district (See Table 3). The research study participants represented a typical sampling of educators (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) who normally work with early learners in a myriad of capacities involving reading, language development, early literacy, SPED, and dyslexia.

Table 3

Demographics of Research Study Participants

Greenbrier City Schools					
Pseudonym	**Worksite**	**Position**	**Highest Degree Earned**	**Educational Experience (years)**	**Race/Ethnicity**
Mindy	Pre-K Facility	Facilitator or Administrator	Master's	34	Black
Stephanie	Catbrier Elementary School	Principal or Administrator	Master's	20	Black
Claire	Pre-K Facility	SPED Teacher	Bachelor's	41	Black

Dana	Catbrier Elementary School	ECE Teacher	Bachelor's	3	Black
Micah	Bullbrier Elementary School	SPED Teacher & Dyslexia Specialist	Master's	22	Black
Sheena	Catbrier Elementary School	Reading Specialist	Specialist's	11	Black
Casey	Central Office	SPED Lead Teacher	Master's	19	Black

Administration

The Greenbrier City School district had a myriad of administrators and leaders responsible for various departments and their employees. The administrative staff who participated in this research study were located at various (four) worksites within the district, which included the central office, prekindergarten (Pre-K) facility, and two elementary schools. The following participants were interviewed about their careers in education, knowledge, and perceptions about dyslexia, and the processes and protocols used by their employing school district to identify and remediate Black early learners experiencing dyslexia.

Stephanie

Stephanie was an instructional leader or principal at Catbrier Elementary School located in the Greenbrier City Schools district. She had been in her current position for four years. Before working as a principal, Stephanie worked as an assistant principal and English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at the secondary level. All of Stephanie's experiences in education were completed within the selected district. Stephanie held a master's degree in educational administration (P-12). Her job responsibilities at the time

included supervising teachers, budgeting for the school, providing professional

development, and ensuring state curricular standards for learning were met. Stephanie

was an educator with the Greenbrier City Schools district for a total of 20 years.

Stephanie attributed a "love of learning" as the driving force for her decision to make a

career in education.

Mindy

Mindy was the prekindergarten facilitator in the Greenbrier City Schools district.

She held a master's degree in early childhood education and another master's degree in

education management. In her current position as the Pre-K facilitator, Mindy was

responsible for the management of the district's preschool facility and programs. She

supervised teachers to ensure that the Office of School Readiness (OSR) guidelines were

followed. Mindy also provided professional development for teachers and managed the

facility's budget. Mindy described herself as "a teacher, family services worker,

education specialist, and dis/abilities coordinator." Mindy worked in early childhood

education for 34 years, spending 24 years employed with the Jefferson County

Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO) Head Start.

Special Education (SPED)

The SPED department in the Greenbrier City Schools district consisted of various

teachers, specialists, administrative staff, and paraprofessionals spread throughout six

different worksites. The participants from this department were a sampling of educators

who normally and continually worked with and advocated for young Black early learners

with dis/abilities. The following participants were interviewed about their careers in education, knowledge, and perceptions about dyslexia, and the processes and protocols used by their employing school district to identify and remediate Black early learners experiencing dyslexia.

Casey

Casey held the position of SPED Lead Teacher for the Greenbrier City Schools district. Casey had held her current position for four years. She worked as a district supervisor and coordinator of teachers and support personnel in this position. Casey's job responsibilities included SPED department management, state department of education compliance, oversight of the RtI process, and coordination of Section 504 (of the Rehabilitation Act) matters. Everything related to exceptional education excluding funding rested on her shoulders. Casey held a master's degree in collaborative special education (K-6). Her decision to pursue SPED was brought on by an event that took place in her personal life. When faced with the challenges of caring for a loved one with special needs, Casey stated, "it wasn't enough for me to actually be told what to do, so I went into the program." Casey was passionate about her work as a SPED lead teacher. She had worked in education for 19 years in the Greenbrier City Schools district. In that time, her professional experience encompassed employment as a first-grade classroom teacher, early childhood and elementary special education teacher, and itinerant SPED teacher.

Micah

Micah was a SPED teacher at Bullbrier Elementary School in the Greenbrier City Schools district. In addition, he was also the district's only trained dyslexia specialist. Micah held a master's degree in collaborative special education (K-6). His 22 years of experience in education was all spent in SPED and the chosen district. In 2015, Micah was selected by his district to participate in a two-year formal training program. Participants in this program were trained and certified as experts and specialists regarding dyslexia. In supplement to his main duties as an elementary SPED teacher, Micah was charged with the added responsibility of solely addressing the issue of dyslexia for all teachers and students within the entire district. Micah held his job and responsibilities in high regard and reflected heavily on how teaching and learning occur. In response to his views on language instruction, Micah stated, "Our link between what we do phonetically and teaching children to spell is—it's broken."

Claire

Claire was the preschool SPED teacher at the Pre-K Facility in the Greenbrier City Schools district. Claire was the only person employed within the district who served all preschool students (between the ages of three and five) with developmental delays, special needs, and dis/abilities. Claire began her career in education in 1981. At that time, she obtained a bachelor's degree in SPED (P-12) with an emphasis on Mental Retardation. Claire had worked as a teacher in SPED for 41 years with the Greenbrier City Schools district. Claire was passionate about preparing young learners for the next level of schooling. She was adamant about the need for more preschool teachers to obtain

traditional degrees and experiences in early childhood education. When asked about her views on language and literacy instruction, Claire said that the current instructional practices at the prekindergarten level do not prepare students for elementary school. "A lot of our teachers—most of the teachers here, they never taught anywhere but Head Start."

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The Greenbrier City Schools district had three elementary schools and one prekindergarten facility. Many of the personnel in early childhood education were employed at these worksites. The following participants were interviewed about their careers in education, knowledge, and perceptions about dyslexia, and the processes and protocols used by their employing school district to identify and remediate Black early learners experiencing dyslexia.

Sheena

Sheena was a reading specialist at Catbrier Elementary School in the Greenbrier City Schools district. Sheena's highest degree earned was an educational specialist degree in early childhood education (P-3). Sheena had 11 total years of experience in education. She has worked as a prekindergarten (Pre-K), kindergarten, and first-grade teacher. Her professional experiences spanned several schools and two different districts. Sheena had been employed with the Greenbrier City Schools district for four years. She had been the reading specialist at Catbrier Elementary School for two years. In her current role, Sheena provided teachers with guidance, information, and instructional support for use

with students during reading and language instruction. Sheena was proud of the work she was doing and found joy in her expertise as an early childhood educator as evidenced in her statement. "To me, it somewhat limits me because my range is only to third grade, but for me, that's just where my heart is. I'm happy to be stuck right there in that P-3."

Dana

Dana was a second-grade teacher with three years of experience in the Greenbrier City Schools district. Dana began her career in education as a teacher of first-grade students. She held a bachelor's degree in elementary education (K-6). In her current position, Dana delivered instruction to her students in all second-grade subject areas (i.e., reading, language, mathematics, science, social science, art) except physical education. As a young teacher newly embarking on her career in education, Dana was a novice teacher who exhibited a willingness to learn and an eagerness to comply. Regarding the programs used and mandates imposed by the Greenbrier district, Dana said, "I will say as I was learning those strategies and techniques, they help. I mean, it's worked wonders. I incorporate them now, and it's like, 'Oh,' [laughter] you know?"

Data Collection

Observations

Observations were conducted to examine how dyslexia and areas most directly affected (e.g., reading, literacy, and language development) by the dis/ability are addressed in regular and SPED early learner classrooms. Two of the participants interviewed consented (Appendix) to instructional observations. The observations were

completed in their classrooms: one early childhood SPED teacher and one early childhood or general education teacher. These classrooms were chosen because they provided the most normative conditions involving Black early learners, reading, literacy, and language instruction, and intervention and remediation practices regarding dyslexia. The observations took place at the Pre-K Facility and the Catbrier Elementary School on two different days. At the time neither teacher acknowledged having any students identified with dyslexia or experiencing the characteristics of dyslexia. The instruction observed in each classroom was whole-group and did not involve differentiation of instruction (or multi-tiered instruction), small groupings, multisensory activities, etc. Therefore, no direct or explicit dyslexia-specific interventions were observed.

Prekindergarten SPED Classroom

The early childhood SPED classroom was larger than the average classroom but small in comparison to other typical early learner spaces. The room had no windows, two doors, and was split into four sections: learning area, food preparation, storage, and teacher planning. Attached to the classroom via a short hallway was a fully functioning restroom. The learning area contained a big book display stocked with books, free play equipment, games, and other items for young students. All furniture was scaled to size for young children including several large tables, chairs, and shelves. The classroom included an area with a large rug and the walls were decorated with colorful pictures and learning guides like posters identifying colors and shapes.

Figure 4

Special Education (Prekindergarten) Classroom Décor

The preschool SPED classroom observation was conducted around 10 o'clock a.m. and lasted only 20-30 minutes. Two Black early learners (boys) were in attendance and were seated at a large kidney table. The number of students in attendance depended on the day of the week which is determined by student dis/ability and special needs. On Monday, there were five students; Tuesday and Thursday, seven students; and Wednesdays, six students. In addition to the preschool SPED teacher, Claire, the students are provided services from one paraprofessional. The students participated in an activity that required them to correctly identify directions and positions using directional and positional words (e.g., front, down, up, back, under, over). Claire used commercially made cards that displayed pictures of persons that corresponded to directions and positions. The students were prompted to respond with the correct directional and positional words when given a choice between the two words provided. The students required an extensive amount of prompting and coercion to respond and remained mostly silent throughout the activity. Claire mentioned that, on most days, the students needed more "mothering" than instruction.

Early Childhood Education Classroom

The early childhood classroom was an average-sized classroom with an entire wall of windows and one door for entering and exiting. The windows were covered with closed blinds that are utilized as a fourth wall to display learning prompts and classroom decor (See Figure 5). The learning environment was equipped with furniture typical for a regular elementary school classroom. The room contained a teacher's desk and chairs, a large kidney table, individual student desks, and chairs all scaled to size for early learners. Additional classroom equipment and furnishings included a wooden stool, one short bookshelf, an interactive smart board, a dry erase board mounted to one wall, two bulletin boards, and another wall of cabinets and closet storage. The classroom was sparingly decorated with learning prompts typically for a second-grade classroom like an alphabet line, reader guides, and vocabulary posters. The classroom displays also included a considerable amount of learning aids directed towards phonetics and proper mouth formations corresponding to letter sounds (See Figure 5). All décor was commercially sourced, and no student work was displayed.

Figure 5

Early Childhood Education (Second Grade) Classroom Décor

The regular early learner classroom held 14 Black second-grade students, including six boys and eight girls. One early childhood education teacher (Dana) taught the class of students. The lesson began around 8:45 a.m. when students took a district-mandated performance assessment. Each student used a school-issued Chromebook or personal computing device. The assessment was administered to the students with a cloud-based product entitled *Edulastic*. *Edulastic* is an interactive formative assessment and instructional product. The educational tool purports to identify students' learning gaps by its instructional and measurement applications (Snapwiz, Inc., 2021). Dana informed me that the students were tested on skills previously taught in reading and language lessons (e.g., vowel sounds, context clues, adjectives, sound blends, vocabulary, and comprehension).

After students completed their assessments, they began a whole-group phonics lesson. The lesson routine was familiar to the students as they sat on the floor in a semi-circle facing their teacher. Dana sat on a wooden stool in front of the dry erase board. The lesson began with a warm-up exercise that followed a call and returns pattern. Dana would provide the students with a word then ask them to replace the beginning or ending letters of the word and say the new word. For example, students were given the word "blend," then told to replace the "bl" with "tr" to make the new word "trend." The students were then asked to say the new word aloud in unison. When they concluded this exercise, they began another review exercise using commercially available flashcards. The flashcards used were part of a phonics program called *Saxon Phonics* (See Figure 6) that includes scripted lessons. The flashcards displayed a picture of an object, animal, or person and the corresponding vowel with accent markings that students needed to use

when identifying the picture. One example of this can be seen in Figure 6 as the card

displayed contains a picture of an octopus.

Figure 6

Saxon Phonics Lesson #8: Spelling with K and C
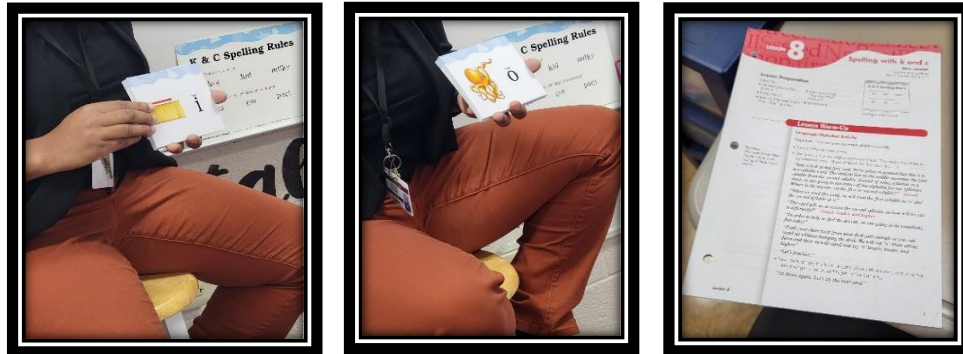
After these review and warm-up exercises were completed, the teacher and

students began an explicit whole-group instruction lesson on spelling with the letters "k"

and "c." Dana used the script provided for Lesson #8 from the *Saxon Phonics* program

(See Figure 6). She read from the scripted lesson and prompted students to spell words

correctly that contained a "k" or "c." Students were given a word like "capital" and using

paper and pencil individually each student spelled the given word on paper. After

sufficient wait time, the teacher called on a student to correctly spell the given word.

Dana would then write the word on the board the way the student instructed. She would

ask the other students if the word were spelled correctly and depending on their answers,

she would ask for an explanation. This is when she guided the students to repeat the

phonetic rule. To extend learning, Dana asked students to use previously taught skills and

mark vowels with a breve or macaron depending on their sound. This continued for a considerable amount of time and made up the entirety of the lesson.

It is not evident how the application of phonics instruction is being carried out or extended in other daily assignments, activities, and instruction. I did not witness any purposeful reading or writing instruction, practice, or use. Dana did tell me that students had access to an electronic basal reader titled *Wonders*. She divulged that district personnel deemed the reader too difficult for students and its use is being discontinued across the district. Some trade books were displayed in the classroom; however, Dana informed me that she uses levelized books with students during center time. She explained that the students are required to follow up their independent reading assignment with a worksheet activity that is separated into three levels (Appendix). Dana explained that the students knew their individualized levels. The leveled worksheets were displayed and available to students in bins on top of the bookshelf where the leveled books are stored.

The activities observed were rote and skills were taught in heavy isolation. Learning was dependent upon memorization of rules with no "real-world" application. Dana explained that students have more time to practice skills during centers. She also stated that during that time, she works with small groups of students to remediate, sustain, and improve learning for students at all levels. The students are grouped by their reading scores from another district-mandated assessment entitled *i-Ready*. *i-Ready* is used by the Greenbrier City Schools district as a diagnostic assessment tool. The district uses the cloud-based technology tool to determine the reading and mathematics levels of all students. Furthermore, equity and individual formative assessments were not utilized

during the lesson. Additionally, dialect and culture were not factored into the application

of this lesson (e.g., how students speak, sound out letters, hear sounds). Adoption and

implementation of the program used did not take into consideration culture or relevance.

Documentation

Documentation was collected from three of the seven participants: early

childhood or general education teacher, SPED lead teacher, and reading specialist. The

documents collected are used in the implementation of processes and protocols set by the

Greenbrier City Schools district to identify and remediate students with or at-risk for

dyslexia. It is important to note that these processes and protocols are not entirely

directed toward the identification of dyslexia in students but any student experiencing

learning difficulties in any subject area.

At the time of collection, there was a myriad of processes, procedures, programs,

and protocols in place to provide intervention for students experiencing reading and

language difficulties. Table 3 supplies a list of documents used by the Greenbrier school

district to guide the implementation of an MTSS framework, and the RtI and reading

intervention processes. A description of each document is provided along with its

purpose, and the school personnel who is expected to use the document. Some documents

provided by the SPED lead teacher showed evidence of established protocols for the RtI

process and the implementation of multi-tiered instructional supports. The documentation

provided by the reading specialists and early childhood education teacher showed

evidence of a plan to identify and remediate reading difficulties in students including

screening measures for dyslexia. No documentation supplied showed evidence of a direct

and explicit process or protocol for the identification and remediation of dyslexia in early

learners at risk for and experiencing.

Table 4

Documentation: What? Why? For Whom?

DOCUMENTS	WHAT?	WHY?	FOR WHOM?
Reading Response Worksheets (blank) (Tiers I-III) (classrooms)	reading activity (reading center)	-to provide multi-tiered (MTSS) reading instruction or activities for student	Second-grade students
Saxon Phonics and Spelling 2 Lesson #8: Spelling with k and c (classrooms)	scripted phonics lesson	-to provide "research-based" and science of reading instruction to students.	Second-grade students
i-Ready Early Reading Tasks (blank) (schools)	formative assessment	-to provide teachers with information regarding students' reading abilities	classroom teachers (elementary)
Phonological Awareness Screening Test (Form A) (schools)	screening tool	-used as a screener for dyslexia and other reading difficulties	reading specialists and reading interventionists
Student Reading Improvement Plan (SRIP) (Template) (schools)	individualized instructional plan	-used as a remediation plan for students with reading difficulties	classroom teachers (elementary) and reading interventionist
PLC Monitoring Quarterly Cycle (schools)	timeline for the implementation of MTSS	-to provide guidance and monitoring from the district	classroom teachers, problem-solving team (PST), building based administrators
The Work of Professional Learning Communities (schools)	descriptors for expected actions during the quarterly cycle	- to differentiate and improve instructional practices	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
Academic Resources (schools) (Tiers I-III)	descriptors for the MTSS	- to differentiate and improve instructional practices	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
Initial Referral to the School RtI Team (schools)	a formal request for additional support for students experiencing learning difficulties	-to refer students to the PST or for the RtI process	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators

Notice of RtI Meeting	form sent to families notifying them of a meeting regarding their student	-to plan and prepare for RtI meetings	PST, building based administrators
Parent Notification Letter (schools)	an invitation to families to attend a meeting on behalf of their student	-to plan and prepare for RtI meetings	PST, building based administrators
RtI Parent Follow-Up Letter (if a parent did not attend) (schools)	A notice for families who could not or did not attend the meeting on behalf of their student	-to document communication with parents and families	PST, building based administrators
Parent Confirmation to Attend Letter (schools)	an official notice that the family of the student will attend the RtI meeting	-to document communication with parents and families	parents and families
School RtI Team Meeting Minutes (schools)	Documentation of the meeting regarding a student referred to the PST experiencing learning difficulties	-to document and plan	PST and building based administrators
Teacher RtI PLC Checklist for Tier II (schools)	guidance and instruction on how to provide tiered instruction during a quarterly cycle	-to provide guidance and monitoring	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
Teacher Referral Checklist for Tier III Services (schools)	guidance and instruction on how to provide tiered instruction during a quarterly cycle	-to provide guidance and monitoring	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
School RtI Team Checklist for Tier III (schools)	guidance and instruction on how to provide tiered instruction during a quarterly cycle	-to provide guidance and monitoring from the district	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
School RtI Team Checklist for Tier IV (schools)	guidance and instruction on how to provide tiered instruction during a quarterly cycle	-to provide guidance and monitoring from the district	classroom teachers, PST, building based administrators
Teacher List (for students not meeting standards on universal screening/not meeting grade-level standards) (schools)	a listing of students needing remediation and intervention	-to document students who need more supports	classroom teachers, reading specialists, and reading interventionists

RtI Student Placement Log (schools)	a listing of students by subject areas and tiered instructional levels	-to document students who need more supports	PST and building based administrators
Student Instructional Plan-Elementary Reading (schools)	a template for use with individual students needing more intensive supports	-to assist in the creation of individualized learning plans that meet the targeted needs of students needing greater supports	classroom teachers and reading interventionists
Student Instructional Plan-Elementary Reading (schools) (sample)	An example of a completed template for use with individual students needing more intensive supports	-to assist in the creation of individualized learning plans that meet the targeted needs of students needing greater supports	reading interventionists and classroom teachers

The documentation collected does not show a clear plan, procedure, or timeline for how Greenbrier City Schools district employees are to follow and implement the state mandated RtI process including the use of an MTSS framework. The documentation collected does not reflect the implementation or use of a substantive plan for identifying or remediating young Black students at-risk for or experiencing dyslexia. The *i-Ready Early Reading Tasks*, *Phonological Awareness Screening Test*, and *Student Reading Improvement Plan* (SRIP) is used to address the needs of early learners with reading difficulties. The *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* is specifically used as a dyslexia screening tool. Further documentation specific to the RtI process, creation, and implementation of an MTSS framework, or the identification and remediation processes for dyslexia were not provided.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were performed with all seven participants involved in this research study, including two school-based administrators (one facilitator and one principal), one

SPED teacher leader, one early childhood or general education teacher, one reading specialist, one SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist, and one early childhood education SPED teacher. All participants at the time of data collection were employees of the same school district but carried out their duties at various worksites. Interviews were conducted with each participant individually at their base worksite, including the central office, two elementary schools, and one prekindergarten facility.

The interviews focused on the educators' knowledge, experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions surrounding the identification and remediation of Black early learners with dyslexia. Included in the interview protocol were questions that asked participants about their general experiences in the education profession, how they understood and viewed the topic of dyslexia, their knowledge of school district policies and procedures pertaining to dyslexia, and their involvement in the processes used to identify and remediate young Black learners with dyslexia.

The average duration of each interview was one hour with the shortest lasting around 40 minutes and the longest-lasting close to 120 minutes. The more professional teaching experience held, the greater the feedback an educator gave; therefore, more time was spent conducting interviews with veteran educators. The shortest interviews held were with the two school-based administrators, the reading specialist, and the early childhood or general education teacher. The longest interviews conducted were with the SPED lead teacher, SPED teacher (and dyslexia specialist), and early childhood education SPED teacher.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the three themes derived from the research study questions, data from the following three sources were analyzed: (a) semi-structured interview responses, (b) early learner classroom or instructional observations, and (c) school district documents used in the implementation of the RtI process, an MTSS framework (or multi-tiered instructional supports), and identification and remediation of dyslexia. Through analysis of the data, codes were utilized to quickly identify information pertaining to the three themes. Number codes were assigned to (1) knowledge; (2) beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes; (3) processes; (4) protocols/procedures; and (5) shape/form (See Table 5).

Each of the themes was disaggregated into subthemes. The first theme identified was urban area school educator knowledge perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about dyslexia. The subthemes that developed are (a) educators possess little to no education and professional development learning about dyslexia, (b) educators described dyslexia as primarily a reading impairment, and (c) educators provided no significant descriptions of laws, codes, or policies regarding dyslexia. The second theme distinguished was urban area school processes and protocols used to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners. The following two subthemes were developed from the second theme: (a) one commercial literacy program assessment was used as a dyslexia screener and (b) commercial literacy programs were used in the place of multi-tiered instruction supports. The last theme was urban area school educator shaping of processes and procedures used to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners. The two subthemes that surfaced were the (a) knowledge about dyslexia and SPED determined educator views and perceptions and (b) knowledge about dyslexia, SPED, RtI, and MTSS shaped educator

perspectives. All themes were a result of the researcher's data analysis and identified as

prevalent.

Table 5

Codes, Themes, Subthemes, and Data Sources

CODE	THEME(S)	DATA SOURCE(S)
#1 knowledge	Urban Area School Educator knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about Dyslexia	Interviews
#2 beliefs, perceptions, attitudes	• Educators possessed little to no education and professional development learning on dyslexia. • Educators primarily describe dyslexia as a reading impairment • Educators provided no significant descriptions for laws or state code regarding dyslexia	
#3 process	Urban Area School Processes and Protocols used to Identify and Remediate Dyslexia in Early Learners	Interviews, Observations, Documents
#4 protocols/procedures	• A commercial literacy program assessment is used as a dyslexia screener. (No clear identification measure is used.) • Commercial literacy programs are used as tiered instruction	
#5 shape/form	Urban Area School Educators' Shaping of Processes and Procedures used to Identify and Remediate Dyslexia in Early Learners • Knowledge or a lack of knowledge about dyslexia and SPED greatly determined educator perceptions about the protocols and processes in place. • Knowledge or a lack of knowledge about dyslexia, RtI, SPED, and MTSS greatly determined educator perspectives on how processes and procedures are and should be implemented	Interviews, Observations

Research Question #1

"How do urban area school and district personnel describe their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions concerning dyslexia and early learners?"

Interview responses from educators in an urban area school district were used to garner answers to research question 1. This question inquired about how urban area school and district personnel identify and perceive the topic of dyslexia regarding early learners. From this question, one major theme and three subthemes emerged during data analysis.

Educator Knowledge, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Perceptions About Dyslexia

The research study participants held varying knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about dyslexia. Likewise, the education and professional development of each participant differed greatly depending on professional teaching experience. The more experience and education specific to SPED and dyslexia a participant held, the more descriptive explanations they gave about dyslexia. Participants also offered differing narratives regarding instructional practices surrounding reading and language development. Educators with fewer years of professional experience in general education and SPED relied heavily on mandates and guidance from the state department of education, their employing school district, and immediate supervisors. The participants with less experience and education provided a portrait of dyslexia that basic and lacked a depth of understanding on the topic. As research has indicated, there is a great need for educators at all levels and in various positions to increase their knowledge of dyslexia (Peterson et al., 2017). From participant responses, considerable myths about dyslexia

continue to prevail (Green, 2015). The lack of educator knowledge on dyslexia impedes the identification and intervention efforts for students with the dis/ability.

Education and Professional Development About Dyslexia

All the participants in this research study reported having taken only one course in their undergraduate studies pertaining to SPED. Participants noted that this course provided them with a brief overview of dyslexia and not much more. SPED educators held more knowledge about dyslexia than the early childhood education teacher, principal, prekindergarten facilitator, and reading specialist. All the information and knowledge that they held about dyslexia was based on specialized education, individual research efforts, and professional development opportunities scattered across many years of professional experience.

Micah was chosen by the Greenbrier City Schools district to participate in a two-year training program that certified him as a dyslexia specialist. In this manner, he possessed an impressive amount of knowledge and understanding about dyslexia. Casey, as the SPED lead teacher and from her desire to know more about dyslexia, held just as much knowledge about dyslexia as Micah. Claire's more than 40 years of experience in SPED allowed her opportunities to engage in meaningful in-service training sessions which enhanced her understanding. Sheena, Dana, and Stephanie relied heavily on the guidance and mandates stipulated by the Alabama Literacy Act that is implemented through the state department of education's Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) program. Mindy provided information about dyslexia from her experiences while working at

JCCEO Head Start as well as other professional experiences in association with the

Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB).

Educator Descriptions of the Characteristics of Dyslexia

SPED educators were able to provide rich and deep explanations for dyslexia,

how it can affect student learning and the spectrum of characteristics associated with the

learning dis/ability. It is important to note that SPED educators were not familiar with

dyslexia in early learners and did not specify how it manifests in their youngest students.

The other participants (i.e., reading specialist, Pre-K facilitator, school principal, early

childhood education teacher) were less descriptive than the SPED educators and provided

fewer explanations of dyslexia. All educators described dyslexia as a reading dis/ability

or difficulty. Most participants said that dyslexia is a disorder that affects reading. The

educators said that students with dyslexia see and write letters backward, have trouble

spelling, and can't recognize words or letters. Some examples of dyslexia manifestations

in students that were given are (a) an inability to write the letters "d," "b," "p," and "q"

correctly consistently; (b) an inability to correctly identify the alphabet in any grade

above kindergarten; and (c) an inability or difficulty to spell words correctly consistently.

Mindy, the prekindergarten facilitator, admitted that she did not know much about

dyslexia and all that she knew was from personal experience. "The little bit that I know

about it is from a classmate of mine in high school and how he would read and look at

different things."

On the other hand, Micah, the SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist stated,

It is a neurological disorder, meaning it's something that happens in the brain, and
it is-in short, it is the brain's inability to process those print symbols. Some people

can spell well, and some people can read it well, but have no idea. Now, given that, and it's not exactly the same for everybody. And comprehend. Dyslexia will impact a student's ability to read, write, spell.

Sheena, the reading specialist, said, "I, honestly, would describe it as a learned behavior, and that would go back to the parents at home."

Casey elaborated on dyslexia by describing it as the following:

I do know that it's tricky, and it's complicated at times because kids can have an average to above-average IQ and actually have dyslexia. I know that some of the causes of dyslexia could be biological, cognitive, behavioral, or even environmental. It can also be a phonological process and deficit as well. I know, with dyslexia, it affects the processing language of the brain.

Claire indicated that dyslexia required a medical diagnosis. "It's a medical diagnosis, whereas all the other things are—you use a standardized test or a criteria reference test to gather your documentation. I guess it is neurological."

Educator Descriptions of the Laws and Education Codes Concerning Dyslexia

Most of the participants did not possess a wealth of knowledge about the laws and education codes that prescribe and governed mandates about how dyslexia is addressed in public schools. Most participants held partial information and understanding regarding laws about dyslexia. Some participants, through their responses, showed a reliance on other educators and educational entities for information regarding how to legally address dyslexia in their various professional roles. The following descriptions are reflective of the participants' understanding of how the law addresses dyslexia in public schools.

By her admission, Claire's knowledge of laws regarding dyslexia was limited to IDEA. She stated, "The things that a dyslexic student experiences fit under what we see,

what we identify as a student with specific learning dis/abilities. The only laws I know is with the IDEA."

Stephanie, the school principal, stated that she was very unfamiliar with laws governing how educators should address dyslexia. Stephanie acknowledged that any information she acquired about dyslexia is ascertained from the school's reading specialist, Sheena. Sheena's sole source of information on dyslexia law comes through the oversight and guidance of state department employees working within the ARI program. It is important to note that the ARI program follows the Alabama Literacy Act.

Sheena remarked, "With the Literacy Act, to me, the main focus is dyslexia, which was convenient for this is my first year as a reading specialist last year." Dana, the early childhood education teacher, admitted that she was given information about some laws but could not remember any of the information she was provided. Neither Casey nor Mindy provided any commentary on laws involving dyslexia in education.

The SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist, Micah possessed the most extensive amount of information pertaining to the laws and mandates regarding dyslexia and public schools. He provided information about dyslexia regarding the Alabama Literacy Act, IDEA, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Micah said, "I know law defines what dyslexia is for the state. The law defines how the state should look for, address-look for, identify and address students who may have characteristics of dyslexia." "The things that a dyslexic student experiences fit under what we see, what we identify as a student with specific learning dis/abilities."

Research Question #2

"How do school and district personnel describe the processes and protocols implemented to identify and intervene on behalf of early learners at-risk for and identified with dyslexia?"

Interview responses, classroom observations, and documentation were used to gather answers to research question 2. This question asked participants to identify and describe the identification and remediation processes and protocols used by their district to identify and remediate early learners at risk for and experiencing dyslexia. From this question, one major theme and two subthemes arose during data analysis.

Processes and Protocols Used to Identify and Remediate Early Learners with Dyslexia

The research study participants provided scattered commentary and incomplete portraits of the processes and protocols used by their employing school district to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners. Responses from all participants except Claire indicated that district employees follow to varying extents the RtI process and implement multi-tiered instruction. Claire does not follow the RtI process to identify or remediate students with developmental delays and learning difficulties. She explained that she uses traditional SPED protocols and procedures to meet the needs of early learners with dis/abilities. The processes and procedures are used to address the needs of all students faced with any learning and behavioral difficulty including dyslexia. Furthermore, there is no additional process for the identification and remediation of dyslexia in early learners being utilized by Greenbrier City Schools employees. From participant responses, the use

of the RtI process and implementation of multi-tiered instruction does not provide a foolproof method for identifying students with any dis/ability including dyslexia or providing them with the interventions that a student may require. Early learners between the ages of three and five have their developmental challenges (e.g., developmental delays, disabilities) met through traditional special education referral processes. Reliance on the RtI process to identify early learners at risk for dyslexia can be problematic and should not be the primary avenue used (DEC of CEC, 2021).

The Greenbrier City Schools district uses a horde of commercial programs to address the literacy needs of early learners. Indicated from the research study data collected, the district uses *Heggerty*, *S.P.I.R.E.*, *Saxon Phonics*, *i-Ready*, *Edulastic*, and *LETRS* to address reading, literacy, and language development in one manner or another. Even though these programs are not defined as a process or procedure, they are a mandated part of the protocols used by the Greenbrier district to identify and remediate reading difficulties (including dyslexia) in early learners. Each program is designed to address the specific needs of teachers and young students (See Figure 7). The assessments are intended to drive instruction. The instructional programs are intended to follow the science of reading (as mandated by the Alabama Literacy Act). The professional development program is meant to provide teachers with education, guidance, and support regarding their instruction. As indicated by Zirkel (2020), school districts across the state (Alabama) continue to need increased teacher preparation to address dyslexia in early learners, greater guidance for dyslexia at the state level, and improved implementation measures at the LEA level.

Figure 7

Literacy Programs Used by Greenbrier City Schools
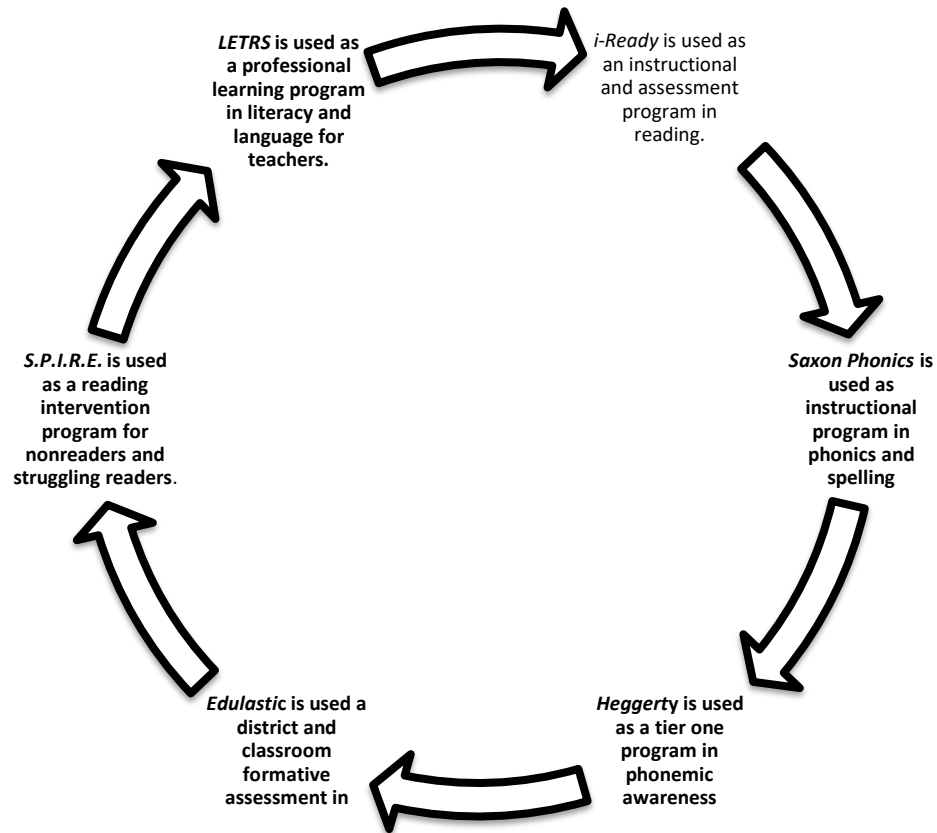
Identification Processes and Protocols

      The Greenbrier City Schools district does not have a clear and concise process for

the identification of dyslexia in early learners. Participants reported that the district does

not test for dyslexia but does utilize a dyslexia screener. Documents collected show that

the district's elementary schools use the *i-Ready Early Reading Tasks* as a formative

assessment measure and *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* as a screening tool for

dyslexia. The *i-Ready* program is also used by the Greenbrier district quarterly to

administer a diagnostic assessment to all students across the district. This test provides

educators with individual reading reports on every student assessed. The Greenbrier

district relies heavily on these screeners as a "red flag" for dyslexia.

Casey reported,

Then, if we do this universal screener, which is *i-Ready*, to determine what every level everybody is on, and then we can see what the issue is, especially since we're doin' these five effective elements of reading, well, we identify, okay, this student has this particular barrier.

Dana explained that the dyslexia screener works to identify issues early learners

may have with reading skills.

We screen for letters, sounds, inverted—the way they write their letters, letter formation, all that stuff, so I'll do a little screening with them as well for those—for the ones—like I have one child that writes her name, her whole name, backward.

"Yeah, it's like a dyslexic—it helps identify those dyslexic traits, so to say, and

then it gives us measures to kind of intervene to actually see, hey, did they just learn

wrong, or is this really a problem?"

When asked about identification measures for dyslexia, Micah remarked,

Does [Greenbrier] necessarily do a dyslexic testing, No, but when the reading coaches do their screenings during the year, they are looking for students who are struggling, and they will —they can identify students who have characteristics of dyslexia, but you are not likely going to find and in fact even when I think you read the Alabama Dyslexia Law, however, you phrase that, I think it's going to say things like characteristics of dyslexia.

"The special education evaluation is not going to be looked-it's not going to

identify. We won't identify dyslexia."

Sheena also stated, "Most of the time the students that are identified as dyslexic is

because they've had a lot of parental advocacy and they've had an outside testing and

evaluation, and diagnosis."

Stephanie and Casey provided the richest responses to questions about the identification procedures using the RtI process.

Stephanie provided a retelling of how Catbrier Elementary School personnel began using a dyslexia screener along with the RtI process.

> I remember at one point, we were like, "We don't really have anything. We don't have anything," and that's when I know our ARI-they came in and said, "Okay, we're gonna do this because we have to implement something. We have to have something in the district," and that's when we started doing that little screener. Well, hey, this is how we're gonna start doing this to make sure that we catch the students or identify should I say, not catch, but identify the students as they're coming up. I do remember us talking about that even in our PLCs and RtI, so they do utilize the screeners, so like I said, [the reading specialist] would be able to tell you more about that, but RtI still plays a process in that, because we have to be able to make accommodation, I don't wanna say that word, but you know what I'm saying? There's a particular RtI team that's our counselor, SPED, general ed teacher, myself, reading specialist, all of us have a hand in RtI because everybody knows, so I know with a general ed teacher, of course, they recommend them and things like that, and when we're in here and we're talking, everybody plays a part in that [the reading interventionist] is our RtI person.

Casey shared information about the RtI process and multi-tiered instructional supports that are mandated for use by teachers with students experiencing difficulties with reading and language. She explained how professional learning communities (PLCs) and PST groups should meet and discuss the use of accommodations and differentiated instruction to assist young students with reading issues. Casey provided the following scenario.

> If the group comes to a consensus to determine what interventions are workin', and then everybody decides on that team. "Okay, we tried everything we can for [the student]. We really think it's time for some testing to be done to rule out that portion of a deficit for her"—if that comes to be to where she doesn't qualify, then, of course, we'll carry back over and just keep trying until we find what interventions are goin' to be effective. It can be after the eight to nine weeks, or it can be the next eight

to nine weeks of the grading period, to where you say, okay, now, this child has made no progress.

Casey also revealed information regarding the use of dyslexia screeners. In her response, Casey mentioned two different programs that are used as potential screeners for dyslexia: *i-Ready* and *S.P.I.R.E.*

> Yes, the universal screener, *i-Ready*. *i-Ready* gives you the interventions that you even need to incorporate. Then, if we do this universal screener, which is *i-Ready*, to determine what every level everybody is on, and then we can see what the issue is, especially since we're doin' these five effective elements of reading, well, we identify, okay, this student has this particular barrier. Well, the next step is the reading specialist, or whomever, does another screener to determine-because, what some people don't understand, it's more than one measure to determine dyslexia. You do this next screener, this secondary screener, and it should be some duplicate with the areas of weakness to let you know that this child does display characteristics of dyslexia. The readin' specialists and coaches were supposed to be the ones to assist with the identification by those universal screeners and the second screeners and measures to determine what deficits in these reading practices or language processing that they were havin'. Now, that second screener could be *S.P.I.R.E.*

Claire is the only SPED teacher for preschool learners in the district. She reported that in her role as the prekindergarten SPED teacher, she is responsible for carrying out the identification process, creating IEPs, completing transition documentation, managing cases, providing instruction, and conducting meetings for each early learner in the Greenbrier district who is between the ages of three and five at-risk for or experiencing difficulties in learning and development. It is important to recognize that the RtI process is not used with preschool learners in the Greenbrier City Schools district. Claire receives referrals from parents, teachers, physicians, and outside agencies to identify and remediate early learners with developmental delays.

Claire explained,

We don't really do RtI with the little ones. When they turn 25 or 26 months, then they are referred to the school system to start the process of early intervention to preschool transition. When they turn 25 or 26 months, then they are referred to the school system to start the process of early intervention to preschool transition. I do intake from early intervention. We hold the transition meeting, and then we go through the process of doin' the acceptance and doin' the assessments and all of that. Once they've been in—been with me at least 30 days, I start the entry data. I have to do the progress monitoring. Then, before they exit to kindergarten, I have to do the exit data and the assessments, the reports that go along with that. Then I also do all the referrals to placement meetings to keep up with the timelines. I do the testing. I do the teaching. I do it all. I have a lot of roles within this role.

Remediation and Intervention Processes and Protocols

The remediation and intervention processes used with early learners experiencing dyslexia could not be directly identified from the data collected. Through a long and arduous RtI and SPED referral processes, an early learner with dyslexia could be identified in the Greenbrier District. The RtI process is mandated by the Alabama State Department of Education for every school district within the state. The process is intended to provide interventions/instructional support in response to used instructional practices to improve learning for students experiencing difficulties (Alabama Department of Education, 2009). However, this is highly unlikely according to participant responses and document analysis.

If identified, an early learner would be diagnosed with SLD, and the interventions provided would not be dyslexia specific as the diagnosis of SLD is an umbrella labeling for any learning disability in reading. According to IDEA, an early learner identified with dyslexia and qualifying for SPED services, would be labeled as SLD (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The concepts and ideas surrounding the science of reading as stated in

the Alabama Literacy Act are one method that is used to provide interventions to early learners with reading difficulties including dyslexia (Alabama Literacy Act, 2019). Another method used by the Greenbrier district is multi-tiered instruction implemented through the RtI process. It is important to note that participant responses and document analysis shows that there is no outline or framework for multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). This means that teachers have no explicit guidance or structure for implementing effective multi-tiered instruction. Even with two methods for providing intervention and remediation, efforts by the district to thwart issues in reading proficiency are blanketed and nonspecific.

Though differentiation in instruction was not detected during the observation of her class, Dana is confident in her practices to provide all students with various levels of instruction as needed even considering dyslexia. Dana said, "Well, everybody gets time with me, or attention, no matter what their level is. It could be to enhance them. It could be to stay on our level. It could be to catch up."

Casey was direct in her commentary on the remediation and intervention processes that are utilized with all students. She said that teachers are instructed to remediate learning through thoughtful, immediate, and shifting student groupings. In her retelling of the proper implementation of multi-tiered instructional supports, Casey said,

> You, of course, jump on those interventions or whatever with that kid, but that's when you go into changing the interventions, after this doesn't work, to see what we can do, and then it might be a quicker entry into testing for that student, to try to identify if there's something else goin' on that we're missing. You don't wait for some students if you can clearly see that there's something indicating that this is a major problem. If the interventions aren't working, you come back and meet with the team because you meet with the problem-solvin' team, but, also, they mix it now, in our district, and they do the professional learning communities. You meet with those teams. You discuss with everybody what's goin' on.

Research Question #3

"How do the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of school- and district-level personnel shape the processes and/or protocols utilized to identify early learners with dyslexia and implement interventions?"

Interview responses and classroom observations were used to gain answers to research question 3. This question explored the understandings and perceptions of school and district personnel regarding district processes and procedures for addressing dyslexia. This question sought to examine how educator perceptions influence and shape the implementation of district processes and procedures. From this question, one major theme and two subthemes emerged during data analysis.

Educator Shaping of Processes and Procedures Used to Identify Dyslexia

Various research indicates that challenges associated with the implementation and interpretation of dyslexia screening measures continue to impede and complicate the identification and remediation processes (Phillips & Odegard, 2017; Zirkel, 2020). Varying interpretations were found across participants regarding the identification and remediation processes used for early learners with dyslexia and its implementation. Some participants felt that the identification and intervention measures used by the district were sufficient. Other participants felt that improvements in instructional practices, identification measures, and implementation efforts were needed across the Greenbrier District. The educators with a lesser amount of knowledge about dyslexia found more satisfaction in district processes. While educators with more professional experience and knowledge about dyslexia found more dissatisfaction in district processes.

Interpretation of Identification and Remediation Procedures

Micah talked extensively about how the instructional practices, identification measures, and interventions used with early learners experiencing dyslexia needed improvement. He remarked that the Greenbrier district uses too many different reading, literacy, and language programs. Micah thinks this is an issue because the differences in language, instruction, procedures, methods, scope, and sequence can widely vary from program to program. One example of his concern was found in one of his comments. In it, he spoke about how different programs used by the Greenbrier district use different terminology to provide reading and literacy instruction.

> This thing is a breath. That's a macron, but they don't all call them final, stable syllables, and what they define as a final, stable syllable isn't universal. That's a digraph, but some people call it a blend. Some say that a blend only makes—a blend makes more than one sound. If you ended with graph, whether it be a digraph, a trigraph, or quadrigraph, it ends with— it's one sound, but if you do blend, you're going to hear more than one sound, but every program doesn't explain it that way.

At the time of data collection, Greenbrier district used a total of six different programs with students and teachers to address literacy, language, and reading at the elementary level (K-6).

As the one person in the Greenbrier district with certification in dyslexia, Micah expressed disappointment in the school system's nonuse of his expertise.

> From my perspective, there's a level of comfort for that, but you're having conversations of how do we improve reading across the board, how do you cook shrimp etouffee, but you don't go ask the dude who cooked shrimp etouffee in culinary school for the rest of the people?

He continued by using a parable to describe how he views the district's waste of his expertise as the school system's dyslexia specialist.

If I paid for my son to go to culinary school and he never cooked me a meal or-and I said dude, cook me something, that shows that I don't mind him growing. I don't know. It does show that. I don't know what else it means, but it does show—it can show him that I don't mind him growing. I got that, but then once I had it, then I think that they're at a place where great, he's finished. That's good for him, not necessarily he's finished, and we paid for that. How could we use that or how can he help us? I have asked, but they don't necessarily know, and I'm not saying that I have said answers. I'm just saying you paid for cooking school, and you don't want a meal.

From her perspective, Casey thought that all students who exhibited characteristics of dyslexia were to be referred to Micah for identification and remediation.

Hm-mm, because the thing was what we were told initially—because he was that dyslexia therapy, we were to refer them to him. I don't know how effective the trainin' was because the training was supposed to assist the district in helping with that. He's still the one that—we've been sendin' 'em to him now. They should turn the names over to him. He looks to see if there are characteristics of dyslexia.

It is worth notating that Micah's primary role in the Greenbrier district is as a SPED teacher and not as a dyslexia specialist. From the descriptions provided by Micah and Casey about the responsibilities of a dyslexia specialist, it is a separate position apart from any other.

Casey also thought that improvements to the processes should begin with regular classroom teachers. She declared that teachers should be diligent in their efforts to find students who are experiencing learning difficulties.

You have to look and research each kid to figure out what they're missing. A reading coach or a math coach didn't come into my classroom and tell me what the issue were with my children. Teachers have to be that first general to basically run their room and their process to know what is affectin' the children and what they see.

Although Stephanie admits that she does not hold much expertise around dyslexia, she does believe it is an issue for some students. However, she is not entirely invested in the recent heavy emphasis on early learners and dyslexia. She remarked,

> I do know that I like that they're starting on the lower level, but in my mind, at this point, you have to think about the children that have already gone on to the second, third, fourth, and that's when that teacher has to kick in and just be able to see.

Stephanie's perspective reflects her professional education and experiences as a secondary ELA teacher and principal.

Claire supplied her thoughts on the identification process by discussing how the inclusion of a SPED teacher (especially Micah as he was a SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist) on a RtI team or PST could be helpful. She explained that a SPED teacher's expertise about dis/abilities would be useful. She was clear to note that the SPED teacher would not be included on the team to diagnose a child but to provide knowledge in areas that other educators may lack.

> Typically, you don't have special education teachers as part of the RtI team, but you could—I would think that you would bring him in early on a situation even if you're-you got this team over here doin' this, generally, a teacher and everybody else on the team, but I would still think you could have him doin' some observations and makin' some suggestions, which would probably—could aid them with the RtI and doin' some of those extra interventions and things like that because it's medical. Because of his expertise, you're not diagnosin' the child. If it is his area of expertise, that would make sense to me that you would involve the expert in that. Well, you can. I know every district doesn't have that, but we're talkin' about [Greenbrier], and [Greenbrier] does have one.

Sheena spoke specifically about the science of reading as a foolproof method for teaching reading and addressing the issues of reading including dyslexia. Sheena said, "The programs that we use are research-based and approved by the State Department of Alabama as dyslexia-specific intervention." Regarding Sheena's statement on this matter,

the state department of education follows the Alabama Literacy Act, and the Act

mandates the use of interventions that follow the science of reading.

Interpretation of How Identification and Remediation Procedures Are Implemented

In some way or another, most but not all the participants felt that the district's

implementation of identification and remediation procedures needed improvement.

Participants provided feedback on how the district should implement identification and

remediation procedures for early learners with dyslexia. The educators' responses

covered various aspects of the processes including a lack of process, improper protocols,

and a need for more pre-service learning, professional development, and in-service

training for teachers.

Claire remarked that identification and intervention processes should begin with

the classroom teachers. Claire expressed that this change could be made with the

implementation of higher standards for preschool teachers. Claire believed that all

preschool teachers should be required to obtain teacher certification through a degree

program and practice teaching in traditional program settings. She thinks that some

practices, while well-intentioned and used by preschool teachers, harm early learners and

do not promote early literacy and language development. Claire recommended more

training for preschool teachers when she said,

> They're not even trainin' them to look for special issues because a lot of
> the children that I get even from early intervention—and early intervention
> is a special education program, whether it's VOC rehab or just early
> intervention, VOC rehab, hand in hand, that's what they do. They don't
> have the training, and they don't know what to look for. They are missed
> because they are they don't have to be-you get some of the best teachers,
> some of the daycare teachers, but they don't have to have a degree.

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Claire told me the story of one of her students who had autism but when he came to her,

he was only being given speech services. She exclaimed, "30 minutes a week of just

speech! He has autism. How do you miss this?"

Concerning nontraditional program settings, Claire recalled the following,

Now these programs are everywhere. I was tellin' my brother this just last
night. There are 26 alphabets. The maximum standard for teachin'
alphabet oughta be 26 out of 26, okay, once you start teachin' them. Well,
their maximum standard, not the minimum standard, is five. That's not
[enough] to write his name.

Casey also explained how teachers in the Greenbrier City Schools district are not

differentiating instruction as mandated within the RtI process. She made mention of how

teachers do not change groups appropriately or incorporate equity in their lessons.

You have to be very intentional with your grouping, and you also have to
know that the grouping changes depending on what you're actually
teaching and what the kids are actually obtaining. As I tell them when I do
these walk-throughs, I'm not supposed to see the same group one, the
same group two, the same group three. Then, once you're teaching, you
see because—and another thing we have an issue with our teaching, we
don't do appropriate equity.

Stephanie said that if a teacher has more knowledge about dyslexia, the better able

that teacher is to look for its characteristics. She said,

I think they need to know those signs. Pretty much, yeah, I guess I will say that
because, yeah, if you know more about it, and you know [what] to look for, you
probably can see it, but if you don't know [what] to look for, you don't know, and
so you're not identifying it.

Regarding his interpretation of the identification and remediation process for

dyslexia in early learners, Micah made this statement.

I know that it—I know that the window into the 504 world-the not
identified world, the 504 world, the special ed world, and I get it because
we want [to do] the least. I'll have to say invasive, but that's not the right
word, but we want the least invasive thing. Oh, I just couldn't catch my

breath. Oh, I just had to cough. I just had to sneeze. I had something up my nose. Oh, maybe it's just a cold. Oh, maybe it's the flu.

Micah also noted that when providing support for early learners with dyslexia, a student does not have to go through the SPED process. He stated,

> I feel like I'm processing which came first and I don't really know, but I don't know other states, but I know here in Alabama, you can be identified as dyslexic, and that would be-that could grant you a 504, which might be certain accommodations, but not necessarily make you eligible for special education, much in the way that being identified as a student with ADD doesn't mean that you're necessarily going to be in the special ed program.

However, Micah also followed with an explanation that even if the district follows the law and is screened for dyslexia and needs intervention, they will not be provided a Section 504 plan.

> Well, they won't even—well, if you look at the Alabama dyslexia law, how that kind of goes, when they are screened, and if they exhibit characteristics of dyslexia, that doesn't even mean that you have to have a 504 plan.

Sheena stated that most students who were referred for SPED testing will not be accepted into their program. A lot of those students who are tested, like I said, they're pushed back to the problem-solving team because they don't qualify for special education. The school district does not want 85% of the students to be in special education, but they might need to be. It's known that you don't want your number to be half of your special education which is why they even have the problem-solving team because a lot of the students get pushed back to us. Like I said, the ones we refer to special education, they're normally pushed back and say, "Hey, they don't qualify for special education," which pushes it back on the classroom teacher then."

When examining proper protocols for the processes and procedures in use by the

Greenbrier district, Casey described how teams of educators that make up PSTs are not

following through with the RtI process implementing multi-tiered instruction effectively.

She described how the teams should be meeting about students, providing

recommendations to teachers and parents, supplying teachers with guidance and support

in classrooms, and following a strict timeline to prevent regression in students. Casey

said that understanding and implementing this process appropriately is important because

most children do not test into SPED. She said the following about her discussions with

building-based RtI teams, "The teachers did not understand, and what I had to get the

teacher and the admin to understand. I asked them, 'What's the next step once I reject

them from the SPED process because they didn't qualify for services?'"

Casey also made mentioned of how Section 504 (of the Rehabilitation Act) plans

are created, monitored, and implemented in the Greenbrier District. This is another

protocol that needs attention according to Casey. Her commentary suggested that

improvements in this area need to be executed to effectively address student needs.

> Even with a 504, for our district, I don't like how they have the counselors
> over 504. I don't think they have enough time. It's not the fact that I don't
> think they're knowledgeable, because they are very knowledgeable. They
> have too much goin' on. How effective is that? If you're workin' with
> registration, if you're workin' with withdrawin', if you're workin' with the
> counseling services that need to be implemented, how effective are you as
> the advocate for the 504 plans and making sure that the kids are actually
> achieving and progressing and moving forward? Again, I think it's just a
> barrier, but I think we're limited because we are a small school district.

Casey remarked on the use of more conclusive testing for dyslexia by declaring

her desire to purchase materials that would give the district a means to identify students

with dyslexia effectively.

Now, what I'm gonna do—we have the Woodcock-Johnson IV and the WIAT test of achievement. Those are tests that we have that have subtests in there that can help us with identifying areas where the kids may have issues with dyslexia.

Summary of Themes

Through the analysis, interpretation, and triangulation of the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews, instructional observations, and school district documents, three themes, and seven subthemes were developed. The first theme developed as urban area school educators' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about dyslexia and early learners. The subthemes that emerged from this theme were (a) educators possessed little to no education and professional development learning about dyslexia, (b) educators described dyslexia as primarily a reading impairment, and (c) educators provided no significant descriptions of laws, codes, or policies regarding dyslexia. The second theme emerged as the urban area school district processes and protocols used to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners. The subthemes that developed were linked with identification procedures and remediation and intervention procedures for dyslexia in early learners. They included the following: (a) one commercial literacy program assessment was used as a dyslexia screener, and (b) commercial literacy programs were used in the place of multi-tiered instructional supports. The last theme that formed was urban area school educators' shaping of the processes and procedures used to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners. Subthemes developed into (a) knowledge about dyslexia and SPED determined educator views and perceptions about procedures and processes, and (b) knowledge about dyslexia, SPED, RtI, and MTSS shaped educator perspectives about implementations.

All seven participants in this research study were employed with an urban area school district. Participants were employed at various worksites within the district: two elementary schools, one prekindergarten facility, and one central office. All participants were Black educators with a range of professional education experience from three to 41 years. All participants worked as professional educators whose roles involved early learners, reading, literacy, language development, classroom instruction, SPED, and the processes involving the identification and remediation of dyslexia. The participants were one prekindergarten facilitator, one principal, one early childhood education SPED teacher, one early childhood or general education teacher, one SPED lead teacher, one SPED teacher and dyslexia specialist, and one reading specialist. Most but not all participants expressed a need for (a) improvements to the processes and procedures used to identify and remediate dyslexia in early learners; (b) more teacher education surrounding dyslexia, early literacy, and language instruction, the RtI process, and multi-tiered instructional supports; and (c) improved implementation protocols, procedures, and practices involving the various educators who make up building based RtI teams or PSTs.

Summary

Chapter 4 reviewed the purpose of this research study and provided a description of each participant and the site for data collection. Included in this chapter was also a review of the theoretical frameworks and philosophical assumptions applied to the analysis of the qualitative data collected. An analysis of individual semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and district documents about the identification and remediation of dyslexia in early learners were provided. The chapter also included an

overview of the data compiled and reported in various figures and charts. Chapter 4 concluded with a summary of the three themes and seven subthemes that emerged from the analysis, interpretation, and triangulation of the data gathered.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the inequities in the identification and remediation of dyslexia in Black early learners. The research study was conducted in an urban area school district typically attended by early learners of color (National Geographic, 2021). This research study focused on various issues involving dyslexia: a lack of early identification and intervention procedures, a dearth of teacher education, and the socio-political issues faced by urban area schools. Using three central research questions, topics surrounding urban area schools, dyslexia, Black early learners, SPED, RtI, and language and literacy instruction were explored. Research question one explored how urban area school educators view, perceive, and understand dyslexia experienced by early learners. Question two asked how urban area educators explain the processes and protocols used by their employing school district to address the needs of and advocate for early learners experiencing dyslexia. Question three examined how educators' knowledge and beliefs about dyslexia shape and influence how the processes and protocols are used and implemented.

Literature in previous chapters examined various elements related to dyslexia, early learners, and urban area schools, including early literacy and language development, approaches to teaching reading, differentiated instructional supports, teacher knowledge and education, laws and policy, and the RtI process. From the

qualitative data analyzed, chapter 5 compared the literature reviewed in three themes and seven subthemes. This chapter commenced with recommendations for SPED and early childhood education programs, and urban area schools. Also, provided in chapter 5 are implications for future research.

Summary of Findings

From the analysis of semi-structured interview responses, urban area school district documents, and early learner classroom observations, three themes and seven subthemes emerged. The three themes were as follows: (1) urban educator knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about dyslexia; (2) processes and protocols used to identify and remediate early learners with dyslexia; and (3) urban educator influence and shaping of processes and procedures used to identify and remediate dyslexia. Seven subthemes emerged as the following: (a) educators possessed little to no education and professional development learning about dyslexia, (b) educators described dyslexia as primarily a reading impairment, (c) educators provided no significant descriptions of laws, codes, or policies regarding dyslexia, (d) one commercial program assessment was used as a dyslexia screener, (e) commercial literacy programs were used in the place of multi-tiered instructional supports, (f) interpretations of identification and remediation processes and protocols, and (g) knowledge about dyslexia and SPED determined educator views and perceptions about procedures and processes, and (h) knowledge about dyslexia, SPED, RtI, and MTSS shaped educator perspectives about implementations.

Educator Knowledge, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Perceptions About Dyslexia

Knowledge and understanding about dyslexia varied greatly across the various urban area school employees interviewed. SPED educators held the most in-depth knowledge about dyslexia in comparison to non-SPED educators. All the participants indicated that they only had one course in their preservice teacher programs that included information on dyslexia. The participants noted that the course was not entirely dedicated to dyslexia but briefly covered it in congruence with other learning difficulties. Thorwarth (2014) reported that less than 30% of opportunities for dyslexia training happened in undergraduate and graduate study programs. The more education and professional development an educator held, the better able they were to describe the characteristics of dyslexia. However, none of the educators interviewed expressed familiarity with dyslexia in early learners. This is problematic because dyslexia is familial, neurological, and has been determined to affect up to 20% of the human population (IDA, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2018; Moat & Dakin, 2017; Thorwarth, 2014).

Early language and literacy development are greatly impacted in early learners when teachers cannot readily recognize when a child is at risk for dyslexia. As the first line of action for recognizing learning difficulties, classroom teachers need more professional development and training regarding dyslexia. Green (2015) posited that many myths about the characteristics of dyslexia continue to persist like letter reversals, vision problems, low intelligence, laziness, and an inability to overcome learning difficulties. Similarly, many other educators should also be required to obtain more education about dyslexia. Administrators need knowledge of dyslexia for the effective implementation of processes and protocols. Reading specialists, interventionists, and

SPED teachers need more knowledge for the effective implementation of identification and remediation measures.

Information was gleaned about reading and literacy instruction while garnering information concerning educator knowledge and perceptions about dyslexia. It is evident that early childhood educators (including administrators, SPED teachers, and reading specialists) especially preschool educators need to re-evaluate the methods and programs used to provide early literacy instruction. Literacy instruction and methods that use cultural relevance and criticality are more effective than the arbitrary use of commercial programs. The adoption of pedagogies and practices that reject racism and deficit perspectives (Nieto, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2013). Utilizing the elements of equity, cultural relevance, reflexive practice, and social justice enhances instruction and eliminates avoidable obstructions in learning (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2012, Souto-Manning, 2013).

An educator's knowledge and understanding of current laws can affect how dyslexia is addressed in schools. The participants' knowledge concerning laws and policies that govern dyslexia in public schools was lacking. This could be attributed to relatively new legislation in Alabama that addresses dyslexia which has been enacted slowly (Youman & Mathers, 2018). Teachers usually rely on employing school districts and administrators to provide guidance and governance regarding legislation applicable to schools. This reliance of educators on the administration to decipher legislation impacts educator understanding and contorts implementations.

Processes and Protocols Used to Identify and Remediate Early Learners with Dyslexia

Early learners enrolled in the selected urban area school district are not likely to be referred for testing when at risk for dyslexia due to several factors: instructional methods, program mandates, inefficient use of designated personnel, and educators' unfamiliarity with the dis/ability. Urban area schools are often plagued with many social, economic, and political adversities. These school districts are densely populated with an overwhelming number of students (National Geographic, 2012). The schools within these districts are often labeled as impoverished due to the number of enrolled students who qualify for free and reduced meals. Funding is an obstacle for urban schools which leads to a lack of resources, proper staffing, dilapidated facilities, and inadequate programs (Ladson-Billings, 2012; White, n.d.). With a barrage of other difficulties, a lack of knowledge regarding dyslexia, and the slow enactment of laws involving dyslexia, urban area schools can easily miss the identification and remediation of early learners with dyslexia.

The urban area school district under examination does not have a clear plan, process, procedure, or protocol for identifying early learners with dyslexia. Preschool education participants could not provide adequate descriptions of how dyslexia manifests in early learners. Students between the ages of three and five can be referred to SPED for screening and testing through parent, teacher, and outside agency recommendations (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). Early learners at the elementary level can be identified and provided interventions for dis/abilities through SPED referral and the RtI process. Like preschoolers, young students from kindergarten through third grade can also be referred for SPED testing by parents or teachers (Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019; Understood Team,

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2019). The students can also be identified and provided interventions through the implementation of the RtI process along with multi-tiered instructional supports. When the accommodations and interventions implemented have been exhausted and do not improve student learning, the PST can recommend a young student for SPED testing. However, according to the U.S. Department of Education, following this process is a "waiting until students" fail approach. In a report from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), this method requires "student's achievement to fall substantially below their ability (as measured by IQ tests) before" they are provided the interventions needed (Eide, 2019). As reported by participants, the RtI process employs tiered instruction and interventions by using dyslexia screeners, several commercial programs (e. g., *LETRS*, *Heggerty*, *S.P.I.R.E.*, *Saxon Phonics*), and student reading improvement plans (SRIP). The commercial programs are used in lieu of an MTSS framework. MTSS involves the differentiation of instruction for individual students based on the various needs of students in multiple areas (e. g., comprehension, phonemic awareness, social-emotional learning) (DEC of the CEC, 2021).

Furthermore, no processes, procedures, or protocols were identified for use with students who (a) do not pass the dyslexia screeners, (b) do not improve with the implementation of differentiated instruction, and (c) do not test into SPED. An early learner fitting this criterion is a real possibility considering the characteristics of dyslexia in relation to other cognitive abilities (IDA, 2018; Moats & Dakin, 2017). Even with the employment of a certified dyslexia specialist, the selected urban school district does not have a plan for how this employee supports and guides the implementation of identification and intervention protocols and processes. This can be attributed to the

urban school employees' dual roles as in the case of the SPED teacher also acting in the role of a dyslexia specialist. This type of double staffing is indicative of urban area districts and schools that lack adequate funding for proper staffing (Annamma et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2012; White, n.d.).

A lack of education on dyslexia and proper literacy instruction in preschool educators is also attributed to a lack of identification. To address dyslexia and fulfill the mandates of the Alabama Literacy Act, the selected urban area school district follows guidance from the Alabama State Department of Education's ARI program. Mandates in the Alabama Literacy Act require the application of the science of reading for literacy instruction. This instructional approach is based on phonics and theories of behaviorism. The science of reading is counterproductive to a balanced reading approach as it places a heavy emphasis on phonics instruction. Educators and scholars who follow this approach believe that the fundamentals of literacy are counter-intuitive and that young children need help to solve the mystery of reading (Chall, 1989; Schwartz & Sparks, 2019). Phonics is only one of the five fundamentals of reading instruction. To effectively provide early learners with literacy and language instruction apropos to their needs, lessons should include aspects of comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics (Dewitz & Graves, 2021). From documents and participant responses, the selected school district is placing a considerably unbalanced emphasis on phonics instruction.

Though unlikely, early learners who have dyslexia and are identified through SPED, will be diagnosed as SLD (Howell, 2019; Understood Team, 2019). When young children are identified as SLD and have dyslexia, the interventions (i.e., accommodations

and modifications) provided through an IEP may not appropriately remediate dyslexia.

SLD is an umbrella term that applies to any learning dis/ability in reading or mathematics

(Howell, 2019; IDEA, 2018; Lee & Mandlawitz, 2019). For remediation apropos to

dyslexia, a young learner would need to be provided with dyslexia-specific interventions

(ALSDE, 2020; DEC of the CEC, 2021). This is a key finding for transferability.

Educator Shaping of Processes and Protocols Used to Identify Dyslexia

Many of the urban district educators expressed a desire to improve instructional

practices and procedures used to advocate for early learners with dyslexia. None of the

participants expressed a particular need for improvements at the preschool level except

for the prekindergarten SPED teacher. Participants admitted that the district did not do a

good job of identifying early learners with dyslexia due to (a) no clear identification

measure for dyslexia, (b) poor implementation of differentiated instructional supports,

and (c) ineffective use and implementation of commercial literacy programs. One

participant indicated that if an early learner is identified with dyslexia, it is due to

parental involvement and is the result of outside testing. Sandman-Hurley (2020) cited

that the children who receive dyslexia advocacy (i.e., identification and remediation

services) derive from families with privilege and resources. Another participant

mentioned that when an early learner has a dyslexia diagnosis, it is usually

accommodated with a Section 504 plan. This is considered problematic as counselors in

the district (and not a Section 504 coordinator) are saddled with the responsibility to lead

the creation of Section 504 plans and monitor their implementation. This occurrence,

again, pinpoints how urban area schools and districts compensate for the intersectionality

of disparities that affect the academic services they provide. Also, the lack of knowledge in PSTs to effectively implement the RtI process and an MTSS framework attributed to missed identification and remediation opportunities for early learners experiencing dyslexia.

The amount of knowledge an educator holds about dyslexia has a deep impact on how the dis/ability is addressed by early childhood educators, SPED teachers, administrators, and other education professionals. Washburn et al. (2017) concluded that teachers and other education professionals continue to hold on to pervasive myths and misunderstandings about dyslexia. Educators with an increased knowledge base for dyslexia better understood how to address the instructional needs of early learners experiencing the dis/ability. Likewise, educators with lesser amounts of knowledge concerning dyslexia, rely heavily on district mandates and outsourcing products to address the needs of early learners with reading difficulties. In addition, an educator's area of expertise is also indicative of their knowledge regarding dyslexia. SPED educators are generally more knowledgeable about dyslexia than administrators or even reading specialists. SPED teachers were the most adamant about improving processes and implementations than educators that were more removed from the field of SPED. Administrators understood dyslexia to be an issue that needs to be addressed but lacked an understanding of the urgency needed to improve identification and intervention measures. Classroom teachers and specialists exhibited more urgency than administrators about improving reading difficulties (which can include dyslexia) in students but did not express a dire need for better identification and intervention procedures.

Implications for Urban Area School Districts

Urban area school districts are fraught with many social, political, and economic adversities. Overcrowding, underfunding, a lack of resources and proper personnel, and inadequate facilities threaten the academic success of many children of color (Ladson-Billings, 2012; White, n.d.). Despite these inadequacies, urban area schools must improve the processes used to identify and advocate for early learners experiencing dyslexia. Based on the findings of this study and the reviewed literature, several implications were identified.

- Limit the number of roles, duties, and assignments given to each employee (e.g., counselor acting as a Section 504 coordinator, SPED teacher acting as a dyslexia specialist);

- Reevaluate and decrease the number of commercial programs used to address reading and literacy difficulties;

- Reevaluate teacher instructional methods and provide professional development and training on effective instruction in lieu of commercial literacy program use;

- Provide professional development for all education professionals on the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogy and educational equity and justice;

- Create and pay for at least one position at the district level that is exclusively dedicated to the needs of students at-risk for and with dyslexia;

- Create a system of checks and balances for the implementation of the RtI process;

- Create and/or improve measures and implementation intervals for RtI training;

- Create and implement professional development and training on an MTSS framework;

- Create an MTSS framework for the school district and supervise its implementation;

- Create a budget and dedicate funding to advocate for students at-risk for and with reading dis/abilities that are often unidentified;

- Create and implement better governance (guidance, monitoring, and follow-up) for the RtI process;

- Provide research-based and meaningful professional development and training for all education professionals about dyslexia; and

- Partner with outside agencies that can assist in providing identification and remediation services for early learners at risk for and experiencing dyslexia.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs in ECE and SPED

Preservice teacher education programs could benefit from the inclusion of more theory and methods in early language and literacy courses involving dyslexia and other dis/abilities that affect reading, language development, literacy, speaking, and writing. SPED and early childhood education programs can incorporate additional courses, offer alternative programs, and specialized certification options. Based on the reviewed literature and the research study findings, the subsequent implications were pinpointed.

- Create and require a course in the maladies of early language and literacy development during preservice teacher education;

- Include culturally sustaining pedagogy and educational equity and justice practices in content area methods courses;

- Create and make available a degree program area of focus concerning dyslexia;

- Create and make available a program for certification in collaborative education with a focus on dyslexia;

- Address the disconnection between early childhood education programs in schools and preschool early learner programs outside of schools;

- Partner with community programs and create course requirements for reading dis/abilities which include field requirements for preservice teachers in the intervention of dyslexia; and

- Address the disproportionate number of young children of color in SPED.

Recommendations for Future Research

Dyslexia is neurological, familial, and affects one in five people worldwide (Moats & Dakin, 2017). Students experiencing dyslexia will have difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition, spelling, decoding, and secondary consequences like impaired reading comprehension and reduced reading experiences (ALSDE, 2020; IDA, 2018). Understanding this means that early identification and intervention for reading difficulties such as dyslexia is imperative for academic success. Black early learners who are at risk for and experiencing dyslexia are at greater risk for lost advocacy due to the circumstances surrounding the educational context of urban area schools (Annamma et al., 2018; Sandman-Hurley, 2020). This research study sought to understand how this risk for loss of advocacy takes place. The processes and protocols

used by educators in an urban school district to identify and remediate dyslexia in Black early learners were studied. Also examined were the urban school district educators' knowledge, perception, beliefs, and attitudes about dyslexia and how these ideas could shape those processes and their implementation.

Recommendations for future research should investigate dyslexia in preschool children between the ages of three and five. The characteristics mainly associated with dyslexia center around an early learner's struggles with print, reading, and writing. An investigation into the characteristics and early indicators of dyslexia in preschoolers could be helpful for targeted early identification and remediation measures.

Preschools and elementary schools differ in the methods, practices, and curricula used with early learners. Some of these differences are due in part to guidance and mandates surrounding developmentally appropriate practices. The learning objectives and instructional needs of toddlers (ages three through five) and early learners (ages five through nine) are vastly different (DEC of CEC, 2021). However, future research that examines the dis/connection between early learner preschool programs and early childhood education school programs might be beneficial in addressing the following: (a) the transition from preschool to "big" school, (b) potential learning loss, and (c) differences in instructional methods.

Over time the education sector has moved deeper into collaborative learning and differentiated instructional supports. As early learners with various and multiple exceptionalities fill general education classrooms, future research investigating how teacher education programs are preparing preservice educators for these collaborative learning and differentiated instructional supports will prove valuable.

A final recommendation for future research could examine the identification measures used to identify early learners with dyslexia. Research informing the field on reliable and refutable testing measures could help to increase identification in early learners and squelch misgiving surrounding the dis/ability. Explorations in standardized testing and brain imaging should be conducted as the existence of dyslexia proves to be a controversial topic among some scholars and educators (Howell, 2019).

Conclusion

This research study explored and examined urban area school district educators' knowledge and perceptions about dyslexia, the processes, procedures, and protocols used by their employing district, and how their knowledge and perceptions shaped and influenced the processes used and process implementations. The following factors were deemed problematic after the collection and analysis of data: (a) ineffective identification and remediation processes, procedures, and protocols; (b) insufficient educator knowledge about dyslexia; and (c) the multiplicity of adversities surrounding the educational services provided by urban area schools and districts.

Dyslexia is neurological, familial, and can be concluded to be existent at birth (Moats & Dakin, 2017; Thorwarth, 2014). The learning dis/ability affects students in language and is evidenced in difficulties with decoding, encoding, word recognition, and fluency (IDA, 2018). Due to these factors and according to Shanahan (2018), early intervention is integral to combating learning difficulties and promoting academic success. Therefore, pinpointing how the identification and intervention processes and procedures occur with early learners experiencing dyslexia is imperative.

Educator knowledge, perceptions, and education concerning dyslexia were important elements of investigation. Through data collection, analysis, and review of existing literature, this study revealed that increasing educator knowledge about dyslexia is vital for the identification and remediation of dyslexia in early learners. Limited educational opportunities in preservice teacher programs have contributed to educators' lack of knowledge about dyslexia (Gonzalez & Brown, 2019). This creates a need for LEAs to increase professional development opportunities concerning the characteristics of dyslexia in early childhood, proper identification measures, and instructional practices that include equity, culture, and social justice (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2017).

It was important for this research study to examine the education context which is typical for Black early learners and apply the theories of CRT and DisCrit. According to Welsh and Swain (2020), the urban area school context is riddled with a plethora of social, political, and economic adversities. These adversities affect teaching practices, learning outcomes, and other academic services. The research study found that these adversities extended to the processes and protocols used for the early identification of young Black students experiencing dyslexia. In their application, there is a call for greater introspection and reflexive action when employing CRT and DisCrit to the education of young Black learners in urban areas. For young learners with dis/abilities, DisCrit informs the importance of eliminating deficit practices that perpetuate low standards of performance and achievement. CRT is

> the critical call for social constructionists to help contribute to a counter-narrative of how prevailing ideas about race have come to be, and how the post-racial agnosticism about their continuing imprint on social life

contributes to rather than detracts from the continuing significance of race. (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1351)

The disruption and dismantling of inherently racist practices require incessive dedication and reinventive approaches to instruction. As Crenshaw (2011) stated in *Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward*, "Such a meaningful modality must be premised on the belief that change is not a paint-by-the-numbers message but embodies the relentless hard work of mapping racial power and transforming it where possible" (p. 1352).

This study accomplished its purpose to examine the factors that surround the inequities involving young Black students concerning dyslexia. The debate surrounding dyslexia in some scholarly circles will always exist. However, longstanding research has provided evidence for dyslexia and the need for early identification. Current and prospective educators need increased knowledge and education about dyslexia and how it affects learning in early learners. Teacher preparation programs and LEA provisions for professional development on dyslexia are in dire need. Urban area schools and districts should reevaluate the use of processes, procedures, and resources applied to address dyslexia in early learners. Because early learners with dis/abilities in urban areas rely on a FAPE to meet their educational needs, urban area schools must improve their implementations of plans and protocols that address learning dis/abilities like dyslexia. The findings from this study are transferable to colleges, universities, and special education programs seeking to improve the pedagogical preparation of preservice educators concerning dyslexia. This study's findings are also applicable for urban area schools and districts seeking to inform policy, procedures, and protocols surrounding how dyslexia advocacy for early learners is conducted.

Closing Vignette

Fred's educational experiences in secondary school were mediocre at best. Each year, Alicia would meet with Fred's teachers, counselors, and school and district administrators to formulate a plan of action that would not only accommodate but provide effective interventions for his dyslexia. However, to Alicia's dismay and eternal exasperation, none of her efforts were ever successful. The Section 504 plan would not be read by his teachers. The accommodations would not be enacted consistently or effectively. The interventions would be useless as the school relied on the use of commercial programs. The programs were implemented during pull-out sessions using rote methods of skill and drill. Much like the uselessness of a weekly spelling list, the commercial literacy programs were implemented in the same manner.

Amid all these misdoings, Fred learned how to overcompensate even better than before. He continued to maintain honor roll status and earned a place in his middle school honor society. During his eighth-grade year of school, Fred successfully completed two high school courses: Algebra I and Spanish I. His success was due in part to the all too familiar deficit practices of urban area schools and the incredible advocacy efforts of his mother, Alicia. Fred's school was overcrowded and maintained high student-to-teacher ratios. The average student attending Fred's school rarely returned homework assignments, completed course readings, or attended school regularly. The rigor and standards of classroom instruction matched this type of student performance. Fred proved to be an above-average student because of his desire and efforts to be a model student. Teachers liked that effort and so it was rewarded. Alicia was a dedicated mother. She was at every parent night, teacher meeting, and field trip. The teachers liked that dedication

and advocacy and so, it was rewarded. One of his teachers lauded Fred in a note to Alicia that stated,

> Fred is one of the most respectable, engaged, and best students from any of my classes! From day one, He has always participated in class discussions when other students would barely speak up. He is constantly completing his work and pushing himself to do better.

As time passed and Fred entered high school, Alicia noticed that her son's experiences with reading were diminished. Fred was no longer engaging in recreational reading. When he happened to read aloud or write out a shopping list, the same difficulties existed as those evidenced in Fred's early years. The interventions did not work but Fred was still an honor student who ended his freshman year of high school with a 3.5 grade point average. When he spoke, he continued to mispronounce words that were commonly spoken by everyone in his home. The order of his words was sometimes jumbled. The accommodations did not work and only proved to stagnate Fred's growth and learning potential. Fred completed his sophomore year of high school as a career technical education student of the year with a 3.4 grade point average. He had completed half of his advanced placement U.S. History course, Chemistry, Geometry, and Algebra II. He was on track to complete high school with an advanced academic diploma. Fred's junior year started and proceeded identically to the past with only one difference. Fred was slated to take the ACT. Even with accommodations, Fred scored poorly. There it was. This was the evidence of his dis/ability, the lack of proper interventions, and the mishandling of his accommodations.

When Fred embarks upon his senior year of high school, which will effectively end his journey in compulsory education, how will his story end? How will Fred's future begin?

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Darrington, Fredeisha H.

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)
IORG Registration # IRB00012550 (IRB 03)

DATE: 05-Aug-2021

RE: IRB-300007068
IRB-300007068-004
The Dyslexia Disparity: An Examination of Inequities in the Identification and
Intervention of Early Learners of Color

The IRB reviewed and approved the Initial Application submitted on 29-Jul-2021 for the above
referenced project. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of
Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Type of Review: Exempt
Exempt Categories: 1
Determination: Exempt
Approval Date: 05-Aug-2021
Approval Period: No Continuing Review

Documents Included in Review:

- IRB EPORTFOLIO
- IRB PERSONNEL EFORM

To access stamped consent/assent forms (full and expedited protocols only) and/or other
approved documents:
1. Open your protocol in IRAP.
2. On the Submissions page, open the submission corresponding to this approval letter. NOTE:
The Determination for the submission will be "Approved."
3. In the list of documents, select and download the desired approved documents. The

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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

<div align="center">**CONSENT FORM TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY**</div>

Title of Research:	The Dyslexia Disparity: An Examination of Inequities in the Identification and Intervention of Early Learners of Color
UAB IRB Protocol #:	IRB-300007068
Principal Investigator:	Fredeisha Harper Darrington, M.S.Ed.
Sponsor:	University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Education, Department of Early Childhood Education (UNFUNDED)

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Students of color are over represented in the special education population. However, the number of these students identified with dyslexia is much lower. Experts report that dyslexia affects as many as 1 in 5 people regardless of age, sex, or race. Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties in reading, processing, and movement. This research study will attempt to provide awareness surrounding this topic; whereby, initiating improvements in the identification and intervention regarding dyslexia and students of color.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how identification and intervention methods regarding dyslexia are implemented within this school district. We wish to explore the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of education personnel in urban area schools regarding dyslexia. This study will also examine the processes and protocols used by urban area schools to advocate for students at-risk for and experiencing dyslexia. I am asking you to take part in this research study because you are connected to the identification and intervention protocols and processes used to advocate for students experiencing dyslexia. You may also be a teacher working in the general or special education sector which means you work directly with students who may be affected by dyslexia. This study will enroll 7 school- and district-level personnel employed by the same school system.

If you agree to participate, you will be in this research study for the duration of one school term (grading/nine-week period). Your participation will involve one or both of the following:

Individual Interview:
The interview process will be conducted in 60 minutes or less by the principal investigator. You will be asked questions regarding your education, career in the education profession, knowledge and experience involving dyslexia, special education, and the RtI process. The interview will take place at your work site and will be completed with the principal investigator of this research study.

In-class Observation:
The observation of classroom instruction will be conducted in 60 minutes or less by the principal investigator. You will be observed providing instruction to students during routine lessons in the general and special education classrooms. The observation will be conducted at your work site. No student identifiable information will be recorded during the observation.

In addition, we would like to collect the following from general and special education teachers:
- Response to Instruction (RtI)
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

- Special education referral processes, protocols, and documentation

This may include student work samples, testing materials, referral documentation, instructional plans, educational plans, communication, classroom instruction, and interventions surrounding dyslexia advocacy; however, all identifiable data about a student should be redacted before submitting it to the investigator.

The only risk of this project is the risk of the loss of your confidentiality. Information obtained about you will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with people or organizations for quality assurance or data analysis, or with those responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research. They include:

- the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is a group that reviews the study to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.
- Fairfield City Schools
- Alabama State Department of Education

The information from the research may be published for research purposes; however, your identity will not be provided or included in those publications.

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed.

You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with your employer, teachers, or administrators. Also, participation in the research study is not part of your duties as an employee.

You may be removed from the study without your consent if the primary investigator ends the study or your input (due to position, normal processes, and protocols, etc.) changes and is no longer needed.

Your signature below indicates that you have read (or been read) the information provided above and agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTERS

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
freddiedee5@gmail.com

Superintendent
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama
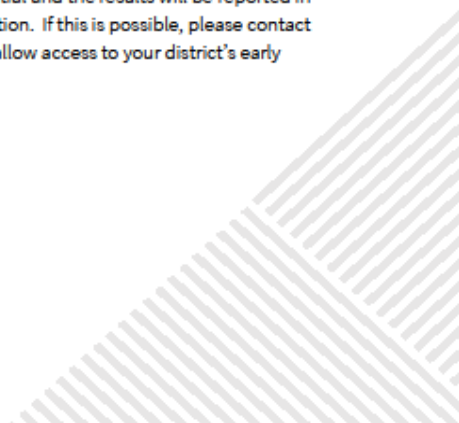
August 2021

Dear Education Professional,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood education. My areas of focus are literacy, dyslexia, social justice, equity, and disability critical race theory. I am kindly asking for your permission to be allowed access to your director of federal programs, lead teacher of special education, administration, and early childhood faculty at the prekindergarten facility and two elementary schools. I need participants for a research study I am conducting entitled: The Dyslexia Disparity: An Examination of Inequities in the Identification and Intervention of Early Learners of Color. The intention of this research is to examine district- and school-level processes and protocols currently used to advocate for students regarding dyslexia. Also under examination are the beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of education professionals surrounding dyslexia and how these phenomena interact to result in the services provided for early learners of color at-risk for and experiencing dyslexia. This study requires the collection of data through conducting semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and collection of documents/artifacts.

The data collection process should take no more than 10 total hours and can be conducted at a time that is non-invasive to the instructional process and convenient to school personnel according to school-based administrators. All I will need is to arrange a suitable time to interview and observe teachers, administrators, and specialists who work with early learners at-risk for and experiencing dyslexia. All answers and results from the research will be kept strictly confidential and the results will be reported in my doctoral dissertation available to all participants upon completion. If this is possible, please contact me using the information above to confirm that you are willing to allow access to your district's early childhood faculty providing they agree and are happy to take part.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Most sincerely,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
freddiedee5@gmail.com
205-901-3587

Lead Teacher, Special Education
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama
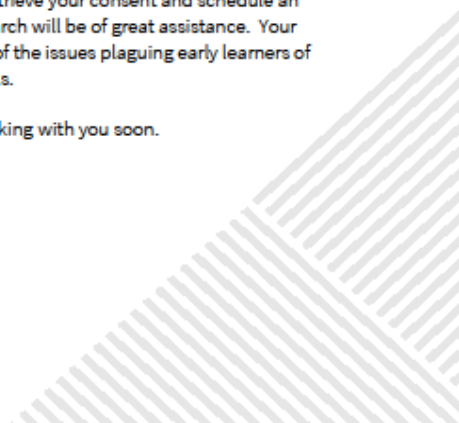
August 2021

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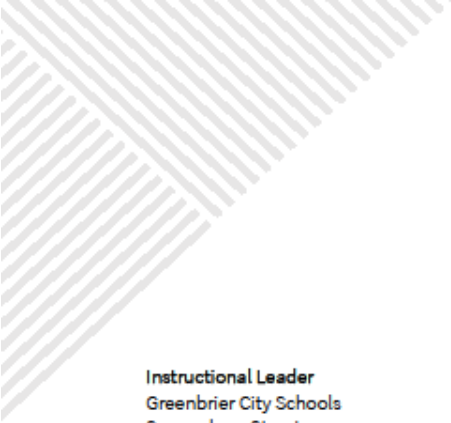
You are asked to participate in the semi-structured interview protocol only. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any information I collect about you will be kept confidential. If you would like to participate in this study, please notify me within a week of receipt of this letter by completing the attached consent form. Please read the consent form carefully as it details more intricately the purpose, time commitments, and benefits of this research. When the form is complete, I will retrieve your consent and schedule an interview time that is best for you. Your participation in this research will be of great assistance. Your involvement will aid my efforts to bring a heightened awareness of the issues plaguing early learners of color, dyslexia, literacy, and advocacy in urban area public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you soon.

Warm regards,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
freddiedee5@gmail.com
205-901-3587

Instructional Leader
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama

August 2021

Dear Education Professional,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood education. My areas of focus are literacy, dyslexia, social justice, equity, and disability critical race theory. I am kindly asking for your participation in a research study I am conducting entitled: The Dyslexia Disparity: An Examination of Inequities in the Identification and Intervention of Early Learners of Color. The intention of this research is to examine district- and school-level processes and protocols currently used to advocate for students regarding dyslexia. Also under examination are the beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of education professionals surrounding dyslexia and how these phenomena interact to result in the services provided for early learners of color at-risk for and experiencing dyslexia. This study requires the collection of data through conducting of semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and collection of documents/artifacts.

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Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you soon.

Warm regards,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
freddiedee5@gmail.com
205-901-3587

Pre-K Facilitator
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama

August 2021

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Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you soon.

Warm regards,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
freddiedee5@gmail.com
205-901-3587

Reading Specialist
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama

August 2021
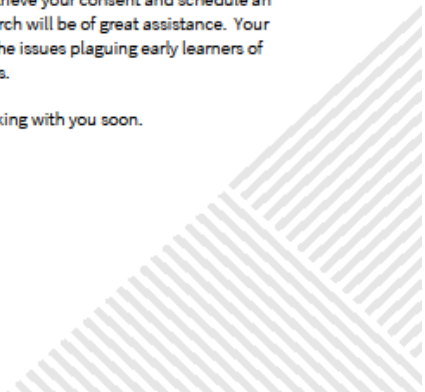
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You are asked to participate in the semi-structured interview protocol **only**. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any information I collect about you will be kept confidential. If you would like to participate in this study, please notify me within a week of receipt of this letter by completing the attached consent form. Please read the consent form carefully as it details more intricately the purpose, time commitments, and benefits of this research. When the form is complete, I will retrieve your consent and schedule an interview time that is best for you. Your participation in this research will be of great assistance. Your involvement will aid my efforts to bring a heightened awareness the issues plaguing early learners of color, dyslexia, literacy, and advocacy in urban area public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you soon.

Warm regards,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

Fredeisha Harper Darrington

4221 Maple Circle
Adamsville, Alabama 35005
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205-901-3587

Teacher, General and Special Education
Greenbrier City Schools
Somewhere Street
Greenbrier, Alabama
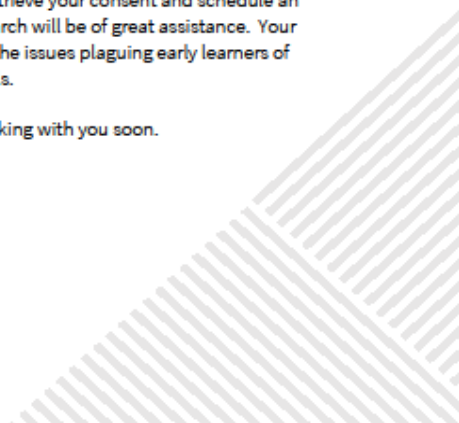
August 2021

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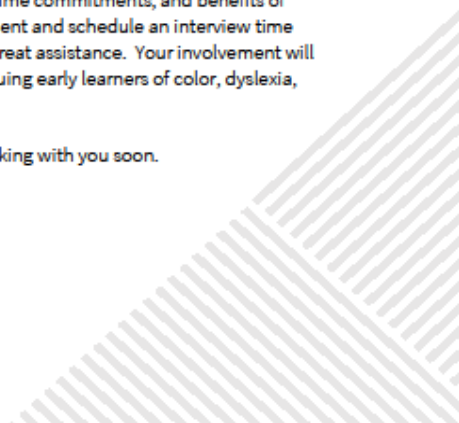
You are asked to participate in all three data collection process-the semi-structured interview protocol, direct observation protocol, and collection of artifacts. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any information I collect about you will be kept confidential. If you would like to participate in this study, please notify me within a week of receipt of this letter by completing the attached consent form. Please read the consent form carefully as it details more intricately the purpose, time commitments, and benefits of this research. When the form is complete, I will retrieve your consent and schedule an interview time that is best for you. Your participation in this research will be of great assistance. Your involvement will aid my efforts to bring a heightened awareness of the issues plaguing early learners of color, dyslexia, literacy, and advocacy in urban area public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you soon.

Warm regards,

Fredeisha Harper Darrington, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**THE DYSLEXIA DISPARITY: AN EXAMINATION OF INEQUITIES IN THE
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION OF EARLY LEARNERS OF COLOR**

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW #

Date:

DEMOGRAPHICS

Position of Interviewee:

Age:

Sex/Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **Knowledge, Experience, and Training in Education Profession**

   Tell me about your career in education.

   How long have you held a career in education?

   What led you to this career choice?

   How do you feel about your career choice?

2. **Current Professional Experience**

   What is your current position in education? Describe your role and duties.

   How long have you been working in your current position?

   What led you to this position?

   How were you prepared for your current position (i.e., training, experience,

   graduate school, etc.)?

3. **Past Professional Experience**

   What positions have you held in education prior to your current position?

   Describe your professional experiences (i.e., school district, setting, students, etc.)

How long did you hold those positions in education?

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS ON DYSLEXIA

1. Tell me what you know about dyslexia.

   How would you describe dyslexia?

   What are the characteristics of dyslexia?

   How does it affect students?

   How does it affect student learning?

   Who does dyslexia primarily affect?

   In your professional opinion, is dyslexia considered an oddity or common? How

   often does it occur in the student population?

2. How did you acquire your knowledge on dyslexia? Please describe each course,

   training, professional development session you have taken and why you chose to

   take them.

3. What would be most important for teachers to understand about dyslexia?

4. What do you know about laws/legislation at the district, state, and federal level

   concerning dyslexia?

   Can any improvements be made to the intervention/remediation processes and

   protocols?

RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTION & MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

1. Describe your understanding of the Response to Instruction (RtI) process.

   Who participates in the RtI process? What school personnel are involved in this

   process?

   Tell me about the time and resources needed to carry out this process.

Why does your school district follow this process?

What is most important to understand about this process?

IDENTIFICATION & INTERVENTION OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING

DYSLEXIA

1. How does your school district handle suspected/cases of dyslexia?

   What are your thoughts on this process?

   What protocols and procedures are in place to advocate for students experiencing dyslexia?

   Are they effective/efficient?

   Can any improvements be made to the screening/identification processes and protocols used to advocate for students experiencing dyslexia?

2. Are faculty and staff employed to provide services specifically for students with dyslexia?

   How would you describe dyslexia-specific instruction?

3. What services are offered in your school district to students after they are identified as experiencing dyslexia?

   How are these services provided to students identified with dyslexia?

   What (if any) options/variations are available for these students?

   Are specific resources slated for use by your district to meet the needs of students with dyslexia?

   What resources (books, materials, programs, etc.) are used to provide specific dyslexic instruction to identified students?

What is the role of the interventionist in the administration of services to students with dyslexia?

What is the role of the general education teacher in the administration of services to students with dyslexia?

How are these services managed, monitored, assessed, and funded?

What is most important to know about how these services are provided?

4. How do the processes and protocols followed by your district affect the learning, growth, academic progress/achievement for students experiencing dyslexia?

How effective are the services rendered by your district for students identified with dyslexia?

What improvements can be made to improve instruction and advocacy for students experiencing dyslexia?

SUMMATION

Please provide any additional information (not asked for) that you feel may be helpful to this study.

APPENDIX E

DIRECT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

THE DYSLEXIA DISPARITY: AN EXAMINATION OF INEQUITIES IN THE
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION OF EARLY LEARNERS OF COLOR

DIRECT OBSERVATION # Date: Educational Setting: Subject: Grade Level(s): Early Learners At-Risk/Dyslexia:			
	Targeted Speech & Behaviors	Descriptive	Reflective
LESSON	General Instruction RtI Process/Procedures MTSS Instruction		
PRACTICE	(Accommodations/ Modifications/ Differentiated Instruction)		
SUMMARY			

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APPENDIX F

LEA DOCUMENTS

Reading Response

Title: _____

Author: _____

Did you like this book? Color one:
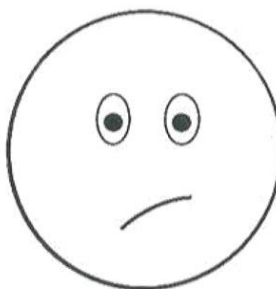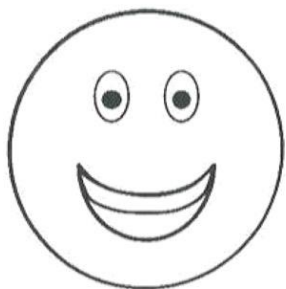
I feel this way because...

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Name: _____

After **Reading** or **Listening**

Beginning:	Middle:	End:

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

READING RESPONSE

Book:_____

Name 2 main characters:

1. _____

2. _____

What was the problem?

_____

_____

_____

What was the solution?

_____

_____

_____

NAME_____

Spelling with *k* and *c*

New concept
reading and spelling
the /k/ sound with *k* or *c*

Lesson Preparation

Materials

- Alphabet/Accent Deck
  (Section 1)
- Review Decks
- Spelling Rule Wall Card 1
  (K & C Spelling Rules)
- Spelling and High
  Frequency Word
  Practice 8
- Worksheet 8

K & C Spelling Rules

Spelling Rule Wall Card 1

Lesson Warm-Up

Language/Alphabet Activity

Objective: To pronounce accented syllables correctly

Introduce
Alphabet/Accent Deck
(Section 1), in order,
having children stand
and sit.

- Seat children at their desks.
- Use Section 1 of the Alphabet/Accent Deck. The cards should be in alphabetical order. Show children the first card (a |___).

  "Take a look at this first card. We're going to pretend that this is a two-syllable word. The straight line in the middle separates the first syllable from the second syllable. Instead of using syllables in a word, we are going to use letters of the alphabet for our syllables. Where is the accent—on the first or second syllable?" **second**

  "When we read this card, we will read the first syllable as 'a' and the second syllable as b."

  "The card tells us to accent the second syllable, so how will we say it differently?" **longer, louder, and higher**

  "In order to help us feel the accent, we are going to do something fun today."

  "Push your chair back from your desk just enough so you can stand up without bumping the desk. We will say 'a' while sitting down and then we will stand and say 'b' longer, louder, and higher."

  "Let's practice."

- Have children say the letter a softly while sitting down, and then the letter b longer, louder, and higher while standing.

  "Sit down again. Let's try the next card."

1

- Show children the second card (b |___`). Children should stand when they say c and say it longer, louder, and higher.
- Continue through the deck, moving as quickly as children can keep up.

Daily Letter and Sound Review

Objective: To practice letter recognition, letter sounds, and sight words

<div style="float:left">Review the Letter, Picture, and Sight Word Decks.</div>

- Quickly review **Letter Cards 1–25.** Have children name each letter.
- Quickly review **Picture Cards 1–30.** Have children name each keyword and sound.
- Show children **Sight Word Cards 1–25** in random order. Ask children to read each word.
- Using the results indicated on the Sight Word Evaluation Form, select individual children to spell those sight words they have not yet mastered. Choose a few children every day.

Spelling Review

Objective: To practice spelling letter sounds and words

- Seat children where they can write comfortably.

<div style="float:left">Distribute **Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8.**

Quickly review blends.</div>

- Distribute **Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8.**
- Make sure children are working on the side with the name line.

  "Today we are going to do something different on the front of the Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice. We are going to spell blends."

  "Find #1 on the sheet. Echo after me: /st/."   /st/

  "Write the blend that stands for /st/ on the line beside #1."

- Walk around the room, giving assistance to children who need help spelling the blends.
- Continue with the following blends:

2. /sl/	9. /fr/	16. /br/
3. /pr/	10. /tw/	17. /sw/
4. /dr/	11. /spr/	18. /gr/
5. /sp/	12. /sm/	19. /pl/
6. /fl/	13. /bl/	20. /gl/
7. /tr/	14. /str/	
8. /spl/	15. /sn/	

<div style="float:left">Review Words:
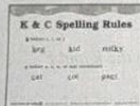1. step
2. twin
3. grin</div>

  "Now turn over Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8. Put your finger next to #1. Spell the word 'step.' If you make a mistake, please correct it."

- Allow children time to correct any mistakes when spelling #1 (step). Continue with #2 (twin) and #3 (grin).

- Spell each word aloud after children have time to write it so they can check their work and make corrections immediately.
- Remind children that they may refer to any of the wall cards when spelling. Provide help to children who have difficulty.

Sight Words:
4. what
5. where
6. they

"Now let's practice some sight words. Put your finger next to #4. Spell the word 'what.'"

- Repeat with #5 (where) and #6 (they).
- Have children put their practice sheets aside for use later in the lesson.

New Increment: Spelling with *k* and *c*

Present example words for spelling with *k* and *c*.

"Echo these words and tell me what they all have in common: cat, keg, kin, cot, cup." cat, keg, kin, cot, cup; all begin with /k/

"I'm going to write these words on the chalkboard and I want you to look at them. Tell me what letter might be making the /k/ sound."

- Write the words on the board.

cat	keg	kin	cot	cup

"With what letters do these words begin?" k or c

"That's correct! Even though each of these words begins with the /k/ sound, some of them begin with the letter c and some of them begin with the letter k."

"This is something new that we haven't talked about before."

"When we spell the /k/ sound, we need to know the spelling rule that tells us which letter to use."

Spelling Rule Wall Card 1

- Hold up **Spelling Rule Wall Card 1.** Point to the appropriate section as you say the following:

K & C Spelling Rules
k before e, i, or y
keg	kid	milky
c before a, o, u, or any consonant
cat	cot	pact

Model spelling examples.

"We spell the /k/ sound with the letter k when the sound is followed by the letters e, i, or y."

"We spell the /k/ sound with the letter c when the sound is followed by the letters a, o, u, or any consonant."

"Let's try this rule and see how it works!"

- Write the following on the board:

_ut	_ite	s_ill	_op	fa_t	lock

- Point to "_ut."

"*This word begins with the /k/ sound.*"
"*How do we spell the /k/ sound?*"   *with the letter c or k*
"*How do we spell the /k/ sound in this word?*"   *with the letter c*
"*Why?*"   *because it is followed by the letter u*

- Point to the u on **Spelling Rule Wall Card 1**; then point to the c. Write the letter c on the blank line. Repeat this procedure with each of the other words.

"*From now on, whenever you spell the /k/ sound, I want you to check Spelling Rule Wall Card 1 to make sure you have spelled it correctly.*"

Post Spelling Rule Wall Card 1.

Refer to the Student Spelling Dictionary and Reference Booklet.

- Post the card in a location that is clearly visible to every child.

"*You can also find these spelling rules in your Student Spelling Dictionary and Reference Booklet. Take out your booklets now.*"

- Allow time for children to locate their reference booklets.

"*Look at the Table of Contents to find 'Spelling Rules.' On what page do 'Spelling Rules' begin?*"   *page 51*

"*Turn to page 51. What spelling rules do you find there?*"
K & C Spelling Rules

- Make sure children are on the correct page.

"*Now let's look at the words on this page.*"

- Allow time for children to examine the words on the page.
- If children are unable to read all the words, read and define the words for them.

"*Can anyone think of any more words that belong on this list?*"

- If children are able to think of any appropriate words, write the words on the chalkboard and have children copy them into their booklets.
- Have children close their booklets and put them away.

Spelling with k and c

Return to Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8.

New Words:
7. act
8. cut
9. skin

Have children put their practice sheets in their Homework Folders.

- Seat children where they can write comfortably.

"*Now we are going to spell some words that follow the k and c spelling rules we just learned.*"

"*Get out Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8 again. Look at the back of the sheet. Put your finger next to #7. Spell the word 'act' on the lines.*"

- Repeat with #8 (cut) and #9 (skin).
- Have children place their practice sheets in their Homework Folders.

Distribute and have children complete **Worksheet 8.**

Check each child's worksheet.

Discuss the hom with children.

Application and Continual Review

Worksheet

Distribute and have children complete Worksheet 8.

- Seat children where they can write comfortably. Distribute Worksheet 8.

"Turn your paper to the side that says 'Worksheet 8.'"

- Make sure children turn to the correct side.

- Discuss the rule written at the top of the worksheet. If necessary, explain that the letter k appearing between slash marks indicates its pronunciation.

"Write the correct spelling of the /k/ sound for each word. Then code the words and read them to yourself."

- As children work, provide help as needed. Have each child correct any incorrect answers.

- Try to call each child to your desk at some time during the day to read some or all of the words on the worksheet, or allow children to read and listen to each other.

Check each child's worksheet.

- Always make sure that each child's worksheet is corrected before sending it home. The worksheet serves as a guide to help children and parents complete the homework.

➤ **Note:** Children should read every day if you want them to become independent readers by the end of the year. If you notice that some children can read the words in the phonics lessons but cannot read the words in the basal lessons, this is because the words in the phonics lessons are controlled. The worksheets contain only those letters or groups of letters that children have been taught. If children are shown letters or groups of letters that they have not learned, many children will not be able to read them. Therefore, to avoid making children feel like failures, give them words containing only those letters and sounds they have learned and the sight words they have been introduced to.

Homework

Discuss the homework with children.

"Turn your paper over. This is the side that you will do at home tonight."

"Write the correct spelling of the /k/ sound for each word. Then code the words and read them to someone at home."

"If you need help, the rule for spelling the /k/ sound is written at the top of your homework. You can also look at the worksheet side to see the words we coded in class today."

"When you finish your paper, read it to someone at home."

5

LESSON
8

"Remember to read and spell the words in the High Frequency Word Box to someone at home. Then bring the practice sheet back to school."

- Have children put their worksheets in their Homework Folders.

Have children put their worksheets in their Homework Folders.

School/Home Reinforcement

- Send the following home with children at the end of the day:

Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 8
Worksheet 8

Review Words

New Words

Sight Words

High Frequency Word Box

	Read	Spell		Read	Spell
I	☐	☐	run	☐	☐
us	☐	☐	ten	☐	☐
sit	☐	☐	hot	☐	☐
not	☐	☐	will	☐	☐

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Lesson 8

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Name _____

Spelling with c and k

To score the entire task:

1 Each student's responses must be scored individually.

2 For Subtask 1, refer to the rubric below to assess the student's orthographic performance:

Correct Orthography: 2 Points	Phonetic Spelling, Below-Level Orthography: 1 Point	Non-Phonetic Spelling: 0 Points
she	shee	All other spellings
at	n/a	All other spellings
her	hir, hur	All other spellings
he	hee	All other spellings
this	dis	All other spellings
when	wen	All other spellings

Enter the points the student earned for each item in the "Points Earned" column of the Student Response Form.

3 For Subtask 2, refer to the rubric below to assess the student's encoding performance:

Correct Phonetic Encoding: 2 Points	Below-Level Phonetic Encoding: 1 Point	Non-Phonetic Spelling: 0 Points
bog	n/a	All other spellings
flap	fap, lap	All other spellings
dusk	dus, duk	All other spellings
mine, mighn, myne	min, myn	All other spellings
weed, wead, wede, wheed	wed, whed	All other spellings
chip	n/a	All other spellings

Enter the points the student earned for each item in the "Points Earned" column of the Student Response Form.

4 Record and report the student's scores, per instructions provided by your administrator. Then consult the following chart:

	Spelling High-Frequency Words	Encoding Phonetically Regular Words
Below-Level Performance	5 or fewer points	5 or fewer points
On-Level Performance	6–9 points	6–9 points
Above-Level Performance	10 or more points	10 or more points

NOTE: If the student fails to start and continue EITHER subtask through its entirety, the scores for this entire administration cannot be used. If the student is highly distracted and does not appear to work as quickly as possible on EITHER subtask, the scores cannot be used. Attempt the entire task on another day with another form, as available. Contact your administrator with any questions.

Student Name:

Task Administrator:

Task Administration Date:

Total Correct in One Minute:

R	t	S	b	m
c	N	d	a	P
F	B	h	K	s
M	o	G	v	n
j	L	r	X	D
u	C	E	p	W
H	z	T	y	k
A	V	q	f	x
w	J	O	Z	e
Q	Y	i	g	U
p	s	R	H	c
v	D	L	a	F
T	j	u	K	b
E	n	x	G	M
S	f	q	P	o
r	W	C	e	Y
k	Z	A	d	V
N	t	h	Q	i
B	X	g	y	w
z	O	m	J	U

Student Name:

Task Administrator:

Task Administration Date:

Total Points for Subtask 1:

Total Points for Subtask 2:

Subtask 1

	Word	Points Earned
Practice		
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

Subtask 2

	Word	Points Earned
Practice		
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS
SCREENING TEST (PAST) FORM A

David A. Kilpatrick, Ph.D.

Adapted from the levels used in McInnis (1999) & Rosner (1973)

Name: _____ D.O.B.: _____ Grade _____ Age _____

Teacher: _____ Date: _____ Evaluator _____

INSTRUCTIONS: See the Instructions for Administering the Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST).

RESULTS:

	Correct	Automatic	
Basic Syllable	____/10	____/10	Highest Correct Level: _____
Onset-Rime	____/10	____/10	(Levels not passed below the highest correct level) _____
Basic Phoneme	____/10	____/10	
Advanced Phoneme	____/20	____/20	Highest Automatic Level: _____
Test Total	____/50	____/50	(Non-automatic levels below highest automatic level) _____

Approximate Grade Level (Circle):	PreK/K	K	late K/early 1st	1st	late 1st/early 2nd	2nd	late 2nd to adult

Note: The grade levels listed throughout the PAST are estimates based on various research studies and clinical experience. They are not formalized norms.

I. SYLLABLE LEVELS

Basic Syllable Levels (D, E2—preschool to mid kindergarten; E3—mid to late kindergarten)*

LEVEL D "Say *bookcase*. Now say *bookcase* but don't say *book*."

FEEDBACK: "If you say *bookcase* without saying *book*, you get *case*. Okay? Let's try another one."

			Correct	Automatic
D1 (book)case _____	(sun)set _____	(space)ship _____		
D2 (sil)ver _____	(mar)ket _____	(gen)tle _____	____/6	A: ____/6

LEVEL E "Say *October*. Now say *October* but don't say *Oc*."

FEEDBACK: "If you say *October* without saying *Oc*, you get *tober*. See how that works?"

		Correct	Automatic
E2 (Oc)tober _____	(um)brella _____		
(fan)tastic _____	(re)member _____	____/4	A: ____/4
	Basic Syllable Total:	____/10	A: ____/10

II. ONSET-RIME LEVELS

Onset-Rime Levels (kindergarten to mid first grade)

LEVEL F (Deletion) "Say *feet*. Now say *feet* but don't say /f/."

FEEDBACK: "If you say *feet* without saying /f/, you get *eat*; *feet-eat*, see how that works?"

			Correct	Automatic
/f/eet → eat _____	/b/irth → earth _____			
/t/ame → aim _____	/t/ime → I'm _____	/c/one → own _____	____/5	A: ____/5

LEVEL G (Substitution) "Say *done*. Now say *done* but instead of /d/ say /r/."

FEEDBACK: "If you say *done* and change the /d/ to /r/, you get *run*; *done-run*."

			Correct	Automatic
/d/one /r/ → run _____	/m/ore /d/ → door _____			
/g/um /th/ → thumb _____	/l/ed /s/ → said _____	/f/ull /w/ → wool _____	____/5	A: ____/5
		Onset-Rime Total:	____/10	A: ____/10

*There is no E3 line on Form A.

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INTEPRETING THE PAST

Even though the PAST correlates powerfully with reading, traditional normative scores have not yet been established. However, based on (1) McInnis' 35 years using these levels; (2) my eleven years working with the PAST; (3) several studies that show when children developmentally can do specific phonological manipulations; as well as (4) several studies I have done on the PAST, the following is a guide to interpreting the results:

Grade Level	Typically Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
1. Late Kindergarten	D1–E2 or higher	D1–2; E2 or lower
2. Mid First Grade	E3, F, G, I, or higher	E2, F, G, or lower
3. Late First Grade	E4–5, F, G, H, I, J	F, G, I, or lower
4. Mid Second Grade	H, I, J, or higher	F, G, H, or I, or lower
5. Late Second Grade	H, I, J, K, and L, most automatic	H, I, maybe J, or lower
6. Mid Third Grade	All levels, most automatic	Many levels correct, I to M mostly not automatic
7. Fourth Grade to Adulthood	All levels automatic	Most levels correct, but J to M not all automatic

If a student's performance matches the shaded Low Achieving Readers column, it suggests that phonological awareness may be a concern. If a student's level is lower than is listed in that column, then a phonological awareness problem is almost certain. In either case, those students will require training beyond what they may be receiving in whole-class instruction.

Notice above how subtle the differences can be, especially early on (i.e., K–1). Except for obvious cases of very low performance, the differences may be very small. This is why all students should get phonological awareness training from kindergarten on. Next, note that over time, typical students start to pull away from those with difficulties. Then, automaticity becomes a big factor, especially after second grade. After third grade, lack of automaticity at any level may indicate that a phonological awareness difficulty may be present.

Do not be surprised by inconsistencies in levels. A student may struggle through an easier level, and pass a higher level. A reason for this is that different levels involve different types of manipulations. For example, Levels H and K involve splitting initial blends. If a student struggles with awareness of sounds in blends, he may not pass H, but may pass I and J, which don't involve blends. Also, students who struggle with awareness of ending sounds may do poorly with Level I and L but do fine with H, J, and K. A final example is a student who had a rough time with E2 and E3*, but who does well with phoneme-level tasks. Most likely, that student took a while to "warm-up" with the task. That student's phonological awareness is probably fine, but you may want to check his working memory and his ability to focus.

Unit 1, Session 2
Oral Language Development Reflection Worksheet

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Fill out a copy of this worksheet for each of your case study students.

1. How consistently does this student use age-appropriate vocabulary? For example, does the student use precise nouns rather than vague terms like *thing* and *stuff*?

2. In contexts where it is appropriate to speak in complete sentences, does this student consistently do so? Can the student easily restate ideas in complete sentences when asked to do so?

3. Can the student easily carry on an extended conversation about an age-appropriate topic?

4. What other indicators of age-appropriate oral language development does this student consistently demonstrate?

5. What challenges have you observed with this student's oral language development?

6. How do you see oral language development impacting (for better or for worse) the student's ability to read?

STUDENT READING IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SRIP) TEMPLATE

(This template contains elements of the Alabama Literacy Act, and supports a Problem Solving Process for Reading, Mathematics and/or Behavior.)
Page 1 is baseline information. Page 2 is evidence based support. Page 3 & 4 contain the plan of action with goals, progress monitoring, & parent communication. NOTE: The SRIP plan may be included in another plan as long as it contains all of the necessary elements per the Alabama Literacy Act.

Student Name: Face-to-Face /Blended/Remote (circle one)	Teacher/School:	Date:
Retention	**Special Populations**	**School Attendance/Current Grade**
List Grade and School year (if applicable) Grade School Year _____ _____ _____ _____	Check below if applicable to the student and write eligibility date for specified service: Special Education/IEP _____ ELL/IELP _____ 504 _____ Characteristic of Dyslexia _____ Other _____	Face-to-Face # Tardies _____ # Absences _____ Remote # Tardies: Google Meet/Zoom _____ # Absences: Google Meet/Zoom _____ Grade: Reading: _____ Math: _____ Behavior _____

Circle Screening Data Source: AIMSWEB   Amplify   iReady   IStation   MAPS   Renaissance *(Attach Individual Student Report)*

Screening Deficiency Area(s)* (Check all that apply)(benchmark or progress monitoring) (Add after each quarter to indicate current deficiencies)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Parent Literacy Support
Letter Naming					Parent Notification Letter Date Sent: _____ Date of Request to Discuss Plan: _____
Letter Sounds					Parent Response
Nonsense Word Fluency					I will not be able to attend the meeting.
Oral reading accuracy					I will be in attendance at the school.
Vocabulary					I will be in attendance via Google Meet.
Comprehension					I will be in attendance via phone conference.
Sight Word					Please reschedule.
Number Sense					Please consider: _____
Measurement and Analysis					Target deficit areas noted:
Geometry					Phonological Awareness
Computation & Algebraic Thinking					Phonics
Behavior Baseline					

Template Updated 03/03/2021   1

	Fluency Vocabulary Comprehension Number Sense & Counting Calculation Place Value Understanding Word Problems Formal Written Numeracy Behavior **SCAN ME**

EVIDENCED BASED SUPPORT		
Approved ALA Interventions Nov. 4, 2020 Memo on Intervention Programs: http://www.alsde.edu/sites/memos/memoranda	**Additional Interventions, Supports, Accommodations, & Assistive Tech.** (as applicable)	**Tutoring Offered During School Year** (Alter checkboxes based on school offerings):

Dyslexia specific intervention, as defined by rule of the State Board of Education, shall be provided to students who have the characteristics of dyslexia and all struggling readers.
 	
    Take Flight (Scottish Rite for Children)
    SPIRE (School Specialty)
    Project Read (Language Circle Enterprises)
    Phonics First (Brainspring)
    Reading Horizons Intervention
    Voyager Read Well
    Sonday System 1 or 2 (not Sonday Essentials)
    IMSE
    Voyager Sound Partners
	Reading:
	    Assistive Technology: _____
	    Assessment program prescriptive interventions
	    Other: _____
	Mathematics:
	    Assistive Technology: _____
	    Assessment program prescriptive interventions
	    Other: _____
	Behavioral:
	    Assistive Technology: _____
	    Other:
		Reading Tutoring (Start Date:_____)
		    Mathematics Tutoring(Start Date: _____)
		    After School Tutoring (Start Date: _____)
		    Other: _____
		Details: _____

Dyscalculia Intervention	(Additional interventions, supports, accommodations & assistive technology that is specific to your school can be added as checkboxes.)	**Summer Learning: (if applicable)**
		
		Summer School Services were offered on _____.
		    Reading (70+ hours)
		    Mathematics
		    Behavior
		The parent/guardian response was (circle one):
		    YES NO
		The student attended (circle one):
		    YES NO
		The student's attendance in the program was:
		    75-100% of the time
		    50-75% of the time
		    Less than 50% of the time
		  ❑ Did not attend

Dyscalculia Specific Intervention		
Parent Resources		

Reading At-Home Parent Activities (QR Code to the left)
Mathematics: AMSTI Family Success Guides (QR Code to the right)
Other: _____

Problem Solving Team Members for Initial Plan (Printed and Signatures)		Date: _____
Must include the teacher, principal, other pertinent school personnel, and the parent or legal guardian at a minimum for SRIP per the ALA.		

SAMPLE PROGRESS MONITORING & NOTE TAKING TEMPLATE

Progress Monitoring Intervention Start Date for _____ is _____
(Student's Name)

Subject: (Circle One)   Reading   Mathematics   Behavior
Tool for Progress Monitoring: _____   Baseline: _____   Goal: _____

Instructions: Teachers should complete progress monitoring. The baseline should be established using the lowest deficit skill.
Progress monitoring should measure progress in the lowest deficit skill. Goals should be targeted in the lowest deficit skill.
Teachers can attach a report from the district approved assessment program to document progress
or use the chart below and fill in for each month's monitoring.

August September October November December January February March April May

Monthly Progress Monitoring Reviews		
August Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____ _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
September Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____ _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
October Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____ _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
November Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____ _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
December Data Review Date: _____	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes:	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes /

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		No
Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	_____ _____	Parent Feedback: _____
January Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
February Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
March Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
April Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
May Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
Pre-Summer School Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____
Post-Summer School Data Review Date: _____ Sufficient Progress Made? (circle one): Yes / No	Any adjustments to Tier I, II, or III instruction? No / Yes: _____	Was progress monitoring the data sent home? Yes / No Parent Feedback: _____

PLC Monitoring Quarterly Cycle
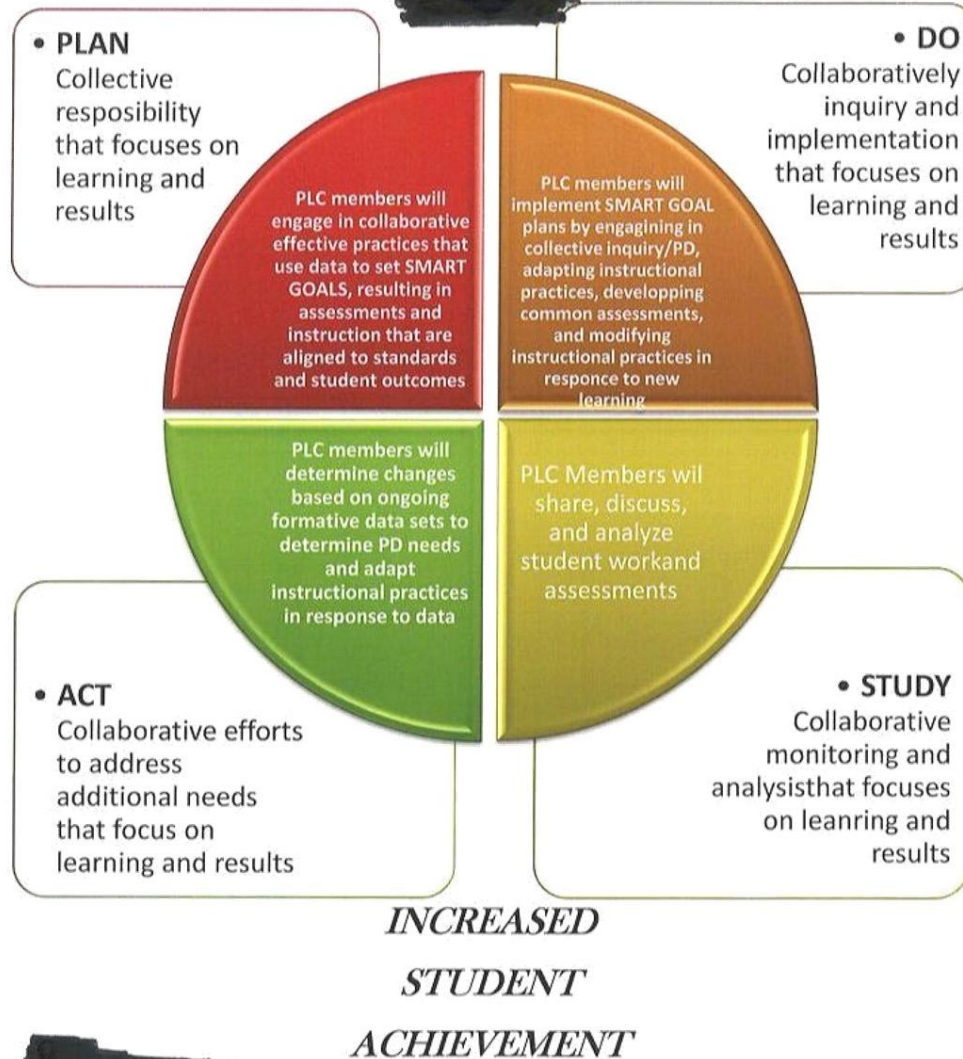
PLC TEAMS MEET WEEKLY

Week 1 (Plan)
- (Principal -Led) Data Analysis
- Identify areas of weakness in teaching and learning
- Identify trends in achievement gaps
- Identify and tier students based on individual needs

Week 2 (Plan)
- Create SMART Goals
- Define problem
- Evaluation of programs and practices
- Communicate expectations
- Identify intervention strategies for students based on needs

Week 3 (Do)
- Research
- Determine professional learning needs in relationship to student & educator needs
- Engage in on-going collective learning
- Scientifically research-based interventions

Week 4 (Do)
- Research
- Engage in on-going collective learning
- Determine best practices and strategies that will meet the SMART goal

Week 5 (Do)
- Implementation
- Engage in collaborative instructional planning
- Implement strategies in classroom instruction for students in Tiers 1-3
- Revise and adjust intervention strategies as needed for targeted students

Week 6 (Do)
- Implementation
- Engage in collaborative instructional planning
- implement strategies in classroom instruction
- Revise and adjust implementation plan as needed

Week 7 (Study)
- Analysis
- Analyze data for continuous improvement
- Analyze student work samples
- Analyze implementation plans and intervention strategies
- Engage in reflective dialogue

Week 8 (Study)
*Walk Throughs
- Analysis
- Analyze data
- Engage in reflective dialogue
- Adjust strategies that were unsuccessful, maintain strategies that were

Week 9 (Act)
Quarterly Common Assessments Administered
- Accountability
- Analyze Common Assessment data
- Share data with students, parents, and staff
- Celebrate successes and consider additional needs
- Engage in reflective dialogue

RICHARD DUFOUR, LEARNING BY DOING, MAY 16, 2016

The Work of Professional Learning Communities

• **PLAN**
Collective resposibility that focuses on learning and results

• **DO**
Collaboratively inquiry and implementation that focuses on learning and results

PLC members will engage in collaborative effective practices that use data to set SMART GOALS, resulting in assessments and instruction that are aligned to standards and student outcomes

PLC members will implement SMART GOAL plans by engagining in collective inquiry/PD, adapting instructional practices, developping common assessments, and modifying instructional practices in responce to new learning

PLC members will determine changes based on ongoing formative data sets to determine PD needs and adapt instructional practices in response to data

PLC Members wil share, discuss, and analyze student workand assessments

• **ACT**
Collaborative efforts to address additional needs that focus on learning and results

• **STUDY**
Collaborative monitoring and analysisthat focuses on leanring and results

INCREASED

STUDENT

ACHIEVEMENT

RICHARD DUFOUR, LEARNING BY DOING, MAY 16, 2016

Tier III

Individualized intensive
interventions

SPIRE
Read 180
Systems 44
Edgenuity
A+ Math
i-Ready
Wonders
ENVISIONS Math
Fairfield 360
Teachtown
LETRS
Balanced Literacy Approach
Performance/Achievement Series

Tier II

Targeted small group
interventions for
at-risk students

APEX
A-Plus College Ready
ACCESS
Acellus
Delta Math
i-Ready
Saxon Phonics
Wonders
ENVISIONS Math
Balanced Literacy Approach
Performance/Achievement Series

Tier I

Whole class
research-based
core instruction

Renaissance - Accelerated Reader
Edulastic
iReady
Number Talks
i-Ready
Performance/Achievement Series
Wonders
ENVISIONS Math
Instructional Practices PD
AMSTI
Saxon Phonics

Initial Referral to the School
RtI Team

Student: _____   School: _____

Teacher: _____   Grade: _____   Subject: _____

Date: _____   First Referral: ____Y ____N   Repeat Referral: ____Y ____N

Student receives Section 504 Accommodations: ____Y ____N   Student served by SPED: ____Y ____N (Includes Speech)

TO: RtI Team

I request that the above named student be reviewed by the RtI Team to assist in providing interventions in an effort to improve his/her overall performance.

TIER 1 AND 2 INTERVENTIONS: (Must be a minimum of 4 - 6 weeks)
I have observed problems that interfere with his/her educational progress in the following area(s):

Specific Area of Concern: _____

Initial Level of Performance (baseline): _____

Intervention Goal: _____

Current Level of Performance: _____

As the teacher bringing the student to the committee, I will provide all of the following applicable documentation:

- o   Grades / Report Card
- o   Common Assessments / Benchmarks / MAP Data
- o   Lesson Plans
- o   Student Instructional Plan, Form F4
- o   Interventions used and progress monitoring
- o   Attendance records / Behavior Log (Copies of Discipline Referrals/PowerSchool Records)

To be completed by the RtI Team:
Initial and date receipt of the student referral   _____
Enter student on RtI Team Referral Log, Form F7   _____
Date of intervention committee meeting   _____
Send Notice of Meeting Date, Form F8   _____
Send Parent Notification & Confirmation letters, Forms F9, F10 & F12   _____

This form should be completed by the referring teacher   Form F4

Notice of RtI Meeting

To. _____   Name of School _____
  {Name of administrator and/or RtI members}

The following student is being referred by the Response to Interevention Team:

Name: _____   Grade/Subject: _____

Purpose of Meeting:

☐ Initial referral to RtI team   ☐ Review

Date of Meeting: _____ Time of Meeting: _____ Location: _____

Check all areas of concern that apply:

Environment	Instruction	Assessment
☐ Frequent Tardies ☐ Frequent absences ☐ Frequent bathroom/nurse visits ☐ Often lacks supplies ☐ Change in appearance/dress ☐ Unusual weight gain or loss ☐ Appears fatigued or overly active ☐ Frequent physical injuries ☐ Easily distracted ☐ Isolated self from others ☐ Change in peer group ☐ Uses obscene language and gestures ☐ Other_____	☐ Fails to complete homework/assignments ☐ Turns assignments in late ☐ Participates reluctantly in classroom activities/discussions ☐ Fails to respond to redirection ☐ Fails to respond to small group instruction ☐ Disrupts class by talking out ☐ Demonstrates weaknesses in _____ ☐ Other _____	☐ Progress has declined ☐ Not meeting standard on formative assessments (teacher made tests) ☐ Benchmark scores below standard ☐ Other_____
Teacher Comments		
_____		
_____		
_____		
Attach work samples (if unable to attend meeting)		

Please provide below response to the RtI chair by _____.

I will be able to attend the meeting: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature _____   Form F7

Parent Notification Letter

Date: _____

Dear Parent/Guardian of: _____:

Our school uses a problem solving model called Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is a process designed to address the needs of all students and is intended as an early intervention to prevent long-term academic failure. Our RtI Team meets on a regular basis to offer assistance to students, teachers and parents regarding student success here in school.

A referral has been made to the RtI Team regarding your child's progress. The team will be reviewing all available information in order to develop an intervention plan and make other recommendations, as appropriate, to better assist your child in making successful progress in school.

This letter is to provide you with written notice that the RtI Team will be gathering data from a wide variety of sources including the student's cumulative file, school health records, teacher reports, other school records, and classroom work. If you have any additional information that you would be willing to provide that might help the RtI Team in planning effective educational strategies and recommendations for your child, please contact me. We will have an RtI meeting regarding your child. You are invited to be in attendance. Meeting details are below:

Date:	
Time:	
Location:	
Address:	
Phone:	
Contact:	

Sincerely,

RtI Team Chairperson _____

Form F8

RtI Parent Follow-up Letter (if parent did not attend meeting)

Date: _____

Dear Parent/Guardian of _____:

The Response to Intervention (RtI) team met on _____
to discuss your child's success in the classroom. The committee will monitor your child's progress and will schedule another meeting in the near future.

You will be invited to the next meeting of our team. For your review, please find attached a copy of the minutes and recommendations from the last conference.

Please feel free to contact me at _____ (phone) or _____
(e-mail) of you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to working with you to ensure your child's academic success.

Sincerely,

_____
RtI Chairperson

Enclosure: RtI Team Meeting Minutes (Form F10)   Form F11

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Parent confirmation to attend letter

In response to the notification of the RTI committee meeting to discuss my child's academic success, I

_____
Printed name of Parent/Guardian

Please check one of the following:

☐ plan to attend.

☐ do not plan to attend. if you do not plan to attend, also check one of the following:

      ☐ I waive my participation in the Rti committee meeting, and I designate the Remaining members of the Rti committee as the decision-makers for all purposes.

      ☐ I cannot attend in person, but I wish to participate by telephone. The number at which I can be reached at the time of the meeting is

      ( )_____

If you would like to attend but can't due to a scheduling conflict, please call us at

_____

_____   _____
Parent/Guardian Signature   Date

Please return this completed form to the Rti Chairperson by _____.

Form F9

School RtI Team Meeting Minutes

Name of School _____ Meeting Date _____

Check one: ☐ Initial Referral ☐ RtI Referral

Name of Student _____ Student's current tier (1, 2, 3, 4) _____

PART I: REFERRAL/ REVIEW INFORMATION.

Reason for referral/review: _____

Student strengths & talents:
_____
_____

Review of current supports or intervention strategies:
_____
_____

Review of all related data:
_____
_____

Summary of findings:
_____
_____

PART II: TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS (Check only those that apply)

☐ Recommended Tier placement: ___ Tier 1 ___ Tier 2 ___ Tier 3 ___ Tier 4
☐ Develop intervention plan
☐ Revise intervention plan
☐ Continue implementing current plan
☐ Course Change, e.g. AP English I to English I
☐ Consider Credit/Grade Recovery Class

Referral made to:
☐ Guidance Counselor
☐ Student Intervention Team (SIT)
☐ Gifted/Talented Program
☐ Special Education
☐ Other_____

Page 1 of 2

Form to be placed in student's RtI folder
Copy to be provided to parent/guardian

Form F10

School RtI Team Meeting Minutes, page 2

Student Name: _____   Date: _____

PART III: MEETING NOTES, continued

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Date to review plan: _____
                     Date of next meeting

RtI Committee Member Attendance

Name	Position	Date

Form F10

Form to be placed in student's RtI folder
Copy to be provided to parent/guardian

Teacher RtI PLC Checklist for Tier 2

1. Prior to initial Tier 2 RtI PLC meeting:	Date(s) Completed:

- ☐ Teacher will conduct and record universal screening results _____

- ☐ Teacher will complete Teacher List of Students Not Meeting Standard, Form F1 _____

- ☐ Administrator will hold a data review meeting with the teacher to review all student data. The meeting shall occur no later than 4- 6 weeks following the universal screening. _____

- ☐ Teacher will develop effective lesson plans that address environment, instruction, & assessment. _____

- ☐ Teacher will implement classroom interventions. _____

- ☐ Teacher will document student progress (progress monitoring). _____

- ☐ Teacher will meet with grade level/department team during professional learning community (PLC) meetings to review interventions and progress made. _____

- ☐ Teacher will contact parents regarding concerns. _____

- ☐ Teacher will implement two cycles of intervention, adjusting instruction as needed. Each cycle will be a minimum of 4-6 weeks. _____

2. Referral Steps:
- ☐ Teacher may use the Teacher PLC Checklist to Tier 2, Form F2-T2. _____

- ☐ Teacher will document all interventions on the Student Instructional Plan, F3 _____ and plan to share data during RtI PLC Team meeting.

Form F2-T2

Teacher Referral Checklist for Tier 3 Services

1. **Prior to initial referral to Tier 3:**   Date(s) Completed:
   - ☐ Teacher will conduct and record universal screening testing   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will complete Teacher List of Students Not Meeting Standard, Form F1   _____
   - ☐ Administrator will hold a data review meeting with the teacher to review all student data. The meeting shall occur no later than 4- 6 weeks following the universal screening.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will develop effective lesson plans that address environment, instruction, & assessment.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will implement classroom interventions.
   - ☐ Teacher will document student progress (progress monitoring).
   - ☐ Teacher will meet with collaborative team during professional learning community (PLC) meetings to review interventions and progress made.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will contact parents regarding teacher's concerns.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will implement two cycles of intervention, adjusting instruction as needed. Each cycle will be a minimum of 4 - 6 weeks.   _____

2. **Referral Steps:**
   - ☐ Teacher may use the Teacher Referral Checklist to Tier 3, Form F2-T3.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will document all interventions on the Student Instructional Plan, F3.   _____
   - ☐ Teacher will complete and submit the Referral to RtI Team, Form F4 (making a copy for his/her own files).   _____

3. **Prior to RtI Team meeting for Tier 3:**
   - ☐ Referring teacher gathers documentation listed on Referral to RtI Team, Form F4.   _____
   - ☐ School RtI Team Chair will distribute the Notice of Meeting, Form F7, to the student's teachers, administrator, and other staff (as appropriate).   _____
   - ☐ School RtI Team Chair notifies the parent of the meeting using Parent Notification Letter, Form F8 and attaches Parent Response, Form F9.   _____
   - ☐ Student's teachers and other staff (as appropriate) complete and return the Notice of Meeting, Form F7, to the RtI Facilitator.   _____

Form F2-T3

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School RtI Team Checklist
For Tier 3

1. Prior to the meeting: Date(s) Completed:
   - RtI Team member enters referral on Referral Log, Form F6   _____
   - RtI Team member sends Notice of RtI Meeting, Form F7, to student's
     teachers and administrators   _____
   - RtI Team member sends Parent Notification Letter, Form F8, and Parent
     Confirmation Letter, Form F9   _____

   - RtI Team reviews data and makes recommendations for placement.   _____
   - Student Instructional Plan, Form F3 is updated by the referring teacher. _____
   - RtI Team Recorder completes the RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10   _____
   - RtI Team will determine who will implement and continue to document
     instruction on the Student Instructional Form.   _____

2. After the meeting
   - A copy of the RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10, is placed in the RtI folder
     in the student's cumulative folder.   _____
   - RtI Team chairperson updates Referral Log information & submits to administrator
     every 4 – 6 weeks.   _____
   - RtI Team chairperson sends copies of RtI Team Meeting Minutes and Parent
     Notification of Meeting Results, Form F11, to parents if they were not able to attend
     the meeting.   _____

3. Implementation Period:
   - RtI Team will conduct a progress review within six weeks.   _____
   - In special circumstances it may be necessary to meet more frequently. _____

4. Record Keeping:
   - A RtI folder must be maintained for each student referred to the RtI Team.
     This folder should be placed in the student's cumulative folder.   _____
   - The RtI Team is responsible for updating the RtI folder and distributing necessary
     information regarding the student's intervention plan to the student's teachers. _____

> Interventions for Tier 3 should:
> - Have targeted objectives that are taught in an explicit and
>   systematic manner
> - Occur for an additional 90 minutes per week (max)
> - Occur in a small group setting
> - Be provided by the classroom teacher or other highly
>   qualified teacher
> - Be provided in the classroom, during tutoring,
>   or via district approved interventions
> - Have weekly Progress Monitoring
> - Include a review of student data every 4 – 6 weeks

Optional form to ensure fidelity to RtI process. Not to be placed in student's RtI folder   Form F5

Optional resource
for RTI Teams

Prior to Tier 4 meeting, a Vision/Hearing Screen should be completed.   Date(s) Completed:

1. At the meeting:
    - RtI Team meets, reviews data, and makes recommendations using the RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10
    - RtI team updates the Student Instruction Plan, Form F1.
    - RtI Team will determine if student should be evaluated for Special Education or 504 services. (*Notice of Parents Rights* and *Request to Evaluate* must be given to parents)
    - A copy of the Tier 4 RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10, is given to parent or guardian

2. After the meeting:
    - A copy of the RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10, is placed in the RtI folder in the student's cumulative folder.
    - RtI Team updates RtI Student Placement Log, Form F6.
    - RtI Team chairperson sends copies of Parent Notification of Meeting Results letter, Form F12, and the RtI Team Meeting Minutes, Form F10, to parents if they were not able to attend the meeting.

3. Implementation Period:
    - RtI Team will conduct a progress review within six weeks unless student is eligible for Special Education or 504 services.
    - In special circumstances, it may be necessary for the RtI Team to meet more frequently.

4. Record Keeping:
    - A RtI folder must be maintained for each student referred to the RtI Team. This folder should be placed in the student's permanent record.
    - The RtI Team is responsible for updating the RtI folder and distributing necessary information regarding the student's intervention plan to the student's teachers.

Interventions for Tier 4 should occur simultaneously with Tiers 1, 2 and 3. Tier 4 should:

o Have targeted objectives that are taught in an explicit and systematic manner
o Occur for more than 90 minutes per week
o Occur in a small group or individual setting
o Be provided by the classroom teacher or other highly qualified teacher
o Be provided in the classroom or pullout setting
o Progress monitor twice a week
o include a review of student data every 4 - 6 weeks

This form is designed to ensure fidelity to RtI process.   This form should **not** be placed in the student's RtI folder.

Form F12

Teacher List

For Students Not Meeting Standard on Universal Screening
or Not Meeting Grade Level Standard

Teacher: _____   Grade/Subject: _____   School Year: _____

Dates of Administrative Data Review meetings: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

| Date | Student Name | Not meeting standard | | Comments |
		Universal Screening - (SCORES)	Other	Please list any current program placement (e.g. 504, SPED, ESL)

This form should be taken to the Administrative Data Review meeting.

Form F1

RtI Student Placement Log

Required Form to be completed by
PLC/RtI Facilitator or School RtI Chair

Grade Level: _____

School: _____   School Year: _____   RtI Facilitator or Chair: _____

Student Information			Teacher	Target Area	Target Area	Target Area	Date of Tier 3 RtI meeting	RtI Team Decision					
Last Name	First Name	Student ID	Teacher Name	Reading	Math	Behavior		Continue Tier 1 instruction	Continue in Tier 2	Place / Continue in Tier 3	Tier 4* Refer to School RtI Team		
											Continue Tier 3	504	SPED

* Students eligible or receiving support through 504 or SPED should not be listed on this form.
Form to be maintained by School RtI Chair

Form F6

Student Instructional Plan

Response to Intervention – Elementary Reading

Student _____ Student ID:_____ School:_____ Universal Screening Scores:
Fall: _____
Teacher _____ Grade:_____ Subject:_____ Winter: _____
Date(s) of meetings: _____ _____ _____ _____ Spring: _____

Date	Elem. Reading	Specific Instructional Focus		Instructional setting/frequency	Results of Intervention (Progress Monitoring Results)	Date(s) of parent contact
		Area of concern	Strategies/Materials	Setting: Whole Group, Small Group, Individual, etc.		
		i.e., main idea, summarization, two digit multiplication, etc.	(Please follow link to view Approved District Strategies/Materials)	Frequency: Daily, Weekly, number of minutes, etc.		
			☐ F&P LLI ☐ Comprehension Toolkits ☐ Leveled Texts ☐ StarLit ☐ SuccessMaker ☐ Other School Selected Resources			
			☐ F&P LLI ☐ Comprehension Toolkits ☐ Leveled Texts ☐ StarLit ☐ SuccessMaker ☐ Other School Selected Resources			
			☐ F&P LLI ☐ Comprehension Toolkits ☐ Leveled Texts ☐ StarLit ☐ SuccessMaker ☐ Other School Selected Resources			
			☐ F&P LLI ☐ Comprehension Toolkits ☐ Leveled Texts ☐ StarLit ☐ SuccessMaker ☐ Other School Selected Resources			

*Attach assessment data, progress monitoring data, and most recent report card

Additional Comments:
Form is maintained and kept with referring teacher's records. Complete for all students who are not successful after two cycles of Tier 1 and or Tier 2 intervention.

Form F3

Student Instructional Plan

Response to Intervention – Elementary Reading (Sample)

Student _____SAMPLE_____   School: _____   Universal Screening Scores:
Fall: 3rd Grade Scores
Teacher _____SAMPLE_____   Grade: _____   Subject: _____   Winter: _____
Spring: _____
Date(s) of meetings: _____

Date	Elem. Reading	Area of concern	Strategies/Materials	Instructional setting/frequency	Results of Intervention (Progress Monitoring Results)	Date(s) of parent contact
		i.e., main idea, summarization, two digit multiplication, etc.	(Please follow link to view Approved District Strategies/Materials)	Setting: Whole Group, Small Group, Individual, etc. Frequency: Daily, Weekly, number of minutes, etc.		
9/2/2014		Reading –Summarization	☐F&P LLI ☒Leveled Texts ☐StarLit ☒SuccessMaker ☐Other School Selected Resources	Small Group, 20 minutes, 4 times a week	Difficulty summarizing passages Difficulty with main idea also.	9/21/2014
10/8/2014		Reading –Summarization	☐F&P LLI ☐Leveled Texts ☒StarLit ☒SuccessMaker ☒Other School Selected Resources	Individualized Instruction, 20 minutes, 3 times a week	Can summarize passages, but requires teacher prompting for main idea	10/13/2014
			☐F&P LLI ☐Leveled Texts ☐StarLit ☐SuccessMaker ☐Other School Selected Resources			
			☐F&P LLI ☐Leveled Texts ☐StarLit ☐SuccessMaker ☐Other School Selected Resources			

Column header: Specific Instructional Focus (spans Area of concern and Strategies/Materials)

*Attach assessment data, progress monitoring data, and most recent report card

Additional Comments:

Form is maintained and kept with referring teacher's records. Complete for all students who are not successful after two cycles of Tier 1 and or Tier 2 intervention.   Sample Form F3