

2018-19 Evaluation of the Dyslexia Program

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EA19-629-4

At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) provides specialized services and accommodations for students across the district showing symptoms of dyslexia. The stated mission of the district's Dyslexia Services program is "to assist students with dyslexia in the attainment of independent literacy skills by providing services and support to students, their parents and school personnel through identification, instruction, and community awareness."¹

According to research from the University of Michigan's Dyslexia Center, dyslexia is believed to be one of the most common language-based learning disabilities, and among those exhibiting reading difficulties, 70 to 80 percent are believed to have some form of dyslexia. Estimates place the percentage of people who have dyslexia between 5 and 10 percent – though, depending on the definition, this percentage can reach as high as 17 percent.²

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

(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" include similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperceptions, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.*³

In the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, the district began a concerted effort to improve and expand services and support for students exhibiting dyslexia symptoms. This included the hiring of a program director as well as more than 100 dyslexia interventionists. The district continues to use dyslexia evaluators to identify needs and prescribe appropriate accommodations and services for students with dyslexia.

Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation examined the characteristics of Dallas ISD Dyslexia Services, including the nature of the expanded services in recent years and the increased

human resources employed to identify and intervene for these students.

Specifically, this evaluation examined: program budget information; Dyslexia Services' components; the process for how students with dyslexia are identified; demographic characteristics of students receiving dyslexia services; and training and professional development related to dyslexia services provided to staff and to parents of identified students.

How were Dyslexia Services in Dallas ISD funded during 2018-19?

The budget for Dyslexia Services in 2018-19 came from the district's General Operating Funds and totaled \$1,284,326. Materials accounted for the largest expenditure at \$528,936 (41%). Professional development accounted for the second-largest funding allocation within the program (\$508,612 or 40%). This category included training and professional development for dyslexia evaluators and interventionists – including in the Wilson Reading Program and the Southern Methodist University (SMU) Learning Therapy Program. Other program spending categories included employee travel (\$58,628), general supplies (\$98,276), testing (\$84,396), and parent resources (\$5,478).

What were the components of Dallas ISD's Dyslexia Services program?

For the past several years, Dallas ISD Dyslexia Services has used structured literacy programs as well as video-based programming to support multisensory language teaching to students identified with dyslexia. The Wilson Reading System is a structured literacy program and is used with dyslexic students in grades two through 12 for 45 minutes a day, four days a week. The Wilson Reading System teaches reading, spelling, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The Esperanza Spanish Language Program provides daily, one-hour long structured literacy lessons in Spanish for elementary level students.⁴

The Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children Dyslexia Training Program is a video-based program used with students in grades two through five. It provides daily, one-hour long lessons covering the alphabet, reading,

¹ <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/52188>, retrieved 9/28/18.

² University of Michigan Dyslexia Help Center, <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/answers/faq>

³ http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter074/19_0074_0028-1.pdf, retrieved 01/28/19.

⁴ Ibid.

cursive handwriting, spelling, listening, and language history. The Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children Literacy Program is also used at the secondary level and likewise provides daily, one-hour long video-based lessons in categories comparable to the elementary program.

In addition, dyslexia interventionists work with classroom teachers, providing training in the Multisensory Teaching Approach (MTA), a teaching method specially designed for use with dyslexic learners. As described by Birsh (2019), “Multisensory teaching and learning is a form of direct instruction of the phonologic, morphemic, semantic and syntactic layers of language. Multisensory strategies...involve visual, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic sensory systems, and/or articulatory-motor components while linking listening, speaking, reading and writing; this means it directly involves students in seeing, hearing, saying and writing during instruction.” Additional detail on the role of dyslexia interventionists is provided in the following section.

What human resources were employed by the district to provide dyslexia services?

In 2017-18, the Dallas ISD hired a program director for Dyslexia Services⁵ as well as 22 dyslexia interventionists – certified teachers with specialized training in dyslexia. Interventionists work with students to provide multisensory instruction and continually assess the achievement level of identified students, as well as train teachers to provide curricula accommodations per the guidelines established in the identified student’s 504 Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Most dyslexia interventionists serve one or two campuses each. According to program records, as of January 2019, a total of 159 campuses in Dallas ISD (69%) were being served by a dyslexia interventionist either full- or half-time.

In addition to interventionists (N=117) and their supervisors (N=5), the district continues to use dyslexia evaluators (N=16) to identify needs and prescribe appropriate accommodations and services for students with dyslexia. Including three administrative assistants, the program has a total of 141 staff members.⁶

How are students in Dallas ISD identified to receive specialized dyslexia services?

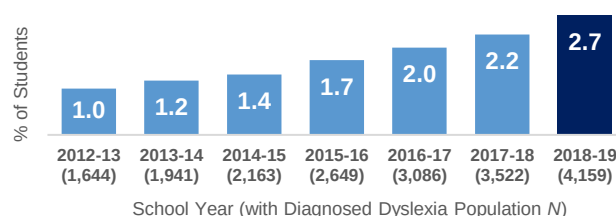
Research on dyslexia notes that the disorder can potentially be identified as soon as a child begins

learning to read, and the earlier a child is identified and intervention is provided, generally, the more promising the developmental trajectory.⁷ According to Dyslexia Services documentation, students in Dallas ISD can be referred for dyslexia assessment through a campus staff member or committee, or by parent referral. According to Texas House Bill (HB) 1886, students in grade one must be screened for reading difficulties such as dyslexia by mid-school year. The Dallas ISD currently uses *Istation’s Indicators of Progress (ISIP)* as the screener for dyslexia. Campuses are required to review dyslexia screening data along with course grades to determine whether dyslexia may be present.

If dyslexia is suspected, parent consent forms for assessment are obtained, and additional student data from a variety of sources are further reviewed, including standardized test scores, hearing and vision test data, attendance records, school work samples, home language survey data, and other outside evaluation findings as applicable. A formal dyslexia assessment is then conducted, professionally scored, and student support teams and parents meet to discuss findings, including whether the student meets the criteria for receiving specialized dyslexia services.

The number and percentage of Dallas ISD students identified as dyslexic has increased steadily each year over the past seven years (see Figure 1). In 2012-13, 1.0 percent of all students in Dallas ISD were identified in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) database as dyslexic (N=1,644); by 2018-19, that percentage had risen to 2.7 (N=4,159, Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentages and Counts of Dallas ISD Students Identified with Dyslexia, 2012-2019



Source: Public Education Information Management System district data file dated October 29, 2012 (2012-13), October 28, 2013 (2013-14), November 2, 2014 (2014-15), November 2, 2015 (2015-16), October 31, 2016 (2016-17), October 30, 2017 (2017-18), and November 2, 2018 (2018-19).

With the addition of more than 100 dyslexia interventionists and the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in 2018-19, which emphasizes universal screening, it is likely that the

⁵ Of note, in 2018-19, the Dallas International Dyslexia Association (IDA) chose the Dallas ISD’s Dyslexia Services program director to receive the 2019 Excellence in Education Award for her leadership in dyslexia services in Dallas ISD. See <https://thehub.dallasisd.org/2019/01/24/dyslexia-services-director-to-receive-excellence-in-education-award/> for more information.

⁶ Staff counts based on program documents provided January 2019.

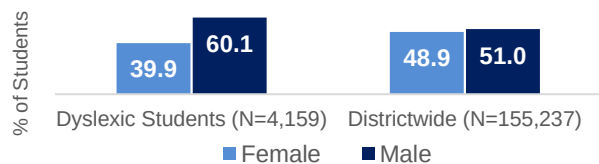
⁷ See <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353557> for more information.

percentage of district students identified with dyslexia will continue to rise over the next few years.

What were the demographic characteristics of students served by Dyslexia Services?

A total of 4,159 students were identified as dyslexic in 2018-19. Of these, males constituted 60.1 percent, 9.1 percentage points above the districtwide percentage of male students (51.0%). Conversely, the percentage of females identified as dyslexic in the district in 2018-19 was nine percentage points lower than the overall district percentage of females. A frequently-cited study by Shaywitz, et al (1990) found no significant difference in the prevalence of reading disorders among boys compared to girls, but that bias in the referral process in favor of boys is common, due in part to boys' greater tendency to engage in externalizing problem behavior ("rambunctiousness") compared to girls.

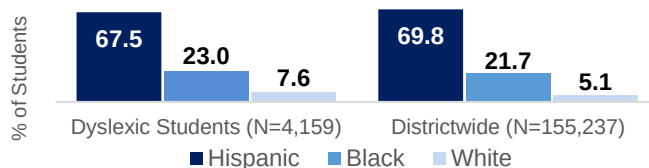
Figure 2: Dyslexic Students by Gender, 2018-19



Source: Public Education Information Management System district data file dated 10/26/2018
Note: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

Compared to districtwide percentages, the percentages of Black or African American students and white students were slightly higher among those identified as dyslexic, while the percentage of Hispanic or Latino students was slightly lower compared to the districtwide percentage (Figure 3).

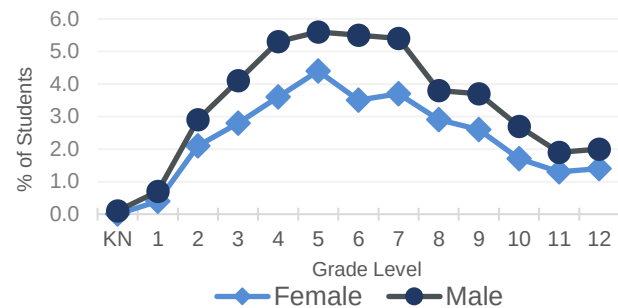
Figure 3: Dyslexic Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-19



Source: Public Education Information Management System district data file dated 10/26/2018.
Note: Figures for American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students were < 1.3 percent each among both the districtwide population and the dyslexic population.

The percentage of district students identified as dyslexic increased with each consecutive grade level in elementary school, beginning in kindergarten (Figure 4). Boys in grade five showed the highest percentage of students identified with dyslexia (5.6%) in 2018-19. Among female students, grade five girls likewise accounted for the highest percentage identified (4.4%, Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of Dallas ISD Students Identified as Dyslexic by Grade Level and Gender, 2018-19



Source: Public Education Information Management System district data file dated 10/26/18
Note: EC=Early Childhood, PK=Prekindergarten, KN=Kindergarten

Among dyslexic students, the percentage of English Learners (ELs) in 2018-19 was approximately 8.5 percentage points lower than the districtwide percentage of ELs (36.1% versus 44.7%, respectively, Figure 5). Students who were simultaneously enrolled in the district's special education program in 2018-19 accounted for 34.3 percent (N=1,425) of all identified dyslexic students.

Figure 5: English Learners (ELs) Identified as Dyslexic, 2018-19



Source: Public Education Information Management System district demographic data file dated 10/26/18.
Note: ELs = English Learners

What types of training related to dyslexia were provided to Dallas ISD staff and to families of identified students in 2018-19?

Dyslexia Interventionists offered professional development and other training sessions throughout both semesters of the 2018-19 school year on the campus(es) to which they were assigned. Interventionists provided training to both campus staff and to parents of identified students. Program records showed that these sessions were offered across 147 schools in the district in 2018-19.

Training for Campus Staff

Topics in sessions offered to campus staff during the fall semester included: the definition of dyslexia and its characteristics; State law and codes; considerations for English Learners; role of the interventionist, and additional resources for dyslexic students. Program records showed that the average attendance count for campus staff sessions in the fall was 34 (ranging from four to 67).

In the spring semester, session topics for campus staff included: review of the characteristics of dyslexia; decoding; fluency; spelling; interventions and accommodations for dyslexic students; and House Bill 1886. Program records showed that the average attendance count at spring sessions for campus staff was 29 (ranging from one to 65).

Training for Parents of Dyslexic Students

Topics in training sessions offered to parents during the fall semester included: the nature of dyslexia; role of the dyslexia interventionist; how to meet the needs of students with dyslexia; dyslexia programming (i.e., Wilson, MTA, Esperanza); Wilson demonstration lessons; and parent supports at home. Program records showed that an average of five individuals attended parent sessions in the fall (ranging from one to 34).

Topics in sessions offered to parents in the spring semester included: a review of the Wilson Reading System/Esperanza; how to maintain balance and organization over the summer; and reading resources – at home, through Dallas ISD Library Services, through the Dallas Public Library, and through Learning Ally. Program records showed the average attendance count at parent sessions in the spring was six (ranging from one to 32).

Training for Dyslexia Services Staff

Professional development opportunities were also provided to Dyslexia Services staff regularly throughout the 2018-19 school year. Attendance at these sessions was generally required and, thus, according to program records and email communications with program staff, included all meeting-relevant members from among the 141-person staff.

Topics in professional development sessions for Dyslexia Services staff included review of Dallas ISD policies relating to dyslexia, including review of the Dyslexia Handbook – a publication of the Texas Education Agency (recently updated in fall of 2018)⁸; the Wilson Reading Program; the district's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process and Root Cause Analysis; and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). In addition, program records showed that teams of interventionists and evaluators within the Dyslexia department met regularly throughout the year for further professional collaboration and mentoring.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the program included the following:

- **Work with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) office to craft communications to campuses emphasizing the importance of universal screening throughout the year.** While the percentage of students identified as dyslexic in Dallas ISD has increased each year since 2012-13, the current percentage (2.7%) of identified students is still lower than national statistics citing a prevalence of 5 percent to 10 percent, or higher, depending on the definition. While the goal is not to increase identification in order to reach a particular target percentage, the current percentage may suggest some under-identification yet.
- **Increase awareness among teachers, evaluators, and interventionists about possible biases that could potentially lead to more boys than girls being identified with dyslexia.** As noted previously in this report, research on reading disorders indicates that boys are not significantly more likely to struggle with reading disorders compared to girls (Shaywitz, et al, 1990), but that same research does indicate that boys are more likely to receive attention for academic struggles because of their greater tendency to engage in externalizing problem behavior compared to girls. This potential bias could be reflected in the lower percentage of girls compared to boys in the district who have thus far been identified as dyslexic (39.9% versus 60.1%, respectively).

References

- Birsh, J. (2006). What is multisensory structured language? *Perspectives, Fall*, 15–20.
- Shaywitz, S.E., Shaywitz, B.A., Fletcher, J.M., Escobar, M.D. (1990). Prevalence of Reading Disability in Boys and Girls: Results of the Connecticut Longitudinal Study. *JAMA*. 264 (8): 998–1002. doi:10.1001/jama.1990.03450080084036

An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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⁸ An online copy of the TEA's 2018 Dyslexia Handbook can be found via: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/dyslexia/>