

By: Representative Byrd

To: Education;
Appropriations A

HOUSE BILL NO. 1162

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTIONS 37-173-1, 37-173-3 AND 37-173-15,
2 MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO EXPAND THE ELIGIBILITY FOR THE
3 MISSISSIPPI DYSLEXIA THERAPY SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH
4 DYSLEXIA PROGRAM TO INCLUDE STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE
5 12; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

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

9 37-173-1. As used in this chapter, the following words and
10 phrases shall have the meanings ascribed in this section unless
11 the context clearly indicates otherwise:

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

13 (b) "Department" means the State Department of
14 Education.

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



relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction, and secondary consequences which may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

These components shall be taught using instructional approaches that include explicit, direct instruction which is systematic, sequential and cumulative, following a logical plan of



45 presenting the alphabetic principle commensurate with the
46 students' needs, with no assumption of prior skills or language
47 knowledge; individualized to meet the specific learning needs of
48 each individual student in a small group setting; intensive,
49 highly concentrated instruction that maximizes student engagement
50 and uses specialized methods and materials; meaning-based
51 instruction directed toward purposeful reading and writing, with
52 an emphasis on comprehension and composition; and multisensory
53 instruction that incorporates the simultaneous use of two (2) or
54 more sensory pathways during teacher presentations and student
55 practice.

56 (e) "AA license" means a certification issued by the
57 department to educators who hold a master's degree, indicating
58 their eligibility to teach in specific academic settings within
59 the State of Mississippi.

60 (f) "Qualified Instructor of Certified Academic
61 Language Therapists" means a professional who is certified in
62 instructor competency through a nationally recognized
63 Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy organization or
64 Orton-Gillingham based academic language therapy organization and
65 has:

66 (i) Experience in Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia
67 therapy situations that include remediating students of various
68 severity levels, ages and group sizes not exceeding six (6)
69 students;



(ii) Completed a minimum of fourteen hundred
(1400) clinical therapy hours;

(iii) Completed a minimum of two (2) curriculum
therapy cycles remediating students;

(iv) Trained in a minimum of two (2)
Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy curriculum programs;

(v) Assisted in training educators through an
Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy program under a Qualified
Instructor of Certified Academic Language Therapists; and

(vi) A master's degree or higher level of
education.

(g) "Department of Education licensed dyslexia
therapist" means a professional:

(i) Who has completed training in a department
approved Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy training program
attaining a AA license in dyslexia therapy; or

(ii) Holding or currently participating in a
master's degree that leads to an AA license and a
department-approved Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy
training program; or

(iii) Holding a standard five-year license or
administrator license and a master's degree having completed a
department-approved Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia training
program; or

(iv) Holding:



1. A national certification for
Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia therapy or Orton-Gillingham based
academic language therapy from a nationally recognized
professional organization;

2. College transcripts as proof of a master's
degree or greater level of graduate education; and

3. Current membership in a national
certifying organization for Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia
therapy or Orton-Gillingham based academic language therapy as
proof of maintenance of professional continuing education
standards.

(h) "Approved dyslexia therapy training program" means
a program accredited by the International Multisensory Structured
Language Education Council (IMSLEC) and includes:

(i) A minimum of two hundred (200) hours of
coursework and seven hundred (700) hours of clinical work,
observed and monitored by a Qualified Instructor of Certified
Academic Language Therapists; and

(ii) A reading-science competency examination,
including multisensory structured language, administered by a
nationally recognized organization with authority to issue
national certification.

(i) "Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for
Students with Dyslexia Program" means a scholarship to provide the
option to attend a public school other than the one to which



assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of choice, for students in * * * kindergarten through Grade 12 diagnosed with dyslexia in order to receive comprehensive multisensory dyslexia therapy delivered by holders of an appropriate license in dyslexia therapy issued by the department.

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

SECTION 2. Section 37-173-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

37-173-3. The Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for Students with Dyslexia Program is established to provide the option to attend a public school other than the one to which assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of choice, for students with a diagnosis of dyslexia. Students in * * * kindergarten through Grade 12 who have been properly screened and diagnosed with dyslexia shall be eligible to receive scholarship assistance under this program.

SECTION 3. Section 37-173-15, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:



37-173-15. (1) (a) Each local school district shall adopt a policy to ensure that students will be screened by a screener approved by the State Board of Education in the * * * fall of kindergarten and the fall of Grade 1. The component of the screening must include:

- (i) Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness;
- (ii) Sound symbol recognition;
- (iii) Alphabet knowledge;
- (iv) Decoding skills;
- (v) Encoding skills; and
- (vi) Rapid naming.

(b) If a student fails the screener, the parent or legal guardian will be notified of the results of the screener. Subsequent dyslexia evaluations may be administered by licensed professionals, including:

- (i) Psychologists, licensed under Chapter 31, Title 73, Mississippi Code of 1972;
- (ii) Psychometrists, licensed by the Mississippi Department of Education, and in accordance with Chapter 31, Title 73, Section 27, Mississippi Code of 1972; or
- (iii) Speech Language Pathologists, licensed under Chapter 38, Title 73, Mississippi Code of 1972.

(c) If a student fails the screener, the school district, in its discretion, may perform a comprehensive dyslexia evaluation, such evaluation must be administered by any of the



licensed professionals identified under paragraph (b) of this subsection.

(d) If a parent or legal guardian of a student who fails the dyslexia screener exercises the option to have a subsequent evaluation performed, such evaluation shall be administered by any of the licensed professionals identified under paragraph (b) of this subsection, and the resulting diagnosis of the subsequent evaluation must be accepted by the school district for purposes of determining eligibility for placement within a dyslexia therapy program within the current school or to receive a Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for placement in a dyslexia program in another public school or nonpublic school.

(2) The screening of all compulsory-school-age children enrolled in each local public school district for dyslexia required by subsection (1)(a) of this section shall in no manner nullify or defeat the requirements of the pilot programs adopted by the State Department of Education to test certain students enrolled or enrolling in public schools for dyslexia under Section 37-23-15.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2025.

