

Specific Learning Disability Supplementary Guide

Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions



Virginia Department of Education

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SECTION II: The Initial Screening Process For Reading Disabilities

What is the screening process for students with reading difficulties or reading disabilities, such as dyslexia in Virginia?

In 1997, Virginia required early screening for reading difficulties and the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) was established. The purpose of this screening is to identify students at risk for reading difficulty and to reduce the number of children with reading problems through early screening and identification, and to accelerate their acquisition of early reading skills by the end of each grade level, kindergarten through third-grade through the provision of research based reading instruction. The Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening – Kindergarten (PALS-K) was developed as part of this effort and is considered to be a reliable criterion-referenced screening, diagnostic and prescriptive tool to inform instruction.

In 2010, the Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 87, requesting the Virginia Department of Education to study dyslexia screening for kindergartners. The results of the study indicated PALS-K has been shown to be a reliable and valid instrument for the identification of students with reading problems. According to the study, common predictors of reading difficulty, such as weaknesses in phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge, can be identified using this instrument. The study indicated that a “rapid naming” (RAN) tool would be a possible addition to the PALS screening process. To read the study and review the recommendations, please see the document titled, *Study of Dyslexia Screening for Kindergartners* (SJR8, 2010) at [http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h3sdocs.nsf/fc86c2b17a1cf388852570f9006f1299/cbf35e67f28c8b328525773f005a73e6/\\$FILE/SD4.pdf](http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h3sdocs.nsf/fc86c2b17a1cf388852570f9006f1299/cbf35e67f28c8b328525773f005a73e6/$FILE/SD4.pdf).

Who is screened using the Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening (PALS) tool?

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) requires universal screening of all kindergarten students at the beginning of the year to detect any student who exhibits early signs of reading difficulties. Mid-year screening is encouraged, especially for those students who have borderline scores. PALS 1-3¹ and PALS Plus are used or can be used with children in the first through eighth grades to identify students at risk of reading difficulties. PALS K and PALS 1-3 (which is available free of cost) are used to satisfy this purpose, but they are also used to guide instruction and to monitor student progress. PALS Plus is also available (for purchase) for students in grades four through eight.

The PALS assessments are designed to identify students in need of additional reading instruction beyond that provided to typically developing readers. They also inform teachers’ instruction by providing them with explicit information about their students’ knowledge of the basic foundational skills of reading. Mid-year assessment and PALS Quick Checks allow for ongoing student progress monitoring throughout the year. It should be noted that some divisions may opt to administer additional screeners and use additional progress monitoring tools. For more information, see the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening - <https://pals.virginia.edu/>. Additionally, the RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, provides information on other screening tools for K-12 and may be a useful resource. Their resources can be found at the following links:

¹ Since 2000, through a contract with the University of Virginia (UVA), the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) has been provided to school divisions at no charge to identify the students to receive reading intervention, while specifying the types of deficiencies to be addressed.

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/assessment/screening/screening-for-reading-problems-in-grades-1-through-3> and <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/assessment/screening/screening-for-reading-problems-in-grades-4-through-12>.

What components of reading should be included in the screening process when identifying characteristics of dyslexia?

Screening instruments must address all components of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Assessments in each area must be conducted in a manner that is appropriate to the grade level of the child (Birsh, 2011). Any screening instrument must include the assessment of the core deficits of dyslexia, such as phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. For more information, see the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) revised fact sheet, Testing and Evaluation, which can be found at <https://app.box.com/s/43120w87h73lf16623erio4eifbhl66t>.