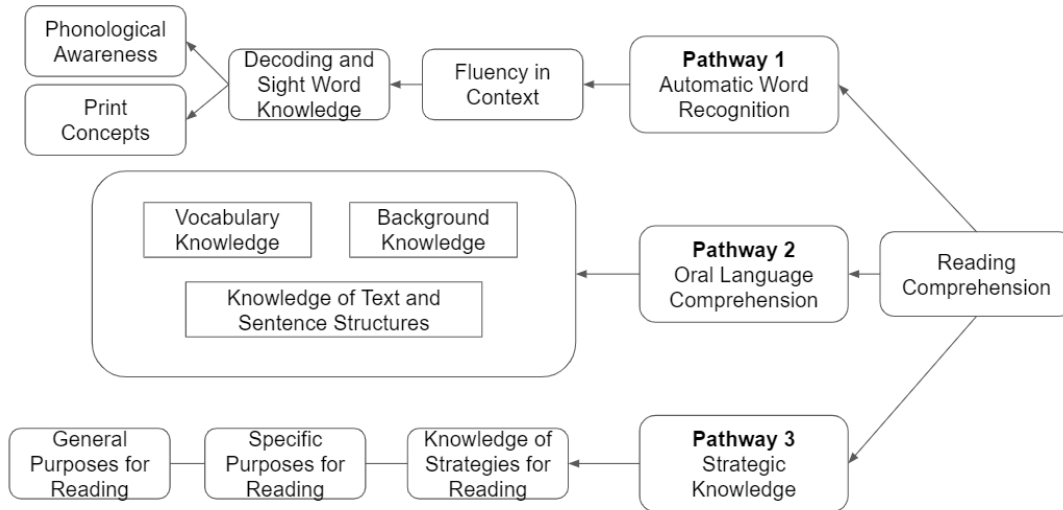


Testimony Provided to: Senate Education Committee  
 From: Kate McCawley Literacy Coach  
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 Topic: Literacy Instruction in Vermont/Dyslexia Screener  
 Date: April 1, 2021



**Point One for Consideration:**

This model is a visual representation of the information pathways that readers use when they are engaged with continuous texts. Each pathway has multiple categories of skills that all readers must possess in order to complete the act of reading. Reading is an orchestrated performance that involves every one of these categories and no category can be ignored or left out in a reader’s instructional journey. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes therefore this graphic supports the acquisition of writing and spelling skills as well.

The dyslexia screeners currently available, that would fulfill the stated intent of Senate Bill S.75, address several components of pathway one while neglecting the other two pathways and parts of pathway one. In addition, the proposed screener does not address the need for the reader to experience reading instruction in context and to apply reading skills in continuous text. In other words, the reader will only get to the rehearsal and never to the performance of reading. According to the International Dyslexia Association a purpose of a screener is to provide “quick and targeted assessments of **discrete** skills that indicate whether students are making adequate progress in reading achievement.”<sup>1</sup> Our concern is that given this statement the focus will be on skills in isolation rather than the expectation that the student learn the skills and apply them to the actual act of reading in texts where the language and vocabulary are not controlled.

## **Point Two for Consideration:**

According to the Agency of Education's Framework for Implementation of [Act 173](#) and the AOE MTSS Field Guide, all school districts in the state of Vermont are required to have a local assessment plan that includes a variety of assessments that address all the pathways of reading and are given at multiple points throughout the school year for the purpose of benchmarking students progress. These local assessment plans should be the initial starting point for the decision to dig further into a student's reading profile with additional assessments. This process of digging deeper may well include a dyslexia screener at some point, but a dyslexia screener should never be the starting point to evaluate a student's reading strengths and weaknesses. The assessments included in a robust local assessment plan serve as both screeners and diagnostics. The proposed Dyslexia screener does not provide diagnostic information that will inform tier I or tier II instruction.

## **Recommendations:**

Step 1: All districts should convene a literacy committee to examine its current local assessment plan to ensure that there is a broad range of diagnostic assessments and screeners that address all of the pathways of reading named in the McKenna and Stahl graphic.

Step 2: Build the capacity of teachers by providing professional development on the administration and scoring of all assessments on the revised local assessment plan.

Step 3: Provide professional development on phonological development and its impact on later reading development to ensure that all readers have the necessary oral language base to access grade level reading instruction. This should include teachers pre-K through grade 5. The district should have a coherent instructional sequence that addresses phonological development.

Step 4: Continue to build the expertise of teachers and the instructional capacity of the district by providing professional development on instructional practices that address all the components of reading on the McKenna and Stahl graphic.

Step 5: Provide additional professional development on the reciprocal processes of writing and spelling as related to the reading pathways.

The success of students in Vermont schools will not rise and fall on the administration of a Dyslexia screener; it will be determined by the knowledge base of individual teachers and their capacity to decide when to administer a Dyslexia screener on a case by case basis.

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*McKenna, M.C., Dougherty Stahl, K. A., & Flanigan, K. (2019). Assessment for Reading Instruction (4th ed). New York, NY: Guilford Press.*

<sup>1</sup>*Universal Screening: K–2 reading. (2020, January 08). Retrieved April 01, 2021, from <https://dyslexiaida.org/universal-screening-k-2-reading/>*