

Recent Developments in the Implementation of Oregon Dyslexia Laws

Work on the implementation of Oregon Dyslexia laws related to screening for dyslexia and teacher training continues at a fast pace this spring. Dyslexia legislation first passed the Oregon legislature and was signed by Governor Brown in 2015. Slightly amended in 2017, it is on track to be in place in schools by the start of the next school year, Fall 2018.

This work goes forward under the able direction of Carrie Thomas-Beck, Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Dyslexia Specialist, in consultation with The Oregon Dyslexia Advisory Council (ODAC) and other stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, therapists, university professors, and education law specialists.

Screening for risk factors of dyslexia

In April, much attention was focused on amending the Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs) to reflect 2017 legislative changes to the plan for universal screening for risk factors of dyslexia in kindergarten (and in grade 1 for students first enrolled in a public school in Oregon in grade 1). A first draft of rules was submitted March 22. Intense discussions of screening procedures followed in both ODAC meetings and a public hearing with opportunities for online input. Two particular issues were especially hot topics for discussion and compromise; when to screen for family history of reading difficulty and how to document family history results. Following a period for comment on the OAR draft, a second draft was submitted on April 18th and adopted by the Oregon State Board of Education at their meeting on April 19.

Still to be fleshed-out in the next months are guidance to districts from ODE on parental notification, a list of approved screening tests (early May), how to provide instructional support to students who demonstrate risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia, and specific support of English learners. In addition, ODE is required to submit a report to the legislature by September 15, 2018 on best practices for screening and instruction. This is all very intense, collaborative, and sometimes tedious work being done now so that screening can begin in schools this fall!

Teacher training

Teacher training efforts under the law have been in full swing over the past several months to meet the required deadline of June 30, 2018 to have at least one teacher in each K-5 program trained to be their respective building dyslexia advisors. A list of about 20 vetted and approved vendor submitted training options was posted in late spring of 2017, and trainings began. Required training components include 3 areas of focus.

1. Understanding and recognizing dyslexia;
2. Using evidence-based practices to systematically and explicitly teach the foundational skills in reading; and

3. Intensifying the instruction to meet the needs of students with more severe reading difficulties, including dyslexia.

The training opportunities must be program-neutral. That is, the training provides teachers with knowledge and skills necessary to present systematic, explicit, and evidence-based reading instruction, but does not focus on providing specific training on a particular intervention or curriculum. The training must :

1. Comply with the knowledge and practice standards of an international organization on dyslexia;
2. Enable the teacher to understand and recognize dyslexia; and
3. Enable the teacher to implement instruction that is systematic, explicit, and evidence-based to meet the educational needs of students with dyslexia.

As long as a teacher completes a single comprehensive training or combination of trainings that include the three focus areas as outlined above, he or she will have met the training requirements. Based on the requirements for the content, the training takes about 30 hours total to complete.

By the end of June of this year, over 700 Oregon teachers will have been trained. Preliminary results from an online survey on the effectiveness of the trainings for approximately 100 participants are currently being analysed. These results are quite promising and positive that the information gained is useful and is already having an impact on students.

Excerpt from comments section on online survey:

What changes did you make in your teaching as a result of the dyslexia train?

“My teaching is more systematic, more sequential, and more individualized.... even though my job entails teaching in small groups anyway!”

Has your perception of dyslexia changed as a result of completing the training?

“Yes.... It’s enormously important that educators recognize and help children with dyslexia very early on. Interventions must happen immediately so that these students don’t fall through the cracks.”

What did you like most about the dyslexia trainings you attended?

“I feel it gave me a true understanding of what dyslexia actually is. The training also reaffirmed the importance of the work we do with our little ones! I left inspired (and a bit overwhelmed) to do everything in my power to give them the best foundation possible.”

As specified in the law, new training vendors may be added each year and previous vendors who wish to continue on the list must apply for a renewal. The RFI for new vendors in 2018 closed on March 15. Nine vendors responded to the RFI with

proposals. Qualified reviewers were recruited and selected April 13. Posting of an amended vendor list by June 15 will follow the review process. Current vendors renewal application will go out May 1.