

## **One New Hampshire school district was well prepared for the new dyslexia law**

**by Dale Vincent**

ROCHESTER, NH -- Not to brag, but the Rochester School District is ahead of the curve in complying with the state's new dyslexia law requiring youngsters to be evaluated for reading issues in kindergarten or first grade by Nov. 30 and then provided with systematic help.

The first group of youngsters who benefited from Rochester's commitment to provide multisensory Orton-Gillingham training to dyslexic children and those with reading issues is now entering middle school, said Heidi Zollman, who is in charge of curriculum, instruction and assessment in the elementary schools.

Supported by Decoding Dyslexia of NH and the New Hampshire IDA, the law now requires kindergarten or first grade students to be evaluated by Nov. 30 for reading issues and a remediation program begun.

The state also provides a resource guide for testing materials and remediation programs. Each district can choose the method or methods it prefers for remediation. [Link to NH DOE's updated Dyslexia Resources and Training Modules](#)

Assistant Superintendent Kyle Repucci said: "We're not trying to change a lot." He said the district has been proactive in assessing students' reading difficulties for years and addressing them. He said what Rochester is doing for youngsters with reading issues is benefitting students without those issues.

Zollman said: "Some things we've done for 10 years." That includes the use of DIBELS, (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills). Zollman said the district has been proactive in assessing preschool early literacy indicators, starting at age 3, and meeting with parents when indicated.

The assessments continued in kindergarten, mostly need-based, said Repucci, and continue as youngsters progress in school. "All our decisions are data informed," he said.

A variety of evidence-based strategies have been used to help dyslexic children learn to read, but a major focus in recent years has been use of the multisensory Orton-Gillingham approach.

That is thanks in large part to a Rochester School Board president whose son is dyslexic.

Paul Lynch pushed for use of the multisensory Orton-Gillingham approach, which was of great benefit to his son, who received the training at the Seacoast Learning Center in Rochester, a charitable project of the Scottish Valley Rite Masons.

As a result of Lynch's experience and enthusiasm, this is the fourth year the district has been paying to have teachers trained in the Orton-Gillingham tutoring approach.

The group is limited to 10 each year for the program that costs the teachers only time and effort.

Assistant Superintendent Kyle Repucci said the district foots the bill for the course, which consists of 50 hours of training plus a 100-hour supervised practicum.

In addition to the direct cost, Repucci said there is the cost of substitute teachers during the training.

Repucci said it's a costly program for the district, but worth it. "It's really about trying to help kids as early as possible," he said.

He said there is no requirement for the teachers to commit to staying in the district and Rochester has lost some of the OG teachers it paid to train. He said they left for the normal reasons teachers leave, including family relocation and higher pay.

Zollman said there are approximately 30 trained OG scholars in the district's schools at this time. She said: "These teachers use the OG method as well as embedding the OG approach into all of their reading instruction."

Repucci said the number of children whose testing indicates reading issues vary from year to year, but efforts are made to ensure those who need extra help are placed with OG trained teachers and Reading Specialists also work with those in need.

He said the district uses a RTI (Response To Intervention) model that has three tiers, ranging from 90 minutes of regular core instruction to 90 minutes of core plus 30 minutes of supplemental support to 90 minutes of core instruction plus 60 minutes of intensive support.

There are OG trained teachers in all the Rochester District schools and Zollman said that includes one trained teacher in both the REACH Preschool and BCA (Bud Carlson Academy), the alternative high school.

The New Hampshire Department of Education lists the 2017-2018 Rochester School District enrollment, preschool through high school as 4,224.

Zollman said: "The OG project is impacting hundreds of students in Rochester."

Repucci said that to ensure that impact continues, Zollman does an amazing job recruiting teachers for the OG training from each of the school buildings, as she keeps track of the OG certified teachers.

Repucci said the training, through the Seacoast Learning Center, is offered to any teacher in the district who is interested in making the major time and effort required to become OG certified.

In the past, it has been primarily elementary teachers, Special Education and Reading Specialists, he said, but there have also been teachers from the middle and high schools who took the course.

He said eight Rochester teachers are signed up for this fall's cohort of 10. They will be joined by two teachers from Wakefield.

The Seacoast center, established in Rochester in 2004, and headed by Brenda Peters, is one of two centers in New Hampshire. Aileen Cormier heads the Children's Dyslexia Center in Nashua, started in 1998.

Both centers provided free dyslexia training to children in a two-year program.

While the new law hasn't prompted any changes in how Rochester operates, Repucci said: "We've had districts reach out to us."

It's also created an awareness in the public, he said, and when parents call, they are better informed about reading issues. "Parents are asking better questions," he said.

Rochester is ready to answer those questions.