

# Continuum of Supports and Opportunities for Improvement in Serving Students with Dyslexia and Other Academic Needs

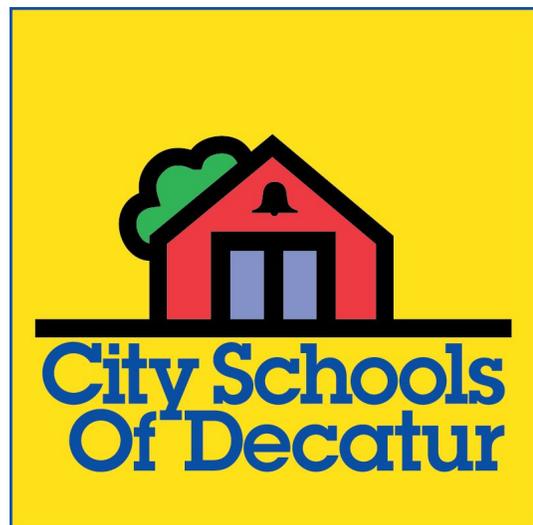
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## Summary

This document outlines the supports that are used to promote the success of all students in City Schools of Decatur (CSD), including students with dyslexia--the group that prompted CSD to critically review student supports. Student supports include school counseling, school social work, school nursing, and school psychology. These are in addition to the academic structures that support students. Academic structures include classroom instruction, Remedial Education Program (REP), Early Intervention Program (EIP), Response to Intervention (RTI), English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 504 accommodation plans, Special Education, and Gifted Education Services.

The Response to Intervention (RTI) process defines a wide array of student supports and interventions. RTI categorizes interventions and supports into tiers and works collaboratively with other support programs. The process is part of classroom education and is designed to ensure that students have been given opportunities and access to the classroom learning environment.

Tier 1 support is universal and is designed to continuously serve all students by providing them with high quality, research-based instructional, and assessment strategies. Examples of these strategies include differentiation, flexible grouping, providing clear learning targets, descriptive feedback, and goal setting. Successful implementation of Tier 1 is the first way to address the various needs of most students.



If a student needs more support, teachers, school leaders, and parents work collaboratively to develop Tier 2 research-based interventions. In Tier 2, teachers collaborate to implement data collection and monitor students' progress (referred to as "progress monitoring"). Examples of Tier 2 interventions include small group or individual repeated reading, choral reading, Check-In/Check-Out, Incremental Rehearsal, and guided problem-solving. Tier 2 interventions may occur in the classroom as well as in Early Intervention Program (EIP) classes for grades K-5, Remedial Education Program (REP) for grades 6-8, and the Decatur High School Learning Center for grades 9-12.

If a student needs more intensive support, Tier 3 interventions will be developed. In Tier 3, interventions may be similar to those in Tier 2 but may occur with more frequency (i.e., increased number of EIP and REP segments per week) and intensity (i.e., a brief one-on-one lesson with the teacher during an EIP or REP segment).

If a student continues to need more support, data will be analyzed and referral to Tier 4 programs will be made. Special education, gifted education, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are Tier 4 supports and require specifically designed learning. 504 plans are another form of support that provide accommodations within the classroom. Students with 504 plans may be in any tier. Students who are not eligible for Tier 4 services will continue to receive appropriate support via Tiers 1 through 3.

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# Continuum of Support Outline

## Classroom Instruction (Tier 1 support, universal for all students)

### Formative assessment

High-impact formative assessment practices:

- Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
- Use examples and models of strong and weak work.
- Offer regular, descriptive feedback during the learning.
- Teach students to self-assess and set goals for next steps.
- Use evidence of student learning needs to determine next steps in teaching.
- Design focused instruction, followed by practice with feedback.
- Provide opportunities for students to track, reflect on, and share their learning progress.

### Collaborative planning

- “Vertically” by subject
- “Horizontally” across grade-level, content area, and schools

### Differentiation:

- What we differentiate: product, process, content, and learning environment
- How we differentiate: readiness, interest, learner profile

### Frameworks

- EL (formerly Expeditionary Learning) Education (K-3 schools): EL Education is a school reform model that emphasizes high achievement through active learning, character growth, and teamwork. EL Education emphasizes five core practices and ten design principles that support teaching and learning in its schools. To learn more, please visit the EL Education website at [eleducation.org](http://eleducation.org).
- International Baccalaureate (PYP, MYP, DP, CP): The 4/5 Academy at Fifth Avenue (F.AVE) is an [International Baccalaureate](http://www.ibo.org) Primary Years Programme (PYP) School. This world-wide framework uses Units of Inquiry to help students assume ownership for their learning within a rigorous curriculum. Renfro Middle School (RMS) is a Middle Years Programme (MYP) within the International Baccalaureate Schools Organization. The MYP continues at Decatur High School (DHS) through Grade 10. The Diploma Programme (DP) and IB Career-related Programme (CP) are also offered at DHS.

## **Other**

- Social-Emotional Engagement - Knowledge and Skills (SEE-KS): In this professional development project, a core group of teachers learn to utilize appreciative inquiry to coach each other in ways to improve student engagement within the context of Universal Design for Learning.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): The purpose of UDL curricula is not simply to help students master a specific body of knowledge or a specific set of skills, but to help them master learning itself—in short, to become [expert learners](#).

## **Response to Intervention (RTI)**

RTI is a collaborative team function that supports teachers in developing strategies and interventions to facilitate student achievement.

- The identification process involves universal screeners, classroom assessments, and teacher referral. The instructional coach is part of the initial process, providing guidance in differentiation and effective strategies at the Tier 1 level. A referral to the school's RTI team is warranted when desired progress is not made using Tier 1 strategies.
- The RTI team develops Tier 2 and 3 interventions and also plans the progress monitoring process of collecting data. The data are analyzed to determine if the intervention is effective and what the next steps should be. It is a data-driven process of decision-making that helps insure that the student's needs are being effectively addressed until goals are achieved or a referral for an evaluation is recommended. The See-Plan-Do-Check process gives students focused attention and expertly guides the supports they receive while also guiding CSD accountability to ensure that the process is working effectively. The CSD process follows the guidelines from Georgia's Department of Education (GaDOE).

## **Tiers of Intervention**

### **Tier 1 intervention (classroom instruction)**

- Universal Screeners (MAP, DIBELS, Spelling Inventory)
- Students "at risk" identified (at or below 34th percentile rank)
- General time frame - 4 weeks of differentiation and/or other strategies

### **Tier 2**

- Problem solving meetings - target skills defined, interventions selected
- Interventions implemented, progress monitoring data collected and analyzed
- Follow-up meetings generally scheduled 4-6 weeks after initial meeting.

### **Tier 3 (also the Student Support Team [SST] level)**

- Problem solving meetings - skills defined, interventions selected
- Interventions increase in frequency, intensity, individualization.
- Follow-up meetings generally scheduled after 4-8 weeks.
- If a student's progress towards the goals for the targeted skills is not as expected after 4-8 weeks of Tier 3 interventions, a referral to the [Central Review Team](#) for possible evaluation may be considered.

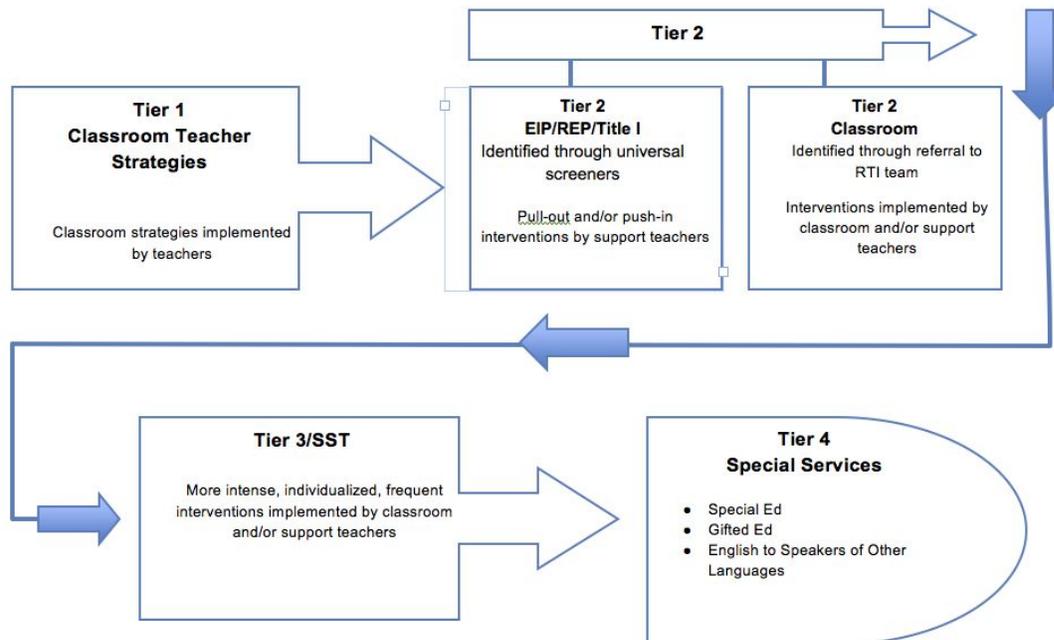
### **Tier 4**

- While being evaluated for Tier 4, students continue to receive Tier 3 interventions.
- If a student is tested and an eligibility meeting is scheduled, a minimum of 12 weeks of Tier 2 and 3 progress monitoring data is required by IDEA in order to determine eligibility for certain disabilities.
- There are federal and state timelines and deadlines that are activated when a parent signs a consent for evaluation.

### **Continuum of support**

- Interventions continue throughout all tiers as our process is a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). We strive to provide the most appropriate strategies, interventions and supports to help students achieve while being mindful that providing excessive intervention may be detrimental to student success.
- If students are not eligible for special education, they will be supported through RTI with interventions at the appropriate tier levels.
- More details are available at CSD's RTI webpage: [csdecatur.net/departments/RTI](https://csdecatur.net/departments/RTI).

## Response to Intervention (RTI) Process



## Early Intervention Program (EIP)

According to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the purpose of the Early Intervention Program (EIP) is to provide additional instructional resources to help students who are performing below grade level obtain the necessary academic skills to reach grade level performance in the shortest possible time. The EIP Placement and Exit Criteria are based on documented student achievement/performance in English/language arts, reading, and mathematics. The EIP is a part of the RTI framework for providing support to students. The EIP provides a structure for additional instruction to ensure students meet grade level expectations at the elementary level. Refer to GaDOE [Rule 160-4017](#) ([GaDOE EIP Website](#)).

### EIP Process:

- Uses universal screeners
- At risk students identified ([Criteria in GaDOE FAQ](#))
  - Eligibility:
    - 34th percentile or below on local assessment (MAP)
    - Retention
    - Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) (level 1 and level 2)
    - EIP rubric (math and reading)
- Intervention provided
- Progress monitored

- Program exit procedures as outlined by the GaDOE are followed when a student has reached grade level performance

## Remedial Education Program (REP)

[REP](#) is a state-funded middle school program that provides support for students who are struggling or have a poor foundation in reading, writing, or mathematics. Students in grades 6-12 may be eligible for services if they meet two or more of the following criteria:

- Student has been through the formal RTI process (Tier 2 or Tier 3/SST) to support placement in remedial education.
- The student has failed either a language arts or mathematics course in grades 6-12.
- The student is receiving services under Title I
- The student has recommendations by the teacher who has documented any of the following student information:
  - Low performance in reading
  - Low performance in mathematics
  - Inability to verbally express ideas or to write or dictate a meaningful sentence.

## Title I Services

[Title I](#) is a part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA and previously No Child Left Behind [NCLB]). This act provides federal funds through the GaDOE to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged children to help ensure that all children meet challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards.

For example, Title I support services include:

- Additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving, economically disadvantaged students master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects
- Extra instruction in reading and mathematics
- After-school and Saturday school programs to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum

Clairemont Elementary School and DHS are Title I Targeted Assistance Schools. Title I schools with less than the 40 percent schoolwide threshold of students from low-income families offer a "targeted assistance program" in which the school identifies students who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the State's challenging academic achievement standards. Targeted assistance schools design, in consultation with parents, school staff, and district staff, an instructional program to meet the needs of those students.

## English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program

English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is a state-funded instructional program for eligible students in grades K-12. The ESOL program is a standards-based curriculum emphasizing academic and social language development.

Students qualify based on the following:

- Home Language Survey
- [WIDA](#) Screening assessment
- [ACCESS](#) for English Learner's assessment

## Section 504

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 \(amended\)](#) is a federal civil rights law that has been in effect since 1973. In 2008 the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), Public Law 110-235, updated regulations. Section 504 prohibits school districts which receive federal financial assistance from discriminating against persons with disabilities. All programs and activities of a school system are subject to 504 requirements. Section 504 has a requirement that the educational system provide the full range of accommodations and services necessary for students with disabilities to participate in and benefit from public school education and activities. 504 accommodation plans are designed to provide access to students supporting their individual needs related to their disabling condition.

### **504 Process:**

- Child Find Screenings - School Health Form, Enrollment Form, teacher report, parent request
- Parent consent for evaluation
- Evaluation by school psychologist - review all reports, teacher questionnaires
- Eligibility determination
  - Identified disability in evaluation
  - Limits one or more major life activities
  - Substantial impact on major life activity
- If eligibility is established, a 504 accommodation plan is developed and implemented
- Required parent notice is provided
- Plan is reviewed at least every two years
  - Continue Eligibility
  - Discontinue Eligibility

## Special Education (IDEA)

Special education is governed by the [Individuals with Disabilities Act \(IDEA\)](#). If a student's disability adversely affects educational performance, the student may be eligible for special

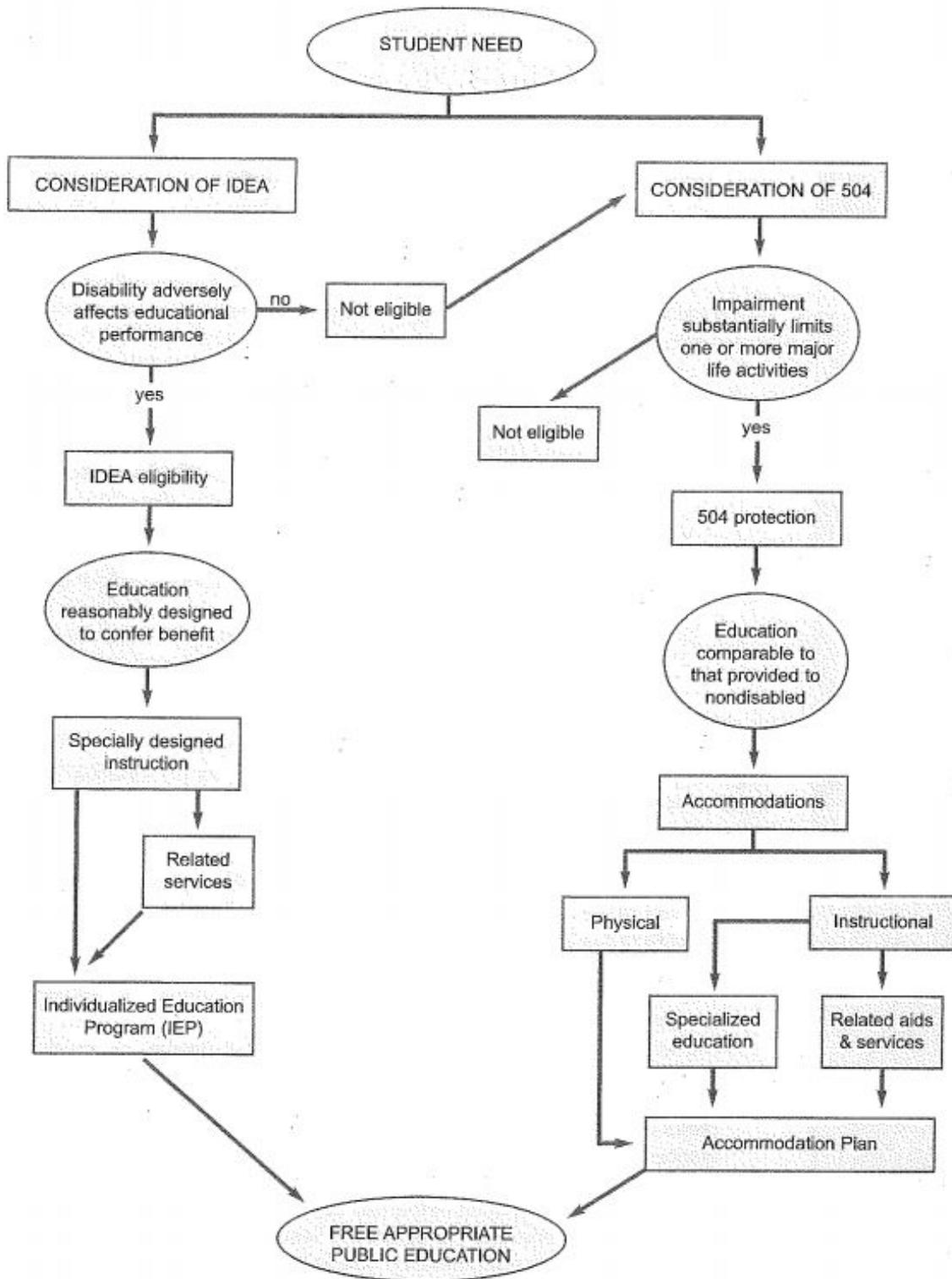
education services which are designed to improve academic performance. Individual education teams are charged to collaboratively design Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students that address their unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses. IEP teams are charged to provide services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and to ensure that students are offered a free and appropriate education (FAPE). Specially designed instruction is provided through IEP services and related services.

A number of child find procedures are in place to identify students with disabilities. These include the RTI process at each school (see details above), teacher report, parent request, transition from Babies Can't Wait (for those under 3), and quarterly community child find screenings at Early Childhood Learning Center.

**Steps in identification of disabilities once referral has been made:**

- Consent to evaluate signed by parents
- Interventions or progress monitoring of areas of concern conducted
- Evaluation completed by psychologist followed by an eligibility meeting (within 60 days of receipt of consent form)
  - Adverse effect on educational performance needed for eligibility
    - Eligibility criteria defined by State. Example: [Specific Learning Disability \(SLD\)](#)
  - If eligible, IEP developed
- IEP meeting to put services in place (within 30 days of eligibility meeting)
- Specially designed instruction provided to address individualized goals
- Re-evaluation of eligibility occurs every three years
  - Continue eligibility
  - Evaluate - conduct eligibility meeting
    - Add or withdraw eligibilities
    - Determine student might not be eligible
- IEP is reviewed annually

# IDEA/504 Flowchart



## Gifted Education

The elementary gifted program is called Links and the middle and high school program is called Bridges. Both names are symbolic of the need of gifted students for extension of learning beyond what is appropriate for typical students of the same age/grade.

The mission of the Gifted Program is to work directly with students and faculty designing instruction and creating a supportive school environment to meet the intellectual, academic, social, emotional, and motivational needs of gifted or high-ability learners.

### Goals of gifted programs:

- Ensure equitable access to appropriate services for all gifted learners by using the student identification process and measures defined by Georgia Board of Education (GaBOE) policy, employing assessment of multiple-criteria (mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation).
- Continually use a variety of data to assess student progress and identify student needs.
- Employ differentiated curricula and research-based instructional practices to address the range of needs of gifted learners, including critical and creative thinking, problem-solving activities, and social and self-awareness.
- Provide services that are comprehensive, structured, sequenced, and appropriately challenging to meet the demonstrated needs of K-12 gifted learners.
- Provide ongoing professional learning for school personnel annually in regards to the nature and needs of gifted learners and appropriate instructional strategies and curricula.

### Gifted Identification Process

- Universal screeners: MAP, CogAT, referrals (teacher, student, parent)
- Interventions
- Gifted Review
  - If referred for evaluation, consent to evaluate issued
  - If not referred, recommendations sent to school
- Evaluation
- Eligibility - [Need 3 out of 4 in State of Georgia](#)
  - Mental Ability at or above 96th percentile
  - Achievement at or above 90th percentile rank
  - Motivation at or above the 90th percentile rank
  - Creativity at or above the 90th percentile rank
- Placement and Service
  - Identified students receive a minimum of 5 segments (i.e., 50-minute class periods) of service per week or the yearly equivalent.
  - Service is based on student needs and area of identified strengths.

- Most gifted Identified students in K-8 receive a combination of resource service outside of the classroom and cluster or collaborative instruction in their area(s) of strength in the regular classroom.
- Most students in 9-12 receive service through advanced content classes, cluster or collaborative instruction in their area(s) of strength in a classroom, or through directed study.

# Information Requested at BOE Listening Session

## 1. Is Dyslexia recognized by federal or state law as a disability?

Under The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), dyslexia is not a disability category but is included in the Specific Learning Disability ([SLD](#)) category, for which students may be eligible for special education services. In order to be eligible under the category of SLD, Response to Intervention (RTI) data and a demonstration that the disability has a significant educational impact is required. Some students who have been identified with dyslexia may meet state-determined criteria for the special education category of Specific Learning Disability while others may not.

Teachers are encouraged to discuss performance, instruction and strategies with families. A focus on skills mastered and skills developing is most helpful in terms of planning for appropriate student supports. Diagnoses are made by professionals in specific fields (medical doctors and licensed psychologists) who use specific criteria that are based on their evaluations. Medical or psychological diagnoses sometimes do not align with state/federal special education eligibility categories. As a school district, we are mandated to follow the latter.

### Resources:

- [GaDOE SLD definition](#)
- [GaDOE Special Education Rules](#)
- [GaDOE Special Education Implementation Manual](#)
- [GaDOE FAQ on Dyslexia](#)

## 2. What is the difference between 504 and IEP?

A 504 plan is about access and comparable education to non-disabled peers. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a comprehensive learning plan including individualized goals, accommodations, and services. To be eligible for an IEP, the disability has to have significant impact on educational performance that requires special education services. The IEP is about providing supports for students to be able to benefit from education. The 504 is about enabling a student to have access. See flow chart above.

## 3. Can students opt out of Spanish instruction?

There are circumstances when school personnel determine that it would be best to provide special services like EIP, REP, or Title I to students during a time they would otherwise be taking Spanish. Students who move into City Schools of Decatur after grade 2 may be put in a beginning Spanish or provided extra assistance.

For special education students, IEP teams have the latitude to make such decisions. When students with IEPs are provided services when they would otherwise be taking Spanish, the time is specifically used to work with special education staff to work on IEP goals. It is important to consider how this decision will affect graduation requirements for high school students.

All students in grades kindergarten through 8 have been expected to take Spanish since approximately 2000. Students in grades 4-10 are required to take a “Language B” under International Baccalaureate guidelines. For CSD, “Language B” is Spanish.

#### **4. What is Orton-Gillingham and are there other reading methodologies?**

There are many approaches to teaching reading. The decision about methodology requires complex problem solving. Different tools are effective for different combinations of issues. Some students struggle with decoding, some with reading speed, some with word meaning, some with comprehension, some with reading stamina. Understanding the specific nature of the reading deficit is key to choosing the best intervention. The strength of the Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach is teaching decoding and the rule-based nature of written language. Other methodologies have strengths in teaching language meaning, reading comprehension and reading stamina. The following link provides a compilation of research-based practices for reading instruction for kindergarten through 3rd grade ([Foundational Reading Skills](#)).

Many of our teachers and interventionists do use elements of the Orton-Gillingham approach. All of our K-3 schools are using Wilson Reading Foundations® which is based on the same research-based elements used in the the Orton-Gillingham approach.

##### **Other OG questions:**

- Are OG tutors recognized as service providers under IDEA? No, IDEA recognizes certified special education teachers as the service providers for students with SLD.
- What training do our teachers have? Out of 154 K-5 teachers who responded to a recent survey, 70% have a masters degree, 18% have an education specialist degree, and two have a Ph.D. (with another 4 enrolled in a Ph.D. program); 42% have a reading, math, and/or gifted endorsement; 71% have 10 or more years of teaching experience; and 10% have received varying levels of training in Orton-Gillingham (OG).

We currently have intervention (Early Intervention, Title I, special education) teachers. Many of them have master's degrees or specialist degrees or higher in reading and are certified by the state to teach reading. Some also have OG training. While all teachers receive some training on teaching reading in their college programs, there is variability in expertise when it comes to reading and writing intervention teachers. Elementary teachers typically have more robust knowledge in teaching basic reading skills. We do

have some middle and high school teachers who are certified to teach reading or hold specialist degrees in teaching reading.

Does CSD encourage teachers to get OG training? Most of our staff members are engaged in professional learning and graduate work toward advanced degrees or additional certification in various areas. CSD encourages and supports all staff members in the areas of continued professional growth. We are exploring the feasibility of providing OG-specific professional learning to teachers of grade K-1 or perhaps K-3.

- Can we offer CSD facilities for teacher training and/or tutoring? We would welcome OG tutors to come into our schools as part of our volunteer programs under the parameters set out for tutors. We would invite anyone with expertise to assist our students in this way. In order for other groups or agencies to use CSD facilities, there is a [Facility Rental Guide](#) application that should be submitted and approved, subject to availability.

## **5. What training do we provide for teachers regarding reading instruction?**

There are a variety of professional learning opportunities provided by CSD.

K-3 teachers, for example, are engaged in ongoing training in how to use the Wilson Foundations® program. Teachers have had additional professional literacy learning through adopted programs such as Lucy Calkins (Columbia Teachers College), Reading/Writing Workshop Model and Making Meaning.

In grades 4-12 the training has focused on reading and writing across the curriculum and within units of inquiry. We have also had a year long mentorship for teachers with Georgia State University (GSU) reading project that has spanned grades K-8. We are in year two of a five year project with GSU.

Additionally, seven years ago CSD provided OG training to special education teachers. We had two cohorts of 25 teachers complete one week of training.

## **6. What are accommodations?**

Accommodations are provided to support student access through a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). For example, if a student has a slow processing speed, extra time may help them access curriculum. When selecting accommodations they should be individualized and designed to address access that is limited by the student's disability. Data should be collected on their use and effectiveness. Not all students require the same accommodations. Common accommodations for students with reading disabilities include large print, color overlays, extra time, or text to speech applications.

Some specific accommodations were mentioned during the Board listening session:

- Fonts – districtwide policy sans serif - A study about fonts, shows some promise that font preference may support faster reading. Different individuals may have different font preferences. This is something that is most effectively addressed on an individual level. Limiting the district to only one font may facilitate one group of students' learning while impairing other students' learning (i.e., through exposure to varied fonts).
- Ensure parents are given lesson plans well in advance so they can help - A list of learning targets or vocabulary words may be more appropriate, and many teachers already provide this through weekly newsletters and/or blogs.
- Grade creative writing based on quality and composition, not spelling or punctuation. - This is typically our practice in K-3, but teachers make choices on what to evaluate and not evaluate based on the specific needs of their class and the purpose of the assignment.
- Don't require essays for leadership positions (e.g., allow kids to submit an "oral essay"): For students who experience a barrier to participation in activities such as this due to their unique needs, CSD schools are willing to explore potential accommodations (e.g., utilization of appropriate technology, oral interviews, teacher recommendations, etc.). Depending on the specific leadership position, and the unique needs of a student, appropriate accommodations will vary.

## **7. Why don't schools test for Dyslexia?**

CSD screens and tests children in reading and writing. We universally screen reading performance and achievement with MAP, DIBELS, DRA, and spelling inventories. We do targeted screenings for students that perform below the average range on universal screeners. The tools used include: the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, Test of Auditory Processing Skills, Test of Visual Perceptual Skills, and Jordan left-right reversal test. We are looking into tools for K-1 to better identify specific reading issues. We are in conversation with Dr. Robin Morris, Regents Professor, Georgia State University, to help us identify better universal screening tools and ways to better utilize our data.

When students show deficits on our universal screeners, the RTI process is initiated to discover root causes and to design research-based interventions to improve performance. Currently, we identify the student falling in the bottom third of performance (i.e., the 34th percentile nationally or below). We do not identify students in the higher levels of performance for intervention because that would not be best practice. Students not showing sufficient progress in the RTI process may be referred for special education (disability) testing.

If students are referred for special education testing, our psychologists complete individual, comprehensive assessments that cover all areas (Achievement, Cognitive, Social Emotional, Adaptive Skills, Behavioral Skills, etc.). When families share private psychological reports with

CSD, the psychologist reviews the report and consults with the teacher or RTI team to problem-solve on how to address the student's needs.

## 8. How do our proportions compare to the nationwide averages?

The national data from the National Center for Learning Disabilities ([State of Learning Disabilities report](#)) says that 1 in 5 students have learning and attention issues (including, but not limited to dyslexia). This broader category includes a wide range of disabilities (ADHD, cognitive disability, health related disability), in addition to dyslexia. National data from schools shows approximately 10% of students qualify as having a disability under IDEA. CSD numbers show that more than 1 in 2 (56%) students receive special services of some kind (special education, RTI, Gifted, or 504). Almost 1 in 3 (31%) students receive services to address an academic weakness.

| Program                                | Number of Students  | Percentage of Total Students |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| EIP K-5 (445)<br>REP 6-8 (247)         | 692<br>Of these students, many are also served by other supports:<br>RTI Tier 2--329<br>RTI Tier 3--100<br>Title 1--209 | 14%                          |
| ESOL                                   | 86  | 2%                           |
| 504<br>(excluding Health only)         | 302   | 6%                           |
| 504 (Health only)                      | 98  | 2%                           |
| Special Educ.                          | 435   | 9%                           |
| Gifted                                 | 1,123   | 22%                          |
| Dual Exceptional<br>(Spec. Ed./Gifted) | 15  | <1%                          |
| Dual Exceptional<br>(Gifted/504)       | 32  | <1%                          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                           | <b>2,783</b>  | <b>56%</b>                   |

Approximately 450 CSD students are currently identified with a disability under IDEA and have IEPs. 302 more have 504 plans because of an identified disability. An additional 98 have a 504 plan due to a health condition. Given these numbers, 17% of our student population is identified with a disability under section 504 or IDEA. Additionally, approximately 900 more students are

receiving extra support through the RTI process and federal and state programs such as EIP, REP and Title I. When these students are included, approximately 31% of our students are receiving support services of one type or another to address weaknesses; a significantly higher level of support than what is provided nationally. Additionally, another 23% of students in CSD receive gifted services. In total, 55% of students in CSD receive some kind of support.

## 9. Are we missing students who need support?

Our students engage in our rich curriculum following the frameworks of EL Education and International Baccalaureate (IB) without specialized support. Classroom teachers work to meet all students at their learning level. District wide you will find teachers engaging in specific instruction based on student data and performance. We are continually monitoring, evaluating and assessing our students and their progress. District staff strive to meet the needs of all students. As a district that practices continuous improvement, we appreciate feedback such as that received at the Board listening session as it enables us to identify areas for improvement.

## 10. Don't we want all students to reach their full potential?

Our district's vision is to "...build the foundation for all children to be their best, achieve their dreams, and make the world a better place." We strive to support and challenge all of our students. Differentiated instruction is designed to meet each student where she is to help her to her best. Improving differentiation has been a goal for the district for a number of years and will remain a goal in our school improvement plans (SIPs) this year.

How to assess a student's potential is a deep question about human cognition. The language "maximum benefit" originally appeared in Public Law 94-142 (1974). This was the first law guiding special education. The language "maximum benefit" was replaced with the language "free and appropriate education" (FAPE) as the concept of "maximum benefit" was too difficult for IEP teams to build consensus about and too expensive for school districts to maintain while being good stewards of public funds.

Historically, what constitutes a child's potential has been an area where parents and educators have not easily found common ground. It is difficult to agree upon what is a disabling condition and what is a personal weakness. All people have strengths and weaknesses. [Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development](#) (ZPD) concept addresses the optimal learning zone for students, one which is challenging but not too challenging.

## 11. What would it cost to address concerns?

| Ideas to get to "Maximum Benefit"  | Calculation                          | Cost                               |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Broaden services provided in Tier 2 and/or broaden criteria used to identify | 10 staff members x \$82,500 (average | \$825,000 per year, locally funded |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| student for Tier 3 RTI services.   | salary and benefits)   |  |
| Add Reading and Math Coordinators for district and a reading and math specialist at each level, 10 staff members total | 2 coordinators x \$114,000<br>8 specialists x \$82,500 (average salary and benefits)         | \$888,000 per year, locally funded   |
| Train all K-3 staff on Orton-Gillingham/Wilson Foundations   | 100 teachers x \$4,250 (\$3,000 for training, \$1,250 stipend for extra days or substitutes) | \$425,000 first year, \$42,500 per year for new staff, combination of local funding and grants |
| Orton-Gillingham tutoring for 20% of our K-5 students 1 hour per week  | \$75 x 540 students x 36 weeks of school   | \$1.5 million per year, combination of local funding and grants                                |

**12. Have all required staff been trained in “child find” procedures?**

Child find is a requirement of IDEA and Section 504. All certified staff receives yearly training in child find procedures, universal screeners, and RTI procedures. This training has been specific to learning, behavior, and social emotional issues--the disability categories defined by IDEA and the definition of a disabling condition under section 504.

**13. Who do we evaluate and do we accept outside evaluations?**

When considering student needs, multiple sources of information are valuable. Occasionally, a family will contract with an outside professional to have their child evaluated. Such evaluations, in conjunction with school district evaluations, are useful data points. Since the work of outside professionals involves more than just educational impacts, the school district is developing a checklist of criteria we use when evaluating outside results. This will enable the provider to maximize a family’s investment in evaluation by ensuring usability within the school district’s processes. The school district conducts evaluations identified through the RTI process or parental request, but families choosing to obtain an outside evaluation can be assured that such evaluations will be duly considered by the school district.

We use the results of outside private evaluations when providers have followed test directions, used valid tests, and included all the important information in their reports. Test results are not valid when private providers test out of the limits of the test, use tests that are not the most recent version, or test students without confirming that vision and hearing is intact. When we receive private reports, supplemental testing is often needed if private evaluators did not give sufficient measures to determine special education eligibility.

We identify students demonstrating performance deficits or behavior issues of concern for a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation conducted by one of our school psychologists. Due to the high cost of these evaluations, and as good stewards of taxpayer funds, we must

make judgment calls regarding who to evaluate and who not to evaluate. While we approve about 90% of parent requests for psychoeducational evaluation, there are occasions where we determine such an evaluation is not appropriate.

#### **14. How much do we spend on 504 plans and how does that compare to others?**

There are no specific funding sources for 504. It is an unfunded mandate. There are costs associated with developing, maintaining and implementing 504 plans. There are some accommodations that involve resources (e.g., time and paper to enlarge print, create visual cues, etc.), equipment (e.g., amplification systems, magnifying equipment, assistive technology, etc.) and services (e.g., a teacher to break down assignments into smaller chunks, an occupational therapist to consult, counseling, etc.). These are paid for with the general fund. Since there is not a funding source or state budget codes specific to 504, we do not have an accurate way to track these costs, nor do others, so comparison is difficult if not impossible.

#### **15. How much do we spend on special education and how does that compare to others?**

- For FY15 CSD spent \$13,966.18 per special education student and for FY16 we spent \$14,972.95 (unaudited) per special education student, on average. The state provided \$10,303.86 per special education student in state QBE funding in FY15 and in FY16 \$10,419.45 per student, on average. Comparisons to national or state averages, or other school districts, were not able to be obtained before publication of this report. However, the following four web pages discuss the funding formulas:
  - <http://www.ecs.org/state-funding-for-students-with-disabilities-db/>
  - <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/19/47/11947.pdf>
  - <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquest3D?rep=SD10>
  - <http://www.ecs.org/do-we-spend-too-much-on-special-education-in-this-country/>
- Financial Reporting: District reports are reported by function and object code, not by program code. We do keep up with special ed costs at the District by either the program code (DOE gives this to us) or fund code by grant. This helps with reporting our expenditures to DOE.
- Legal Costs of Special Education: We did not have any cases go through due process the past school year, but we did have meetings with Attorneys present and needed/utilized legal consultation. Legal expenses cannot be calculated as part of what is spent for special needs children. As our services have become more comprehensive, we have had fewer legal expenses.

## **16. Why is the IEP and 504 process adversarial?**

The special education (IEP and 504) process is designed to serve the students most impacted by disabling conditions. The intent of the process is to be collaborative, bringing parents, teachers, and administrators together to develop plans that will be appropriate for the student. When a child is struggling, parents are understandably passionate about helping their child and usually want to insure that their child is receiving the absolute best. IDEA charges IEP teams to agree upon a Free and Appropriate Education.

Differences of opinion about what is best for a child can lead to feelings of “us versus them” and the process begins to feel adversarial. Careful attention to communications, developing trust, sharing information clearly, and following required protocols can help to keep the process of collaboration in the best interest of the child.

The IEP process is designed to be one of consensus, which means that everyone may have to give a little. Each person should come to the table to consider all perspectives and as a collaborative team reach consensus. The intent is that differing viewpoints will yield a plan that best serves the child. The goal is to find a plan that, while it may not be the dream plan for each person, every person can agree that they can accept and support it.

There are some legal requirements that may not allow the schools to provide an option that the parents expect. These are a couple of examples:

- IDEA mandates provision of services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). One-to-one services are rarely LRE because they take students out of class and limit their access to curriculum and their peers. LRE is designed to protect students from unnecessary isolation.
- IDEA mandates that no individual or group can pre-determine the eligibility of a student for IDEA services prior to the initial eligibility meeting. Therefore, the district must be cautious sharing the results of a psychoeducational evaluation prior to such a meeting in order to avoid any possible appearance of pre-determination. The district fully understands parental desires to review the results of such an evaluation so they can come to the initial evaluation meeting prepared, so we are critically examining our practices in this area to try to identify a way to legally and ethically provide this information to parents in advance.

## **17. Why don't we pull students out of class for specialized instruction more often?**

Instruction outside the classroom is considered more restrictive. We strive to serve students in the most inclusive way possible (i.e., Least Restrictive Environment [LRE]) that is appropriate for that student. IEP teams may decide that pull out instruction is appropriate. Students meeting eligibility requirements for EIP or special education may be pulled out for services in the areas

of reading and math or the EIP/special education teacher may serve the students in the classroom.

## **18. What more can we do to help educate parents and the community?**

We can increase our communication process of informing parents of system-wide information sessions and workshops. We can research and expand our list of resources available to parents and engage with the local parent networks. Collaboration with private providers may also help there be more consistent practices which would help families and decrease frustration.

## **19. What happened to Neuronet?**

The research shows that Neuronet is good for motor coordination. We do still use it with some kids, but it is not a program that every child needs. Neuronet was used by our K-3 schools for a few years. It is currently not being used for the vast majority of our students. Neuronet is effective for building motor coordination skills. It is currently only being used for student who demonstrate a need for motor skills intervention.

## **20. Do we have a process when families go to private school?**

If the student has an IEP we offer a service plan (typically speech services). We ensure families have appropriate paperwork and keep in touch for the purpose of reviewing eligibility every three years.

We strive to work with parents/guardians by keeping the lines of communication open. If families decide to leave, we respect their decision and will welcome them back if they make a decision to return to CSD. At this time, we do not have a formal process to conduct exit interviews beyond asking the reason to record in our data system. As such data would be helpful, we are exploring options to gather it, such as inviting those who withdraw to an in-person or phone interview, sending a postcard (with return postage) with a short survey, sending an email with a link to a short survey, etc.

## **21. Can we get an outside expert to perform a thorough evaluation of our current practices?**

As part of our current strategic plan, the district is going to put each program on a review cycle. The Superintendent is working with the Urban Child Study Center at Georgia State University to conduct a comprehensive program review of our special education program.

## **22. Where are the positive outlier schools for students with dyslexia in public education? What are they doing?**

There are some schools that are extremely effective at serving students with dyslexia, such as the Schenck School and Atlanta Speech School. Some ways they do this is through extremely low students-to-teacher ratios (e.g., 5:1), adherence to effective methodologies with fidelity (e.g., Orton-Gillingham), focus on a particular sub-group of our greater population (e.g., students with dyslexia), and extended time on specific subject areas (e.g., reading and writing) with limited time on others (e.g., math and science). These private programs are often extremely expensive. Tuition at the Schenck School is over \$30,000 per year.

CSD has learned of programs in the Houston Independent School District and, closer to home, in the Atlanta Public Schools. We look forward to investigating these further to determine what we can learn to improve our own program.

## **23. Is there research based evidence to support a developmental window of opportunity and/or diminishing returns on investment in interventions to address reading issues? If so when? When is too early, optimal, too late?**

While we have not yet been able to devote sufficient resources to review the research literature in this area, local experts agree that best practice is to address reading issues as soon as possible and to continue to teach reading to struggling readers throughout their whole education.

## **24. Where do we use the Wilson Reading System, what training do our teachers have, and what evidence based research is there supporting its effectiveness?**

WRS is used in grades K-3. After WRS was adopted, teachers received training from a Certified WRS trainer and by teachers that are proficient in utilizing the WRS strategies. Teachers do not need to have a WRS certificate to teach or use the WRS program, so we have not pursued that level of professional learning.

Research supporting the effectiveness of this system can be found at <http://www.wilsonlanguage.com/programs/research-results/>.

## **25. How can we use the data collected to predict who will have dyslexia?**

We are working with Georgia State University on developing a predictive formula to identify who may struggle with reading, utilizing the pre-K assessment and other screening tools, such as DIBELS.

## **26. How do we assess whether supports are working?**

IEP and RTI have a system in place for monitoring progress of students. In RTI, progress monitoring data are collected at least every two weeks for students in Tier 2 and weekly for students in Tier 3. RTI teams review the data approximately every 6-8 weeks (or more frequently, as determined by the RTI team). If students are not demonstrating satisfactory growth, the team engages in collaborative problem-solving to make adjustments in the intervention plan.

## **27. How do "study skills classes" specifically provide or address issues related to reading?**

Teachers identify the content of these classes based on the IEP goals of students. They use the time to provide small group reading instruction, organizational skills, etc. Additionally, other IEP goals can also be worked on during this time.

## **28. Under what circumstances are parents allowed to remove children from school for reasons related to disability?**

Absences will be excused if students are removed from school for medical reasons. We encourage families to engage in medical care outside of school hours to the greatest extent possible. When medical need requires students to miss more than 10 days of school (i.e., students requiring chemotherapy, dialysis or other time sensitive medical procedures), hospital homebound services can be provided.

## Next Steps

(in no particular order)

1. Identify funding that can be allocated to address these issues.
  - a. Identify potential grants (i.e., Dyslexia Resource Trust, REAP, DEF, etc.)
  - b. Reallocate existing funds by sunsetting some programs
  - c. Tax revenue: At current valuations, \$10,600,000 is “left on the table” due to the difference between the current millage (18.66 mils) and the maximum legal millage (25 mils).
2. Improve our engagement with the community and outside providers
  - a. Begin a networking group with outside providers to collaborate about the parameters of schools, 504, and IDEA and reach consensus on what kind of recommendations are helpful.
  - b. Create a training and informational document for outside providers and parents that outline the elements in a private psychological evaluation that the district can utilize as a valid source of data.
  - c. Work in partnership with community groups, including Decatur Dyslexia Network.
  - d. Provide education to local service providers (i.e., tutors) on data collection and progress monitoring requirements so that they can provide data to support the RTI process.
  - e. Provide a list of local service providers who have attended our training and participate in progress monitoring.
  - f. Provide a list of psychologists who have attended our training on eligibility criteria and elements of a psychoeducational evaluation that the district can utilize.
3. Conduct a third party program evaluation of our special education program.
4. Study what is needed to strengthen our reading curriculum and instruction.
5. Review practices regarding the sharing of evaluation reports with parents to ensure we are being the best partner we can be
6. Examine the students who are in EIP and REP, but not tier 3 RTI. Study what would be needed to provide tier 3 level services for those students.
7. Consider providing options for grades 6-12 reading instruction and support outside the school day (e.g., workshops for students on organizational skills, how to utilize a text book, etc.).
8. Examine how we locally define the need for intervention (assess cut off scores, evaluation rubrics, etc.) and identify opportunities for providing an authentic continuum of supports.
9. Identify appropriate screening assessments that can assist the district in locating students with dyslexia and allow us to begin addressing their needs as early as possible.

10. Develop a collaborative process through which students, staff, parents, and community members can provide input on how we can improve.

## List of Acronyms

|  |  |
|--|--|
| ACCESS.. Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners | IEP..... Individualized Education Program                      |
| ADA..... Americans with Disabilities Act   | K..... Kindergarten  |
| ADHD..... Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder   | LEA..... Local Education Agency                                |
| CogAT..... Cognitive Abilities Test  | LRE..... Least Restrictive Environment                         |
| CP..... (International Baccalaureate) Career-related Programme   | MAP..... Measures of Academic Progress                         |
| DHS..... Decatur High School   | MTSS..... Multi-Tiered System of Supports                      |
| DIBELS.... Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills   | MYP..... (International Baccalaureate) Middle Years Program    |
| DRA..... Developmental Reading Assessment  | NCLB..... No Child Left Behind (Act)                           |
| DP..... (International Baccalaureate) Diploma Programme  | OG..... Orton-Gillingham (Multisensory Education Approach)     |
| EIP..... Early Intervention Program  | PYP..... (International Baccalaureate) Primary Years Programme |
| ELA..... English/Language Arts   | QBE..... Quality Basic Education                               |
| ESOL..... English Speakers of Other Languages  | REP..... Remedial Education Program                            |
| ESSA..... Every Student Succeeds Act   | RMS..... Renfroe Middle School                                 |
| FAPE..... Free and Appropriate Education   | RTI..... Response to Intervention                              |
| FAQ..... Frequently Asked Questions  | SEE-KS.... Social Emotional Engagement Knowledge and Skills    |
| F.AVE..... 4/5 Academy at Fifth Avenue   | SIP..... School Improvement Plan                               |
| FY..... Fiscal Year (July 1 - June 30)   | SLD..... Specific Learning Disability                          |
| GaBOE.... Georgia Board of Education   | SST..... Student Support Team                                  |
| GaDOE.... Georgia Department of Education  | UDL..... Universal Design for Learning                         |
| GSU..... Georgia State University  | WRF..... Wilson Reading Foundations®                           |
| IB..... International Baccalaureate  | WRS..... Wilson Reading System®                                |
| IDEA..... Individuals with Disabilities Education Act  | ZPD..... Zone of Proximal Development                          |