

By: Senator(s) England, DeLano, Boyd, Carter, Horhn, Kirby, McCaughn, Norwood, Parks, Simmons (12th), Simmons (13th), Suber, Turner-Ford, Wiggins, Blackmon, Michel, Seymour

To: Education

SENATE BILL NO. 2681

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-173-1, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO EXPAND THE DYSLEXIA THERAPY SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH
3 DYSLEXIA PROGRAM BY MAKING CERTIFIED ACADEMIC LANGUAGE THERAPISTS
4 (CALT) ELIGIBLE TO BE EMPLOYED BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PROVIDE
5 DYSLEXIA SERVICES; TO BRING FORWARD SECTIONS 37-106-71, 37-173-9
6 AND 37-173-21, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, FOR PURPOSES OF POSSIBLE
7 AMENDMENT; 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 which is
30 scientific, research-based, Orton-Gillingham based, and is offered
31 in a small group setting to teach students the components of
32 reading instruction which include:

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

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

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

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

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

44 These components shall be taught using instructional
45 approaches that include explicit, direct instruction which is



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

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

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

68 (i) Experience in Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia
69 therapy situations that include remediating students of various



70 severity levels, ages and group sizes not exceeding six (6)
71 students;

72 (ii) Completed a minimum of fourteen hundred
73 (1400) clinical therapy hours;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

92 (iii) Holding or having held a five-year teaching
93 or administrative license in good faith and a master's degree



94 while completing or having completed a department-approved
95 Orton-Gillingham based dyslexia training program;

96 (iv) Holding:

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

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

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

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

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

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



119 (* * *i) "Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for
120 Students with Dyslexia Program" means a scholarship to provide the
121 option to attend a public school other than the one to which
122 assigned, or to provide a scholarship to a nonpublic school of
123 choice, for students in Grade 1 through Grade 12 diagnosed with
124 dyslexia in order to receive comprehensive multisensory dyslexia
125 therapy delivered by holders of an appropriate license in dyslexia
126 therapy issued by the department.

127 (* * *j) "School" means any public or state_accredited
128 nonpublic special purpose school that provides a specific learning
129 environment that provides comprehensive dyslexia therapy
130 instruction delivered by dyslexia therapists licensed by the
131 department providing highly qualified education and intervention
132 services to children diagnosed with the primary learning
133 disability of dyslexia.

134 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-106-71, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
135 brought forward as follows:

136 37-106-71. (1) There is established the Mississippi
137 Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan Program for the purpose of
138 identifying and recruiting qualified university and college
139 students from the state for schooling in education with a focus on
140 dyslexia therapy.

141 (2) The receipt of a forgivable loan under the program shall
142 be solely limited to those students who are enrolled in or who
143 have been accepted for enrollment into a master's degree program



144 of study for dyslexia therapy at any public or private institution
145 of higher learning within the State of Mississippi at the time an
146 application for a forgivable loan is filed with the board.

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

152 (4) Upon completion of the master's program and licensure
153 requirements, a forgivable loan recipient who has not been
154 previously licensed by the State Department of Education shall
155 render service in an instructional or clinical capacity as a
156 licensed dyslexia therapist in a public school district in the
157 state or an eligible nonpublic school as defined by Section
158 37-173-1 and meets the criteria established in Section 37-173-17,
159 not to exceed five (5) recipients rendering instructional or
160 clinical services in a nonpublic school at any time.

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

163 (6) The board shall prepare and submit a report to the
164 Legislature by January 1, 2015, and annually thereafter, outlining
165 in detail the number of participants who have received forgivable
166 loans under the program, the record of service provided by those
167 recipients as they transition out of the degree program into the
168 public school districts of this state, and the projection for



169 expanding the program to include more participants annually as
170 determined by the need for such qualified professionals in the
171 public school setting. Additionally, the report shall include a
172 summary of allocations and expenditures for the administration of
173 the program and the total amount of funds issued to recipients of
174 forgivable loans from the inception of the program until such time
175 as the report has been prepared and submitted to the Legislature.

176 (7) The Mississippi Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan
177 Program shall be administered in the same manner as the Critical
178 Needs Teacher Forgivable Loan Program established under Section
179 37-106-55 and shall be incorporated into the Critical Needs
180 Teacher Forgivable Loan Program for all purposes.

181 (8) Funding for the establishment and continued operation of
182 the Mississippi Dyslexia Education Forgivable Loan Program shall
183 be administered by the board through a special fund established
184 within the Critical Needs Teacher Forgivable Loan Program. The
185 board may accept and receive monetary gifts and donations from any
186 source, public or private, which such funds shall be deposited in
187 the special fund for the benefit of the Mississippi Dyslexia
188 Education Forgivable Loan Program with the Critical Needs Teacher
189 Forgivable Loan Program.

190 (9) No more than twenty (20) students per cohort shall be
191 selected annually to be admitted into the program for receipt of
192 forgivable loans beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year.
193 However, forgivable loans awarded under the program shall be



194 provided only to students who have been accepted into a Dyslexia
195 Therapy Master's Degree Cohort Program approved by the State
196 Department of Education that provides instructional training as
197 required under Chapter 173, Title 37, Mississippi Code of 1972,
198 for dyslexia therapy in preparation of those cohort students for
199 AA licensure by the department.

200 (10) As part of the Mississippi Dyslexia Education
201 Forgivable Loan Program, the State Department of Education is
202 authorized and directed, subject to the availability of funds
203 specifically appropriated therefor by the Legislature, to provide
204 financial assistance for the recruitment, placement and employment
205 of qualified licensed dyslexia therapy professionals identified
206 under Section 37-173-15(1) (b), Mississippi Code of 1972, in order
207 to provide dyslexia screening, evaluation and therapy services to
208 the students attending school in the school district. Said
209 funding may be used to purchase curriculum materials and supplies
210 for dyslexia therapy services. Said funding shall be provided to
211 public school districts upon application therefor regardless of
212 the financial need of the school district in an amount not to
213 exceed Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) annually, and subject
214 to specific appropriation therefor by the Legislature. In order
215 to qualify for such funds, the school district shall meet the
216 following criteria:

217 (a) Use licensed dyslexia therapists or individuals
218 participating in an approved training program resulting in State



219 Department of Education licensure to provide dyslexia therapy to
220 students diagnosed with dyslexia;

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

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

223 (d) Have a current School Program Verification and
224 Assurances form on file with the State Department of Education,
225 Office of Curriculum and Instruction. Procedures and standards
226 for the application for such funds shall be established by
227 regulations developed and issued by the State Board of Education.

228 **SECTION 3.** Section 37-173-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
229 brought forward as follows:

230 37-173-9. (1) (a) The parent or legal guardian is not
231 required to accept the offer of enrolling in another public school
232 in lieu of requesting a Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship
233 to a nonpublic school. However, if the parent or legal guardian
234 chooses the public school option, the student may continue
235 attending a public school chosen by the parent or legal guardian
236 until the student completes Grade 12.

237 (b) If the parent or legal guardian chooses a public
238 school within the district, the school district shall provide
239 transportation to the public school selected by the parent or
240 legal guardian. However, if the parent or legal guardian chooses
241 a public school in another district, the parent or legal guardian
242 is responsible to provide transportation to the school of choice.



243 These provisions do not prohibit a parent or legal guardian
244 of a student diagnosed with dyslexia, at any time, from choosing
245 the option of a Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship which
246 would allow the student to attend another public school or
247 nonpublic special purpose school.

248 (2) If the parent or legal guardian chooses the nonpublic
249 school option and the student is accepted by the nonpublic school
250 pending the availability of a space for the student, the parent or
251 legal guardian of the student must notify the department thirty
252 (30) days before the first scholarship payment and before entering
253 the nonpublic school in order to be eligible for the scholarship
254 when a space becomes available for the student in the nonpublic
255 school.

256 (3) The parent or legal guardian of a student may choose, as
257 an alternative, to enroll the student in and transport the student
258 to a public school in an adjacent school district which has
259 available space and has a program with dyslexia services that
260 provide daily dyslexia therapy sessions delivered by a department
261 licensed dyslexia therapist, and that school district shall accept
262 the student and report the student for purposes of the district's
263 funding under the Mississippi Adequate Education Program.

264 **SECTION 4.** Section 37-173-21, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
265 brought forward as follows:



266 37-173-21. (1) The State Board of Education in conjunction
267 with each nonpublic school and local school board operating under
268 the provisions of this chapter, may:

269 (a) Extend the school day or length of the scholastic
270 year;

271 (b) Develop and establish a curriculum that is
272 consistent with the Mississippi Curriculum Framework in the
273 subject areas of mathematics, social studies, science, music, art
274 and physical education; and

275 (c) Select, purchase and use textbooks, literature and
276 other instructional materials that would improve educational
277 attainment by students in the school, subject to the approval of
278 the board.

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

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

284 (b) A dyslexia therapist licensed by the department in
285 dyslexia therapy;

286 (c) Dyslexia therapists in training participating in a
287 department approved dyslexia therapy graduate internship program;
288 and

289 (d) Licensed elementary teachers under the supervision
290 of a state department licensed dyslexia therapist.



291 **SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
292 and after July 1, 2024.

