



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

Capstone Showcase

2025 Spring Capstone Project Descriptions

Project Title	Facilitator	Description/Abstract
Reading the Game: Neurodiversity in Sports	Kevin Kelly	Rhode Island Department of Education Literacy Guidance states, “15-20 percent of the population as a whole—have some of the symptoms of dyslexia, including slow or inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words.” Sports left a significant impact on my educational journey and life, so I developed a Google Survey to seek answers from parents to see if language based learning differences impact their child's athletic journey. Furthermore, in my survey, I inquired if coaches and staff, in their opinion, are aware of these language based differences. Initial results indicate this topic has not been researched and coaches are lacking training. Moving forward as a future educator and coach, I plan to use this information to spread awareness to coaches and teachers around the country. Lastly, I will use this new information to unlock levels of academic and athletics achievement for students with learning based differences.
Technology & Social Media Use Influence in Reading	Autumn Blakely	In today's digital age, technology and social media play a central role in how people consume and interact with information. While digital platforms offer new ways to engage with text, they may also impact traditional reading skills such as fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking. Many students now navigate a world where quick scrolling, skimming, and short-form content dominate their reading habits, potentially influencing their ability to focus on longer texts and analyze information deeply. This

		project/survey examines the relationship between early technology and social media use and its effects on reading development. It was created to explore students' reading habits, preferences, and challenges when transitioning between digital and print formats. Initial results indicate both positive and negative implications about the early use of technology and the early that there is a relationship between use of technology and a strain on children's reading brains. Understanding the influence of technology and social media on reading skills is essential for developing effective literacy strategies that help students navigate both digital and print texts with confidence and comprehension.
Early Intervention and Dyslexia	Mikenzey Carr	Early Intervention plays a crucial role in supporting children with Dyslexia by providing essential strategies to improve their reading skills, and overall academic performance. Interventions and supports such as multisensory instruction, Tier 2 and Tier 3 intensive reading interventions, assistive technology, screening, outside tutoring, and speech and language therapy are all effective approaches used to support students with Dyslexia. This research explores different types of early intervention strategies children with Dyslexia typically receive and evaluate their effectiveness. Additionally, it examines the broader impact of early intervention on reading development, self-esteem, and classroom motivation. Through feedback from both parents and educators, this investigation highlights how early intervention influences a student's Dyslexia's academic journey and social-emotional well being. The goal is for me to better understand the effectiveness of early intervention strategies. Your responses will help inform my future work as a teacher supporting students with Dyslexia.
Equipping Teachers with Orton-Gillingham Skills	Brianna Magiera	Every child deserves the right to the best quality education. The benefits of Orton-Gillingham should not be confined to specialist settings. We must advocate for a widespread understanding and application of its essential strategies across all classrooms by providing comprehensive teacher training. Schools should prioritize providing all teachers with foundational training in Orton-Gillingham principles. This

		training should focus on the core components of structured literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, all through a multisensory lens. The goal is not to create classrooms full of Orton-Gillingham specialists, but to create classrooms full of teachers who understand and use these powerful teaching strategies. Training should focus on providing teachers with practical, classroom-ready strategies that align with Orton-Gillingham principles. Teachers should be given strategies that they can use within their general education classrooms. Ongoing professional development and support, to help teachers refine their skills and stay up-to-date on best practices, are most beneficial for teachers to be able to spot struggling students and adapt lessons in pace, strategy, or approach, and provide early support to those students.
Neuroscience of Dyslexia: Teaching in the Window of Opportunity	Savanna Dessert	Neuroscience has provided valuable insights into how young children develop reading skills, particularly in the early years of education, known as the window of opportunity. Understanding the neurological foundations of literacy can inform teaching strategies, ensuring students receive practical, evidence-based instruction. This capstone explores how research on the reading brain influences early identification and intervention for dyslexia, emphasizing the importance of the "window of opportunity" in K-2 education. To gain practical insights, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a first-grade teacher at Hamilton School at Wheeler. The Hamilton School at Wheeler has served elementary and middle school children with great overall cognitive ability but who struggle with reading, organization, and study skills due to dyslexia, attention-deficit disorder (ADHD), executive function deficits, or other learning differences. The initial results reflected the power of multisensory instruction in rewiring the brain for reading. As Carrie Champlin Sorensen (the teacher I interviewed) explained, "In OG, there's the audio-visual-kinesthetic triangle... saying it, hearing it, tracing it, and writing it literally changes the way your brain works." Explicit instruction is non-negotiable: "We are working the parts of your brain that you need to read—and it needs to be explicitly taught." The importance of early screening was emphasized: "Catching dyslexia early is crucial. It's just harder when we start later."

<i>Dyslexia and Social-Emotional Wellness: Anxiety and Its Effects on Students with Reading Difficulties</i>	Orchid Perez	Studies have shown that up to 60% of students diagnosed with Dyslexia and other learning differences also face psychological difficulties, specifically Anxiety. Dyslexia expands beyond academic challenges, impacting students' social-emotional wellness. Students with Dyslexia often experience anxiety due to not fully understanding the nature of their learning differences and blaming themselves for their academic difficulties. A survey interview through a Google Form was conducted and directed to educators teaching third to fifth grade. My intent through this survey was to find out how educators in Rhode Island, whether that is general educators or special educators, navigate their classrooms to meet the needs of students with Dyslexia and Social-Emotional wellness. Initial results indicate that educators use the school resources provided to ensure that students are accessing tools to better help their learning when facing social-emotional wellness and Dyslexia. It is also helpful for me, as a future special education teacher, to better understand and support the needs of students in the classroom, helping to assist and advocate their needs to be successful learners.
How Parents' Involvement Affects their Child's Education with Dyslexia.	Austin Faria-Meade	As a student with dyslexia and teaching my own students with dyslexia, it is evident that there is one key critical factor for success of the child. The impact parents have on their child who has been diagnosed with dyslexia is extremely important. As a child that had dyslexia, it took a village for me to get where I am today. That meant countless days taken off for diagnoses, multiple tutoring and after school programs and endless nights of research that my parents went through. My parents sacrificed their social and free time to get me the extra support I desperately needed. I witnessed my Mother fight for my IEP when others told her it wasn't needed. This is a positive example of parents' involvement, but there are cases that are not so positive. Parents are scared of the diagnoses and the label. In reality not getting the diagnosis hurts your child more than the label does. In my experience, parent involvement saved my academic career and life, if it wasn't for my family constantly helping me with extra services my life could look very different. This is why I decided to go back on memory lane with my mother to ask her how her involvement positively affected my education.

How the Right to Read Act has Impacted the Identification of Students with Dyslexia in Urban Districts in RI	Caitlyn Garant	This project examines the impact of the Right to Read Act (2019, 2022) on the identification of students with dyslexia within urban schools in Rhode Island. To investigate this, the study employed qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews with a former superintendent and an analysis of relevant data. The findings suggest that the Right to Read Act, through its emphasis on training more educators to recognize the indicators of dyslexia, has the potential to increase the identification of students during the critical "window of opportunity" for early intervention. This research highlights the importance of teacher professional development in improving the early detection of dyslexia within urban school settings and its potential to positively influence literacy outcomes for affected students.
Family Engagement in Their Education (Students with Dyslexia)	Hannah Ouimette	Family engagement is a major factor in the success of students with dyslexia. Research shows that when learning profiles are understood by families and participation is actively shown in their education; academic and emotional outcomes improve. This capstone examines how schools can provide the correct tools and resources to help improve family engagement, especially during the early years (K-2). This survey was created to examine how family engagement influences academic experiences for students with dyslexia. Results suggest that early and ongoing family engagement play an important role in student confidence, reading progress, and advocacy. Also, reinforcement at home and collaborating with educators and administration are effective strategies. Overall, the level of support your student receives from family members, educators, and school districts is essential for developing thriving students in and out of the classroom.

2024 Fall Capstone Project Descriptions

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Parent/Guardian Knowledge of Dyslexia <i>Capstone Self-Driven Project Slide Deck</i>	MacKenzie Seel	Across the United States, upwards of 20% of students struggle with language-based learning disabilities such as Dyslexia. Although Dyslexia is common, many people, including parents, still hold misconceptions about Dyslexia. This raises the questions: What do parents know about Dyslexia? and What misconceptions are being held within parent knowledge about Dyslexia? In my research study, I surveyed 19 parents and guardians from Cumberland, Rhode Island to find the answers to these questions. Using <i>The Gaab Lab's</i> Dyslexia Myths, I created a survey to identify parent knowledge and misconceptions about Dyslexia through a convenience sample. My results indicate that most parents and caregivers were knowledgeable of Dyslexia, but some misconceptions were still held.
How dyslexia affects families: Focusing on the experience of one family	Kiara Orellana	Based on data presented on the Decoding Dyslexia Rhode Island website, Dyslexia is identified within 5-10% of the population across the United States. Despite being a common language-based learning disability, the identification process and subsequent resources to support a child's learning have shown to be difficult to acquire. In my research study, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the parent of a student who was identified as having Dyslexia in 2nd Grade. Based on the first-hand experience of this family, my results indicate that their lived experience, with obstacles starting years prior to the <i>Right to Read Act</i> established in 2019, aligns with a common narrative related to the identification process of Dyslexia. Ultimately, this single case study design explored the research question: How does Dyslexia affect families? Lessons learned from this family's lived experience, the journey from the first suspected Dyslexia characteristics to today, indicate that effective changes have been made.
Portraits of Teachers Who Made a Difference to a Student with Dyslexia	Ashley Stewart	According to the Rhode Island Department of Education and the International Dyslexia Association, approximately 15-20% of the population shows symptoms of dyslexia. Children with dyslexia often face significant challenges and obstacles in learning to read. Despite the prevalence of dyslexia and the difficulties these students encounter, not all teachers possess the necessary knowledge or strategies to effectively support their learning. In my study, I developed a Google Forms survey that includes both multiple-choice and short-answer questions designed for parents of students with

		dyslexia. The goal is to understand their experiences with teachers who have made a positive impact on their children's education. This project highlights the qualities and practices of effective teachers, focusing on common themes in dyslexia education, such as the importance of personalized support, early intervention, and structured literacy instruction. By gathering insights from parents through surveys and interviews, this research aims to celebrate effective teaching practices and contribute to a broader understanding of what defines an exceptional teacher for students with Dyslexia.
Hard of Hearing (hh) Individuals with Dyslexia	Hailey Hurteau	Literacy is the destination for all children who are deaf/hard of hearing (d/hh) (Young, 2024). Individuals that are hard of hearing (hh) and have Dyslexia experience many different challenges and supports throughout their life. Being hh myself, this made me curious as to what it would be like to have Dyslexia as well. To learn more about the lived experiences of individuals that are hard of hearing and Dyslexic, a semi-structured interview was conducted with expert Aileen Hammar. The chapter entitled, D/HH Deaf Or Hard Of Hearing, from the book Climbing The Ladder of Reading & Writing: Meeting the Needs of ALL Learners was utilized as a resource during the development of the conversation guide for the interview. The primary research question that was discussed and expanded upon was: What are the experiences and difficulties that people that are hard of hearing (hh) and have dyslexia face? The interview provided many different stories, resources, and outreach for this topic of discussion. My results indicate that in terms of lived experience, individuals that are hh and Dyslexic don't necessarily have access to all of the resources needed in order to go through their day to day lives, the educational system, and work opportunities. There are many resources available and still work to be done in order for individuals to be as successful as they can be. There is a call for action as individuals need to be aware and advocate for these individuals in order to have access to these tools and resources.

Social-Emotional Importance of Teaching Brain Science to Students with Dyslexia	Olivia Doyle	To explore the social-emotional benefits of teaching students with Dyslexia about brain science, I conducted semi-structured interviews with experts Heather Ballentine and Kendal Martes. Through these conversations, I sought to understand how learning about brain science impacts students' self-perception, confidence, and resilience, particularly as they grapple with the challenges associated with Dyslexia. Both Heather and Kendal emphasized that when students with Dyslexia learn about how their brains process language differently, it can be empowering, shifting their perspective from self-blame to self-acceptance. This knowledge often reduces frustration and fosters a sense of capability, helping students develop a growth mindset as they realize that their struggles are not due to a lack of intelligence. The insights from these interviews helped inform a series of guiding questions and strategies for integrating brain science education into literacy instruction. Ultimately, this research highlights the potential of brain science education as a tool to strengthen social-emotional development in students with dyslexia, equipping them with a positive self-concept and the resilience needed to navigate their educational journeys.
Non- verbal students; expressive and receptive language regarding reading; technology and reading strategies to enhance what teachers can do to help these students	Hannah Cote	It is a well known fact that many students in the United States struggle with receptive and expressive language, but less appears to be known about the expressive and receptive needs of non-verbal students. Working with these students, it has become evident that there are not as many well known resources for nonverbal students, and those who aid them. As such, the primary research question explored in my study follows: "What can teachers do to help non-verbal students at an economical disadvantage use expressive language?" To delve deeper into this topic and to learn more about different resources, technologies, and strategies to help non-verbal students utilize both their expressive and receptive language, My research study had two phases: 1) a semi-structured interview with an expert in the field, Hannah Duffy and 2) a survey, developed based on lessons learned from the interview and conducted within a pool of educators in the field. These surveys not only inform educators of these resources, but also gauge how much knowledge they each have on these resources and assistive technology as a whole. Ultimately, the goal is to determine progressive and upcoming technologies, techniques, and even training for those interested or in need of these resources.

Social and Emotional Problems That Dyslexia Causes in Elementary Children	Christina Bonaminio	Studies show that Dyslexia can cause anxiety, anger, poor self-esteem, depression, social problems, and family issues. My research project focuses on how these aspects can affect the lives of elementary aged children. The research question that I explored is: How does Dyslexia affect elementary children socially and emotionally? In my research study, I surveyed 9 parents from the Decoding Dyslexia Rhode Island Facebook page. The survey that I created asked parents about the social and emotional impacts that Dyslexia has on their child and how they help their child cope with these challenges. The results of the survey indicate that Dyslexia does affect children socially and emotionally who have been identified with Dyslexia.
4th and 5th Grade & Dyslexia	Arianna Annicelli	One of the biggest things we have talked about in class this semester is how many students are not sought out for testing in their early elementary or even Pre-K years and that has a major effect on their learning in upper elementary. My research project is about how difficult it can be for students in upper elementary who have specific learning disabilities or dyslexia. I asked a plethora of upper elementary school teachers what they have put in place for those students who need it. I posted a survey on the Rhode Island Science of Reading page, and I have gotten 11 responses. The majority of responses have been from teachers who teach 6th grade. The general consensus is that teachers work in Urban districts and it looks like based on the results almost half of their students are reading below grade level. This proves my point about the fact that students should be tested as early as they can be so this can be avoided as much as possible.
Dyslexia Diagnosis: A Privilege	Daniella D'Amico	Dyslexia is a challenging diagnosis to receive, and securing resources for it in schools can be even harder. I conducted a survey across various types of school settings—urban, suburban, private, and charter—to explore the similarities and differences in how they address Dyslexia. My goal is to uncover the common injustices different schools face and identify potential solutions. Additionally, I aim to examine how these inequities impact students in different areas, focusing on the intersection of school settings and dyslexia diagnosis, available supports, and provided resources. I will explore Dyslexia as both a diagnosis of privilege (Conroy, 2024)—highlighting ableism in

		the process—and as a reflection of systemic inequities in identification and resource allocation that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.
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Dyslexia Misconceptions: A Closer Look at Teacher Awareness	Sofia Nassi	Misconceptions about Dyslexia are still prevalent in today's education system. Despite working with students that have Dyslexia, teachers still hold misconceptions about this language-based learning difference that affects how these students are instructed. At Rhode Island College, we have made progress busting common myths about Dyslexia, but we still have work to do. My research project sheds light on myths we've debunked and myths we still hold onto/need to debunk at RIC.
Building The Reading Identity	Samantha Ames	Reading identities are not talked about enough in the classroom among teachers, despite students beginning to develop their reading identities halfway through their first year of school. I am learning what strategies teachers use to build or unintentionally break down positive reading identities in students. These results will tell me how aware teachers are of building students reading identities in the classroom. I will also answer the question "why is awareness of reading identities not the forefront of our reading theories and therefore our career-building education?. I am proposing a focus on the Active view of reading with modifications to the "Active Self-Regulation" component.

Comprehension and Vocabulary Milestones (Ages 0-5) for Parents/Guardians	Trinity Reilly	A summary of comprehension and vocabulary milestones with some recommendations and resources. The goal is for parents/guardians to be more aware of these skills their children should be developing over time starting from the moment they are born. If they are aware, they can help their children make more progress at home if time permits, and advocate if they notice their child is not reaching certain milestones. This could lead to more children getting extra help/building more vocabulary and comprehension skills they need at an early age.
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2023 Fall Showcase Project Descriptions		
Project Title	Facilitator	Description
Libraries and Literacy Resources	Bailey DiRaffaele	Examining the role of the community in a student's academic literacy achievement. How do community resources differ amongst socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds? Libraries play a role in providing students and families access to literacy resources to improve language comprehension skills. However, libraries should focus on providing more resources to improve word recognition skills.
A Tale of Two Statuses	Alyssa Furtado	Comparing RI-CAS 3rd Grade reading scores from districts with "higher socio-economic" status vs. "lower socio-economic" status. What do teachers identify as variables that promote literacy outcomes both in terms of what they have and what they wished they had...
Right to Read Law: The Impact on Teachers	Kyla Lynn Russo	Understanding the true effect that the Right to Read Act has had on all Rhode Island Educators. Is there a gap with the early education teachers? The window of opportunity is from grades K-1, are we missing that window?

The Risk and Resilience Model- how teachers can help students	Alli Picchioni	Exploring the Risk and Resilience Model as a way to support “at risk” students, with a heightened focus on the home environment. Through a deeper understanding of what protective factors lead to resilience in striving readers, teachers can differentiate their supports by applying strategies to address protective factors and strengthen resilience to promote stronger reading outcomes.
The Effects of Chronic Absenteeism on Literacy Outcomes	Anivia Carinha	Investigating the effects that chronic absenteeism has on literacy and overall academic performance. What does the data indicate? What trends, if any, are apparent in the data? What can we do to address chronic absenteeism as we work to improve literacy outcomes for all students?
Early Prevention for Dyslexia: How Low Can We Go?	Brianna McCarthy	Examining the reasons why early prevention and intervention utilizing systematic and explicit evidenced- aligned instruction at a young age (e.g., Pre-K/K) will help “prevent” Dyslexia. The “wait to fail” model and Dyslexia Paradox is explored, and the common practice of identifying children with Dyslexia in 2nd grade and beyond when interventions are less effective fuels the pitch “To Go Low”.

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Revising the RI SLD Guidance Document: A Closer Look at An Exclusionary Criteria	Jennifer Angelo	Specific Learning Disability, or SLD, is the highest incidence category in special education. The definition of the term SLD under IDEA (2004) includes a set of exclusionary criteria, including Environmental/Economic Factors. Due to COVID, there has been an increase in students falling under this exclusionary criterion. When students who are struggling academically do not qualify for protection under IDEA due to this exclusionary criterion, there is still a need. This Capstone Project proposes an amendment to the RI SLD Guidance Document

		to include steps that should be taken if a student does not qualify for special education due to the environmental/economic factors for school to follow.
Revising the PLP: Is this (or can it be) an effective tool to address the literacy crisis and COVID learning?	Shannon O'Connell	How have Personal Literacy Plans, or PLPs, been used historically, and how are they being used currently? Coming out of COVID, many students have experienced learning loss and test scores represent that. This is in addition to a long-standing literacy crisis. Is it time to rethink and revise the PLP?

2022 Showcase Project Descriptions		
Project Title	Facilitator	Description
Speech and Literacy CGS	Natalie Jorge (Also Presented at The Reading League COP w/ Dr. Hogan)	Bridging the gap between speech pathology and special education, proposing that in the long run, co-teaching with a dual certified teacher and a SLP is the best case scenario in the "window of opportunity". Short term, proposing a new Certificate of Graduate Study, or CGS, at RIC combining speech with literacy/dyslexia.
Connecting the Dots Between Assessment and Intervention through a Heightened Awareness of Reader Profiles	Jenna Almagno (Also Presented @ 2023 NEERO Conference)	Improving literacy outcomes for all students, especially at-risk students and students with special needs, remains a challenge for professionals in the field of education. Recent literature indicates that teachers who demonstrate an understanding of common Reader Profiles can more effectively connect the

		dots between assessment and intervention to promote student outcomes in the area of literacy.
Every Student's Right to Read	Samantha Benjamin	Focusing on Rhode Island's Right to Read Act and how it is not specifically geared towards helping Multilingual Learners. There is an immediate need to focus on the reading proficiency of Multilingual Learners, who need more support within the Right to Read Act via better aligned proficiency pathways. This capstone looks to bridge the gap between reading advocates and ESL advocates.
Take Home Bag to Support Literacy Outcomes for Multilingual Learners	Derek Urena	Creating a take-home bag to support and improve literacy outcomes for MLLs. The take-home bag will be a compilation of various free or inexpensive resources for elementary aged students.
School Psychologist: A Critical Member of the Team	Brianna Pagano	Perceptions on Knowledge and Skills related to the Assessment and Identification of Students on the Dyslexia Continuum by School Psychologists.
Intersectionality of Race and Dyslexia	Samantha Soares	Exploring the "other narrative" of Dyslexia - and questions related to what is "often unexpected": implicit bias, lack of culturally responsive teaching, and the assertion that Dyslexia is a diagnosis of privilege. Are students of color already expected to fail due to teacher/societal biases?
Supporting Families through the SLD Eligibility Process for	Victoria Tella	The families of students going through the SLD Eligibility Process may feel like they are out of the loop on what exactly this means for their child. This feeling may be even more worrisome for families of MLLs. Outlining this process to parents, providing resources, and laying out the steps they can do at home to

Students with Language Based Learning Differences		best support their child can help families during the time of a newly diagnosed learning disability.
The Importance of Diversity and Representation in Children's Literature	Kenny Vallejos	The importance of having more diverse children's books that students can feel seen and celebrate diversity. Studying how many teachers implement more current diverse books in their classrooms compared to those who have outdated books.
Acknowledging and Addressing Dysgraphia to Help Students with Language-Based Learning Differences be more Successful	Olivia O'Connor	As with the term dyslexia, there appears to be a trend that state and local educational agencies are reluctant to reference or use the term <u>dysgraphia</u> in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or in developing IEPs; however, according to OSEP (2015), there is nothing in IDEA that would prohibit the use of the term dysgraphia in these instances. A consequence of this trend is a diminished focus on dysgraphia, and the knowledge and skills to effectively support students with this language-based learning difference. In an effort to improve literacy outcomes for all students, an increased focus on dysgraphia is encouraged.
Serving Students with Vision and/or Hearing Impairments and Language-Based Learning Differences	Angelica Moschetti	The importance of having assistive technology and an understanding of students who have a vision and/or a hearing impairment. How can we best service these students in the public school system when they also have language-based learning differences?