

**A PARENT'S GUIDE TO DYSLEXIA
AND THE
WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**



WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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1. What is 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.

As defined in the Texas Education Code:

- (1) *“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.
- (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.”

TEC §38.003 (d)(1)(2)
(1995)

The current definition from the International Dyslexia Association states:

“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.)

Students identified as having dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single-word reading (decoding), reading fluency, and spelling. Consequences of dyslexia 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. *“From a practical perspective this means that the weakness in reading is isolated and circumscribed, reflecting a local rather than generalized cerebral dysfunction. A child who is slow in all cognitive skills would **not** be eligible for consideration of dyslexia; a dyslexic child has to have some cognitive strengths, not only depressed reading functions.”* (*Overcoming Dyslexia*, Sally Shaywitz, M.D., 2003.) Additionally, there is often a **family history** of similar difficulties.

2. What is **NOT** dyslexia?

Dyslexia is **NOT**:

- It is not a sign of poor intelligence.
- It is not the result of laziness or not caring.
- It cannot be “cured with pills, diets, or medical treatment.”
- It is not an eye (visual) problem.
- It is not outgrown, although individuals with dyslexia can be taught *how* to learn.
- It is not writing letters and words backward. *“While it is true that children with dyslexia have difficulties attaching the appropriate labels or names for letters and words, there is no evidence that they actually see letters and words backward.”* (Overcoming Dyslexia, Sally Shaywitz, M.D., 2003.)

The good news is that with appropriate education, understanding, and time, many individuals with dyslexia learn to read and write and to develop their special abilities and talents. Many successful scientists, artists, athletes, and world leaders are people with dyslexia.

(Basic Facts About Dyslexia: What Every Lay Person Ought to Know. The Orton Emeritus Series, The International Dyslexia Association, Baltimore, MD. 2nd Edition, 1998.)

3. Who is considered an individual with dyslexia?

Research is ongoing and some results vary. The National Institutes of Health and other reputable agencies estimate that between 10% and 15% of the men, women, and children in this country may have dyslexia. Nancy Mather and Barbara Wendling report recent estimates suggest approximately 5% to 8% of the school age population have dyslexia. Some people may have severe problems, in several areas, such as reading, spelling, remembering, listening, and sequencing. Other people may have less severe or even mild difficulty in just one or two areas. Dyslexia occurs among all groups of the population, from young children to adults. Dyslexia is **NOT** related to race, age, or income.

(Basic Facts About Dyslexia: What Every Lay Person Ought to Know. The Orton Emeritus Series, The International Dyslexia Association, Baltimore, MD. 2nd Edition, 1998.)

(Mather, N., & Wendling, B.J. (2012). Essentials of Dyslexia Assessment and Intervention. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

4. What are the characteristics of dyslexia? (It is important to note that individuals demonstrate differences in degree of impairment.)

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)
- Difficulty spelling

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)

Consequences of dyslexia may include the following:

- Variable difficulty with aspects of reading comprehension
- Variable difficulty with aspects of written language
- Limited vocabulary growth due to reduced reading experiences

(The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders – 2018 Update. Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas. November 2018, pgs. 1 – 2.)

Common Risk Factors Associated with Dyslexia

If the following behaviors are unexpected for an individual's age, educational level, or cognitive abilities, they may be risk factors associated with dyslexia. A student with dyslexia usually exhibits several of these behaviors that persist over time and interfere with his/her learning. A family history of dyslexia may be present; in fact, recent studies reveal that the whole spectrum of reading disabilities is strongly determined by genetic predispositions (inherited aptitudes) (Olson, Keenan, Byrne, & Samuelsson, 2014).

Preschool:

- Delay in learning to talk
- Difficulty with rhyming
- Difficulty pronouncing words (e.g., "pusgetti" for "spaghetti", "mawn lower" for "lawn mower")
- Poor auditory memory for nursery rhymes and chants
- Difficulty in adding new vocabulary words
- Inability to recall the right word (word retrieval)
- Trouble learning and naming letters and numbers and remembering the letters in his/her name
- Aversion to print (e.g., doesn't enjoy following along if book is read aloud)

Kindergarten and First Grade:

- Difficulty breaking words into smaller parts (syllables) (e.g., "baseball" can be pulled apart into "base" "ball" or "napkin" can be pulled apart into "nap" "kin")
- Difficulty identifying and manipulating sounds in syllables (e.g., "man" sounded out as /m/ /ă/ /n/)
- Difficulty remembering the names of letters and recalling their corresponding sounds
- Difficulty decoding single words (reading single words in isolation)
- Difficulty spelling words the way they sound (phonetically) or remembering letter sequences in very common words seen often in print (e.g., "to," "said," "been")

Second Grade and Third Grade:

Many of the previously described behaviors remain problematic ***along with*** the following:

- Difficulty recognizing common sight words (e.g., "to," "said," "been")
- Difficulty decoding single words
- Difficulty recalling the correct sounds for letters and letter patterns in reading
- Difficulty connecting speech sounds with appropriate letter or letter combinations and omitting letters in words for spelling (e.g., "after" spelled "eftr")
- Difficulty reading fluently (e.g., slow, inaccurate, and/or without expression)
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words in sentences using knowledge of phonics
- Reliance on picture clues, story theme, or guessing at words

- Difficulty with written expression

Fourth Grade through Sixth Grade:

Many of the previously described behaviors remain problematic ***along with*** the following:

- Difficulty reading aloud (e.g., fear of reading aloud in front of classmates)
- Avoidance of reading (e.g., particularly for pleasure)
- Difficulty reading fluently (e.g., reading is slow, inaccurate, and/or without expression)
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words in sentences using knowledge of phonics
- Acquisition of less vocabulary due to reduced independent reading
- Use of less complicated words in writing that are easier to spell than more appropriate words (e.g., “big” instead of “enormous”)
- Reliance on listening rather than reading for comprehension

Middle School and High School:

Many of the previously described behaviors remain problematic ***along with*** the following:

- Difficulty with the volume of reading and written work
- Frustration with the amount of time required and energy expended for reading
- Difficulty reading fluently (e.g. reading is slow, inaccurate, and/or without expression)
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words in sentences using knowledge of phonics
- Difficulty with written assignments
- Tendency to avoid reading (particularly for pleasure)
- Difficulty with a foreign language

Postsecondary:

Some students will not be identified as having dyslexia prior to entering college. The early years of reading difficulties evolve into slow, labored reading fluency. Many students will experience extreme frustration and fatigue due to the increasing demands of reading as the result of dyslexia. In making a diagnosis for dyslexia, a student’s reading history, familial/genetic predisposition, and assessment history are critical.

Many of the previously described behaviors remain problematic ***along with*** the following:

- Difficulty pronouncing names of people and places or parts of words
- Difficulty remembering names of people and places
- Difficulty with word retrieval
- Difficulty with spoken vocabulary
- Difficulty completing the reading demands for multiple course requirements
- Difficulty with notetaking
- Difficulty with written production
- Difficulty remembering sequences (e.g., mathematical and/or scientific formulas)

(Fact Sheets - *Dyslexia Basics*, The International Dyslexia Association, May 2012, <https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/> (Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-based Program for Reading Problems at any Level, Sally Shaywitz, M.D., 2003.)

(*The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders – 2018 Update*. Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas. November 2018, pgs. 2 – 4.)

5. What causes dyslexia?

Dyslexia results from differences within the organization of the brain. Why these differences occur and what they mean for understanding dyslexia are questions yet to be answered. People with dyslexia are born with this condition, and it has a tendency to run in families. Most individuals with dyslexia have been found to have difficulty identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Some adults may not realize that their difficulties are due to dyslexia. Even students in colleges or graduate schools who are having difficulty may be dyslexic and have gone undiagnosed. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods and remediation, individuals with dyslexia can learn successfully.

(Frequently Asked Questions about Dyslexia, The International Dyslexia Association, 2018)

6. Who can make a referral for consideration of dyslexia?

Anyone can refer a child for evaluation and consideration of dyslexia. In addition, students who have not reached age-appropriate developmental milestones with the use of scientifically, research-based interventions and/or remediation, and who display characteristics of dyslexia should be referred for consideration of a dyslexia evaluation as outlined in the district's Section 504 evaluation process or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

While anyone can make a referral, such as parents or a doctor, OCR stated in a staff memorandum that *"the school district must also have reason to believe that the child is in need of services under Section 504 due to a disability."* (**OCR Memorandum, April 29, 1993; Frequently Asked Questions About Section 504 and the Education of Children with Disabilities, Question 30, OCR, Revised Sept. 2018; Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 – Student Evaluations and Placement Under Section 504, OCR, pg. 12, Dec. 2016.**) Therefore, a school district does not have to refer or evaluate a child under Section 504 for consideration of dyslexia solely upon parental demand. The key to a referral is whether the school district staff suspects that a child has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity (such as reading) and is in need of either regular education with supplementary services or special education and related services [**Letter to Mentink, 19 IDELR 1127 (OCR) 1993**]. A special education full and individual initial evaluation (FIIE) may occur if it is suspected that the dyslexia may create an educational need requiring specially designed instruction. In IDEA (special education), dyslexia is considered one of a variety of etiological foundations for specific learning disability (SLD). [**34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10)**].

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 believe the student may have a disability. If a disability is suspected, the student needs to be evaluated following the guidelines outlined in ***The Dyslexia Handbook – 2018 Update*** in Chapter 3.

The academic history of each student will provide the school with the cumulative data needed to ensure that underachievement in a student suspected of having dyslexia is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading. Additional information to be considered includes the results from some or all of the following: vision screening; hearing screening; teacher reports of classroom concerns; accommodations or interventions provided; academic progress reports (report cards); gifted/talented assessments (if given/applicable); samples of school work; parent conference notes; K-2 reading instrument results as required in TEC §28.006 (English and native language, if possible); K-1st grade dyslexia screening as required in TEC §38.003(a); 7th grade reading instrument results as required in TEC

§28.006; observations of instruction provided to the student; speech and language assessment (if applicable); outside evaluations (if available); school attendance, curriculum-based assessment measures; universal screening for all grade levels available; and state student assessment program results (grades 3 and above).

If a parent requests a referral for evaluation and consideration of dyslexia, and the school district refuses, the school district **must** provide the parent with the rationale for refusal and notice of their due process rights under Section 504 or the IDEA. **Progression through tiered intervention is NOT required in order to begin the identification of dyslexia.**

(The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders – 2018 Update. Texas Education Agency, November 2018.)

7. Is a student automatically “504” if he/she has been determined to be dyslexic?

NO. This applies to those students referred for a dyslexia evaluation as well as those students who may have received a diagnosis of dyslexia from a professional resource outside of the school district. To be a person with a disability (dyslexia) within the meaning of Section 504, the student’s dyslexia **must** affect the student’s education. Thus, a student with dyslexia may be considered to have a disability within the scope of §504 if the condition substantially limits the student’s learning and/or ability to read, write or spell.

In determining whether a student with characteristics of dyslexia is eligible within the meaning of Section 504, a variety of information **must** be considered. Information from parents, including professional evaluations and/or a diagnosis, will be carefully documented and considered by the Section 504 committee. It is important to understand that a single source of information, such as an outside professional evaluation or doctor’s diagnosis, does **not** mean that a student is automatically eligible for identification and placement into a dyslexia program and Section 504 eligibility. The decision concerning Section 504 eligibility and need for services must be determined by a “*duly constituted Section 504 committee*” in accordance with federal regulations and state law.

8. How does a district address the instructional needs of identified and eligible students with dyslexia?

Instructional decisions for a student with dyslexia must be made by a committee (§504 **or** ARD) that is knowledgeable about the instructional components and approaches for students with dyslexia. In accordance with 19 TAC §74.28(e) districts shall purchase or develop a reading program for students with dyslexia and related disorders that incorporates all the components of instruction and instructional approaches outlined in TEA’s *The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders – 2018 Update, Chapter 4*.

These programs are individualized, intensive, utilize multi-sensory teaching methods, contain writing and spelling components and meet the state required descriptors. In addition, the student will be provided appropriate instructional strategies including accommodations/interventions to be utilized throughout the school day. Instructional and accommodation decisions for students must be determined by the Section 504 Committee or the Special Education ARD Committee, and be designed to meet the student’s individual needs and provide the student with a free appropriate public education.

9. As a parent, what can I do at home to assist my child?

As a parent, it is important that you:

- Establish good study habits for the child. Consider a regular study schedule and a quiet study environment to address possible attention interference. Monitor nightly study to verify work is progressing or is completed.
- Consider establishing a system of reinforcers, either tangible or intangible, to encourage the child to be more successful in reading. Student can participate in these choices.
- Listen to your child's feelings.
- Encourage child to discuss and talk about his/her feelings.
- Reward effort and not just the "product" of school.
- Stress improvement and not just the grades.
- Encourage the child to succeed in other areas such as talents in athletics, the arts, mechanics, volunteer work, and community service.
- Help the child to set realistic goals.

(The Other Sixteen Hours: The Social and Emotional Problems of Dyslexia. The Orton Emeritus Series, The International Dyslexia Association, Baltimore, MD, 1997.)

10. What testing accommodations are available for students identified with dyslexia taking the state student assessment program – STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness)? Please check the TEA website for the most current information.

www.tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/accommodations/staar-telpas

Accommodations for students with disabilities provide students with effective and equitable access to grade-level or course curriculum and assessments. For the purposes of the statewide assessments, students needing accommodations due to a disability include:

- 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 met established eligibility criteria for certain 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, the decision to use a particular accommodation with a student should be made on an individual basis. An educator's ability to meet the individual needs of a student with dyslexia should not be limited by whether an accommodation is allowable on a state assessment. An educator should take into consideration both the needs of the student, and whether the student routinely receives the accommodation in classroom instruction and testing. If a student receives special education services or Section 504 services, all accommodations must be documented in the student's individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 individualized accommodation plan (IAP).

For specific accommodation descriptions, STAAR assessments, student eligibility criteria, and the committee that has the authority for decision-making and the required documentation, view the TEA Accommodation information at:

www.tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/accommodations/staar-telpas

Once on this link, “click” each specific accommodation being considered to access further detail.

11. Are testing accommodations available for the ACT or SAT?

YES. A student with a documented disability **may** be eligible for accommodations on College Board tests. A *Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Student Eligibility Form* must be submitted for each student requesting accommodations. If the student is requesting accommodations that require a nonstandard administration of the test, there is a specific process that schools must follow. Just because you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or §504 plan (IAP) does **not** automatically guarantee that you are eligible for accommodations.

A student needing accommodations on a College Board exam **must** first meet the basic eligibility requirements. The requirements include (but are not limited to):

- Does the student have a disability that makes it difficult to learn?
- Does the disability make it hard to take tests in the traditional manner?
- Does the student receive accommodations for the tests they currently take in school? (Extra time, a different version of the test, etc.)
- Is the student part of a resource room or special education class?
- Does the student have documents on file at the student’s school that show the student has a disability that requires test accommodations?

If the student answers “YES” to any of the above questions, they **may** be eligible for accommodations. Additionally, the documentation on file at the student’s school of secondary education needs to:

- State the specific disability, as diagnosed;
- Be current – in most cases, the evaluation should be completed within three years of the request for accommodations;
- Provide relevant educational, developmental, and medical history;
- Describe the comprehensive testing and techniques used to arrive at the diagnosis (including evaluation dates and test results with subtest scores from measures of cognitive ability, current academic achievement, and information processing);
- Describe the functional limitations supported by the test results;
- Describe the specific accommodations requested, and state why the student’s disability qualifies the student for such accommodations on standardized tests; **and**
- Establish the professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification and area of specialization.

Accommodations that may be available include (but are not limited to):

- Extended testing time;
- Enlarged print;
- Testing across more than one day;
- Alternative test formats; and
- Assistance marking their responses.

Accommodations requested may vary depending on the specific disability and documentation provided.

For information about testing accommodations for the SAT, go to: www.collegeboard.com.

For information about testing accommodations for the ACT, go to: www.actstudent.org.

12. Will the district test my child for dyslexia *after* graduation from high school?

NO. Although colleges frequently require students to provide a professional evaluation and assessment scores, a district is **NOT** required by any state regulation to provide this service. According to the Office of Civil Rights, neither the high school nor the postsecondary school is required to conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document a student's disability and need for accommodations.

(Appendix H: *Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities*. OCR 2011. *The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders – 2018 Update*, Texas Education Agency, November 2018, pg. 147.)

To learn more about dyslexia and service agencies, contact:

The International Dyslexia Association

40 York Road, 4th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21204
(410) 296-0232
<https://dyslexiaida.org>

**Learning Disabilities Association of Texas
(LDAT)**

P.O. Box 831392
Richardson, TX 75083-1392
www.ldatx.org

**For additional information regarding the
Waco Independent School District Dyslexia Program, contact:**

**Kourtni Parnell, District Dyslexia Director
District §504 Coordinator
(254) 799-0983**

**Betsy Gilchrist
District Special Education Director
(254) 755-9569**

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