

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) Dyslexia Services program, funded by a budget of \$1,419,019 (an increase from \$1,243,117 in 2019-20), provides campus-based services districtwide for students with dyslexia. The mission of the 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

Dyslexia is one of the most common language-based learning disabilities; 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;² depending on the definition, this percentage can reach as high as 17 percent.³

Dallas ISD Dyslexia Services has expanded notably over the past four years. In 2016-17, with 14 dyslexia evaluators serving districtwide, programming was primarily video based, and no dyslexia interventionists were employed. In 2020-21, 179 staff members comprised the Dallas ISD Dyslexia Services department, with 147 dyslexia interventionists serving one to three campuses each (189 campuses in total), and 27 dyslexia evaluators identifying students and prescribing accommodations.

This evaluation examined: 1) the program budget; 2) program components; 3) the identification process and available programming; 4) characteristics of district students with dyslexia; 5) efforts to identify dyslexia early; 6) characteristics of program staff members; 7) dyslexia-related professional development; 8) education and support provided to parents of students with dyslexia; 9) growth in literacy skills and trends in reading and writing achievement for students with dyslexia, and 10) perceptions of interventionists working in the context of the hybrid teaching and learning environment that the district instituted in 2020-21.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What were the components of the Dyslexia Services program?

Before 2017-18, video-based programming was the primary method of support for identified students until 2017-18,

when the district amplified efforts to expand and enhance services, including increased use of the following systems.

Wilson Reading System. The *Wilson Reading System* (*Wilson*), which focuses on reading, spelling, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, is currently the most widely used structured literacy program in the district for students with dyslexia. The *Wilson System* is an intensive literacy program provided by a highly-trained teacher – a dyslexia interventionist – to individual students or to small groups in kindergarten through grade eight for 45 minutes a day, four to five days a week. Dyslexia interventionists earn special certification to provide *Wilson Reading System* instruction and support to students. The *Wilson Reading System*.

Other Literacy Programs for Dyslexic Learners. The district also uses 1) the *Esperanza Spanish Language Program* (*Esperanza*) for Spanish literacy (elementary grades); 2) the Multisensory Teaching Approach (MTA).

Support for Teachers and Parents

Dyslexia interventionists also work with teachers, providing training in MTA, a teaching method specially designed for learners with dyslexia that directly involves students in seeing, hearing, saying, and writing during instruction (Birsh, 2019). Dyslexia interventionists lead trainings twice per year for campus staff members on dyslexia characteristics. They also provide regular support to parents of students with dyslexia through sessions on supporting continued student growth in the summer and on additional available community supports.

How are students with dyslexia in the Dallas ISD identified, and how many students received dyslexia programming and support?

Identification Process

Dyslexia potentially can be identified as soon as a child begins learning to read, and, generally, the sooner dyslexia is identified and intervention provided, the more promising the developmental trajectory.⁴ District students can be referred for assessment through a campus staff member or committee, or by a parent. According to Texas House Bill (HB) 1886, grade one students must be screened for reading difficulties like dyslexia by mid-school year. In 2019-20, campuses used the *Texas Kindergarten Entry*

¹ <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/52188>, retrieved 09/28/18.

² A January 2019 report by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) similarly noted that the prevalence of dyslexia in the United States “has not been determined definitively but [that] the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development estimates the rate at approximately 10%” (p. ix).

³ University of Michigan Dyslexia Help Center, <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/answers/faq>.

⁴ See <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353557> for more information.

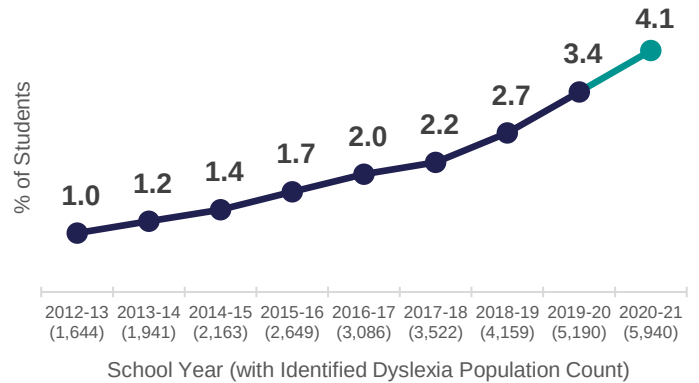
Assessment System (TX-KEA) for kindergarten students; *Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP)* in grade one; *Measures of Academic Progress Growth (MAP)* for grade two; and MAP, *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*, or *Common Assessments* for middle school students. Campuses review screening data and grades to assess whether dyslexia may be present.

When dyslexia is suspected and other interventions [like through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework]⁵ were provided but unsuccessful, parent consent for a dyslexia assessment is obtained, and a variety of additional student data are reviewed, as applicable. After a dyslexia evaluator assesses the student, student support teams and parents meet to determine if the student requires dyslexia services. If so, an Individual Accommodations Plan (IAP)⁶ is created for the student and interventions begin. If the student is identified with dyslexia and needing special education (SPED) services, dyslexia accommodations are integrated into the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Longitudinal Trends in Dyslexia Identification

The rate of district students identified with dyslexia increased from 1.0 percent in 2012-13 to 4.1 percent in 2019-20 (Figure 1). Increases will likely continue due to increased dyslexia staff and improved universal screening.

Figure 1: 2012-2020 Percentages and Number of Dallas ISD Students Identified with Dyslexia



Source: 2019-20 evaluation report (2012-13 through 2019-20; Mejan, 2020). Dallas ISD PEIMS demographic snapshot data file for 10/30/20 (2020-21).

Note: Counts and percentages reflect those of students enrolled on the PEIMS snapshot date (late October) of each year.

Program Placement

As in 2018-19 (78%) and 2019-20 (74%), most students needing Dyslexia Services received *Wilson Language* programming (81%, Table 1). *Esperanza* was the second-most-commonly used dyslexia program over the past three years.

⁵ See Springer and Kim (2020).

Table 1: 2018-19 to 2020-21 Program Placement of Dallas ISD Students with Dyslexia

Dyslexia Program	2018-19 (N=2,287)		2019-20 (N=1,112)		2020-21 (N=1,172)	
	N	%	n	%	N	%
Wilson Language	1,777	77.7	820	73.7	948	80.9
Esperanza	313	13.7	226	20.3	208	17.7
MTA/Alphabetic Phonics	139	6.1	21	1.9	16	1.4

Source: Dyslexia Services, November 2019 (2018-19 and 2019-20) and July 2021 (2020-21).

Note: N=number of students identified that year and receiving programming. Percentages may not add to 100.0 because a limited number of students were placed in Other dyslexia-related programs.

What were the characteristics of students served by Dyslexia Services?

In 2020-21, 5,940 district students were identified with dyslexia. Over half of these students were male (59%; 51% districtwide). The rate of 2020-21 English learners (ELs) with dyslexia (42%) was lower than EL students districtwide (46%). Also, 35 percent of students with dyslexia received SPED services, while districtwide, excluding students with dyslexia, SPED-enrolled students represented 8.6 percent. SPED program leadership attributed this difference to a continuum of severity in dyslexia symptoms and the possibility of concurrent disabilities.

What progress was made in 2020-21 to meet the Dyslexia Services early identification goal?

The goal of Dyslexia Services was to identify and effectively support students with dyslexia as early as possible.

Increases in Dyslexia Services Staffing

To meet the goal of early identification, the program increased the number of staff members who provide dyslexia services. Shortly before 2017-18, the district hired a Dyslexia Services program director. In 2017-18, the program added 22 dyslexia interventionists. In both 2019-20 and 2020-21, the program employed 147 dyslexia interventionists and 27 lead dyslexia evaluators. The Dyslexia Services program received in spring 2021 approval for funds to hire and place additional interventionists at most Dallas ISD high school campuses beginning in 2021-22.

Roles and Dispersion of Staff Members

Dyslexia interventionists, the largest group of Dyslexia Services staff members (N=147), are certified teachers with specialized dyslexia training. Interventionists work with identified students to provide supplemental multisensory instruction, most commonly through the *Wilson Reading System*, and continually assess their achievement levels. Further, interventionists train teachers to provide effective curricular accommodations for identified students, according to IAP or IEP guidelines. Interventionists served

⁶ IAPs are also called section 504 plans and provide accommodations for students not meeting the criteria for SPED but require accommodations to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

one or two campuses each, and 179 district campuses were assigned an interventionist either full- or half-time.

Dyslexia evaluators ($N=27$) identify needs and prescribe appropriate accommodations and services for students with dyslexia. Including the program director, coordinators, staff supervisors, and administrative assistant, 179 employees served the Dyslexia Services department as of spring 2021. Increased numbers of Dyslexia Services staff members and the type, intensity, and dispersion of services provided districtwide has likely contributed to increased and earlier identification of students with dyslexia.

What types of dyslexia-related training was provided to staff members in 2020-21?

Training for Dyslexia Services Central Staff Members

Attendance at regular professional development (PD) sessions was required of all program staff members. Topics covered for Dyslexia Services staff member PD in 2020-21 included the following: 1) Introduction to Section 504, 2) EdPlan overview, 3) Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL), 4) Behavioral training, 5) Tech Tools, 6) Virtual Learning, 7) Speed of Trust, and 8) *Wilson Reading* Program training. In addition, interventionists and evaluators met regularly for collaboration and mentoring.

Training for Campus Staff Members

Sessions provided to campus staff members in 2020-21 covered the following topics: 1) Definition of Dyslexia, 2) Characteristics of Dyslexia, 3) Referrals, 4) Accommodations, 5) Simulation, and 6) Resources.

What services and supports did Dyslexia Services offer to parents of students in 2020-21?

Sessions for parents in 2020-21 included 1) Definition of Dyslexia, 2) How to Help at Home, 3) Inspiring Leaders, 4) Foundations of Reading, 5) Accommodations, 6) Simulation, and 7) Resources.

How did students with dyslexia perform and grow in literacy skills and reading and writing achievement in 2020-21?

Wilson Word Identification and Spelling Test (WIST)

The average beginning-of-year (BOY) Fundamental Literacy Ability Index (FLAI) score across all grade (two through eight) levels was 66.8 (66.9 in 2018-19). By the end of year (EOY) assessment for 2020-21, the average FLAI score among these students was 74.7 (75.2 in 2018-19): an increase of 7.9 points (8.3 point increase in 2018-19).

STAAR

The percentage of students with dyslexia (who were not also flagged as receiving special education services) that tested at the Approaches+ and Meets+ achievement level dropped slightly in 2020-21 (43.2%) from 2018-19 (52.7%). There was a slight increase in the percentage of students

with dyslexia that scored at the Masters level, from 5.7 percent in 2018-19 to 5.9 percent in 2020-21. Progress measures showed some evidence of limited growth in reading performance from 2018-19 (41.0%) to 2020-21 (47.2%) for these students. Writing scores for students with dyslexia at Approaches+ decreased from 29.9 percent scoring in 2018-19 to 18.0 percent in 2020-21.

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

From BOY to EOY, students with dyslexia performed similarly to those not identified with dyslexia in grade one (41.7 and 42.5 average Conditional Growth Percentile, respectively). The greatest difference between these two student groups was seen in grade four, where the average Conditional Growth Percentile from BOY to EOY was 52.9 for students not identified with dyslexia and 43.7 for those identified with dyslexia.

What were the experiences of Dyslexia Services interventionists during the spring 2020 districtwide transition to at-home learning?

In spring 2021, with input from Dyslexia Services staff members, the evaluator design and administer a survey to solicit interventionists' feedback about their experiences teaching their distance-learners. The survey was sent to all interventionists on May 4, 2021 and closed on May 18, 2021. Of the 138 interventionists invited, 123 (89%) completed the survey.

Engagement with Students and Parents

Distance-learner engagement with dyslexia interventionists varied widely in 2020-21. While 61 percent of respondents (a 7-percentage point improvement from 2019-2020) reported that at least half of their distance-learners logged in each day, 14 percent indicated that only a quarter or fewer of these students did so, and 25 percent reported that 26 to 50 percent of students logged in daily.

The most common reasons that interventionists reported parents gave for their child not logging in each day were: no parental supervision (69%), poor internet connectivity (59%), parents forgot (32%), and lack of adequate technological resources (21%).

Overall, more than half (56%) reported that it was easy or very easy to communicate with their students' parents, and slightly less than half (49%) reported that communication with their distance learning students was easy (43%) or very easy (6%).

Interventionists' Perceptions About Adequacy of Services Provided to Distance-Learners

Most interventionists (78%) reported that they believed they were able to support their distance learners less adequately than they could on-campus learners. A small percentage of interventionists (5%) reported that they felt they could actually support their distance-learning students more

adequately than they could their in-person students, and 16 percent reported that the quality of service they felt they could provide was about the same for students in both learning arrangements.

Reasons interventionists gave for why they believed the quality of service they provided their students was lesser this year compared to last included: 1) distractions in students' homes ($n=37$); 2) students did not log in at all or did not log in on time ($n=18$); 3) the Wilson Program is not designed for distance learning; it is designed for face-to-face instruction ($n=16$); and 4) students had unreliable technology and/or students encountered technical difficulties that they were ill-equipped to handle such as microphone or camera issues ($n=15$).

Resources which interventionists identified as those they lacked and that would have helped them provide more effective services to distance learners included: 1) more teaching resources appropriate for distance learning ($n=11$ responses with this theme; 2) a large screen or projector for those teaching in-person and distance learners simultaneously ($n=11$); 3) ensure all students have appropriate working technology for distance learning ($n=10$); 4) a microphone for interventionists ($n=9$); and 5) parent support to keep distance learners on track and focused ($n=9$).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Review ways to improve online engagement in instruction to support students during possible future at-home learning. Sixty one percent of interventionists indicated that at least half of their distance-learners logged in each day, 14 percent reported that a quarter or fewer of these students did so, and 25 percent reported that 26 to 50 percent of their students logged in daily. While these rates showed some improvement from spring of 2020, the program should continue its efforts to mitigate barriers to student engagement.

Ensure adequate instructional and technological support for dyslexia interventionists. Resources which interventionists identified as those they lacked and which would have helped them provide more effective services to distance learners included: 1) more teaching resources designed for or otherwise more appropriate for distance learning ($n=11$ responses with this theme, 2) a large monitor or projector for those teaching in-person and distance learners simultaneously ($n=11$); and 3) a microphone for interventionists to speak in to when teaching in-person and distance learners simultaneously ($n=9$).

Review communication and technological hurdles with students and caregivers during at-home learning. Overall, only slightly more than half (56%) of interventionists reported that it was easy or very easy to communicate with parents of their students, and slightly less than half (49%) reported that communication with distance learning students was easy or very easy. The most common reasons that parents gave for their child not logging in each day were: 1) no parental supervision (69% reported this), 2) poor internet connectivity (59% reported this), parents forgot (32%), and lack of adequate technological resources (21%).

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