



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OUR MISSION

South Shore Stars provides comprehensive early education and youth development programs, fostering growth through a family-centered approach. Building on this foundation, Stars School & Learning Center (SS&LC) extends this mission by providing innovative, evidence-based, multi-sensory education, grounded in the [Science of Reading](#), for cognitively skilled students with [dyslexia and related language-based learning differences](#).

Our mission is to create a path to success that fosters self-efficacy, resiliency, and future academic opportunities for all children, regardless of their prior learning experiences, demographics, or academic history. We are committed to empowering students and their families by surrounding them with resources that [celebrate neurodiversity](#) and build upon their strengths, positively shaping their educational journey and life trajectory.

WE BELIEVE

At South Shore Stars, we believe all children can learn and deserve access to high-quality educational experiences. It is known that students who struggle to attain literacy skills are at a higher risk for academic failure and behavioral health impacts. We believe that students who receive multi-sensory, differentiated, and [research and evidence-based literacy instruction](#) will develop the skills necessary to thrive academically. We will support our students to achieve by teaching them to leverage their significant strengths in areas that may have been difficult, and to self-advocate for the tools that they deserve and need to be successful. This is achieved by providing a positive school climate, individualized curriculum, attention to sensory needs, effective [research-based instructional strategies](#), social-emotional support, robust specialized course offerings, and high expectations. At South Shore Stars, we believe all children can learn and deserve to shine!

OUR VISION

Stars aspires to show the world that young people with language-based learning differences and diverse learning styles can be among the most creative, productive, and successful members of society. We further aim to inspire others to understand and value these students from very young ages, while simultaneously helping them realize their full potential. We seek to see our students develop into confident

and successful adults who are committed to lifelong learning and are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and social and emotional competencies they need to achieve their future endeavors.

OVERVIEW

The Initial Spark

A small group of parents, educators, clinical support professionals, and advocates of multi-sensory differentiated learning, banded together with one goal: to create an educational institution that would meet the needs of students struggling with literacy, specifically those students with dyslexia or other language-based learning needs. The goal is to provide these students, and our South Shore communities, with a robust, high-quality, accessible, and research-based education. This passionate group of individuals will form what will be called the South Shore Stars School & Learning Center. This newly founded educational institution is a private, nonprofit day school with after-school programming opportunities. SS&LC will be a division of South Shore Stars, Inc. a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Skilled, licensed educators will teach students with language-based learning differences in a manner that celebrates the creativity, intelligence, and capability of each student. It is essential that all staff, students, and families embrace our foundational belief that with individualized, appropriate instruction, our students can succeed beyond their wildest dreams.

Our students may have been diagnosed with a specific language difference, perceptual difficulties, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, developmental delay, specific learning disability, and/or attentional issues. Many of our students will have gone undiagnosed for extended periods and often feel discouraged by previous educational efforts and potential misdiagnoses. Typically, they have been unsuccessful learners in traditional general education classrooms or special education settings utilizing curriculum tools and resources that may be misaligned to their individual learning needs.

SS&LC's teaching methodology and structured curriculum may not be suitable for all students who learn differently. Applicants for our programming will be considered individually to determine whether SS&LC can provide the student with the best educational program to meet their individual needs. Students with the following learning profiles most likely will be better served by other educational programs that have the expertise to meet their specific needs: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Nonverbal Learning Disability, Intellectual disabilities, Emotional and/or behavioral disorders, and Complex Communication Disorders requiring intensive direct speech and language services. We desire to successfully meet the needs of students struggling with literacy, specifically those with dyslexia or other language-based learning differences. It is also our goal to partner with local school communities to address the needs of these students in a collaborative approach.

By utilizing a multi-sensory teaching approach as our core instructional methodology, we can teach our students in a modality that maximizes learning. Our program strategies are applied in small groups, whole classes, individually, and school wide. This helps students generalize their skills across classrooms, content areas, and grade-spans while building self-efficacy and social and emotional skills. Building off the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) State Curriculum Frameworks, our skilled educators will utilize multiple pedagogical practices without being limited to one specific curriculum. Orton-Gillingham (OG) certified instructors will directly incorporate OG practices with students daily. These multifaceted learning techniques can serve an individual for a lifetime. All teaching staff are DESE licensed and trained to infuse research-based literacy instruction throughout all curriculum subjects. As skilled educators, ongoing professional development will be a cornerstone of success and a requirement of all employees.

South Shore Stars is an [approved Chapter 766 school](#) through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and an active member of the Massachusetts Association of Approved Special Education Schools. We have also received approval from the school district where the school is located.



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DYSLEXIA AND OTHER LANGUAGE-BASED LEARNING DISABILITIES

Dyslexia is the most common specific learning disability affecting reading and is characterized by unexpected 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. Research and years of historical information have shown that limited literacy skills impact future educational endeavors, earning potential, professional success, and self-esteem, and increase the potential for suspension, dropping out of school, and sadly [incarceration](#). It is believed that dyslexia [may impact up to 20%](#) of the United States population.

MULTI-SENSORY, STRUCTURED, SEQUENTIAL, AND EVIDENCED-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Research has shown that the most effective, evidence-based intervention for dyslexia and language-based learning differences is instruction that is structured, sequential, and multi-sensory. An approach such as [Orton-Gillingham](#) is designed specifically for use with students who have difficulty with reading, spelling, and writing. This approach will be foundational in providing learning opportunities that lead to academic achievement and success. Other methodologies will be considered to meet individual student needs. These may include, but are not limited to: Lindamood-Bell, Project Read, Wilson, Framing Your Thoughts, Lexia, Report Form, Story Form, Think-SRSD, Talian/Lively Letters, Handwriting Without Tears, Geodes, Into Reading, EL Learning, iReady Mathematics, Woodin Math, and other appropriate tools.

CURRICULUM

The essential curricular content and instructional practices that characterize a structured language approach are derived from scientific evidence about how people learn to read and write, why a significant number have difficulty in doing so, how having dyslexia makes achieving literacy skills more difficult, and which instructional practices are best suited for teaching such persons to read and write. A structured language approach is always focused on the unique learning needs of individual students. The [Massachusetts DESE Curriculum Frameworks](#) are the foundation to provide a rigorous and high-quality educational experience for all students. The pedagogy used to teach the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of students who learn best from multi-sensory, structured, sequential, and systematic learning experiences. We will also incorporate components of EL Learning, formally called [Expeditionary Learning](#).

EL Learning believes in “*empowering educators to evaluate the unique genius of every student.*” Students are empowered to build [communication skills](#), empathy, and a strong foundation for academic success. Written language curriculum will be instructed using [self-regulated strategy development pedagogy](#). Mathematics and all other content areas will engage students in multi-sensory teaching strategies.

All educators at SS&LC will be specifically trained to assist students in closing achievement gaps by using best practices in structured language and multi-sensory teaching approaches, utilizing auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic modalities in every academic and enrichment experience throughout the school. The curriculum will ensure that all students are instructed with explicit, structured, systematic, sequential, and scientifically supported methods. Regular data collection and analysis will inform the modification of instructional strategies to ensure that students are making progress.

FRAMEWORK

The following framework will be implemented at Stars School with commitment and in a rigorous manner with a primary focus on reading, writing, fluency, and comprehension:



- **High-quality, research-based, and validated instructional strategies**

All students will receive high-quality research-based instruction starting with multi-sensory, sequential, and structured practices. The use of high-quality curricula and educational practices allows students the opportunity to thrive, succeed, and excel in our academic setting.

- **Data-based differentiation and decision-making**

Data-based decision-making is used to efficiently differentiate instruction for all students, providing individualized instruction based on each student's needs. SS&LC will incorporate increasing intensities of instruction, offering specific, research-based interventions matched to student needs. Instruction is designed in response to formative data collected from students.

- **Joy**

At SS&LC, certified teachers and support staff will assist students in building social and emotional skills, empowering students to find joy in learning and day-to-day interactions to become self-confident leaders and learners. [Joy is essential to healthy development](#) and personal success. SS&LC will provide ample opportunity to celebrate the joy that each day has the potential of offering.

NEED FOR LANGUAGE-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Just under 2.5 million students who receive special education services in U.S. public schools have a learning disability, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). Private schools for children with [learning disabilities](#) have some clear advantages, Horowitz says. They are often smaller, with low student-to-teacher ratios. In contrast, non-private schools often have larger classes and fewer staff. This creates a learning environment with less opportunity for differentiated, individualized instruction and support.

Research has shown that one in every five students in a general education classroom is at risk of dyslexia. Schools may struggle to identify these children and at times, may not be equipped to educate students with language-based needs. In addition to having difficulty with reading, writing, and spelling, students with dyslexia often experience challenges with social skills, time management skills, comprehension, and memory. They often suffer from poor self-esteem and feelings of failure and inadequacy. The SS&LC is an opportunity to close achievement gaps and open the gates to academic success for those under-served dyslexic learners in areas that are on the South Shore of Boston, MA. SS&LC is poised to provide the unique type of instructional approach best suited to students with language-based learning differences.

Local Data

Based on [DESE RADAR data](#) for the 2021-2022 school year, over 700 South Shore students with a diagnosed disability attended out-of-district school placements. These students may spend up to 11.5 hours per week traveling to these schools. Many of these students attend school districts where the transportation cost is left to the sending school district to financially account for. This creates a difficult financial burden for communities, as well as a much longer school day for students. While students may academically benefit from these placements, they frequently miss out on public school-based extracurricular activities, local social engagement opportunities, and time spent with family and friends in their home communities. SS&LC aims to offer opportunities closer to towns on South Shore. We also hope to provide a collaborative approach with local school departments and combine efforts to best meet the needs of students and families.



TOTAL STUDENTS WITH IEP by COUNTY	
Norfolk	18,758
Plymouth	13,252
Barnstable	4,284
Bristol	16,848
TOTAL	53,142



1 in 4 South Shore students with disabilities has a diagnosed Specific Learning Disability.

Why are current learning opportunities for dyslexic learners scarce?

Many public school systems do not have the necessary resources or dedicated staff to teach at-risk students with language-based learning disabilities and/or dyslexia. Frequently, staff are not fully trained to implement and effectively use the curriculum that best supports the way dyslexic students learn. Private psychoeducational testing that includes academic, social-emotional, and cognitive-based measures to identify the potential of dyslexia is extremely costly. At times, due to many special education qualifying and rule-out regulations that public schools must adhere to, language-based needs may not be recognized by public schools as sufficient evidence to qualify students for an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). Private tutoring using the Orton-Gillingham approach is usually between \$95-125 per session and it is recommended that the child attend at least twice a week. Unfortunately, there are not even enough certified Orton-Gillingham tutors in the area to assist all the families that are looking for services. Many qualified private school opportunities for children with dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities are over fifty miles from the South Shore. Again, this results in high transportation costs and hours spent traveling back and forth.

What do we intend to do about it?

SS&LC intends to offer dyslexic learners the environment they need to become confident learners while aiming to close existing achievement gaps. As a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education initially [approved 766 school](#) and a private tuition-based program, it is our goal and part of our mission to provide students in need with access to scholarship programs and/or [awareness of funding opportunities](#). SS&LC aims, at full build-out, to enroll classes offered for students in grades 1 through 5 with a maximum of 100 students at full enrollment. Students will be taught using direct, explicit, multi-sensory techniques in which teachers break lessons into smaller units and continuously spiral back to ensure that students have been taught concepts to mastery. If needed, due to enrollment demands, Stars School will consider expanding to include Kindergarten and grade 6.

Our staffing model will offer increased staff to student ratios. Each classroom will endeavor to have a minimum of three full time staff consisting of one general education teacher, one special education teacher, and one educational support professional. A literacy/reading specialist will be assigned to each classroom as well as curriculum specialists and auxiliary staff consisting of but not limited to occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, family support clinicians, and math coaches. Students' IEPs will be the guidepost for curriculum modifications, classroom accommodations and required services.

SUPPORT

Independent community members and local stakeholders have collaboratively worked with South Shore Stars leadership and Board representatives over the past year. During this time, they have assessed the need for alternative schools for students with language-based needs. This was done by hosting several meetings and extensive qualitative and quantitative research. The overwhelming response



from parents, guardians, special education advisory committees, and educators in the area has driven us to conclude that this is a very sought-after concept that is greatly needed on the South Shore of Massachusetts. It is clear through community outreach that parents are interested in supporting children with dyslexia and language-based learning differences.

Marketing for SS&LC will be extensive and will cover as many socioeconomic populations as possible throughout the counties indicated. The SS&LC has been in contact with local educational specialists who have offered their support of this endeavor for students whose primary diagnosis is dyslexia or related reading challenges associated with language-based learning disabilities. Some of these professionals are the experts who conduct testing to determine if a diagnosis of dyslexia is warranted. We hope that these psychoeducational specialists will be able to refer students to SS&LC.

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