

Comanche Independent School District

Dyslexia Handbook

Updated 2019

The Texas Dyslexia Handbook is the ultimate guide for dyslexia programs in the state, and it is quoted extensively in this Comanche Handbook. Therefore, for additional information, refer to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook 2018 found on the TEA website.

I. Definitions and Characteristics of Dyslexia

The student who struggles with reading and spelling often puzzles teachers and parents. The student displays 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.

Comanche ISD follows the Texas Dyslexia Handbook and the Texas Definition of Dyslexia with the guidance of the International Dyslexia Association's definition:

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 disorders similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperceptions, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.

TEC §38.003(d)(1)-(2) 1995

The International Dyslexia Association defines "dyslexia" in the following way:

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, reading fluency, and spelling. Consequences 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. Additionally, there is often a family history of similar difficulties.

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)
- Difficulty spelling

It is important to note that individuals demonstrate differences in degree of impairment.

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

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 and 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/ /a/ /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., "sed" for "said")

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)
- 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 with written assignments
- Difficulty learning a foreign language

Postsecondary

Some students will not be identified prior to entering college as having dyslexia. 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 may 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 note-taking
- Difficulty with written production
- Difficulty remembering sequences (e.g., mathematical and/or scientific formulas)

(Appendix H from the Texas Dyslexia Handbook is included for those preparing for post-secondary education.)

Since dyslexia is a neurobiological, language-based disability that persists over time and interferes with an individual's learning, it is critical that identification and intervention occur as early as possible. **However, a parent can request dyslexia testing at any time.**

II. Required Dyslexia Screening in Grades K and 1

Under TEC § 28.006, Texas has long required schools to give an early reading inventory to identify children in K-2 who may have difficulty with reading and to students in grade seven who did not demonstrate proficiency on the sixth grade state reading assessment. Now, however, TEC § 38.003 also requires public schools to screen all students in Kindergarten and first grade for dyslexia and related disorders. Additionally, the law requires that all students beyond first grade be screened or tested as appropriate. (For a full text of these laws, refer to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook.)

All Comanche first graders will be screened at mid-year. The screener used will be updated as the state releases more information for schools. Areas to be measured as set by the state include phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, letter knowledge, decoding skills, spelling, reading rate, reading accuracy,

and listening comprehension. After a knowledgeable team reviews results, parents will receive a letter indicating if their child is at risk or not for dyslexia and related disorders. If a child is considered at risk, with parent knowledge and participation, the team will plan targeted intervention or will request a full dyslexia evaluation for the student.

All Comanche Kindergarteners will be screened at the end of their Kindergarten year. Areas measured as set by the state will include phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, sound-symbol recognition, letter knowledge, decoding skills, spelling, and listening comprehension. Parents will be notified if their child is at risk or not for dyslexia. For those at risk, with parental knowledge and participation, targeted intervention or a full dyslexia evaluation will be planned for their first grade year.

Certified teachers (which could include the classroom teacher as well as dyslexia and intervention staff) will conduct the screening. Dyslexia screening is NOT a dyslexia evaluation. A student is not identified as dyslexic from a screening alone. The evaluation process is much more involved and requires parental consent.

III. Assessment and Identification

The identification and intervention process for dyslexia is multifaceted. These processes involve both state and federal requirements that must be followed.

Parents, as well as the school, can request an evaluation for dyslexia. Working together as a team, the parents and school personnel will determine the appropriate path the evaluation should take. A student can be tested for dyslexia under Section 504 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or they can be tested under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and special education. **The law that applies to an individual student is determined by data and the student's individual needs.** (For more information about these two laws, refer to the Side-by-Side Comparison in Appendix D of the Texas Dyslexia Handbook.) Also refer to Figure 3.8 in this handbook for a flow chart entitled Pathways for the Identification and Provision of Instruction for Students with Dyslexia.

Many Texas schools, including Comanche Elementary, use an approach called Response to Intervention. When used correctly, an Rtl team carefully monitors a student's progress and provides support and intervention as needed. However, progress through the tiers or levels of Rtl intervention is not required in order to begin the identification of dyslexia. An evaluation is appropriate when the data indicates that it is needed. When it comes to dyslexia, the earlier the intervention begins, the better the results should be for the student.

Through Rtl and dyslexia screenings, Comanche ISD begins monitoring its students in Kindergarten. If data show that students have poor decoding abilities due to phonological weaknesses, students may be placed in Comanche's Early Intervention program, an intervention developed for those who may have characteristics of dyslexia.

Whenever a student's performance in reading is unexpected for the student or if the student seems to have characteristics of dyslexia, a referral for a dyslexia evaluation should be made. **Parents/guardians always have the right to request a referral for a dyslexia assessment at any time.** Whether the evaluation takes place under IDEA or 504, Comanche ISD follows procedural guidelines and timelines set forth in the IDEA law and/or the Texas Dyslexia Handbook. Furthermore, parental involvement is critical to a quality assessment, and parents are asked to be a part of both ARD and 504 committees to review the completed evaluation and make decisions for their child's educational plan.

Procedures for Assessment

1. Data Gathering

A major part of a dyslexia evaluation is the gathering of data and an academic history on the student. This information includes data that demonstrates that the student was provided appropriate instruction and includes data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals (progress monitoring), reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction. This cumulative data also includes information from parents/guardians as well as from the student's permanent file. Information from previous teachers, and, when applicable, previous schools, is also included.

Some examples and sources of data include:

- Vision screening
- Hearing screening
- Teacher reports of classroom concerns
- Parental concerns and family history (parent survey)
- Classroom reading assessments
- Accommodations or interventions provided
- Academic progress reports (report cards)
- Gifted/talented assessments
- Samples of schoolwork
- Parent conference notes
- K-1 dyslexia screening
- K –2 reading instrument results as required in TEC §28.006 (English and native language, if possible)
- 7th-grade reading instrument results as required in TEC §28.006
- State student assessment program results as described in TEC §39.022
- Observations of instruction provided to the student
- Full Individual Evaluation (FIE)
- Outside evaluations
- Speech and language assessment
- School attendance

- Curriculum-based assessment measures
- Instructional strategies provided and student's response to the instruction
- Universal screening
- Behavioral record
- Any other relative information

Comanche ISD is also required to gather data about the student's early literacy experiences, environmental factors, and socioeconomic status to support the determination that difficulties in learning are not due to cultural factors or environmental or economic disadvantage. If the student is an English Learner, LPAC will be involved, and the dyslexia evaluation will include information from these possible sources:

- Home Language Survey
- Assessment related to identification for limited English proficiency (oral language proficiency test and norm-referenced tests—all years available)
- Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) information for four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)
- Instructional interventions provided to address language needs
- Information regarding previous schooling inside and/or outside the United States
- Type of language program model provided and language of instruction
- Any other relevant information

2. Formal Assessment

An individualized assessment, using both formal and informal measures, will follow data gathering. In compliance with Section 504 and IDEA 2004, Comanche ISD's test instruments and other evaluation materials must meet the following criteria:

- Be validated for the specific purpose for which the tests, assessments, and other evaluation materials are used
- Include material tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely materials that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient
- Be selected and administered so as to ensure that, when a test is given to a student with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the test results accurately reflect the student's aptitude, achievement level, or whatever other factor the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills
- Be selected and administered in a manner that is not racially or culturally discriminatory
- Include multiple measures of a student's reading abilities such as informal assessment information (e.g., anecdotal records, district universal screenings, progress monitoring data, criterion-referenced assessments, results of informal reading inventories, classroom observations)

- Be administered by trained personnel and in conformance with the instructions provided by the producer of the evaluation materials
- Be used for the purpose for which the assessment or measures are valid or reliable
- Be provided and administered in the student’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information regarding what the child can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to provide or administer

Additional considerations will be made for ELs in compliance with the Texas Dyslexia Handbook.

Each evaluation will be individualized based on the needs of individual Comanche students, and the table below may not include all areas assessed; however, possible areas to assess include:

Academic Skills	Cognitive Processes	Possible Additional Areas
Letter knowledge (name and associated sound)	Phonological/phonemic awareness	Vocabulary
Reading words in isolation	Rapid naming of symbols or objects	Listening comprehension
Decoding unfamiliar words accurately		Verbal expression
Reading fluency (rate, accuracy, and prosody are assessed)		Written expression
Reading comprehension		Handwriting
Spelling		Memory for letter or symbol sequences (orthographic processing)
		Mathematical calculation/reasoning
		Phonological memory
		Verbal working memory
		Processing speed

3. Procedures for Identification

The identification of dyslexia will be made by a §504 committee under Section 504 or, the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee under IDEA. In order to make

an informed determination, either committee will include members who are knowledgeable about the:

- Student being evaluated
- Evaluation instruments being used
- Meaning of the collected data.

For ELs, a member of the LPAC must be part of either the Section 504 or ARD committee.

Additionally, the committee members will have knowledge regarding:

- the reading process;
- dyslexia and related disorders;
- dyslexia instruction; and
- district or charter school, state, and federal guidelines for assessment.

The committee must first determine if a student's difficulties in the areas of reading and spelling reflect a pattern of evidence for the primary characteristics of dyslexia with unexpectedly low performance for the student's age and educational level in some or all of the following areas:

- Reading words in isolation
- Decoding unfamiliar words accurately and automatically
- Reading fluency for connected text (both rate and/or accuracy)
- Spelling (An isolated difficulty in spelling would not be sufficient to identify dyslexia.)

Evaluation data collected also may include information on reading comprehension, mathematics, and written expression as well as the student's linguistic background. An underlying weakness in phonological/phonemic awareness generally is the root of dyslexia; however, it may only appear in the student's history.

If the committee determines that the student exhibits weaknesses in reading and spelling, the committee will then examine the student's data to determine whether these difficulties are **unexpected** in relation to the student's other abilities, sociocultural factors, language difference, irregular attendance, or lack of appropriate and effective instruction. It is not one single indicator but a preponderance of data (both informal and formal) that provides the committee with evidence for whether these difficulties are unexpected.

In summary, the committee must consider these questions:

- Do the data show the following characteristics of dyslexia?
 - Difficulty with accurate and/or fluent word reading?
 - Poor spelling skills
 - Poor decoding ability
- Do these difficulties result from a deficit in the phonological component of language? (Be mindful that average phonological scores alone do not rule out dyslexia.)
- Are these difficulties **unexpected** for the student's age in relation to the student's other cognitive abilities and provision of effective classroom instruction?

Concerning 504, once a committee has identified a student as dyslexic, it must then use 504 parameters to determine eligibility under Section 504 law. If the committee determines that a student is eligible under 504, an educational plan is made for that student which may include intervention class as well as classroom and testing accommodations. Under IDEA, the ARD committee also creates an individualized, educational plan for students who qualify for Special Education.

4. Transfer students

When receiving students with dyslexia labels from other districts, Comanche ISD will make every attempt possible to obtain dyslexia testing and pertinent paperwork from the previous district(s). If the student has been served under Section 504, a 504/Dyslexia committee will study the paperwork provided and make plans for the incoming student. Parents and dyslexia students who are older will be encouraged to attend these meetings. Only when incoming paperwork is insufficient or questionable might Comanche ISD further evaluate, and if so, 504 procedures will be followed. IDEA law covers Special Education students who transfer from district to district.

5. Gifted and Talented students

Yes, GT students can be dyslexic. Due to the diversity of twice-exceptional students, the identification of twice-exceptional learners can be challenging. The Texas Dyslexia Handbook provides more in depth discussion than will be included here. However, it is important to note that **a student with a disability such as dyslexia or a related disorder may not be denied admission to an accelerated or advanced class or program solely because of the student's need for special education or related aids or services or because the student has an IEP or Section 504 Plan.**

Comanche ISD often has GT students in its dyslexia program who go on to master accelerated classes and advanced programs.

IV. Instruction for Students with Dyslexia

TEC 38.003(b) states, “In accordance with the program approved by the State Board of Education, the board of trustees of each school district shall provide for the treatment of any students determined to have dyslexia or a related disorder.”

www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/Ed.38.htm#38.003

Effective literacy instruction is essential for all students and is especially critical for students identified with dyslexia. Dyslexia instruction needs to be

- Evidence-based and effective for students with dyslexia
- Taught by an appropriately trained instructor
- Implemented with fidelity

After identifying a student with dyslexia, the committee then proceeds to draft an educational plan for that student based on evaluation data and the needs of the child. Pull-out dyslexia intervention may well be appropriate. Pull-out dyslexia instruction at Comanche ISD has eight critical components – phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllabication, orthography, morphology, syntax, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. It is delivered through multisensory instruction that is systematic and cumulative. Instruction is explicit, and the student is taught to automaticity. Synthesis and analysis of words are incorporated. Extra consideration is given to ELs who may also need instruction in language development.

Comanche ISD offers several different reading curriculums which can be used within the dyslexia program. Neuhaus Basic Language, a multi-sensory approach, is the program of choice; however, if students do not respond, other curriculums are tried. Students are carefully monitored to see which program is the best fit. Highly trained certified language practitioners or therapists and/or licensed dyslexia therapists deliver the instruction. Spelling and written expression are also taught within the dyslexia class, and careful communication and alignment with classroom teachers is critical to student success. Parents will receive regular reports from the interventionists on the progress of their CISD student.

Comanche ISD also offers technology education through its dyslexia classes. Use of audio books is highly recommended as is keyboarding and mastery of available software to aid reading, writing, and spelling.

Students proceed through pull-out dyslexia classes for intervention until

- Intervention is no longer needed due to academic success (Committee decision including parent and student),
- Parents request in writing that intervention be stopped, or
- Students have successfully completed their reading program and are ready to be dismissed from intervention.

From identification to graduation, each student who is served through Section 504 will have a committee meeting each year to visit the student's educational plan, monitor student progress, and make plans for the upcoming year. Parents and older students are greatly encouraged to be a part of these meetings. Accommodations are put in place as needed and monitored to determine effectiveness. Every three years, a new 504 evaluation is completed on each student, so paperwork stays current.

V. Dysgraphia

Texas state law requires districts and charter schools to identify students who have dyslexia and related disorders. Dysgraphia is one of those related disorders and is defined as difficulty with handwriting. It is a written language disorder in serial production of strokes to form a handwritten letter. This involves not only motor skills but also language skills – finding, retrieving, and producing letters, which is a subword-level language skill. The impaired handwriting may interfere with spelling and/or composing, but individuals with dysgraphia only do not have issues with reading.

While all dyslexics are technically dysgraphic, not all dysgraphic students are dyslexic.

The characteristics of dysgraphia include the following:

- Variably shaped and poorly formed letters
- Excessive erasures and cross-outs
- Poor spacing between letters and words
- Letter and number reversals beyond early stages of writing
- Awkward, inconsistent pencil grip
- Heavy pressure and hand fatigue
- Slow writing and copying with legible or illegible handwriting (Andrews & Lombardino, 2014)

Additional consequences of dysgraphia may also include

- Difficulty with unedited written spelling
- Low volume of written output as well as problems with other aspects of written expression

Dysgraphia is NOT:

- Evidence of a damaged motor nervous system
- Part of a developmental disability that has fine motor deficits (e.g., intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy)
- Secondary to a medical condition (e.g., meningitis, significant head trauma, brain trauma)
- Association with generalized developmental motor or coordination difficulties (Developmental Coordination Disorder)
- Impaired spelling or written expression with typical handwriting (legibility and rate) (Berninger, 2004)

Procedures for Evaluation

The process of identifying dysgraphia will follow one of two procedures. School districts may evaluate for dysgraphia through either IDEA or Section 504. If a student is suspected of having a disability within the scope of IDEA and a corresponding need for special education services is suspected, all special education procedures must be followed.

The same steps are followed for a dysgraphia evaluation as a dyslexia evaluation. Extensive data gathering is first. Then, the school working with the parent as a team makes a decision if the student is to be tested through IDEA or Section 504. If the student is already being served through IDEA, the dysgraphia evaluation must be through IDEA. The formal evaluation follows, and the Texas Dyslexia Handbook outlines the areas for evaluation and the procedures. Then, the appropriate committee (504 or IDEA) reviews and interprets the data. At Comanche ISD, parents are always invited to the 504 committee meetings as well as the ARD meetings. The committee must first determine if a student's difficulties in the areas of writing and spelling reflect a pattern of evidence for the primary characteristics of dysgraphia with unexpectedly low performance for the student's age and educational level in some or all of the following areas:

- Handwriting
- Writing fluency (accuracy and rate)
- Written Expression
- Spelling

If the committee determines that the student exhibits weaknesses in writing and spelling, it then must determine whether these difficulties are unexpected in relation to the student's other abilities, sociocultural factors, language differences, irregular attendance, or lack of appropriate and effective instruction. For example, the student may exhibit strengths in areas such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, oral verbal ability or math reasoning yet still have difficulty with writing and spelling. Therefore, it is not one single indicator, but a preponderance of informal

and formal data that provide the committee with evidence for whether these difficulties are unexpected.

In summary, the committee must decide

- Does the data show a pattern of low writing and spelling ability that is unexpected for the student in relation to the student's other cognitive abilities and provision of effective classroom instruction?
- Does the pattern indicate the student has dysgraphia?
- Does the student meet eligibility as a student with a disability under Section 504 or IDEA?

If a dysgraphia diagnosis is given, the committee must then decide what interventions and accommodations are needed to support the student. Then, a plan is developed for the student. As with dyslexic students, if the dysgraphic student is served through Section 504, a committee meeting will be held each year to review the student's previous year and make plans for the upcoming one. A new 504 evaluation will be conducted every three years to keep paperwork current.

Additional Sources of Dyslexia Support

Dyslexia Coordinator for Comanche ISD Jennifer C. Rucker, SSP 325-356-3900
Comanche ISD's website (www.comancheisd.net) under the Curriculum link.
The Texas Dyslexia Handbook, Revised 2018; For an electronic version visit
<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/dyslexia/>
Region 14, Abilene, Texas 325-675-86100
State Dyslexia Consultant 800-232-3030