

Thorndale ISD Dysgraphia Handbook

300 North Main Street
Thorndale, TX 76577



2018-2019

Table of Contents

- I. Definition of Dysgraphia
- II. Assessment for Dysgraphia
- III. Referral Process
- IV. English Language Learners
- V. Special Education Students
- VI. Students with Outside Evaluations for Dysgraphia
- VII. Students Identified Outside the District
- VIII. Programming
- IX. Program Exit Criteria
- X. District Contacts

Thorndale Independent School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability or genetic information in employment or provision of services, programs or activities.

Definition 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 development dyslexia, **developmental dysgraphia**, and developmental spelling disability.

<http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm#38.003>

For purposes of identification and assessment, TISD will use the following definition of “dysgraphia” in the following way:

“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.”

Primary Characteristics of Dyslexia

Primary characteristics of dyslexia include difficulty with:

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

Associated Cognitive Processes include:

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

Assessment for Dysgraphia

The identification of dysgraphia is made by a §504 committee or, in the case of a special education referral, the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee. In order to make an informed determination, either committee must include members who are knowledgeable about the

- student being assessed,
- assessments used, and
- meaning of the collected data.

Additionally, the committee members should have knowledge regarding

- the writing and spelling processes;
- dysgraphia and related disorders;
- dysgraphia instruction; and
- district or charter school, state, and federal guidelines for assessment

Review and Interpretation of Data and Assessments

To appropriately **understand** evaluation data, the committee of knowledgeable persons (§504 or ARD) 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 (§504 or ARD) 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 legibility and/or fluency
- Orthographic processing
- Compositional fluency and/or quality

Review and Interpretation of Data and Assessments continued

Based on the above information and guidelines, should the committee (§504 or ARD) 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 different, 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**.

If the student's difficulties are unexpected, in relation to other abilities, the committee (§504 or ARD) must then determine if the student has dysgraphia. If the student has dysgraphia, the committee also determines whether the student has a disability under §504. A student is disabled under §504 if the physical or mental impairment (dysgraphia) substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as the specific activity of writing and/or spelling (34 C.F.R. §104.3(j)(1)). Additionally, the §504 committee, in determining whether a student has a disability that substantially limits the student in a major life activity (writing and/or spelling), must not consider the ameliorating effects of any mitigating measures that student

is using. If the §504 committee does not identify dysgraphia, but the student has another condition or disability that substantially limits the student, eligibility for §504 services related to the student's other condition or disability should be considered. The §504 committee will also consider whether the student is eligible for accommodations. This is a separate determination from the determination that the student has dysgraphia.

See figure 2.5 for a list of questions to be considered when making a determination.

Figure 2.5. Questions to Be Considered When Making a Determination

- 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 provision of effective classroom instruction?
- Does this pattern indicate the student has dysgraphia?
- Does the student have a disability under §504?

Making a Determination continued

Based on the data, if the committee (§504 or ARD) determines that weaknesses are indicated in writing and spelling, the committee, based on the student's pattern of performance over time, test profile, and response to instruction, will determine the intervention plan. Refinement of that plan will occur as the student's response to instruction is observed.

Review of Data by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee - When Is It Appropriate?

At any time during the assessment for dysgraphia, identification process, or instruction related to dysgraphia, students might be referred for evaluation for special education services. At times, students will display additional factors complicating their dysgraphia and will require more support than what is available through general education. In such cases, a referral to special education for evaluation and possible identification as a child with a disability within the meaning of IDEA 2004 (20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.) should be made.

Referral Process

Notification and Permission

When formal assessment is recommended, the school completes the evaluation process as outlined in §504 or IDEA 2004.

Through the §504 process, the school completes the evaluation as outlined using the following procedures:

1. Notify parents/guardians of the proposal to assess student for dysgraphia (§504).
2. Inform parents/guardians of their rights under §504.
3. Obtain permission from parents/guardians to assess the student for dyslexia.
4. Assess student, being sure that individuals/professionals who administer assessments have training in the evaluation of students for dysgraphia and related disorders (19 TAC §74.28).

Referral Process continued

Once assessment for dysgraphia is recommended, the procedures for Section 504 must be followed:

1. Begin gathering data for the committee decision.
 - a. School Records – history of writing difficulties, vision and hearing, medical history, other assessments, any other difficulties besides handwriting
2. Collect samples of the student's written work.
 - a. Worksheets or answers to question in a textbook
 - b. Spelling tests and Journal writing
 - c. Short classroom assignments (3-4 paragraphs)
 - d. Reports or essays (more than one page)
 - e. Examples of note-taking & homework assignments
3. Obtain information from the student's parents and teachers. Areas to assess:
 - a. Legibility of handwriting – letter formation, size and proportion, spacing, slant, alignment, line quality, repetitive figures
4. Obtain information from the student about their handwriting (continued).
 - a. Automaticity (rate), keyboarding abilities
 - b. Orthographic processing
 - c. Spelling

Tests, assessments and other evaluation materials will:

- Be validated for the specific purpose for which they 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 or 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 of 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.

Domains To Assess - Thorndale ISD administers measures that are related to the student's educational needs. Depending upon the student's age and stage of writing development, the following are the areas related to writing that should be assessed:

- Academic Skills – letter knowledge, writing words in isolation and in context, writing fluency (both speed and accuracy), spelling
- Possible Additional Areas – vocabulary, listening comprehension, written expression, handwriting, orthographic processing, verbal working memory, processing speed

English Language Learners

Much diversity exists among English Language Learners (ELLs). The identification and service delivery process for dysgraphia must be in step with the student's linguistic environment and educational background. In Thorndale ISD, the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee, (LPAC) will be involved in the decision making process.

Additional data to be gathered when assessing English Language 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

Students Presenting Outside Independent Evaluation for

Dysgraphia

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

The outside evaluation (assessment) should:

- Have been administered by an individual who is knowledgeable about the characteristics of dysgraphia;
- Be considered valid and comparable to the evaluation standards that Thorndale ISD would conduct.

Student Identified Outside the District

Students identified as having dysgraphia from an outside source will be evaluated for eligibility in the Thorndale ISD program. Thorndale ISD may choose to accept the outside assessment, or may re-assess the student. In either situation, a duly constituted campus §504 committee will determine the identification status of a student enrolled in Thorndale ISD.

Programming

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

- The §504 committee will make instructional decisions for a student with dysgraphia.
- TISD 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.
- The instructional program will be offered in a small class setting and include handwriting and spelling as appropriate.

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 gathered shows consistent progression of improvement in student's handwriting abilities.
- Lack of progress due to factors such as behavior and/or absenteeism prevent the student from benefitting from the District's dysgraphia instructional program. **This lack of progress must be documented in either the student's §504 committee minutes or ARD minutes along with documentation indication District remediation.**