

Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia

Synopsis

Historical Perspective

Individuals in Kansas have been working on making progress for children with dyslexia for 25 years. It was not until the Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia that much movement occurred.

The Charge

Pursuant to 2018 Sub. for HB 2602, the Task Force is to advise and make recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and the State Board of Education regarding matters concerning the use of evidence-based practices for students with dyslexia. Specifically, the bill provides the Task Force's recommendations and resource materials shall:

- Research and recommend evidence-based reading practices to address dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia for use by schools;
- Research and recommend high-quality pre-service and in-service professional development activities to address reading difficulties like dyslexia, including identification of dyslexia and effective reading interventions to be used in schools and within degree programs, such as education, reading, special education, speech-language pathology, and psychology;
- Study and examine current state and federal laws and rules and regulations, and the implementation of such laws and rules and regulations that affect students with dyslexia; and
- Identify valid and reliable screening and evaluation assessments and protocols that can be used and the appropriate personnel to administer such assessments in order to identify children with reading difficulties, such as dyslexia or the characteristics of dyslexia as part of an ongoing reading progress monitoring system, multi-tiered system of supports, and Child Find special education eligibility for students.

Work of the Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia

Our first meeting was on July 13, 2018.

- To be honest, I was a bit worried about what the Task Force would be able to accomplish.
- In most States that attempted legislative solutions for the problems involving reading failure, the process began with laws that required screenings to occur just prior to entering kindergarten or early in the fall of the student's kindergarten year.
 - Legislation in these States also required two (2) hours of professional learning experiences.
 - Several States had been successful in passing such legislation
 - The next step in the legislative process was to indicate the types of science-based curricula and interventions that could be used in public schools.
 - Many fewer States made it to this level of success with passing of various bills that dictated that the curricula and interventions be science-based.
 - Even fewer yet were legislative efforts that required that States' colleges of education train pre-service teachers in what science has determined are the best approaches to teaching reading in general and to teach reading to students with dyslexia. Only two States had any success with this very effort.
- Fortunately, Jim Porter was selected prior to our first meeting to be the chair of the task force.
 - Jim's views mirrored the members of the task force in that he believed that the children of Kansas deserved to be taught to read.
 - After Jim's remarks that we were here to help children to become competent readers, Jim asked each of us to talk about who we were, why we were there, and what we hoped to accomplish with the task force.
 - My concerns and doubts evaporated as each of you spoke. I knew that we were all on the same page to help the children of Kansas. Reading is an essential skill.
- A third of our children in Kansas and across the nation cannot read at the Basic Level. The Basic Level represents a rudimentary ability to read, so if 34% are not reading at the Basic Level, they are essentially non-readers. Fewer than 40% of our children read at the Proficient Level.
- We still have a lot of work to do.
- Fortunately, the work that was accomplished on the Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia will prove to make significant contributions to the potential for better reader skills.
 - Very few States have been able to accomplish what the Task Force accomplished.
 - Recommendations:
 - KSDE should adopt the International Dyslexia Association's Knowledge and Practice Standards.
 - KSDE should require candidates for K-6 teaching, English Language Arts, reading specialists, and special education teaching licenses to pass an exam addressing their knowledge of the Science of Reading

- The Legislature should provide funding for training for university professors to receive training in the Science of Reading
 - KSBE should require professional learning experiences for in-service teachers
 - KSBE should develop a dyslexia handbook.
 - KSBE should identify a dyslexia coordinator within KSBE.
 - KSBE should require screening for dyslexia.
 - KSBE should require districts to implement a rigorous tiered system of supports subject to external review.
 - KSBE should require accredited school districts to use structured literacy as the evidence-based approach to teaching literacy instruction.
- KSDE has adopted the recommendations and is in the process of implementing them.
 - The pandemic has caused issues with legislative actions regarding funding for the dyslexia coordinator position within KSDE.
 - Continued work to seek legislative approval for funding of this position will continue.
 - However, several KSDE employees have been assigned duties that would have been assigned to the dyslexia coordinator. So, even though there currently is not a dyslexia coordinator, those duties are being addressed.
 - Most colleges and universities are making progress toward addressing the new standards for accreditation by KSDE regarding reading.
 - Professional learning activities are occurring in many school districts.
 - Several school districts are planning to begin screening. Many are not ready.
 - School districts have had significant issues to address with regard to the pandemic including teacher shortages.
 - The Dyslexia Handbook has not been accomplished and will not until a dyslexia coordinator has been hired.

Conclusions

- The Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia addressed the issues related to reading failure and made appropriate recommendations based on the task force's findings and expertise.
- The recommendations that were made to KSDE were accepted and are being implemented.
- Some delays are likely to occur with regard to implementation, but implementation will still occur. KSDE will insure appropriate implementation.
- Although it is unfortunate that the pandemic has caused difficulties with some of the recommendations being implemented, the movement toward fulfilling the recommendations that are being implemented by KSDE continues in the correct direction.