



Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY

2021–2022: Year 2 of Implementation

Samantha Durrance

Kim Anderson

Wendy McColskey

Melissa Williams



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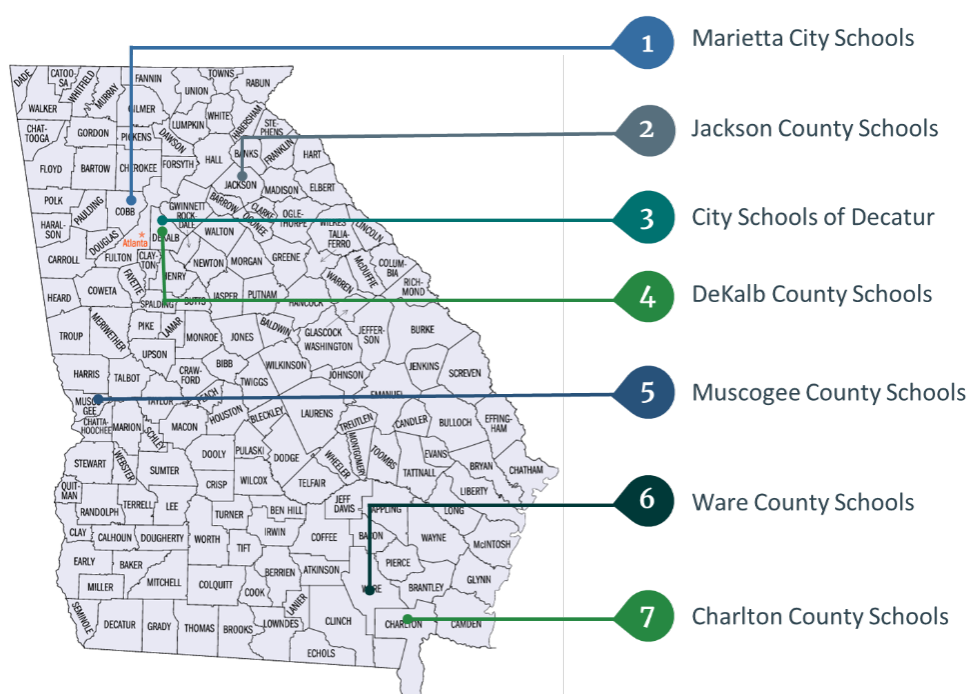
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I. Introduction

This document is a summary containing the main findings of the [Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis: 2021–2022: Year 2 of Implementation](#). This 2021–2022 brief is the third 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, and the [Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis: 2020–2021: Year 1 of Implementation](#), which provided information on the first year of implementation.

Seven districts participated in the Pilot Program in 2021–22, as seen in the figure and table below.

Figure 1. 2021–22 Participating Pilot Districts



A total of 45 schools were reported by the districts to be involved in the pilot in 2021–22.

Table 1. Pilot District Location, Student Enrollment, and Number of Pilot Schools

District	Location	Student Enrollment 2021–22	Number of Schools in Pilot
1. Marietta City Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	8,696	4
2. Jackson County Schools	Near Athens (Non-Rural)	9,245	3
3. City Schools of Decatur	Atlanta (Urban)	5,645	7
4. DeKalb County Schools	Atlanta (Urban)	93,293	13
5. Muscogee County Schools	Columbus (Non-Rural)	29,774	15
6. Ware County Schools	South GA (Rural)	6,010	1
7. Charlton County Schools	South GA (Rural)	1,693	2

II. The Second Year of Implementation: Findings Overview

The pilot districts developed plans and laid the foundation for the pilot in the planning year—2019–2020—and worked through the initial challenges of familiarizing themselves with new tools and processes in Year 1 of the pilot, 2020-21. Their experiences in the 2021–22 school year, the second year of implementation, provide important insights into how the rollout of [S.B. 48’s requirements](#) may proceed and the supports that need to be in place for districts across the state to successfully implement dyslexia screening in 2024-25. Key findings from seven interviews with a total of 15 staff in the seven pilot districts about their experiences in 2021–22 are grouped into five areas:

- 1) Successes and Challenges.
- 2) Resources Used to Support the Pilot.
- 3) Support Needed from the GaDOE.
- 4) Expected Changes to Implementation in 2022-23.
- 5) Looking Ahead to 2024-25: Lessons Learned from the Pilot.

1. Successes and Challenges

Figure 2 outlines some key implementation successes districts reported experiencing in the 2021–22 school year, grouped by how they related to the local context, staff and resources, and how the pilot intersected with ongoing efforts to implement Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students (MTSS). In sum, the successes districts discussed indicate that they were building on what they learned in Year 1 of implementation and finding ways to continue what worked well and change what did not.

Figure 2. Successes Districts Identified in 2021–22

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flexibility to implement the pilot in different ways was valuable for three districts as they staged their efforts, examined differences in implementation across their schools, and in some cases prepared to expand the pilot districtwide. • A few districts reported seeing improved literacy outcomes for students in 2021-22 as compared to previous years.
Staff & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several districts spoke of the value of motivating staff to grow professionally and shift their mindsets regarding how reading instruction and intervention should be provided. • Within-district training and professional development on reading instruction generally, as well as on specific approaches to instruction and intervention, were reported as instrumental to the work of the pilot by more than half of the districts.
MTSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All seven districts talked positively about their experiences with screening tools. For example, most said the tools provided them with valuable, high-quality data that helped them make better instructional decisions. • Two districts cited intervention as a specific success in 2021-22, saying their processes and intervention strategies worked well. Two more districts mentioned successes with progress monitoring, noting that it had become routine for school staff and progress monitoring processes were being followed.

Districts also reported a variety of challenges (Figure 3) in implementing the dyslexia pilot in 2021–22, again grouped by how they related to the local context, staff and resources, and how the pilot intersected with ongoing MTSS efforts. A common theme of the challenges reported were difficulties experienced as the pilot districts adjusted their practices and focused on providing reading instruction in new ways.

Figure 3. Challenges Districts Identified in 2021-22

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All but one district described contextual factors as challenges (e.g., their large size, staff turnover). Getting buy-in from school and district staff and school boards for screening, teaching the science of reading, and updating curriculum resources were challenges for four districts. Four districts described district-to-school communication and collaborating across district offices and between schools as challenging. A few districts reported challenges from the impact of the COVID-19 Omicron wave.
Staff & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six districts pointed to logistical hurdles they faced in implementation, including finding the time, staff, or space to provide intervention and the difficulty of balancing pilot implementation with other initiatives. A majority of districts found that gaps in their core instructional materials and/or the implementation of new core materials presented challenges to pilot implementation. Six districts reported that the need to build the knowledge of school and district staff was a challenge to implementing the pilot. They specifically mentioned the need to build knowledge of MTSS, dyslexia, the science of reading and structured literacy, and the pilot itself.
MTSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost every district identified using data well as a particularly difficult challenge. The main struggles they cited revolved around interpreting screening and progress monitoring data, combining data from different sources, and using it to make decisions about instruction, intervention, and the need for further assessment.

2. Resources Used to Support the Pilot

The pilot districts used a variety of resources from the state, commercial publishers, and other external sources to support their pilot work in 2021-22, as shown in Figure 4. All districts relied heavily on and reported finding great value in resources provided by the GaDOE.

Figure 4. Resources Districts Used in 2021-22

GaDOE Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-demand tools: Every district said that GaDOE-created resources were key to supporting their implementation efforts. They specifically named the Georgia Dyslexia Informational Handbook, four-part Dyslexia Video Series, MTSS trainings and guidance, and professional development from the GaDOE. Staff expertise: Five districts named specific GaDOE staff as key supports who provided professional development, answered questions, and created resources. A few districts also utilized GaDOE regional MTSS coaches to support their pilot work and collaborated with the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) on Pre-K implementation. Pilot supports: Five districts said the pilot’s support structures were helpful to their implementation efforts. They mentioned the value of pilot Professional Learning Community meetings, implementation chats, and meetings and communication in general.

Grants and Funding

Most districts reported the benefits of receiving extra funds that could support implementation in 2021-22. These funds were largely used for training. Funds came from several different sources:

- **State Grants:** Three districts received extra funding from state grants—the Readiness in Literacy Grant, GEER II, and Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA).
- **Private Grants:** Two districts received a total of three grants funded by four external organizations. Funding for the three grants came from the International Dyslexia Association, the United Way and The Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and the Whitehead Foundation. These grants paid for training and an initiative to increase teachers’ knowledge of the science of reading.
- **Federal Funds:** One district said CARES Act funds were very helpful.

External Organizations

- Three districts received support from external individuals or organizations, including the International Dyslexia Association, the Schenck School, and the Student Support Team Association of Georgia Educators (SSTAGE).

Regional Agencies

- Two districts mentioned receiving support from regional agencies in Georgia. The Georgia Learning Resource System funded a staff member in one district to earn the dyslexia endorsement, and the local RESA provided coaching on Foundations in another district.

3. Support Needed from the GaDOE

Districts agreed on a number of ways in which the GaDOE could help them continue to improve—and in some cases expand—their implementation of the pilot in the coming years (Figure 5).

Figure 5. District-Identified Needs for Support in 2021-22

Technical Assistance and Guidance

Four districts described a need for technical assistance or guidance on topics including:

- What implementation should look like and how it will benefit students.
- Using screening and progress monitoring data to inform instruction and intervention.
- Using data to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia.
- When to request parent consent for screening or other assessments.
- Expectations for how reading should be taught—both for schools and for RESA and GLRS staff and the staff who are part of the Growing Readers program.

Professional Learning

Three districts requested more professional learning opportunities, including:

- Trainings on pilot implementation aimed at both district-level and school-level administrators.
- Face-to-face and live webinar trainings for all staff on the science of reading and the connections between MTSS, the pilot, and special education.
- Better local access to the Dyslexia Endorsement.

Information for Parents

- Three districts cited a need for more support from the GaDOE in providing information to parents. They specifically mentioned a need for parent consent form templates and information they could provide parents about dyslexia, including a parent dyslexia handbook.

Funding

- Two districts said that it would be helpful to have access to funding they could use to pay for additional staff to provide intervention or serve as a district liaison for parents who have dyslexia-related concerns about their students.

4. Expected Changes to Implementation in 2022–23

Districts anticipated making an array of changes in the final year of the pilot, 2022-23. These changes reflect the lessons they had learned in the first two years and the many ways in which they were still fine-tuning implementation (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Expected Changes Pilot Districts Reported for 2022-23

Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two districts planned to expand to district-wide implementation of the pilot in 2022-23. • An additional district planned to maintain its current pilot schools but also invite other elementary schools districtwide to implement pilot practices on an informal, voluntary basis.
Staff & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five pilot districts reported a number of anticipated changes to staff involved in pilot implementation, including adding additional staff, getting more district-level staff involved in implementation, and developing a district-level dyslexia team. • Districts planned to expand professional development offerings, including those on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The science of reading and effective instructional practices for reading. ○ Specific programs (e.g., LETRS, Orton-Gillingham, Kagan engagement strategies, and using Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention in a structured literacy manner). ○ Progress monitoring and data analysis and use.
MTSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Instruction: At least half of the districts planned to add to or change their core instructional materials. Four districts had plans to adjust their use of existing instructional materials and instructional practices by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focusing on fidelity of implementation. ○ Using curriculum mapping and pacing guides to “pull the best of the best resources” and “reframe what we have.” ○ Moving toward research-based science of reading practices. • Screening: Four districts expected changes to their screening processes, including changing tools, clarifying expectations across schools, and changing the frequency of screening. • Intervention: Districts planned various changes to intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Several districts planned to help their schools provide intervention to students by encouraging or requiring a dedicated intervention block. ○ Three districts planned to streamline intervention selection by reducing the options available and clarifying how to match available interventions to students’ needs. ○ Three districts planned to add or change commercial intervention programs. • Progress Monitoring: Four districts planned changes to progress monitoring. One was implementing a districtwide progress monitoring tool. Three planned to make progress monitoring expectations clearer for school staff, including when to initiate progress monitoring, which tool(s) should be used, and when data should be collected and analyzed. • Data Analysis and Management: Districts described a need to strengthen guidance and expectations for data management and analysis by (for example): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating schedules and expectations for the frequency of data review meetings. ○ Creating a step-by-step guide for analyzing data and pairing students with supports. ○ Determining which pieces of data all schools should examine for decision-making. ○ Using a data management platform instead of multiple reports and spreadsheets. ○ Requiring staff who conduct progress monitoring to upload reports into a data management platform.

5. Looking Ahead to 2024–25: Lessons Learned from the Pilot

The successes, challenges, resources, and needs of districts as reported in 2021-22 and the changes districts expected to make in the final year of the pilot can do much to inform the statewide rollout of dyslexia screening in 2024-25. Below are four key takeaways based on the information collected from districts and summarized above. For non-pilot districts, taking these lessons into consideration early means being better prepared for implementation of S.B. 48’s requirements in 2024. For the GaDOE, these takeaways represent important considerations for support for districts statewide.



MTSS provides a critical foundation and infrastructure for the requirements of S.B. 48.

The pilot districts repeatedly described dyslexia pilot implementation as fitting into and working alongside the framework of MTSS, whose key elements are strong core instruction, screening, intervention, and data-based decision making—exactly those actions the dyslexia pilot requires. MTSS staff played key roles at both the school and district levels in many of the pilot districts. Some districts are still working to better align existing MTSS processes and the requirements of SB 48, but all acknowledge that these processes must stand together. “I don’t know if [schools] understand how baked in MTSS is with this process of the dyslexia pilot,” said one interviewee.

District Takeaways

- Begin or advance MTSS implementation if MTSS is not already in place or is in an early stage of implementation.
- Evaluate current MTSS processes, expectations, and supports for schools and identify any areas of implementation that could be strengthened, including ensuring that processes and decision rules are documented clearly.
- Reference the document [MTSS Snapshot: Are you Implementing with Fidelity?](#) and consult with [GaDOE MTSS staff](#) for assistance, if needed.

GaDOE Takeaways

- Review and update MTSS resources to clearly show how S.B. 48 requirements intersect with the Georgia MTSS framework.
- Consider expanding current support for MTSS cohort districts to districts across the state.
- Widely disseminate [MTSS resources](#) that are already available, including recorded professional learning sessions, and consider offering new professional development sessions using these materials to provide an opportunity for districts to ask questions and receive more individualized assistance.



Accurately identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia requires that all students receive strong core instruction in reading.

The pilot districts found that when they looked closely at student screening data and instructional practices, they often found shortcomings in foundational skills instruction. Gaps in core reading instruction can result in many students being flagged as “at risk” by screeners, especially in schools where large proportions of students enter school without strong oral language and pre-reading skills. This larger number of students at risk for reading problems, in turn, makes it more difficult for schools to provide intervention to all students in need and to identify those who may have characteristics of dyslexia or other related disorders that impact reading.

District Takeaways

- Ensure that core instructional materials support teachers in providing explicit, systematic reading instruction.
- Identify any gaps in core instructional materials that may need to be filled with other materials. Phonological awareness was a component of reading that several pilot districts noted could be better supported.
- Ensure that K-3 teachers receive training on evidence-based reading instruction, including strategies for explicitly teaching all five components of reading.

GaDOE Takeaways

- Provide resources to aid schools in evaluating their core instructional materials.
- Continue to provide statewide professional learning opportunities on evidence-based reading instruction.
- Consider developing a state vision for early literacy instruction that includes evidence-based methods for teaching foundational reading skills.



Fulfilling the requirements of S.B. 48 requires time, training, and a clear process for identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia.

By the end of Year 2 of the dyslexia pilot, some pilot districts felt they had a firm grasp on their screening processes, but others were still working to acquire screening tools that gave them the data needed to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia. Across the board, it was clear that screening students and using the screening data well—to make decisions about intervention and identify students who may have characteristics of dyslexia—would require additional time and training for school and district staff. In some cases, the pilot districts were still adjusting their screening processes, and there was variability in terms of when students with characteristics of dyslexia were identified in those processes and how identification impacted their instruction and intervention.

District Takeaways

- Review current literacy screening tools to see if they align with [the requirements of S.B. 48](#).
- Begin to consider a process for identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia and what it means for students if they are identified.
- Consider [data reporting requirements](#) associated with S.B. 48 and how the data will be collected and managed.
- Train staff on interpreting literacy screening data and using it for instructional decisions.
- Consider providing support for key staff members to earn a Georgia PSC-approved Dyslexia Endorsement so they can serve as resources for colleagues in 2024-25 and beyond.

GaDOE Takeaways

- Develop guidance on the expected process for the identification of students with characteristics of dyslexia.
- Provide statewide professional learning opportunities on using screening and progress monitoring data to inform instruction and intervention.
- Provide guidance on the intervention students with characteristics of dyslexia should receive.
- Consider providing flexibility in the implementation of S.B. 48 to allow new districts the ability to start small and scale up their processes.



Pairing students with strong instruction and the right intervention for their needs is the goal for all students, whether they have characteristics of dyslexia or not.

The pilot districts were focused on—and sometimes struggled with—pairing students with the right intervention for their needs. This matching of support to need required not just collecting data, but also knowing how to interpret it and accurately identifying specific skill gaps, then accessing the right intervention support for those gaps. The pilot districts described an increase in the use of non-commercial intervention strategies in 2021-22, reflecting a greater focus on equipping teachers to provide teacher-designed intervention support.

District Takeaways

- Review existing intervention programs and strategies to ensure they can meet the skill-specific needs of students and that dyslexia-specific interventions are available for students who need them.
- Provide teachers with training on using existing evidence-based intervention programs and strategies with fidelity.

GaDOE Takeaways

- Provide support to districts and schools as they review their existing intervention programs and strategies and select new ones as needed.
- Provide statewide professional learning opportunities on identifying and using effective, evidence-based intervention programs and non-commercial strategies.

For details about the Year 2 district implementation pilot, including overall structure and key staff, instruction, screening, intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making, see the full report [Georgia Dyslexia Pilot Program Implementation Analysis: 2021–2022: Year 2 of Implementation](#).