



Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis

2019–2020

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The brief begins with a description of Georgia Senate Bill 48, which established the Dyslexia Pilot Program. Following this is a summary of how the GaDOE structured its leadership of the pilot, as well as a description of the work the GaDOE and the pilot districts performed prior to Year 1 (2020-21) of the three-year program. Important aspects of the districts' planning for implementation of the dyslexia pilot are summarized, followed by challenges and needs expressed by the districts in interviews conducted by SREB for RC6. The brief concludes with future training needs and policy considerations.

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I. Introduction

Purpose

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Senate Bill 48

In 2019 the Georgia Assembly passed [Senate Bill 48 \(S.B. 48\)](#) into law. The bill required the State Board of Education, State Superintendent, GaDOE, and Georgia Professional Standards Commission to:

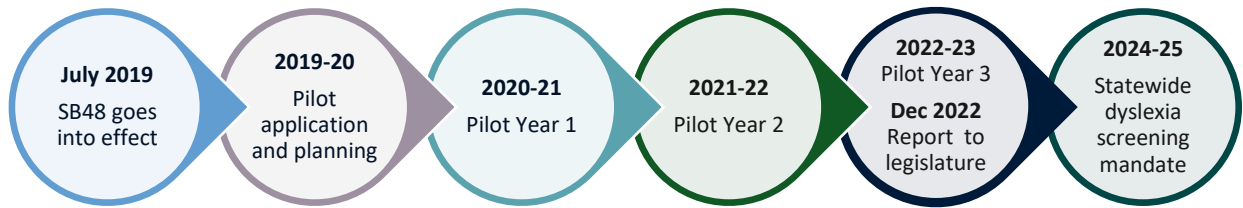
- develop policies for referring certain elementary students for dyslexia screening,
- create a dyslexia informational handbook to assist school districts,
- provide professional development opportunities on dyslexia for teachers,
- create a dyslexia endorsement for teachers, and
- add instruction on dyslexia and response to intervention to existing standards for teacher preparation programs.

S.B. 48 requires local school systems to begin screening all kindergarten students and certain students in grades 1-3 for characteristics of dyslexia beginning in 2024-25. To prepare for this statewide mandate in 2024, the bill also requires that the GaDOE conduct a three-year Dyslexia Pilot Program (2020-2023) including at least three school districts to “demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of early reading assistance programs for students with risk factors for dyslexia” (S.B. 48 p.1).

Eight districts applied and were accepted by the GaDOE into the three-year Dyslexia Pilot Program. The requirements of the pilot districts, as outlined in S.B. 48, are as follows:

- screen all kindergarten students for characteristics of dyslexia,
- screen students in grades 1-3 for characteristics of dyslexia if they are identified through the response to intervention process as being at risk,
- provide reading intervention services for students with characteristics of dyslexia and administer assessments to determine whether the intervention services improve students' language processing and reading skills,
- obtain parent consent for students to participate in the pilot, and
- report pilot data to the GaDOE.

Figure 1. Timeline of the Georgia Dyslexia Pilot



II. Building the Infrastructure: Georgia Department of Education

After the passage of the bill in 2019, the GaDOE began its work to build organizational, policy, human, and resource capacities to support implementation of S.B. 48’s requirements. These efforts, including support structures at the state level and direct support for pilot districts, are described below.

1. Support Structures at the State Level

GaDOE Dyslexia Pilot Program Team

- **Lead team** – A team of staff members representing several divisions in the agency was tapped by department leaders to coordinate the pilot, foster communication between pilot districts and the department, and lead the department’s efforts in complying with requirements of the law, such as developing annual reports on the pilot program.
- **External consultant** – The GaDOE contracted with a consultant to help support the pilot districts and facilitate communication between the districts and the GaDOE.

Capacity Building Resources

- **A Dyslexia Informational Handbook** – This [Handbook](#) was produced in December 2019 by the GaDOE in collaboration with a Committee on Dyslexia composed of experts, educators, dyslexia advocates, and parents of children with dyslexia, to provide information about dyslexia and guidance to districts across the state.
- **Various resources on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)** – Georgia’s [Tiered System of Supports for Students](#) is a data-driven prevention framework that uses assessment to identify and support students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes or who experience social-emotional and/or behavioral concerns that impact learning. Each of the 23 districts across the state participating in the State Personnel Development Grant — including four of the Dyslexia Pilot Program districts — receives support in measurement and evaluation, professional learning and technical assistance, including coaching to support implementation. Schools in these districts will also receive multi-phase training and ongoing supports for refinement and sustainability purposes. MTSS provides the framework for the identification and support provided to students with characteristics of dyslexia. Because MTSS is foundational to the dyslexia pilot’s success, the GaDOE supports all pilot districts with their MTSS implementation.
- **Data supports for pilot districts to access for reporting** – Pilot districts were encouraged to use a new [MTSS application](#) within the state’s existing longitudinal data system to track and report

the data required by S.B. 48. Districts could also use this data system for progress monitoring and to determine if their interventions are effective.

- **Partnership with the RC6** – The RC6, in partnership with SREB, agreed to provide the GaDOE with the following types of supports:
 - Support for policy capacity – Includes developing annual descriptions and analyses of efforts to plan and implement the requirements of the pilot, informed by interviews with pilot leaders in the participating districts.
 - Support for human capacity – Includes developing informational resources/products (Rapid Response documents) in response to questions from the GaDOE and the pilot districts about challenges they face, such as screening for reading problems, selecting evidence-based interventions, and monitoring progress.
 - Support for organizational/resource capacity – Includes assessing and organizing informational, training, and other resources so that districts can more efficiently and effectively get the information they need about best practices (for example, in MTSS, reading instruction and interventions).

2. Direct Support for Pilot Districts

Convenings

- The GaDOE hosted an initial meeting of the dyslexia pilot districts on February 28, 2020 to review the requirements of the pilot and provide the districts with an opportunity to meet and network with each other.

Professional Learning Offerings

In 2019-20 the GaDOE provided the following professional learning opportunities for educators:

- Three Winter 2020 Literacy Institutes with a focus on dyslexia and reading difficulties
- Collaboration site using Microsoft Teams to enable districts to easily communicate with the GaDOE and each other, initiated in spring 2020
- Virtual Dyslexia Cohort Professional Learning Community to provide pilot districts with opportunities to hear and share information, launched in August 2020
- Dyslexia Professional Learning Series, begun in fall 2020
- Training sessions on MTSS implementation offered in the fall and winter 2020
- Monthly [Dyslexia Professional Learning Opportunities flyer](#) that provides a list of upcoming professional learning opportunities related to dyslexia, MTSS, and literacy instruction

A list of professional learning resources offered to the pilot districts and links to recorded trainings are provided in Appendix A.

III. Preparing for Implementation: Pilot Districts

In October 2019, the GaDOE requested that districts interested in the Dyslexia Pilot Program apply to participate. The GaDOE sought at least one rural, one suburban, and one urban school district in accordance with the guidelines in S.B. 48.

The pilot application asked each district to identify its universal screening method for reading difficulties in K-3, describe its use of an IDA-approved reading intervention program, describe how a child with dyslexia would receive instruction that meets his/her needs, and explain why the district felt ready to implement the pilot. Eight districts applied, and all were accepted into the pilot program.

As the pilot districts approached the 2020-21 school year, they focused on communicating the pilot expectations and processes to participating schools. District leaders also participated in opportunities offered by the GaDOE to receive implementation support and provide information about their implementation progress, as specified above. One pilot district withdrew its participation in August 2020 due to a change in leadership.

Based on information collected through interviews with the pilot districts, the main elements of districts’ plans for 2020-21 can be grouped into five areas of work: establishing their implementation design; screening for reading difficulties and characteristics of dyslexia; intervention for reading difficulties and characteristics of dyslexia; data-based decision making and progress monitoring; and monitoring implementation of the pilot. The information below reflects the status of district efforts in these five areas as of June 2020.

1. District Implementation Design

The table below shows the seven districts participating in the pilot as of September 2020.

Table 1. September 2020 Participating Pilot Districts

District	Location	Student Enrollment (19-20)
Charlton County Schools	South Georgia (Rural)	1,628
City Schools of Decatur	Atlanta (Urban)	5,540
DeKalb County Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	98,957
Jackson County Schools	Near Athens (Non-Rural)	7,621
Marietta City Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	8,624
Muscogee County Schools	Columbus (Non-Rural)	30,756
Ware County Schools	South Georgia (Rural)	5,809

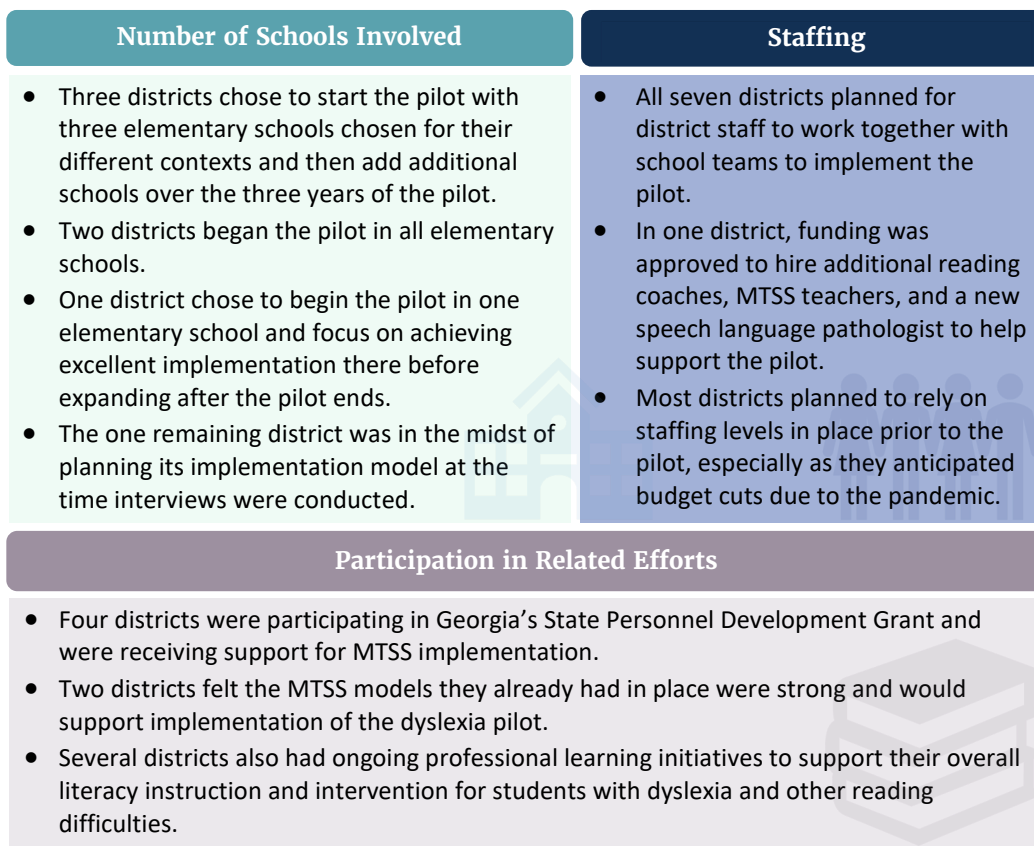
S.B. 48 gave pilot districts flexibility to determine goals and an implementation design that best fit their local contexts.

The seven pilot districts articulated similar goals for their participation in the pilot, all of which aligned with the GaDOE’s goals for the pilot. District goals included:

- strengthening Tier I literacy instruction, interventions for struggling readers, data-based decision making, and policies, procedures, and support for dyslexia and MTSS,
- improving educators’ understanding of dyslexia,
- building better focus on prevention, screening, and early intervention for reading difficulties, and
- helping the state learn how to support districts when the dyslexia screening requirement of S.B. 48 goes into effect statewide in 2024-25.

Variations in the pilot districts’ approaches to implementation of the pilot are described in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Pilot Districts’ Approaches to Implementation



2. Screening for Reading Difficulties and Characteristics of Dyslexia

S.B. 48 requires that all kindergartners and students in grades 1-3 who have been identified through the response to intervention process be screened for characteristics of dyslexia starting in 2024. In 2020-23, this requirement applies only to districts participating in the pilot program. The bill specifies that this screening include:

- phonological awareness and phonemic awareness,
- sound symbol recognition,
- alphabet knowledge,
- decoding skills,
- encoding skills, and
- rapid naming.

Most of the pilot districts planned to continue using the universal reading screening tools they were already using prior to the pilot. However, some also planned to use an additional tool because the instruments they were using for universal screening did not assess all the skills required by S.B. 48.

Overall, early reading screening instruments in use across the districts varied widely. Key findings included the following:

- Most districts planned to use multiple instruments to assess the skills required by S.B. 48.
- The most common screening tools were DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress). Interviews did not explore which version of these instruments that districts used or planned to use.
- As of summer 2020, many districts were still making decisions about their screening tools.

For a list of screening tools districts reported planning to use in 2020-21, see Appendix B.

3. Intervention for Reading Difficulties and Characteristics of Dyslexia

S.B. 48 requires that districts participating in the pilot program “[provide] for the enrollment of students with characteristics of dyslexia in an International Dyslexia Association (IDA)-approved reading program staffed by teachers trained in structured literacy programs as outlined in IDA’s Knowledge and Practice Standards” (S.B. 48, p.4). Figure 3 describes variations in the district plans for dyslexia intervention programs and strategies. For a list of intervention programs and strategies districts reported planning to use in 2020-21, see Appendix B.

Figure 3. Pilot District Planning for Dyslexia Interventions

Multiple Interventions	Types of Interventions
All but two districts planned to use multiple interventions depending on a student’s demonstrated need. Some districts planned to use as many as 10 or more interventions (to provide schools an “intervention bank” from which to select).	Interventions mentioned mostly consisted of commercial programs districts could purchase. While some of the interventions might be considered multisensory language programs appropriate for students with dyslexia and other specialized needs, others might not.

4. Data-Based Decision Making and Progress Monitoring

S.B. 48 requires that pilot districts administer assessments to determine whether intervention services provided to students with characteristics of dyslexia improve those students’ language processing and reading skills.

At the time of the interviews, most pilot districts were still deciding how to conduct progress monitoring and use the data to inform instruction and intervention (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Pilot Districts’ Plans for Progress Monitoring and Data Use

Tools	Data
Three districts planned to use DIBELS for progress monitoring; others planned to use data from their chosen screening tools.	Data collection cycles varied from weekly to every 6-8 weeks depending on the district and a student’s needs.
Three districts reported that they used proprietary Excel spreadsheets to organize and analyze student data.	Data analysis and decision-making cycles were reported as ranging from every three weeks to every 12 weeks.
One district planned to use the state’s MTSS-SLDS platform in school year 2020-21.	One district noted that its district MTSS staff planned to do weekly check-ins with teachers and school-level MTSS staff.

5. Monitoring Implementation of the Pilot

S.B. 48 requires that pilot districts report data about the operation and results of the pilot program to the GaDOE. The bill also requires the GaDOE to submit a report to legislators by December 1 of the third pilot year containing the State Superintendent’s recommendations based on the results of the pilot program.

At the time of the interviews, pilot districts were in the process of determining how they will meet the reporting requirement of the bill.

While not required by S.B. 48, a few districts described plans to conduct some monitoring of implementation using the following methods:

- Two districts had project management plans to guide implementation.
- One district planned to use a self-assessment of MTSS implementation. No district cited using the department’s rubrics for [MTSS implementation](#).
- Other districts described informal procedures such as meeting periodically as a team and reviewing feedback from stakeholders, conducting classroom walkthroughs, using the state’s teacher and leader evaluation tools, and developing “look-fors” for the pilot.

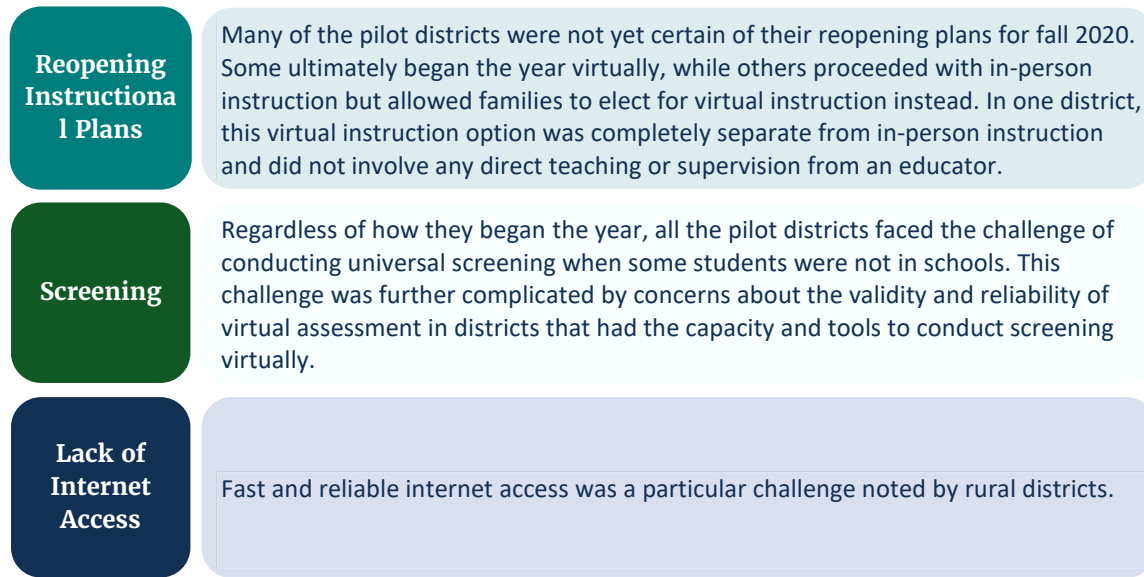
IV. Challenges

Districts reported two areas of significant challenges they faced in implementing the pilot in 2020-21.

1. COVID-19

At the time interviews were conducted, COVID-19 had created or deepened challenges for all the districts that included instructional plans for reopening, screening, and lack of internet access (Figure 5).

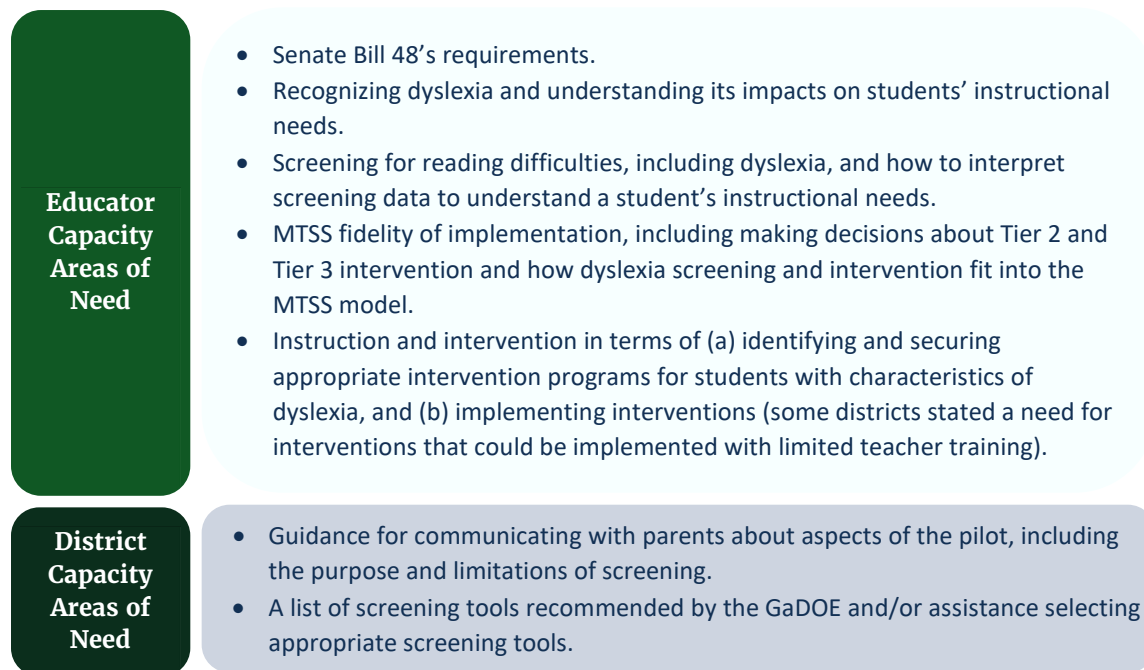
Figure 5. Challenges Due to COVID-19



2. The Capacity to Implement the Pilot with Fidelity

As shown in Figure 6, districts reported a need to increase capacity at two levels: the educator level and the district level (i.e., district builds the systemic capacity to successfully implement the pilot).

Figure 6. Challenges in Building Educator and District Capacities



V. Looking Ahead: Future Training Needs and Policy Implementation Challenges

Based on the findings about the implementation of S.B. 48 so far, as described above, the GaDOE and state legislators could consider the following actions to support implementation moving forward.

The GaDOE could continue, adjust, or augment the supports it provides in two areas.

1. Help Build Educators' Knowledge and Skills for Addressing Dyslexia

These topics for support include understanding what dyslexia is and how to recognize it; how dyslexia impacts students' instructional needs in the general education environment; and how to select effective interventions and assessments, including screening tools (the full list of areas in which to build educator capacity are listed in Figure 6 above).

2. Help Build Educators' Capacity to Implement MTSS

The GaDOE has dedicated time and resources to help districts across the state implement MTSS and support them as they fine-tune their implementation efforts. The needs of pilot districts overlap with the needs of all districts implementing MTSS. As Georgia looks ahead to statewide implementation of the dyslexia screening mandate in 2024-25, the GaDOE can lay a foundation for districts across the state by ensuring that its MTSS support addresses how to identify and serve students with characteristics of dyslexia. This includes guidance on selecting effective and appropriate Tier I literacy curricula that address the needs of diverse students; best practices for instruction, screening, and intervention in both face-to-face and digital learning environments; best practices for data analysis and decision-making, especially in relation to interpreting dyslexia screening data; and support for monitoring implementation of the pilot, which may include providing tools and processes for districts to use.

Legislators can also consider two areas of support for the implementation of the pilot.

1. Revisit S.B. 48 and Adjust it to Reflect Understandings Gained from the Dyslexia Pilot Work to Date

Interventions. Some of the pilot districts have struggled to identify and purchase or arrange training for the "IDA-approved" dyslexia intervention programs required by S.B. 48, in part because the IDA does not approve nor reject dyslexia programs and does not publish a list of approved or acceptable programs. Thus, this "IDA approved" language in the legislation is problematic for districts.

Screening. No existing screening instrument covers all the skills required by S.B. 48, meaning that screening is more costly and time-consuming than it could be if such an instrument existed. Research also shows that it may be unnecessary for an initial dyslexia screener to cover all the skills required in the bill. Consultation with experts and reexamination of what is required to screen students effectively and efficiently might assist legislators in updating the requirements of S.B. 48 to reflect best practices.

2. Consider District Funding Needs

The GaDOE received \$100,000 for the pilot in FY2020. The department used those funds for a dyslexia consultant and to provide other supports, as described in Section II of this brief. The supports provided by the department also involved the use of additional GaDOE funds from other areas. Thus far, no state funds have been appropriated to support the districts in the three-year pilot program. That is, the pilot districts received no additional funds for participating in the three-year pilot program.

Pilot districts without adequate screening tools have struggled to find affordable instruments they can use to meet the requirements of S.B. 48. Similarly, pilot districts without existing intervention programs and approaches that are appropriate for students with characteristics of dyslexia have struggled to figure out how they can acquire these without additional resources.

These challenges facing the pilot districts likely reflect difficulties that districts across Georgia will face in 2024-25 if no financial support is provided to help them comply with the law's requirements. Without funding to support implementation, students across the state will likely experience widely varying access to screening and intervention, calling questions of quality and equity to mind and putting in jeopardy the goals of S.B. 48.

Appendix A: Professional Learning Resources Provided by the GaDOE in 2020

Winter Literacy Institutes

Session strands included: Supportive Learning Environment, Professional Capacity, and Coherent Instruction. Dr. Jennifer Lindstrom and Dr. Julie Washington provided an overview of dyslexia and guidance on structured literacy.

- February 5, 2020: Cartersville, GA
- February 19, 2020: Dublin, GA
- March 4, 2020: Tifton, GA

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students

The last presentation is from a previous training session held in 2019. All sessions were led by Dr. Tessie Rose Bailey with the American Institutes for Research.

- August 25, 2020: [Overview of the MTSS Framework](#)
- September 9 or 10, 2020: [Screening](#)
- September 30 or October 1, 2020: [Progress Monitoring](#)
- November 4 or 5, 2020: [Robust Tier I](#)
- December 7 or 8, 2020: [Tiers II and III](#)

Dyslexia Professional Learning Series for Fall 2020

- October 8, 2020: [Differences are not Deficits: Cultural, Linguistic, and Socioeconomic Differences in the Classroom](#) (Dr. Julie Washington, Georgia State University)
- November 6, 2020: [A Deep Dive into Dyslexia, Session One](#) (Dr. Nora Schlesinger, Kennesaw State University)
- November 9, 2020: [A Deep Dive into Dyslexia, Session Two](#) (Dr. Nora Schlesinger, Kennesaw State University)
- November 10, 2020: [The Impact of Language Variation on Development: What Do We Know?](#) (Dr. Julie Washington, Georgia State University)
- November 13, 2020: [A Deep Dive into Dyslexia, Session Three](#) (Dr. Nora Schlesinger, Kennesaw State University)

Appendix B: Screening Tools and Intervention Programs Reported by Districts

The following two tables summarize information gathered during interviews with the seven pilot districts in summer 2020.

Screening Tools Pilot Districts Planned to Use in 2020–21

Acadience (1 district)	KTEA-3 Dyslexia Index (1 district)
Benchmark Phonics (1 district)	Lexercise Mississippi Screener (1 district)
DEST-2 (1 district)	MAP (5 districts)
DIBELS (3 districts)	Reading Ready (1 district)
Fountas and Pinnell (1 district)	Renaissance STAR suite (2 districts)

Note. Interviews did not explore which version of these instruments that districts used or planned to use.

Intervention Programs and Strategies Pilot Districts Planned to Use in 2020–21

95 Percent	Acadience
*Foundations	Classworks
*Just Words	Decoding Power/Journeys
Lexia Core5	Edmentum
MaxScholar	Georgia’s Early Intervention Program (generally)
Mindplay	Fast ForWord
*Orton-Gillingham	Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention
*Sunday System by Winsor Learning	iReady
System 44	Pathways
*Wilson Reading	Wonder Works/Reading Wonders

*Interventions that are suggested in the Georgia Department of Education’s Dyslexia Informational Handbook or noted by the publisher as being designed specifically for dyslexia are in **bold**.*

** Denotes interventions recognized by the International Dyslexia Association as [multi-sensory language programs](#).*