How Schools and School Systems Respond to Students with Dyslexia and Their Families:
A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how schools and school systems support students with dyslexia and their families in schools located in central New York. Complexity theory was the theoretical lens that guided the study. A review of literature including dyslexia, teacher knowledge of reading instruction, Response to Intervention (RtI), and research on parent-school relationships in response to student needs informed this study. The study was guided by two questions:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?

2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

A qualitative study approach was used to explore and describe the experiences and perspectives of central office administrators, teachers, parents, and a school psychologist to draw out the rich, thick descriptions of how participants understood and supported students with dyslexia. It is evident that dyslexia is a disability that can greatly impact students academically and emotionally if not addressed effectively. It is not a term used in schools or school systems in central New York. In addition, the study revealed that any actions or supports that teachers took to better understand dyslexia were done so independently of the school system. The findings of this study, in addition to the analysis of themes, have the potential to inspire a new direction that will better support students with dyslexia, their families, and their teachers.

Keywords: dyslexia, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Response to Intervention (RtI), teacher knowledge, Tier I instruction, Tier II/III intervention
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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem Statement

While dyslexia’s origins and effects are known, the ways schools and school systems are attempting to address and support students with dyslexia need further investigation, as do parents’ experiences in working with school systems to ensure that their child is being provided with the appropriate supports and assistance in order to be academically successful given their specific needs. The neurobiological-based disorder called dyslexia encompasses approximately 80% of the specific learning disability (SLD) population, which includes learning disabilities in areas of writing, speaking, listening, reading and mathematics (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). Lyon, Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2003) argue the breadth of the SLD category includes the term dyslexia. Dyslexia affects one out of five children (Armstrong, 2010; Merkle, 2014; Lyon et al., 2003; Wolf, 2007).

Students with dyslexia have average to above-average intelligence, are out-of-the box, critical thinkers, are problem solvers, and have strong visual-spatial skills (Lyon et al., 2003). Yet many dyslexic children do not identify as intelligent due to the struggle to read (Humphry & Mullins, 2002). Children with dyslexia benefit from explicit and systematic instruction targeting specific needs (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011, 2012). It is imperative that classroom teachers know the science of reading and signs of dyslexia in order to identify and support children who have reading difficulty (Snowling, 2013). However, teachers are not provided with the background, training or accountability measures to support dyslexia awareness (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell, Washburn, & Joshi, 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009; Passig, 2011; Williams & Lynch, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2013). And problems arise if the instruction is not adjusted to match the strength as well as specific need of
the dyslexic child (Bell, 2013; Denton, Tolar, Fletcher, Barth, Vaughn, & Francis, 2013; Lyon et al., 2003; Snowling, 2013; Williams & Lynch, 2010).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an approach required of schools to ‘catch’ children who struggle academically. The research-based methodology of RtI implementation is rooted in validity, metrics, and evidence-based, quality instruction (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). In addition to dyslexia knowledge, classroom teachers either misunderstand or do not have a deep knowledge of RtI (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, & Moore, 2014; Friedli, Brunker, Snow, & Ritzman, 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; White, Polly, & Audette, 2012; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Thus, RtI contributes to how school systems and their educators experience challenges while trying to support students with dyslexia.

A fluid discourse between parents and educators is critical for families with dyslexic children (Daniel, 2000; Murray, Handyside, Straka, & Arton-Titus, 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004). Reid and Valle (2004) posit school voice as one of positional ‘scientific’ authority, where the school district maintains control and the upper hand during sessions where parents and school personnel gather to discuss the needs of the child (Griffiths, Norwich, & Burden, 2004; Reid & Valle, 2004). It is not clear to parents whether or not schools place value upon the parental knowledge and input as a power and influence (Murray et al., 2013). Planning for a fair and appropriate educational experience for children with dyslexia involves an intricate interconnected point of view, inclusive of parent input.

Dyslexic students face difficulty with academics and low self-esteem if the educational system does not support their specific need (Foss, 2013; Granger, 2010; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). The implications for a fair and appropriate educational experience for students with dyslexia within public schools are not clearly understood or applied due in part to late or
unidentified diagnosis (Sandman-Hurley, 2016; Waddlington & Waddlington, 2005; Youman & Mather, 2013, 2015), teacher knowledge, (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009), and systems of support (Waddlington & Waddlington, 2005; White et al., 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore central office administrator, educator and parent experiences and perspectives on effectively supporting students with dyslexia. Emergent perspectives and themes may provide a window to central office administrators, educators and parents as they attempt to support children with dyslexia in public schools. In addition, opportunities to exercise social perspective taking (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Wang, 2012) may present themselves as a result of this study with school staff. It is important to note the experiences of parents who may already have the positional knowledge afforded to them as a result of their own profession or experiences from having children with dyslexia. Educators may also share their experiences with colleagues from the parent perspective instead of that of educator. Therefore, this study may benefit parents and public school systems working to support students with dyslexia as best as they can.

**Significance Statement**

A study such as this is warranted in order to better understand the complexity of knowledge, input and instructional implementation in circumstances where the school system may or may not have the knowledge or systems in place to best meet the needs of dyslexic students.

Lyon et al. (2003) posit dyslexic students are big picture thinkers, have a high oral vocabulary, are strong in problem solving, are creative, and benefit from specific multisensory approaches to reading instruction. Teachers’ understandings of dyslexia (Binks-Cantrell et al.,
2012; Snowling, 2012), reading instruction (Moats, 1994), and addressing both strengths and areas of need (Williams & Lynch, 2010) are inconsistent with what research and policy suggest (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2015). Therefore, this study seeks to explore the support for educators who work with dyslexic students within the public school system.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2002, 2008) policy indicates that collaborative and problem-solving efforts are required and must be equal on behalf of all participants including students (when appropriate), parents and school personnel who are involved in the development of individualized learning plans. It is not always the case that such collaboration exists during meetings between parents and school staff. For example, parents receive a Parents’ Bill of Rights document from their school district illustrating the process and their rights prior to any meeting involving an individual learning plan such as a 504 or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The discourse and readability in this document are most often at an academic level much higher than the suggested text level (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006), thus distinguishing the school’s discourse from the that of the family, which can be intimidating. Acronyms or terminology unique to education may not be a part of the parents’ or advocates’ schema (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). The school district maintains control and the upper hand during sessions where parents and school personnel gather to discuss the needs of the child (Griffiths et al., 2004; Reid & Valle, 2004). Parents possess knowledge unique to their child, yet it is not clear to parents whether or not schools place value upon the parental knowledge and input (Murray et al., 2013).

Reid and Valle (2004) posit the power of positional authority is exercised on behalf of school personnel. The intentionality may not be mindfully exercised; however, it exists due to contextual experiences in the educational profession (Reid & Valle, 2004). This qualitative
study aims to reveal if the powers of position and knowledge are leveraged between school personnel and parents. It also explores collaborative efforts between school faculty and parents regarding specialized instruction or methodology to be used with the dyslexic student in order to ensure confidence and academic success.

This qualitative study will add to the body of research illustrating the complexity of voice in the development of individualized learning plans and the need for professional development support for educators and administration, parental empowerment, accessibility, and authentic discourse between parents and school personnel. Thus, it will offer reflective insights of those involved in planning for a child with dyslexia for a sample of participants in Central New York.

**Positionality**

The researcher for this study is an educator with 19 years of experience. She has spent the past 11 years as a district-wide instructional coach after leaving the classroom as an elementary teacher. Also, the researcher has been a parent advocate for her 12-year old son who has dyslexia. The researcher’s experiences as both an insider (educator) and outsider (parent) prompted her interest in this proposed study.

The researcher acknowledges an intersection between her educator, parent, and researcher roles. As an educator and a mother, the researcher has experienced the immediacy of addressing the dyslexic child’s needs earlier in her/his academic career. The window of opportunity closes for dyslexic students if each school year passes by with little to no change in practice or response to their needs. She recognizes the challenges of supporting children with dyslexia within a system that may not be equipped to do so. Much of the researcher’s work in schools has been fueled by her own personal experiences as both an educator and as an advocate.
The researcher believes in change agency and facilitates that movement within the conversations that ultimately center on how to reach, engage and educate children.

This qualitative study explores other administrator, educator and parent perspectives. Research questions for this qualitative study were designed with the researcher’s experiences in mind working at the district level, as a classroom teacher, and as a parent. The positionality of the researcher will place her in situations where she will garner a broader understanding of how other administrators, educators and parents across central New York experience and support students with dyslexia in public schools. Her identity as a district-wide support person, an educator, and one who lives the unique circumstances of parenting a dyslexic child will connect with participants in the study (Briscoe, 2005).

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study explores how knowledge is shared and supported among three stakeholder groups: central office administrators, building-level educators, and parents of children with dyslexia. Central office administrators and building-level elementary educators from across Central New York districts will participate in independent central office administrator interviews and teacher focus groups. This study solicits responses to questions regarding what schools and school systems know about the specific needs of dyslexic students and the kinds of assistance that could benefit students with dyslexia. It will identify to what degree administrators and educators believe they are providing appropriate resources and supports to actually benefit those students while ensuring academic success. If schools and school systems are not able to do so, administrators and educators should reveal their challenges.

A subsequent parent focus group from Central New York districts will ensue. The specialist model holds that dialogue between parents and educators positions the educators as
experts and the parents as passive recipients (Mortier, Hunt, Desimpel, & Van Hove, 2009). Parents bring another perspective that may support, challenge and offer more than the academic ways of knowing (Griffiths et al., 2004). A qualitative study of the lived experiences of the focus group participants may further reveal positions of power. This qualitative study will also explore what parents say about why schools and school systems are or are not able to provide such supports for students with dyslexia. As a result, two questions have emerged:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?

2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Discrepancy Model.** The use of IQ and performance measures to indicate a discrepancy in order to be considered for specialized education. It was viewed as a ‘wait to fail’ method used in the late 1970s and ended with IDEA legislation to be in place by 2006 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013).

**Dyslexia.** Identified as a specific learning disability. It is neurobiological in origin, often presented as an unexpected difficulty in learning (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008). As defined on the International Dyslexia Association’s website,

It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary
consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

(International Dyslexia Association, 2017)

**Individualized Education Program (IEP).** An individualized program that is intended to accommodate the student as well as provide additional supports and/or adjustments to the core classroom program (Fish, 2008). Students must qualify within one of the 13 categories in order to receive an IEP.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** A federal law that secures access to education for children with special needs from birth to age 21. In efforts to support inclusive practices, the last updates in 2004 acknowledged parental rights, Fair and Appropriate Education (FAPE), and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

**Response to Intervention (RtI), also known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).** An approach designed to replace the discrepancy model and include all primary school children. RtI or MTSS has core components within its system where high-quality, evidence-based classroom instruction, regular progress monitoring, tiered systems of support and communication with parents occur (RtI Action Network; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

**Tier I Instruction.** Regular or core classroom instruction designed for all students.

**Tiers II and III Intervention.** Supplemental small group or individualized instruction designed to address student needs based upon what students are not responding to during core Tier I instruction.

**Theoretical Framework**

The complexity behind the problem itself is supported in the literature review. Educator knowledge of dyslexia and subsequent classroom support of the dyslexic student is far from the
knowledge base provided by research. Explicit reading instruction and Response to Intervention (the typical assistance provided to the dyslexic reader) reflect the gaps from research to higher education to schools to home. Lastly, while it is clear educators believe in parent involvement, it is not clear as to what degree. This problem of practice investigates the exchange of knowledge between three stakeholders – parent, administration, and educator(s) – in efforts to support a fair and appropriate educational experience for the dyslexic child. When the parent initiates and questions the academic/social emotional difficulty, shares knowledge about the child, and supports it with research-based information with the school system, parent involvement in the school-family relationship takes a different turn.

Although the problem of practice was framed with an insider/outsider perspective, the researcher needed to discover how dyslexia was explained within research and practiced within schools. This problem of practice is complex and interconnected with the exchange of knowledge, understanding and fluidity between people within the educational system.

**Complexity theory.** Complexity theory will address the literature review and problem of practice. It provides a systems perspective. The findings will identify how various stakeholder voices in turn affect the system, as this new insight will connect back to complexity theory.

Chaos theory describes the fluctuating conditions an event experiences based upon the smallest amount of uncertainty introduced to the whole system (Mason, 2008). Complexity emerged as scientists developed an understanding of the laws of thermodynamics in the late 19th century (Cilliers, 1998; Horn, 2008). Horn (2008) describes thermodynamics as “energy that can neither be created nor destroyed” (p. 134). As a part of chaos theory, complexity theory (Mason, 2008; Waldrop, 1993) originated in the fields of chemistry, biology, and physics as well as economics (Mason, 2008). Complexity theory eventually emerged in the social sciences in
the 1990s (Mason, 2008). Sharing chaos theory’s concern for the whole, complexity theory differs in that it seeks to understand how agents are connected, how they interact with each other, and how relationships are formed and sustained (Mason, 2008). Mason (2008) defines agents as atoms, humans or organizations.

The guiding principles behind complexity theory in the hard sciences are also replicable to social sciences and the systems within them. As put forth by Manson (2001), systems are living entities where the flow of energy is nonlinear, interconnected, and supported at various points within a system. Cilliers (1998) asserts that a complex system often includes a large number of agents. If the system becomes too large, the agents do not see nor understand the interconnected networks. There is historical significance within dynamic systems as the past co-creates the future. However, this does not mean that a system is closed and the circuitry and interconnected nature cannot be changed. Cilliers (1998) identified complex systems as self-organizing. A complex system is open, meaning opportunities arise for unexpected shifts (Cilliers, 1998). Complexity theory posits that every agent has potential to create momentum through a networked series of incidence(s) that are unpredictable at times (Cilliers, 1998; Horn, 2008; Mason, 2008; Stacey, 2001).

Mason (2008) and Horn (2008) are current complexity theory scholars in education. Mason (2008) describes complexity theory as a means to “seek the sources of and reasons for change in the dynamic complexity of interactions among elements or agents that constitute a particular environment” (p. 119). Mason (2008) identifies emergence as an important aspect of complexity theory. Emergence occurs when different behaviors within the system develop, causing unexpected properties to emerge (Mason, 2008). Mason (2008) posits there is not an outsider within the system. All agents count and can influence a change within the dynamic
system. The entire educational system including the child, parent, educators, administrators, organizations, higher education, research and policy are networked like a web rather than a chain. Momentum is required to create a change within a system (Mason, 2008).

Horn (2008) claims that complexity theory can help the educational researcher better understand conditions within a system. Complex systems are interactive with both positive and negative feedback loops (Horn, 2008). Agents within a system may not have the ability to exchange knowledge freely thus impeding the development and movement within a system (Horn, 2008; Mason, 2008). Horn (2008) suggests school systems build awareness of the capacity that supports growth and reflexivity within and among the system and its agents.

Control measures placed upon a system intended for orderliness prevent the novel experiences from naturally occurring (Stacey, 2001). However, just because that momentum was prevented from happening does not mean the energy was stopped. Rather, a new energy may emerge as a result of the blocked momentum (Stacey, 2001). Power is influential. It becomes the gatekeeper with potential to prevent uncontrolled movements within a dynamic system. Instead, the networked system is limited to linear, unidirectional movement for agents. Thus the intended flow of fully interactive exchanges of information and making new meaning between agents is blocked. The energy does not disappear as a result; it finds another way to move within a system.

It is compelling to see this problem of practice through historical and networked layers of knowing between the agents within an educational system. Applying Mason’s (2008) and Horn’s (2008) assertions points to the conclusion that knowledge and action are not static, nor are they linear. As Stacey (2001) noted, “Knowledge is not a ‘thing,’ or a system, but an ephemeral, active process of relating” (p. 10).
**Why complexity theory?** This study will be informed by complexity theory, which seeks to understand how agents are connected, how they interact with each other, and how relationships are formed and sustained (Mason, 2008). Complexity theory proposes that every agent has potential to create momentum through a networked series of incidence(s) that are unpredictable at times (Cilliers, 1998; Horn, 2008; Mason, 2008; Stacey, 2001). This study intends to identify how central office administrators, educators and parents experience supporting children with dyslexia within a system. This problem of practice was framed by first identifying the interconnected ways in which knowledge is understood, created and shared between administrators, educators and parents within any given educational system and across systems within a region.

**Summary**

Children with dyslexia sit in roughly one out of five seats within any given classroom within any given school and school district across this country. Approximately 80% of students identified with Specific Learning Disability in reading are, in fact, dyslexic. As much as the science of reading has been supported by years of scientific reading research, it has yet to affect and positively impact dyslexic students. Instructional knowledge of dyslexia, reading and Response to Intervention continues to be lacking for public school teachers. Meanwhile, parents may or may not attempt to take part in the conversation (again due in part to knowledge) as part of IDEA. Grass roots groups like Decoding Dyslexia, consisting mainly of parents, have been a catalyst toward raising awareness and supporting policy requiring early screening, earlier intervention and teacher training. Recent legislation at the federal and state levels have taken heed of the reprehensible academic experiences of students with dyslexia. This study is
warranted to better understand how agents within a system (administrators, educators and parents) think about effectively supporting students with dyslexia.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and gain a better understanding of how school systems and parent perspectives are positioned within the context of school collaboration involving instructional decisions to support dyslexic children. In order to understand the subject of this study, three interconnected areas of literature are reviewed:

1. What Is Dyslexia
2. Impact on Schools, School Systems, Teaching and Learning

In the first section titled What Is Dyslexia, a historically developed understanding of dyslexia is introduced, then followed up with current understanding in research. It is important to identify threads of connectivity throughout this section. Dyslexia misconceptions and missed opportunities to effectively educate students with dyslexia continue to plague educator knowledge despite the abundance of research collected over the past thirty years. Dyslexia is then presented from the educational perspective, notably dyslexia-specific policy and practice. This section concludes with a parent and child perspective.

The second section, Impact on Schools, School Systems, Teaching and Learning, builds upon current educator understanding of the shift in policy to identify students who struggle in reading. The former IQ achievement discrepancy model has been replaced by Response to Intervention (RtI), an intervention system placed primarily into teachers’ hands. This section describes the RtI framework as it impacts classroom reading instruction. As in the first section, the literature in this section will shift from research and policy to practice. This section concludes with parent perspectives of RtI.
The final section of the literature review, titled Research on Parent-School Relationships in Response to Student Needs, delves into overarching social constructs that drive relationships between school systems and parents. Schools posit the need for parental involvement, yet the question of on whose terms that involvement occurs remains.

Finally, a summary is provided, presenting the main points of the literature review and implications for this study. Throughout this review two questions will be posed:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?

2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

Given the complicated nature of dyslexia, instruction and positions of power within the school system, these questions elicit a depth of understanding to systems processes in areas of dyslexia awareness, instruction, intervention, regulation and parent advocacy.

What Is Dyslexia?

Reading is a relatively new evolution of just a mere thousand years (Lyon et al., 2003; Wolf, 2007). It was not a natural process but one that was instructionally and intentionally applied to the brain’s capacity to function in an ever-increasing shift toward a literate environment (Lyon et al., 2003; Wolf, 2007). Eventually, reading became the measure of success, often resulting in strengths in other areas being overlooked (Armstrong, 2010; Lyon et al., 2003). The focus on and importance of reading ability outmatch the understanding of why students struggle to read and how to address those struggles (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; Hayward, Phillips, & Sych, 2014; Johnston,
The inability to read immediately stigmatizes students and conjures misconceptions of low intelligence or inadequacies in parenting, environment and/or instruction. Students and adults who struggle to read also struggle with self-worth (Armstrong, 2010; Hinshelwood, 1907; Lyon et al., 2003; Wolf, 2007).

Thomas Armstrong (2010) asserts the high value placed upon reading with an example of what might be a common conversation between adults:

If you’re at a cocktail party and you tell a group of people, “I really can’t balance my checkbook,” everyone will laugh understandingly. But if you say, “I can’t read,” there’s likely to be a shocked silence. We expect everyone to read in our culture. (p. 76-77)

The following section will build a case of the complexity surrounding dyslexia. Leading with an overarching lens, this part of the literature review looks at the development of the disorder known as dyslexia over time. A discussion of the effects of dyslexia research in policy and in school systems will follow. A subsequent section includes teacher understanding of dyslexia. A final section includes a perspective of the dyslexic child and family.

**Dyslexia.** Morgan (1896) and Hinshelwood (1904, 1907, 1912) contributed to understanding word-blindness as a foundational framework that contributed to the current understanding of dyslexia. Dyslexia was described as having great difficulty in interpreting written or printed symbols (Berlin, 1887; Hinshelwood, 1895). The discoveries at this time were viewed through an ophthalmological perspective as a visual problem, but were eventually attributed to a neurological concern. The availability of Functional Magnetic Resonance Images (fMRI) as a non-evasive measure made it possible to identify and postulate theories and
methodologies for remediation (Shaywitz, 1998; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, Lyon, & Shaywitz, 2006; Wolf, 2007). The available fMRI scans contributed to competing theories related to determining and locating causes of developmental dyslexia within the brain (Habib, 2000; Jorm, 1979; Ramus, Rosen, Dakin, Day, Castellote, White, & Frith, 2003; Shaywitz, 1998; Shaywitz et al., 2006). Due to the differing theories, defining dyslexia in generalities has perhaps contributed to the confusion and complexity from the researcher to policy to practitioner (Youman & Mather, 2013).

Jorm (1979) compiled a review of the literature that discussed the basis for developmental dyslexia. Within the study, Jorm (1979) posited there were two different groups of dyslexics: those with developmental dyslexia and those with acquired dyslexia (due to brain damage). The review investigated the reading difficulties developmental dyslexics tend to have. Jorm’s (1979) compendium of research supported the evidence that dyslexic readers struggle with phonological application to reading, meaning the ability to identify phonemes (units of sound) and phonics (correlating sounds) in order to read with fluency and comprehend. Jorm’s (1979) review supported the frequency with which dyslexic readers struggle with pseudowords, claiming it was due in part to sense-making of the pseudoword and struggling to hold it in short term storage.

Jorm (1979) identified the phonological theory as favorable in research but advocated for avoidance of phonics instruction, due to what his research had concluded about short-term memory deficits as a basis for reading struggle in dyslexic readers. Instead, Jorm (1979) recommended a look-say method based upon Chall’s 1967 work. The look-say method teaches children to read whole words instead of breaking the words into phonetic parts (Chall, 1979; Collins, 1997). Chall’s (1967) point of view was concerned with how systematic phonics was
taught and posited that mindful application into real authentic text was equally important. This suggestion conflicts with and avoids the exposure of phonics instruction, as it is needed in order to read the words.

Shaywitz (1998) identified dyslexia as the most common neurobehavioral disorder in children, identifying contemporary theories such as problems in the visual system, language and temporal processing of stimuli. Shaywitz’s (1998) research suggested problems in the area of language-phonology as the determinant and cause for struggle in a dyslexic person. Thus the difficulty with decoding slows down the efficiency of the reading process.

Habib (2000) contributed further to the body of research proposing differing theories of dyslexia. A meta-analysis of thirteen studies involving Morphological MRI and fourteen studies using fMRI concluded with Habib (2000) suggesting a turn toward a consideration of a multi-system deficit model. Meaning, visual, auditory and motor discriminations were evident in addition to phonological deficits in dyslexic research. Central to Habib’s (2000) conclusion is the support for temporal processing impairment as it supports the previous deficits.

Ramus et al. (2003) acknowledged phonological, visual, cerebellar and rapid auditory processing as conflicting theories of developmental dyslexia. According to Ramus et al. (2003), visual theory suggests impairments with vision at magnocellular layers, cerebellar theory posits poor motor control, rapid auditory processing theory includes deficits in auditory processing, and magnocellular theory contends all of the above complete a dyslexic profile. Ramus et al. (2003) designed a multiple case study to measure each of the competing theories using psychometric tests as well as tasks that addressed each of the theories. The authors used 16 confirmed dyslexic college students and 16 non-dyslexic college students. Ramus et al. (2003) found 16 out of 16 dyslexic participants to have poor phonological performance scores using the psychometric and
phonological assessments. The remaining theories presented with mixed results, meaning that poor performance in visual, speed, auditory or motor theories were not consistently identified with all 16 dyslexic participants. However, Ramus et al. (2003) observed that sensory and motor disorders were connected in some participants but not in all participants, as was the case with phonology. Although each theory attributes a specific concern to describe why a dyslexic struggles with reading, phonology is one area where it is most consistent among all dyslexics (Ramus et al., 2003).

**Dyslexia as deficit.** “Dyslexia represents a disorder within the language system and more specifically, within a particular subcomponent of that system, phonological processing” (Shaywitz et al., 2006, p. 627). Shaywitz et al. (2006) noted the strong support for a phonological theory as cause and remediation for the difficulty a dyslexic reader has with accessing and lifting text off the page. The young adult participants in this study were poor readers as children and remained so as young adults. Participants were divided into categories based upon reading achievement in grade two as well as in grades nine and 10. The participants had been part of a longitudinal study since they were five. Pseudoword rhyming and real word tasks were given to the participants. Shaywitz et al. (2006) found consistent results with pseudowords in low to persistently low readers as in past studies. More importantly, this study’s real word task results presented unexpected information. The low performing readers’ brain activation suggested underactivity. However, the non-impaired and persistently low readers’ brain activation indicated activation in the left posterior region, while the non-impaired readers’ brain activation showed the use of the left side, and the low performing readers’ brain activated on the right frontal region that is often associated with working memory (Shaywitz et al., 2006). The authors pointed to the importance of vocabulary instruction, as it influences cognitive
abilities and is often an area of compensation for struggling readers (Shaywitz et al., 2006). This study suggested continual support for phonological theory, reading intervention and additionally the importance of building vocabulary in a multisensory, explicit and systematic nature.

Figure 1. A Neural Signature for Dyslexia: Underactivation of Neural Systems in the Back of the Brain (Lyon et al., 2003, p. 83).

Wolf (2007) and a colleague studied two specific dyslexic reading attributes-difficulties in phonology, or what Wolf considered the structure of language; and difficulty in rapid naming, or what Wolf determined as speed; which will impact fluency. Wolf (2007) found results that may challenge the phonics-only need. The data indicated that about 25% of participants demonstrated a phonics-only deficit, 20% indicated a rapid-naming or fluency-only deficit, and the majority of participants indicated a double-deficit. Thus the present study concludes with the complex nature of determining one singular or multiple areas that contribute to a dyslexic person’s struggle to read.

**Dyslexia as strength.** “I may add that the boy is bright and of average intelligence in conversation. The schoolmaster who has taught him for some years says that he would be the smartest lad in the school if the instruction were entirely oral” (Morgan, 1896, p. 1378).
Dyslexia is known more for academic (reading) deficits than it is for strengths (Armstrong, 2010; Karolyi, Winner, Gray, & Sherman, 2002; Williams & Lynch, 2010). Most dyslexic students are of average to above-average intelligence (Lyon et al., 2003). Often, people are surprised to know the dyslexic person struggles because she/he presents and participates in an otherwise considered intellectual capacity, therefore supporting the notion that dyslexia is in a way an invisible disorder (Lyon et al., 2003). Dyslexic students are big-picture thinkers and have a need to build understanding with concepts through meaning instead of through details (Lyon et al., 2003). Often described as ‘out of the box thinkers,’ sensitive, intuitive and with strong visual/spatial abilities, dyslexic students are often good at logic, sports, the arts, architecture and public speaking (Merkle, 2004; Lyon et al., 2003). All dyslexic children may not become the next big entrepreneur or artist, but all dyslexic children do have the potential to unleash their unique talents if teachers and parents know how to tap into them (Wolf, 2007).

Reflecting upon how and why so many dyslexics are incredibly talented, Wolf (2007) wondered whether the dyslexic reader was using the right side of the brain in order to read, thus activating the creative capacities, or whether the creative capacities overtook the reading ability. Wolf (2007) believed in the power of connecting the strengths in order to move forward with addressing areas of concern.

**Dyslexia research in federal and state policy.** Currently, dyslexia does not have a specific category. Rather, dyslexia is identified within a general category of Specific Learning Disability in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V* (DSM-V). Snowling (2012) identified the specific nature dyslexia presents under the specific learning disabilities. Although the neurological developmental disorders such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia are referenced, Snowling (2012) preferred to see a proposed definition of dyslexia as:
1. Difficulties in accuracy or fluency of reading that are not consistent with the person’s chronological age, educational opportunities or intellectual abilities. Multiple sources of information are to be used to assess reading, one of which must be an individually administered, culturally appropriate and psychometrically sound standardized measure of reading and reading-related abilities.

2. The disturbance in the first criterion, without accommodations, significantly interferes with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require these reading skills (Snowling, 2012, p. 9).

Without such amendments, it is more difficult to identify and appropriate instruction. If the dyslexic child’s needs are not identified as specific to the dyslexic profile, the child risks not getting what she/he needs instructionally (Snowling & Hulme, 2011; Youman & Mather, 2013).

The Research Excellence and Advancements for Dyslexia Act. July 2015 brought great hope to dyslexia advocacy efforts as the Research Excellence and Advancements for Dyslexia Act (READ Act) was introduced at the federal level. This was the first time the federal government had recognized the prevalence of dyslexia and the challenges it brings to students in classrooms. The READ Act requires the National Science Foundation’s budget to earmark $2.5 million for the advancement of dyslexia research, early screening, curricula and professional development for teachers and administrators. The READ Act was passed in October 2015 and signed by President Obama in December 2015. Youman and Mather (2015) assert this passage will begin to steer state directives toward cohesion in efforts to support dyslexic students and the teachers who teach them.

State legislation. The demand for dyslexia awareness and training has increased over recent years (Youman & Mather, 2013). In January 2014, Congressman Bill Cassidy and
Congresswoman Julia Brownley sponsored the bipartisan Resolution H.Res.456, which calls on school systems as well as state and local educational agencies to recognize the significance dyslexia has with student learning and success. The bill requests acts of agency to acknowledge the need for dyslexia awareness, interventions and supports as well as to put systems in place. The need for such a resolution is paramount. Many school systems and the teachers who work with dyslexic children have insufficient understanding of dyslexia (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009; Passig, 2011; Williams & Lynch, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2013). Therefore, students fall further behind. There is a need for research to reach practice in order to provide dyslexic students with a relevant and socially just education (Snowling, 2012).

Several states have recognized the need for developing statewide dyslexia laws due to the complex and varied needs of dyslexic children (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2015). As of publication, an updated 2015 Youman and Mather study identified 28 states that have passed dyslexia legislation. Another six states have pending resolutions or initiatives (Youman & Mather, 2015). Eight states have proposed dyslexia legislation that failed to pass. While New York is not one of the states that has passed dyslexia legislation, it is one of seven states that identified a specific day as ‘Dyslexia Day.’ This notion acknowledges the need to build dyslexia awareness and support. Youman and Mather (2015) found many states had a combination of the following proposed laws and initiatives:

- Screening for dyslexia
- Dyslexia training for professionals
- Eligibility for accommodations and services for students with dyslexia
- Classroom instruction for students with dyslexia
An overwhelmed system. Dyslexia legislation recognizes the need for a heightened awareness and response to dyslexia in the classroom, yet it varies in terms of what has been passed (Youman & Mather, 2015). Mississippi, for instance, passed a bill allowing dyslexic students to attend another school if their home school did not provide targeted instruction for dyslexic students (Lemonis, 2015; Youman & Mather, 2015). Parents were free to transfer their child to another school that could better serve her/his dyslexic needs. The passage created a tidal wave of problems due to limited capacity, resources and finances (Lemonis, 2015). Lemonis (2015) identified obstacles such as dyslexia identification/diagnosis, teacher training, few schools prepared to support dyslexic students, student enrollment numbers in selected schools, and state suggested/supported screeners, interventions and curricula. Passing dyslexia legislation requires a systemic plan of support. Otherwise, it becomes yet another roadblock for dyslexic students, their families and teachers.

Dyslexia awareness in the public school system. Dyslexia affects one out of five children (Armstrong, 2010; Merkle, 2014; Lyon et al., 2003; Wolf, 2007). Dyslexia is genetic, neurological, varies in severity, is not related to intelligence, and is indicative of reliance on the right side of the brain (Habib, 2000; Jorm, 1979; Ramus et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 1998; Shaywitz et al., 2006; Wolf, 2007). The profile of a dyslexic student is one that has an unexpectedly difficult experience with reading (Morgan, 1896; Shaywitz, 2008). However, differences in theoretical construct have led researchers to differences in academic and remediation
recommendations (Jorm, 1979; Habib, 2000; Ramus et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 1998; Shaywitz et al., 2006; Wolf, 2007), only furthering the complexity of addressing dyslexia in school systems across the country. The deficit is no longer in knowledge but in action; given the breadth of research, practitioner understanding and application leaves much to be desired.

**Teacher knowledge.** Teacher knowledge of reading research, understanding of the science of teaching reading, and ultimately the methodology used to teach dyslexic students how to read is inconsistent, insufficient or even yet invisible (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Moats, 1994; Snowling, 2012; Williams & Lynch, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2013). Pre-service teachers receive little information about dyslexia as it is often considered a special education issue (Moats, 1994; Williams & Lynch, 2010). Teachers are faced with barriers to the acquisition of reading research and effective instruction such as school preference, pedagogical policy, materials and limited college instructor knowledge (Hayward et al., 2014). Reading instruction is seldom or not sufficiently taught explicitly to pre-service teachers in special education programs (Moats & Lyon, 1996). However, dyslexic children are a part of the general education landscape. Therefore, it is paramount that pre-service teacher preparation, on-going professional development and district acknowledgement of the unique needs of dyslexic children shift away from vague understanding to explicit insight.

**Explicit, systematic, bound by belief.** Dyslexic students benefit from multisensory explicit and systematic phonics instruction with additional emphasis in vocabulary and fluency (Adams, 1990; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). Moats (1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996) claimed teachers did not have enough exposure to knowledge of the structure of language at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Therefore, teachers were misinformed and underprepared to instruct children, especially those who struggle
to read. Moats (1994) posited that the brief points of exposure to explicit instruction were not enough to build a depth of understanding of reading instruction. Rather, for students to be proficient readers, writers and spellers, they must have the ‘appreciation’ of how words are made up of units of sounds in the form of letters. In order for accurate reading to occur, students need routine exposure of decoding skills applied in authentic and meaningful contexts (Moats & Lyon, 1996). Therefore Moats and Lyon (1996) concluded it was critical for teachers to have both an understanding of reading instruction and dyslexia awareness.

Gwernan-Jones and Burden (2009) claimed that teacher beliefs frame the context of instructional delivery and attitudes toward students who may need more instructional support. Their study sought to capture whether or not pre-service teachers believed dyslexia was a catalyst for learned helplessness and overall laziness. Findings suggested that the predisposition of teacher belief prior to coursework remained central to attitudinal response after coursework (Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009). Trainee teacher perceptions were generally positive in the belief that dyslexia was real and required specific instruction. However, the data changed as teachers reflected upon their own understanding of how to explicitly teach dyslexic students as well as the attitude of parental understanding about their child’s needs. Over 90% of the respondents believed dyslexia existed and was not an excuse for laziness. When asked about trainee confidence in instructing dyslexic students, only 58% of the participants felt confident about their own abilities. Therefore, Gwernan-Jones and Burden (2009) concluded that good intentions and general understanding could only go so far. This important study shows a great need for more support for pre-service teachers as they prepare for the work of teaching reading, understanding dyslexia, and acknowledging parental perspectives as legitimate concerns.
In another study, both pre-service and experienced teachers were asked about basic concepts of reading instruction. Washburn et al. (2011) found teachers to overestimate their general knowledge of basic language understanding as well as of dyslexia. Teachers’ basic understanding of terminology such as phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, alphabetic principles and phonics was lower than 50% in explicit competencies (Washburn et al., 2011). Teachers generally believed dyslexic students to have a lower I.Q and dyslexia was also understood to be a visual processing deficit, with letters in reversal or words written backwards (Washburn et al., 2011). Teacher misconception of dyslexia presented serious concerns in addition to the difference in implicit and explicit knowledge about basic reading concepts.

There remain definitive gaps between research, teacher knowledge of explicit reading instruction and dyslexia awareness in the classroom (Bell, 2013; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2005; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011; Youman & Mather, 2013). The same is said to be true with reading specialists, as their conceptual framework has been influenced by their undergraduate and post-graduate experiences (Hayward et al., 2014; Moats & Lyon, 1996). Teacher knowledge and ongoing professional development is warranted (Bell, 2013; Hayward et al., 2014; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005; Washburn et al., 2011). Support for teachers who work with dyslexic children on a daily basis is also unclear, much like how the theoretical debate clouds dyslexia awareness perception and instruction.

**Parents and dyslexia advocacy.** The literature successfully argues the importance of the parent’s perspective as a means of ensuring the dyslexic child gets what she/he needs, yet little research exists that addresses that perspective. Adding to the complex nature of dyslexia are the ways in which educational systems tend not to take parental perspective seriously (Griffiths et al., 2004; Gwernan-Jones, 2009; Nicolson, 2002). Nicolson (2002) calls this difference a
“conflict vs. interest” (p. 60). Parents have considerable insight into their dyslexic child’s need (Griffiths et al., 2004; Gwernan-Jones, 2009; Poon-McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014). While parents indicated that they initiated interventions with the child’s well being in mind, teachers responded reactively, as they believed trust was violated and felt overstepped (Griffiths et al., 2004). Griffiths et al. (2004) examine the distinction between how the parents and the teacher(s) look at the child. The parent may have the individual child that is of concern while the teacher has an entire classroom of students to think about (Griffiths et al., 2004). It would seem then that a parental perspective is warranted if the child displays areas of academic and social concern.

People who are not dyslexic may never understand the day-to-day struggle in school (Cosenza, 2014; Granger, 2010; Wolf, 2007). Disability discourse identifies deficiency as compared to normalcy (Cosenza, 2014). Dyslexia’s attributes are known more for deficiency than for strength (Armstrong, 2010), hindering understanding by a limited perception of those who do not have a disability. Yet mindful attempts to glean understanding are warranted. Gehlbach et al. (2012) describe Social Perspectives Taking as a “process through which the perceiver discerns the thoughts, feelings and motivations of one or more targets” (p. 2).

Gehlbach et al. (2012) stress the important role that motivation to understand plays within this process. Meaningful contexts support the dyslexic student (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008) and it would benefit professionals who work with dyslexic students to do the same. This might be an appropriate step from dyslexia research to engaging daily with a dyslexic student.

Granger (2010), a dyslexic scholar, writes about her own experiences in school. Granger imagines her dyslexic body as fragmented and thus broken as it strived to conform to what was considered acceptable in school. Granger’s attempts to conform to a narrow version of ‘normal learning’ sacrificed her unique ways of knowing, only to leave behind a part of herself that was
considered ‘deviant’ but was the essence of her ways of knowing (Granger, 2010). Although parental attempts were recognized, they were identified as another reminder of a student who was not accepted entirely (Granger, 2010). Granger urges a deeper look of the learning disability label. There are other ways to acknowledge the learner and maintain the whole self as one complex entity with multiple opportunities to learn.

Poon-McBrayer and McBrayer (2014) wanted to understand parental perspectives as they advocated for their dyslexic child. Confucianism was a foundational philosophy in the region they studied. According to Poon-McBrayer and McBrayer (2014), family is a focal point in Confucian philosophy, as well as a sense of harmony in all relationships. The importance of harmony is reflected in relationships between parents and educators. Parents made sacrifices to ensure an education for their dyslexic child while maintaining balance with Confucian philosophy (Poon-McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014).

**Organizing from the outside.** Researchers, policy makers, institutions, teachers, parents and dyslexic children contribute to what Nicolson (2002) calls a dyslexic ecosystem. Like a biological ecosystem, the dyslexic ecosystem is interconnected and interdependent (Nicolson, 2002). This metaphor supports the complexity of dyslexia within the public school system. Within any ecosystem, conflicts of interest inherently appear. Nicolson (2002) describes cognitive conflicts as conflicts of knowing. The dyslexic ecosystem supports what Cosenza (2014) argues: dyslexia “can function as a magnifying glass that can see the interworking of the educational ‘machine’” (p. 9).

Decoding Dyslexia, a parent-centered grassroots movement, has become influential in shifting policy in recent years. A branch can be found in every state. The aim is to empower change within the educational system in order for children who have dyslexia to have a
meaningful and successful academic experience (Decoding Dyslexia). Decoding Dyslexia group members have participated in federal and state hearings regarding dyslexia support. Citing this as a social justice issue, Decoding Dyslexia members aim to ensure that all dyslexic students are supported in schools and that teachers are supported in this important work (Johnson & Lynam, 2015). This has become a bipartisan effort. Decoding Dyslexia recognizes that schools are not prepared to support dyslexic students and subsequently requests systems to change that. For instance, parents representing the New Jersey branch of Decoding Dyslexia were influential in passing a state law mandating two hours of professional development on dyslexia each year for teachers (Johnson & Lynam, 2015). Like many other Decoding Dyslexia groups, the New Jersey group worked alongside state education representatives and facilitated partnerships with dyslexia specialists (Johnson & Lynam, 2015). Parents have taken great strides in order to have their voices heard and as a result, a change has happened.

**Impact on Schools, School Systems, Teaching and Learning**

Dyslexia necessitates intervention in reading instruction (Moats & Lyon, 1996; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). Dyslexia robs students of time (Armstrong, 2010; Merkle, 2014; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). It is also important to recognize there are accommodations for the dyslexic learner (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Williams & Lynch, 2010). If a child is in need of reading remediation, schools are required to respond to the need by delivering regular small group instruction based upon need (a deficit) as well as notify families (Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010; Stewart, Rinaldi, & Higgins-Averill, 2011). This creates an opportunity to communicate regularly with families. This section begins with a description of Response to Intervention (RtI) and its influence on identifying students for special education services. Since RtI hinges upon both general and specialist educator
understanding of reading instruction (Bell, 2013; Hayward et al., 2014; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005; Washburn et al., 2011; Youman & Mather, 2013), teacher understanding of intervention will be discussed. Parent understanding of RtI is yet another key component (Fletcher et al., 2010; Stuart, Rinaldi, & Averill, 2011). Therefore, the parent’s perspective of RtI will be shared, leading to next steps for the dyslexic child and her/his family.

**Response to Intervention (RtI).** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), put into place December 2004 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), affected the lives of children nationally. This piece of legislation put to rest the I.Q.-achievement discrepancy requirement children needed to have in order for special education services to be considered (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The discrepancy model, popular in the late 1970s, was viewed as a “wait to fail” method and ended with IDEA legislation to be in place by 2006 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). The 2004 law seemingly represented a more socially just model in regard to access to special education. Additionally, the dismissal of I.Q.-achievement discrepancy was viewed as a good financial move (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The cost of special education was high with the majority of students considered Learning Disabled (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Instead, school systems across the country would be expected to put systems in place that supported a proactive stance called Response to Intervention (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Hauerwas et al., 2013).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a framework designed to reach the youngest of learners who show signs of academic struggle in the areas of reading and now mathematics (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lipson et al., 2011; Walmsley & Allington, 2007). RtI is in addition to core classroom (or Tier I) instruction. Over a determined period of time, students move through a two-four tiered approach where instruction intensifies and becomes
more specific while the student-teacher ratio lessens (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Walmsley & Allington, 2007). Data collection in the form of progress monitoring is frequently administered. If the child is not responding at an appropriate rate or is considered a non-responder, the intervention is said to be in need of change (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Walmsley & Allington, 2007).

The intent of RtI is to begin by ensuring all students have access to quality classroom instruction (Fuchs et al., 2003; Lipson et al., 2011). This is considered Tier I. Tier II is for students whose needs are not being met by the classroom instruction, based upon data collected (Fuchs et al., 2003). Therefore, children in this tier may be working in smaller groups with interventions predesigned or designed by either the general classroom teacher or another teacher (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Tier III is the most intensive level and requires students to work in a 1:1 ratio with another adult (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) suggest that the more intensive interventions become, the more teacher-centered the intervention is.

Understanding how, what and when to adjust interventions and services is a complex piece to the entire RtI framework. RtI may take the form of a problem-solving approach (favored by practitioners) or a standard treatment approach (favored by researchers) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Practitioners who use the problem-solving approach analyze the causal root of the child’s areas of concern and determine an intervention (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) recognized the individualistic approach to intervention or remediation in this approach as both a strength and a weakness. The plan requires practitioners to be highly skilled in development of interventions, treatment and collection of data (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The standard treatment approach is just as it states, standard, meaning it is not adjusted to
the unique needs of a child (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) posit this is a cleaner approach in that a standard intervention is delivered and after a given amount of standard intervention time, if the intervention does not work, the child moves to a higher intensity or tier. This quickens the pace of determining the need for special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Lipson et al. (2011) disagree with the standard treatment approach, as it reflects an unfortunate “one-sized fits all” methodology. They point instead to the importance of recognizing the unique underlying causes, therefore favoring the problem-solving approach (Lipson et al., 2011). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) focus on the potential RtI offers as well as the inconsistencies from the starting gate. Like the dyslexia research generally, researcher and practitioner perspectives are unaligned and only enhance the complexity of how best to instruct the dyslexic student.

Johnson (2011) claims that tensions in regard to funding and overall knowledge at the school system level impede the promise of RtI. IDEA developed RtI as a means to shift the financial cost attributed to a large amount of students identified as Learning Disabled (LD) in the special education budget (Hauerwas et al., 2013; Johnson, 2011). It makes perfect sense to reconsider the I.Q.-achievement discrepancy as the lone determinant for special education services. Instead, classroom instruction became the starting point for identifying whether or not a child needed differentiated or more intense instruction. Approximately 15% of the special education budget supports this preventative approach (Johnson, 2011). However, this trims the available funds to support students who already are and who eventually will be identified.

School systems’ knowledge of the RtI process, data and instructional interventions presents another tension (Johnson, 2011). Johnson (2011) identified how school systems are inconsistent and uncertain about how to move forward within a standard treatment or problem-
solving approach. While data can determine next steps according to benchmarks, the issue then becomes what, exactly, are the next steps. The interventions hinge upon whether or not a school takes the standard treatment approach (one-size fits all, canned) or problem-solving approach (specific to the child’s need, teacher-selected) (Johnson, 2011), meaning teachers are now expected to expertly interpret data and assign evidence-based interventions (Johnson, 2011). The expectation that all teachers are expert at identifying and remediating students who struggle is a strong presumption on behalf of the RtI legislation (Johnson, 2011). Johnson argues that teacher knowledge will have a greater effect than a canned, programmatic intervention. Johnson thus explores the ideal appeal of RtI, but suggests the reality of implementation is far from ideal.

Hauerwas et al. (2013) identified the variability in RtI regulation nationally. To date, there is no national common definition of RtI. Generally, there is a national understanding that RtI is a means to determine whether or not students are responding to core instruction first (Hauerwas et al., 2013). Hauerwas et al. (2013) found that eleven states require RtI prior to determining whether or not a child is in need of special education services. The RtI requirements in nine of those states are not specific to any grade level (Hauerwas et al., 2013). However, in New Mexico and New York, the RtI requirement is K-3 and K-4, respectively. The regulation and guidance documents also indicate that if a child is not “responding,” she/he is required to have remediation or intervention in a Tier II (Hauerwas et al., 2013). Based upon reviewing state regulations and guidance documents, Hauerwas et al. (2013) conclude RtI data does not always lead to determining whether or not a child is a candidate for additional support as a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). In fact, Hauerwas et al. (2013) question the main reasoning behind RtI.

**Teacher perception of RtI.** Teachers are experiencing first-hand the results of RtI
legislation. The research-based methodology of RtI implementation is rooted in validity, metrics, and evidence-based, research-based, quality instruction (Murawski & Hughes, 2009), something which is unfamiliar to most classroom teachers (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger, Friedli, Snow, Brunken, & Ritzman, 2012; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014; White et al., 2012). The classroom teacher is responsible for expertly understanding and utilizing data generated from metrics unfamiliar to most practitioners (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger et al., 2012; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014; Speece, Case, & Malloy, 2006; White et al., 2012).

Speece, Case, and Molloy (2006) put forth the importance of a systematic approach that ensures quality interventions and appropriately measures the student’s response to the instruction. Speece et al. (2006) identify a need for the RtI framework to be realistic in implementation, since interventions and data collection are predominantly provided by the classroom teacher who may not have the understanding required by the research community.

White, Polly, and Audette (2012) found that little was known about how school systems understand and apply RtI. White et al. (2012) investigated how a school’s leadership team (consisting of administration, school psychologists and teachers) applied RtI policies and procedures. While participants were in favor of shifting toward an RtI framework, the changing roles of all participants proved to be of high concern with regard to implementation (White et al., 2012). Classroom teachers were at the epicenter of the RtI framework, meaning they needed to understand the requirements of RtI and the changes necessary to support it (White et al., 2012). Requirements include teacher understanding of what the universal screener is (such as AIMSweb); why it is considered a valid instrument; what data is generated; and how to interpret results, implement evidence-based intervention, modify schedules, understand the different
levels (Tiers) of RtI, conduct progress monitoring probes, and reevaluate instruction (White et al., 2012). White et al. (2012) found that participants had better understanding of the overall RtI framework, but noted increased fatigue due to being overwhelmed, since “as RtI was added, little was taken away” from the already full teacher responsibilities (White et al., 2012, p. 87). There was a need for clear principal leadership and communication, teacher training regarding how to shift thinking to reflect ongoing instructional adjustments, collaboration between teachers, and a plan to include families in the vision (White et al., 2012).

Teacher buy-in is critical to effective RtI implementation (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Buy-in includes teacher understanding and attitude. Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) identified the scant availability of qualitative research about teacher RtI perception. Teacher perceptions and overall understanding were barriers to RtI implementation, and suggestions to improve RtI (such as a decrease in paperwork) influenced whether or not teachers bought into the RtI framework (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014).

Castro-Villarreal et al., (2014) found the majority of the participants (78%) in their study to not have a general understanding of RtI. A better teacher understanding was identified as both a barrier as well as a suggestion to improve (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Teachers identified training, resources, RtI process clarity, communication and time as proposed suggestions to improve RtI understanding and application (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) concluded that a systems approach was needed and stressed the importance of slowing down in order to provide teachers with the support needed to successfully implement RtI.

Core instruction and the dyslexic student. Quality classroom instruction is viewed as the most essential component to the RtI process (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lipson et al., 2011; Noll, 2013; Wamsley & Allington, 2007). RtI requires core classroom, or
Tier I, use of evidence-based methodologies (Fuchs et al., 2003, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lipson et al., 2011; Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012; Noll, 2013; Wamsley & Allington, 2007). In a discussion of reading intervention or remediation for dyslexic students, it is essential to mention the competing reading methodologies of the core program (Tier I) in general education classrooms. These differences influence core classroom instruction for all students, including students with dyslexia.

The ongoing whole-language (look-say method) vs. phonics methodology continues to swing on a politicized pendulum, resulting in polarized pedagogical approaches, limited teacher understanding and preparation, and ultimately impacting the very students who may need something else (Adams & Bruck, 1995; Collins, 2003; Cunningham et al., 2004; Hempenstall, 1997; Liberman & Liberman, 1990). Research suggests dyslexic students respond to specific, phonetically based instructional attributes (Adams, 1990; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Wolf, 2007).

Whole reading supporters indicate that phonics instruction is in fact evident; it is woven into meaningful experiences within writing and authentic reading (Dahl & Scharer, 2000). Phonics instruction is also applied *if and when* the students need it (Adams, 1995; Dahl & Scharer, 2000; Liberman & Liberman, 1990). It is not explicit.

Phonics supporters point to the importance of explicit instruction with the alphabetic principles, which then leads to an understanding of morphology (Liberman & Liberman, 1990; Moats, 1994). Liberman and Liberman (1990) found that as many as 75% of students may become successful readers with almost any reading-based pedagogical framework, but believe all children, especially the 25% who struggle, would benefit from code-based instruction. Adams (1990) posits quality systematic code instruction with meaningful contexts is beneficial to all
learners. Moats (1994) claims code-based instruction does not occur prior to comprehension instruction, as it is not the dreaded workbook instruction of the past. Instead it is integrated into meaningful contexts (Moats, 1994).

Teacher use of the English Language Arts instructional block is predicated upon teacher knowledge of literacy instruction (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Spear-Swerling and Zibulski (2014) replicated a 2004 study aimed at understanding first grade teacher use of instructional time using the Language Arts Activity Guide (LAAG). The results from this study indicated the use of allotted 120-minute language arts instructional time was inconsistent between teachers as well as with suggested research-based recommendations (Cunningham et al., 2004). Spear-Swerling and Zibulsky (2014) replicated this study with 102 participants who were in graduate classes and were licensed general elementary or special educators. Results from this study revealed similar results to the Cunningham (2004) study.

An emphasis on code cracking for primary students as well as a continuation of orthographical and morphological instruction over the course of the grade levels is suggested in order for students to acquire functional reading skills (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Participants in the Spear-Swerling and Zibulski (2014) study completed surveys designed to show teacher understanding of five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. In most cases, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction constituted a marginal portion in K-1 classrooms, with less than four minutes for phonemic awareness and less than 18 minutes of phonics instruction (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). In grades 2-3, the average amount of time spent on phonics instruction in a two-hour block was 11.5 minutes (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Grades 4-5 showed an average of 2 minutes of instructional time spent on phonics (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014).
Special educator data did not indicate any more time devoted to phonics instruction (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). The authors found this to be unsettling due to the large amount of reading problems originating from this part of the reading process. The use of assessment data, frequently mentioned in research, was not identified by any of the 34 K-1 participants. Meanwhile, a preponderance of time was spent with independent activities. Some of the participants allocated approximately 50 minutes to independent reading activities (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014).

Teachers are inconsistent in their understanding of how to design 120-minutes of English Language Arts Instruction (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Spear-Swerling and Zibulsky (2014) suggest a need for school districts to provide educators with research-based curricula, authentic and ongoing professional development experiences, and the time necessary to develop an effective block of instructional time.

This complex perspective considerably blurs the remediation for dyslexic students and potentially neglects the needs of those who require explicit, systematic and multisensory phonetic instruction if they are in a school or classroom with a whole language approach (Adams, 1990; Collins, 2003; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Wolf, 2007). Noll (2013) suggests beginning a quality RtI framework with the core classroom, where all children feel the effects, especially the struggling reader. A child’s zip code may ultimately determine which specific methodology is practiced. If a district is prone to using a whole language approach, dyslexic children will not have the necessary explicit and systematic instruction required in order to learn how to read.

**Intensive instruction and the dyslexic student.** States require a universal screener that identifies reading ability risk in all children (Albers, Glover, & Kratochwill, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs,
Children identified below a benchmark cut will need additional differentiated instruction in the area of need (deficit) (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011; Wamsley & Allington, 2007; Williams & Lynch, 2010). Students who are not responding to core classroom (Tier I) instruction are considered at risk. The sooner a child is identified as not responding to instruction the better (Coyne et al., 2013; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Snowling, 2011, 2013). Intended to be of benefit, the early identification and subsequent remediation or interventions put into place may also be a prolonged curse. The school’s collective knowledge of RtI and evidence-based interventions (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Johnson, 2011; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger et al., 2012; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2013; Stewart & Rinaldi, 2009; Stewart et al., 2011; White et al., 2012) for students who may be dyslexic is in the driver’s seat (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011).

Snowling and Hulme (2011) recognized that little is still known about how reading skills become automatic in developing readers. However, there are consistent findings with approximations of instructional approaches that do benefit dyslexic readers (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011, 2012). Children who present with reading difficulties benefit from explicit and systematic instruction (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011, 2012). The instruction must not replicate general Tier I instruction, as it at a higher intensity (Snowling & Hulme, 2011, 2012). Interventions that emphasize exposure to letter sounds, phonemic awareness, word decoding through a multisensory approach, linking letters and phonemes to writing, and exposure to meaningful texts, and which support the pace of a dyslexic reader are warranted (Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Snowling & Hulme, 2011, 2012; Snowling, 2013). Snowling (2013) identified
educator understanding of the cause of a disorder as a starting point to determining next steps.

**Response to Intervention and the parent.** RtI was intended as a collaborative initiative with feedback informing decisions and next steps. Families who are left out of the collaborative conversations feel unsupported (Kelleher, 2011). Many parents are concerned with the RtI process, as it is unclear, may not provide the appropriate instruction, and may further delay the student’s access to what she/he needs (Byrd, 2011; Kelleher, 2011). Ideally, parents should be equal partners in the RtI process, as they are an extension of support for the child (Fuchs et al., 2003; Searle, 2010; Wamsley & Allington, 2007).

Kelleher (2011) describes the skepticism some parents feel regarding RtI. Parent concerns with implementation, understanding, and addressing needs of children with dyslexia echo similar sentiments in teachers (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Kelleher, 2011). Furthermore the inconsistency and lack of information widen the communication divide, build adversarial relationships, and potentially lead to the involvement of lawyers (Kelleher, 2011), thus fracturing any trust between home and school.

Parents reported confusion about the RtI process as well as concern for prolonging special education services (Byrd, 2011; Kelleher, 2011). Byrd (2011) posits the need to educate and include parents in the RtI process. Byrd (2011) claims the shift in service as well as complexity of the RtI framework alienate and intimidate parents. Instead, Byrd (2011) suggests the school’s leadership team should train and involve parents in the process in order to build relationships between school and home.

Like instructional decisions, teachers are critical to the success of the relationship with families. Positive and transparent relationships with students’ families provide a united front (Hargreaves, 2001). Teachers are responsible for developing and maintaining effective
relationships with students and their families no matter how difficult it may be (Hargreaves, 2001; Lasky, 2000; Lott, 2001).

**Research on Parent-School Relationships in Response to Student Need**

“If we listen closely to parents – their wishes and dreams, fears and concerns – we find that there are lessons and suggestions that emanate from a deep sense of caring. Educators must be able to view such listening opportunities as an asset in order to be the best educators possible” (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p.10). School and parent relationships are noted as a necessary staple in a child’s academic and emotional diet (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Dufour & Fullan, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2001; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Lasky, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Moody, 2010; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004). For families with children who are in need of academic supports, a fluid discourse between parents and educators is critical (Daniel, 2000; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2001). Schools are ultimately responsible for understanding parent perspectives and welcoming parents to be a part of the child’s academic experiences (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Hargreaves, 2001; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Keen, 2007; Lasky, 2000).

This final section of the literature review will examine the experiences of parents involved in required collaborations born from IDEA to support their child with dyslexia. Additional literature involving parents of children with special needs was included in this review due to the limited research involving parents supporting the dyslexic child.

**A socially just education.** Social justice is so broadly defined that the intention and practice in education are confusing (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). According to Hytten and Bettez (2011), this encompassing term leads to a struggle to transfer the thinking into practice.
Discussions involving social justice have become a concern for parent(s) of dyslexic children.

The aim for critical pedagogy is to reframe traditional societal beliefs embedded in the educative experience (Freire, 1970). Rather than accepting what is, critical pedagogy challenges and disrupts thinking in order to construct and rebuild understanding (Erevelles, 2000; Freire, 1970; Hytten & Bettez, 2011).

**IDEA: finding the parent voice.** IDEA legislation includes parent involvement (Cantone & Brady, 2005; Daniel, 2000; Haley, Hammond, Ingalls, & Marin, 2013; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Murray et al., 2013; Yell, Conroy, Katsiyannis, & Conroy, 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004). The Parents’ Bill of Rights and safeguards within IDEA have been amended four times since 1975 (Daniel, 2000; Mead & Paige, 2008) to identify and adjust what parents can do to advocate for their child. The literature in the previous section suggests and encourages respectful and collaborative relationships between parents and the school. The relationships, however, are not a requirement until parents with children who have specialized needs work through an evaluative process, concluding with a meeting between parents and the school personnel who work with the child.

The data may suggest that the child should receive a Section 504 or an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). A Section 504 plan can be created in the absence of the parent. The plan includes accommodations to help level the playing field for the student. Core classroom instruction is not adjusted. An IEP is intended to accommodate the student as well as provide additional supports and/or adjustments to the core classroom program (Fish, 2008). IDEA regards parents as equal participants in the planning for their child (Daniel, 2000; Fish, 2008; Mead & Paige, 2008; Moody, 2010).

Following an evaluation provided by the school or outside of the school, parents are
invited to review the results and address the next steps. Schools are obligated to inform parents of the meeting as well as parental safeguards (Fish, 2008; Haley et al., 2013; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Moody, 2010; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004; Turnbull, 2009).

Parental rights and safeguards provide parents with the power to be equal participants in the development of an IEP. Parents, according to Mead and Paige (2008), are entitled to:

- Receive written notice of their rights under the law
- Receive written notice of the school’s intent to evaluate for special education services
- Receive written notice of whenever the school initiates a change of placement or refuses to make a change in placement
- Grant or deny permission to evaluate their child
- Grant or deny permission to provide special education and related services to their child
- Be a member of any IEP team for their child
- Have access to all records about their child
- Have all evaluation results explained to them
- Participate in all decisions about their child
  - Parents must be involved in placement decisions
- Receive copies of evaluations and IEPs regarding their child
- Receive information about the child’s progress
  - Measurable annual goals
  - Participation in state-wide and district-wide assessments
  - Receive information (specified in IDEA 1997 and dropped from IDEA 2004) about the progress of the child as often as nondisabled children
- Be offered mediation at school expense as a means to settle a dispute with the school
- Challenge school’s decision in front of an impartial hearing officer
- Appeal the decision of the hearing officer in state court or federal district court
- Receive reimbursement of attorney’s fees and educational costs if the district fails to provide an appropriate education (pp. 157-167).
**Say dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia.** Michael Yudin, Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Education, issued a memo in October 2015 regarding the use of the terms dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia on an IEP. Yudin (2015) asserted that the use of such terms within the IEP document was essential to provide the appropriate interventions and accommodations. IDEA has not stated such terms could not be used on an IEP in the past, yet school systems have been leery of including them (Yudin, 2015).

**Power, position and discourse.** Reid and Valle (2004) describe discourse as a set of rules that frame a person’s thinking, resulting in a position. Dworin and Bomer (2008) define discourse as the ways in which people interact within a given community that elicit a sense of belonging or membership (Dworin & Bomer, 2008). Dworin and Bomer (2008) suggest that educators should be mindful of the ways in which they subscribe to specific kinds of discourse. At the core of any discourse are deeply rooted perceptions (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leonardo 2002). The following section illuminates ways in which parents are “othered” and not identified as authentic participants in their child’s experiences.

Parents are marginalized when they voice concerns or participate in ways unexpected by the teacher (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Yet research asserts the importance of parental involvement to student success (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems, & Doan, 2005). Our profession labels parents that respond (or not) in a manner that is unaccepted and misunderstood. Briscoe (2005) claimed the “other” is subordinated through strategies of marginalization. The strategies further the divide between those with perceived power and those who attempt it for the sake of their child.

Parents identified as not understanding the safeguard language and therefore not fully understanding the rights they have as parents in this process (Fish, 2009; Reid & Valle, 2004).
The Section 504 and IEP meetings are wrought with emotion for parents (Fish, 2009; Haley et al., 2013; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Lasky, 2000; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004), as the meeting and identification of special needs presents as a deficit (Haley et al., 2013). Tensions between parent and school personnel perspectives ensue (Reid & Valle, 2004; Valle & Aponte, 2002).

Lasky (2000) describes the importance of power, culture and a sense of purpose as they influence teacher discourse with parents. Emotional understanding between teacher and parent are central to a fluid discourse (Lasky, 2000). Lasky (2000) posits that schools develop their own unique cultures that maintain teacher knowledge (as expert), values and beliefs intact. Meanwhile, this discourse is entrenched in traditional roles between teacher and parent. Lasky (2000) argues that not only are culture and power inseparable, so are emotions and power.

Teachers were more receptive to parents who fulfilled the traditional roles where the teacher was in control (Lasky, 2000). Parents who questioned teachers challenged the teachers’ sense of self as the value system was challenged (Lasky, 2000). Some teacher participants “othered” parents due in part to parents not fulfilling the teacher norms of behavior (Lasky, 2000). This most likely stemmed from little understanding or connection to parents on behalf of teachers (Lasky, 2000). There is an emotional connection to maintaining traditional roles in parent-teacher discourse from the teacher perspective (Lasky, 2000).

Valle and Aponte (2002) identified the way in which language used to identify and support students reflects an insider stance. The specific dialogue used by those inside the system places parents at a disadvantage (Valle & Aponte, 2002). Positional authority remains in the hands of the school system while parents are mere recipients of the documented information gathered by the educators. Parents receive formal documentation created by school staff, while
they are only expected to share their information verbally, implying that parental information shared with school staff is of less value (Valle & Aponte, 2002). Discourse that is unilaterally delivered does not offer room for parents to engage conversationally and collaboratively. The belief again reflects an outward exchange of information, meaning parents may receive the information but may not question it (Valle & Aponte, 2002).

Griffiths, Norwich, and Burden (2004) propose there are distinct differences in how parents and the teacher(s) look at the child. The parent may have the individual child that is of concern while the teacher has an entire classroom of students to think about (Griffiths et al., 2004). The authors conducted a two-year evaluation project with mothers of dyslexic children. Mothers in the study identified as having knowledge of dyslexia, unlike the schools their children attended. In addition to mothers feeling that their knowledge about their child was not of the same value as school data, there was a preponderance of connectivity between motherhood and schooling, gendering the role of academic responsibility to the mother. Parents do have knowledge specific to the unique aspects of the child to share with school staff (Griffiths et al., 2004). Griffiths et al. (2004) posit parental perspective is warranted if the child indicates areas of academic and social concerns.

Reid and Valle (2004) explore the complexity behind what parents experience as they take part in discourse about the child with school personnel. Context elicits perspectives unique to the individual role each participant plays in carrying out “educating and remediating the child.” The unsaid dialogue perpetuates the discourse and roles unique to each participant, only to alienate parents in the process (Reid & Valle, 2004). Educators maintain power and authority in the field of data and knowledge of the child. Parental knowledge is considered second-class compared to educator perspective instead of maintaining the collaborative status as proposed by
IDEA with regard to parents’ right to participate (Reid & Valle, 2004). Parents are within their rights to disagree and yet are “othered” and identified as oppositional (Reid & Valle, 2004; Valle & Aponte, 2002).

Reid and Valle (2004) identify the construction and identity of special educators in a field where difference is the norm. In practice, parents whose discourse differs in thought are alienated by the very people who represent “difference” (Reid & Valle, 2004). Reid and Valle (2004) question whether it is often a matter of role-play on behalf of school personnel in order to meet the IDEA parental involvement regulation. Reid and Valle (2004) suggest that educators seriously reflect upon the ways in which they interact with and acknowledge parental knowledge in order to be authentically collaborative.

Hess, Molina, and Kozleski (2006) posit that parents are isolated while advocating for their child. Parents identified with feelings of disempowerment due to the isolated experiences of navigating the special education process, understanding the nature of the disability, and obtaining supports for the child. Schools do not engage in a reciprocal approach where information is shared with families (Hess et al., 2006). Parents identified with feelings of frustration due to the limited communication with the school regarding the child. Hess et al. (2006) found that families wish to be a proactive part of the child’s academic experience. However, it is ultimately in the hands of how the system perceives parents wishing to exercise their involvement (Hess et al., 2006). Teachers are responsible for ensuring an authentic and collaborative relationship where information is exchanged reciprocally (Hess et al., 2006). Teachers can provide insight to parents regarding the academic language while the parents can provide insight into the child as well as any information gathered about the disability (Hess et al., 2006).
Keen (2007) identified educator judgments placed upon parents as disruptive to trust, open communication and collaborative work between parents and educators. IDEA language supports parents as partners in the IEP development and decision-making, but that is not always the case realistically (Keen, 2007). Keen (2007) found that parents valued the opportunities for shared decision-making but felt that most of the power and authority rested with the school personnel. The relationship is unbalanced and parents feel the need to become more assertive as a result (Keen, 2007). Keen (2007) states, “It is as if they have to struggle to be ‘allowed’ to participate, which runs contrary to notions of partnership and shared planning” (p. 343). Parents are invited to the IEP “table,” but only on the school’s terms.

Parent knowledge and academic professional knowledge are not of equal merit according to Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008). Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) assert that parents feel their knowledge of their own child is undervalued by school personnel. Academic discourse alienates parents who are not familiar with it, resulting in parents feeling “othered” in conversation (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Parents are uncomfortable with the perceived gap in conversation and knowledge about the child, fear saying the wrong thing and doubt their own knowledge, as the school personnel are positioned as expert (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) identify the need for educators to come into the conversation from a position of willingness to learn about the child, which includes acknowledging and respecting parental knowledge.

McKenna and Millen (2013) assert that educators often miss opportunities to understand and connect with families due to the inaccuracies of their own understanding of the family unit. Parents indicated a wish for more time to talk with the teacher and share information about the child that the parent found important or helpful. Parents also found the assumed expectations
with regard to communicating with teachers to be traditional, where the teacher was the expert and in control of communication (McKenna & Millen, 2013). McKenna and Millen (2013) found that educators could overlook the caring parenting practices made apparent by the study if parents were not participating in school volunteer functions. Parents were found to play a large role in the lives of their children, just not on the school’s identified terms (McKenna & Millen, 2013). McKenna and Millen (2013) conclude that new frames of thinking about parent engagement are needed, beginning with educators setting aside their own misconceptions and building authentic collaborative relationships with the families (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

IDEA may situate parents in a position of access to knowledge, yet the practice of enacting the policy warrants a closer look within school systems. Adding to the complex nature of dyslexia are the ways in which educational systems tend not to take parental perspective seriously (Griffiths et al., 2004; Gwernan-Jones, 2009; Nicolson, 2002). Nicolson (2002) calls this difference a “conflict vs. interest” (p. 60). Parents have considerable insight into their dyslexic child’s need (Griffiths et al., 2004, Gwernan-Jones, 2009; Poon-McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014).

Parent voice found. Parents take steps to navigate their role as advocate and support system for the child (Duquette, Fullarton, Orders, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011; Fish, 2009; Munn-Joseph & Gavin-Evans, 2008; Murray et al., 2013; Poon-McBrayer & Mcbrayer, 2014). Parents identify with the transformation of emotions that occurs over the course of the advocacy experience (Duquette et al., 2011). Parental advocacy thus is born from frustration with not truly having a collaborative voice.

Munn-Joseph and Gavin-Evans (2008) found social networks used by mothers whose children were disabled provided an avenue to understand and support parental advocacy outside
of the school system. Parents identified communication struggles between school and home as a contributor to the difficult conversation about their disabled child and as a result, parents mistrusted school personnel (Munn-Joseph & Gavin-Evans, 2008). Participating mothers shared their vision about the current and desired states regarding the relationship between home and school with others in the social network group (Munn-Joseph & Gavin-Evans, 2008). The network supported the parents to find their voice as advocates. Munn-Joseph and Gavin-Evans (2008) suggest that schools take the perspective of others, such as parents, as an approach to understand their experiences.

Fish (2009) suggests that educators must provide an environment where parents have an equal voice and a belief that parents are a part of the solution during IEP meetings. Including parents as equal decision makers in the IEP process is an essential element in order to work collaboratively with school personnel (Fish, 2009). Parents are at a disadvantage if they are not familiar with the educational language or lack the expertise the educators possess (Fish, 2009). Fish (2009) found 62% of the parents to be satisfied with the IEP experience with school staff and the time allotted to meet. When asked how parents acquired knowledge, 44% indicated it was done independent of the school system, while only 24% referenced the school system as an influence on their IEP knowledge (Fish, 2009). More time must be allocated to meeting with families in order to work through the IEP process collaboratively (Fish, 2009).

Duquette et al. (2011) propose parent advocacy awareness, parent-initiated information seeking, presenting a case to educators, and monitoring as four dimensions to the advocacy process. Parents initiate conversations with educators as a means to connect, develop trust and open lines of communication (Duquette et al., 2011). Parents linked educator knowledge with caring about the child and questioned educator intent due to perceived lack of knowledge about
Parents were frustrated when educators did not have a level of understanding about the disability, thus lead to mistrust between families and educators (Duquette et al., 2011). Parent involvement in presenting knowledge to teachers regarding the child and the disability supported the basis that parents value knowledge (Duquette et al., 2011). The entire advocacy process for parents is never ending.

Murray et al. (2013) posit that parents often feel their knowledge is undervalued by educators, while educators are more concerned with the disability or deficit. The authors found parental knowledge as a means of empowerment. Educators and parents bring experiences and perspectives unique to their position/role in a child’s life (Murray et al., 2013). Murray et al. (2013) designed a course titled Consultation and Collaboration with Families and Colleagues. The course design provided authentic opportunities for the parents and pre-service students to role-play as well as build authentic relationships. Educators and parents responded to experiencing significant personal change (Murray et al., 2013). Murray et al. (2013) espoused the power behind perspective taking and authentic collaborative relationships between parents and school personnel.

Parents recognize the additional roles and responsibilities involved in advocating for their child (Scorgie, 2015). Born from necessity, parents become the expert caregivers and acquire specialized knowledge about their child’s disability in addition to their role as “parent” (Scorgie, 2015). Supplied with knowledge, parents wish to share with teachers but often feel segregated, are labeled as difficult, and face adversarial responses (Scorgie, 2015). Parents value educators who are open to exchange of information and collaboration and who show an understanding of the disability as part of the whole child (Scorgie, 2015). In addition to parenting, the role of
advocate requires the parent to assume additional responsibilities that are time consuming, stressful and isolating (Scorgie, 2015).

Parents recognize the need to share information with others concerning the wellbeing of their child. However, in doing so, parents experience feelings ranging from isolation to empowerment (Duquette et al., 2011; Munn-Joseph & Gavin-Evans, 2008; Fish, 2009; Murray et al., 2013; Poon-McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014; Scorgie, 2015). School systems are the critical link to making IDEA a reality for families.

**School and parent collaboration.** Parents are navigating their own space in a system where positional authority often surpasses knowledge (Reid & Valle, 2004). IDEA requires school faculty to collaborate with parents when involving children with disabilities in Section 504 and IEPs (Daniel, 2000; Fish, 2008; Mead & Paige, 2008). Although schools comply with the regulation, it is unclear how authentic the collaborative experience between families and schools is. This final section examines the need for schools to reframe perspectives.

School systems indicate that parent involvement and parent support are necessary to the success of the child (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Dufour & Fullan, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2001; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Lasky, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Moody, 2010; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004). Trust is an indicator of whether or not parents are feeling included (Angell, Stoner, & Sheldon, 2009). The way in which information between parents and schools is exchanged must change if parents are to feel they are truly a valued part of the solution (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Dufour & Fullan, 2013; Gehlbach et al., 2012; Hargreaves, 2001; Keen, 2007; Reid & Valle, 2004). By prioritizing how we make sense of parent experiences and facilitating meetings with parents, we can then say parents are truly included.
Trust. Trust between parents and the school is a connective thread woven throughout the advocacy initiative, both driving and sustaining parent-teacher relationships (Angell et al., 2009; Keen, 2007). Parents trust educators and leaders who are open, nonjudgmental, authentic and collaborative and who establish accommodations in a timely manner (Angell et al., 2009). Regular communication between schools and families is a factor in whether or not parents feel they can trust the school system (Angell et al., 2009). The school leadership bears the responsibility to ensure honest and authentic exchanges (Angell et al., 2009).

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that teachers must make efforts to welcome and understand parent experiences as well as build a bridge toward collaboration. IEP meetings and other conferences occur at school. Therefore, the parent is the visitor. School experiences imprint favorable or unfavorable memories (Hargreaves, 2001). Parents who are faced with the challenges of supporting their child experience a range of emotion that others may not readily identify with. Teachers report feelings of stress when parents question intent and therefore react accordingly (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves (2001) suggests that instead of leading with a single, teacher-led point of view, educators should support parents through the process by identifying memories and redefining what school could be. Teachers are in a position to support parents while navigating their own interpretation (Hargreaves, 2001).

Mortier et al. (2009) hold that the specialist model positions educators as experts and parents as passive recipients. A creative partnership between parents and educators not only supports the child’s academic wellbeing, but also leverages knowledge and input between parents and the school (Mortier et al., 2009). Parents reported feeling like an invaluable participant in the collaborative and flattened process (Mortier et al., 2009).
Summary

IDEA recognizes the importance of parental involvement in planning for a fair and appropriate academic experience for their dyslexic child (Daniel, 2000; Fish, 2008; Mead & Paige, 2008; Moody, 2010). However, authentic collaborative relationships stated in research are not as readily recognized in practice (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Dufour & Fullan, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2001; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Keen, 2007; Lasky, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Moody, 2010; Murray et al., 2013; Reid & Valle, 2004). This researcher wishes to better understand how central office administration, educators and parents are positioned within the context of school collaboration involving instructional decisions to support dyslexic children. Therefore, dyslexia awareness, RtI and parent participation are viewed as three interconnected threads.

First is the general misunderstanding on behalf of the school system surrounding what dyslexia is (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009; Passig, 2011; Williams & Lynch, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2013) and how to instruct a dyslexic student (Moats & Lyon, 1996; Lyon et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). Teachers are not provided with the background, training, or accountability measures to support dyslexia awareness (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009; Passig, 2011; Williams & Lynch, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2013). Born out of necessity to understand why the child struggles, some parents take measures into their own hands by having children evaluated outside of school, researching dyslexia in order to understand how to help the child, and networking with others. Parents try to communicate informally about their child and educate teachers, but their concerns often are not taken seriously (Duquette et al., 2011). Parents have initiated activism in grassroots movements such as Decoding Dyslexia because they felt their
voices were not heard within the school or because they simply wished to bring awareness to others (Armstrong, 2010; Poon-McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014).

Next, as a result of the I.Q.-achievement elimination, IDEA proposed Response to Intervention as a means to shift toward ensuring quality, research-based classroom practice (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Jones et al., 2012; Lipson et al., 2011; Noll, 2013; Wamsley & Allington, 2007). RtI was designed to slow down the process of special education identification (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Unlike dyslexia, RtI has nationally designated regulations, although it lacks a consistent definition (Hauerwas et al., 2013). However, like dyslexia, practitioner understanding and application of the complexity behind the RtI process is mixed and often unsupported (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger et al., 2012; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014; White et al., 2012). This presents another problem for the dyslexic child, who may be in a district or classroom that fails to understand the process, use data to design interventions, select the appropriate intervention unique to the dyslexic child, monitor interventions over time or communicate with parents. It is unclear at the moment if this process is helping or hindering children with dyslexia (Turnbull, 2009; Snowling, 2013).

Finally, another discrepancy between policy and practice is regarding parental involvement and collaboration with school educators. In many instances, parents feel like outsiders (Duquette et al., 2011), their knowledge is undervalued (Haley et al., 2013; Hess et al., 2006), and they sit on the sidelines as the school staff maintains unbalanced power and control. Meanwhile, parental knowledge of dyslexia may be greater as a need to understand and support the child (Kozleski, Engelbrecht, Hess, Swart, Eloff, & Oswald, 2008). IDEA provides parents with safeguards against the practices maligning them, yet if parents exercise their rights, they
may widen the adversarial divide. Parents bring forth knowledge (Nicolson, 2002) and a willingness to participate in planning for the dyslexic child’s academic experience. Yet power in knowledge and position influence whether parents are authentically a part of the process.

Dyslexia remains tucked into a general category of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) despite what is known in the research. Dyslexic students thus face misunderstanding on behalf of general education, resulting in misconceptions and inconsistent regulation. Parents of dyslexic children face complex concerns regarding the academic wellbeing of their child ranging from dyslexia awareness, teacher knowledge of instructional implications and need for accommodations. Further complicating matters, RtI has been a gateway to additional service and in some instances has prolonged the process for dyslexic children because of poor understanding of dyslexia and instructional approaches that could support a dyslexic reader. Finally, social constructs between school and family are woven throughout this interconnected matter. There is a preponderance of concern for relationships (Duquette et al., 2011; Hess et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2013) within collaborative settings. Implications from this study will benefit the parent and the educational system as a whole.
Chapter III: Research Design

This chapter provides the design and rationale for the qualitative study. It details procedures such as participant recruitment, data collection, storage, and analysis, as well as steps taken to protect participants.

Methodological Approach

The researcher designed her intended study around how various stakeholders experience supporting students with dyslexia. This intended study was designed through a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is what Creswell (2013) describes as an approach in which the researcher “seeks understanding of the world in which they work” (p. 24).

Qualitative studies provide participants the chance to speak authentically about a lived experience. The researcher designs questions that will draw forth such experiences through conversation with guided questions (Creswell, 2013). The researcher must be versatile with participant responses while eliciting answers to address the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Inquiry into how school systems (inclusive of central office administration, teachers and parents) respond to supporting dyslexic children necessitated the researcher to enter the study with an understanding of the problem of practice and responsibility for taking an in-depth approach to portraying participants’ experiences. The researcher enters the study with prior experiences supporting students with dyslexia. Therefore, the researcher will bracket or suspend her experiences and expectations in order for participant responses to surface (Ponterotto, 2005).

Purpose statement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore central office administrator, educator and parent experiences and perspectives of effectively supporting students with dyslexia. Administration, educator and parent understanding and action revealed insights into the complexities behind current systems supporting children with dyslexia. The
researcher explored various stakeholder perspectives and actions taken to meet the needs of children with dyslexia in elementary and middle schools across Central New York. This proposed qualitative study is a window into the workings behind how school systems attempt to provide applicable supports to students with dyslexia and the experiences of parents who have attempted to gain advocacy for their child with dyslexia in those same systems.

**Research questions.** This qualitative study solicited interview and focus group responses to the following questions:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?
2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

**Research design.** This study examined how the distinct agent groups of administrators, educators and parents experienced supporting children with dyslexia and addressed challenges along the way. Interviews informed the researcher. Participant narratives required an ear for listening and knowing when to make an in-depth inquiry based upon participant response (Creswell, 2013). The researcher attended to instances needing more exploration due to participant responses, as this study required participants to discuss their current understanding of dyslexia, reading instruction, data analysis, classroom accommodations and communication.

This study utilized semi-structured independent interviews with central office administrators, teachers and parents from area schools across central New York. The researcher facilitated the semi-structured conversations with prepared questions, provided the space for
participants to respond to the questions and asked follow-up questions as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Face-to-face interviews were used rather than a survey in order to draw out the rich, thick descriptions of how participants understood and supported students with dyslexia. Administrator interviews were used instead of focus group interviews due to the facts that there were few special education and/or curriculum directors across the region and that their experiences were reflective of indirect involvement with dyslexic students. Educator and parent participants could decide if they preferred face-to-face interviews.

Focus groups provided a platform for multiple perspectives about a particular problem. The researcher’s use of teacher and parent focus groups was intended to draw out as many voices as possible. Teachers and parents also have direct experience supporting dyslexic children. Kittinger (1994) asserts that focus group interviews are a valuable approach for a researcher to address how and why participants think about an experience. The dynamics between participants in a focus group enable the researcher to observe and respond to how members of the group think about an experience while interacting with one another (Kittinger, 1994). The use of focus groups was optimum due to the nature of group conversations, in which participant responses provide a launching point for other participants to respond in kind. It should be noted that only one teacher participant preferred to participate in a focus group. The teacher participant agreed to a phone interview.

Additional documentation indicating any sharing of knowledge between schools and parents was discussed. The parents in the study discussed the contents of the IEP when needed. Subsequently, parents were asked to share documentation supplied to the schools in efforts to address and recognize dyslexia. No information was shared with parents. This kind of data
helped to “corroborate and argue evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2014, p. 107) in efforts to illustrate how schools and parents communicated and shared pertinent information.

**Research tradition.** This study sought to understand how central office administrators, teachers and parents experienced supporting students with dyslexia in public schools. It elicited responses regarding how participants thought about and experienced supporting students with dyslexia. The researcher designed this qualitative study within the constructivist tradition. The researcher intentionally designed interview questions to be open-ended and broad in scope (Creswell, 2013). By doing so, the researcher relied upon participants’ experiences and points of view, which provided the researcher with varied and complex responses (Creswell, 2013).

This study identified four distinct perspectives (central office administration, teachers, parents and a school psychologist) as important agents for supporting children with dyslexia within public schools. The researcher designed her qualitative study to acknowledge participant experiences and to offer participants the space to share their experiences by using a constructivist framework (Creswell, 2013).

Other qualitative study designs such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and case study were considered. IPA would require the researcher to investigate how participants make sense of their experiences. It would be of benefit to work with one small sample of six to eight members of a stakeholder group; however, it would not support the complexity of how various stakeholders within any given school system support students with dyslexia. This design could potentially alienate others who also have direct experiences supporting students with dyslexia. A case study design was also considered. This proved to be problematic in that it required special permissions from districts. Parents who have dyslexic children would be difficult to identify within any given district due to privacy of student information. A case study
would require deep exploration within three schools and/or districts. This would limit participant access to the study. By designing this proposed study as a qualitative study, the researcher was able to solicit participants across multiple districts in order to address her research questions.

**Researcher-participant relationship.** The researcher engaged with independent interview participants using a “conversational partner” perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) stress the importance of both participants and researcher shaping the arc of the interview. This allows for unintended exploration, acceptance and voice (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participant quotations were used to reflect themes as well as to support the research findings. Quotations that demonstrated the complex and emotionally charged nature behind supporting children with dyslexia within the public school system were included. This study demonstrated the various perspectives and diverse understandings behind a common yet misunderstood issue across schools.

**Participants and Recruitment**

School directors, educators and parents are considered collaborative stakeholders who work together in order to ensure success of a dyslexic student. These particular groups brought distinct perspectives, experiences and constraints to the conversation. Multiple perspectives contributed to a better understanding of how public school systems supported students with dyslexia. Participants were recruited across as many as fourteen school districts located in central New York.

The researcher recruited central office administrator, teacher and parent participants who were members of The Reading League, a not-for-profit organization launched in the fall of 2015. The researcher is also the board president. According to its website, the aim of The Reading League is to “advance the use of evidence-based reading practices in education.” Members of
The Reading League represent “a multitude of stakeholders… teachers, professors and researchers, administrators, parents, people with dyslexia and other reading difficulty, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, counselors, health care providers, attorneys, and more” (The Reading League). Membership spans three counties and more than ten school districts in central New York in addition to more than six other states and countries.

An initial participant recruitment email was sent to The Reading League membership. The researcher’s access to over 650 Reading League member email addresses allowed her to contact participants across multiple districts within central New York. A snowball sample approach followed. Reading League members shared the email with other participants who were not members of The Reading League.

**Data Collection**

Independent interviews with three central office administrators (one of whom was also a parent participant), eight teachers, nine parents and one school psychologist took place in person or over the phone and lasted for approximately 35-120 minutes. The researcher conducted five face-to-face interviews with three central office administrators, one teacher and one parent. The remaining fifteen interviews occurred by phone. One central office administrator participant was also a parent participant and therefore this interview lasted 120 minutes. Parent interviews generally were longer than 45 minutes.

The researcher asked follow-up questions throughout the interview in order to enable participants to respond deeply. Rubin and Rubin (2012) claim the small details have the greatest amounts of information that can be missed or overlooked if the researcher is not in the moment and asking ‘why’ to responses.
Data Analysis

An inductive analysis using first cycle coding was applied to stakeholder interview transcripts. An inductive analysis is a method used to categorize and describe non-numerical data, such as interviews or survey responses (Creswell, 2012). First cycle coding means that data are initially analyzed and broken down into smaller discretionary parts according to similar and different attributes. The researcher honored participant voices and identities by directly quoting words and phrases from the data by using in-vivo coding during this part of the analysis (Saldana, 2009).

Once all data were reviewed, a cross stakeholder review was used in order to identify common and discrepant themes from across the interview data. The researcher looked for alignment or differences across stakeholder groups as well as among various stakeholders representing a particular school and/or district. The researcher had an opportunity to see what participants were saying about how to support students with dyslexia from multiple perspectives.

An iterative second cycle of pattern coding was undertaken. Pattern coding is a method used to identify emergent themes through the examination of identified codes from the first cycle of coding (Saldana, 2009). Through this iterative process of reading and re-reading the transcripts and developing potential themes, pattern coding produced several themes from across the interviews and revealed any discrepant themes from across stakeholder groups and schools and districts (Saldana, 2009). This iterative process required the researcher to review and then re-review interview transcripts while she identified themes across the data. In this way, the pattern codes continuously developed as earlier proposed themes were considered through the iterative review of the data (Saldana, 2016).

Central office administrators, teachers, parents and the school psychologist interview data
were organized using a word table. Triangulation of the interview data and field notes enhanced the data, suggesting a stronger collection of evidence, or what Yin (2014) referred to as the “development of converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2014, p. 120).

**Trustworthiness**

Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the researcher’s positionality as both an insider (educator) and an outsider (parent) and of the possibility for researcher bias. The researcher facilitated face-to-face or phone interviews by establishing a rapport. Saldana (2016) suggests that researchers consider questions such as, *What surprised me?*, *What intrigued me?*, and *What disturbed me?* as a means to keep positionality and bias at bay while coding data (p. 23). The researcher engaged with the data and its review with these questions in mind, while also analyzing the data. Peer debriefing with a disinterested peer was another approach used to maintain the integrity of the researcher.

Participant voices were central to this study. Therefore, member checking was used in order to maintain authenticity and ensure participants had the opportunity to view transcripts to check for accuracy. Interview data was a part of the triangulation process in order to cross check information.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This study included very little risk for participants. Interviews comprised like-position participants (administrators, teachers, parents and a school psychologist) within the context of the educational system. Therefore, all interviews were conducted independently in order to minimize risk of discomfort on behalf of the participants. Participant names and district information were not revealed; instead, pseudonyms were used in the study. Participants who were frustrated with the current state of supporting dyslexic students or who had varying levels
of understanding about supporting dyslexic students were protected. Information gathered was for analysis purposes only. It was the researcher’s responsibility to establish a rapport with participants at the start of the study in order to ensure safety and trust. The researcher stated that participants had the right to not respond to any questions. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Consent forms protected participant identities. Interview data was recorded on the researcher’s personal handheld recording device, which was closely held and safely stored by the researcher. The researcher collected field notes throughout each interview. Transcripts were created, shared with the participants to member-check, and then stored on the researcher’s password-protected personal computer kept at the researcher’s residence. Any documentation, including field notes and documents given to the researcher, was stored in a locked storage box. All data were safely secured against access by any other party except the researcher in accordance with the Northeastern University IRB policies and practices.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore central office administrator, educator, and parent experiences and perspectives regarding the effective support of students with dyslexia. Administrator, educator, and parent understanding and actions reveal insights to the complexities behind current systems’ support of children with dyslexia. With this being the focus of the study, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?

2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

This chapter summarizes the demographics of the participants from school systems across Central New York, examines the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents involved in the study, and presents the themes that emerged from a deliberate review and analysis of the data.

Summary of Participants and Data Collected

The participants for this study included 20 participants including central office administrators, teachers, parents and a school psychologist from across 14 school systems in Central New York. The participants were selected based upon their experiences with supporting students with dyslexia.

An initial recruitment invite was extended to members of The Reading League, a local non-profit group whose members self-identify as interested in the beneficial support of students’ reading, including the support of students with dyslexia. Subsequently, fourteen eventual participants are members of The Reading League with the remaining six educators participating
as a result of a snowball sampling on behalf of The Reading League members sharing the study. The three Central Office Administrator participants are responsible for district-wide K-12 curriculum decisions and supports. The eight teacher participants worked with students in grades 2-8 in varying capacities ranging from a grade 2 classroom teacher (two participants), one multi-age teacher, three special educators, and two reading/academic intervention support teachers. Years of teacher experience ranged from three years to twenty-seven years. Seven out of the nine parent participants worked within school systems at varying capacities. One parent was a former educator who now home schools her children. Four parents worked as a substitute teacher or teacher aid. One parent was a literacy coach in another school system. And one parent was also a Superintendent. This participant responded to both interview protocols, once as an administrator and the other as a parent. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the various participants and their primary roles as participants in the study.
The researcher facilitated each individual interview. Four of the interviews involved the researcher meeting the participant at a space suggested by the participant while the remaining sixteen interviews were conducted by phone. Interview participants were asked a series of questions related to the research questions. After the interviews, the researcher used

Table 4.1

*Participant Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Parent (child)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Molly (Emily, 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Liz, Grade 2 Teacher</td>
<td>Marcia, Assistant. Superintendent</td>
<td>Susan (Jackson, 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amy (Jason, 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Melissa (Rebecca, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jen, Special Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jill (Morgan, 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Elizabeth (Brandon, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sara, Special Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Andrea, Special Educator</td>
<td>Sarah, Director of Literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Christine, Grade 2 Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stephanie, School Psychologist</td>
<td>Maria (Sophia, 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Colleen, Reading Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Teresa, Superintendent</td>
<td>Teresa (Mark, 14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Eve, Multi-Age Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dan, Academic Support Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Marla (Jason, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
https://transcribe.wreally.com to help facilitate the transcription of each interview. The researcher shared the transcriptions with each participant and provided them with an opportunity to correct any discrepancies. One parent participant followed up with additional comments to expand upon two of her answers. The researcher read through transcriptions three times while making notes. The researcher first used In vivo coding, then employed pattern coding to identify and develop emergent themes from the data.

In the following section, the researcher presents the overarching themes resulting from the interviews with each identified participant group: administrator, teacher, and parent.

**Question 1: How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?**

**Central office administrators.** Three important themes emerged from across the three Central Office Administration interviews. These themes are presented in Table 4.2. Although the themes intersect across all three interviews, the perceptions regarding supporting students with dyslexia often varies.

Table 4.2

*Themes from Central Office Administrators in Response to the First Question.*

- Familiarity with dyslexia and knowing what to do was dependent upon administrator experiences with dyslexia.
- A school's response to instructional needs varied within the RtI framework employed by the district (tiers 1, 2, 3).
- Challenges to supporting students with dyslexia and their teachers was dependent on perceived administrator control.
Familiarity with dyslexia and knowing what to do is dependent upon administrator experiences with dyslexia. During the interviews with administrators, responses to supporting students with dyslexia varied in part due to administrator experiences with dyslexia. One participant's response is a direct reflection of her personal experiences as a parent of a child with dyslexia. It has transformed her approaches to supporting students and the teachers who teach them. This is very different from another administrator’s knowledge being limited to their experiences with students who struggle across the district as a result of interfacing with parents and teachers. A third administrator acknowledged dyslexia existed but she did not have experiences with dyslexic students or with supporting dyslexic students and their teachers. In turn, administrator responses to supporting children with dyslexia varied with their knowledge of and experiences with students with dyslexia.

In October 2015, Michael Yudin, Assistant Secretary for Special Education issued a guidance document illustrating the recognition of using terms such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia in IEP documents. When that guidance document was provided to states, Teresa, who was a participant in this study and also fulfilled a role as a Superintendent as well as a parent of a dyslexic, stated, “When that memo came out a few years ago, I was like, 'WAAAA!' Yelling all over the office. I was distributing it to everybody.” Teresa's personal experiences transformed how and what she intended to focus on within her district. There was a need to support classroom teachers. Teresa explained, “I did a lot with curriculum. I'm trying to change the mindset of teachers in the classroom when kids struggle.” Teresa admitted that she too, was not as knowledgeable about dyslexia until she was faced with it. In turn, Teresa was motivated to support others. While meeting with a younger teacher Teresa explained, "You've got to read it [Overcoming Dyslexia] because what I didn't know as a teacher coming out college about
reading instruction and what I now know is because of my son." The change in Teresa's knowledge instilled a sense of urgency to detect reading difficulties in the students in her district, "I can pick them out like nobody's business now. It's just funny how, how evident it is to somebody who knows the information." Teresa further stated,

I'll say until I'm blue in the face that all the changes that I made there was so that no other kid had to feel the way my son felt. I did not want a kid to get to 5th grade feeling stupid for something that could so easily be addressed in kindergarten and first grade. Period. I feel like I have to be that champion somehow in the district to make sure things get changed.

Marcia recognized an inherent tension with the use of the term dyslexia between staff members in her district. Marcia explained,

I understand sort of the tension between people even in our own district about saying and labeling someone with dyslexia on an IEP or just saying it. One of the reasons why some people don't want to do that is because they don't think that other people will know what that means, know what to do.

While this was a recognized tension, Marcia stated, "It doesn't mean that we don't know that we try to help kids that have it. Build programs and such..." The response to supporting students with dyslexia varied within this system. One approach was to target a small group of educators to receive training on a specific intervention. How to support students who are dyslexic within the context of the school day contributes to the already strained school day schedule. This led to the group of educators offering an after school tutoring session with 8-10 students. "Feedback has been anecdotally positive. Kids are feeling more confident and they feel like they're doing better and the teachers do too.” Marcia reported having interaction with
concerned parents, "I've gotten involved a couple of times this year only because parents have been frustrated and feeling like they are at the end of their rope not knowing what to do." Marcia recognized her own limitations to providing supports and stated,

So I don't always have a very good answer. But listening and um, trying to understand what we can do. Trying to provide some kind of option of what we can do for parents I think is important. Even if it means, Jorene, telling the parents that this is where your kid is at and they need a 1:1 tutor and you need to go find it for them because we can't provide it.

Like Teresa, Marcia acknowledged the need to build educator understanding at the primary level. Marcia stated, "I think the other thing I'd like to see happen is um, more focus on the primary. So that we don't get kids in fifth grade still not able to read."

Sarah explained how dyslexia was not a term used in her district by adding, "I'm not able to answer that because I don't, so my understanding, um it is not, it is not been very often that a student is presenting themselves I guess you would say as dyslexic." Sarah inquired with her school psychologist in efforts to more accurately respond to this study and replied, "It's not very often that they have that (dyslexia)." Sarah described the case of one first grade student who is suspected of having dyslexia and that the team was working collaboratively. Regarding how to support students with dyslexia in her district Sarah replied,

Specifically with students with dyslexia? I wouldn't know that answer. I honestly wouldn't know, I cannot think of any conversation that a teacher or a special ed teacher has had with me or even a reading teacher has had with me about a student that you know, has had difficulty with reversals, not able to be able to um, you know, ah read. But for students that are having severe reading difficulty, um, when I talk with the
teachers about strategies, I very often bring in the importance of the gross motor, the cross body movement.

Administrators’ responses to instructional needs varied within the RtI framework (Tiers I, II, III). All administrators revealed the influence Tier I instruction and Tiers II & III interventions have on all students and especially those who have reading difficulties. The focus on teacher groups (classroom teacher vs. special educator) varied between the three participants. Specific programs were also referred to over the course of the interviews, but this will be detailed later.

As a result of her personal experiences with dyslexia, Teresa shared a specific question she asked teacher applicants in her district,

The standard question was, “So you have a student and you're going to be a second grade teacher. You know this student um, is really having a hard time comprehending stuff. Um, they can't spell very well and they're, they're definitely not fluent. What do you do?” Yes, so and when someone nailed it I'm like that's the one I want to hire (laugh)! That's the one we hire! You know. If they couldn't answer my question I wasn't hiring them!

Teresa was invested in evidence-based practices and stated, "During one of the cuts when I first got there, we got rid of Reading Recovery. Because longitudinal studies in our district said, bull." Recognizing her limited influence, Teresa supported classroom and reading teachers by providing training in foundational reading practices. "I couldn't affect the special ed department. But I could affect the general ed teacher and that's really what I went after."

Teresa recognized the support needed on behalf of building leaders. Therefore, Teresa made points of knowledge building with administration as well, "The principals were involved in
me sharing knowledge and information with them." Teresa also reached out to outside supports in order to provide training to her staff. "I kept telling Stacey, I want you to teach them what they don't know." In kind, Teresa stated, “Finally we could walk through the halls /c/ /a/ /t/ cat. We were able to accomplish a lot that way. Every time I would do professional development it would squirrel itself in—it always did.”

It was not as important to label a student as dyslexic as it was to know how to intervene and support a child with reading difficulties. Marcia stated, "The question that we always ask is—what will the service that we provide be?" Marcia recognized the inconsistencies in service delivery and acknowledged part of the work was to streamline them as well as "trying to be more purposeful about our explicit instruction." Inclusive practices that keep students within the classroom instead of being pulled out are a cornerstone to Marcia's design for intervention scheduling,

Getting more teachers up to speed with what they can do to intervene in their regular general education is what our goal is right now. We're able to group kids and we're able to have different times in the schedule where we can get the interventions, where they're not being pulled out of their-any other class.

Marcia reported teachers were doing the best they could with what they have, "I do believe most teachers are doing everything they know how." but recognized constraints to supporting all students, especially those with reading difficulties. For example, Marcia identified inconsistencies in principal and teacher leader support across the district. Where there was better collaboration there was more success. Additionally, Marcia felt that supports like professional development for teachers are only useful if "they feel like they could really turn around and use tomorrow." In turn, Marcia identified the focus of the work on behalf of children with reading
difficulties should rest in the hands of special educators,

Obviously all teachers need to see the IEP, know what exactly is going on with the child. I almost think that the focus needs to be on special ed now. We've always kind of included special ed teachers but now maybe we need to go after special ed teachers and not everyone.

Sarah described her work with general classroom teachers as the foundation of her work within the school district, "I work more with the teacher piece of that, the instructional delivery of the Tier I curriculum." If the student is not responding to regular classroom instruction, she/he moves into Tier II, "So we have a continuum and there is like, there's a chart that has the different criteria of the continuum. And then if the student is not showing enough growth or progress using the guide they go to Tier III level interventions." In Sarah's district, professional development has been "comprehensive and aligned to the curriculum." Teacher knowledge has increased as a result of implementing a Tier I program across the district. Sarah stated,

Honestly, CKLA has taught teachers how to teach reading. It's been amazing. If the teachers actually implement and read ahead and teach the lesson as they have, they have had epiphanies as they teach it. It has changed them. It's been awesome for teachers that have been open about it.

Much like Teresa and Marcia, administrative support and knowledge was also influential in teacher support with students with reading difficulties. Sarah recognized the need to revisit supporting teacher knowledge as a potential source for ongoing training. However, addressing all students has made significant changes in the way teachers perceive students with reading difficulties. Sarah stated, “I'm really excited about how more of our teachers are also intervening with students. It used to be oh, they have a reading problem, then that's the reading teacher who
helps them.”

**Challenges to supporting students with dyslexia and their teachers was dependent upon administrator control.** The three study participants identified situations that prevented them from the work of supporting students with reading difficulties. From relationships, to multiple responsibilities, to general dyslexia knowledge, these administrators were faced with complex and complicated pieces that may impede supporting students with dyslexia, many of which were ultimately out of their direct control.

As an assistant superintendent, Teresa was limited by working with all staff due in part to a difficult relationship with the special education director. Therefore, Teresa's impact to build educator knowledge was not felt by special education teachers. "I didn't and couldn't influence in my position her ability to change what she was doing in, in special education." At one point, Teresa created a summer school program for children with reading difficulties. Teresa was able to secure the funding to allocate the program but found the program unsuccessful due to attendance issues.

An ongoing conversation across districts involves teacher knowledge and training. Teacher knowledge was a driving force behind why students struggle as well as what can be done about it. Teresa recognized it in her own graduate and undergraduate training by stating, "Um, I just think that the knowledge level for the teacher, the general ed teacher. If they understood, so many kids would be caught sooner. Period. And for teachers to embrace that information as real scientific knowledge because I think we were all brainwashed with whole language."

This continued to be a sensitive topic for Teresa. She acknowledged teachers may not have the knowledge but since they are working within her system, "I took my 6 credits in reading um, like
there's a whole generation of us who don't understand what we don't understand. So there was a little bit of an uphill battle and we had to figure out how we change that presentation for the teachers."

Marcia's work as an assistant superintendent of curriculum includes grant writing, overseeing all curricula, budgeting and funding programs from preschool-grade 12. Marcia described the multiple projects as "A big part of my job. So the normal, day-to-day building curriculum and providing good pd gets ah, minimized. Effort gets minimized on that unfortunately." In addition, Marcia stated the district is facing financial constraints and she has a small team to do any of the work. There were additional tensions presented in her district such as scheduling, and ultimately supporting the teachers. Marcia identified the need dyslexic students have included the need for time to have an intervention. Citing the limitations of the normal school day, Marcia stated, "We may have to figure out how we can get extra time before school or after school or some other time during the day." Teacher training was also something that Marcia acknowledged was a challenge. Since professional development was not something Marcia could directly be a part of due to her work. Marcia added that her staff still did not have a good command on understanding and using the data and felt "I think we need better data." or that her staff really understands how to use the interventions they have. Marcia claimed, And honestly that's been the truth since I came here seven years ago and that's kind of depressing to think we haven't done anything. But I think a lot of it's our fault. We've never given them really good interventions. And we've never given them prolonged training on how to do it. I mean I feel like we are always jumping onto what we think might be the next best thing.

Sarah works as a k-12 director of literacy. Like the previous participants, Sarah is
involved with staff development. Sarah identified teacher knowledge, use of curricula with fidelity, and consistent support among building leaders present as ongoing challenges to Sarah's work. Sarah addressed knowledge of dyslexia that was reflective of her own understanding in addition to her staff. "I know I don't have a lot of knowledge of dyslexia. But what I do know is that it is complicated beyond just reversal of letters. That we may not have the training to even recognize dyslexia." Sarah later described the difficulty at varying levels ranging from classroom teachers, reading teachers, to special educators by stating,

I really, I don't know if they are equipped to teach a student with dyslexia. I don't even know if I would be equipped to do that I can't imagine that a teacher would feel ok yeah, I'm equipped to do this, I know the strategies. And including special ed teachers too. I'm not sure if they would have those um, specialized strategies or not.

In addition to supporting students with dyslexia, general education teacher understanding of the Tier I program is a concern for Sarah. "They are cutting things out and they're making some decisions because of convenience and for time instead of what the science is behind it." Sarah identified the need to refresh teacher knowledge but also addressed the limited amount of time or opportunities for teachers over the course of their careers, "I think it's important that, um, that their reading instruction needs to be professionally developed for teachers. Not just the one time from their master's program. I don't think that we slow down and you know, really talk about the continuum of how students learn to read." Sarah identified staff fidelity to the program was influenced by the building leaders' knowledge of reading instruction. "I've found with our principals that the ones who are more passionate about reading themselves, they were more apt to be interested."

**Teachers.** Four themes emerged from across the nine teachers interviewed. These
themes are presented in Table 4.3. Although the themes intersect across all nine interviewees, the perceptions regarding supporting students with dyslexia again often varied a great deal.

Table 4.3

*Themes from Teacher Participants in Response to the First Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexia was not a conversation within the school system and if it came up it was only by virtue of the parents raising the concern and need for assistance.</th>
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<tr>
<td>It was helpful to students to know that they have dyslexia, yet the acknowledgement and response varied across teachers due to whether or not dyslexia was recognized within the system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers had to take it upon themselves to find out and learn about possible supports, resources, or interventions on their own and pursue them independently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers felt unprepared, have few resources, and limited time to support students with dyslexia.</td>
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Dyslexia is not a conversation within the school system and if it comes up it is only by virtue of the parents raising the concern and need for assistance. All nine teacher participants responded that dyslexia was not a term that was generally used within the schools. Teachers reported frustrations with not clearly identifying aspects of reading difficulty. Additionally, some of the teachers reported dyslexia was used if a parent was pushing for the term to be used. Otherwise, teachers felt their input to use the term was not acknowledged.

All participants replied in kind to the use of the term dyslexia in their respective schools. In responding to why dyslexia was not a term used in her school, Liz, a second grade teacher replied, “In my past cases it's been, ‘well, I can't diagnose that, I can't, I don't have the wherewithal to do that.’ And, that's kind of where it all stops.”

Teachers have identified school system responses as lacking when they have initiated or investigated support for students with dyslexia. For instance, Christine, also a second grade
teacher, commented how her district does not have a tool to identify students with dyslexia, "We do not have any formal testing for dyslexia, um, we do not um, have anyone specifically trained as far as teaching students with dyslexia. At least in my school." Another instance was Eve's attempt to support the reading difficulties of students in her multi-age classroom resulted in her administrator questioning the existence of dyslexia. "In talking with my administrator about um, concerns that I had with students who are dyslexic, and programs to use with them, um, she responded with that she wasn't even sure she believed in dyslexia anymore." In addition, Jen, a special educator, said her school system did not identify students with dyslexia and commented, "It's been frustrating over the years cause I wish that we used that term." Sara, also a special educator explained, "We don't use the term dyslexia as far as like actually identifying a student on their IEP as being dyslexic." Andrea who is a special educator, stated, "Well, to be honest. I've never actually seen that word written on an IEP. Um, nor have I ever heard, you know our special education director or any other special education teacher refer to it specifically."

Colleen, a reading teacher and RtI facilitator stated her district did not use the term dyslexia. But commented further,

I did find out though, um, I took some training with Wilson this summer and that they brought to our attention was the memo that was sent across NYS to special education departments that says yes we can use the term dyslexic in our IEPs and so on. That was kind of news to me because I, um, the way things are at work really isn't the case in our district.

Finally, Dan, who is an academic intervention support teacher, summarized why he believed dyslexia was not a term used in his district by stating,

I really think honestly there's not an idea of what dyslexia is. There's still the belief out
there you know, ah, a mix up of letters or seeing letters backwards. It's still that. It's not
the idea that a student with an actual disability has difficulty with the reading but it's just
with not really understanding what the definition of what dyslexia is.

Liz felt that her school’s response was due to parents pushing the issue. "I don't think the
district was in search of a program to help students who may have dyslexia or are already
dyslexic. It was, 'Uh-oh, we now have this and now need to find something to help this student.'
It wasn't being proactive." Parents may have more influence on calling attention to supporting
students with dyslexia. Liz advises parents to be proactive, "I would tell the parents that they
need to be their child's advocate."

Christine shared a story about a student of hers who has been a part of the RtI process for
two years since she was in kindergarten with little growth. At the start of the year the parents
met with Christine, "They made that known to me right up front. They wanted further
evaluation done and really wanted to stay on top of identifying her because they really felt there
was a concern." It was fortunate that this student had parents who acted, but as Christine said,
"You know, those parents who aren't aware or don't have the ability to identify something that
was wrong. That they're left just to us to figure it out, really. And if we're not identifying it..."

Sara described an experience to address dyslexia for her student named Martin,

Martin is one of our students who I consider, I definitely believe is dyslexic. Um,
he, his mom has asked a couple of times and our psychologist has said, 'We totally agree
with you, but if you want more information about that, there are some specialists that we
can refer you to.'

Dan described the process itself as complex; which stalls supporting the very students it
was designed to support, "Unfortunately, a lot of it gets stalled in just the initial intervention
process. They don't really get anywhere. So most of the kids who would have dyslexia aren't labeled at all. They don't make it that far."

It is helpful to students to know that they have dyslexia. Yet the acknowledgement and response varied across teachers due to whether or not dyslexia is recognized within their school system. Teacher participants identified both the strengths and difficulties students with dyslexia face. Participants recognized how hard students with dyslexia work and also acknowledge how difficult it must be for them beyond academics. Many of the participants indicated the importance of identifying dyslexia not only to label a difficulty but as a means to understand that it is not about intelligence or effort.

Liz identified the successes her students with dyslexia have had with oral discussions. "Their comprehension is amazing and if you speak with them, their speaking vocabulary is great." She also recognized the lived experiences and the toll it must take for her students, "I think with both of them they get very discouraged easily when they see that other students around them are picking things up and making gains and they are still having struggles with that."

Christine described her second grade student as driven, persistent and funny. Christine believed it was important to help students understand dyslexia. "I want them to feel like you know, that they are ok. That there are other children out there that are just like them. Um, I think that's going to be a really big piece for them. I'm not sure how to really make that happen but I'm encouraging that."

Eve works with students who have prior experiences with being a struggling student. She understands their struggle personally. "Well first off I am very upfront with my students that I am dyslexic. I model being a good dyslexic![laugh]I really stress that there are some things that
we're gonna innately be good at and there are some things that we're gonna have to really work on."

Jen shared an experience that transformed how she approached the use of the term dyslexia. "And so no one ever told my student, Mike. But when he was in fourth grade he was like, 'Why didn't anyone ever tell me!' I said, 'Well you know Mike, I don't know why I didn't tell you.' And from that point on I started telling people." As a special educator, Jen incorporated understanding how the dyslexic brain works with her students. Jen understood how self-identity is a big part of dyslexia by stating,

- It is so empowering to them. Because it gives them that fuel-because they do feel dumb. And then they have a term to say when kids say, why can't you read or why do you go to reading class, well I have dyslexia!

As a special educator, Andrea works alongside many other classroom teachers. Therefore, sharing what dyslexia is and how it impacts students is not just helpful to the student but to the adults as well. Andrea shared,

- But they kind of make these judgments like, 'Well, you know if she was ever here,' or 'Her family doesn't value education.' And things like that. I'm like well, once you get to know her, you really will see how extensive her reading disability is. But if they, if they could just know that from the beginning, it might save a little bit of judgment. You know.

Andrea believed it would be empowering to her students and said she would love to have that conversation with them. However, Andrea experienced a tension with whether or not she should use the term dyslexia in her school system. Therefore she is "cautious about using the word."

**Teachers have to take it upon themselves to find out and learn about possible**
supports, resources, and interventions for students with dyslexia. All teacher participants pointed out how much they had to pursue various supports, resources, and interventions they could employ with their dyslexic students. There was no mention of district-wide training, resources for all teachers, or opportunities from within or outside to build teacher knowledge of dyslexia. Some teachers mentioned a literacy coach, outside support groups such as The Reading League, attending a dyslexia workshop, or training independent of the district.

Liz responded with feeling unsupported by her school system. She stated, "But it's like, you have to go out, and you have to find it, and you have to push. And see what you can get. It's not like, this is what we have, this is where we can go, and this is what you can try. Instead it's, we need this." She acknowledged feeling frustrated. Knowing her students struggled and being unsure of what her options to support the dyslexic students were, Liz reported,

If you have a student that needs, like crutches, or a student that needs OTPT, we get that for them. And we have students that have this need and there is nothing that we are giving them. I don't know. It's hard-it's not physically in your face and you don't see it like you would see a limp and they need a crutch, I know it's a stupid analogy, but.

You can't see that. You can't see what they're struggling with.

Christine shared that she and her team were trying a variety of things ranging from covered overlay strips to an intensive and targeted intervention for her dyslexic student. One glaring concern for Christine was the lack of formal training to use programs or methodologies for the students who need them. "There are several teachers that use Wilson but are not formerly trained in it." Christine's special educator co-teacher was provided with a very brief overview before using the system with her students. Christine has taken it upon herself to develop her own knowledge of dyslexia. "Until I went to The Reading League meeting and was like wow, this
really identifies this student and I just kept having this feeling like we needed to do something more for her." In addition to attending a local event, Christine has also developed her knowledge by listening to a few webinars and reading books. Asked who drove the learning, Christine replied,

I guess I feel like I've been doing this more on my own. I'm not feeling like I have a lot of support or help from inside the district. I think that is key for teachers to be able to have these resources to go to. I think that's more of my frustration I just feel like I am doing a lot of this on my own.

Eve shared her attempts to bring her new learning into her system. But her attempts were ultimately rejected. Eve stated,

There is something to say for going to school and then coming back and being like, 'Whoa, this is what we should be doing.' That you know it always ruffles other people's feathers. I really thought that I was doing it not subtly but I thought I was doing it like, 'Hey, here is this new scientific research.' And it was like, yeah, no.

Jen identified her approaches to supporting dyslexic students as eclectic. She stated that she took parts of interventions that work and created an approach that married all of the good parts. "I take good things that I can find out of programs because I don't really believe I've found that meets my needs." Jen cited The Gift of Dyslexia and the Davis Approach as two influential sources that have developed her own knowledge about dyslexia. Both resources were discovered independent of the school system. Jen's response to the question about the school system supplying Jen with knowledge about dyslexia was, "I would have liked to hope if they would give me something if they ever had it."

Sara wondered if maybe the reason her district has not provided support for dyslexia was
because they might have moved away from labeling. Sara reported asking and attending a recent professional development session about dyslexia and stated, "We came out very skeptical ourselves. But excited about um, parts of it, but just skeptical too." The professional development session was primarily about cross-body movements, vision therapy, and covered overlays. Sara was also using a combination of interventions she had been trained in over the course of her time in her district. "I'm doing a combination with the four kids that I work with. I use System 44, I use Edmark reading for sight words, and I use Wilson and I do a kind of a, and then phonemic awareness on top of all of that." However, Sara reported that she was responsible for doing her own research and would like support from her school system, "I think, um, maybe guidance on what programs are the best to use, which ones are research-based programs, best practice at this point, you know? And I did a lot of research on my own and I just keep trying to find things and trying to see what works and trying to hold onto things that work."

Andrea had been using resources she acquired as a result of her graduate program. She remarked that many teachers utilized these resources because they too were graduates of the same program in her school system but that the programs were not supplied or required to be used by the district. Andrea commented how a reading teacher in her district wished to consistently deliver an intervention to a particular group of students using another program called Wilson. Andrea did not have any formal training or experiences with the Wilson intervention and asked,

Will there be any chance that I could be Wilson trained? Do we offer this? She had just ordered the DVD series. Those five DVDs that are like, you know, they are quite long. So I watched them over the course of a couple of weeks and just kind of taught myself. And um, and so then I passed them onto the other teachers.
Andrea and her colleagues were expected to independently learn how to use the program with fidelity. And on their own time.

Colleen recognized that she needed to do something different to supports students with reading difficulty. Colleen shared how she came upon the Wilson Reading System. An extra kit was returned to a supervisor's office and she asked to look at it. She took it upon herself to learn how to use the resource and implement it. Since then, Colleen has modified the Wilson kit to work with younger students. When asked about school system support, Colleen replied,

I paid for the (Wilson) training myself. I haven't received any help from the district. Um, I will say that our special ed coordinator who runs the meetings for special ed, she seems to understand.

Colleen's school system has supplied their teachers with a quick training by an individual who was not certified in Wilson. The small group of teachers who were interested in building their understanding were also left to create the materials needed for the program. "We have this one kit of the Wilson materials in our building and I bought some additional you know magnets, personally. I found another one that a special ed teacher had from somewhere but then when other teachers began using we tried to get some additional materials and the request was turned down." In efforts to independently build her own knowledge, Colleen has joined The Reading League. "Another place that I've found support is, and I'm sure you've heard of it is, The Reading League. I'm glad that that organization is up and running and I can plug into it on occasion."

Dan credited the lack of resources, knowledge, and time as additional reasons students with dyslexia face limited support. "Like you know I could probably see like 75% of my school. But with you know, maybe with six hours in the day, and taking away their lunch time, and their
specials time when I can't pull them, there's not enough time to meet with the kids who need it."

Dan was trained in an intervention called Lexia but his district no longer utilizes the program.

"It really worked with my kids and they were motivated, too." Currently, Dan uses interventions he collected as a result of his graduate work. There are inconsistencies across his school and system that prevent a common dialogue due to not meeting "We need to get together and figure out you know what are we doing to help our kids at grade level so that it's kind of a commonality."

**Teachers felt unprepared, have few resources, and limited time to support students with dyslexia.** Teachers identified not having the appropriate training in their undergraduate, graduate, or support within their school system to support students with dyslexia. The underlying notion is with regard to knowledge and what can be done. Special educators and reading interventionists felt the constraints of time and caseload played as well.

Liz replied, "I don't know personally of any programs that are out there that could help dyslexic children" and summarized her experiences as follows,

It's a struggle. I struggle. I don't know how to help him. I don't know how to make connections for him. I feel like I don't have the wherewithal teach him. I don't think I've been taught to teach children who are dyslexic. I don't think we are exposed to um, undergrad studies. I even have masters in reading. I-we didn't touch on that. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know where we go with him. I don't know who to go to. I don't know what to do, where to take him.

Christine referred to the inconsistency between intervention focus over the past few years. "It's a lot of Fountas and Pinnell reading. They were using um, LLI series. I don't know if that's currently what they've gone back to. Last year they tried to use, um our CKLA
remediation and assessment with students. The directive this year was to go back to using more of the LLI, um approach to reading." The interventions referenced also reflect the divisiveness between reading programs as one involves whole language while the other involves scientific approaches to reading instruction. Christine identified such inconsistency leaves little support for the teachers who are working with dyslexic students. While commenting about interventions and supports for students with dyslexia Christine stated, "I would really love to see the district provide professional development as well in that area."

"I do find that ones that do struggle with reading um, it's usually because they can't hear the sounds in the words. And they're told things like, look at the picture, look at the words around it. And I used to say those things also." Eve's understanding of reading instruction changed as a result of her graduate work. While Eve saw success with using what she has learned through her graduate program, she felt that she was limited in using her knowledge of how to support dyslexic students due in part to administrator constraints. "A lot of things that I would like to have these kids working on I can't do because of administration. And, um, we very much had the brakes slammed on us."

Jen identified a variety of experiences with programs to build her eclectic approach to working with children with reading difficulties. A driving force is because Jen recognized the personal experiences her students brought in with them. While working with teachers, Jen recognized that not all teachers understand dyslexia's reach with academics and self-esteem. Discussing how teachers respond to Jen mentioning dyslexia, Jen stated,

But I'll say they're dyslexic and they seem to-like I'll say do you know what that means and they will say yes. I don't know if they really do. I think they know like, how some people knew about autism when they watched, They know about dyslexia like most
people know about autism from *Rain Man*.

Sara stated the inconsistencies across her district in teacher knowledge of supporting students with dyslexia through the use of programs such as Wilson, Fundations, and Lips are inconsistent. "We need to retrain in Wilson and Fundations. There are people within our district that are using Wilson who have never been trained." Another issue is time allocation for intervening with students due to many requirements over the course of a day. "There's always that struggle between being exposed to everything and finding a time in the day for them to get the interventions that they need." Sara reflected on her own understanding of how to support students with dyslexia and stated,

> Even in my masters in reading, that was back, I don't know—maybe, like later in the 80s and it was more of the whole language back then. We didn't really get into acknowledging phonemic awareness and that kind of stuff as the basis. I guess when we did LIPS, was when, when we were trained in LIPS was when I first really started realizing that I had to work more on that. You know?

Andrea felt the tension between minutes for an IEP as well as RtI minutes, "Instead of working together they kind of work against each other." She was stretched to where she did not even provide intervention supports to some of the students on her caseload and that an AIS teacher was responsible for that. Coupled with knowledge of how to best utilize interventions and time placed Andrea within constraints. She received differing responses for how to cover her minutes from different building leaders. Reflecting on the overall RtI framework Andrea replied, "I think the first year it made more sense to me because they were going to an intervention team and then you would put in place an intervention. Now it's like we are doing these interventions from the beginning of the year and then as the year goes on, you know
teachers are basically asked to bring two to three kids they are most concerned about."

Colleen identified steps within her school's Response to Intervention process but acknowledged big flaws, "We don't have a Tier I program. I think our principal wants to support us and wants to support the students. Because we have so many kids coming through the Tier II process because they don't have the basics." In response to teacher support for additional interventions, Colleen referred to training a small group of teachers from someone who was not certified in the program they were learning. Time to deliver the Wilson intervention was also discussed. Colleen described her efforts to adjust the intervention to meet the time limitations. Asked about supporting teacher knowledge about dyslexia, Colleen responded,

I guess, well first of all we need not be afraid to talk about it. Um, and then to talk as to have some professional development as reading teachers and special educators on what to look for in terms of to let us know what students need for guidance and practice.

Teachers are presented with a great deal to consider within the context of their working day. Dan recognized the tension of the work placed upon teachers in his building. His school offered professional development but it might not be directly related to supporting teacher knowledge of the science of reading or dyslexia. And done so over time so that it can be understood. "We mandate all this pd but then they can pick like you know Microsoft Word 100 and get credit hours for you know, doing that or like learning how to use an iPad in the classroom." Dan identified a large Tier I problem in his school. As a result of the gap in teacher knowledge, Dan stated, "What they're not understanding is having the kids memorize the letter and sounds-anything if they can't manipulate the sounds in words like that." He shared that his district has begun to implement teacher knowledge through Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS). However, this professional development was designed for
reading support staff. Dan identified the conflict between support, who is involved, and time by stating, "We were training a lot of the coaches with that and they were struggling with it. It's a lot to digest. But unfortunately it's really intense expensive training and the teachers weren't exposed to it all. It was very time intensive and they kind of feel like they're not given the time to understand it properly." Lastly, Dan reported on a greater issue at a systems level. He stated,

There's a real disconnect between like the policy of what schools want to be going on and then actually if it feasible for them to even do. Let alone for people to even know what is expected of them. I mean when you sit there and decide to do something that you love just because you like it... is that what you're gonna base all your decisions on? You're gonna neglect kids that have real needs because you don't believe in scientifically based research and reading instruction? Like, I have a huge problem with that.

**Summary.** There were common and discrepant perspectives among administrators and educators in schools across central New York. It was evident in the research findings that dyslexia was not a term used regularly or at all by both administrators and teachers in this study. Administrators discussed professional development and whether or not it was found to support general teacher knowledge. However, dyslexia knowledge was not a topic offered in school systems. Teacher participants shared experiences where they felt unsupported or in need to discover how to support students with dyslexia.

**Question 2: What have been parents' experience in ensuring that their child with dyslexia has the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?**

Parent participants have shared experiences in their efforts to advocate and work with school systems. The parent participants shared experiences with years of advocacy work on behalf of their child. Only two children were identified with dyslexia in third grade while the
remaining seven children were identified at a later point. All parents reported the use of an external tutor to address reading difficulties in addition to the regular classroom day. Four themes emerged from across the parent interviews, as presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4**

*Themes from Parent Participants in Response to Question 2.*

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>It was very hard to get the schools to do something. The school response varied greatly over the course of time to identify and support the students with dyslexia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents felt they had to be persistent and push the school to do something because they were the primary advocate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The advocacy work doesn't end. It is enduring, even after being identified as dyslexic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia's effects are felt beyond a struggle to read.</td>
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It was very hard to get the schools to do something, and even when they did, the school response varied greatly over the course of time to identify and support their child with dyslexia. All parent participants shared concerns about their child's reading intervention/instruction as well as accommodations for the classroom prior to and after being identified with dyslexia. In many instances, parents accounted for consistently reaching out to the school system in response to their child's reading difficulties. Schools reacted as best as they could.

The following transcript excerpts reflect the conversation between the parents and the school system early on in the process. Parents reported the initial school response was to consider ADD/ADHD testing or wait it out. All parents reported the dyslexia identification process occurred over a period of years. For instance, Susan explained that she was told to "Give him the gift of time, he will mature." But after his second year of kindergarten, Susan's son was recommended for ADHD testing and to consider medication. Susan's son was officially
identified with dyslexia when he was in fourth grade.

Molly shared her concerns with her daughter's first grade teacher and was also told, "Let's see how she does." Molly explained further,

They were the ones suggesting to wait and see. That she's showing and making gains, that her report cards were good. They kept referring back to her report cards. That she's such a sweet little girl. I kind of felt like I was like being told to just you know, hold off. 'Your daughter's going to be ok.' You're over thinking this.

Molly's daughter was identified with dyslexia in grade 3.

Maria initiated concerns about her daughter's reading difficulty during her first grade year. It was not until she was in second grade that Maria's daughter started to receive reading interventions. Maria also said, "And the teacher thinks, 'Oh, maybe we should also have her tested for ADHD." Maria's daughter was not identified with having dyslexia until late spring of grade 4.

Melissa's experiences were similar stating, "The (1st grade) teacher said it was because of her behavior and that she couldn't sit still. Right away they said, 'You need to have her tested. We think that she has ADD/ADHD.' And so we did. And it came back that she didn't. They encouraged us to get a second opinion and put her on medication. And I refused." Melissa remembered reaching out again during her daughter's third grade year. It wasn't until the summer of her daughter's sixth grade year that she was identified with dyslexia.

If parents brought up the topic of dyslexia prior to an evaluation or thereafter, they found that the school did not know how to address dyslexia or did not support their concern. For instance, Susan's son's second grade teacher said "Dyslexia was too broad of a term and that they couldn't touch upon it." Elizabeth referenced dyslexia to school staff over the course of the years
attempting to support her son. She explained, "I kept telling them and they came back with 'You can't say'-you know the whole dyslexia' garbage." When Amy met with the school psychologist about her son's reading and spelling difficulties in first grade, she asked if it was dyslexia. Amy said, "The school psychologist had talked to him and she thought it was not dyslexia and it was maybe like ADD and to maybe medicate him and retain him." Amy's son was identified by an outside evaluator during the summer of his 7th grade year.

Maria and her husband met with her daughter's reading specialist during her second grade year. Maria described her concerns and asked, "Are kids diagnosed with dyslexia anymore? Gosh, she really mixes up her letters a lot. She skips words that she should know. She's not pronouncing the endings correct. And they're like, 'No, no, she's fine.'"

Parent participants identified experiences where teachers were uncertain or did not know what to do to address the reading difficulties. Marla shared a conversation she had with her son's kindergarten teacher. She stated,

The comment from the kindergarten teacher was that he's unteachable. Everything that she had tried-she was a 20-year veteran. I guess as a teacher and as much as she knew and had tried, she just said there was absolutely nothing that will teach this child. He is unteachable.

Marla continued to describe her son's struggle to read in first grade. Their school system facilitated meetings to support children with academic and behavioral difficulties. The team consisted of school personnel such as the teacher, special educator, and principal. Parents were not a part of the team. Marla said she wrote a letter to the team asking for support. Marla stated, "The SET team decided that um, he just wasn't learning up to his capacity. And that it was because he needed to work harder." Therefore, the team determined that effort was the impeding
factor in Marla's son's learning. Marla's son was identified with dyslexia in fifth grade.

Elizabeth's son had an IEP for Other Health Impaired when he entered school. Elizabeth found that his teachers could not give her any answers as to what they are doing to support her son. Elizabeth explained, "When I went to the school they didn't supply me with really solid answers. So I started on my own. Instead of asking me, I started asking them some questions. I asked them about Orton-Gillingham and they didn't know what I was talking about. Um, they thought that the more I read to him and the more that he read, then it would click at some point." Elizabeth's son was identified with dyslexia in fifth grade.

Teresa discovered her son was in the lowest reading group while doing walk-throughs in classrooms. She and asked the teacher about her kindergarten son's reading group. Teresa stated, "And she, she really didn't have an explanation for me." Teresa's son was identified with dyslexia in the spring of grade 4.

Jill recognized how difficult reading was for her daughter and approached her daughter's teacher. The teacher initially agreed with the concerns but later changed her mind. Jill stated, At that point she agreed with me and she said, 'I think you're right. I think there's something that is impeding this.' On Monday she said, 'I think I misspoke when I told you that there was something wrong.' The school wasn't necessarily willing to do anything because at that point they do not label a child in 1st grade learning disabled because not enough learning has occurred.

Jill's daughter was identified with dyslexia in grade 3.

Schools did attempt to resolve the reading difficulties on behalf of most of the parent participants. Interventions ranged from vision therapy (outside of the school day at the parents' expense) to fluency practice to Leveled Literacy Intervention. Few schools had teachers on hand
who were trained in the use of multisensory and explicit approaches involving phonemic awareness and phonics. Molly shared that her daughter was given fluency strips, which did not attend to the causal root of her daughter's reading difficulty. In Amy's son's case, he was placed in inclusion classrooms where there was an extra teacher to support students. However, he did not receive any specific reading intervention with a specialist. Jill's daughter continued to receive Leveled Literacy Intervention, which did not address the core phonological reading issues.

Parents indicated relationships with the schools also influenced whether or not anything was done to address the reading and writing difficulties their children faced. Some parents had an advantage due to working within a school. However, it did not make supporting their dyslexic child within the school system that much easier.

Marla worked as a substitute aide in her son's school. She described a time when she was working in her son's second grade class. Marla was asked to assess students and was given a list of the students ranked according to reading ability. Her son was in the bottom third yet he was not receiving any academic intervention services while students who scored better were receiving academic intervention. After thinking about it for two days, Marla addressed his teacher with her concerns and stated,

I needed to know if that paper was in fact what I thought it was. She (the teacher) said she was being put in a hard place and I said I understood. I said to her, 'Is he not in AIS because of the direction from the principal?' and she said yes. I um, was of course upset. So I called the principal's office and requested a meeting and was denied the meeting.

Elizabeth recalled times where she was having frequent contact with her son's teacher,
special educator and special education director and the curriculum director. Elizabeth was a stay at home mother who had prior experiences as a teacher. Elizabeth explained that the district was "in damage control" and further described the nature of her work with the school,

They set things up so that on paper it would change but the nuts and bolts of it didn't change. The knowledge wasn't there. I had the director of curriculum contact me and asked if I could come in for a meeting. I was asked what should the special ed teacher be doing? What do I think she should be doing? And then she was going to go back to the teacher and then tell her what to do! [laughs] Because I told her?

The school district had one teacher who had experience with Orton-Gillingham and there were not any explicit or systematic interventions in place to address the needs of Elizabeth's son. They purchased a program and trained teachers for two days in October. Elizabeth stated, "Let me remind you that they said he needed this before that. And said he needs a multisensory program and it was on his IEP to start in September. They did not have anyone trained until October and it lasted for two days." Yet, Elizabeth recognized how her son's school could have responded differently to her. She stated, "I do want you to know that I believe the district tried. They could have been much, much more difficult, dug their heels in and forced us to take things to court in order to get an independent evaluation or anything else the law requires."

Some of the parents identified having a favorable response from the school system over the course of time. The teacher's willingness to listen to and try to support the children with dyslexia described the parents' perspective. The parents reported favorably if their child was being supported with appropriate accommodations. Parents did not indicate satisfaction with the reading instruction.

Susan stated she had done a lot of the work to bring accommodations to her son's school
for his teachers to use. For example when Susan asked about the use of an iPad for her son, she was told, "that it was for blind people. That's where I started two years ago with that." However, he now has an iPad that enables him to be independent during class time and to take his tests on. Her son's current teachers are "very open to want to help him. They're very open to new things." Her work with the school continued on with regard to reading instruction. Susan stated, "My son's been in the district for almost eight years and is reading at a first grade level." She described the school's current response to train some teachers in an intervention to support her son but stated, "If they go to a workshop and learn for a three day period, they know one specific program and they're following it to a 't' and not every child-you're not going to catch every deficit for that child."

Molly's daughter responded favorably to her accommodations that enable tests read and stated, "She's receiving 100s and 90s on all of her reading assessments." Molly expressed satisfaction with her daughter's teacher this year. Her daughter's teacher "knows what her modifications are and her accommodations are." Much like Susan's experiences with addressing reading difficulties, Molly was also in pursuit of teachers gaining knowledge of how to best teacher her daughter to read as well as use the resources with fidelity. Even though Molly was satisfied with her daughter's experiences this year, Molly recognized her reservation with regard to dyslexia knowledge and stated, "As far as like, teaching her to read and being able to address some of her skill deficits, I'm not too confident that she has the understanding. It's just having conversations and they are very willing to work with me."

Melissa described a successful conversation with her daughter's team during the appointment she requested at the start of the year and stated,

The principal is like you know, 'we'll do anything we can. We'll help her.' So they
met with me in regards to apps that she was able to use for reading. So they've been really working with her in her reading labs and her math labs. We're still struggling at home but she's doing a lot better.

Melissa continues to struggle with ensuring accommodations are in place and understood by her daughter's teachers.

**Parents felt they had to be persistent and push the school to do something because they had to be the primary advocate.** All parents shared experiences that illustrated their efforts to address concerns over the course of their child's education. All participants indicated initial concern occurred between kindergarten and first grade. Most of the children (7 out of 9) were not identified as either Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in reading or Other Health Impaired (OHI) until they were in grade 4 or after (grade 7 being the latest). Six out of the nine parent participants sought an outside evaluation to diagnose dyslexia. The use of the term dyslexia was initiated with the school system on behalf of 8 out of 9 parents. Only one parent stated the school psychologist used dyslexia in his description of her child. All parent participants stated they had to be persistent from initial conversations about a concern to evaluations to addressing student needs.

Parent participants reported they felt something was wrong while their child was in primary grades. Teresa recalled, "I felt like something was wrong and I couldn't put my finger on it." Jill knew when her daughter went to kindergarten that something was off. While sharing her experiences Jill commented, "Now that I look back at her writing, I'm like oh, my gosh." Elizabeth had an "inkling" while Maria and her husband felt that "something was missing" by the time their daughter entered first grade. Marla noticed in kindergarten that her son was approaching letters and words differently. Susan's son was retained in kindergarten as he was
not showing signs of readiness for first grade. Amy noticed her son struggled with reading and spelling in first grade. Melissa reported concerns while her daughter was in first grade. Molly's daughter struggled with speech in kindergarten. By the time she was in first grade Molly's daughter was able to talk about books. It seemed to Molly that her daughter was closing gaps.

Molly explained how all that changed one evening:

I'll remember this; it was vivid in my mind. There was a book about a gymnast. She was reading the book, and she knew gymnast and she knew all of these higher level words and then she got to the girl's name. And the girl's name was Kit. And she looked at the picture, and she looked at the sentence, and she looked at the picture, and she was like, "I don't know. I don't know her name. I don't know what to do. I don't know her name."

And so I realized then she had no strategies to figure out words she didn't know. And she truly could not decode.

Parent participants indicated a need to continuously persist with schools to address the reading difficulties. A common response on the school's behalf was to "wait and see" Molly followed up with the reading teacher once she discovered her daughter's difficulty decoding the name, Kit. They endured a year of intervention before moving forward. Molly stated, "I have waited and I gave it time and (breathes deeply) we need to move forward because there's something there. There's a barrier. By her 2nd grade um, I asked for a full eval. So it took the entire year to she was not evaluated until 3rd grade." Melissa was led to believe that the reading difficulty was due in part to her daughter's attention. "But they didn't; they said the academics was because of her behavior and that she couldn't sit still." After seeking outside tutors for their daughter, Melissa and her husband again approached the school at the start of their daughter's third grade year, "I went again at the beginning of the year with my husband and said, something
is wrong." Maria described her experiences with revisiting her daughter's reading difficulties:

I remember sitting at a parent teacher conference in third grade as well and talking about the reading and bringing up dyslexia again. Like gosh, we just have this hunch and we need more information about it and she's like, 'This is because of her inattentiveness-or impulsivity.'

Jill also experienced the need to continuously persist the school system to do something differently. Jill shared,

I approached her teacher and I said, something doesn't seem right here. It's like we're working so hard and she's not progressing. Well we went through first grade and basically I was just trying to do anything I could at home. She was tutored over the summer by her first grade teacher. At that point I started asking around. Because the school was very, very hesitant to do anything at that point.

Parents reported the persistent efforts to get the school system to take a closer look at why their child struggled to read as well as what could be done to support their child. All parents identified with being the advocate and approaching the school from the onset of the concern.

Susan described her perspective, "Again as a parent, you have to research everything and then bring it into the district and then you have to push because I think people like to point fingers they're going to do it, they're going to do it, they're going to do it."

Teresa recognized her position of influence as a superintendent, but experienced first hand the persistence still needed to support her son. Since Teresa already knew there was not anyone in her son's grade who was trained to teach him to read, she found another teacher from a different grade level and said, "I basically begged her to come tutor after school everyday and I would pay her out of my own money to do it." In her efforts to identify the support needed for
her child, Teresa also stated,

I had to go look for white papers on writing and how important encoding was. And when they've mastered the reading piece to the point where he had you just don't drop them. In 8th grade is when I had a pre-emptive strike. I said before school starts I'm having a conference. Because I'm not going to go through this again fighting with a teacher wearing a hat as mom and assistant superintendent.

**The advocacy work doesn't end. It is enduring, even after being identified as dyslexic.** Parent participants reported the advocacy work did not end once their child was identified with dyslexia. In some cases it was just the beginning. In Teresa's case, she has a thick binder where she has kept all papers concerning her work to support her son. Teresa said, "See this is my binder [shows researcher a 2-inch binder and opens binder to a list of categories drawn up by the school psychologist]. Everyone has a binder right?"

Parent participants were communicating with the school system to support the need to follow items described in the IEP, or to advocate for accommodations and find at times they are not supported by the school system in their efforts. Parent participants described situations where they found teachers not following the IEP. For example, Molly's daughter was experiencing anxiety due to reading aloud in class. Molly said she knew her daughter's science teacher was unfamiliar with the IEP and that it was "a conversation that needed to be had."

Melissa described how her daughter felt embarrassed to read aloud in class. This has been an ongoing conversation with the school system. Melissa stated,

Although it's not in the IEP, it's in my initial email, that and the notes. I said, 'This is what she does. She'll read-she'll count the paragraphs and read her part over and over and over and over again. It's because she knows you're going to be calling on her and she is
reading ahead so that she knows what she's reading and that she doesn't sound like a freak. So she won't sound like she's stupid if she reads out loud.' They'll say, 'But she's very fluent.' Well no kidding! Come on now. So now you know why she had no reading comprehension'

Teresa described instances where teachers have not had any students with an IEP take an upper level course. Teresa described her son's strength in accessing information was to hear it. Note taking was cumbersome and therefore he needed notes provided. Teresa explained,

I said, ‘About the notes,’ I said, ‘So if you're trying to get him to write igneous rock for earth science. This child, if he just listens to what you're teaching, he will learn everything you're telling him. But if you ask him to take igneous rock and to decode that- and then copy it back onto the paper (modeling looking up/down to copy) i-g-n-e and you've lost him. As a teacher, do you want him to learn how to take notes? If so have him take notes. If you want him to know about igneous rocks, Mesopotamia, bah-dah-dah, just give him the notes.’ You can visibly see the light bulb go off.

Teresa shared another time where she had difficulty with a teacher providing notes. She stated the teacher finally conceded and delivered notes to her son on bright pink paper in front of the class.

In Amy's case she felt like the bulk of accommodation to support her son required her to do the work with her son at home. Amy explained one instance with her son's English teacher, I have to have another meeting. They're not following the guidelines of the IEP. I sent her an email and I said, 'I'm wondering what's going on in his English class. I go, 'But does my son have the steps? Or do I have to text my son the steps? So she says, 'I'll print out the steps to give to him.' That should have been done before. This has to be one
of the worst years. I've never had to contact the district so much. I've never had to constantly ask them questions what's going on? Please explain to me. Please send me stuff. I just feel like he's basically on his own. And set up to fail.'

Marla shared that she and her husband had multiple meetings to put accommodations in place for their son. However, just because the accommodations are listed did not mean they were followed. Marla shared a recent experience,

I said to him, 'Who read this to you and where was it read?' And he said, 'They didn't read this to me.' He came in a half an hour late because I had gone to an early morning dentist appointment with him. They had told him he had missed his morning work and that he had to make it up in a hurry and they didn't have time to figure it all out who would take him where and test him and read to him. And so he did and he failed it.

Parents reported situations where the IEP was initially drafted by the school personnel. In one case, Molly explained how the goals were not adequately attempting to close the gap. Molly stated,

Um so I would like to have, you know a phonological awareness goal as well. Because right now with vowel patterns, vowel blends and consonants she her criteria is only 3 out of 5 five trials. That's only 60% on vowel teams and consonant blends. A child in 4th grade who only knows vowel teams and consonant blends which is a 1st grade standard-that's not acceptable (laughs). So, we have I think we have some work to do with this IEP.

Parent participants described situations where they continued to push. Marla shared times where she felt like the outsider due to the shear number of school staff. "My husband and I just went in for a second meeting with the um, there was like 13 of them in the room. We went
in because we felt there were things that he really needed and wasn't getting and these were the requests that we made." In some cases parents recognized the need to temper what they were asking for. Melissa described how she felt that overall, school staff were attempting to make adjustments to support her daughter, "When I have asked during the meeting they, they don't answer the questions. They answer the question with a question. But on the flip side they've been very accommodating for me and the teachers that she's got this year have really worked with her and tried very, very hard."

Jill continued to advocate for the appropriate reading instruction to support her daughter. In doing so, Jill acknowledged the difficult work of advocacy, "At one point I wanted to go into the CSE meeting and ask how qualified she felt she was to teach a child with a label with dyslexia. I thought, well gosh, that won't make her defensive at all [laughter]. Very valid question, you know what I mean? If you don't know the six syllable types then I'm a little scared."

Elizabeth shared there were multiple times where she has had to approach her son's school to address his reading needs. The school was responding but they were not prepared. Like Jill, Elizabeth recognized her relationship with the school system. "In January he was sent home with a spelling list with the word pig on it. I'm like mmm no. He knows how to spell pig. He is not going to write pig on the spelling test. So, back to the school again. Back to the email again. I emailed the special ed teacher and she never emailed me back. It was like, she was afraid of me. I will admit that."

Maria has continued to advocate for her daughter to receive appropriate reading instruction. Although she is in 5th grade she does not any specific reading intervention but a literacy lab with a small group of students. However, Maria also acknowledged the upside of
difficult road it has been just to get her daughter some support, "I think the relationship that we have too with the resource teacher that she's paired with. When I met her last spring at the IEP meeting I thought oh my God a match made in heaven." The enduring advocacy places Maria in a spot, Maria stated, "I don't want to make noise about the services they're finally meeting and you know have it taken away from me kind of a thing."

In addition to following up with the IEP, many of the parents indicated a concern for the upcoming school year. It is never ending conversation loop for the parent participants. Teresa stated, "I'll have a conference at the beginning of the school year and I'll just say he's not dumb. I want them to get to know who he is and what his strengths are. And what his weaknesses are."

Amy described her meeting at the start of this past school year, "I wanted the meeting before school started. I wanted all of his teachers to be there, to be on board, and there was only one teacher that came."

The work done by parents endures. Melissa stated, "What happens when we start school again next year? We'll be starting over again. I want a meeting now before the school year ends. To move forward so that I know in September we are not going backwards. I wish they would just plain and simple that they understood what dyslexia is." Jill described the tension she felt over the course of her advocacy work and said, "that job is never-ending. Every year I am presented with new teachers and you know what I mean? Someone once joked that there was a red folder that follows me along and gets passed teacher to teacher. That's sad. Like I don't want to be that person."

Parent participants wished for teachers to have an understanding of dyslexia and how it impacts their child. Molly stated, "I would like all of the teachers that work with my daughter to have an understanding and training in dyslexia. I would like them to know what it's like for her."
Susan said, "I have to share with the teachers what it is. They will openly admit, 'I don't know what dyslexia is.'" Susan also explained,

I'd like to see children actually be identified early. I mean my son has every indicator and red flag now than he had when he started in the district. Um and along with it, a strong family history. These were all things we brought up-if they can be identified earlier. I don't understand. If you say to teachers it affects 1 in 5 they think you're crazy. I've had teachers say, 'I've taught for 30 years and never seen a dyslexic child.'

Jill explained, "I wish they had some understanding of what dyslexia is and how it presents. And I wish they could have a little bit of insight into who she is at home. I wish they could see this incredible little human being who works harder than anybody." Amy concluded with, "It's been one hell of a winding road. And I think, are we done yet, are we done yet [laugh']." All parent participants' lived experiences support the enduring characteristic of advocacy work.

**Dyslexia's effects are felt beyond a struggle to read.** All parent participants indicated a transformation in awareness of how best to support their child as well as an increase of self-awareness. Dyslexia affects more than reading, writing and spelling. It is intertwined with the child's self-concept, relationships with others, and overall well-being. Parents used this new knowledge and set of experiences to inform their practice in the educational setting. Some parents came to realize that they too were dyslexic during this process, thus adding an additional layer of perspective. During the process parents shared feelings of guilt, frustration, sadness, and empowerment.

Teresa admitted her to having a limited understanding about dyslexia until her son was diagnosed and she read the book, *Overcoming Dyslexia* by Sally Shaywitz. Thinking about how
she handled her son's spelling work Teresa stated, "I can probably get the world's best parenting award for yelling at my child for not knowing his spelling. I feel horrible about that. It's probably scarred him for life. I even have the spelling test that he failed miserably, you know."
The process of identification has encouraged Teresa to advocate to her son's strengths. Dyslexia may not be widely understood by all of the teachers who work with Teresa and her son. Teresa wanted to keep IQ scores on her son's IEP to support the balance of strength with need. Teresa described,

Each year I get anxious at the start of the school year because it's a new set of teachers who don't know. I felt like teachers need to see what his IQ and his levels were. There was this one thing that doesn't make him stupid. I always worry about that. Maybe I shouldn't you know? But I think that was a huge piece for me to make sure of. Because I, he's never said that he thought he was dumb. It's just with me being the mom and the parent watching it all. I think there definitely is a confidence issue.

The experiences of supporting a child with dyslexia have carried over into Teresa's practices as a superintendent. Teresa stated, "I think I have a lot of empathy about the CSE process. More so than ever before. I don't think people are listened to enough as parents." She has made it a goal to support all children.

"You don't know what you don't know." Molly regretted not advocating for her daughter sooner than she did. Molly said, "Unfortunately, I think I waited too long. I think I should have advocated a little bit stronger at the beginning of second grade maybe." Molly recounted how her daughter would get physically sick during her third grade year when she knew she would have to read and would say,

I didn't want to go because I would have to read this and I didn't want to have to read it
and I didn't want my friends to know that I couldn't read it. I don't know how to read and I don't know how to answer the questions and everybody just sits there and answers questions and I don't know how to. I don't know.

As an educator, Molly has struggled with being both knowledgeable about reading instruction and being the parent. Molly described her response to a video shown to the audience during a summer Response to Intervention workshop. "They were showing that video with children that struggle and I think, 'Oh, my gosh...that's my child.' [takes a deep breath] It makes you, it makes you lose your breath. It has definitely given me an awareness in my own profession that we need to be very careful. It's raised my awareness a little bit about how you know, children that might struggle or might have dyslexia that we're not aware of." Advocacy as a parent brought about a different tension according to Molly, "I mean it's so hard because I feel bad sometimes. Part of me is like, ah, I feel bad. I don't want to call, I don't want to keep pushing. I start to get my own anxiety about that. When in reality it's nope, it's ok. Keep pushing and advocating because that's what your child needs."

During her advocacy work while her son was in school, Elizabeth recounted that she tried to be firm but civil when working with the school, "I gave them all of the information. I was very, very, very frustrated." School was stressful for her son. The advocacy work left Elizabeth feeling incredibly driven and protective, stating,

There's a scene (from The Revenant) of when a mother bear attacks him. And it's like I'm like that. Like I feel like I am crazy mom. That is what I feel, like that attack scene. That is my definition of a mother bear. I feel like it's parenting on adrenaline.

Elizabeth's experiences have altered her life. She became an Orton-Gillingham trainer and now home schools her four children stating that "A whole new world has opened up. I wouldn't have
gotten to know other people, and know their struggles, the whole thing. I wouldn't change it."

Jill's advocacy work is personal and she said she wanted it to be personal to those who work with her daughter. Jill reflected on how she is perceived as her daughter's advocate. Describing how it felt to be in a CSE meeting Jill stated, "I don't ever get a warm fuzzy feeling. I don't ever walk away from these CSE meetings or meetings with her teachers and think, 'Wow, they're listening and they want to learn and-.' I don't ever get that feeling. I feel like you are an outsider watching a team of people who may or may not know what they are doing watch your daughter. That's what it felt like to me." She has expressed concern for how she works with school staff to support her daughter. Jill said that she felt that she never seems to be doing it right.

Dyslexia has enduring characteristics academically and socially. Jill stated, "If I could pigeonhole dyslexic people, I would say that pain that they feel lasts forever." In Jill's daughter's case it is the belief that she is the worst reader in her group. "And to hear her talk about these things in the group, it breaks my heart to think that. She's so much better than she was before." Jill's own experiences as a parent have prompted her to want to help others. Jill said, "It kind of lit a fire. I want maybe some day help somebody that's like me, felt the way that I've felt through all of this."

Maria expressed how she and her husband are part of the school community, "We're a pretty engaged family in the school and don't make a lot of noise you know? It had gotten to the point where I'm not going to get anything done unless I start to make some noise." Maria discussed how she wished the school would have done something sooner. She stated, "You know, if I could have just gotten somebody to tell me in first grade that I wasn't crazy. I think I was just really bitter going through the whole process with CSE and the school district. And
here is an elementary school that we love." The official diagnosis impacted Maria's family. She said,

Once you get the diagnosis, it not only changes what you can give her at school but it changes your parenting. It changes it for the better. It's going to be a long road. You're working on it but all that stuff changes. It changed our family dynamics. We realized this isn't a behavioral choice. There are many layers to this and we've got to be more patient. We've been able to words to it and talk about it openly.

Maria credits her own growth in building knowledge about dyslexia. She shared her learning with her daughter through reading and viewing documentaries. Maria stated, "And she goes, 'There's actually somewhere in the brain where they can see this?' And all of a sudden for her it was like oh, my gosh!"

Marla has expressed that she felt frustrated over the course of her son's academic experiences. Marla said, "I have to fight and I would do anything for my kids. I don't have much of a backbone and so that is a real struggle for me. I just feel like this is a role that I've had to take on and I really don't appreciate the role." She was denied meetings with people who were in charge of setting academic intervention groups on more than two occasions stating, "I felt like my son had been skipped over when it came to AIS services and I wasn't sure why." Marla shared her concern for a community she was raised in and how they were not responding to her son's needs. Marla stated,

They're saying comments to him like, 'You failed this and I expected so much more of you.' At twelve years old? Oh my. It's ripping us apart and I can't tell you how many times we've been on the fence about homeschooling.

However, Marla has also recognized that she in turn feels differently about her role. "It's made
me stronger, it's made him stronger and it lets my son knows that I'm there for him." As with other parent interviews, Marla felt isolated and on her own as she worked to support her son's needs in school. At the close of the interview, Marla stated, "I've got to be honest with you I feel like it's bottled up inside and I don't feel like I have anybody I can speak with about it."

Susan shared the additional efforts she took to help her son better understand dyslexia by taking him to a workshop for dyslexia. After the two-week period, Susan claimed he was a different person. "Until he knew it was dyslexia, he thought-he really got down on himself. He didn't understand what was going on. He thought he was stupid. Once he learned more about dyslexia was that's when he flourished. And he said, 'You know what, now I get this. Now I understand my brain.'"

Like the other parents, Susan has taken it upon herself to better understand dyslexia in order to help her son. Her trust with the school district has been challenged. The uncertainty continues to rupture any trust. Susan explained,

My son's biggest fear is that teachers aren't going to understand him because there have been so many that don't get it. They don't understand why he's so intelligent and can't- I've heard that he doesn't try, he isn't focused, he doesn't apply himself and that affects my son. His biggest fear is that a teacher is not going to understand where he is coming from. We are not out of the woods yet.

Amy's enduring efforts to support her son led her to rethink her own experiences as a student. This was a breakthrough for Amy as she came to terms with the fact that she too is dyslexic. She stated,

Through my son [crying] I, everything, I'm thinking back to myself. I was retained in 1st grade. I went to speech. I remember being in middle school and I always had a
good rapport with teachers. And I struggled all the way through. But I had an English teacher that was wonderful. He knew I didn't understand certain things. I also had a 7th grade teacher who I'll never forget his name and he taught Latin. And I could not learn a language for the life of me. I had to stay after school and he shut the door and told me that I was stupid [crying].

Amy's experiences in turn have helped her to better understand her son's struggle in school as well as his many strengths as they are both "read people well and can memorize anything." She said, "It's taught me to be more compassionate towards people. I think that's what my son and I have in common too." While Amy negotiated her own experiences as she supports her son, Amy shared her son's anxiety and overall disinterest in school. She said, "I feel like my son's been robbed of an education. It hurts him, his self-esteem, he has anxiety. It's been a lot of trying to build him back up on my own no thanks to the district." Despite Amy's frustrating and arduous experiences to support her son academically and emotionally she stated that she hopes this will strengthen him and stated, "I would not change him for the world [crying]. It's been hard. I wouldn't you know, I wouldn't change anything about him."

Melissa carried guilt thinking that she has done a disservice to her daughter once she had been identified with dyslexia during the summer of her sixth grade year stating, "Like I cried a lot over that. I cried a lot for the fact that I feel that I could have helped her from the start of first grade." At another point Melissa also said, "that's when I lost my mind over it. And thought here I've done a disservice to my daughter since 3r grade. We've been going through this since 3rd grade." Melissa also felt remorseful for how she responded to her daughter's work. She said, "I feel horrible about this but I'm more understanding about this now. Because before I was like, 'Stop being lazy. I know you're lazy because I know you're so smart.' That poor kid. All the
times that I said she was lazy. That's hard on a parent." Melissa said, "I feel like I've failed her and the school system failed her. New York failed her."

Melissa reported the toll dyslexia has taken on her daughter academically, socially, and emotionally. She said her daughter is exhausted and takes a nap after school. Melissa stated, "And that's from trying so hard during the day. Trying not to be singled out. It's, it's very difficult for because of the emotional piece." Melissa said her daughter continues to be defensive and wishes not to discuss dyslexia. Melissa shared, "She thinks that she's stupid. Um, she doesn't want to talk about it. We still are not allowed to tell anyone freely that she has dyslexia."

Through investigating the origins of dyslexia in Melissa's family, Melissa discovered that she was tested for dyslexia as a child. Her family did not share it with her but she was taken out of Catholic school and placed in public school. A family member shared all of this with Melissa while vacationing with her family just before this interview. Melissa said,

And that's when everything kind of flooded and hit me like a movie. Like I remember struggling during school. I remember my father pulling my hair in the dining room telling me I was stupid because I couldn't get my times tables right. I remember a lot of what my daughter is going through is what I went through. It took me a little bit longer to learn than the others. But I made it. Nothing's wrong with me, I worked hard.

**Summary.** Parent participants have experiences in common regarding their efforts to work with school systems across central New York. Efforts to support their child with dyslexia proved to be enduring and at times place parents at odds with the school system. Some parents reported schools attempted to respond to the specific needs of their child by training teachers within a program to address reading instruction. And some of these parents replied favorably to the schools attempting to meet their request of accommodations. Other parents reported an
ongoing exchange of emails and visits to address concerns about schools not supporting their child's IEP requirements or reading instruction.

**Something further to note: There were more commonalities than discrepancies in District B.** Liz (teacher), Marcia (assistant superintendent of curriculum), Susan, and Amy (parents) are participants from District B. Their perspectives suggest the complexity behind supporting students with dyslexia. From the teacher perspective dyslexia is not a commonly addressed topic within District B. Liz frequently stated her need for more support as she currently has a student with dyslexia and has had a student with dyslexia in previous years. Both Susan and Amy explained the amount of work done on their end to support their children with dyslexia as parents. Although Susan's and Amy's sons went to different elementary schools, frustrations with limited understanding for children with dyslexia were consistent with Liz's need for professional development to support students with dyslexia. Teachers just don't know. Marcia's perspective as an assistant superintendent of curriculum added another layer. There have been varying ideas about whether or not the dyslexia term should be used within the school system. Teachers have not had access to data in order to better understand why students struggle, nor had a solid command of how to intervene according to Marcia. Marcia's description of work-related tension to support both teachers and the students they serve are reflected in the teacher and parent transcriptions.

**A school psychologist's perspective contained elements from all three participant groups.** The researcher included a school psychologist's perspective in light of anticipating another participant group. However, one school psychologist participated in this study. Stephanie is a school psychologist who preferred to use the term dyslexia and acknowledged her district did not promote the use of the term dyslexia. She stated it was "tricky" and said,
Our district has just shied away from that um, but I know it's controversial and people have different opinions. My personal opinion is I don't have any problem using that term. I think it more helps closely and defines what's going on.

Stephanie noted the tension between her school system and families advocating for the use of the word dyslexia and explained, "Part of me doesn't blame them [parents]. It just causes resistance, a kind of strife between the two parties where it doesn't need to be."

One reason why Stephanie preferred to use the term was because it helped educators to identify what supports are needed instructionally. Stephanie indicated that she wished teachers in her district had more knowledge or support around what dyslexia was and how it could be addressed in the classroom through ongoing professional development. Stephanie explained,

Um, I don't know if there needs to just be more education around it. You know, I always just say that, you know this; there's a big disconnect between the research and present practice for kids.

Stephanie also reported her district had access to several programs designed for direct instruction but said teachers will pick and pull from programs. "It's very hard to do systematic reading instruction, or orthographic mapping you know, if they're not up to date and they're doing whatever they can at their comfort level, um, but if there was more of a systematic, um, approach." Stephanie explained further,

I talk to everyone and they'll say, 'This is great, I love this.' Um, 'I'm all on board' but...having people actually carry it out, I think it's hard. They want you to hand them a canned program and I think its hard for them to you know, understand there's a process to reading and every child is you know, at a different point and you have to have thinking skills behind this.
Summary of Findings

This study is a qualitative study designed to better understand how schools and school systems support students with dyslexia along with their parents. The researcher facilitated twenty interviews with participants including three administrators, eight teachers, nine parents, and one school psychologist. One participant was both an administrator and a parent of a dyslexic student. Her interview transcription provided data for both participant fields.

The themes from administrators addressed Question 1, which asked: *How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?*

The responses were summarized in the following themes:

A. Familiarity with dyslexia and knowing what to do was dependent upon administrator experiences with dyslexia.

B. A response to instructional needs varied within the RtI framework (Tiers I, II, III).

C. Challenges to supporting students with dyslexia and their teachers influenced what was within administrator control.

Themes from teacher participants also addressed Question 1. The teacher participants included two grade two teachers, one multi-age teacher, two AIS teachers, and three special educators. Together, these participant perspectives provided additional themes that included:

A. Dyslexia was not a conversation within the school system and if it came up it was only by virtue of the parents raising the concern and need for assistance.

B. It was helpful to students to know that they have dyslexia. Yet the acknowledgement and response varied across teachers due to whether or not dyslexia was recognized
within the system.

C. Teachers had to take it upon themselves to find out and learn about possible supports, resources, or interventions on their own and pursue them independently.

D. Teachers felt unprepared, have few resources, and limited time needed to support students with dyslexia.

The themes from parent participants addressed Question 2, which asked What has been parents' experience in ensuring that their child with dyslexia has the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful? Parent participants shared experiences about their efforts from the start of their child's schooling to their current state. The responses were summarized into the following themes:

A. Parents felt they had to be persistent and push the school to do something because they were the primary advocate.

B. The advocacy work doesn't end. It is enduring, even after being identified as dyslexic.

C. It was very hard to get the schools to do something. The school response varied greatly.

D. Dyslexia's effects are felt beyond a struggle to read.

To summarize the administrator themes, a level of response to supporting students with dyslexia was tied to administrator experiences with dyslexia. For example, Teresa experienced her own instances of not knowing how to support a dyslexic student once her son was identified. After reading and researching on her own, Teresa sought staff support to deepen teacher understanding of reading instruction and support for dyslexic students at the elementary level. The Response to Intervention tiers were identified in administrator interviews with special
emphasis placed on Tier I instruction and Tier II small group instruction. Focus on who was responsible for delivering instruction varied among participants. Tensions and barriers to administrators' work were identified.

Teacher participants offered a closer look into the exact nature of their own understanding of what dyslexia was, how they supported students with dyslexia, as well as a set of tensions and barriers to their work with students or families. All teacher participants felt unsupported by their school system in the development of dyslexia knowledge building. If there was an intervention program, most teachers were required to develop their knowledge and familiarity of it on their own. Many teachers have sought professional development in this area independently of their school system. Dyslexia was not a term used with the teachers and if it was it either came from a parent advocating or from their own experiences with dyslexia. Teachers wished dyslexia was a term used in order to support students academically and emotionally.

Parent participant responses suggested efforts to identify and explicitly address both reading and accommodations took years to occur. Some parents felt that schools did respond to their inquiry and were willing to work together. However, most parents felt that schools reacted slowly to the needs of their child and in some cases it took many years to do so. All parent participants shared personal experiences where feelings of guilt, frustration, sadness and empowerment were conveyed over a period of time. Parents expressed a concern for educators not knowing what dyslexia was, what could be done to support their child, or whether they have knowledge about the strengths in addition to the difficulties faced by their children in school.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Knowledge of what dyslexia is and what to do about it continues to be of paramount concern within public schools (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Youman & Mather, 2013). Response to Intervention (RtI) has contributed further to the vague understanding of how to support children who struggle to read due to the complicated and unclear RtI process (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger et al., 2012; Speece et al., 2006; White et al., 2012). Parent advocacy, understanding and support for the dyslexic child bring stress to the system if parents question or wish for instructional supports beyond what is already provided (Lasky, 2000). The demands placed upon an educational system ultimately require a systems understanding of dyslexia, evidence-based reading support, data analysis and RtI. While looming legislation requiring educational systems to take heed and ultimately change current practices to support dyslexic students may be the answer for parents, it may also be an added challenge to school systems already lacking access to knowledge and time to change.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how school systems support students with dyslexia across central New York. In addition, this study sought to better understand how parents experience supporting their children with dyslexia in school systems across Central New York. This qualitative study offers a lens into the workings behind how school systems attempt to provide applicable supports to students with dyslexia and the experiences of parents who have attempted to gain advocacy for their child with dyslexia in those same systems.

Review of Methodology

This qualitative study examined central office administrator, educator and parent perspectives and experiences with supporting students with dyslexia in school systems across
central New York. To meet the purpose outlined above the researcher framed her study using two questions:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?

2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

To achieve the goal of this study, the researcher initially recruited participants who belonged to The Reading League, a not-for-profit group located in central New York. The Reading League was selected due to its large membership of potential participants who were office administrators, educators or parents across central New York. Snowballing occurred as Reading League members forwarded the recruitment email. At the outset of each interview or focus group, the researcher developed a rapport with the participants as a conversational partner at the start of the interview and continued to sustain it during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After conducting the interview, the researcher revisited notes taken during the interview and recorded overall impressions of the interview. Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher engaged in a thematic analysis of the data through an iterative process of first and second cycle coding. In-vivo coding was used during first cycle coding, capturing specific phrases and quotes pertinent to the questions to capture study participants’ language and voice. Pattern coding was subsequently used to support the researcher in her efforts to draw forth common and discrepant themes within stakeholder groups.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

After careful review of the themes that emerged from a close and iterative review of the
data and its analysis, four major findings surfaced:

1. Dyslexia as a disability that can greatly impact students’ learning was not readily recognized or well attended to by teachers or administrators in many school systems in central New York.

2. Any actions or supports that teachers wanted to seek out and employ had to be initiated and undertaken by the educators directly serving those students.

3. Schools and school systems did not proactively pursue supports for students with dyslexia, either directly or through professional development with their educators.

4. Administrators, teachers and parents all believed that ongoing professional development was warranted to foster system-wide knowledge about what dyslexia is, inclusive of early signs, practices to prevent reading difficulty, how dyslexia impacts academic and emotional development, and what can be done in the classroom for students with dyslexia or who are suspected to be dyslexic.

Findings are discussed below.

Dyslexia as a disability that can greatly impact students’ learning was not readily recognized or well attended to by teachers or administrators in many school systems in central New York. Participants from across all stakeholder groups acknowledged that dyslexia was not a term used by school systems. There are 13 categories to describe a disability on an IEP. The descriptors that indicate dyslexia are subsumed under broader categories such as Specific Learning Disability (SLD) or Other Health Impaired (OHI). This was reflected in interviews with all stakeholders. The SLD category described dyslexia as one of the learning disabilities. However, it was evident throughout interviews with participants that dyslexia was not used specifically by school systems on IEPs or 504 plans. For instance, the special education
teachers that participated had the most contact with IEPs to draft and measure specific goals due to the nature of their role. Yet they had not drafted IEPs that specifically indicated dyslexia within the IEP document unless it was drafted with families who had sought outside evaluation and the evaluation had indicated dyslexia. In some of those instances there continued to be a struggle with the school system to include the use of the dyslexia term on the IEP document.

Some of the participants recognized the inherent tension regarding whether or not dyslexia was a term that should be used due to misunderstanding of dyslexia. In these cases, it was felt that a description of the problem was sufficient and would lead to appropriate instruction more so than just stating “dyslexia.” Teachers and parents alike reported observing the child struggle both academically and emotionally. Both of these stakeholder groups recognized the emotional toll it took on the student due to a struggle to read, write and spell like their peers. Virtually all participants recognized how the use of the term dyslexia helped educators, parents and the students themselves to better grasp areas of difficulty and to identify specific strengths and what might be done to support the learner. Teachers and parents who used the term dyslexia with the child found clarity and confidence in the child over time. As Susan explained, it helped her son understand his brain better.

**Any actions or supports that teachers wanted to seek out and employ had to be initiated and undertaken by the educators directly serving those students.** All educator participants shared experiences where they sought to support students with dyslexia independently of the school system. In some instances, educator participants said they did not know what to do and had never received any training or dyslexia knowledge in undergraduate or graduate studies. All educator participants felt as if they were on their own to develop knowledge of how to support students with dyslexia. Some participants read books about
dyslexia, consulted with a literacy coach, or attended webinars or in-person professional development independent of their schools. In one instance a teacher paid for her own Wilson Reading professional development, which can cost anywhere from $250-$600 a session. It was apparent to the researcher that teacher training and access to knowledge varied among participants. One teacher commented that she was grateful to have a dyslexic student enter her second grade classroom because she had been developing her own understanding of dyslexia, while dyslexia knowledge is not consistent across her school.

The inconsistencies in teacher knowledge and access to information on how to support dyslexic students supported why parents felt such anxiety at the start of each school year. Parents worried about whether or not teachers had an understanding of dyslexia, as well as how best to support their dyslexic child. The evidence from this study maintains that the inadequacies and inconsistencies in dyslexia support for educators varied, due in part to whether or not teachers took it upon themselves to deepen their own understanding about dyslexia. One teacher stated that her school was not proactive but rather reactive in supporting students with dyslexia. A parent stated her son's school was not prepared to support his needs and was in damage control.

**Schools and school systems did not proactively pursue supports for students with dyslexia, either directly or through professional development with their educators.**

Virtually all schools and school systems represented in this study did not indicate a proactive, system-wide level of support for teachers to better understand dyslexia in order to effectively instruct students with dyslexia. Dyslexia greatly impacts how students read, write, and spell. Therefore, in addition to dyslexia knowledge, teachers were faced with the need to better understand the science of reading, which includes how to identify whether or not students are
responding appropriately to instruction.

All three administrator interviews identified either general, or Tier I, instruction or small group, or Tier II, instruction as an area of need with regard to instructional knowledge, understanding of data or scheduling. One administrator shared the need to revisit the science of reading with her staff in order to use the Tier I curriculum appropriately. She stated the general curriculum her district was using also developed teacher understanding about how reading is developed in children. Dyslexia was not seen as an area of concern for her district. Another administrator recognized difficulty with reaching special education staff while attempting to reach all educators with regard to understanding the science of reading. Citing her own limitations and access to this information as an undergraduate and graduate student, this administrator led the development of her teachers in order to ensure students no longer fell through the cracks. This administrator said her work “weaseled its way in” during meetings with staff and administrators. This administrator was personally motivated due to experiences with supporting her son with dyslexia.

A third administrator cited a greater need to provide better professional development for staff. This administrator recently supported teacher training in a reading intervention designed to assist students with dyslexia. This group consisted of reading teachers, special educators and speech/language therapists. A small group of children were the recipients of an after-school tutoring program using the intervention for two hours each week. However, to date there has not been a system-wide initiative to train all teachers to understand what dyslexia is or how to support students within classrooms.

None of the educator participants could provide the researcher with any evidence that their schools offered specific training in dyslexia awareness. Instead, some of the participants
had attended professional development on their own and shared their learning with colleagues. During the interviews, educator participants referenced RtI or other student-centered groups that met to review data and determine next steps. Responses varied with regard to the positive and negative impact such group meetings had on teacher knowledge and support for dyslexic students. Some of the educators felt that the process to meet further negatively impacted students who struggled to read, due to it being cumbersome, and offering limited ideas or next steps.

 Administrators, teachers and parents all believed that ongoing professional development was warranted to foster system-wide knowledge about what dyslexia is, inclusive of early signs, practices to prevent reading difficulty, how dyslexia impacts academic and emotional development, and what can be done in the classroom for students with dyslexia or who are suspected to be dyslexic. Knowledge of what dyslexia is or what could be done to effectively support students in classrooms varied most among educator participant groups. However, all participant groups identified professional development as something systems could do to support students with dyslexia.

 What is dyslexia? All interview participants shared a commonality with regard to dyslexia in that it is not a term used within school systems, unless parents have sought outside evaluations and requested that the term be used to describe their child. Participant understanding of dyslexia varied in this study as well. For instance, some participants referred to dyslexia as letter reversals. Teacher and parent participants cited a need for schools to support the use of the term dyslexia in addition to developing teacher knowledge about what dyslexia is.

 Early signs. School responses to addressing the need varied across parent and educator interviews. All parents reported academic concerns during kindergarten or first grade. Some of
the children already had an IEP for speech/language or OHI. Yet the general response from the school was to wait and see. Many parents said they were told reading difficulties were due to attention and they needed to address that first. Parents felt frustrated about the length of time it took to officially determine why their child struggled to read and cited a loss of time to close gaps. In some of the interviews, parents shared feelings of guilt over not doing enough to address concerns early on in their child’s academic career.

**Practices to prevent reading difficulty.** Students with dyslexia can be taught to read when reading instruction is multisensory, explicit, inclusive of systematic phonological and phonics approaches, with an additional emphasis in vocabulary and fluency (Adams, 1990; Kilpatrick, 2015; Lyon et al., 2003; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007). Reading instruction and intervention varied greatly among participants. In many cases, preventing reading difficulty was replaced by remediation. Teacher training in reading and intervention practices was also another erratic practice according to teacher participants.

Some parents and teachers shared strategies, therapies or interventions used to support reading instruction. Many of these did not directly involve the phonological-phonics route, but rather addressed issues like body movements or the visual system. Some educators reported the importance that cross-body movements have regarding learning to read. One teacher reported her dyslexic student also receives occupational therapy. This might be to address the student’s fine motor skills with regard to written expression. Additionally, the visual system was thought to be the route cause of reading difficulty. Many parents reported going to vision therapy. This therapy was in addition to the school day and was often at the parents’ expense. According to the American Optometric Association’s website, vision therapy involves the “treatment of physiological neuromuscular and perceptual dysfunctions of the vision system” (Optometrists
Network). The emphasis here was on an issue with the visual system. Parents stated this therapy did not improve their child’s ability to read. In addition to vision therapy, some parents and teachers used covered overlays during reading instruction and intervention. Again, this adhered to the assumption that the visual system was the causal route of reading difficulty.

Many teachers and a few parents cited Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) as an intervention used for struggling students. In fact, all educator participants identified LLI as one intervention that they knew was used in their schools, but some did not have access to it. Although some teachers had used LLI with struggling readers, they felt that it did not address the specific word-level needs of dyslexic students or students who were unidentified. Instead, something else was needed.

Teachers, administrators and parents all cited specific reading interventions designed for students with dyslexia. Interventions such as Road to the Code, Fundations, Road to Reading, Barton Reading, The Davis Method, Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program (LIPS), Wilson Reading, Seeing Stars, Rewards, System 44, and Read 180 were examples of packaged programs mentioned. It was evident throughout the interviews with teachers that training to understand and implement such programs was on the teachers’ own time and frequently undertaken independently. Results of the training also hinged upon teacher knowledge about reading itself. Most teachers identified whole language as the reading methodology they were trained with. Therefore, interventions such as those listed above may be unfamiliar to teachers who are expected to instruct struggling readers. One teacher stated that it wasn’t until her district implemented LIPS training years ago that she learned how to teach a child to read. Interventions such as System 44 and Read 180 have a computer-based component or are entirely computer-based. Parents have reported that during this type of intervention, the child did not even have
access to a teacher.

This was the most inconsistent data to report on. Many systems had some kind of commercial intervention program. Teacher participants reflected on the inconsistencies within their own schools and school systems around what was done to support students with dyslexia. In some cases, general education teachers reported that they did not know what was done when their students left the classroom. In other cases, special educators who provided small group instruction were not able to balance RtI minutes versus IEP minutes, claiming that they canceled each other out. In other instances, special educators may not have had any explicit instruction to utilize an intervention or approach and were left to their own devices to figure it out. Finally, some special educators put together their own compilation of interventions because they had not found something that worked for their students.

**Dyslexia’s impact on academic and emotional development.** Teachers and parents had the most direct contact with students who were dyslexic. Both stakeholder groups identified the importance of knowing what dyslexia was. It greatly impacts children both academically and emotionally.

All participants recognized how dyslexia grossly impacts students academically. Participants in this study reiterated a desire to reach their students or children in order to best educate them. Participants identified both strengths and struggles on behalf of the dyslexic students. Teachers spoke about how students were able to participate orally but struggled greatly if they had to read or write anything. It affected all academic areas, such as math. Parent responses differed as students progressed through the grade levels. In some instances, parents felt there was finally a moment when the educators understood the needs of their child. In other instances, parents reported they felt their child was robbed of an education.
Parents shared the costs of late identification for their children and families. In some instances, parents found success in rebuilding their child’s sense of self while continuing to work for appropriate educational experiences. Both parents and teachers noticed that as students began to understand dyslexia, it also influenced how they felt about themselves. For instance, a teacher shared a time when one of her students asked why nobody ever told him he was dyslexic. This was a change for both the teacher and her student, as she began to talk about it more with her students. A parent talked about a time when she was watching a documentary about dyslexia and her daughter stopped to watch, too. It was the starting point of a different narrative for her daughter. Her daughter later referenced what it was like to be dyslexic in her classroom. Yet parents also reported how their children have identified negatively with their experiences and were not yet comfortable talking about it. They continue to grapple with the emotional difficulties of struggling to read and write like their peers.

What can be done in the classroom for students with dyslexia or who are suspected to be dyslexic? Teacher participants reported a variety of strategies they have used to support students with dyslexia. Some of the strategies, such as the use of covered overlays, reiterated beliefs about what dyslexia is or what is a defining part of dyslexia. Parent participants identified accommodations as an area of ongoing advocacy efforts on their behalf.

Providing notes and simplifying assignments were two accommodations shared by educator participants. Additionally, some teachers found the use of technology to be an incredible support for dyslexic students. This was also an area about which teachers stated they would like to know more. Especially with regard to advances in technology, there are many apps and features that could support students within the classroom.

Parents reported that the work to support accommodations for their child was ongoing
and required frequent follow-ups. For instance, one parent researched how an audio system
would support her son in all of his core courses. She had to advocate for his need within the
school system in which she worked. Once she moved to another district, this parent again had to
explain why her son needed the audio system, even though it was in his IEP. Another parent
wanted her son to have access to an iPad in order to listen to text. She was initially told no. A
third parent had advocated for her son to read his tests on his own, since he could make use of
his extended time. At that point, her son was in a small group and was required to listen to a
teacher read the test to the small group. He was distracted due to frequent interruptions by the
teacher to focus her group. This parent was denied her request. Some parents reported difficulty
with schools following certain accommodations such as tests being read aloud, having notes
provided, or not requiring the child to read aloud. The parent participants reported exasperation
with having to follow up frequently, as the accommodations were not provided or may have been
overlooked.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The literature presented in Chapter II focused on defining dyslexia; the impact dyslexia
and response to reading instruction has had on schools and school systems, teaching and
learning; and parent-school relationships in response to student needs. In the following section,
the researcher presents the findings of the study aligned with these three areas.

What is dyslexia? Dyslexia is recognized more for academic deficits (in areas of
reading, writing and spelling) than for strengths (Armstrong, 2010; Karolyi et al., 2002; Williams
& Lynch, 2010). Similarly, data collected in this study focused mostly on difficulties students
face academically and emotionally. Educator beliefs about dyslexia framed a construct inclusive
of when and how students develop reading skills, instructional delivery and attitudes toward
students who may need more instructional support (Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009). Some parents asked about dyslexia early on but the belief that students might catch up over time or that attention was the culprit defined parent experiences while advocating for their children during primary school years.

Participant responses were inconsistent when they were asked to define dyslexia. Some participants could describe what dyslexia is, inclusive of familial history, while other participants could share just a feature (in some cases, this indicated a misunderstanding about dyslexia). Defining dyslexia has been met with inconsistencies across national associations comprising educators, other school staff or parents, contributing why schools and school systems may not be actively using the term dyslexia with teachers and students. Three of the largest national groups are the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

The IDA is an association where most parent participants and some teachers and administrators had sought information about dyslexia. The IDA defined dyslexia as:

A specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (International Dyslexia Association, 2017)

The ILA is a national association recognized mainly by teacher participants. Many
reading teachers and classroom teachers are members of the ILA. According to the ILA, “ILA’s position is that teachers do not need to spend substantial amounts of time learning about dyslexia, which, as has been argued, is a construct of questionable utility” (ILA, 2016, p. 8).

Last, the NASP approaches defining dyslexia in schools as follows:

The term dyslexia is often used interchangeably with reading disability. Dyslexia is commonly used in medical settings, although the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) uses the term “reading disorder” instead. Some researchers use the term dyslexia in a narrow sense to refer to difficulty with accurate and fluent single word identification, or decoding. To avoid confusion, NASP advises school psychologists to use the term “reading disability,” rather than dyslexia, when referring to learning disabilities in the area of reading, and to reframe parents’ referrals and inquiries accordingly. (NASP, 2007, p. 3)

Membership in any of the above groups provides parents, educators and other school staff with varying ideologies about how dyslexia should be defined and whether it should be used in school systems. Given the differences in understanding the term, dyslexia was acknowledged by most school staff as a problem in schools. However, what to do about it faced greater uncertainty.

A definitive gap remains between research and teacher knowledge of explicit reading instruction and dyslexia awareness in the classroom (Bell, 2013; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005; Washburn et al., 2011; Youman & Mather, 2013). Teachers did not have enough, if any, exposure at the undergraduate and graduate levels to the knowledge of the structure of language (Moats, 1994, Moats & Lyon, 1996). The responses in this study support these assertions.
Teachers overwhelmingly repeated a need to strengthen dyslexia awareness in school systems. This was supported in parent participant interviews. Knowledge of dyslexia was inconsistent given that educator participants in this study sought to develop their knowledge independently of a school or school system. Parents also stated that their knowledge about dyslexia was due to their persistence in determining what dyslexia meant and how they could support their dyslexic children in school systems and at home. Despite the prevalence of dyslexia research and access to sites supporting dyslexia, dyslexia continues to be a topic not addressed in schools across central New York.

The impact dyslexia and response to reading instruction has on schools and school systems, teaching and learning. The way in which RtI data is interpreted and tailored to instruction raises concerns (Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Wamsley & Allington, 2007). Some students are misidentified due to a narrow scope of the assessment, such as needing fluency practice when a student really needs very basic and foundational skills (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Schools and school systems represented in this study acknowledged their attempts to support students who struggled to read. Such students were not successful with general (Tier I) classroom instruction. There was a process in many of the school systems in which student data was discussed and next steps were identified. Yet students continued to struggle.

RtI is dependent upon general educator and specialist knowledge about reading instruction (Bell, 2013; Hayward et al., 2014; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005; Washburn et al., 2011; Youman & Mather, 2013). The three administrators in this study described various approaches to support general, or Tier I, instruction. This group of administrators used terms such as “the science of reading” or “explicit and systematic” in describing attempts to support general teacher knowledge. All three administrators
acknowledged the importance of having building-level support and follow-up with teachers. Without it, schools were not as successful in supporting this level of work with staff.

Teacher participants also discussed RtI. One teacher said her district’s RtI process was very good. Her school had charts for staff and supported teachers new to the district and new to RtI. Yet at a later point in the interview, she disclosed there was a large number of children in need of Tier II, or small group, specially designed instruction due to the fact that they do not have a Tier I program or system-wide approach for all students. Another teacher said that RtI was where things began to crumble for many of the students in need of help, as the process was not clear. Additional teachers were able to speak of the processes used in their schools’ approaches to RtI but knowledge of data, assessment and interventions varied greatly.

Teachers continue to be faced with disparaging perspectives regarding systematic and explicit reading instruction. Thoughts and practices that dismiss scientific approaches to reading instruction place children with dyslexia or children who have dyslexic-like difficulties with reading at a great disadvantage (Adams & Bruck, 1995; Collins, 2003; Cunningham et al., 2004; Hempenstall, 1997; Liberman & Liberman, 1990).

**Parent-school relationships in response to student needs.** Both parent and teacher participants reported reaching out to schools and families, respectively. Parent participants identified tensions and some worried about how they were perceived by school staff, as they felt they were overstepping their roles. Most teacher participants did not indicate how they felt they were perceived by parents.

While the parent has the individual child of concern, the teacher has an entire classroom of students to think about (Griffiths et al., 2004). What may not be apparent to the parents are the multiple hats and expectations teachers face daily. Many systems use additive models where
expectations, paperwork, policies, procedures and curricular decisions are added to teachers’ plates without taking anything away (White et al., 2012). Parents feel marginalized by how they voice concerns or participate as expected by the teacher (Young et al., 2013). Parent participant interviews reflected the flux of emotions experienced when advocating for their child. What may not be apparent to teachers was the enduring level of concern that had taken place in previous years. Parents identified a range of emotional responses due to the many experiences gained over their child’s academic lifetime. Some of the parent participants recognized the inherent difficulty they experienced personally. All parents had instances where they felt they needed to question or challenge school decisions. It was uncomfortable and the parents preferred not to be in that position.

Some of the parent participants referenced how they were perceived by teachers knowing that teachers “othered” parents due in part to parents not fulfilling the teacher norms of behavior (Lasky, 2000). One parent said she felt like there was a red folder following her daughter around with her name on it. Another parent described instances when she felt uncomfortable asking questions, as doing so might place the teacher in an uncomfortable position. Further, some of the parents acknowledged their driven state and understood they may come off as being aggressive, but said if the teachers only knew where they had come from might they understand what was driving the parents to respond or act in a specific way.

Hess et al., (2006) described how parents identify with isolation while advocating for their child. Parents identify with feelings of disempowerment due to the isolated experiences navigating the special education process, understanding the nature of the disability and obtaining supports for the child (Hess et al., 2006). All parent participants experienced feelings of isolation and felt as if they were not a part of the overall team to support their child. One parent
who also worked as a superintendent stated her face would be red after every CSE meeting, as it was a very emotional experience for parents.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used complexity theory to examine the findings of this study. She chose this theoretical framework because of the nature of relationships between agents, access to knowledge, and exchange within a school system and beyond. All agents within a given system have potential to create momentum through a networked series of incidence that are unpredictable at times (Cilliers, 1998; Horn, 2008; Mason, 2008; Stacey, 2001). School systems are inclusive of school staff, parents, and students. While this study investigated how schools across central New York State supported students with dyslexia and their families, it should be noted that the schools in the study are a part of the educational system-at large. Regulations at the state and federal level influence what agents within a school system can or cannot do. New York State is one of few states that do not require school systems to develop teacher knowledge of dyslexia, including early identification. Thus, contributing more to the interconnected complexities behind this problem of practice. Furthermore, individual agents within school systems were part of additional groups or have sought information to support their work with dyslexic students. Participant perspectives and experiences reflected their roles and how they attempted to support students with dyslexia within their school. Results in supporting students with dyslexia were inconsistent across school systems in central New York. It has been the experiences of the particular participants within this study to support why complexity theory was a justified framework to use.

**Dyslexia as a disability that can greatly impact students' learning is not readily recognized or well-attended to by teachers or administrators by many school systems in**
Central New York State. Study participants agreed that dyslexia was not a term used in school systems. Reasons varied detailing why dyslexia was not a term used. Some participants could not answer why. However, federal regulations state terms such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia should be used in conversations and documented on IEPs when warranted. One teacher participant shared that she discovered this regulation while at a training. She was not aware the document existed some nine months before. This participant was also an RtI member for her district. She met regularly with district staff. It was never discussed with her. An administrator participant referenced the same document. She shared it with her entire district. This document led to two very different outcomes for two schools within central New York State. Parents reported inquiring about the use of the word dyslexia to describe students like their own child. Parent participants felt invalidated by schools. Therefore, many parents sought outside evaluations and returned to schools with a diagnosis and requested support for their dyslexic child.

**Any actions or supports that teachers wanted to seek out and employ had to be initiated and undertaken by the educators directly serving those students.** Teacher participants described district support as something they desired to have in order to build dyslexia knowledge and awareness. Teacher participant responses varied greatly regarding what they did to support students with dyslexia. Teacher participants shared difficulties in finding supports as well as having the time to do so as this was something they sought independently of their school systems. Some teacher participants identified groups like The Reading League as a local resource. However, not all teachers are active members in such groups. Parent participants were anxious at the start of every school year due to not knowing if the new teacher had knowledge of what dyslexia was, how it impacted the child, and what could be done to support
the child in class. There were inconsistencies in teacher awareness. Some teachers have access to dyslexia knowledge while others did not. Relationships between parents and teachers are overwrought with tension. Parents question teachers and teachers feel unsupported. These

**Schools and school systems did not proactively pursue supports for students with dyslexia, either directly or through professional development with their educators.** Teacher and parent participants identified with seeking outside resources to better understand and support students with dyslexia. Parents felt the urgency and eventual knowledge of dyslexia was met with inconsistencies on behalf of school systems. In one instance school staff regarded the parent as having more knowledge and began to defer to her feedback. Like teachers, parents stated they sought outside supports through reading, joining groups, and consulting with outside agencies. The outreach performed by the participants in the study reflected the momentum Stacey (2001) described.

**Administrators, teachers, and parents all believed that ongoing professional development is warranted to foster system-wide knowledge about what dyslexia is, inclusive of early signs, practices to prevent reading difficulty, how dyslexia impacts academic and emotional development, and what can be done for students with dyslexia or who are suspected to be dyslexic in the classroom.** Study participants identified a need for ongoing professional development after sharing experiences with supporting students with dyslexia in schools. Study participants identified tensions to their efforts in supporting students with dyslexia. Access to information, complications with RtI, relationships, time, and money were shared among school staff. In some cases schools themselves are complex simply due to their size and number of agents involved (Cilliers, 1998). If the system becomes too large, the agents do not see nor understand the interconnected networks (Cilliers, 1998). Complexity
theory suggests systems are interactive and have positive and negative feedback loops (Horn, 2008). Meaning school systems are dynamic where opportunities arise for unexpected shifts (Cilliers, 1998).

Complexity theory supported how the researcher identified the findings. Knowledge about dyslexia and what could be done to support students has not made its way from research communities into school systems and ultimately into the classroom. Rather, individuals have sought to better understand dyslexia independently of their system. This has contributed to an imbalance of support for students with dyslexia in school systems, their families, and their teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how schools and school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. The researcher sought to understand how administrator and teacher stakeholder groups support students within their schools and school systems, how parents experience advocating and supporting their child while working with a school. Additionally, a school psychologist’s perspective was included as her understanding reflected the three original stakeholder groups. This study used a qualitative design to understand the following questions:

1. How do schools and school districts (central office administrators and teachers) think about effectively supporting their students who have been identified with dyslexia, including challenges in providing that assistance and supports?
2. What have been parents’ experiences in ensuring that their children with dyslexia have the appropriate supports and assistance to be academically successful?

To achieve the goals of this study, the researcher submitted a recruitment email to
members of The Reading League. The Reading League is a not-for-profit group located in central New York. Members of The Reading League include teachers, administrators, psychologists, parents and others interested in supporting evidence-based reading instruction. Therefore, The Reading League was determined to be a strong group from which to recruit participants for this study. Additionally, Reading League members forwarded the email to others who might not be members of The Reading League but who might be interested in participating in this study. The researcher conducted 20 individual interviews with participants who responded to the recruitment email. The participants represented 14 school systems across central New York. Once the interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed the interview using an online transcription tool called Transcribe. Member-checking occurred once all interviews were transcribed. One participant followed up with the researcher to clarify a few comments and the researcher noted the clarification in the transcript. The researcher then utilized a multi-coding process in order to draw out pertinent themes within stakeholder groups and identified commonalities and differences across stakeholder groups. Last, the researcher analyzed the themes in relation to the review of literature.

Four major themes emerged following a thorough analysis of the data and literature. First, dyslexia as a disability that can greatly impact students’ learning was not readily recognized or well-attended to by teachers or administrators by many school systems in central New York. Second, any actions or supports that teachers wanted to seek out and employ had to be initiated and undertaken by the educators directly serving those students. Third, schools and school systems did not proactively pursue supports for students with dyslexia, either directly or through professional development with their educators. Last, administrators, teachers and parents all believed that ongoing professional development was warranted to foster system-wide
knowledge about what dyslexia is, inclusive of early signs, practices to prevent reading
difficulty, how dyslexia impacts academic and emotional development, and what can be
done in the classroom for students with dyslexia or who are suspected to be dyslexic. These
major findings address the two research questions detailed above.

**Significance of the Study**

This research study investigated how schools and school systems support students with
dyslexia. Interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, parents and a school
psychologist. It was critical to understand the diverse perspectives, experiences and approaches
to supporting students with dyslexia. A student’s ability to read is a primary gateway to
depening academic knowledge. Without it, students face falling further behind their peers and a
diminished sense of self, which can lead to a lifetime of difficulty. Dyslexia is a learning
disability that impacts approximately one in five students. This study contributes to a body of
research that warrants teacher and school system understanding of dyslexia (Bell, 2013; Binks-
Cantrell et al., 2012; Gwernan-Jones & Burden, 2009; Passig, 2011; Williams & Lynch, 2010;
Youman & Mather, 2013) in addition to attending to evidence-based reading instruction (Moats,

The interviews with school staff revealed that dyslexia was not a topic that was discussed
or a term that was used within participants’ schools. This was a frustration felt especially by
teacher participants. Parent participants were also frustrated due to the “wait and see” practices
coupled with seemingly limited understanding of dyslexia in the school systems. All parent
participants reported that the process to find appropriate supports and accommodations took
years and, in some instances, is still continuing today. This study provides evidence of the
complexity behind supporting students with dyslexia in school systems. Teacher and
administrator participants identified many factors that contributed to the difficulty with supporting students with dyslexia. Not only was the term dyslexia not used, but many teachers felt they needed to take it upon themselves to find the right supports, and contributed to grave inconsistencies within a school. In addition to dyslexia awareness, schools are charged with understanding the science of reading, implementing universal screening instruments to identify students who demonstrate difficulty with foundational skills, having evidence-based practices in place system-wide, and executing RtI procedures where student responses to instruction are supported by knowledgeable staff. Teacher participants felt there should be adequate resources and ongoing training provided to them to better understand the nature of reading difficulties and how to remediate them.

Research has provided a profound understanding of how a person learns to read (Adams, 1990; Kilpatrick, 2015; Lyon et al., 2003; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Shaywitz, 2008; Wolf, 2007) in addition to what prevents reading ability, specifically at the word level (Habib, 2000; Jorm, 1979; Ramus et al., 2003; Shaywitz, 1998; Shaywitz et al., 2006; Wolf, 2007). However, it seems this research has yet to make its way into the hands of most practitioners (Kilpatrick, 2015). Many states have passed legislation intended to address the need for dyslexia awareness, and a majority of states now require schools and school systems to implement early screening and provide evidence-based instruction with students who demonstrate difficulty with foundational skills (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2015). This requires educators and administrators to receive training in understanding dyslexia and how to support dyslexic students in the classroom (Youman & Mather, 2013, 2015). However, New York state has yet to pass any legislation urging schools to address the needs of dyslexic students or to support their teachers in doing so.
Knowledge of what dyslexia is and what can be done about it continues to be of paramount concern within public schools (Bell, 2013; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Youman & Mather, 2013). RtI has further contributed to the vague understanding of how to support children who struggle to read, due to the complicated and unclear RtI process (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Sanger, et al., 2012; Speece et al., 2006; White et al., 2012). Parent advocacy, understanding and support for the dyslexic child bring stress to the system if parents question or wish for instructional supports beyond what is already provided (Lasky, 2000). The demands placed upon an educational system ultimately require a systems understanding of dyslexia, evidence-based reading support, data analysis, and RtI. While looming legislation requiring educational systems to take heed and ultimately change current practices to support dyslexic students may be the answer for parents, it may also be an added challenge to school systems already lacking access to knowledge and time to change.

**Recommendations**

After a careful analysis of the research findings, this researcher offers the following recommendations to district leaders and teaching staff:

1. Create a dyslexia coalition within school systems inclusive of parents, school psychologists, teachers and administrators.

2. Train school staff in dyslexia awareness, inclusive of accommodations for the classroom.

3. Implement early screening tools to identify students who might be at risk for dyslexia as early as kindergarten.

4. Provide ongoing professional development to support all staff in better understanding the science of reading, inclusive of how to support students with reading difficulties.
Create a dyslexia coalition within school systems inclusive of parents, school psychologists, teachers and administrators. School districts are living systems with communities of practice that are interconnected (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). By recognizing the agents (parents, teachers, school psychologists and administrators) involved within an educational system, we can better understand the relationships among agents. All participants in this study identified specific tensions to supporting students with dyslexia. The interviews shed light on the various perspectives and experiences with dyslexia. Participants reported being isolated, in a sense, from sharing their personal experiences. Dyslexia was usually not a topic discussed and in cases where it was discussed, the discussion occurred without a diversity of stakeholder involvement. As one parent said, “I've got to be honest with you; I feel like it’s bottled up inside and I don’t feel like I have anybody I can speak with about it.” Other parents identified with feeling like an outsider at their child’s IEP meetings. Parents were able to share a personal side of how dyslexia had impacted their child and family. As one parent said, “This is personal to me. How can I make it so that you feel this, too?”

A dyslexia coalition will foster conversation between parents and school staff who are stakeholders. It will provide an opportunity to exercise Social Perspectives Taking (SPT). Gehlbach et al. (2012) describe SPT as the “process through which a perceiver discerns the thoughts, feelings and motivations of one or more targets” (p. 2). This encompasses not only the ability to figuratively walk in another’s shoes, but also the motivation to do so. Benefits to utilizing SPT include greater self-efficacy and understanding of others (Gehlbach et al., 2012). Supporting parents, educators, administrators and other school staff to locate a means to engage with SPT in efforts to better understand the complexities of enacting dyslexia awareness and support within a school system will become a catalyst to building trust between families and the
school system (Gehlbach et al., 2012).

The dyslexia coalition will be the source for supporting students with dyslexia and their teachers. Through engaging in building SPT, the members of this coalition will enact a plan for supporting stakeholders by developing and gathering resources for educators and parents. Opportunities or ideas for professional development will be generated. Additionally, this coalition will be a diverse collective of various stakeholders in which a problem-solving model can shed light on how best to support all members in better understanding dyslexia.

Train school staff in dyslexia awareness, inclusive of accommodations for the classroom. Educator and parent participants echoed a desire for school training in dyslexia awareness. Teachers shared their independent actions taken (if any) in order to gain more knowledge about dyslexia, accommodations to support dyslexic students, and interventions to use with dyslexic students. According to teacher participants, dyslexia-related professional development opportunities were not made available by their districts. Parents also shared examples of how they developed knowledge of dyslexia and reported a mismatch between what they knew and what was being done to support their child. Parents discussed the recursive feelings of dread and stress at the start of each school year. They worried about what school staff knew about dyslexia and noted the tension due to broaching that conversation each year.

Many states require a minimum of two hours of dyslexia training per year. Although this is a start, it may not suffice due to the depth of understanding and transfer into practice. Schools may want to consider ongoing training inclusive of what dyslexia is in order to clarify misconceptions; indicators of suspected dyslexia; how to accommodate students with dyslexia, inclusive of technology; as well as the impact that stress has upon learning.

Implement early screening tools to identify students who might be at risk for
**dyslexia as early as kindergarten.** Dyslexia is phonologically based and is also marked by rapid automatized naming. Some schools do not assess these core areas with all students and are therefore at risk of failing to identify students early in their schooling. All parent participants shared experiences in which they were concerned during their child’s kindergarten and first grade years. Most teacher participants described a screener or assessment that was used to determine which students struggled. However, some of the screeners were untimed or required children to read text for which they could heavily rely upon picture cues. A part of the dyslexia coalition would involve a plan to incorporate a system-wide early literacy screener that identified foundational skills impacted by dyslexia. All kindergarten and first grade children should be screened in order to identify students who are at risk for reading difficulties.

The dyslexia coalition comprised of diverse participants will attend to developing a course of action in order to support students who show early signs of reading difficulty. Therefore, in addition to providing a screener, school systems need to ensure classroom teachers, special education teachers, reading support teachers, and speech/language practitioners have a clear and common understanding of how to interpret data results, identify steps to explicitly support students that need it using evidence-based practices, as well as communicate with parents.

**Provide ongoing professional development to support all staff in better understanding the science of reading, inclusive of how to support students with reading difficulties.** The three district leader participants indicated a need to support staff understanding of the science of reading. The district leader participants recognized inherent tensions to the work, including building-level support. The locations with better success had leaders knowledgeable about reading to support the work. Teacher participants described working with
staff but also working independently to develop knowledge about reading instruction and dyslexia. Therefore, this recommendation entails a system-wide approach to develop stakeholder understanding about the science of reading, as this is a Tier I initiative. All students are entitled to having access to educators who are knowledgeable about how one learns to read. This is the foundation for RtI.

All stakeholders must be a part of the development of system-wide understanding about the science of reading in efforts to support all students, especially those who have reading difficulties. This includes building leadership, school psychologists, K-12 classroom, content area teachers, and special educators, as well as support staff such speech/language and reading instructors. Organizations may have limited opportunities for agents to interact and develop networks. In an educational system, agents may only be aware of their own content area or grade level. This limitation of scope has the potential to be problematic for students have learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Therefore system-wide approach to building knowledge about the science of reading should also be diverse. Meaning, there should be opportunities where representatives from different roles within a school system have occasions to work with staff who are not familiar with their grade, content area, or role. All students are entitled to having access to educators who are knowledgeable about how one learns to read. This is the foundation for RtI.

**Validity of the Study**

The researcher included participants who represented a broad range of organizational members in order to ensure the results of this study were valid. She informed all participants of the purpose of the study and identified her relationship to the study as a practitioner and parent. Participants were assured of their anonymity and pseudonyms were assigned to participant
Participant voices were central to the study. The researcher followed the interview schedule but would follow up with “why” and “how” questions when participant responses warranted. Member-checking was used after the interview transcription process. The researcher provided participants with a copy of the transcript to ensure the contents of the interview were valid. The measures outlined in this section helped the researcher to ensure the validity of the data and the findings of the study.

Limitations of the Study

In using a qualitative study design, the researcher was able to cast a wide net in order to better understand what participants were experiencing at various schools and school systems across central New York. The findings of this study are limited to the parameters of this research, namely location and participation. This qualitative study involved schools and school systems across central New York. Although 14 school systems were represented, they were not represented as a collective of various stakeholder perspectives and experiences within each school system. Only one school system had participants representative of all three stakeholder groups.

The researcher investigated how schools and school systems supported students with dyslexia and their families. This required the researcher to attend to various perspectives, namely district leaders, teachers and parents. While data collected across schools and school systems shared more similarities than differences, an in-depth study of an entire system was not reflected in the data. Therefore, these experiences and perspectives are reflective of the specific participants in this study.
Future Research Considerations

This study represents a series of shared perspectives and experiences across a particular region within New York. To date, there is not another qualitative study that investigates how schools and school systems support students with dyslexia, inclusive of parents.

Central New York does not have a dyslexia-friendly school. Dyslexia-friendly schools are schools where there are staff who are trained in specific methodologies, such as Orton-Gillingham; have a small student to teacher ratio; and they are most often private. Another study such as this in an area where there are a variety of schools, inclusive of dyslexia-friendly schools would add to what was learned in this study.

As some states are advancing to recognize and require dyslexia training and support, a future study like this one would also be of benefit. Many states are implementing mandates such as early screeners, dyslexia training and evidence-based instructional practices. This study could be replicated to determine how schools and school systems are supporting students with dyslexia and their families as a result of having such mandates in place.

Personal Reflection

This study has been near and dear to me. It has been an incredible experience. Reading instruction has been a cornerstone of my work with students or staff for almost twenty years. I have transformed from a frenzied investigator while I was developing the literature review and refining the problem to one who is an activist seeking to support all agents within a system. I’ve emerged on the other side of better understanding this problem in practice. My story is like many of the participants in this study.

While I was a classroom teacher years ago, I remember feeling incredibly creative and confident that I had selected the right book to use with students during small-group reading
lessons. I had it down, or so I thought. Developing relationships and motivating students were strengths of mine. However, none of that really seemed to help me when a student struggled to read. Now what? Make your best guess? Skip and come back? Give up? Try harder? Tell them the answer? No. Unfortunately, as a practitioner I did not have the depth of knowledge needed to help students who struggled. I always felt unsuccessful and thought that I could have done more. But I didn’t know what to do and was embarrassed to ask. Little did I know, many colleagues felt the same as I did.

I left the classroom nine years later to become an instructional coach. This started my 10-year journey to developing my understanding. As a coach, I had access to information. I made it my personal goal to grow my knowledge, as I knew I did not have the answers. In addition to reading instruction, I also became incredibly interested in adult learning and how an organization learns. I felt fairly confident in what I thought I knew and I had shifted my understanding about reading instruction along the way, but not quite to the degree that I needed to – yet.

Everything changed for me when my oldest son entered school. It was during his kindergarten year when I could not put my finger on why he had difficulty with reading and I trusted the “wait and see,” and “he’s just a boy” commentaries. In first grade my son continued to struggle and was provided a 1:1 intervention service. At the time I thought it was terrific because finally, somebody saw that he struggled. I was tentative to question the school about why he continued to experience reading difficulty, as I wanted to trust that the school staff would reach out to me if there were a problem. I was wrong. The intervention relied heavily on memorization of whole words, the intensity was speed-related, and nobody reached out.

This was just the beginning of a long dance with trying to address this issue with my
son’s school. “Yes,” the school responded to my question during the fall conference in second
grade in which they asked us, “Reading is a problem. Have you considered ADHD?”

Concurrently, I began my doctoral studies at Northeastern and I poured myself into the research.

By third grade we requested a formal evaluation due to my son’s struggle to read, write and
spell. The evaluation did not change what the school was doing for my son. My son was
struggling, his creative, upbeat little soul was becoming stifled and I didn’t know what to do. I
was alone on this one.

My son was identified with dyslexia during his fourth grade year by an outside evaluator.

An IEP with an appropriate intervention and accommodations was drafted during the fall of fifth
grade. We also began outside tutoring. His tutor, Maria, was our game-changer. He has been
able to close many of his gaps and mend his confidence over the past three years. In fact, he
recently included how dyslexia impacted his reading at an early age during a presentation in
front of his peers. Maria has been a cornerstone in my own development as an advocate. We are
forever grateful. Yet I always wonder what if. What if we had been able to capture this early
on? Or worse, what if we had never found access to the right people?

But not everybody has a Maria in their lives. Or rather, access to one. I recognized this
as a tension I experienced as an educator, parent and scholar. As a scholar, I had access to
knowledge and people where others did not. At this point as an instructional coach, I had ample
research and began to apply it to my work at the systems level. I made it a mission to support
teachers and parents alike.

My personal, professional, and academic worlds collided when I decided this was the
problem of practice I wished to address. Chapters 1-3 were the most difficult for me due to what
I found in the research. I grew frustrated. The research supported how I felt as both an educator
and a parent. Dyslexia and evidence-based reading instruction were not a common understanding in my professional world and most certainly not in my personal world as an advocate for my son. However, the literature also led me to better understand others. I remember feeling the emotional drain due to what I found in the research, what had not been done for my son, and how difficult it was for me to advocate for him. I also began to better understand why others may not have responded. If I was just deepening my knowledge about dyslexia, how could I expect others to have already done so, especially since the research corroborated that teacher knowledge of dyslexia, evidence-based reading practices, and RtI are warranted? It was at this point that I transformed from a frustrated parent into an informed advocate.

I am grateful to all the participants in this study. Their perspectives and experiences led me to a deeper understanding of just how complicated it has been to support students with dyslexia in schools. I have been afforded an opportunity to experience a problem of practice from multiple perspectives. Having personally experienced specific roles myself, I understand the importance of merging experiences in order to better understand and attend to how best to support students with dyslexia. Therefore, I want to support discussion and help transform how school systems can better support students with dyslexia, their families, and teachers as well.
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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email

December 2016

Dear Reading League Members:

    My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University and the board president of The Reading League. I am also an instructional coach in a local school system as well as a parent of a dyslexic student. For my dissertation research, I am conducting a study about how school systems and parents understand and support students with dyslexia in Central New York State through face-to-face or phone interviews and focus groups with curriculum directors, special education directors, elementary teachers, special educators, reading specialists, and parents.

    You have received this e-mail because you are a member of The Reading League. I am emailing members of The Reading League because you may have worked directly with supporting students with dyslexia or may have a child with dyslexia. Your insight will be helpful in obtaining information regarding how your school supports students with dyslexia and collaborates with their families. Your knowledge and experiences regarding the role of leadership, resource identification, school initiatives, and policy and practices will be helpful in obtaining information for this qualitative study.

    Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Any participation in the study will be confidential; names and other personal information will not be used. Please note it has no bearing on your involvement with The Reading League if you should choose not to participate in this study. If you would be willing to participate in this study and/or have any questions about participating in the study, please feel free to email me at cook.jor@husky.neu.edu. I will look to schedule face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, or participation in focus groups at a time most convenient for you depending upon your availability once I have received an email response from you.

Best,

Jorene M. Cook, Doctoral Candidate College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston, MA
Board President, The Reading League
District-Wide Instructional Coach
Auburn Enlarged City School District
Appendix B

Recruitment Announcement on The Reading League Face Book Page

December 2016

Dear Reading League Members:

My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University and the board president of The Reading League. I am also an instructional coach in a local school system as well as a parent of a dyslexic student. For my dissertation research, I am conducting a study about how school systems and parents understand and support students with dyslexia in Central New York State through face-to-face or phone interviews and focus groups with curriculum directors, special education directors, elementary teachers, special educators, reading specialists and parents.

I am reaching out to members of The Reading League because you may have worked directly with supporting students with dyslexia or may have a child with dyslexia. Your insight will be helpful in obtaining information regarding how your school supports students with dyslexia and collaborates with their families. Your knowledge and experiences regarding the role of leadership, resource identification, school initiatives, and policy and practices will be helpful in obtaining information for this qualitative study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Any participation in the study will be confidential; names and other personal information will not be used. Please note it has no bearing on your involvement with The Reading League if you should choose not to participate in this study. If you would be willing to participate in this study and/or have any questions about participating in the study, please feel free to email me at cook.jor@husky.neu.edu. I will look to schedule face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, or participation in focus groups at a time most convenient for you depending upon your availability once I have received an email response from you.

Best,

Jorene M. Cook, Doctoral Candidate College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston, MA
Board President, The Reading League
District-Wide Instructional Coach
Auburn Enlarged City School District
Appendix C

Unsigned Informed Consent Phone Interview Protocol

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigators: Principal Investigator, Chris Unger, Student Researcher, Jorene M. Cook

Title of Project: How do Schools and School Systems Respond to Students with Dyslexia and their Families: A Qualitative Study

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this phone interview. You have been invited to participate in this study because you may have worked directly with supporting students with dyslexia or may have a child with dyslexia. This research project focuses on how school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how school systems, the educators, and parents experience supporting dyslexic students. In turn, we hope this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and the challenges systems face while supporting students with dyslexia in elementary school. As a doctoral student and an instructional coach, I am very interested in your experience. Your participation in this study consists of (choose administrator-8, teacher-9, parent-6) brief questions that you will be asked. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. This interview should take no more than 30-45 minutes to complete. Thank you again for your participation.

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are an administrator, educator, or parent who may have worked directly with supporting students with dyslexia or may have a child with dyslexia.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, your responses may help me learn more about how schools and school systems support students with dyslexia in the greater Syracuse area.

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost to participate in this study.
Who will be able to see the responses I give?
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Chris Unger, the principal investigator, at c.unger@northeastern.edu or 857-272-8941, or Jorene Cook, student researcher, at cook.jor@husky.neu.edu or 315-427-7942.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

If you should decide to participate, I will record your verbal consent to participate.
Appendix D
Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigators: Principal Investigator, Chris Unger, Student Researcher, Jorene M. Cook

Title of Project: How do Schools and School Systems Respond to Students with Dyslexia and their Families: A Qualitative Study

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are an administrator, educator, or parent who may have worked directly with supporting students with dyslexia or may have a child with dyslexia.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how school systems and parents understand and support students with dyslexia. Through a qualitative study model, interviews and focus groups will be conducted with district administration, teachers, and parents. This will lead the researcher to identify to what degree administrators and educators believe they are providing appropriate resources and supports to actually benefit those students while ensuring academic success. This study will also explore parent experiences in ensuring the academic success with their dyslexic child.

What will I be asked to do?

Participate in a face-to-face interview or focus group session that will be audio recorded.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

Face-to-face interviews may last for 30-45 minutes and the focus group session will last approximately 60-75 minutes. Face-to-face interviews will take place at a location convenient to you. Focus groups will take place at a neutral location (3 locations for teachers and 3 locations for parents). All focus group interviews will occur at a convenient time for participants.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There are no direct benefits for you. With your insight and feedback, your participation could
potentially assist other school systems and families navigating how to support students with dyslexia within the public school system.

Who will see the information about me?

Your participation will be confidential. If you are participating in a focus group you will participate with other participants. The other participants in your focus group will hear your ideas, but confidentiality will be discussed with all participants. The data collected for this study will be kept by the researcher, including audio tapes, and any documentation you share and will not be shared with others. Only first names will be used during focus group sessions and in transcriptions. False names will be used in reports related to focus groups. All audio tapes will be destroyed following transcription.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. The researcher would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information. No identifying information will ever be shared with people at in your school district.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign this form.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your participation or non-participation will not in any way affect your relationship with The Reading League. You may discontinue your participation in this research program at any time without penalty or costs of any nature, character, or kind.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

Jorene M. Cook                                      Christopher Unger, Ed. D.
4650 Goldrush Dr.                                    College of Professional
Studies                                             Studies
Marcellus, NY, 13108                                  360 Huntington Avenue
Cell # (315) 427-7942                                  Northeastern University, Boston
Cell # 857-272-8941
Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. Should I be selected, I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

____________________________________
Research Participant (Printed Name)

____________________________________  __________
Research Participant (Signature)            Date
Appendix E

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Special Education Director

Interviewer: Jorene M. Cook

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about how your school supports students with dyslexia. This research project focuses on how school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how school systems, the educators, and parents experience supporting dyslexic students. In turn, we hope this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and the challenges systems face while supporting students with dyslexia in elementary school.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you
have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 30-45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also an instructional coach for a district in Central New York. This is my nineteenth year as an educator.

**Interview Questions:**

1. How long have you worked at your current position?

2. What are your specific tasks you are responsible for?

3. What is the process your district uses in order to identify the disorder of dyslexia?
   - How does your district define dyslexia?
   - How do you identify dyslexic students?
   - What is the typical age at which children in your district are recognized/identified as dyslexic students?

4. How is the instructional plan determined for dyslexic students and who is a part of making and carrying out that plan?
   a. Does that happen across all of the schools in the district, pretty much the same, or not?
   b. If there is variation, why?
   c. If some schools do a better job than others, why?

5. What instructional strategies, programs, accommodations, and use of resources are used in your district to support students with dyslexia?
   a. What do you think is working well?
   b. Not working well?
   c. What do you think could be done better and how could/would that happen?
   d. Can you give me some examples of that?

6. Tell me how the district and schools work with parents of children with dyslexia
   a. What does the district and schools do?
   b. What works well there?
c. Not so well?
d. What could be done better and how would/could that happen?
e. Can you give me some examples of that?

7. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences?

8. If you have worked in any other districts and/or schools where the approach and work is different (either better, the same, or worse), can you talk share how it was different?
Appendix F

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Curriculum Director

Interviewer: Jorene M. Cook

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about how your school supports students with dyslexia. This research project focuses on how school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how school systems, the educators, and parents experience supporting dyslexic students. In turn, we hope this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and the challenges systems face while supporting students with dyslexia in elementary school.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held
confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 30-45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

B. Interviewee Background – My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also an instructional coach for a district in Central New York. This is my nineteenth year as an educator.

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you worked at your current position?

2. What are your specific tasks you are responsible for?

3. What is the process your district uses in order to identify the disorder of dyslexia?
   - How does your district define dyslexia?
   - How do you identify dyslexic students?
   - What is the typical age at which children in your district are recognized/identified as dyslexic students?

4. How is the instructional plan determined for dyslexic students and who is a part of making and carrying out that plan?
   - Does that happen across all of the schools in the district, pretty much the same, or not?
   - If there is variation, why?
   - If some schools do a better job than others, why?

5. What instructional strategies, programs, accommodations, and use of resources are used in your district to support students with dyslexia?
   - What do you think is working well?
   - Not working well?
   - What do you think could be done better and how could/would that happen?
   - Can you give me some examples of that?

6. Tell me how the district and schools work with parents of children with dyslexia
- What does the district and schools do?
- What works well there?
- Not so well?
- What could be done better and how would/could that happen?
- Can you give me some examples of that?

7. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences?

If you have worked in any other districts and/or schools where the approach and work is different (either better, the same, or worse), can you share how it was different?
Appendix G

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Teacher

Interviewer: Jorene M. Cook

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about how your school supports students with dyslexia. This research project focuses on how school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how school systems, the educators, and parents experience supporting dyslexic students. In turn, we hope this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and the challenges systems face while supporting students with dyslexia in elementary school.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you
have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this (face-to-face/focus group) interview to last no longer than (30-45/60-75) minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also an instructional coach for a district in Central New York. This is my nineteenth year as an educator.

Questions:

1. (Face-to-face) Discuss your current position and how long you’ve worked there. (Focus group) Let’s go around the table and discuss your current position and how long you’ve been working there.

2. What is the process your district and/or school uses in order to identify students with dyslexia?
   - How is dyslexia defined at your district and/or school?
   - What effect(s) does dyslexia have on your students academically? Emotionally?
   - What data or observations are used to identify dyslexia?
   - What’s good about that process? What do you think could be better about that process?
   - Are there occasions where you feel like you have a student with dyslexia and she/he hasn’t been identified? If so, how would you know that?

3. How is the instructional plan determined, who is a part of the plan, and who is responsible to carry it out?
   - Does this happen for all dyslexic students in your school?
   - If there is some variation, why?

4. What instructional strategies, programs, accommodations, and use of resources are used in your district to support students with dyslexia?
   - What are you expected to do in order to support dyslexic students?
   - What do you think is working well?
   - Not working well?

5. Tell me about what your school and/or district does to support your work with dyslexic students.
- Do you see a benefit to the student(s)?
- What do you think could be done better and how could/would that happen?
- Can you give me some examples of that?

6. Tell me about your work with the parents whose children are dyslexic.
   - What does your school or district do to support this work?
   - What works well?
   - Not so well?
   - Do you feel you have parent support?
   - Can you give me some examples of that?
   - What do you wish for parents to know?
   - What could be done better and how would/could that happen?

7. How would you advise other teachers embarking on similar work to support dyslexic students and their parents?

8. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences?

9. If you have worked in any other districts and/or schools where the approach and work is different (either better, the same, or worse), can you share how it was different?
Appendix H

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Parent

Interviewer: Jorene M. Cook

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about how your school supports students with dyslexia. This research project focuses on how school systems support students with dyslexia and their families. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how school systems, the educators, and parents experience supporting dyslexic students. In turn, we hope this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and the challenges systems face while supporting students with dyslexia in elementary school.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you
have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this(face-to-face/ focus group) interview to last no longer than (30-45/60-75) minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Jorene Cook and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also an instructional coach for a district in Central New York. This is my nineteenth year as an educator. Finally, I am a mother to two boys, one of which has dyslexia.

Questions:

1. (Face-to-face) How many children do you have and what are their ages? What do you do for employment?  
   (Focus group) Let’s just go around the table and share a little bit about ourselves- how many children do you have and what are their ages? What do you do for employment?

2. Tell me about how you discovered your child was dyslexic. Who noticed there was a problem and what happened as a result?
   - How old was your child when you discovered there was a problem?
   - Was he/she identified in school? Outside of school?
   - How old was your child when she/he was identified with dyslexia?
   - Was she/he diagnosed in your current district?
   - What was shared with you?
   - What did you share with your child’s teacher(s)?
   - How does dyslexia affect your child’s academic experience? How about socio-emotionally?

3. How did the district and/or school respond once you had a diagnosis? What is your role in this process?
   - Who initiated steps to plan for your child?
   - Does your child’s school have a specific plan in place such as a 504 or an IEP for your child? If not, do you know why?
   - Are you included in developing the plan for your child? What does that look like?
   - Does the district and/or school use specific programs to support your dyslexic child?
   - Do you know if teachers are trained in dyslexia awareness? Are they trained in how to deliver the instruction?
   - Do you feel satisfied with what the district and/or school is doing to support your child? Why /why not?
4. Tell me what your overall experiences as a parent have been in working with the district and/or school to support your dyslexic child.
   - What’s working?
   - Is your input considered with regard to supporting your child in the classroom? Why/why not?
   - What does communication with your child’s teacher(s) look like? How often do you communicate with your child’s teacher? Who initiates the conversation?
   - Do you feel supported by your child’s teacher(s)? Why/why not?
   - Do you feel supported by your child’s school and/or district? Why/why not?
   - What could be done better and how would/could that happen?
   - Has your role as a parent changed in any way since your child has been identified with dyslexia? In what way?
   - What do you wish for your child’s teacher(s) to know?

5. How would you advise other parents of dyslexic children embarking on similar work?

6. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences?