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## DYSLEXIA HANDBOOK 2021 UPDATES

Last week, the State Board of Education voted unanimously to approve updates to the Dyslexia Handbook. TSTA supports the changes as a first step in a positive paradigm shift in how Texas identifies and serves students with dyslexia and related disorders. The updates are related to screening, evaluation, and instruction and are an effort to better align state practice with federal law.

The changes center an attempt to clarify two pieces in particular: students suspected of having dyslexia or a related disorder should receive a full evaluation; and students identified as having a learning disability can receive special education services in addition to instruction from a trained and certified dyslexia therapist *whether or not that therapist is certified as a special educator*.

### Screening

Schools are required to conduct a universal dyslexia screening of students at the end of kindergarten and in first grade before January 31<sup>st</sup>. The handbook describes the screening criteria for this requirement, and updates include a reduction in the number of skills that must be included on the instrument.

Districts must adopt an instrument that tests student knowledge of letter names, sounds and phonological awareness in kindergarten and reading fluency and phonological awareness in first grade. The current approved instruments exceed these required subtests, so districts likely won't adopt anything new, but educators may be able to administer a shorter version of the test.

Educators should expect that these updates may require districts to make some changes to policy or practice. Additional guidance and information will be released.

### Evaluation

If it is suspected that a student has dyslexia or a related disorder, schools must seek parental consent for a Full Individual Initial Evaluation (FIIE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Using a single pathway for the identification of dyslexia and related disorders under IDEA ensures that districts fulfill their child find obligations.

Districts that are not already conducting an FIIE under IDEA must be prepared to implement this change. This may include training evaluation staff on identifying dyslexia and dysgraphia or support absorbing an increase in evaluations. Districts should also ensure strong collaboration between evaluation staff, special educators, and individuals with expertise in dyslexia and related disorders.

### Instruction

The Dyslexia Handbook states that while educators who provide dyslexia intervention for students are not required to hold a specific license or certificate, they must have additional documented dyslexia training that is

clearly defined in law. The most highly trained dyslexia interventionists are certified academic language therapists (CALTs). Some CALTs hold a special educator certification, but most do not.

There was some confusion in many districts regarding whether a dyslexic student could continue to receive specialized instruction from a CALT if they were also identified as needing special education services. In many instances, this misunderstanding has resulted either in a dyslexic student being removed from academic language therapy prematurely to receive other special education services OR forgoing additional needed services (and dollars) to continue with the most impactful reading instruction.

The updates in this section clarify that a provider of dyslexia instruction, such as a CALT, is not required to be certified as a special educator to serve a dyslexic student who is identified as in need of special education services.

## Additional Dyslexia Supports

Texas districts are experiencing a critical shortage in credentialed and highly trained dyslexia therapists. House Bill 1525 provided TEA with \$50 million to be used to reimburse staff to acquire credentialing around dyslexia intervention and remediation. These funds will be made available later this year.

As a part of the digital dyslexia intervention project, TEA is offering a completely digital dyslexia intervention platform through Amplio Learning. This platform provides the MTA curriculum in English and Esperanza in Spanish. TEA has partnered with Service Center Region IV to provide training free of charge.