

A Parent's Guide to Dyslexia

AND

Leon Independent School District

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Information included in this document comes directly from the Dyslexia Handbook.

What Is Dyslexia?

The student who struggles with reading and spelling often puzzles teachers and parents. The student displays ability to learn in the absence of print and receives the same classroom instruction that benefits most children; however, the student continues to struggle with some or all of the many facets of reading and spelling. This student may be a student with dyslexia.

Texas Education Code (TEC) §38.003 defines dyslexia and related disorders in the following way:

“‘Dyslexia’ means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity.

‘Related disorders’ include disorders similar to or related to dyslexia, such as developmental auditory imperception, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.”

TEC §38.003(d)(1)-(2) (1995)

The International Dyslexia Association defines “dyslexia” in the following way:

“Dyslexia is 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.”

**Adopted by the International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors
November 12, 2002**

Dyslexia Characteristics:

Students identified as having dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single-word reading, reading fluency, and spelling.

Consequences may include difficulties in reading comprehension and/or written expression. These difficulties in phonological awareness are unexpected for the student’s age and educational level and are not primarily the result of language difference factors. Additionally, there is often a family history of similar difficulties.

The following are the primary reading/spelling characteristics of dyslexia:

- Difficulty reading words in isolation
- Difficulty accurately decoding unfamiliar words
- Difficulty with oral reading (slow, inaccurate, or labored without prosody)

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- Difficulty spelling

It is important to note that individuals demonstrate differences in degree of impairment and may not exhibit all the characteristics listed above.

The reading/spelling characteristics are most often associated with the following:

- Segmenting, blending, and manipulating sounds in words (phonemic awareness)
- Learning the names of letters and their associated sounds
- Holding information about sounds and words in memory (phonological memory)
- Rapidly recalling the names of familiar objects, colors, or letters of the alphabet (rapid naming)

Information on Testing:

The evaluation and identification process for dyslexia can be multifaceted. The process involves both state and federal requirements that must be followed. The evaluation and identification process for students suspected of having dyslexia is guided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In Texas and throughout the country, there is a focus on a Response to Intervention (RTI) or a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process as a vehicle for meeting the academic and behavioral needs of all students. The components of the Student Success Initiative (SSI) and other state-level programs offer additional support. Current federal legislation under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), calls for the use of benchmark assessments for early identification of struggling students before they fail. In fact, state law requires the use of early reading assessments that are built on substantial evidence of best practices. Carefully chosen, these assessments can give crucial information about a student's learning and can provide a basis for the tiered intervention model. Through the tiered intervention process, schools can document students' learning difficulties, provide ongoing evaluation, and monitor reading achievement progress for students at risk for dyslexia or other reading difficulties.

Early intervention is further emphasized as the result of research using neuroimaging. Diehl, Frost, Mencl, and Pugh (2011) discuss the need to determine the role that deficits in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness play in reading acquisition, thus improving the methodology for early intervention.

The authors note that future research will be enabled by longitudinal studies of phonology remediation using various treatments. "It will be especially important to take a multilevel analysis approach that incorporates genetics, neuroanatomy, neurochemistry, and neurocircuitry, and also to combine the strengths of the different neuroimaging techniques" (Diehl et al., 2011, p. 230). Evaluation followed by structured intervention that incorporates new scientific research must be embraced.

Effective Strategies for Teaching Students:

Critical, Evidence-Based Components of Dyslexia Instruction

- Phonological awareness— "Phonological awareness is the understanding of the internal sound structure of words. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a given language that can be recognized as being distinct from other sounds. An important aspect of phonological awareness

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is the ability to segment spoken words into their component phonemes [phonemic awareness].” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**

- Sound-symbol association—Sound-symbol association is the knowledge of the various speech sounds in any language to the corresponding letter or letter combinations that represent those speech sounds. The mastery of sound-symbol association (alphabetic principle) is the foundation for the ability to read (decode) and spell (encode) **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**. “Explicit phonics refers to an organized program in which these sound symbol correspondences are taught systematically.” **(Berninger & Wolf, 2009, p. 53)**

- Syllabication— “A syllable is a unit of oral or written language with one vowel sound. Instruction must include the six basic types of syllables in the English language; closed, open, vowel-consonant, r-controlled, vowel pair (or vowel team), and final stable syllable. Syllable division rules must be directly taught in relation to the word structure.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**

- Orthography—Orthography is the written spelling patterns and rules in a given language. Students must be taught the regularity and irregularity of the orthographic patterns of a language in an explicit and systematic manner. The instruction should be integrated with phonology and sound-symbol knowledge.

- Morphology— “Morphology is the study of how morphemes are combined to form words. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in the language.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**

- Syntax— “Syntax is the set of principles that dictate sequence and function of words in a sentence in order to convey meaning. This includes grammar, sentence variation, and the mechanics of language.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**

- Reading comprehension—Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning through the interaction of the reader with the text to be comprehended and the specific purpose for reading. The reader’s skill in reading comprehension depends upon the development of accurate and fluent word recognition, oral language development (especially vocabulary and listening comprehension), background knowledge, use of appropriate strategies to enhance comprehension and repair it if it breaks down, and the reader’s interest in what he or she is reading and motivation to comprehend its meaning. **(Birsh, 2018, p.14; Snow, 2002)**

- Reading fluency— “Reading fluency is the ability to read text with sufficient speed and accuracy to support comprehension.” **(Moats & Dakin, 2008, p. 52)**

Fluency also includes prosody. Teachers can help promote fluency with several interventions that have proven successful in helping students with fluency (e.g., repeated readings, word lists, and choral reading of passages.) **(Henry,2010,p. 104)**

In addition, other areas of language processing skills, such as written expression, which require integration of skills, are often a struggle for students with dyslexia. Moats and Dakin (2008) posit the following:

The ability to compose and transcribe conventional English with accuracy, fluency, and clarity of expression is known as basic writing skills. Writing is dependent on many language

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skills and processes and is often even more problematic for children than reading. Writing is a language discipline with many component skills that must be directly taught. Because writing demands using different skills at the same time, such as generating language, spelling, handwriting, and using capitalization and punctuation, it puts a significant demand on working memory and attention. Thus, a student may demonstrate mastery of these individual skills, but when asked to integrate them all at once, mastery of an individual skill, such as handwriting, often deteriorates. To write on demand, a student has to have mastered, to the point of being automatic, each skill involved (p. 55).

Both the teacher of dyslexia and the regular classroom teacher should provide multiple opportunities to support intervention and to strengthen these skills; therefore, responsibility for teaching reading and writing must be shared by classroom teachers, reading specialists, interventionists, and teachers of dyslexia programs.

Delivery of Dyslexia Instruction:

While it is necessary that students are provided instruction in the above content, it is also critical that the way in which the content is delivered be consistent with research-based practices. Principles of effective intervention for students with dyslexia include all of the following:

- Simultaneous, multisensory (VAKT)— “Teaching is done using all learning pathways in the brain (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) simultaneously in order to enhance memory and learning.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)** “Children are actively engaged in learning language concepts and other information, often by using their hands, arms, mouths, eyes, and whole bodies while learning.” **(Moats & Dakin, 2008, p. 58)**
- Systematic and cumulative— “Multisensory language instruction requires that the organization of material follow order of the language. The sequence must begin with the easiest concepts and most basic elements and progress methodically to more difficult material. Each step must also be based on [elements] already learned. Concepts taught must be systematically reviewed to strengthen memory.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 26)**
- Explicit instruction— “Explicit instruction is explained and demonstrated by the teacher one language and print concept at a time, rather than left to discovery through incidental encounters with information. Poor readers do not learn that print represents speech simply from exposure to books or print” (Moats & Dakin, 2008, p. 58). Explicit Instruction is “an approach that involves direct instruction: The teacher demonstrates the task and provides guided practice with immediate corrective feedback before the student attempts the task independently.” **(Mather & Wendling, 2012, p. 326)**
- Diagnostic teaching to automaticity— “The teacher must be adept at prescriptive or individualized teaching. The teaching plan is based on careful and [continual] assessment of the individual’s needs. The content presented must be mastered to the degree of automaticity.” **(Birsh, 2018, p. 27)** “This teacher knowledge is essential for guiding the content and emphasis of instruction for the individual student.” **(Moats & Dakin, 2008, p. 58)** “When a reading skill

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becomes automatic (direct access without conscious awareness), it is performed quickly in an efficient manner.” (Berninger & Wolf, 2009, p. 70)

- Synthetic instruction— “Synthetic instruction presents the parts of the language and then teaches how the parts work together to form a whole.” (Birsh, 2018, p. 27)
- Analytic instruction— “Analytic instruction presents the whole and teaches how this can be broken into its component parts.” (Birsh, 2018, p. 27)

As appropriate intervention is provided, students with dyslexia make significant gains in reading. Effective instruction is highly-structured, systematic, and explicit, and it lasts for sufficient duration. With regard to explicit instruction, Torgesen (2004) states, “Explicit instruction is instruction that does not leave anything to chance and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire on their own” (p. 353).

In addition, because effective intervention requires highly structured and systematic delivery, it is critical that those who provide intervention for students with dyslexia be trained in the program used and that the program is implemented with fidelity.

Sources for Critical, Evidence-Based Components and Delivery of Dyslexia Instruction:

Berninger, V. W., & Wolf, B. (2009). Teaching students with dyslexia and dysgraphia: Lessons from teaching and science. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Birsh, J. R. (2018). Connecting research and practice. In J. R. Birsh, Multisensory teaching of basic language skills (4th ed., pp21–34). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Henry, M. K. (2010). Unlocking literacy: Effective decoding and spelling instruction (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

The International Multisensory Structured Language Council. (2013). Multisensory structured language programs: Content and principles of instruction. Retrieved from <https://www.imslec.org/directory.asp?action=instruction>.

Mather, N., & Wendling, B. J. (2012). Essentials of dyslexia assessment and intervention. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Moats, L. C., & Dakin, K. E. (2008). Basic facts about dyslexia and other reading problems. Baltimore, MD: The International Dyslexia Association.

Qualifications of Those Delivering Services to Students with Dyslexia:

In order to provide effective intervention, school districts are encouraged to employ highly trained individuals to deliver dyslexia instruction. Teachers, such as reading specialists, master reading teachers, general education classroom teachers, or special education teachers, who provide dyslexia intervention for students are not required to hold a specific license or certification. However, these educators must at a minimum have additional documented dyslexia training aligned to 19 TAC §74.28(c) and must deliver the instruction with fidelity. This includes training in critical, evidence-based components of dyslexia instruction such as phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllabication, orthography, morphology, syntax, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. In addition, they must deliver multisensory instruction that simultaneously uses all learning pathways to the brain, is systematic and

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cumulative, is explicitly taught, uses diagnostic teaching to automaticity, and includes both analytic and synthetic approaches. A provider of dyslexia instruction does not have to be certified as a special educator when serving a student who also receives special education and related services if that provider is the most appropriate person to offer dyslexia instruction.

Although Texas does not have a certification requirement specific to teachers providing intervention to students with dyslexia, opportunities for those who provide dyslexia instruction to pursue a certification and/or license are available through several professional organizations as well as through the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. More information concerning licensure in the State of Texas, may also be found in Texas Occupations Code, Chapter 403. (See Appendix C, State Laws and Rules Related to Dyslexia). The effort to train professionals who work with students with dyslexia is also supported by The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Position Statement: Dyslexia Treatment Programs (March, 2009), which states the following:

Professional practitioners, including teachers or therapists, should have had specific preparation in the prevention and remediation of language-based reading and writing difficulties. Teachers and therapists should be able to state and provide documentation of their credentials in the prevention and remediation of language-based reading and writing difficulties, including program-specific training recommended for the use of specific programs (pp. 1–2).

Providers of dyslexia instruction must be prepared to use the techniques, tools, and strategies outlined in the previous sections of this chapter. They may also serve as trainers and consultants in dyslexia and related disorders for regular, remedial, and special education teachers.

Instructional Accommodations for Dyslexia Students:

Students with dyslexia who receive dyslexia instruction that contains the components described in this chapter will be better equipped to meet the demands of grade-level or course instruction. In addition to dyslexia instruction, accommodations provide the student with dyslexia effective and equitable access to grade-level or course instruction in the general education classroom. Accommodations are not one size fits all; rather, the impact of dyslexia on each individual student determines the necessary accommodation.

Listed below are examples of reasonable classroom accommodations:

- Copies of notes (e.g., teacher- or peer-provided)
- Note-taking assistance
- Additional time on class assignments and tests
- Reduced/shortened assignments (e.g., chunking assignments into manageable units, fewer items given on a classroom test or homework assignment without eliminating concepts, or student planner to assist with assignments)
- Alternative test location that provides a quiet environment and reduces distractions
- Priority seating assignment
- Oral reading of directions or written material
- Word banks
- Audiobooks
- Text to speech

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- Speech to text
- Electronic spellers
- Electronic dictionaries
- Formula charts
- Adaptive learning tools and features in software programs

Accommodations are changes to materials, actions, or techniques, including the use of technology, that enable students with disabilities to participate meaningfully in grade-level or course instruction. The use of accommodations occurs primarily during classroom instruction as educators use various instructional strategies to meet the needs of each student. A student may need an accommodation only temporarily while learning a new skill, or a student might require the accommodation throughout the school year and over several years including beyond graduation.

Decisions about which accommodations to use are very individualized and should be made for each student by that student's ARD or Section 504 committee, as appropriate. Students can, and should, play a significant role in choosing and using accommodations. Students need to know what accommodations are possible, and then, based on knowledge of their personal strengths and limitations, they select and try accommodations that might be useful for them. The more input students have in their own accommodation choices, the more likely it is that they will use and benefit from the accommodations.

When making decisions about accommodations, instruction is always the foremost priority. Not all accommodations used in the classroom are allowed during a state assessment. However, an educator's ability to meet the individual needs of a student with dyslexia or provide support for the use of an accommodation should not be limited by whether an accommodation is allowable on a state assessment.

In order to make accommodation decisions for students, educators should have knowledge of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and how a student performs in relation to them. Educators should also collect and analyze data pertaining to the use and effectiveness of accommodations (e.g., assignment/test scores with and without the accommodation, observational reports from parents and teachers) so that informed educational decisions can be made for each student. By analyzing data, an educator can determine if the accommodation becomes inappropriate or unnecessary over time due to the student's changing needs. Likewise, data can confirm for the educator that the student still struggles in certain areas and should continue to use the accommodation.

For more information about accommodations, see Accommodations for students with Disabilities available at <https://dyslexiaida.org/accommodations-for-students-with-dyslexia/>.

Standardized Testing Accommodations and Modifications:

Educators, parents, and students must understand that accommodations provided during classroom instruction and testing might differ from accommodations allowed for use on state assessments. The state assessment is a standardized tool for measuring every student's learning in a reliable, valid, and secure manner. An accommodation used in the classroom for learning may invalidate or compromise the security and integrity of the state assessment; therefore, not all accommodations suitable for instruction are allowed during the state assessments. It is important to keep in mind that the policies for accommodation use on state assessments should not limit an educator's ability to develop individualized

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materials and techniques to facilitate student learning. Instruction comes first and can be customized to meet the needs of each student.

For the purposes of the statewide assessments, students needing accommodations due to a disability include the following:

- Students with an identified disability who receive special education services and meet established eligibility criteria for certain accommodations
- Students with an identified disability who receive Section 504 services and meet established eligibility criteria for certain accommodations
- Students with a disabling condition who do not receive special education or Section 504 services but meet established eligibility criteria for certain accommodations

For students who receive special education or Section 504 services, the decision for student use of accommodations during the statewide assessments is made by the ARD or Section 504 committee. In those rare instances where a student does not receive services but meets the eligibility criteria due to a disabling condition, the decision about using accommodations on the statewide assessments is made by the appropriate team of people at the campus level, such as the RTI team or student assistance team.

For more information about accommodations on statewide assessments, visit <https://tea.texas.gov/accommodations/>.

Eligibility:

If, through the evaluation process, it is established that the student has the condition of dyslexia, then the student meets the first prong of eligibility under the IDEA (identification of condition). In other words, the identification of dyslexia, using the process outlined in this chapter, meets the criterion for the condition of a specific learning disability in basic reading and/or reading fluency. However, the presence of a disability condition alone, is not sufficient to determine if the student is a student with a disability under the IDEA. Eligibility under the IDEA consists of both identification of the condition and a corresponding need for specially designed instruction as a result of the disability.

In IDEA, dyslexia is considered one of a variety of etiological foundations for specific learning disability (SLD).

Section 34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10) states the following:

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

The term *SLD* does not apply to children who have learning difficulties that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

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The IDEA evaluation requirements for SLD eligibility in 34 C.F.R. §300.309(a)(1) specifically designate the following areas for a learning disability in reading: basic reading skills (dyslexia), reading fluency skills, and/or reading comprehension.

The October 23, 2015 letter from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) (Dear Colleague: Dyslexia Guidance) states that dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia are conditions that could qualify a child as a child with a specific learning disability under the IDEA. The letter further states that there is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in the IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents. For more information, please visit

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf>.

A 2018 Letter to the Administrator Addressed from the Texas Education Agency regarding the provision of services for students with dyslexia and related disorders states that any time it is suspected that a student requires special education or related services to provide appropriate reading supports and interventions, a referral for an FIIE should be initiated. The letter further states that all students who are identified with dyslexia or a related disorder and who require special education services because of dyslexia or a related disorder are eligible under the IDEA for special education and related services as students with a specific learning disability. For more information, please visit

https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Correspondence/TAA_Letters/Provision_of_Services_for_Students_with_Dyslexia_and_Related_Disorders_-_Revised_June_6,_2018/

Once the condition of dyslexia has been identified, a determination must be made regarding the most appropriate way to serve the student. If a student with dyslexia is found eligible for special education (i.e., student requires specially designed instruction), the student's IEP must include appropriate reading instruction. Appropriate reading instruction includes the components and delivery of dyslexia instruction discussed in Chapter IV: Critical, Evidence-Based Components of Dyslexia Instruction. If a student has previously met special education eligibility and is later identified with dyslexia, the ARD committee should include in the IEP goals that reflect the need for dyslexia instruction and determine the least restrictive environment for delivering the student's dyslexia instruction.

If—based on the data—the student is identified with dyslexia, but is not eligible for special education, the student may receive dyslexia instruction and accommodations under Section 504.

A student who is found not eligible under the IDEA, but who is identified with the condition of dyslexia through the FIIE process should not be referred for a second evaluation under Section 504. Instead, the Section 504 committee will use the FIIE and develop an appropriate plan for the student without delay.

For students eligible for Section 504, a Section 504 committee will develop the student's Section 504 Plan, which must include appropriate reading instruction to meet the individual needs of the student. Appropriate reading instruction includes the components and delivery of standard protocol dyslexia instruction identified in Chapter IV: Critical, Evidence-Based Components of Dyslexia Instruction. Revision of the Section 504 Plan will occur as the student's response to instruction and to the use of

accommodations, if any, is observed. Changes in instruction and/or accommodations must be supported by current data (e.g., classroom performance and dyslexia program monitoring).

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Evaluation Requests:

Parents/guardians always have the right to request a referral for a dyslexia evaluation at any time. Once a parent request for dyslexia evaluation has been made, the school district is obligated to review the student's data history (both formal and informal data) to determine whether there is reason to suspect the student has a disability. If a disability is suspected, the student needs to be evaluated following the guidelines outlined in this chapter. Under the IDEA, if the school refuses the request to evaluate, it must give parents prior written notice of refusal to evaluate, including an explanation of why the school refuses to conduct an FIIE, the information that was used as the basis for the decision, and a copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards. Should the parent disagree with the school's refusal to conduct an evaluation, the parent has the right to initiate dispute resolution options including; mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings. Additionally, the parent may request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at public expense. Should the parent believe that their child is eligible for Section 504 aids, accommodations, and services the parent may request an evaluation under Section 504.

Contact Information:

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Leon County Special Education Co-op
Sandy Welker
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Region 6 Education Service Center
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Texas Reading Academy, Dyslexia and SLAR Specialist
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Links:

Dyslexia Handbook:
[2021 Dyslexia Handbook \(texas.gov\)](#)

Learning ALLY:
<https://learningally.org/>

Bookshare:
<https://www.bookshare.org/cms/>

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Talking Books:

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/tbp/index.html>

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