



*New Frontiers Charter School  
4018 South Presa  
San Antonio, Texas 78223  
210-533-3655  
Fax 210-533-5077*

## **New Frontiers Charter School Dyslexia Department Parent Education Program**

### **Definition of Dyslexia:**

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological 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 intervention. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

*Adopted by the IDA Board of Directors, Nov. 12, 2002. This Definition is also used by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).*

### **Breaking it down:**

**Specific learning disability** – research has indicated specific cognitive characteristics related to dyslexia.

**...that is neurological in origin** – dyslexia results from differences in how the brain processes information. Specifically, functional brain imaging has demonstrated a failure of the left hemisphere posterior brain systems to function properly during reading.

**That is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities** – unexpected in relation to the student's: oral language skills, the ability to learn in the absence of print, intellectual functioning, or strong math skills in comparison to reading skills

**...and the provision of effective classroom instruction** – if the child has been identified as at-risk for reading failure in kindergarten and first grade, have they been provided with effective instruction in order to develop proficient early reading skills? The lack of response to scientifically informed instruction is one factor that differentiates severe reading deficits from reading failure resulting from inadequate instruction. **Early intervention is critical**...students who receive appropriate instruction show changes in how their brain processes the information so that it resembles that of non disabled readers. Research has found that effective early interventions have the capability of reducing the expected incidence of reading failure from 18% of the school age population to 1 – 5%.

**Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge** – because students with reading difficulties typically do not read the same amount as non disabled readers, it may impact their vocabulary development as well as their exposure to information learned by reading.

[Source: *A Definition of Dyslexia* by G. Reid Lyon, Sally E. Shaywitz and Bennett A. Shaywitz; *Annals of Dyslexia*, Volume 53, 2003]

## **Primary Characteristics of Dyslexia:**

- Difficulty reading single words in isolation
- Phonological Awareness – being able to hear and manipulate individual sound s in words.
  - ❖ Making the connection between oral language and the letters/sounds that represent language in written form requires an awareness that all words can be decomposed into phonologic segments (i.e., the word bat can be broken down into three phonemes or individual sounds – b, a, and t). Research findings have been consistent in confirming that in young school-age children as well as in adolescents, *a deficit in phonology is the strongest and most specific finding related to dyslexia.*
- Difficulty accurately decoding unfamiliar words (real and nonwords)
  - ❖ Students with dyslexia will demonstrate difficulties identifying real words (word recognition) and pronouncing nonsense words (decoding); the student's ability to read fluently is also a major characteristic as well as

difficulty with spelling. This is in contrast to the popularly held belief that the major characteristic is the reversal of letters, words and numbers.

- Letter Knowledge (name and associated sound)
- Rapid naming
- Slow, inaccurate, and/or labored reading
- Fluency/rate and accuracy
- Reading Comprehension (understanding what they are reading)
- Difficulty with learning to spell

### **Dyslexia Facts:**

- The causes for dyslexia are neurobiological and genetic. Individuals inherit the genetic links for dyslexia. Chances are that one of the child's parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles is dyslexic.
- Studies show that individuals with dyslexia process information in a different area of the brain than do non-dyslexics.
- Many people who are dyslexic are of average to above average intelligence.
- It is never too late for individuals with dyslexia to learn to read, process and express information more efficiently. Research shows that programs utilizing multisensory structured language techniques can help children and adults learn to read.

**Dyslexia is not a disease but with proper identification, appropriate instruction, hard work and support from family, teachers, friends, and others, individuals who are dyslexic can succeed in school and later as working adults.**

**Dyslexia is one type of learning disability. Other related learning disabilities include...**

- **Dyscalculia** - a mathematical disability in which a person has unusual difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.
- **Dysgraphia** - a neurological-based writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

## **Prior to Assessment:**

### ***When is a student who is having problems in reading to be considered for placement in an instruction program for dyslexia and related disorders?***

If the student is not progressing in the general, remedial, and/or compensatory reading programs in school and other causes have been eliminated, the student should be recommended for assessment to determine if he or she has dyslexia or a related disorder.

### ***How long must students receive general, remedial, and/or compensatory reading instruction before being recommended for assessment for dyslexia?***

Students demonstrating difficulties with reading or related areas should be carefully monitored by staff during classroom remedial, and/or compensatory reading instruction and should experience ongoing progress monitoring. If the student does not make progress, then a recommendation for assessment for dyslexia should be made.

### ***At what grade level should a student be recommended for assessment for dyslexia?***

It is recommended that priority be given to Grades 1, 2, and 3 to focus on early intervention. However, when a student fails to make expected academic progress at any grade level, the needs of the student should be analyzed and evaluated. The sooner a student is identified and can receive the appropriate intervention/instruction, the better chance the student has to overcome their reading difficulties.

### ***If students do not make expected academic progress in Grade 1, should they be recommended for an assessment for dyslexia?***

They may, but not in all cases. It could be that the student has not had the breadth of enhanced language and literacy experiences required to progress at the same rate as his or her classmates. The student may require tutoring, accelerated (intensive) instruction, placement in smaller instructional groups, or counseling. If the student is not a native English speaker, the student's oral English may not be developed sufficiently and the child may require reading instruction in his/her native language, English as a second language, or bilingual classes. Teachers should consider the results of the early reading instruments that are required by TEC §28.006. Following accelerated (intensive) reading instruction or other steps to facilitate reading acquisition, students who do not make expected academic progress may require remedial, compensatory, or dyslexia services.

### ***Should all students be routinely reviewed for dyslexia?***

The reading progress of all students should be monitored and reviewed. A recommendation for assessment for dyslexia is made only for students who respond poorly to some or all of classroom reading instruction and exhibit some or all of the

characteristics of dyslexia. Additionally, the student's poor reading performance is unexpected for the student's age/grade.

***Must a student fail a class or subject before being recommended for assessment for dyslexia?***

**No.** When the student is not progressing and the teacher has exhausted alternative strategies for instruction in the regular classroom, the student should be considered for an alternative program (e.g., Title 1, compensatory education) or be recommended for assessment for dyslexia.

***May a parent recommend a student for assessment for dyslexia?***

Yes, a parent may request to have his/her child assessed for dyslexia or a related disorder. A parent may choose to have his/her child assessed by a private diagnostician or other source. To be valid, this assessment must comply with the requirements set forth in §504 and the guidelines in this handbook (see the section on tests, assessments, and other evaluations). The district or charter school must consider information provided by the parent when interpreting evaluation data and making placement decisions. However, the district or charter school determines whether the student is eligible for services for dyslexia and/or related disorders.

***Should parents be notified if a district or charter school plans to evaluate a student for dyslexia or a related disorder?***

Yes, notice of the recommendation to assess the student for dyslexia must be given to the parents prior to any individualized assessment. Parental consent for individualized assessment is necessary before assessment begins. In addition, notice of §504 due process rights must be provided to parents at this time.

**How does §504 affect the way school districts and charter schools implement the state dyslexia law and the State Board of Education rules and procedures?**

When students are singled out for individualized assessment, the procedures for assessing students for dyslexia must be carried out within the requirements of §504 including notification of parents; opportunity for parents to examine relevant records; use of valid measures; and evaluation and placement by a team of persons knowledgeable about the student, meaning of the evaluation data, and placement options. The steps taken to comply with §504 should be documented in writing. If a student is suspected of having a disability within the scope of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all special education procedures must be followed. IDEA procedures meet the requirements of §504.

***What is a reasonable time span between the recommendation for assessment and final determination of whether a student has dyslexia?***

Districts and charter schools establish the reasonable timeline within their written procedures for identifying and serving students with dyslexia. In determining a reasonable timeline, districts and charter schools are encouraged to remember that time is critical. The sooner students receive appropriate instruction, the sooner that student moves toward successful independent reading.

**Is there one test that can be used to determine that a student has dyslexia or a related disorder?**

There is no one test. Districts and charter schools should use multiple data sources including formal and informal measures that are appropriate for determining dyslexia and related disorders.

**Additional information to be considered includes results from the following:**

- Vision Screening
- Hearing Screening
- Teacher Reports of classroom concerns
- Accommodations and modifications provided by classroom teacher
- Academic progress reports (Report Cards)
- Samples of school work
- Parent Conferences
- Testing for limited English proficiency
- Speech and language screening through a referral process
- The K-2 reading instrument (TPRI)
- State student assessment program
- Poor performance in one or more areas of reading and/or the related areas of writing and spelling that is unexpected for the student's age/grade and;
- Some or all of the characteristics of dyslexia.

## **Who ultimately identifies the student as dyslexic and makes the placement decision?**

- The identification must be made by a school's committee of knowledgeable persons that should include two or more of the following individuals:
  - ❖ The superintendent, a principal, a counselor, a consultant, a reading specialist, a dyslexia specialist, a speech and language pathologist, an educational diagnostician, a special education teacher, and/or a teacher or other professional educator.
- The team must be knowledgeable about the student being assessed; reading; dyslexia and related disorders; dyslexia instruction; district or charter school, state, and federal guidelines for assessment; the assessments that were used; and the meaning of the collected data. In addition, it is suggested that the student's parent(s) be a part of this process.
- This answer does not necessarily apply to students covered by IDEA. If a student is covered by IDEA, the placement decision would be made by the student's ARD committee which might include members of the dyslexia committee.

## **The committee must consider what factors before placing a student into a dyslexia program?**

Identification must be determined based on the following:

- The student has not made academic progress.
- The student has adequate intelligence.
- The student has the characteristics of dyslexia or a related disorder.
- The student's reading difficulties and characteristics of dyslexia will be reflected or supported by low performance for the

student's age and educational level in some or all of the before mentioned areas.

## **Components Of Instruction:**

- **Phonemic Awareness** – instruction in this area enables students to detect, segment, blend, and manipulate sound in spoken language.
- **Phonics** – instruction that takes advantage of the letter-sound plan in which words that carry meaning are made of sounds and sounds are written with letters in the right order. Students with this understanding can blend sounds associated with letters into words and can separate words into component sounds for spelling and writing.
- **Language Structure:**
  - **Morphology** – study of meaningful units of language such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots.
  - **Semantics** – meaning of language such as vocabulary, analogies, figurative language, multiple meanings, etc.
  - **Syntax** – set of principles that dictate the sequence and function of words in a sentence in order to convey meaning. This includes grammar, sentence structure and variation, and the mechanics of language.
- **Pragmatics (social use of language)** – involves a set of rules that dictate communicative behavior in three main areas: reasons for which we communicate; different codes or styles of communication necessary in a particular context; and conversation or discourse.
- **Linguistic** - directed toward proficiency and fluency with the patterns of language.
- **Process Oriented Strategies** - Step-by-step in a precise sequence in order to develop a reliable set of procedures for decoding and encoding that lead to word recognition, fluency and comprehension.

## **Dyslexia Accommodations for TAKS Reading**

A series of studies were conducted in 2004 and 2006 to evaluate the effects of 3 accommodations on the performance of students with dyslexia on the TAKS reading tests. Both students with dyslexia and special education students who have a severe reading disability that causes them to have difficulty reading words in isolation were eligible to participate in these studies.

The 3 accommodations studied included:

- Orally reading all proper nouns associated with each selection before students began individual reading of all selections (to reduce decoding difficulties specifically associated with dyslexia),
- Orally reading all questions and answers choices to students (as many times as needed) and
- Extending the testing time over a two-day period (to counteract the effect of fatigue and loss of interest due to word decoding difficulties).

These 3 accommodations were “bundled”; that is, the purpose of the studies was not determine which accommodation was most effective but whether these accommodations as a group provided appropriate support for this population of students without creating an unfair advantage or invalidating the test.

Beginning in Spring 2007, districts may use these accommodations to administer TAKS reading tests both in English and Spanish at grades 3 through 6 and TAKS reading tests in English at grades 7 and 8.

To receive the accommodations, students in both elementary and middle school must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Students not receiving special education services must be identified with dyslexia.
- Student receiving special education services must either be identified with dyslexia or have a severe reading disability that exhibits the characteristics of dyslexia, causing them to lack word identification skills and to have difficulty reading words in isolation.
- Students must routinely receive accommodations in classroom instruction and testing that address the difficulties they have reading words in isolation.

Districts must use these accommodations as a “bundled” package; the test administrator must administer the reading test using all 3 accommodations. Students may test individually or in small groups.

**Sources:**

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