

Sweetwater ISD District Dysgraphia Plan



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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 development 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, Sweetwater ISD 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)

Associated Cognitive Processes include:

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

II. Procedures for the Assessment and Identification of Students with Dysgraphia

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

Once a parent request for dysgraphia assessment has been made, the school district is obligated to review the student’s data history (both formal and informal data) to determine whether there is reason to believe the student has a disability. If a disability is suspected, the student needs to be evaluated following the guidelines outlined in this section. If the school does not suspect a disability and determines that evaluation would not be warranted, the parents/guardians must be given a copy of their due process rights. While §504 is silent on prior written notice, best practice is to provide a parent the reasons an evaluation is denied. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) recommends that districts provide documentation that the denial was based on data to support there is no disability.

When a referral for dysgraphia assessment is made, districts should ensure that evaluation procedures are followed in a reasonable amount of time. Section 504 does not require specific timelines; therefore, it is beneficial for districts to consider the timelines Texas has established for the completion of initial special education evaluations through TEC §29.004(a). The OCR looks to state timelines as a guideline when defining the “reasonable amount of time” should a complaint be filed regarding the evaluation procedures.

Procedures for Assessment

The identification of writing disabilities, including dysgraphia, will follow one of two procedures. A district will typically evaluate for dysgraphia through §504. On the other hand, if a student is suspected of having a disability within the scope of IDEA 2004, all special education procedures must be followed. 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 assessment process, data gathering, should be an integral part of the district’s or charter school’s process for any student exhibiting learning difficulties.

1.Data Gathering

Cumulative Data

The academic history of each student will provide the school with the cumulative data needed to ensure that the writing difficulties in a student suspected of having dysgraphia are not due to lack of appropriate instruction in handwriting/written expression. This information should include data that demonstrates that the student was provided appropriate instruction and include 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. Sources and examples of cumulative data are provided in Figure 2.1.

Vision screening	Samples of written work:
Hearing screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheets or answers to questions in workbook
Medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelling tests
Teacher reports of classroom concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal writing
Accommodations provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short written assignments (3-4 paragraphs)
Interventions provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports or essays (more than 1 page)
History of writing difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note-taking assignments
Other difficulties besides handwriting	Speech and language assessment
Statewide writing assessment (4 th /7 th)	Parent information

2. Formal Assessment

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 written permission from parents/guardians to assess the student for dysgraphia.
4. Assess student, insuring that individuals/professionals who administer assessments have training in the evaluation of students suspected of having dysgraphia.

Note: The §504 process is used most frequently unless a referral to special education is indicated. See paragraph below.

Referral to Special Education

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 that may complicate the identification of dysgraphia and may 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.

If the student is being assessed as part of a special education evaluation or is already served in special education and a dysgraphia evaluation is requested, IDEA 2004 procedures must be followed. Information regarding special education procedures may be found on The Legal Framework for the Child-Centered Special Education Process website at <https://framework.esc18.net>. The notices and consents must be provided in the native language of parents/guardians or other mode of communication used by parents/guardians unless it is clearly not feasible to do so (§504, §74.28(d)). Additional information regarding special education is located in the section titled 'Review of Data by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee-When Is It Appropriate?'

Tests and Other Evaluation Materials

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 written abilities such as informal assessment information (e.g. anecdotal records, district universal screenings, progress monitoring data, criterion-referenced assessments, results of informal handwriting assessment, 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 measures are valid and 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.

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 Sweetwater ISD, 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:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Sweetwater ISD 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 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Areas for Assessment		
Academic Skills	Cognitive Processes	Possible Additional Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter knowledge • Writing words in isolation and in context • Writing fluency (both speed and accuracy) • Written expression (getting thoughts on paper) • Spelling 	Orthographic processing Graphomotor processing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • body posture • handedness • pencil grip • legibility of handwriting • letter formation • size and proportion • spacing • slant • alignment • line quality • organization on the page • erasures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary • Listening comprehension • Verbal working memory • Keyboarding skills, if appropriate

It is rare for a child to have ONLY dysgraphia, without any reading deficits. Therefore, data regarding the student’s reading skills (word identification, decoding, fluency, and comprehension) should be included in the assessment process.

Procedures for Identification

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 characteristics;

- dysgraphia assessment;
- 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

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 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 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 has a disability 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 the 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 questions to be considered when making a determination.

Figure 2.5. Questions to Be Considered When Making a Determination
• Do 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?
• Does the student have a disability under IDEA 2004?

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, the identification process, or instruction related to dysgraphia, students may 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 the general education dysgraphia program. At other times, students with severe dysgraphia will be unable to make a sufficient rate of academic progress within any of the programs described in the procedures related to dysgraphia. 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.

If the student with dysgraphia is found eligible for special education services in the area of written expression, and the ARD committee determines that the student’s instructional needs for writing and spelling are most appropriately met in a special education placement, the student’s individualized education program (IEP) must include appropriate writing and spelling instruction. Appropriate writing and spelling instruction includes the components and delivery of dysgraphia instruction listed in *Section III: Instruction for Students with Dysgraphia*. If a student has previously met special education eligibility, the ARD committee should include goals that reflect the need for dysgraphia instruction in the IEP and determine the least restrictive environment for delivering the student’s dysgraphia intervention.

In IDEA 2004, §1401(30), dysgraphia is considered one of a variety of etiological foundations for “specific learning disability (SLD).” Section 34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10) states the following:

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological

processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

<http://framework.esc18.any/Webforms/ESC18-FW-Citation.aspx?ID=2137>

See also the October 23, 2015 letter from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services related to IDEA and the “use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia to describe and address the child’s unique identified needs through evaluation, eligibility, and IEP documents”.

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

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 Sweetwater ISD would conduct?

Students Identified Outside the District

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

III. Instruction for Students with Dysgraphia

Once it has been determined that a student has dysgraphia, Sweetwater ISD 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.
- Sweetwater ISD 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 handwriting and spelling as appropriate.

Integration of Reading and Writing

In addition, other areas of language processing skills, such as written expression, which require

integration of skills, are 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 has to 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 student’s handwriting abilities.
- Lack of progress due to factors such as behavior and/or absenteeism that 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 committee minutes along with documentation indicating district remediation.**

District Contacts

Position	Name	Phone #/email
District superintendent	Dr. George McFarland	325-235-8601 george.mcfarland@sweetwaterisd.net
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