

By: Senator(s) England

To: Education

SENATE BILL NO. 2809

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-173-1, 37-173-9 AND 37-173-21,
 2 MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO EXPAND THE DYSLEXIA THERAPY
 3 SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA PROGRAM BY MAKING CERTIFIED
 4 ACADEMIC LANGUAGE THERAPISTS (CALT) ELIGIBLE TO BE EMPLOYED BY
 5 SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PROVIDE DYSLEXIA THERAPY SERVICES; TO AMEND
 6 SECTION 37-106-71, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, IN CONFORMITY TO THE
 7 PRECEDING PROVISIONS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

9 **SECTION 1.** Section 37-173-1, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
 10 amended as follows:

11 37-173-1. As used in this chapter, the following words and
 12 phrases shall have the meanings ascribed in this section unless
 13 the context clearly indicates otherwise:

14 (a) "Board" means the State Board of Education.

15 (b) "Department" means the State Department of
 16 Education.

17 (c) "Dyslexia" means a specific learning disability
 18 that is neurological in origin, characterized by difficulties with
 19 accurate and fluent word recognition and poor spelling and
 20 decoding abilities, which typically result from a deficit in the



21 phonological component of language that is often unexpected in
22 relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of
23 effective classroom instruction, and secondary consequences which
24 may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading
25 experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background
26 knowledge.

27 (d) "Dyslexia therapy" means an appropriate specialized
28 dyslexia instructional program that is delivered by a Mississippi
29 Department of Education licensed dyslexia therapist or certified
30 academic language therapist, which is scientific, research-based,
31 Orton-Gillingham based, and is offered in a small group setting to
32 teach students the components of reading instruction which
33 include:

34 (i) Phonemic awareness to enable students to
35 detect, segment, blend and manipulate sounds in spoken language;

36 (ii) Graphophonemic knowledge (phonics) for
37 teaching the letter-sound plan of English;

38 (iii) The entire structure of the English language
39 that encompasses morphology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics;

40 (iv) Linguistic instruction directed toward
41 proficiency and fluency with the patterns of language so that
42 words and sentences are carriers of meaning; and

43 (v) Strategies that students use for decoding,
44 encoding, word recognition, fluency and comprehension.



45 These components shall be taught using instructional
46 approaches that include explicit, direct instruction which is
47 systematic, sequential and cumulative, following a logical plan of
48 presenting the alphabetic principle commensurate with the
49 students' needs, with no assumption of prior skills or language
50 knowledge; individualized to meet the specific learning needs of
51 each individual student in a small group setting; intensive,
52 highly concentrated instruction that maximizes student engagement
53 and uses specialized methods and materials; meaning-based
54 instruction directed toward purposeful reading and writing, with
55 an emphasis on comprehension and composition; and multisensory
56 instruction that incorporates the simultaneous use of two (2) or
57 more sensory pathways during teacher presentations and student
58 practice.

59 (e) "Dyslexia therapist" means a professional who has
60 completed training in a department approved Orton-Gillingham based
61 dyslexia therapy training program attaining a AA license in
62 dyslexia therapy or a professional participating in a state
63 approved dyslexia therapy training program to attain a AA license
64 in dyslexia therapy.

65 (f) "Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for
66 Students with Dyslexia Program" means a scholarship to provide the
67 option to attend a public school other than the one to which
68 assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of
69 choice, for students in Grade 1 through Grade 12 diagnosed with



70 dyslexia in order to receive comprehensive multisensory dyslexia
71 therapy delivered by holders of an appropriate license in dyslexia
72 therapy issued by the department.

73 (g) "School" means any public or state accredited
74 nonpublic special purpose school that provides a specific learning
75 environment that provides comprehensive dyslexia therapy
76 instruction delivered by dyslexia therapists licensed by the
77 department providing highly qualified education and intervention
78 services to children diagnosed with the primary learning
79 disability of dyslexia.

80 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-173-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
81 amended as follows:

82 37-173-9. (1) (a) The parent or legal guardian is not
83 required to accept the offer of enrolling in another public school
84 in lieu of requesting a Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship
85 to a nonpublic school. However, if the parent or legal guardian
86 chooses the public school option, the student may continue
87 attending a public school chosen by the parent or legal guardian
88 until the student completes Grade 12.

89 (b) If the parent or legal guardian chooses a public
90 school within the district, the school district shall provide
91 transportation to the public school selected by the parent or
92 legal guardian. However, if the parent or legal guardian chooses
93 a public school in another district, the parent or legal guardian
94 is responsible to provide transportation to the school of choice.



95 These provisions do not prohibit a parent or legal guardian
96 of a student diagnosed with dyslexia, at any time, from choosing
97 the option of a Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship which
98 would allow the student to attend another public school or
99 nonpublic special purpose school.

100 (2) If the parent or legal guardian chooses the nonpublic
101 school option and the student is accepted by the nonpublic school
102 pending the availability of a space for the student, the parent or
103 legal guardian of the student must notify the department thirty
104 (30) days before the first scholarship payment and before entering
105 the nonpublic school in order to be eligible for the scholarship
106 when a space becomes available for the student in the nonpublic
107 school.

108 (3) The parent or legal guardian of a student may choose, as
109 an alternative, to enroll the student in and transport the student
110 to a public school in an adjacent school district which has
111 available space and has a program with dyslexia services that
112 provide daily dyslexia therapy sessions delivered by a department
113 licensed dyslexia therapist or certified academic language
114 therapist, and that school district shall accept the student and
115 report the student for purposes of the district's funding under
116 the Mississippi Adequate Education Program.

117 **SECTION 3.** Section 37-173-21, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
118 amended as follows:



119 37-173-21. (1) The State Board of Education in conjunction
120 with each nonpublic school and local school board operating under
121 the provisions of this chapter, may:

122 (a) Extend the school day or length of the scholastic
123 year;

124 (b) Develop and establish a curriculum that is
125 consistent with the Mississippi Curriculum Framework in the
126 subject areas of mathematics, social studies, science, music, art
127 and physical education; and

128 (c) Select, purchase and use textbooks, literature and
129 other instructional materials that would improve educational
130 attainment by students in the school, subject to the approval of
131 the board.

132 (2) The qualified personnel to facilitate the educational
133 process of learning and instruction for children with dyslexia who
134 attend the schools shall consist of the following:

135 (a) An administrator or director with additional
136 training in the characteristics of dyslexia;

137 (b) A dyslexia therapist licensed by the department in
138 dyslexia therapy;

139 (c) Dyslexia therapists in training participating in a
140 department approved dyslexia therapy graduate internship program;
141 and



142 (d) Licensed elementary teachers under the supervision
143 of a state department licensed dyslexia therapist or certified
144 academic language therapist.

145 **SECTION 4.** Section 37-106-71, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
146 amended as follows:

147 37-106-71. (1) There is established the Mississippi
148 Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan Program for the purpose of
149 identifying and recruiting qualified university and college
150 students from the state for schooling in education with a focus on
151 dyslexia therapy.

152 (2) The receipt of a forgivable loan under the program shall
153 be solely limited to those students who are enrolled in or who
154 have been accepted for enrollment into a master's degree program
155 of study for dyslexia therapy at any public or private institution
156 of higher learning within the State of Mississippi at the time an
157 application for a forgivable loan is filed with the board.

158 (3) The annual amount of the forgivable loan award shall be
159 equal to the total cost for tuition, materials and fees at the
160 college or university in which the student is enrolled. Awards
161 made to nonresidents of the state shall not include any amount
162 assessed by the college or university for out-of-state tuition.

163 (4) Upon completion of the master's program and licensure
164 requirements, a forgivable loan recipient who has not been
165 previously licensed by the State Department of Education shall
166 render service in an instructional or clinical capacity as a



167 licensed dyslexia therapist in a public school district in the
168 state or an eligible nonpublic school as defined by Section
169 37-173-1 and meets the criteria established in Section 37-173-17,
170 not to exceed five (5) recipients rendering instructional or
171 clinical services in a nonpublic school at any time.

172 (5) Repayment and conversion terms shall be the same as
173 those outlined in Section 37-106-53.

174 (6) The board shall prepare and submit a report to the
175 Legislature by January 1, 2015, and annually thereafter, outlining
176 in detail the number of participants who have received forgivable
177 loans under the program, the record of service provided by those
178 recipients as they transition out of the degree program into the
179 public school districts of this state, and the projection for
180 expanding the program to include more participants annually as
181 determined by the need for such qualified professionals in the
182 public school setting. Additionally, the report shall include a
183 summary of allocations and expenditures for the administration of
184 the program and the total amount of funds issued to recipients of
185 forgivable loans from the inception of the program until such time
186 as the report has been prepared and submitted to the Legislature.

187 (7) The Mississippi Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan
188 Program shall be administered in the same manner as the Critical
189 Needs Teacher Forgivable Loan Program established under Section
190 37-106-55 and shall be incorporated into the Critical Needs
191 Teacher Forgivable Loan Program for all purposes.



192 (8) Funding for the establishment and continued operation of
193 the Mississippi Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan Program shall
194 be administered by the board through a special fund established
195 within the Critical Needs Teacher Forgivable Loan Program. The
196 board may accept and receive monetary gifts and donations from any
197 source, public or private, which such funds shall be deposited in
198 the special fund for the benefit of the Mississippi Dyslexia
199 Education Forgivable Loan Program with the Critical Needs Teacher
200 Forgivable Loan Program.

201 (9) No more than twenty (20) students per cohort shall be
202 selected annually to be admitted into the program for receipt of
203 forgivable loans beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year.
204 However, forgivable loans awarded under the program shall be
205 provided only to students who have been accepted into a Dyslexia
206 Therapy Master's Degree Cohort Program approved by the State
207 Department of Education that provides instructional training as
208 required under Chapter 173, Title 37, Mississippi Code of 1972,
209 for dyslexia therapy in preparation of those cohort students for
210 AA licensure by the department.

211 (10) As part of the Mississippi Dyslexia Education
212 Forgivable Loan Program, the State Department of Education is
213 authorized and directed, subject to the availability of funds
214 specifically appropriated therefor by the Legislature, to provide
215 financial assistance for the recruitment, placement and employment
216 of qualified licensed dyslexia therapy professionals identified



217 under Section 37-173-15(1) (b), Mississippi Code of 1972, in order
218 to provide dyslexia screening, evaluation and therapy services to
219 the students attending school in the school district. Said
220 funding may be used to purchase curriculum materials and supplies
221 for dyslexia therapy services. Said funding shall be provided to
222 public school districts upon application therefor regardless of
223 the financial need of the school district in an amount not to
224 exceed Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) annually, and subject
225 to specific appropriation therefor by the Legislature. In order
226 to qualify for such funds, the school district shall meet the
227 following criteria:

228 (a) Use licensed dyslexia therapists, certified
229 academic language therapist or individuals participating in an
230 approved training program resulting in State Department of
231 Education licensure to provide dyslexia therapy to students
232 diagnosed with dyslexia;

233 (b) Use daily Orton-Gillingham-based therapy;

234 (c) Have school leadership trained in dyslexia; and

235 (d) Have a current School Program Verification and
236 Assurances form on file with the State Department of Education,
237 Office of Curriculum and Instruction. Procedures and standards
238 for the application for such funds shall be established by
239 regulations developed and issued by the State Board of Education.

240 **SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
241 and after July 1, 2023.

