TISA Quick Guide: Unique Learning Needs

What are Unique Learning Needs?

A unique learning need (ULN) is defined in law as a learning need for which an LEA must provide the student individualized services, interventions, accommodations, or modifications to meet the student's need.

In practice, this means the identification of academic supports a student needs to be successful. Supports for any student need considered must include these two components:

- An **assessment** to identify the need
- A **plan** to provide support in meeting the need

ULNs are divided into 10 progressive categories, ULN 1 through ULN 10, aligned to higher levels of support necessary to meet the student's unique learning needs. Each ULN is assigned a progressive percentage weight, from 15% to 150%. These percentages are then multiplied by the base funding amount, or $6,860 in the 2023-2024 school year, to generate additional funds for students.

Depending on their needs, students may **generate up to four ULN codes**:

- Primary option;
- Secondary option;
- Characteristics of dyslexia; and/or
- English learner status.

It is also possible for students to generate some codes twice. For example, if a student has characteristics of dyslexia and also generates a SPED option code 2, they would generate funding under ULN 2 twice.

The weights for each ULN category are listed below:

ULN	Weight
ULN 1	15%
ULN 2	20%
ULN 3	40%
ULN 4	60%
ULN 5	70%
ULN 6	75%
ULN 7	80%
ULN 8	100%
ULN 9	125%
ULN 10	150%

Students with Disabilities

The Individualized Education Plan or IEP is the primary vehicle for capturing this information.

- **Assessment**: Initial evaluation and annual reevaluation
- **Plan**: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

*It is important to note here that **nothing about how IEPs operate is changing** due to TISA. Educators should continue to follow the same practices and adhere to the same compliance requirements they always have for implementing state and federal special education law. The application of ULNs simply uses the existing data generated from this process.*

The crosswalk between option and ULN codes is listed here:

Special Education Option Code	Services / Hours Descriptions	Unique Learning Need Assignment
Option 1	Consultation - Minimum of 2 contacts/month, except OT/PT (minimum of 3 contacts/year). Time must be reported. Direct Services equal to or less than 1 hour/week. Related Services equal less than 1 hour/week.	**ULN 1**
Option 2	Direct Services more than or equal to 1, but less than 4 hours/week; or any one Related Service more than or equal to 1, but less than 4 hours/week.	**ULN 2**
Option 3	Direct Services more than or equal to 4, but less than 9 hours/week; or any one Related Service more than or equal to 4, but less than 9 hours/week.	**ULN 3**
Option 4	Direct Services more than or equal to 9, but less than 14 hours/week; or any one Related Service more than or equal to 9, but less than 14 hours/week.	**ULN 6**
Option 5	Direct Services more than or equal to 14, but less than 23 hours/week; or any one Related Service more than or equal to 14, but less than 23 hours/week.	**ULN 7**
Option 6	Ancillary Services - Attendant provided so that the student can have at least 4 hours/day in less restrictive and general education settings.	**ULN 8**
Option 7	Direct Services - Special Education services 23 or more hours/week; or, any one Related Service 23 or more hours/week.	**ULN 9**
Option 8	Self-Contained or CDC - The sum of all direct services plus related services listed below plus up to 10 hours/week of special education educational assistant in the general program equals 32.5 or more hours/ week. In addition, at least two Related Services from those specified below must be received for at least the minimum times listed.	**ULN 9**

Special Education Option Code	Services / Hours Descriptions	Unique Learning Need Assignment
	• 1 Hour/Week: Psychological Services, Counseling Services, Speech/Language Services, Vision Services, Hearing Services • 3 contacts/year, with time span reported: Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy	
Option 9	Residential Services - Provided 24 hours/day.	**ULN 10**
Option 10	Hospital/Homebound - Provided 3 or more hours/week.	**ULN 10**

How does an IEP produce funding for ULNs?

An IEP ultimately captures a set of services and hours needed to provide the student with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Those services/hours are then translated into funding categories via the following process:

1. Teachers use the IEP to capture services and hours needed to support student
2. IEP services/hours are translated into Special Education option codes within the state's IEP system.
3. Option codes are translated into ULNs, following business rules mapped out in the State Board's TISA rule.

A student may generate both a primary and secondary option code, depending on the amount and type of service hours needed. For the funding formula, both the primary and secondary option codes, if applicable, generate funding for the student.

English Learners

These are students who qualify for English as a Second Language Services via a department approved assessment.

- **Assessment**: Home language, entry screener, WIDA
- **Plan**: The Individualized Learning Plan (or ILP) has been required historically, but beginning in the 23-24 school year, will be moved into a state-hosted system, providing for consistent application and tracking of services.

In prior funding formulas, students coded as receiving direct services (L), waived (or indirect services) (W), and transition year 1 and 2 (T1 and T2) after exiting ESL services generated funding. All of these students will continue to generate funding under TISA. Similar to IEPs, educators should continue to follow compliant and best practices for the identification, planning, and services for EL students.

Similar to students with IEPs, educators must continue to follow legal requirements and are encouraged to follow best practices for the identification, planning, and services for EL students.

What are the three tiers of English Learner in TISA?

The TISA rule sets three tiers of English Learners, placing students based on three data points: EL status, years of services, and WIDA scores. The three tiers progress from lower intensity supports to higher, from Tier 1 to Tier 3 respectively.

- **Tier 1** English Learners include students who are in any one of the following situations:
    - In transition Year 1 or Year 2 after exiting ESL services (T1 or T2);
    - Receiving indirect ESL services after a guardian waived direct services (W); or
    - Students identified as Long-Term English Learners—students in year seven or beyond who have not met exit criteria.
- **Tier 2** English Learners includes students who are receiving direct services code as "L" and meet one of the following conditions:
    - Most recent overall WIDA score is above a 3; or
    - Have received ESL services for more than 3 years.
- **Tier 3** English Learners include students who meet all of the following conditions:
    - Receiving direct ESL services (coded as an "L");
    - Have received ESL services for a maximum of 3 years; and
    - Most recent overall WIDA score is 3 or lower.

These three Tiers of English Learners are then placed into ULNs in alignment with mapping laid out in the TISA rule:

EL Tier	Assigned ULN
EL Tier 1	ULN 2
EL Tier 2	ULN 4
EL Tier 3	ULN 5

Characteristics of Dyslexia

This student designation is new to the 2023-2024 school year and will be captured in the same state system of record as IEPs and ILPs. Like both of those, students with characteristics of dyslexia require an assessment and plan, both of which are articulated in more detail in State Board of Education rules. In short:

- **Assessment**: The assessment required for identification for characteristics of dyslexia is a student's composite score on a universal reading screener (URS) or an LEA's Early Warning System AND deficiencies in 50% or more of the grade-appropriate subtests outlined on the URS Minimum Matrix.
- **Plan**: ILP-D – The Individualized Learning Plan – Characteristics of Dyslexia. This plan, known as an ILP-D, maps out the supports for a student and requires an agreed upon need by both the student's teacher and parent/guardian.

Important notes:

- All students identified with characteristics of dyslexia are placed into **ULN 2**.
- It is important to note that characteristics of dyslexia is not the same thing as a specific learning disability in reading itself.

- Students whose parent/guardian declines an ILP-D, or a student who has or is later determined to qualify for an IEP to support deficiencies in the areas of basic reading, reading fluency, or reading comprehension do not also qualify for the characteristics of dyslexia ULN.
- In the first year of TISA implementation, all districts will receive funding for characteristics of dyslexia aligned to 5% of their base ADM counts, providing districts time for the initial implementation of the ILP-Ds.

ADM Values

Once a student has been categorized into a ULN, like with most other elements of the TISA formula, the student's average daily membership, or ADM, will be used to determine the multiplier against the designated ULN weight and base. The ADM value runs from the time a student's plan is in place under a given ULN until such time as it is no longer assigned. If a student's status changes during the year, the ULN and ADM value will follow suit.

Monitoring

All the identified subgroups discussed will be monitored for compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. This is already the case for students with disabilities and English Learners and will be true as students served with an ILP-D for characteristics of dyslexia moving forward. The monitoring reviews identification, planning, and services provided to these students against all applicable laws, regulations, and rules. Notably, the state monitors regularly for variations in identification rates and quality of service plans. It will be important for educators and districts to continue to maintain compliance for all of these students.

For more detailed information, local education leaders can refer to TDOE's TISA Resources Page.