

West Rusk CCISD



District Dysgraphia Plan

Source: The Dyslexia Handbook, 2021 Updates 2021 and 2022

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Texas state law requires districts and charter schools to identify students who have dyslexia and related disorders. Texas Education Code §38.003 identifies the following examples of related disorders: developmental auditory imperception, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability. Recent research in the field of dysgraphia has prompted the addition of the following guidance regarding the evaluation, identification, and provision of services for students with dysgraphia.

The referral process for dysgraphia is the same as dyslexia. Students are referred for a full and individual evaluation under IDEA. This helps make sure that schools find any child that has a disability and needs special education services.

I. Definition and Characteristics of Dysgraphia

Texas Education Code §38.003 requires school districts to consider and evaluate for dyslexia and dysgraphia:

“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.

<http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm>

For purposes of identification and assessment, West Rusk CCISD will use the following definition of “dysgraphia”:

Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder that involves handwriting. It is a written language disorder in serial production of strokes to form a handwritten letter and involves not only motor skills but also language skills – finding, retrieving and producing letters, which is a sub-word level language skill. The impaired handwriting may interfere with spelling and/or composing, but individuals with only dysgraphia do not have difficulty with reading. (Berninger and Wolf, 2016)

Primary characteristics of dysgraphia include difficulty with:

- Handwriting legibility, automaticity, and fluency
 - Spelling (orthographic processing)
 - Fluency and/or quality of composition (putting thoughts on paper)
 - 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)

Associated Cognitive Processes include:

- Orthographic processing – affecting automaticity and spelling
- Graphomotor processing – affecting legibility, speed, and volume

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)

Dysgraphia can be due to:

- Impaired feedback the brain is receiving from the fingers
- Weaknesses using visual processing to coordinate hand movement and organize the use of space
- Problems with motor planning and sequencing
- Difficulty with storage and retrieval of letter forms (Levine, 1999)

Despite the widespread beliefs that handwriting is purely a motor skill or that only multisensory methods are needed to teach handwriting, multiple language processes are also involved in handwriting. Handwriting draws on language by hand (letter production), language by ear (listening to letter names when writing dictated letters), language by mouth (saying letter names), and language by eye (viewing the letters to be copied or reviewing for accuracy the letters that are produced from memory) (Berninger & Wolf, 2016).

II. Procedures for Evaluation and Identification of Students with Dysgraphia

Parents/guardians always have the right to request a referral for a dysgraphia assessment at any time.

Procedures for Identification

The process of identifying dysgraphia will follow Child Find procedures for conducting a full individual and initial evaluation (FIE) under the IDEA. These procedural processes require coordination among the teacher, campus administrators, diagnosticians, and other professionals as appropriate when factors such as a student's English language acquisition, previously identified disability, or other special needs are present. The first

step in the evaluation process, data gathering, should be an integral part of the district's or charter school's process for any student exhibiting learning difficulties.

Documentation of the following characteristics of dysgraphia could be collected during the data gathering phase:

- Slow or labored written work
- Poor formation of letters
- Improper letterslant
- Poor pencil grip
- Inadequate pressure during handwriting (too hard or too soft)
- Excessive erasures
- Poor spacing between words
- Poor spacing inside words
- Inability to recall accurate orthographic patterns for words
- "b" and "d" reversals beyond developmentally appropriate time
- Inability to copy words accurately
- Inability of student to read what was previously written
- Overuse of short familiar words such as "big"
- Avoidance of written tasks
- Difficulty with visual-motor integrated sports or activities

While schools must follow federal and state guidelines, they must also develop procedures that address the needs of their student populations. Schools shall recommend evaluation for dysgraphia if the student demonstrates the following:

- Impaired or illegible handwriting that is unexpected for the student's age/grade
- Impaired handwriting that interferes with spelling, written expression, or both that is unexpected for the student's age/grade

1.Data Gathering

Schools collect data on all students to ensure that instruction is appropriate and scientifically based. Essential components of comprehensive literacy instruction, including writing, are defined in Section 2221(b) of ESSA as explicit instruction in writing, including opportunities for children to write with clear purposes, with critical reasoning appropriate to the topic and purpose, and with specific instruction and feedback from instructional staff.

Any time from kindergarten through grade 12 a student continues to struggle with one or more components of writing, schools must collect additional information about the student. Schools should use previously collected as well as current information to evaluate the student's academic progress and determine what actions are needed to ensure the student's improved academic performance. The collection of various data, as indicated in Figure 5.1 below, will provide information regarding factors that may be contributing to or primarily to the student's struggles with handwriting, spelling, and written expression.

Cumulative Data

The academic history of each student will provide the school with the cumulative data needed to ensure that underachievement in a student suspected of having dysgraphia is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in handwriting, spelling, and written expression. This information should include data that demonstrate that the student was provided appropriate instruction and include data-based documentation of repeated evaluations of achievement at reasonable intervals (progress monitoring), reflecting formal evaluation of student progress during instruction. This cumulative data will also include information from parents/guardians. Sources and examples of cumulative data are provided in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Sources and Examples of Cumulative Data:

- Vision screening
- Teacher reports of classroom concerns
- Parent reports of concerns about handwriting, spelling, or written expression
- Classroom handwriting assessments and Classroom spelling assessments
- Samples of written work (e.g., journal, story responses, writing samples, etc.)
- Accommodations or interventions provided
- Academic progress reports (report cards)
- Gifted/talented assessments
- Samples of written schoolwork (both timed and untimed)
- State student assessment program results as described in TEC §39.022
- Observations of instruction provided to the student
- Full Individual and Initial Evaluation
- Outside evaluations
- Speech and language assessment
- School attendance
- Curriculum-based assessment measures
- Instructional strategies provided and student's response to the instruction
- Universal screening
- Parent survey

2. Formal Evaluation

After data gathering, the next step in the process is formal evaluation. This is not a screening; rather, it is an individualized evaluation used to gather evaluation data. Formal evaluation includes both formal and informal data. All data will be used to determine whether the student demonstrates a pattern of evidence for dysgraphia. Information collected from the parents/guardians also provides valuable insight into the student's early years of written language development. This history may help to explain why students come to the evaluation with many different strengths and weaknesses; therefore, findings from the formal evaluation will be different for each child. Professionals conducting evaluations for the identification of dysgraphia will need to look beyond scores on standardized assessments alone and examine the student's classroom writing performance, educational history, and early language experiences to assist with determining handwriting, spelling,

and written expression abilities and difficulties.

Notification and Permission

When formal evaluation is recommended, the school completes the evaluation process as outlined in IDEA. Procedural safeguards under the IDEA must be followed. For more information on procedural safeguards, see Appendix D, IDEA/Section 504 Side-by-Side Comparison, and TEA's Parent Guide to the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Process (Parent's Guide) and Notice of Procedural Safeguards.

Tests and Other Evaluation Materials

Test instruments and other evaluation materials must meet the following criteria:

- Be used for the purpose for which the evaluation or measures are valid or reliable
- 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 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 writing abilities such as informal assessment information (e.g., anecdotal records, district universal screenings, progress monitoring data, criterion-referenced evaluations, samples of written work, classroom observations)
- Be administered by trained personnel and in conformance with the instructions provided by the producer of the evaluation materials
- 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

Language Proficiency

Much diversity exists among English Learners (ELs). The identification and service delivery process for dysgraphia must be in step with the student's linguistic environment and educational background. In West Rusk CCISD, the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) will be involved in the decision making process. Additional considerations for English Learners are provided in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Additional data to be gathered when assessing English Learners include:

- 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
- Information regarding the written system of the first language

Domains to Assess

West Rusk CCISD administers measures that are related to the student’s educational needs. The student’s age and stage of writing development must be considered when establishing an assessment plan. Areas for assessment are provided in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Areas for Assessment		
Academic Skills	Cognitive Processes	Possible Additional Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter formation • Handwriting • Word/sentence dictation (timed and untimed) • copying of text • Spelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Written Expression ★ Writing fluency (both accuracy and fluency) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory for letter or symbol sequences (orthographic processing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness • Phonological memory • working memory • Letter retrieval and letter matching

Procedures for Identification

To make an informed determination the ARD committee must include members who are knowledgeable about the following:

- Student being assessed
- Evaluation instruments being used
- Interpretation of the data being collected

Additionally, the committee members should have knowledge regarding

- the handwriting process;
- dysgraphia and related disorders;
- dysgraphia instruction, and;
- district or charter school, state, and federal guidelines for evaluation.

Review and Interpretation of Data and Assessments

To appropriately **understand** evaluation data, the ARD committee of knowledgeable persons must **interpret** test results in light of the student's educational history, linguistic background, environmental or socioeconomic factors, and any other pertinent factors that affect learning.

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

Based on the above information and guidelines, should the committee determine that the student exhibits weaknesses in writing 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. For example, the student may exhibit strengths in areas such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, math reasoning, or verbal ability yet still have difficulty with writing and spelling. Therefore, it is **not** one single indicator but a preponderance of data (both informal and formal) that provide the committee with evidence for whether these difficulties are **unexpected**.

Dysgraphia Identification

If the student's difficulties are unexpected in relation to other abilities, the ARD committee must then determine if the student has dysgraphia. The list of questions in Figure 5.3 below must be considered when making a determination regarding dysgraphia.

See figure 5.3 for questions to be considered when making a determination.

Figure 5.3. Questions to Be Considered When Making a Determination

- Do the data show the following characteristics and consequences of dysgraphia?
 - Illegible and/or inefficient handwriting with variably shaped and poorly formed letters
 - Difficulty with unedited written spelling
 - Low volume of written output as well as problems with other aspects of written expression
- Do these difficulties (typically) result from a deficit in graphomotor function (hand movements used for writing) and/or storing and retrieving orthographic codes (letter forms)?
- Are these difficulties unexpected for the student's age in relation to the student's other abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction?
- Does the data show a pattern of low spelling skills & handwriting difficulties that is **unexpected** for the student in relation to the student's other cognitive abilities and
 - Does this pattern indicate the student has dysgraphia? Provision of effective classroom instruction?

Once dysgraphia has been identified, a determination must be made regarding the most appropriate way to serve the student.

The ARD committee will determine whether the student who has dysgraphia is eligible under IDEA as a student with a specific learning disability. The student is eligible for services under IDEA if he/she has dysgraphia and, because of the dysgraphia needs special education services. The October 23, 2015 letter from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) (Dear Colleague: Dyslexia Guidance) states that dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia are conditions that could qualify a child as a 67 child with a specific learning disability under IDEA. The letter further states that there is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents. For more information, please visit:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcitrs/guidance-on-dyslexia-10-2015.pdf>.

If the student with dysgraphia is found eligible for special education, the student's IEP must include appropriate writing instruction, which might include instruction from a related service provider. If the student is identified with dysgraphia but is not considered a student with a disability under the IDEA (because the student does not need specially designed instruction), then the student may receive appropriate accommodations and services under Section 504. Students are protected under Section 504 if the physical or mental impairment (dysgraphia) substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as the specific activity of writing. Additionally, the Section 504 committee, in determining whether a student has a disability that substantially limits the student in a major life activity (writing), must not consider the ameliorating effects of any mitigating measures that student is using.

Revision of the Section 504 Plan will occur as the student's response to instruction and to the use of accommodations, if any, is observed. Changes in instruction and/or accommodations must be supported by current data (e.g., classroom performance and dyslexia program monitoring)

Students Presenting Outside Independent Evaluation for Dysgraphia

For students who present outside independent evaluations addressing dysgraphia, the following questions should be considered.

- Was the evaluation conducted by an individual who is knowledgeable about the characteristics of dysgraphia?
- Is the evaluation considered valid?
- Is the evaluation comparable to the evaluation standards that West Rusk CCISD would conduct?

Students Identified Outside the District

Students identified as having dysgraphia from an outside source will be evaluated for eligibility in the West Rusk CCISD program. West Rusk CCISD may choose to accept the outside assessment or may reassess the student. In either situation, a duly constituted ARD committee will determine the identification status of a student enrolled in West Rusk CCISD.

III. Instruction for Students with Dysgraphia

Once it has been determined that a student has dysgraphia, West Rusk CCISD shall provide an appropriate instructional program for the student. The following procedures will be followed:

- The 504 or ARD committee will make instructional decisions for a student with dysgraphia
- West Rusk CCISD shall purchase a writing program or develop their own writing program for students with dysgraphia.
- Parents/guardians of students eligible under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 504, will be informed of all services and options available to the student under that federal statute.
- Parents/guardians of students eligible under IDEA 2004 will be informed of all services and options available to the student under that federal law.

The instructional program will be offered in a small class setting and include fine motor skills, handwriting and spelling as appropriate.

Please refer to the [2021 Dyslexia Handbook Pages 67-73](#) for more information on the delivery of instruction and interventions for students with dysgraphia.

Integration of Reading and Writing

In addition, other areas of language processing skills, such as written expression, requires Integration of skills is often a struggle for students with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Moats and Dakin (2008) posit the following:

The ability to compose and transcribe conventional English with accuracy, fluency, and clarity of expression is known as basic writing skills. Writing is dependent on many language skills and processes and is often even more problematic for children than reading. Writing is a language discipline with many component skills that must be directly taught. Because writing demands using different skills at the same time, such as generating language, spelling, handwriting, and using capitalization and punctuation, it puts a significant demand on working memory and attention. Thus, a student may demonstrate mastery of these individual skills, but when asked to integrate them all at once, mastery of an individual skill, such as handwriting, often deteriorates. To write on demand, a student must have mastered, to the point of being automatic, each skill involved (p. 55).

Teachers of dyslexia and/or dysgraphia and the regular classroom teacher should provide multiple opportunities to support intervention and to strengthen these skills; therefore, responsibility for teaching reading and writing must be shared by classroom teachers, reading specialists, interventionists, and teachers of dyslexia and dysgraphia programs.

Program Exit Criteria

The dysgraphia instructional program exit criteria are based on a thorough consideration of a preponderance of student data. The committee (§504 or ARD) will make the decision to exit a student from the district's dysgraphia instructional program if such evidence is available to support the decision. The data may include:

- Completion and/or mastery of all the objectives in the district's dysgraphia instructional program
- Data that shows consistent improvement in a student's handwriting abilities.
- Lack of progress due to factors such as behavior and/or absenteeism that prevent the student from benefiting from the district's dysgraphia instructional program. **This lack of progress must be documented in either the student's 504 committee minutes or ARD committee minutes along with documentation indicating district remediation.**

District Contacts

Position	Name	Phone #/email
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Dyslexia/Dysgraphia Teacher	Tamara Elliott	903-392-7850 ext. 5105 elliottt@westruskisd.org
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