



Frequently Asked Questions

When does the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act go into effect?

The Nebraska Reading Improvement Act (Section 79-2601-79-2607) is effective beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

Why Grade 3?

As students transition from early to upper elementary grades, reading instruction also shifts. Once students enter fourth grade, they are increasingly tasked to learn from their reading rather than learn how to read. There is a higher expectation for students to be able to read independently and understand what they are reading. Reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade is a significant predictor of future success. Children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade will continue to struggle academically as they are called upon to engage with increasingly complex texts across content areas.¹

What is an approved reading assessment?

An assessment of student reading is administered three times during the school year to all students in grades kindergarten through grade three to 1) screen students within the first 30 days of school to identify students who may have a reading deficiency, 2) measure progress toward grade level reading in skills including but not limited to: alphabetical and phonological awareness, sound-symbol correspondence, decoding and fluency and comprehension and 3) inform instruction targeted to student needs. Such assessments will be approved by qualified NDE personnel or its designees, be reliable and valid, and align with appropriate academic content standards for reading adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to section 79-760.01. Assessments should allow teachers to access results in a reasonable period, be commercially available, and comply with requirements established by NDE.

How will parents be notified if a student is determined to have a reading difficulty?

Parents or guardians of students who are identified with a reading difficulty are notified in writing or in electronic form no later than 15 days after the identification. Notification will come from the student's school.

¹Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, 2011

What is a supplemental reading intervention program?

Any student identified with a reading deficiency must be provided a supplemental reading intervention program. A supplemental reading intervention program is an intensive and research-based program of instructional strategies designed to support students in developing critical skills associated with reading. Effective programs are characterized by skillful instruction, the use of focused strategies informed by data and tailored to specific needs of students, small-group and/or individualized instruction, and the use of ongoing formative assessment, guided practice, and immediate feedback.

Where can I find more information about summer reading programs?

Many Nebraska school districts have in place robust and comprehensive summer learning opportunities for students and should continue seeking ways to improve and enhance the reading instruction that is offered. Some districts may take steps toward creating learning opportunities that meet the academic needs of students. Smaller districts may rely upon other community programs and resources that will enrich early literacy skills. Schools and districts are encouraged to foster partnerships with local libraries and other outreach groups to creatively address the early literacy needs of identified students. The National Summer Learning Association provides a starting point for information, support, and resources related to the implementation of quality summer learning for all students: www.summerlearning.org/about-nsla.

Who is exempt from taking the approved reading assessment?

To recognize the needs of some students, some are exempt from taking the approved reading assessments. These include:

- any student with limited English proficiency who has received less than two years of English instruction
- any student receiving special education services for whom such assessment would conflict with their individualized education plan
- any student receiving services under a plan pursuant to the requirements of section 504 of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act for whom such assessment would conflict with such section 504 or Title II Plan

What is the difference between a student who has a reading difficulty and a special education student?

Some students struggle with reading but do not have a diagnosed disability. These students may lag behind their peers and require more time with more specialized reading instruction and intervention to overcome their challenges with emergent literacy skills. Students identified with a reading difficulty depend on caring and insightful schools, teachers, and parents to provide them the reading help they need to become successful readers.

Some students are formally diagnosed with a learning disability. These students can receive special education under a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To outline the educational goals and services that the student needs to be successful, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed. For students with a learning disability who struggle with reading, reading-related support and services can be included in the student's IEP.

When a student has a reading deficiency— whether he or she has been formally identified as having a disability or not – the key is to:

- correctly determine the nature and source of a student's difficulty,
- provide targeted instruction to remediate difficulties and increase skill level,
- and accommodate a student's challenges and build upon his or her strengths.

How will student progress be monitored?

An approved reading assessment will assess all students, kindergarten through grade 3 three times during the school year to 1) screen students within the first 30 days of school to identify students that may have a reading deficiency, 2) measure progress towards grade level reading and 3) to inform instruction targeted to students' needs. Supplemental reading intervention programs may include ongoing diagnostic assessments and do not require NDE approval.

How do the requirements for students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia (LB 1052) relate to effective reading instruction and intervention?

LB 1052, now Nebraska Revised Statute 79-11,156, outlines requirements for the identification and support for students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia, complements the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act. Both laws underscore the role of effective reading instruction and intervention for students who struggle with reading proficiency. The NDE has developed a technical assistance [guide for dyslexia](#).

The purpose of the guide for dyslexia is to provide information, resources, guidance and support to schools, families and caregivers in understanding the specific learning disability of dyslexia. This technical assistance document is a starting point and includes additional resources for educators to access when they suspect a student may have dyslexia. In addition, 79-11,158 requires teacher education programs to include instruction in dyslexia.

How can parents be supportive at home?

Teachers and parents should work together to ensure that students are strengthening their reading skills and are meeting milestones each year, so they are ready to advance to the next grade. There are multiple ways to support your child's reading outside of the classroom.

1. Read something every day. Reading just 20 minutes each day can help your child's reading skills.
2. Choose books of interest to your child to read.
3. Ask your child questions about what they read. Talking about the words in the book helps them understand what they are reading.
4. Make sure books are accessible. Your child will be more likely to pick up a book and read if they are out in the open and easy to find.
5. Sing rhyming songs, read rhyming books, and say tongue twisters with your child. This helps them learn new sounds in words.
6. Talk to your child. Use trips to the grocery store, dinnertime chats, and driving in the car as an opportunity to introduce new words and practice their speaking skills.
7. Talk about letters and sounds. Help your child learn the names of the letters and the sounds the letters make.
8. Have your child write. Writing grocery lists, notes, or letters helps children connect spoken words to written words.
9. Take advantage of community resources. Ask your child's teacher or school librarian for help picking out books. Visit your local library for events and programs like reading clubs.
10. Reading doesn't end when the school year ends. Help prevent the "summer slide" by reading over the summer months to better prepare your child for the next school year. The Nebraska Department of Education offers a Summer Reading Challenge program free to all Nebraska students www.education.ne.gov/tl/summer-learning-programs/.

What resources will be available?

To assist with implementation, tools and resources will be made available. Those include, but are not limited to, the following:

- List of approved reading assessments including the performance levels at which a deficiency is identified
- Supplemental reading program template
- Communication tools
- Information about summer reading opportunities

