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Preface

This document serves as guidance for Arkansas educators in the selection of accessibility features and accommodations, Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (ADE:DESE) accommodation policies, and the administration of selected features on statewide assessments. Individual assessment vendors provide their own manuals for outlining accessibility supports and accommodations within their assessment; however, Arkansas policy supersedes vendor policies in the event of any conflict between this guidance document and any vendor-specific accessibility and accommodations manual. Barring such conflict, educators should look to vendor-provided manuals for administration guidance of accessibility supports and accommodations within that assessment but should use this guidance document for selection considerations.
Section I: Providing Accessibility

**Expecting Students to Achieve Grade-level Standards**

Education is a basic right for all children in the United States. With legislation aimed at the inclusion of all students, comes the drive to ensure equal access to grade-level standards. Academic standards are educational targets outlining what students are expected to learn at each grade level. Teachers ensure that students work toward grade-level standards by using a range of instructional strategies based on the varied strengths and needs of students. For some students, accessibility supports are provided during instruction and assessments to help promote equal access to grade-level content.

Members of the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team, the 504 plan committee, or the LPAC (Language Proficiency and Assessment Committee) who are familiar with all characteristics and needs of students should make instructional and assessment decisions for them. These teams are responsible for developing, implementing, and improving accessibility practices for students. Appropriate accessibility supports are provided to help students access instructional and assessment content.

**Including All Students in State Assessment Systems**
Federal and most state laws (including Arkansas), legal cases, and federal guidance require that all students be administered assessments intended to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of students. Educators must actively engage in a planning process that addresses:

- assurance of the provision of accessibility supports to facilitate student access to grade-level instruction and state assessments and

- use of alternate assessments to assess the achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

### Equal Access to Grade-level Content

Inclusion of all students in large-scale assessments and grade-level standards is mandated by both federal and state laws. Educators ensure that students work toward grade-level standards by using a range of instructional strategies based on the varied strengths and needs of students. Accessibility supports are provided for students during instruction and assessments to guarantee equal access to grade-level content. To meet this goal of equal access, educators must be familiar with standards and accountability systems at the state and district levels as well as locations of these standards and their updates.

All students, including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and ELs with disabilities, can work toward grade-level academic content standards. They will be able to achieve these standards when instruction is provided by teachers who are qualified to teach in the content areas addressed by state standards and who know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners. Meaningful access of grade-level content by diverse students is also made possible by appropriately selected accommodations. Additionally, to secure successful student access to grade-level content, English as a second language (ESL) educators, special educators, and their general education counterparts must collaborate when making accessibility decisions.

### Use of Accessibility Supports & Accommodations

When students have had standards-based instruction, with support provided through services and strategies outlined in an IEP or 504 plan, they need an opportunity to show what they have learned on state assessments – with access that is equal to the access provided to students without disabilities. For some students, this access can be increased through the use of accommodations.

Accommodations are changes in the way a student accesses instruction and assessment, without changing the actual standards a student is working toward. The goal is to find a balance that gives students equal access to instruction and assessment without changing or reducing the rigor of the content.
Accommodations are tools and procedures in the areas of presentation, response, and general test condition supports that provide equitable instructional and assessment access for students with disabilities. Accommodations are intended to *mediate* the effects of a student’s disability—they are *not* intended to reduce learning expectations.

All accommodations requested for use by the students for general statewide testing must be documented in the student’s current IEP, 504, or LPAC plan, and be an allowable accommodation. The same accommodations requested for testing must also be used with the student in the classroom.

Available accommodations for state-mandated general testing vary by test. Educators must be familiar with what accommodations and accessibility features are available for each test. However, it is important to note that no accommodation listed on a test vendor’s list of available accommodations may be assigned if that accommodation conflicts with ADE: DESE assessment policy concerning accommodations. It is very important that the educators responsible for selecting accommodations for students with disabilities are familiar with ADE: DESE accommodation policies. If unsure about a specific accommodation, test coordinators are directed to contact the ADE: DESE Office of Student Assessment for clarification. Additionally, some accommodations may not be listed by a test vendor, yet may be allowable by ADE: DESE policy. These accommodations may be requested by submitting a **2019-2020 Summative Special Accommodation Request form** to the ADE: DESE Office of Student Assessment for review.

Educators must adhere to the directives found in IDEA when making selections. According to IDEA, Sec. 300.160 (b), under “Accommodation Guidelines,” a state must develop guidelines for the provision of appropriate accommodations. The state guidelines must identify only those accommodations for each assessment that do not invalidate the score, and instruct IEP teams to select, for each assessment, only those accommodations that do not invalidate the score. In keeping with this mandate, the Assessment Decision page contained in all student IEPs instructs IEP team members to list any assessment accommodations needed (if any) that are consistent with IEP and test administration guidelines.

Accommodations for assessment and instruction are integrally intertwined. There are some accommodations that are appropriate for classroom use that would NOT be appropriate, or permitted, in testing situations. Some accommodations may provide an unfair advantage, or even disadvantage, in assessment situations. **No accommodation should be recommended for an assessment that a student has not had a thorough opportunity to learn to use comfortably and effectively during classroom activities.**

When choosing an assessment accommodation for a particular student, it is important to consider state guidelines to determine whether the accommodations are considered acceptable or unacceptable to use. Unacceptable assessment accommodations are commonly referred to as modifications, adaptations, alterations, and nonstandard, non-allowable, or non-approved accommodations. The use of these unacceptable assessment accommodations could invalidate the test, change the construct of the test, in some way provide unfair advantage to the student or would not give a true picture of what the student knows.
Some assessment changes that are never acceptable include coaching, editing student work, answering questions, or giving cues in any way, including gestures, facial expressions, or encouragement to change an answer. Changing the content of a test to make it easier for students who have not learned the content being tested invalidates a test, especially if the test is designed to be used for accountability. These changes might include allowing a student to answer fewer questions, reducing the number of responses required, or changing the content by paraphrasing or offering additional information. An example of an ACT Aspire non-allowable change is reading aloud the reading and/or the English tests. Accommodations are intended to promote access, not give students with disabilities an unfair advantage.

**Involving Students in Choosing and Using Accessibility Supports & Accommodations**

It is critical for students with disabilities to understand their disabilities and learn self-advocacy strategies for success in school and throughout life. The more students are involved in the selection process, the more likely it is that the accommodations will be used. Students need opportunities to learn which accommodations are most helpful for them and to make sure those accommodations are provided in their classes and wherever they need them outside of school.

**Accommodations and the Student’s IEP/504**

For students with disabilities served under IDEA, determining appropriate instructional and assessment accommodations should not pose any particular problems for the IEP teams that follow good IEP practices. With information obtained from the required summary of the student’s present level of educational performance, the process of identifying and documenting accommodations should be a fairly straightforward event. Describing the student’s present level of educational performance is a federal requirement. IEP team members must state “how the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum—the same curriculum as non-disabled children” (34 CFR §300.346).

Information obtained from the most recent evaluation, results on state assessments, input from special and general education teachers, and information obtained from the student and parents should serve as a solid foundation for making consistent, coherent, and legally defensible decisions about the identification and use of appropriate instructional and assessment accommodations for students with disabilities.
Administering Accessibility Supports & Accommodations on Arkansas Assessments

Once decisions have been made about providing accommodations to students, the logistics of providing the accommodations must be considered. It is essential that EVERYONE involved in this process knows and understands the requirements and consequences of using accommodations for statewide assessments.

Prior to state-level testing, the test administrator must be aware of what accommodations the student will be using. A test administrator, particularly those unfamiliar with the student, will need to know how and what accommodations to administer. The test administrator may not be familiar with some of the less conventional response formats. Accommodations will mean little if they are poorly implemented—so logistical considerations are vitally important.

During testing, all accommodations must be implemented by a teacher licensed by the ADE, a long-term substitute holding a license, or an administrator or teacher of record employed under a waiver from licensure. All teachers administering exams should be familiar with the accommodations given to the student, as well as the general administration of the test.

Practices to avoid when planning for accommodations and/or accessibility features during testing:

- Making “on the spot” decisions about what accommodations and/or accessibility supports a student needs for testing,
- Making an accommodation and/or accessibility supports available to everyone simply because of convenience, and
- Not considering an accommodation and/or accessibility support as essential because only one student needs it.

Strict adherence to the accommodation guidelines is necessary to ensure that the test results reflect actual student learning. If accommodations are administered inconsistently, the results will not be comparable across examinees. The use of detailed guidelines not only ensures that the efforts of students and teachers will yield meaningful information, but it also makes the test administration easier.

Test Security

In order to administer test accommodations appropriately, teachers and other school personnel must understand the importance of test security, standardization, and ethical testing practices. Adherence to standard procedures and directions for the implementation of accommodations is necessary to preserve the integrity of the test.

ADE: DESE Guidelines for Assessment Accessibility | last revised 09/2019
In order to ensure test security and confidentiality, test administrators need to (1) keep all test materials in a secure place to prevent unauthorized access, (2) keep all test content confidential—refrain from sharing information with or implying test content to anyone, and (3) return all materials as instructed. Braille, large print and standard paper tests need to be provided to the test administrator under secure and confidential means.

Test administrators must also recognize the importance of ethical testing practices. An important consideration for ethical testing practices during test administration relates to interactions between test administrators and students taking the test. If a student receives extra help during testing, his or her scores may not be valid indicators of what he or she can do. Helping includes coaching, editing student work, answering questions, or giving cues in any way, including gestures, facial expressions, or encouragement to change an answer.

Each test administrator must read and sign the **Summative Security Agreement** to indicate he/she understands the prohibited activities and that he/she understands these actions and consequences prior to setting up for and/or administering the state-mandated tests.
Section II: Allowable Accessibility Supports and Accommodations for Arkansas Assessments

General (Content) Assessment, grades 3-10 [ACT Aspire]

Once the appropriate testing supports and/or accommodations have been established for a student, strict adherence to the delivery of these accommodations is necessary to ensure that the test results reflect actual student learning. If accommodations are administered inconsistently, the results will not be comparable for all students.

For complete details about delivery of accessibility features and accommodations, please see the current ACT Aspire Accessibility User’s Guide posted on the ACT Aspire: Arkansas website. It is important to note that ACT Aspire’s accessibility and accommodations policies differ from Arkansas’s policies in a few areas. Be aware that Arkansas policy supersedes the testing policies of Aspire. If you are unsure about a specific policy, please contact the ADE Office of Student Assessment at 501-682-4558.

ACT Aspire

- Level One: Default Embedded System Tools
- Level Two: Open Access Tools
  - Per Arkansas policy, although features at this level are available to all students, they must be selected to meet individual student needs are not to be selected en masse and delivered to students at the class, school, or district level.
  - Not all Open Access tools listed in the ACT Aspire Accessibility User’s Guide are available for use in Arkansas. Additionally, not all Open Access tools listed in the ACT Aspire Accessibility User’s Guide are available for use at this level in Arkansas and are restricted to the accommodation level (see below).
- Level Three: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
  - Accommodation-level supports for students with a disability, including English Learners with a disability, are reserved only for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 plan, or LPAC (if applicable) in place. Selected accommodations must be listed in the student’s IEP or 504 and have been in use the classroom prior to testing in order to allow students time to become familiar with the accommodation. No accommodation should be recommended for an assessment that a student has not
had a thorough opportunity to learn to use comfortably and effectively during classroom activities.

- The following supports are reserved as accommodation-level supports in Arkansas:
  
  - Large print (*see below*)
  - Respond on separate paper
  - Augmentative or Assistive Communication (AAC) device
  - Dictate responses (scribe)
  - Paper test (*see below*)

**Clarification of Administration of Allowable Supports**

- **Extra Time** means that (up to) the end of the instructional school day may be used for the portion of the test that is scheduled for that day. When extra time is allowed, students must complete each session in the order scheduled before moving on to the next session. Students who are at different points in the test schedule must be isolated from students on the regular schedule for testing, during breaks, and during lunch. Extra time does not allow students to go back into a session at a later time in the day to continue working or to complete unfinished items. Arkansas policy does not allow for any one session to be completed over multiple days.

- **Paper Test** requires a special accommodation request and approval by the ADE. This accommodation is reserved for students with an IEP or 504 whose disability **physically prevents them from online testing**. Simply marking “paper test” in a student’s IEP or 504 does not mean that a student will receive a paper copy of the ACT Aspire if the student does not have a disability that physically prevents access to the online test.

- **Sign language, Large print, and Braille** accommodations require paper testing per ACT Aspire policy; therefore, they do not require submission of a special accommodation request. However, if they need something in addition to the three (e.g. human reader), then a Special Accommodation Request form might be needed. Selection of any of these must be made based on the student’s IEP, 504, or LPAC (if applicable) and used in the classroom for instruction and assessment.

If a student with an IEP, 504, or LPAC has a need that is not available in the portal, the school may submit a Special Accommodation Request to the Office of Student Assessment for consideration.
Accommodations for English Learners

Students who are English Learners have access to all the ACT Aspire Default Embedded Tools and Open Access features that all students may use. The accommodation-level supports listed in the table below are available to English learners, if included in a student’s LPAC and used in the classroom prior to testing. Students who are English Learners with a disability have access to all accommodation-level features outlined in the student’s IEP or 504.

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<tr>
<td>Translated Directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word-to-Word Dictionary, ACT Approved</td>
<td>Included in LPAC</td>
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In Arkansas, testing is only allowed in English. Alternate Language Versions of ACT Aspire items and responses are not allowed by Arkansas policy.

Arkansas’s Translated Directions Policy

From the ACT Aspire Accessibility User’s Guide: “It is acceptable to have the standard English test directions translated into languages other than Spanish; however, all locally provided translation of directions must be prepared in writing ahead of time and based as precisely as possible on the exact standard English directions. Slight adaptations may be used as necessary to communicate the same meaning as that found in the standard form; however, the same instructions for reading the directions are the same as those for English administrations.”

The ADE:DESE will allow Arkansas schools the option of translating the English language test directions for all ACT Aspire tests into another language. This is a local decision and the district will be responsible...
for contracting and funding the written translation of directions to be given to the student. Contracted translators must be certified in the target language and proficient in English. Districts are responsible for ensuring the translation communicates the same meaning as that found in the standard form and must keep all documentation related to the qualifications of the translator. The ADE: DESE will not allow the use of electronic translators, either external or web-based in real time.

Spanish translation of directions is provided by ACT Aspire.

For those providing a live reading of the prepared directions translation, the process is detailed in the Accessibility User’s Guide. In addition, Arkansas policy is that the person providing the live reading of the prepared directions translation must be an ADE-licensed educator, a long-term substitute holding a license from the ADE:DESE or be employed under a waiver from licensure as a teacher or administrator.

**General (Content) Assessment, grade 11 [The ACT]**

Arkansas students in grade 11 will have the opportunity to take the ACT and earn a college-reportable score. All accommodations for the ACT must be approved by ACT through the ACT review process. Information on accommodations for The ACT can be found in the TAA User’s Guide (Test Accessibility and Accommodations System). The ACT also offers EL accommodations to language learners. These accommodations must also be approved through ACT, not the Arkansas Department of Education. Accommodations information can be found at The ACT: Arkansas website.

The online Test Accessibility and Accommodations System (TAA) is used for ACT-approved accommodations management. The test coordinator (TC), and/or test accommodations coordinator (TAC) use TAA for:

- submitting requests for ACT-approved accommodations to ACT,
- checking the status of requests,
- reviewing decision notifications,
- requesting reconsideration of requests that were not approved initially, if applicable, and
- viewing examinee information for planning purposes, as needed.

**Alternate Assessment Grades 3 - 10 [Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)]**

Students with a significant cognitive disability for whom the general state-level assessment would be inappropriate, participate in the alternate assessment in order to demonstrate his or her academic progress. Participation in the alternate assessment is only for those students who meet the criteria established by the Arkansas Department of Education. (These criteria can be found in Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for the Arkansas Alternate Assessments.)

Accommodations for students participating in the DLM are not required to be documented in the IEP. Please refer to the DLM Accessibility Manual for additional information.
English Language Proficiency Assessment, grades K-12 [ELPA21]

Both Titles I and III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) require states and local education agencies to annually assess the English language proficiency of all English Learners (ELs) in the state enrolled in public schools in Kindergarten through twelfth grade in the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Sections 1111(b)(7) and 1123(b)(3)(D) of the ESEA).

ELPA21 is designed for all ELs, including those who have disabilities. ELs with disabilities are ELs who have an IEP or a 504 accommodation plan. Those with an IEP may be identified as having one or more categories of disability.

To ensure that ELs with disabilities are receiving appropriate accessibility supports and accommodations, IEP team members should consider the degree of each student’s language- and disability-related needs. Accessibility and accommodation decisions should be individualized based on the particular language- and disability-related challenges faced by ELs with disabilities. Students with high English language needs and low disability-related needs will require more LPAC supports, while those with high disability-related needs and low English language needs will require more IEP supports. At the same time, students with high English language needs and high disability-related needs will benefit from more intensive language- and disability-related supports, while students with low English language needs and low disability-related needs will require fewer supports that alleviate linguistic and disability-related assessment challenges.

Accessibility on the ELPA21 is outlined using a three tier system:

- Universal Features
- Designated Features
- Accommodations

(Please see the ELPA21 Accessibility and Accommodations Manual for detailed descriptions of features.)

K-2 Assessment (district choice)

- Istation
- NWEA
- Renaissance

All students in grades K–2 should participate in the district-selected adaptive assessment program. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to access the tests with the allowable (per the appropriate manual) accommodations and accessibility supports may not be required to test if indicated in the student’s IEP or 504 plan. School personnel should make every effort to test students using the appropriate and allowable supports and accommodations.
The LPAC may not exempt a student from K-2 testing.

Each K-2 Assessment offers allowable accommodations. Information may be accessed on the K-2 LiveBinder.