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Dyslexia Defined

The Tennessee Department of Education has adopted the International Dyslexia Association's definition of dyslexia, which is as follows:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin and 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.

International Dyslexia Association (2002)
<https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/>

Dyslexia as an IEP Eligibility

If your child already has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is served under the eligibility of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in Basic Reading Skills or Reading Fluency, that meets the definition of dyslexia ("...is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities"). There is no separate eligibility for dyslexia because it is already encompassed in these SLD categories.

Your student has met the eligibility criteria and should be receiving dyslexia-specific reading intervention through Special Education services to address the area(s) of underachievement. If your child has an SLD eligibility for Reading Comprehension, that is not reflective of dyslexia, and your child will require intervention that addresses his/her areas of weakness specifically related to reading comprehension skills.

Dyslexia-specific Reading Intervention

Dyslexia-specific intervention is specialized instruction provided by a highly trained teacher. In accordance with Tennessee law (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-229), the teacher may use an instructional approach or a commercial program that includes these principles:

- evidence-based: there is valid evidence through research that children can make gains when using the program
- multisensory: links the senses together during instruction; for example, the student hears the word, sees the word, says the word, and writes the word
- direct instruction: all skills are explicitly explained by the teacher with an I do, we do, you do sequence of modeling
- systematic: start with the easiest and most basic elements then progress to more difficult concepts
- cumulative: each step builds on the one before it

This instruction should target your child's documented, specific area(s) of weakness in reading as determined by the IEP team's evaluation report, progress monitoring data, and other reading assessments conducted. Dyslexia-specific instruction targets the following skills:

- phonological awareness: the sounds of language, including phonemic awareness (for example, recognizing the three distinct sounds in the word *cat*)
- sound-symbol association: sounds matched to letters
- syllable structure: predictable patterns that support word decoding and spelling
- morphology: meaningful word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words
- syntax: sentence structure
- semantics: word and phrase meanings

Accommodations and Modifications

The characteristics of dyslexia vary in severity from child to child. Some students may require the most intensive intervention while others may experience less difficulty and require less support. Accommodations (changes to how a student learns the material) and modifications (changes to what the student is taught or expected to learn) should be based on your child's individual pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Discussions should focus on allowing full access to the teaching curriculum and full expression of your child's knowledge through accommodations. Modifications should be carefully considered to ensure that learning expectations are not reduced. Following are examples of accommodations that can support the needs of a student with characteristics of dyslexia:

- Audio books
- Text-to-speech technology
- Oral testing or prompting
- Extended time on assignments involving reading and writing
- Extended time on assessments
- Writing options: print, cursive, or word processing
- Grading assignments for content without penalizing for spelling errors
- Audio recorder for orally presented information
- Avoid having child read or spell aloud
- Use spelling words that assess specific features (ie., syllable types)
- Provide copies of teacher's or peer's notes
- Use of graphic organizers
- Pre-teach new, essential vocabulary words when introducing content

Evaluate your Child's IEP Supports

Use this information to guide an informal evaluation of your child's current school services. You are a full and equal member of the IEP team. You may choose to request an IEP team meeting to benefit from the insight your child's teachers and other team members will offer regarding your child's performance and services. Your evaluation can then be used to reinforce and/or modify your child's current school-based supports.

My child has an IEP with an eligibility that is consistent with dyslexia: **yes / no**
Specific Learning Disability in Basic Reading Skills or in Reading Fluency

My child's reading strengths and weaknesses have been assessed and are clearly stated in the IEP under Present Levels of Performance: **yes / no**
Dyslexia-specific screening includes phonological and phonemic awareness, sound-symbol association, alphabet knowledge, decoding, rapid naming (accurate and automatic retrieval of information), and spelling

My child's specific needs are identified as "exceptional" and are targeted with annual goals supported by individualized, skills-based instruction: **yes / no**
List specific skills and instruction used to address his/her identified needs

My child is receiving dyslexia-specific interventions: **yes / no**
List programs and materials used that match principles of dyslexia-specific instruction

My child is receiving special education and related services that support his/her needs: **yes / no**
List type(s) of service, name of trained provider, frequency, length, duration, and location of service(s)

My child has accommodations that support his/her access to and expression of learning: **yes / no**
List accommodations (and modifications, if needed) and how they support access to and expression of knowledge based on your child's strengths and weaknesses
