



Texas Dyslexia Program

Texas has a long history of supporting the fundamental skill of reading. This includes a focus on early identification and intervention for children who experience reading difficulties, including dyslexia, and determining a student's reading and spelling abilities and difficulties. Thirty years ago a Texas law was passed requiring each district campus to have a program for those with dyslexia, or a related disorder. While many students with dyslexia can be and are served through special education, this dyslexia program is separate from special education services and the Reading First Initiative programs.

The Texas approach to teaching students with dyslexia is founded on research-based best practices, and are based on the ideas that: "Gains in reading can be significant if students with reading problems are provided systematic, explicit, and intensive reading instruction of sufficient duration in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, & writing. A failure to learn to read impacts a person's life significantly. The key to preventing this failure for students with dyslexia is early identification and early intervention. Instruction by a highly skilled and knowledgeable educator with specific preparation in the remediation of dyslexia is necessary." (pg 30)

Guidelines on this program are in *The Dyslexia Handbook – Revised 2014, Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders* (<http://www.region10.org/dyslexia/index/>). It provides "guidelines for school districts, campuses, teachers, students, and parents/guardians in the identification of, instruction for, and accommodations for students with dyslexia." Schools are to develop written procedures based on the guidelines. Quotes in this document are from the Handbook.

I. Definitions and Characteristics of Dyslexia

"The student who struggles with reading and spelling often puzzles teachers and parents. The student displays average 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."

The Texas Education Code (TEC) §38.003 defines dyslexia as *"a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity. (2) Related disorders includes disorders similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperception, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability."*

"Students identified as having dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonemic awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single-word decoding, 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." (pg. 8)

The primary reading/spelling characteristics of dyslexia are: difficulty reading words in isolation; difficulty accurately decoding unfamiliar words; difficulty with oral reading (slow, inaccurate, or labored); and difficulty spelling. Common evidence of dyslexia is listed in the Handbook for each grade group.

II. Procedures for Assessing Students for Dyslexia

Procedures Required By State and Federal Law Prior To Formal Assessment

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) is a state-level effort to ensure that all Texas students receive the instruction and support needed to be academically successful in reading and mathematics. For students that demonstrate difficulties during early reading instruction (kindergarten, grades 1 and 2), the SSI is the most common form of instructional help available. Districts are required to administer early reading instruments to all students in these grades to assess their reading development and comprehension. If, on the basis of the testing results, students are determined to be at risk for dyslexia or other reading difficulties, the district must notify the students' parents, and implement an accelerated (intensive) reading program that appropriately addresses the students' reading difficulties and enables them to "catch up" with their peers.

A district will typically evaluate for dyslexia through §504. However, if a student is suspected of having a disability within the scope of IDEA 2004, all special education procedures must be followed. **"Parents/guardians always have the right to request a referral for a dyslexia assessment through Section 504 or a special education evaluation at any time."** (pg. 14)

"When a referral for dyslexia assessment is made, districts should ensure that evaluation procedures are followed in a reasonable amount of time. Section 504 does not require specific timelines; therefore, it is beneficial for districts to consider the timelines Texas has established for the completion of initial special education evaluations through TEC §29.004(a). The Office of Civil Rights looks to state timelines as a guideline when defining the "reasonable amount of time" should a complaint be filed regarding the evaluation procedures." (pg. 15)

Procedures for Assessment of Dyslexia

"Since dyslexia is a neurological, language-based disability that persists over time and interferes with an individual's learning, it is critical that identification and intervention occur as early as possible." (pg. 11)

The basic steps to be followed are:

1. data gathering;
2. formal assessment - domains to assess – academic skills (Letter knowledge (name and associated sound); Reading real and nonsense words in isolation (decoding); Reading fluency (both rate & accuracy should be measured); Reading comprehension; Written spelling) and Cognitive processes that underlie the reading difficulties (rapid reading, and phonological/phonemic awareness);
3. English Language Learners;
4. Identification of students with Dyslexia - The §504 committee first determines whether the student has dyslexia. (The process for doing this is laid out in detail on pages 16-18.)

The identification of dyslexia is to be made by a committee knowledgeable about the: student being assessed, assessments used, and meaning of the collected data, and knowledge regarding: the reading process; dyslexia and related disorders; dyslexia instruction; and district, state, and federal guidelines for assessment. (pg. 21)

"The committee (§504 or ARD) must first determine if a student's difficulties in the areas of reading and spelling reflect a pattern of evidence for the primary characteristics of dyslexia with unexpectedly low performance for the student's age and educational level in some or all of the following areas: Reading words in isolation - Decoding unfamiliar words accurately and automatically - Reading fluency for connected text (both rate and/or accuracy) - Spelling (An isolated difficulty in spelling would not be sufficient to identify dyslexia.) (pg. 22)

"With the decision to assess for dyslexia in a young child (K-1), *it is important to note* that current standardized test instruments available to school districts are not particularly sensitive to the skill variations for these students. The identification will require data gathering that is not limited to standardized instruments and includes information from these early reading instruments and classroom performance patterns." (Question #14, pg. 64)

Parental consent for individualized assessment is necessary and notice of §504 due process rights must be provided to the parents at this time. (Question #22, pg. 65) An IQ test is not required for a 504 dyslexia evaluation.

An educational diagnostician or LSSP possess the underlying knowledge on how to administer & interpret formal assessments, but additional training may be needed to better understand the characteristics of dyslexia, to increase awareness of the domains to assess for dyslexia, & to identify the strengths & weaknesses typically exhibited when a student has dyslexia." (Question #57)



III. Instruction for Students with Dyslexia

Effective literacy instruction is essential for all students and is especially critical for students identified with dyslexia. High-quality core classroom reading instruction can give students identified with dyslexia a foundation upon which intervention instruction can have a more significant impact.

Instructional decisions for a student with dyslexia are made by a team that is knowledgeable about the student, the meaning of the evaluation information, and instructional components and approaches for students with dyslexia. "Based on the data, if the committee (§504 or ARD) determines that weaknesses are indicated in reading and spelling, the committee will determine the intervention plan. *Refinement of that plan will occur* as the student's response to instruction is observed." (pg. 23)

If a "student with dyslexia is found eligible for special education services in the area of reading, and the ARD team determines that the student's instructional needs for reading are most appropriately met in a special education placement, the student's individualized education program (IEP) must include appropriate reading instruction. The ARD committee must include members with the knowledge of dyslexia, dyslexia evaluation, and interventions required by ... the Handbook." (Question #56, pg. 76)

"Appropriate reading instruction must include the required components and delivery of dyslexia instruction. If a student has previously met special education eligibility, the ARD team should include goals that reflect the need for dyslexia instruction in the IEP and determine the least restrictive environment for delivering the student's dyslexia intervention." (pg. 23)

School districts must purchase or develop a reading program that incorporates **all** the components of instruction and instructional approaches listed in the *Handbook*. Content must be delivered consistent with research-based practices. Principles of effective intervention include **all** of the following: simultaneous, multisensory (VAKT); systematic and cumulative; explicit instruction; diagnostic teaching to automaticity; synthetic instruction & analytic instruction. (pg. 26) When scheduling specialized dyslexia intervention, districts should maintain recommended program intensity. (Question #40, pg. 72)

Identified students must have access to the required instructional program at their campus, and to the services of a teacher trained in dyslexia and related disorders. The district may, with the approval of a student's parents, offer additional services at a centralized location. Such centralized services cannot preclude a student from receiving services at their campus.

"(R)esponsibility for teaching reading and writing must be shared by classroom teachers, reading specialists, interventionists, and teachers of dyslexia programs." (pg. 26) "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." (pg. 29) Parents/guardians of students eligible under §504 must be informed of all services and options available to the student under that federal statute.

"Digital books or text-to-speech functions on computers and mobile devices provide access to general education curriculum for students with dyslexia." (pg. 37) "The research is definitive regarding technology and instruction for students with dyslexia. When students have access to effective technology, their overall educational performance improves." The *Technology Integration for Students with Dyslexia* online tool is a Texas resource developed to support instructional decisions regarding technology that benefits students with dyslexia." (This resource is at: www.region10.org/dyslexia/techplan) (pg. 39)

Professional Development Relative to Dyslexia for All Teachers

"Research consistently confirms the impact that a knowledgeable teacher can have on the success or failure of even the best reading programs." State laws require educators who teach students with dyslexia to be trained in new research and practices related to dyslexia as a part of their continuing professional education (CPE) hours. (pg. 39)

"Teachers who provide appropriate instruction for students with dyslexia must be trained and be prepared to implement instructional strategies that use individualized, intensive, multisensory, phonetic methods, and a variety of writing and spelling components." (Question #50, pg. 74)

"Districts shall provide a *parent education program for the parents/guardians of students with dyslexia and related disorders*. The program should include: awareness of characteristics of dyslexia and related disorders; information on assessment and diagnosis of dyslexia; information on effective strategies for teaching students with



dyslexia; awareness of information on classroom modifications and especially of modifications allowed on standardized testing." (19 TAC §74.28)

Enrollment in Gifted/Talented and Advanced Academic Programs

"A student who has been identified with dyslexia can also be a gifted learner, or a twice-exceptional learner." "Assessment and identification of twice-exceptional learners can be challenging" The disability can mask the giftedness, conversely, the giftedness may mask the disability. (pg. 38)

Flowchart of the process for identifying dyslexia and an appropriate instructional program. (Question #34, pg. 70)

"**At risk for dyslexia:** a term used to describe students who are not making adequate progress in the areas of reading and/or reading development, but who have not yet been identified as students with dyslexia. The students considered at risk are at the pre-identification level. These students must be provided accelerated reading instruction (intensive, research-based instruction that addresses the reading needs of the student)." (pg. 85)

"**Multisensory instruction:** instruction that incorporates the simultaneous use of two or more sensory pathways (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile) during teacher presentation and student practice." (pg. 88)

"**Progress monitoring:** a scientifically based practice used to assess students' academic progress and/or performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class. Progress monitoring is a quick (less than 5 minutes) assessment that is done frequently (weekly or biweekly) in order to make instructional changes in a timely fashion." (pg. 89)

Resources:

- Each ESC has a designated consultant to assist districts with implementing state rules and procedures regarding dyslexia. The handbook contains contact information for the designated consultants at each regional ESC.
- Understood.org is a resource for learning & attention issues: www.understood.org/en/about/search-results?q=dyslexia
- The Florida Center for Reading Research, www.fcrr.org



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