Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis

2020–2021: Year 1 of Implementation

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The purpose of this brief is to provide information about the first year of implementation of the three-year Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program. The Region 6 Comprehensive Center (RC6) at SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the RC6 partner, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), developed this brief at the request of, and in collaboration with, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). This is the second brief; the first brief, *Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis: 2019-2020*, provided information on the planning year of the pilot.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to provide information about the first year of implementation of the three-year Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program. The Region 6 Comprehensive Center (RC6) at the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the RC6 partner, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), conducted this descriptive work on the Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program at the request of, and in collaboration with, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). This 2020–21 brief is the second brief produced. It follows the *Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis: 2019–2020*, which provided information on how pilot districts approached the planning year of the pilot. The current brief is based on virtual interviews conducted with key Dyslexia Pilot Program leaders in each of the seven pilot districts in June 2021.

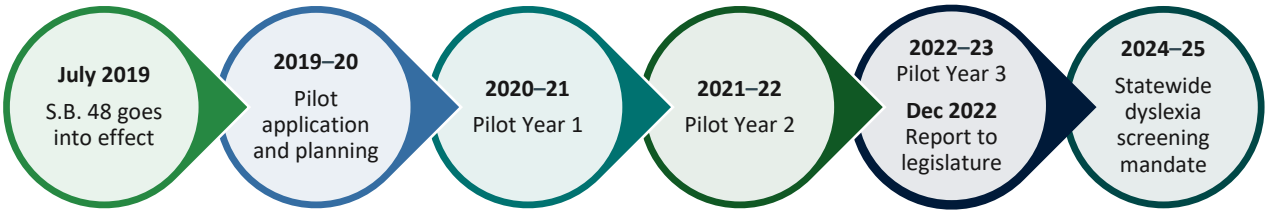
The brief begins with a short description of Georgia Senate Bill 48 (S.B. 48), which established the Dyslexia Pilot Program. Following this is a summary of how the GaDOE structured its leadership of the pilot and a description of the work the GaDOE and the seven pilot districts completed in Year 1 (2020–21) of the three-year pilot program. Important aspects of the pilot districts' implementation of the pilot requirements are summarized, including successes, challenges, and needs expressed by the pilot districts. The brief concludes with considerations for the GaDOE and the Georgia legislature as they look to support the pilot in the coming years. (An executive summary is available on the GaDOE Dyslexia webpage.)

Senate Bill 48

In 2019, the Georgia Assembly passed Senate Bill 48 into law. The bill requires local school systems to begin screening all kindergarten students and students in grades 1–3 who have been identified through the Response to Intervention process for characteristics of dyslexia beginning in the 2024–25 school year (Georgia Code §20-2-159.6 or S.B. 48).

To prepare for this statewide mandate in the 2024–25 school year, the bill also requires that the GaDOE conduct a three-year Dyslexia Pilot Program (2020–23). Seven districts were selected by the GaDOE to be part of the pilot. The requirements of the pilot districts, as outlined in S.B. 48, are identified at the beginning of the sections that follow in part two of this report.

Figure 1. Timeline of the Georgia Dyslexia Pilot



State Infrastructure and Support for Pilot Districts

After the passage of S.B. 48 in 2019, the GaDOE began its work to support implementation of the bill's requirements and the pilot. These efforts went well beyond the requirements of S.B. 48. In 2019–20, the work included the following:

S.B. 48 required the GaDOE to create a dyslexia informational handbook that includes guidance, technical assistance, and training to assist all local school systems in the implementation of evidence- based practices for instructing students with characteristics of dyslexia.

- Establishing a lead team at the agency.
- Contracting with a dyslexia pilot consultant to provide direct support to districts.
- Developing the *Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook*.
- Providing various resources on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).
- Initiating a partnership with the RC6 and SREB to analyze pilot implementation.
- Reviewing pilot program progress at monthly cross-division meetings of GaDOE staff from various divisions, including English Language Arts (ELA), MTSS, and Special Education.

(For more details, see the *Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis 2019-20*.)

In addition, the GaDOE expanded its direct supports for the pilot districts in 2020–21, as described below.

Professional Learning Resources

In 2020–21, the GaDOE provided the following supports for educators:

- Professional learning, including the following (for a full list of professional learning resources offered to the pilot districts in 2020–21 and links to recorded trainings, see Appendix A):
  - Literacy Institutes with a focus on dyslexia and reading difficulties.
  - Dyslexia Professional Learning Series.
  - Training sessions on MTSS implementation.
- Virtual Dyslexia Pilot Cohort Professional Learning Community. The GaDOE collaborated with the RC6 and SREB to facilitate three meetings, in August 2020, January 2021, and May 2021. District staff had the opportunity to share experiences, discuss challenges, and hear valuable information related to implementation.
- Collaboration site using Microsoft Teams to enable districts to easily communicate with the GaDOE and each other.
- Monthly communications about upcoming Dyslexia Professional Learning Opportunities related to dyslexia, MTSS, and literacy instruction were made available on the GaDOE Dyslexia webpage.

II. The First Year of Implementation

Seven districts participated in the Pilot Program in 2020–21, as seen in the figure and table below.

Figure 2. 2020–21 Participating Pilot Districts

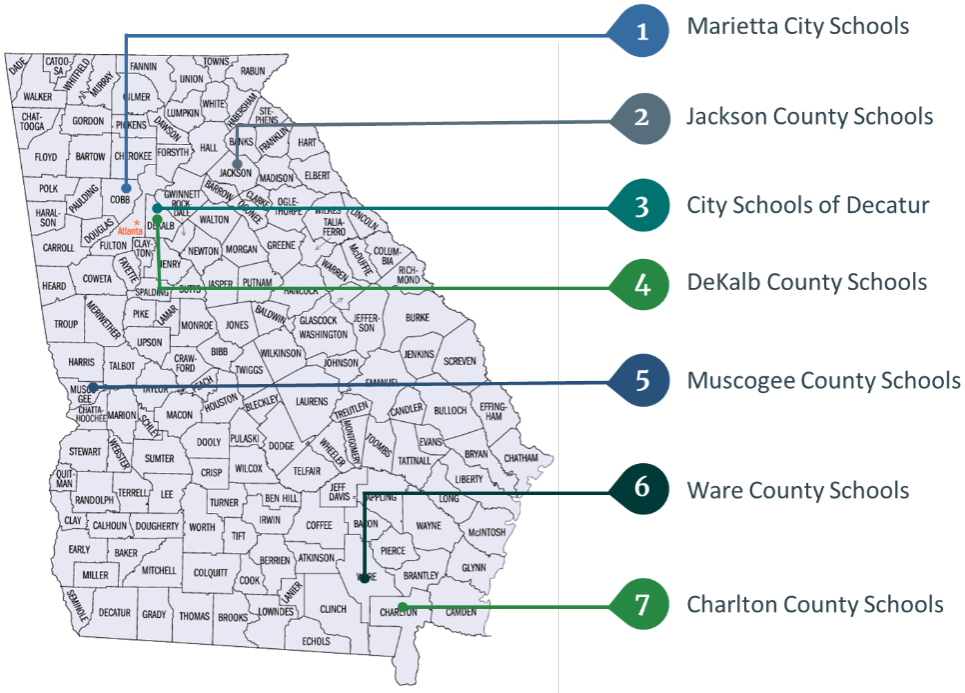


Table 1. Pilot District Location and Student Enrollment

District	Location	Student Enrollment, 2020–21
1. Marietta City Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	8,523
2. Jackson County Schools	Near Athens (Non-Rural)	8,675
3. City Schools of Decatur	Atlanta (Urban)	5,658
4. DeKalb County Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	92,353
5. Muscogee County Schools	Columbus (Non-Rural)	30,514
6. Ware County Schools	South GA (Rural)	6,041
7. Charlton County Schools	South GA (Rural)	1,648

S.B. 48 gave pilot districts flexibility to determine goals and an implementation design that best fit their local contexts. Based on information collected through interviews with the pilot districts, implementation efforts in 2020–21 can be grouped into four areas:

1) District Approach to Pilot Implementation.
2) Screening for Reading Difficulties and Characteristics of Dyslexia.
3) Reading Instruction and Intervention.
4) Data-Based Decision Making and Progress Monitoring.

The following sections provide an overview of the status of district efforts in these four areas as of June 2021.

1. District Approach to Pilot Implementation

Number of Schools Participating

At the end of the 2020–21 school year, districts shared that, overall, they were able to implement the pilot as they had planned. This was despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic forced educators to change their daily routines, sometimes drastically and repeatedly, in ways that made elements of the planned work extremely difficult.

A total of 97 schools were involved in 2020–21 across the seven pilot districts, as shown in Table 2.

S.B. 48 gave pilot districts flexibility to establish an implementation design that best fit their local contexts. Districts could start small and scale up over time, start district-wide from the beginning, or choose another design in between.

Table 2. District Approaches to Implementation and Schools Involved in 2020–21

Implementation Approach	Pilot Districts	Total Schools Involved
District-wide implementation	3	87
Start with three schools and scale up in subsequent years	3	9
One pilot school for all three years of the pilot	1	1
Total	**7**	**97**

Factors Supporting and Hindering Implementation

Factors Supporting. Numerous factors contributed to districts' abilities to implement the pilot as planned in 2020–21. Interviewees reported eight aspects of their district context, school context, and daily practice that supported implementation.

Figure 3. Factors Supporting Successful Implementation in 2020–21

District Size

Districts with smaller student bodies had fewer students to screen. This helped them become familiar with individual students and their needs. Having fewer schools to manage was also described as a benefit.

Starting Small

Beginning implementation in fewer schools was helpful for some districts because they were able to learn and practice the process on a small scale first.

Technology Expertise

In some districts, staff's preexisting expertise with technology made it easier to adapt to COVID-19-related changes, like virtual screening and instruction.

Low Staff Turnover

Low staff turnover in some districts made it easier for them to move forward without having to train many new staff members.

Existing MTSS Structures and Processes

Several districts said existing MTSS structures and processes helped them maintain momentum for the pilot in a school year fraught with unexpected changes and challenges.

Buy-In
Buy-in from parents and the school community for addressing dyslexia and overall reading instruction provided support for the work in a couple of districts.
Project Management
One district described its efforts to guide implementation of the pilot using a project management approach, including establishing a project management team, organizing the pilot requirements into three phases and a series of tasks, assigning due dates for deliverables at the end of each team meeting, and soliciting feedback from schools and using this feedback to adjust plans.
Resources
Interviewees spoke about resources internal to their districts that helped them in their work. They leaned on reading coaches and other staff members with deep knowledge of reading instruction or of specific student groups—like English learners—or instructional methods. Some of these staff members gained their expertise from the state's dyslexia endorsement. A few districts also took advantage of contacts they had formed in other districts and the knowledge of staff in their local GLRS branches and RESAs. Nearly every district also reported that they used multiple state-provided resources to support their work. Most said that the professional learning opportunities offered by the GaDOE were helpful, as was the *Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook*. Two districts mentioned seeking support from the GaDOE's dyslexia pilot consultant.

Factors Hindering. Districts also reported two aspects of their district and school context and daily practice that hindered successful implementation of the pilot.

Figure 4. Factors Hindering Successful Implementation in 2020–21

Staff Turnover
Staff turnover was high in one district, requiring it to make significant efforts to train new staff at the beginning of the year.
Student Participation
One district reported that loss of student participation in the virtual learning required by COVID-19 impacted screening and intervention, as well as instruction in general. This district reported that student participation in screening was down by more than 30% from the previous school year. English learners were hit particularly hard because district staff often struggled to collaborate with them and their families, and they often had no one at home to help with virtual learning.

Expected Changes to Implementation Approach in 2021–22

More than half of districts expected to alter their approaches to implementing the pilot in the coming school year. Three districts planned to expand the pilot, and several districts also expected to make changes to their structure and procedures, as described below.

Figure 5. Expected Changes to Implementation Approach in 2021–22

Expand the Pilot	• Add additional schools. • Make information about the pilot widely available to school leaders and allow new schools to join the pilot if they choose.
Adjust Structures & Processes	• Involve more parents by offering virtual meeting options. • Strengthen expectations for schools: require an MTSS facilitator in each school implementing the pilot. • Strengthen organization to manage an expansion of the pilot and increase the consistency of pilot and MTSS structures. • Improve documentation of the district's structures and processes to improve the consistency of information provided to schools. • Improve collaboration and efforts to work across departments.

2. Screening for Reading Difficulties and Characteristics of Dyslexia

All seven pilot districts reported conducting universal screening for K-3 students in 2020–21, as required by S.B. 48. Some districts also included Pre-K students in the screening. Four districts conducted universal reading screening for students beyond the third grade.

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. The bill specifies that this screening must include phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, sound symbol recognition, alphabet knowledge, decoding skills, encoding skills, and rapid naming.

Staffing

Training for Conducting Screening. Most districts either provided their own training to staff on conducting screening or brought in trainers from the screening tool publisher to provide training.

Staff Involved in Screening and Analyzing Data. A variety of school staff were involved in *conducting* screening in the pilot districts. Classroom teachers were the most common type of staff, reported by more than half of the seven pilot districts. Other staff involved in screening included school administrators and special education teachers. Two districts said their schools had assessment teams. In one of these districts this assessment team was composed of counselors, assistant principals, and special educators; in the other, the team included Early Intervention Program (EIP) teachers and paraprofessionals.

Different types of staff were also involved in *analyzing* screening data. At the school level, teachers and administrators were the staff most frequently reported as involved, followed by interventionists. Other staff included EIP teachers, coaches, and school psychologists. One district said a district-level team of staff was also involved in data analysis and decision-making.

Timing of Screening Process

Districts reported conducting universal screening three times a year, in fall, winter, and spring. They described varying approaches to timing the screening windows. One district reported that screening took two to five days per school, while another said it took three to four days per grade. Four districts gave schools a two- or three-week window to complete each round of screening.

Screening Tools

Pilot districts described the use of two types of screeners in 2020–21. These are summarized in the figure below. A total of 23 different universal and additional screening tools were identified by the pilot districts. It was common for districts to use more than one screening tool, and four districts said they used four or more. (For a full list of screening tools districts used in 2020–21, see Appendix B.)

Figure 6. Overview of Screening Tools Used in 2020–21

Universal Screening
• A total of 13 universal screening tools were identified by the seven pilot districts. • There was little overlap across districts, with only four of the universal tools being used by more than one district: Acadience, MAP products, Star Early Literacy, and Star Reading.
Multistage Screening
• In five districts, students who met certain criteria on the universal screener were further assessed using one of 10 different tools. • There was no overlap across districts; none of these tools was used by more than one district.

Pilot districts described a number of different considerations for selecting screening tools for 2020–21. The main considerations are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 7. Screening Tool Selection Considerations in 2020–21

Familiarity	S.B. 48
More than half of districts reported continuing to use screening tools they already had in place prior to the pilot.	Two districts explicitly discussed taking the skill areas required by S.B. 48 into account.
Data	**COVID-19**
Several districts looked for tools that informed instruction and intervention by providing detailed information about specific skills.	The challenges of virtual learning (and screening) in 2020–21 affected districts' screening tool choices.

Screening Process

Districts approached the screening process in different ways, though most used one or more assessments beyond the universal reading screener(s). There were two approaches: multi-stage screening and single-stage screening. One district had not yet decided on its approach.

Five districts reported using a multi-stage screening process, where all students were screened using a universal reading screening tool, followed by additional, more specific screening for certain students.

The purpose of this additional level of assessment was to dig more deeply into specific skills and gather data that could be used to inform intervention and identify possible characteristics of dyslexia.

The five districts implementing multi-stage screening had established different decision rules for identifying students for further assessment based on universal screening results, as listed below:

- Below the 15th percentile.
- Below the 20th percentile.
- Below the 25th percentile.
- Between the 20th and 40th percentiles.
- Below an established "risk score" based on a district-created spreadsheet of student-level screening data.

Four of these five districts used two stages of screening. One had a three-stage screening process in which students who scored low on both the universal and second-round screeners then received a third, even more specialized assessment.

One district used a single-stage screening process. This district conducted universal screening, set goals for students based on the results of that screening, and monitored progress toward those goals. Students who were not making adequate progress were referred for an evaluation for special education eligibility.

One district did not conduct dyslexia-specific screening or seek to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia in 2020–21. This district expects to do so in 2021–22 because its universal screening tool's publisher is adding a dyslexia screener to that tool. The exact process has not yet been decided.

Identifying Students With Characteristics of Dyslexia

Current GaDOE guidance does not specify cut scores or decision rules for identifying students for additional screening or as having characteristics of dyslexia. As such, each pilot district developed decision rules for itself. One consulted with an expert at a local university but still reported feeling "uneasy" about making the decision about a cut score without further direction from the GaDOE. The complexities involved in teasing out English learners who might have characteristics of dyslexia from those whose screener results just reflected their growing mastery of English were also a concern.

As described previously, five districts used multiple stages of screening and assessment—often in addition to other information like teachers' observations and classroom data—to identify weaknesses in specific skills that could indicate dyslexia. The sixth district, a small one, chose to consider universal screening and progress monitoring data in addition to other qualitative and quantitative information about students and move forward with a special education evaluation for those students who were not making adequate progress with intervention.

Four pilot districts reported information about the number of students they identified as having characteristics of dyslexia in 2020–21. One district identified about twice as many students as in previous years and attributed this to a more robust screening process that included Pre-K students in addition to K-3. Another district reported that more than half of the students who received its second-level screener were ultimately identified as having characteristics of dyslexia, indicating that the district's screening process and decision rules were working well. One interviewee noted hearing from

staff that there were no surprises with regard to the students who were formally identified as having characteristics of dyslexia—in most cases, these students were already receiving intervention and being monitored closely due to the strength of the district's existing screening processes.

Several districts observed that the enhanced screening they implemented due to the pilot helped them better target intervention to students' specific needs, whether or not those students were identified as having characteristics of dyslexia.

Expected Changes to Screening in 2021–22

None of the pilot districts expressed that they expected to make changes to their overall screening process in the coming year, but more than half knew that their screening tools would be changing as shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. Expected Changes to Screening in 2021–22

Collect Additional Data	One district planned to add one or more additional screening tools and ask parents about their history of reading problems.
Replace a Screening Tool	Two districts will be replacing an existing screening tool with a different one to better meet their needs.
Publisher Changing Screening Tool	In one district, the screening tool publisher will add a rapid automatic naming assessment for use in 2021–22; in another, the publisher is adding a new dyslexia screener within the current tool.

3. Reading Instruction and Intervention

District interviewees shared that participating in the Dyslexia Pilot Program revealed to them the need for their districts to focus more on improving core reading instruction for all students. Core reading instruction is not addressed by S.B. 48. However, interviewees reflected that strong core reading instruction provided by well-trained teachers who are supported by quality reading curricula and other instructional materials is the critical foundation for reading and the first step in preventing reading difficulties. All students receive core reading instruction, so it is important that the reading curricula and instructional materials being used equip teachers to address the learning needs of as many students as possible.

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).

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students (MTSS) is the framework the GaDOE recommends districts and schools adopt to provide a comprehensive, data-based approach to teaching and learning. The framework consists of three tiers of support intended to encourage positive educational outcomes for all students. The first, Tier 1, is core instruction, provided to all students. Students who need support beyond core instruction receive either targeted Tier 2 or intensive Tier 3 intervention in addition to Tier 1 instruction. The boundaries between Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention can be determined in different ways, based on differing school and district contexts and student needs. For more information about MTSS in Georgia, visit the GaDOE's MTSS webpage.

Core/Tier 1 Curricula and Instruction

Curricula. A curriculum consists of the lessons and content students are taught in a given grade or program of study, and multiple curricula may be used in the classroom. Pilot districts reported using a total of 12 different Tier 1 reading curricula in 2020–21. There was little overlap in the curricula districts reported using. Only two curricula—Wilson Fundations and Reading Wonders—were used by more than one district, and these were used by only two districts each. A majority of districts used more than one curriculum—as many as four, in some cases—which reflects districts' recognition that gaps in one curriculum required supplementation with another. Tier 1 curricula were an aspect of reading instruction that most districts identified as an area they could improve, and more than half of the pilot districts reported that their experience in the pilot in 2020–21 revealed a need to change their Tier 1 reading instruction to provide a better foundation for literacy. (For a list of curricula districts used in 2020–21, see Appendix C.)

Instruction. Beyond changes to curricula, the pilot districts reported a number of efforts that were underway to improve early reading instruction in 2020–21 as important context for their dyslexia pilot work. These efforts are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 9. Efforts to Improve Tier 1 Reading Instruction in 2020–21

Professional Development

- All seven pilot districts reported either having efforts underway or plans to provide teachers—and other staff, in some cases—with professional learning to improve Tier 1 reading instruction.
- Several districts shared details about the training topics, which included how to use a specific curriculum and information on the science of reading and dyslexia.

Efforts to Improve Core Curriculum

- One district monitored and supported school implementation of existing curriculum materials to encourage fidelity.
- One district required 30 minutes per day of phonics instruction.
- In one district, schools began buying large sets of decodable texts to use during core instruction.

Other

- One district used CARES Act funds to hire three support teachers to strengthen co-teaching.
- One district planned to change the master schedule for 2021–22 to designate time for intervention.
- District staff in one district began to work across departments (e.g., ELA, ESOL, MTSS teams) to unify their approach to instructional walkthroughs and feedback.
- Some districts also noted that schools were beginning to adjust their approach to teaching reading in small ways "where they could" to include strategies more reflective of a structured literacy approach.

Intervention for Students Who Need Additional Support

Effective intervention for students who need support beyond core instruction is key to addressing students' difficulties in the MTSS framework. Intervention consists of targeted (Tier 2) or individualized (Tier 3) instruction provided to students in addition to core instruction. Commercial intervention programs are sometimes used, but evidence-based instruction from teachers who are responsive to students' specific needs is the best way to ensure that students receive the support they require.

In interviews conducted in June 2020 for the previous implementation analysis, pilot districts noted that, contrary to the requirement for International Dyslexia Association (IDA)-approved reading programs in S.B. 48, the IDA does not approve or endorse reading programs designed for students with dyslexia. Thus, districts had to do their own research on potential interventions. The GaDOE did, however, include a list of example interventions for students with dyslexia in the 2019 version of the *Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook*, and many of the interventions identified by the pilot districts can be found there.

Interventions for Students Needing General Support in Reading. There was little consistency in terms of the interventions districts used for students who needed general support in reading. A total of 18 different interventions were mentioned across the seven pilot districts, and some districts reported using as many as seven. Only four interventions were used by more than one district: Fundations, MaxScholar, Wilson Read Live, and Orton-Gillingham-based intervention strategies. (For a list of interventions districts used in 2020–21, see Appendix D.)

Interventions for Students Needing Dyslexia-Specific Support in Reading. The seven pilot districts reported using five different dyslexia-specific interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia: Lexia Core5, MaxScholar, Mindplay, Wilson Read Live, and individualized Orton-Gillingham-based interventions.

Districts reflected that they were exploring how best to provide intervention for students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia within the framework of MTSS. While research shows that most students with dyslexia can be successfully served in general education with the right instruction and intervention, some districts were still struggling with the question of how to do this, and additionally, how to determine if and when students might need to be evaluated for special education eligibility.

Two districts reported providing dyslexia-specific intervention at the Tier 2 level, and one said it occurred at Tier 3. Five districts provided structured literacy intervention to all students who needed Tier 2 or 3 support, not just students with characteristics of dyslexia. One interviewee noted that the dyslexia pilot "is MTSS for literacy," and that the district was working to help staff understand that best practices for students with dyslexia or other learning disabilities in reading were really best practices for all students.

Overall, there was significant variation in what type of intervention specific students received and at what point in the MTSS process they had access to that support.

Intervention Processes. In addition to the programs and strategies used, districts also shared details about how intervention was structured in their schools. Some aspects of structure include the staff who provide intervention, how students received intervention, and how long intervention sessions lasted. Another important aspect was the difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. This distinction is often reported as a challenge in terms of overall MTSS implementation. Several of the interviewees shared some details about the difference between each level of intervention in their districts. This information, and information about other key aspects of intervention, is summarized in the figure below.

Figure 10. Key Aspects of Intervention for Students with Reading Difficulties in 2020–21

Staffing
• Classroom teachers were key providers of intervention in six of the pilot districts. • Two districts also utilized EIP teachers, one used interventionists, and one used paraprofessionals and/or co-teachers.
Time & Method

• Five districts offered both face-to-face and computer-based intervention.
• Three districts identified expectations for intervention duration. These expectations varied:
  ○ Tier 2: Either 20 or 30 minutes daily.
  ○ Tier 3: 20 minutes per session, with sessions occurring three times weekly.

Tier 2 vs. Tier 3
• Three interviewees said a change in intensity (group size, duration, and/or frequency) elevated Tier 2 intervention to the level of Tier 3. • Two interviewees said this distinction came from using multiple strategies or using an intervention tool differently. • One interviewee said their district used a push-in model for Tier 2 intervention and a pull-out model for Tier 3.
Dyslexia-Specific
• One district reported using a greater variety of intervention strategies for students with characteristics of dyslexia. • One district used a computer-based intervention, while in another, teachers pulled lessons from the computer-based intervention and worked through them with students in person.

Intervention Decision Rules. A few districts shared information about how they made decisions about which students receive Tier 2 intervention and which students receive Tier 3.

- **District-Determined Cut Scores:** In one district, students who scored in the bottom 10% on universal screening received Tier 3 support, while students scoring between the 11th and 25th percentiles received Tier 2 support. However, the district noted that these were general criteria and not set guidelines; additional information like classroom data and teacher observations were also considered.
- **Publisher-Determined Score Range:** In another district, students who scored within a certain range on universal screening received Tier 2 intervention, and students who scored within another range received Tier 3. Guidance on these ranges was provided by the screening tool publisher.
- **Individualized Process:** One district combined data from screening with anecdotal information from school staff. District leaders reviewed screening data and selected students they thought should move forward with intervention, then shared these selections with school teams, who added notes about those students to the data document. In a collaborative meeting, the district and school teams reviewed students' data and notes and made decisions about which students required intervention or additional screening.

Districts identified these decision protocols as an area in which they need more support in the future.

Expected Changes to Instruction and Intervention in 2021–22

Most districts reported changes on the horizon for their Tier 1 reading curricula or interventions in 2021–22. Some of the expected changes were being made to address weaknesses in teachers' knowledge and skills for teaching reading. Districts were also seeking to address a lack of alignment between the principles and practices consistent with the science of reading and their current curricula. These changes are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 11. Expected Changes to Instruction and Intervention in 2021–22

Curricula Changes	• Two districts reported that their core reading curricula would be changing.
New Purchases	• One district was planning to purchase a new curriculum supplement for phonics. • One district was planning to purchase new intervention programs.
Intervention Expectations	• Two districts had plans to create more consistent expectations for how intervention is provided to students.

4. Data-Based Decision Making and Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is the collection of student data and analysis of that data to inform instruction and intervention. S.B. 48, and best practices according to the MTSS framework, hold that educators should regularly assess students receiving intervention to determine whether the intervention is providing the right type and level of support.

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.

Tools for Progress Monitoring

In 2020–21 the pilot districts used a wide variety of progress monitoring tools, the majority of which were purchased from vendors. A total of nine commercial progress monitoring products were listed, and only one of those—Acadience—was used by more than one district. A few districts also said they used locally-created progress monitoring assessments.

Several districts shared that they were pleased with their chosen progress monitoring tools because the tools assisted with data review and analysis in addition to data collection. One district said its tool made it easy for both teachers and district staff to access data; another was pleased with the charts and goal lines generated for students to help analyze whether they were making progress toward the identified targets. (For a list of progress monitoring tools districts used in 2020–21, see Appendix D.)

Timing of Progress Monitoring

There was very little commonality across the districts in how often they monitored the progress of students who needed intervention. One district reported that progress monitoring occurred weekly, one said every two weeks, one said monthly, and three reported different progress monitoring schedules depending on each student's needs or their tier of intervention (with increasing frequency from Tier 1

through Tier 3). One district reported that in 2020–21 progress monitoring was sporadic due to the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Use of Progress Monitoring Data

Data analysis and decision making can be structured in a number of different ways. Aspects of these structures include the staff and staff teaming structures involved, how frequently they meet to review data, and any decision rules they use to make data-based decisions. The pilot districts shared the following details about their approaches.

Figure 12. Key Aspects of Data Analysis and Data-Based Decision Making in 2020–21

Teaming Structure

- Four districts reported that schools used a team structure, which went by different names: MTSS teams, Team Initiated Problem Solving process (TIPS), teacher data review team meetings, and grade-level teacher meetings.
- One district reported that district staff analyzed data and communicated findings to the schools.

Staff Involved

- Teachers: 6 districts
- Instructional and MTSS coaches: 4 districts
- School administrators: 2 districts
- District staff: 2 districts
- School psychologist: 1 district
- Parents: 1 district

Frequency of Data Analysis

The frequency with which districts expected schools to analyze progress monitoring data varied:

- Every 2 weeks: 1 district
- Monthly: 1 district
- After 3–4 data points had been collected: 1 district
- Varied depending on the student's intervention tier: 1 district
- Sporadic in 2020–21: 1 district

Decision Rules

- District-wide: In four districts, district-wide cut scores on a universal screener were set to guide decisions for tier placement and/or further screening. One of these districts added that teacher professional judgement was also considered, though it was a less influential factor than in the past given the data available from the screeners.
- School-determined: In two districts, interviewees did not report the use of any district requirements or guidance for how school teams made decisions.
- Case-by-case: One district made decisions on a case-by-case basis for each student.

Expected Changes to Data-Based Decision Making and Progress Monitoring in 2021–22

District leaders reported that they anticipated two types of changes to progress monitoring for school year 2021–22. Most district leaders shared that progress monitoring was an area that needed further growth in their districts' MTSS implementation, and all expected that it would mature in the coming year.

Figure 13. Expected Changes to Data-Based Decision Making and Progress Monitoring in 2021–22

District-Wide Monitoring Tool	One district had budgeted to purchase a district-wide progress monitoring tool.
Scheduled Data Review Meetings	One district had revamped and strengthened its schedule for data review meetings, making them monthly, in the coming year.

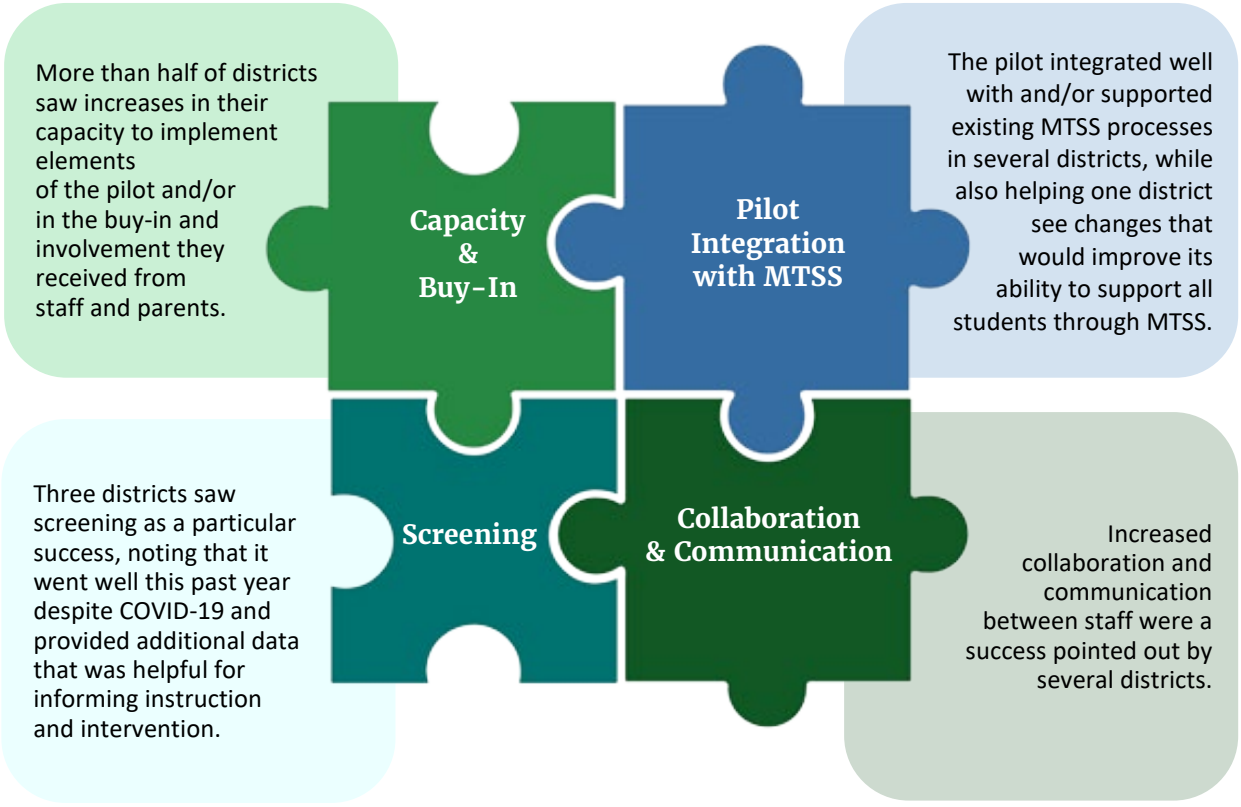
III. Successes, Challenges, and Needs for Support

The 2020–21 school year was completely outside the norm. COVID-19 impacts included quarantines of students and entire classrooms, school closures, and transitions from virtual learning to hybrid or in-person learning. Despite these background issues and their impact on all facets of schooling, the pilot districts reflected on both successes and challenges following the first year of implementation.

Successes

Pilot districts identified several types of successes they experienced during the 2020–21 school year. Together, these indicate that S.B. 48's requirements fit well into existing efforts to support students through MTSS and, in some cases, even led districts to make changes that will benefit both pilot implementation and MTSS implementation as a whole.

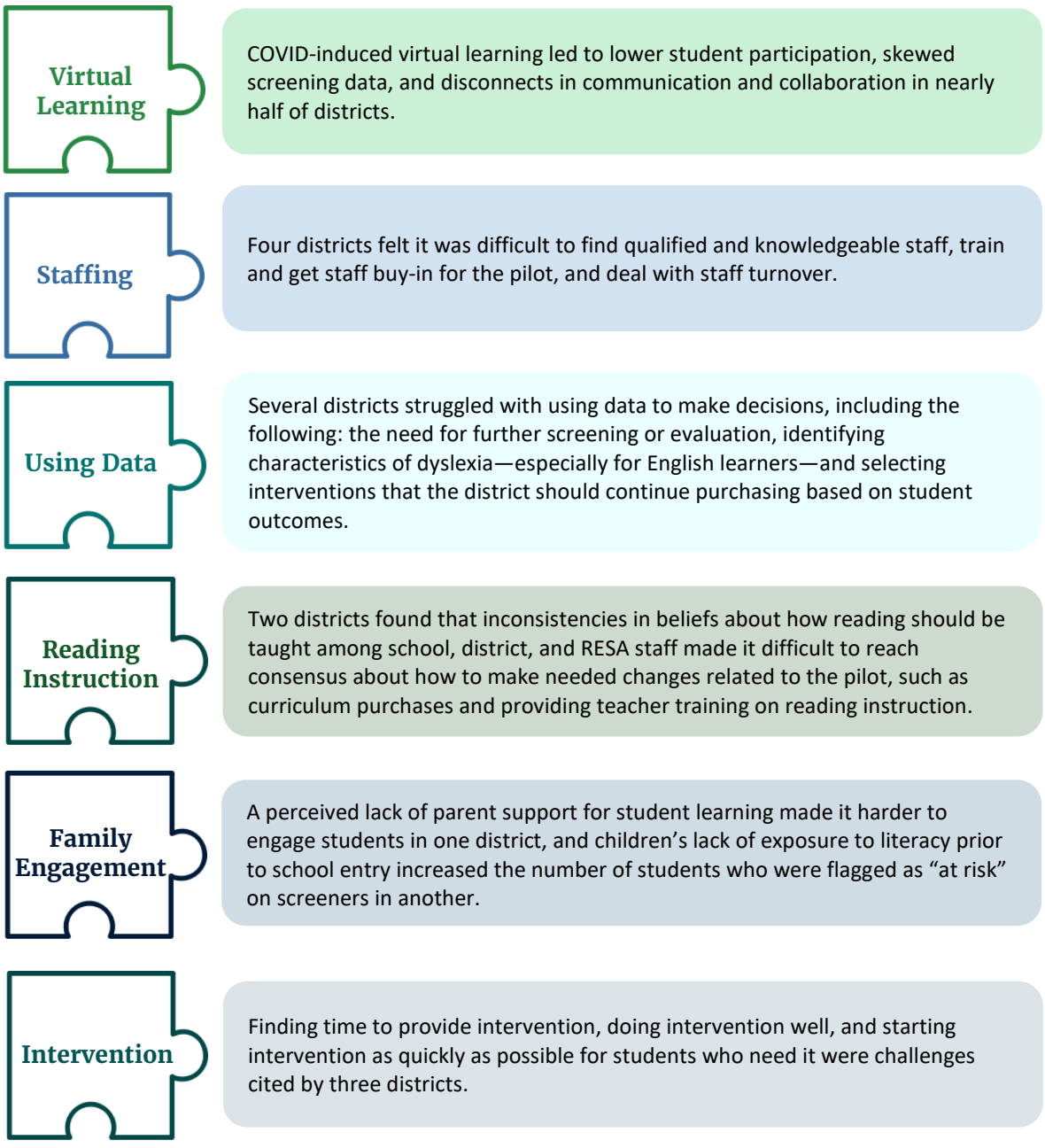
Figure 14. Successes the Pilot Districts Identified in 2020–21



Challenges

Districts also faced a variety of challenges in implementing the dyslexia pilot in 2020–21. Some related to COVID-19, but many reflect broader difficulties as districts adjusted their practices and focused on reading instruction in new ways.

Figure 15. Challenges the Pilot Districts Experienced in 2020–21



Support Needed from the GaDOE

Districts agreed on a number of things the GaDOE could do to help them continue to improve—and in some cases expand—their implementation of the pilot in the coming years.

Figure 16. Main Types of Support the Pilot Districts Need from the GaDOE in 2021–22 and Beyond

Parent Information

The number one need districts expressed was for the state to provide information to and for parents about dyslexia identification and intervention:

- what dyslexia is,
- how students with characteristics of dyslexia can be served in general education, and
- how schools identify students who do require special education services.

Interviewees expressed that parents have many questions and districts could use support with answering these questions accurately and communicating "the right things" about dyslexia to parents.

State Guidance

More than half of districts wanted additional guidance from the GaDOE for their implementation efforts, including:

- clearer state expectations for the timeline and structure of implementation;
- more guidance related to selecting screening tools, including a list of state-approved screeners; and
- decision rules for using screening data and identifying students who can be served in general education versus students who may be eligible for a 504 plan or require an evaluation for special education eligibility, especially where English learners are concerned.

Funding

Four districts expressed that more funds for implementation of the pilot would be beneficial. They said additional funds could be used to hire additional staff and pay for professional learning. One district also noted that the state could use funds to make the dyslexia endorsement more affordable for teachers.

Collaboration

Three districts said they would like more opportunities to collaborate with the other pilot districts and share information about their processes, tools, and experiences implementing the pilot. One of these interviewees also noted that the opportunity to discuss and possibly seek greater consistency in pilot practices across the districts would be valuable.

Other

Two other areas of need identified by one district each were additional training opportunities like the Deep Dive Into Dyslexia series and more monitoring.

Looking Ahead: Considerations for State Leaders

Considerations for the Georgia Department of Education

Findings from the interviews with the pilot districts, detailed above, lead to several areas of action that the GaDOE might consider as it continues to support the pilot in 2021–22 and prepares to support implementation of S.B. 48 requirements statewide in 2024–25.

Identify opportunities to enhance the information and guidance the department provides to districts to help them strengthen local decision making and practice.

District interviewees expressed a desire for the state to expand upon the information and guidance it provides in key areas of work related to the pilot, including the following:

- Communicating with parents about dyslexia and about how children with characteristics of dyslexia can be served in the general education environment and within an MTSS approach.
- A list of state-approved screening tools that meet the requirements of S.B. 48 and are valid and reliable for dyslexia identification.
- Determining which students should be considered for Section 504 plans or special education evaluations and which can be served in general education and within an MTSS approach.

Explore ways to increase opportunities for districts and state department staff to share information, reflect, plan, and learn from the pilot process.

District leaders shared that the Virtual Dyslexia Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings the department facilitated were very helpful, and they desired more such opportunities. Additionally, non-pilot districts across the state would benefit from learning from the experiences of the seven pilot districts in real time, so they can strengthen their own preparations for implementing S.B. 48 in 2024–25. The department could consider the following actions:

- Continue hosting regular meetings of the PLC for pilot districts.
- In addition to the PLC, offer more frequent informal forums for pilot districts to convene. (Note: As this brief was finalized, the department had begun hosting monthly virtual Implementation Chats for the pilot districts. These sessions exemplify the intent of this recommendation.)
- Continue to communicate the descriptive research findings on pilot implementation, such as this brief, with districts statewide and with partners, including RESAs and GLRS.

Explore opportunities to augment the department's well-regarded professional learning offerings to help districts build educators' capacity to implement the pilot and improve reading instruction.

Pilot districts reported that the GaDOE's 2020–21 professional learning offerings were of great value, and they hoped for more in 2021–22. Based on district input, topics to consider when planning future professional learning include:

- Creating decision rules for screening to accurately and consistently identify students who may need further assessment or have characteristics of dyslexia.
- Selecting interventions that are aligned to student needs and produce positive outcomes for students.
- When working with English learners, discerning the difference between the challenges inherent in learning a new language (to be addressed within the context of English language development instruction) and reading difficulties, including characteristics of dyslexia (to be addressed within the context of reading instruction and intervention).
- How to do and apply progress monitoring and data-based decision making within a MTSS approach.

The GaDOE could also increase communication about available offerings so that everyone who needs the information can easily access it.

Pinpoint ways in which diverse initiatives across the GaDOE connect and overlap to support coherence in the teaching and learning of reading. Identify opportunities to increase educator awareness of these connections and overlaps so they can streamline and strengthen their efforts.

District interviewees mentioned several different initiatives, programs, and policies that intersect to varying degrees with the work of the pilot. For example, the department could consider ways to further align the following:

- Georgia's MTSS initiative.
- Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA) grant.
- Special education and 504 regulations.
- Georgia's Early Intervention Program (EIP) and its requirements.
- School improvement efforts (CSI, TSI).
- Equity efforts supported by, for example, Title III supports for English learners and Title V supports for homeless students.

Ways the department could highlight and communicate about these connections and overlaps and help GaDOE teams and educators coordinate their efforts accordingly include:

- Analyze the various initiatives, programs, and policies, and map out the connections and overlaps in an accessible, visual format.
- Based on the identified connections and overlaps, establish action steps to coordinate efforts across teams, programs, and initiatives. These actions might relate to strategic planning, information dissemination, programmatic requirements and processes, technical assistance, and professional learning.

Consider ways to bolster financial support for districts as they tackle key elements of the pilot.

In the interviews, some pilot districts indicated that they especially need state support to help pay for:

- Professional learning, for example, on selected intervention programs.
- Hiring staff to help implement the pilot.
- Helping more educators pay for training to obtain the dyslexia endorsement.

Department leaders could consider what, if any, state-level funds might be applied to help districts address these needs. Department leaders should also consider the fact that the types of challenges and needs for funding support facing the pilot districts likely reflect difficulties that districts across Georgia will face in 2024–25.

Considerations for Legislators

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 neither approves nor rejects 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 and is not something with which they can comply.

Screening. Very few existing screening instruments cover all the skills required by S.B. 48. When educators have to use multiple tools, screening becomes even more costly and time-consuming. 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.

Continue to ensure that sufficient funds for implementing the requirements of S.B. 48 are appropriated.

During the 2021 legislative session, the General Assembly of Georgia approved House Bill 81, which includes an allocation of $1,630,000 to the GaDOE to fund the S.B. 48 screening mandate and professional development and provide for a state educational agency dyslexia specialist.

The GaDOE has since contracted with the University of Georgia to provide for the hiring of a dyslexia coordinator to manage the implementation of S.B. 48. The purpose of the dyslexia coordinator is to provide support and guidance to schools, districts, and families that pertain directly to the instruction of students with dyslexia. This person will also design resources and professional learning experiences that support schools and districts in the successful implementation of the dyslexia program as outlined in S.B. 48. Additionally, the coordinator will aid in the dyslexia screening process by assisting in the possible development of a dyslexia screener and/or by helping to identify valid and reliable screeners.

At the time this publication was finalized, the GaDOE was still determining how the remaining funds appropriated in 2021 might be best used to support the pilot districts and will consider the findings of this brief to help guide those decisions. Ongoing funding for the dyslexia coordinator is an area of need in coming years, especially when the screening requirements go statewide in 2024–25. It is likely that any funds used to help pilot districts pay for ongoing expenses—such as the use of screening tools or hiring additional staff—will need to be replenished in future years, as well.

Appendix A: Professional Learning Opportunities Provided by the GaDOE in 2020–21

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students

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 (This presentation is from a previous training session held in 2019.)

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)

Dyslexia Professional Learning Series for Spring 2021

All sessions were led by Dr. Jennifer Lindstrom with the University of Georgia.

- March 12, 2021: What is Dyslexia? What Do We Know About It?
- April 23, 2021: How to Screen for Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties
- May 7, 2021: The Intersection of Teacher Preparation, the Science of Reading, and Dyslexia

Appendix B: Screening Tools

Universal screeners districts reported using in 2020–21 included the following.

Universal Screening Tools	
Acadience (2 districts)	PALS (1 district)
Benchmark Phonics (1 district)	PPVT (1 district)
DIBELS 8th Ed. (2 districts)	Reading Inventory (1 district)
Fountas & Pinnell running records (1 district)	Star CBM (1 district)
Fluharty (1 district)	Star Early Literacy (2 districts)
iReady (1 district)	Star Reading (2 districts)
NWEA MAP Growth (3 districts)	

Second and third-level tools districts reported using in 2020–21 included the following. Each district was using a different tool.

Second/Third-Level Screening or Diagnostic Tools	
Acadience	MindPlay
Differentiated Reading Instruction	NWEA MAP Fluency
KTEA-3	Star CBM
KTEA Dyslexia Index	Woodcock-Johnson achievement measures
MaxScholar Phonics Screener	WIAT-4

Appendix C: Reading Curricula

Curricula districts reported using in 2020–21 included the following. “Curricula” as used here includes all named instructional materials used in core reading instruction.

Core Reading Curricula	
Benchmark Phonics	Journeys
Edmentum	Lexia Core5
Fountas & Pinnell	Lucy Calkins
Freckle	Orton-Gillingham strategies
Fundations	Reading Wonders
Guided Reading	Reading and Writing Workshop

Appendix D: Interventions and Progress Monitoring Tools

Intervention programs and strategies districts reported using in 2020–21 included the following.

Intervention Programs and Strategies	
Fundations *	Edmentum
Lexia Core5 †	Fast ForWord
MaxScholar †	Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention
Mindplay †	iRead
Orton-Gillingham based strategies *†	iExcel
System 44	Read180
Wilson Read Live *†	Reading Eggs
Classworks	Reading Wonder Works
Decoding Power	

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.
† Denotes interventions districts were using for students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Progress monitoring tools districts reported using in 2020–21 included the following.

Progress Monitoring Tools	
Acadience	MaxScholar
AimsWeb	MindPlay
Benchmark Phonics	Star tools
Fundations	Intervention-specific tools
Lexia	School-created data sheets
MAP Fluency	