

By: Representatives Byrd, Smith, Arnold,
Boyd (19th), Boyd (37th), Calvert, Lott, Tubb

To: Education;
Appropriations A

HOUSE BILL NO. 1204

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

42 These components shall be taught using instructional
43 approaches that include explicit, direct instruction which is
44 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) "Dyslexia therapist" means a professional who has
57 completed training in a department approved Orton-Gillingham based
58 dyslexia therapy training program attaining a AA license in
59 dyslexia therapy or a professional participating in a state
60 approved dyslexia therapy training program to attain a AA license
61 in dyslexia therapy.

62 (f) "Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for
63 Students with Dyslexia Program" means a scholarship to provide the
64 option to attend a public school other than the one to which
65 assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of
66 choice, for students in * * * kindergarten through Grade 12
67 diagnosed with dyslexia in order to receive comprehensive
68 multisensory dyslexia therapy delivered by holders of an
69 appropriate license in dyslexia therapy issued by the department.



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

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

79 37-173-3. The Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for
80 Students with Dyslexia Program is established to provide the
81 option to attend a public school other than the one to which
82 assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of
83 choice, for students with a diagnosis of dyslexia. Students
84 in * * * kindergarten through Grade 12 who have been properly
85 screened and diagnosed with dyslexia shall be eligible to receive
86 scholarship assistance under this program.

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

89 37-173-15. (1) (a) Each local school district shall adopt
90 a policy to ensure that students will be screened by a screener
91 approved by the State Board of Education in the * * * fall of
92 kindergarten and the fall of Grade 1. The component of the
93 screening must include:

94 (i) Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness;



- 95 (ii) Sound symbol recognition;
- 96 (iii) Alphabet knowledge;
- 97 (iv) Decoding skills;
- 98 (v) Encoding skills; and
- 99 (vi) Rapid naming.

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

- 104 (i) Psychologists, licensed under Chapter 31,
105 Title 73, Mississippi Code of 1972;
- 106 (ii) Psychometrists, licensed by the Mississippi
107 Department of Education, and in accordance with Chapter 31, Title
108 73, Section 27, Mississippi Code of 1972; or
- 109 (iii) Speech Language Pathologists, licensed under
110 Chapter 38, Title 73, Mississippi Code of 1972.

111 (c) If a student fails the screener, the school
112 district, in its discretion, may perform a comprehensive dyslexia
113 evaluation, such evaluation must be administered by any of the
114 licensed professionals identified under paragraph (b) of this
115 subsection.

116 (d) If a parent or legal guardian of a student who
117 fails the dyslexia screener exercises the option to have a
118 subsequent evaluation performed, such evaluation shall be
119 administered by any of the licensed professionals identified under



120 paragraph (b) of this subsection, and the resulting diagnosis of
121 the subsequent evaluation must be accepted by the school district
122 for purposes of determining eligibility for placement within a
123 dyslexia therapy program within the current school or to receive a
124 Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for placement in a
125 dyslexia program in another public school or nonpublic school.

126 (2) The screening of all compulsory-school-age children
127 enrolled in each local public school district for dyslexia
128 required by subsection (1)(a) of this section shall in no manner
129 nullify or defeat the requirements of the pilot programs adopted
130 by the State Department of Education to test certain students
131 enrolled or enrolling in public schools for dyslexia under Section
132 37-23-15.

133 **SECTION 4.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
134 and after July 1, 2024.

