No person shall be denied employment, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in any program or activity on the basis of disability, gender, race, religion, national origin, color, age or genetics. Ref: Sec. 1983, Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C.; Title VI and VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964; Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Sec. 504; Age Discrimination in Employment Act; The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008; Equal Pay Act of 1963; Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972; Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008. Title IX Coordinator, P.O. Box 302101, Montgomery, Alabama 36130-2101 or call (334) 242-8165.
Alabama Student Assessment Program Policies and Procedures for Students of Special Populations

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Introduction

The *Alabama Student Assessment Program Policies and Procedures for Students of Special Populations*, Updated November 2015, sets forth the policies and procedures regarding the inclusion of students of special populations in the Alabama Student Assessment Program. These policies and procedures include the written guidelines to be used in decision-making with regard to the state testing program.

This manual provides information for students with disabilities receiving special education services with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), students with disabilities receiving 504 services with a 504 Plan, English Learner (EL) students with an Individual English Language Plan (I-ELP). The guidance in this manual provides information regarding the testing of these students in the Alabama Student Assessment Program and the instruction these students receive. A five-step process has been incorporated to assist personnel working with these populations as they consider decisions regarding participation in the Alabama Student Assessment Program and the selection, administration, and evaluation of assessment accommodations. The five-step process includes the following:

1. Expect students of special populations to achieve grade-level academic content standards.
2. Learn about accommodations for instruction and assessment.
3. Select accommodations for instruction and state assessments for individual students.
4. Administer accommodations during instruction and on state assessments.
5. Evaluate and improve accommodations use.

If you have questions regarding the testing or accommodating of students of special populations for the Alabama student assessment program, please call Student Assessment at 334-242-8038.
General Policies Guiding the Alabama Student Assessment Program

Participation of Students of Special Populations

Alabama requires all students to participate in the Alabama Student Assessment Program. Specific information regarding participation for students of special populations can be found in this manual. All students must be included to the fullest extent possible in all assessments and have their results included in the state accountability system. This required participation is supported by federal legislation.

All assessments are available in English only; therefore, all students, including EL students must take state assessments as written in English. Documentation regarding participation in the Alabama Student Assessment Program must be made on the appropriate Participation Documentation form.

Local Education Agency’s Responsibilities Regarding Local Assessments

The Local Education Agency (LEA) may have local requirements that require the administration of assessments that are not a part of the Alabama Student Assessment Program. If the LEA administers an assessment other than those specified by the state or administers a state assessment in grades other than those mandated by the state, the LEA must include all students of special populations in the assessments. In addition, the LEA must provide a local alternate assessment for students with disabilities receiving special education services who cannot participate in the local assessment. Each LEA must have policies and guidelines in place for these local assessments and include them in the LEA’s state-approved Test Security Plan. LEAs are responsible for scoring and reporting the results of these local assessments.

Content and Instruction

LEAs must ensure equal access to grade-level content standards for all students. The state-mandated curriculum of the Alabama College- and Career-Readiness Standards (Alabama Courses of Study) sets forth the learning expectations for students at each grade level and subject area. The Alabama Extended Standards (Extended Standards) are the content standards for students with disabilities receiving special education services taking the Alabama Alternate Assessment (AAA). Teachers must provide instruction on state content standards using a variety of materials and instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students.

In order to promote equal access to grade-level content, every IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee member and all teachers must be familiar with state content standards and collaboration among general educators, special educators, and English Learner (EL) educators must occur. All students can work toward grade-level academic content standards, and most of these students will be able to achieve these standards when the following three conditions are met:
1. Instruction is provided by teachers who are qualified to teach in the content areas addressed by state content standards and who know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners.

2. IEPs/504 Plans/I-ELPs are developed to ensure the provision of specialized instruction needed by the individual students.

3. Appropriate instructional accommodations are provided.

An instructional accommodation is a practice or procedure intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability (student with a disability) or limited-English language proficiency in order to provide equitable access to content during instruction and on classroom assessments. Providing accommodations for students of special populations during instruction will help to promote equal access to grade-level content. However, accommodations should not reduce learning expectations for students.

**Students Eligible for Accommodations on State Assessments**

In Alabama, students must be eligible and receiving special education services, 504 services, or English language instructional services in a pull-out program or in the regular classroom in order to qualify for testing accommodations. This manual addresses the use of testing accommodations.

**Requirements for Use of Accommodations on State Assessments**

A testing accommodation on a state assessment should enable the student to demonstrate the degree of achievement the student possesses in the content area. When the disability or language proficiency prevents the student from being able to demonstrate what he or she knows or is able to do, testing accommodations may be needed. Accommodations should be provided to ensure that each student receives individual consideration of his or her disability or limited-English proficiency. However, an accommodation should not be provided if it changes the nature, content, or integrity of the test. Testing accommodations provided to students on state assessments must be accommodations that also are provided and proven to be successful during classroom instruction and on classroom tests. It should be noted there are some accommodations that may be appropriate for instruction, but would not be appropriate for use on state assessments. There may be consequences (e.g., invalidation of a student’s test score) for the use of accommodations on state assessments that are not on the approved testing accommodations checklists. For example, the use of a reading accommodation on a subtest designed to measure one’s skill in reading would invalidate the subtest.
Testing accommodations on state assessments must adhere to the following principles:

- Testing accommodations should enable students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Testing accommodations must be based upon individual student needs and not upon a category of disability, level of language proficiency, level of instruction, time spent in the general classroom, or program setting.
- Testing accommodations must be accommodations which have been regularly made during classroom instruction and on classroom tests.
- Testing accommodations must be justified, proven successful, and documented in the student’s IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP.
- Testing accommodations should foster and facilitate independence for students, not dependence.
- Testing accommodations cannot supplant the skills the test is designed to measure.
- Only testing accommodations listed on the approved testing accommodations checklists should be used.

The following are required for a student to qualify for testing accommodations on state assessments:

1. Justification of the need for the testing accommodation;
2. Prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis for instruction and on classroom tests; and
3. Success of the accommodation during prior practice.

The justification of the need for the testing accommodation documented in the student’s IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP on the Participation Documentation forms, proof of prior practice, and proof of success of the accommodation must be verified and documented by the LEA and available for review by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). A copy of the Participation Documentation forms can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.

In special situations where ALSDE written approval is required prior to the administration of the state assessment with accommodations, the LEA must make a written request using the “Form Requesting Testing Accommodations Needing ALSDE Approval.” Additional documentation (prior practice documented in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP, documented proof of prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis, and documented proof of success of the accommodation) must be provided for the request to be processed. This form and documentation must be coordinated through the System Test Coordinator (STC) within each LEA and submitted to the ALSDE no later than four weeks prior to the state assessment to be administered. A copy of this form can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.
The Five Step Process

Step 1: Expect Students of Special Populations to Achieve Grade-Level Academic Content Standards

Several important laws require the participation of students of special populations in standards-based instruction and all assessment initiatives. These include federal laws such as the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Federal law requires the use of an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities receiving special education services who cannot participate in the state assessment program. Each state is required to establish the state’s definition of “significant cognitive disabilities.” In Alabama, the definition of a student with significant cognitive disabilities is a student with an intelligent quotient (IQ) of three standard deviations below the mean, which is an IQ of 55 or below. IEP teams should use this as a guideline when determining if a student should take an alternate assessment. A student meeting this definition and receiving instruction on the Alabama Extended Standards, an extension of the grade-level state content standards, is eligible for the Alabama Alternate Assessment as determined by the student’s IEP.

IDEA specifically governs services provided to students with disabilities receiving special education services. Accountability at the individual level is provided through IEPs developed on the basis of each child’s unique needs. IDEA requires standards-based IEPs for students with disabilities receiving special education services who are participating in an alternate assessment (Alabama Administrative Code requires standards-based IEPs for all special education students) and requires the participation of all students with disabilities receiving special education services in state and local assessments.

Federal law requires the assessment of English language proficiency for students with limited-English proficiency that are found eligible for English language instructional services in a pull-out program or in the regular classroom. In Alabama, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs) and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs are the language proficiency tests administered to EL students.

Equal Access to Grade-Level Content

With the focus of legislation aimed at accountability and the inclusion of all students comes the drive to ensure equal access to grade-level content standards. Academic content standards are educational targets for students to learn at each grade level. Alabama’s College- and Career-Readiness Standards are the Alabama state courses of study. Alabama state law requires state courses of study to be the minimum content taught by Alabama teachers to students for each grade level and course.

The state content standards drive both instruction and assessment in Alabama. The Alabama State Courses of Study can be found at www.alsde.edu, the Office of Student Learning, under Curriculum.
Step 2: Learn About Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment

Accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of scheduling, setting/administration, format and/or equipment, and recording that provide equitable access to content during instruction and allow the student to demonstrate the degree of achievement the student possesses in the content areas on state assessments.

Accommodations are intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of the student’s disability/language proficiency; they do not reduce learning expectations. The accommodations provided to a student on a state assessment must have been accommodations used regularly during classroom instruction and on classroom tests. It is critical to note that although some accommodations may be appropriate for instructional use, they would not be appropriate for use on a standardized assessment. There may be consequences (e.g., invalidation of the test) for the use of some accommodations during state assessments. It is very important for educators to become familiar with state policies regarding accommodations during state assessments.

Typically, accommodation use does not begin and end in school. Students who use accommodations will generally also need them at home, in the community as they get older, in postsecondary education, and at work. Accommodations for instruction and on state assessments are integrally intertwined.

Description of Accommodations Categories

Accommodations in Alabama are commonly categorized in four ways:

- **Scheduling Accommodations**—Allow students to complete the assignment or take the test at the best time of the day, take breaks, or increase the allowable length of time to complete the assignment or assessment.
- **Setting/Administration Accommodations**—Specify or change the location in which an assignment or test is given or change the conditions of the assignment or assessment setting.
- **Format and/or Equipment Accommodations**—Allow students to access information in an alternate mode or use equipment to aid in their access of information in the classroom and on assessments. These alternate modes of access can be auditory, multi-sensory, tactile, and visual.
- **Recording Accommodations**—Allow students to complete activities, assignments, and assessments in different ways such as the use of a scribe.

Modifications vs. Accommodations

Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations. Accommodations provide access. However, modifications refer to practices that change, lower, or reduce learning expectations. Modifications can actually increase the gap between the achievement of students and expectations for proficiency at a particular grade level. Using modifications may result in practices that adversely affect students throughout their educational career.
Examples of modifications include:

- Requiring a student to learn less material (e.g., fewer objectives, shorter units or lessons, fewer pages or problems);
- Reducing assignments and/or classroom tests so a student only needs to complete the easiest problems or items;
- Revising assignments and/or classroom tests to make them easier (e.g., crossing out half of the response choices on a multiple-choice test so that a student only has to pick from two options instead of four); and
- Giving a student hints or clues to correct responses on assignments and/or classroom tests.

Providing modifications to students during classroom instruction and/or classroom tests may have the unintended consequence of reducing their opportunity to learn critical content. If students have not had access to critical, assessed content, they may be at risk of not scoring proficient on state assessments or not meeting graduation requirements. In addition, modifications on state assessments will result in the assessment being invalidated.
Step 3: Select Accommodations for Instruction and State Assessments for Individual Students

To ensure that students are engaged in standards-based instruction and state assessments, every IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee member must be knowledgeable about the state academic content standards and state assessments. Effective decision-making about the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with making good instructional decisions. In turn, making appropriate instructional decisions is facilitated by gathering and reviewing accurate information about the student’s disability/level of language proficiency and present level of performance in relation to state academic standards.

The process of making decisions about instructional accommodations is one in which members of the IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee recommend a practice or procedure intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of a student’s disability/language proficiency in order to provide equitable access during instruction and on classroom tests. As students are taught, teachers use different approaches, techniques, instructional materials, and with some students, accommodations, to ensure that optimal learning for each student is taking place. When successful instructional accommodations have been determined, they should be used regularly in instruction and on classroom tests. A student may be accommodated in one content area (e.g., mathematics) or accommodated in multiple content areas (e.g., a reading accommodation in science and social studies).

Once instructional accommodations have been established, proven successful, and are regularly being used during instruction and on classroom tests, appropriate decisions regarding state assessment accommodations can be made by the IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee. State assessment accommodations are practices or procedures which should enable the student to demonstrate the degree of achievement which he or she possesses. There are many accommodations that may be appropriate during the teaching of content in the instructional program that would not be appropriate on a state assessment. An accommodation on a state assessment should not supplant the skill that the assessment is designed to measure (e.g., a reading accommodation on an assessment of reading comprehension).

An accommodation is not something that is provided on a student’s classroom tests and state assessments to help the student “pass” the test but rather is a part of that student’s total program which should originate in the instructional program. IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee meetings that simply engage people in checking boxes on a state accommodations checklist are neither conducive to sound decision-making practices, nor do they advance equal opportunities for students to participate in the general education curriculum. A list of do’s and don’ts for selecting accommodations can in this manual.
Documenting Accommodations on a Student’s IEP

For students with disabilities served under IDEA, determining appropriate instructional and state assessment accommodations should not pose any particular problems for IEP Teams that follow good IEP practices. With information obtained from the required summary of the student’s present level of academic achievement and functional performance, the process of identifying and documenting accommodations should be a fairly straightforward event. The “present level” is a federal requirement in which the 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 students.”

There are several areas on the Alabama IEP form where instructional accommodations can be addressed. These areas are found in the “Special Education and Related Services” box on the “Measurable Annual Goal” page. Any instructional accommodations to be used in the classroom during instruction and on classroom tests must be outlined here. Some instructional accommodations may be consistent over several annual goals, but many may vary depending on the individual needs of the student.

Once instructional accommodations have been in place and proven successful, the IEP Team should consider if accommodations are needed on a state assessment. When determining appropriate state assessment accommodations, the IEP Team must look at accommodations regularly being made on the student’s classroom tests over time in that particular subject area. State assessment accommodations must be reasonable, proven successful for the student, and be a part of the student’s instructional program. The IEP Team must work within the framework of the approved accommodations for special education students as indicated on state assessment accommodations checklists. A state assessment accommodation should not supplant the skill the test is designed to measure. Accommodations that change the nature, content, or integrity of the test should not be used. Approved state assessment accommodations checklists for students with disabilities receiving special education services can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.

In special situations where ALSDE written approval is required prior to the administration of the state assessment with accommodations, the LEA must make a written request using the “Form Requesting Testing Accommodations Needing ALSDE Approval.” Additional documentation (prior practice documented in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP, documented proof of prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis, and documented proof of success of the accommodation) must be provided for the request to be processed. This form and documentation must be coordinated through the STC within each LEA and submitted to the ALSDE no later than four weeks prior to the state assessment to be administered. The form can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.
Documenting Accommodations on a Student’s 504 Plan

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires public schools to provide accommodations to students with disabilities even if they do not qualify for special education services under IDEA. The definition of a disability under Section 504 is much broader than the definition under IDEA. Section 504 states:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. [29 U.S.C. Sec. 794]

Examples of students who may receive instructional and assessment accommodations based on their 504 Plan and regular practice in the instructional program include students with

- communicable diseases;
- disabilities from accidents who may need short term hospitalization or homebound services;
- allergies or asthma;
- drug or alcoholic addictions, as long as they are not currently using illegal drugs;
- environmental illnesses; and
- attention difficulties.

Instructional accommodations for the classroom and on classroom assessments can be documented anywhere in the student’s 504 Plan. Once documented, they should be used regularly.

Once instructional accommodations have been in place and proven successful, the 504 Committee may consider if accommodations are needed on a state assessment. When determining appropriate state assessment accommodations, the 504 Committee must look at accommodations regularly being made on the student’s classroom tests over time in that particular subject area. State assessment accommodations must be reasonable, proven successful for the student, and be a part of the student’s instructional program. The 504 Committee must work within the framework of the approved accommodations for students with disabilities receiving 504 services as indicated on state assessment accommodations checklists. A state assessment accommodation should not supplant the skill the test is designed to measure. Accommodations that change the nature, content, or integrity of the test should not be used. Approved state assessment accommodations checklists for students with disabilities receiving 504 services can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.

In special situations where ALSDE written approval is required prior to the administration of the state assessment with accommodations, the LEA must make a written request using the “Form Requesting Testing Accommodations Needing ALSDE Approval.” Additional documentation (prior practice documented in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP, documented proof of prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis, and documented proof of success of the accommodation) must be provided for the request to be processed. This form and documentation must be coordinated through the STC within each LEA and submitted to the ALSDE no later than four weeks prior to the state assessment to be administered. The form can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.
**Documenting Accommodations on a Student’s I-ELP**

In Alabama the definition of an English Learner (EL) is taken from federal regulations.

The term EL is an individual
- who is aged 3 through 21;
- who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary school;
- who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
  - who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
  - who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English proficiency; or
  - who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
- whose difficulty in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual
  - the ability to meet the state’s proficient level of achievement on state assessments;
  - the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is in English; or
  - the opportunity to participate fully in society.

The EL definition includes students with a wide range of educational needs with respect to learning English as a second language.

Examples include the following types of students:
- Children of recent immigrants who speak no English and who have had no formal training in written language.
- Children of highly educated immigrants who have had formal training in English during formal schooling.
- United States-born children whose primary language is not English and who have had limited formal education through English language.

Instructional accommodations for the classroom and on classroom assessments can be documented anywhere in the student’s I-ELP and should be used regularly.

Once instructional accommodations have been in place and proven successful, the EL Committee may consider if accommodations are needed on a state assessment. When determining appropriate state assessment accommodations, the EL Committee must look at accommodations regularly being made on the student’s classroom tests over time in that particular subject area. State assessment accommodations must be reasonable, proven successful for the student, and be a part of the student’s instructional program. The EL Committee must work within the framework of the approved accommodations for EL students as indicated on state assessment accommodations checklists. A state assessment accommodation should not supplant the skill the test is designed to measure. Accommodations that change the nature, content, or integrity of the test should not be used. Approved state assessment accommodations checklists for EL students can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.
In special situations where ALSDE written approval is required prior to the administration of the state assessment with accommodations, the LEA must make a written request using the “Form Requesting Testing Accommodations Needing ALSDE Approval.” Additional documentation (prior practice documented in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP, documented proof of prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis, and documented proof of success of the accommodation) must be provided for the request to be processed. This form and documentation must be coordinated through the STC within each LEA and submitted to the ALSDE no later than four weeks prior to the state assessment to be administered. The form can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.

Determining the Consequences of State Assessment Accommodations Use

When selecting accommodations for state assessments for a student, it is important to look at state policies and procedures to determine whether use of an accommodation results in consequences on a state assessment (e.g., invalidation of a student’s score). State assessment accommodations that result in adverse consequences are commonly referred to as nonstandard or non-approved accommodations in Alabama. Nonstandard accommodations which adversely affect the validity of the assessment and non-approved accommodations will result in the invalidation of the student’s test.

Questions to Guide Accommodation Selection

Selecting accommodations for instruction and state assessments is the role of a student’s IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee. The questions provided below should be used to guide the selection of appropriate accommodations for students receiving special education services, 504 services, or students receiving English language instruction services in a pull-out program or in the regular classroom:

- What are the student’s learning/language strengths and areas needing further improvement?
- How does the student’s learning/language needs affect the achievement of grade-level content standards?
- What specialized instruction (e.g., learning strategies, organizational skills, reading skills) does the student need to achieve grade-level content standards?
- What accommodations will increase the student’s access to instruction by addressing the student’s learning needs and reducing the effect of the student’s disability/language proficiency?
- What accommodations are regularly used by the student during instruction and on classroom tests?
- What are the results for assignments and classroom tests when this accommodation was used and not used?
- What is the student’s perception of how well an instructional accommodation “worked”?
- Are there effective combinations of accommodations?
- What difficulties did the student experience when using instructional accommodations?
- What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and specialists about how the instructional accommodation worked?
- Should the student continue to use the accommodation, are changes needed, or should the use of the accommodation be discontinued?
- What accommodations will enable the student to demonstrate the degree of achievement which he or she possesses on state assessments?
Of the accommodations that match the student’s needs, consider
- the student’s willingness to learn to use the accommodation;
- the opportunities to use the accommodation in classroom settings; and
- the conditions for use on state assessments.

Plan how and when the student will learn to use a new accommodation. Be certain there is ample
time to use instructional accommodations and prove they are successful. Finally, you should plan
for ongoing evaluation and improvement of the student’s use of the accommodation.
Step 4: Administer Accommodations during Instruction and On State Assessments

Accommodations during Instruction

The IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee should consider use of appropriate and needed accommodations during instruction and on classroom tests. These accommodations should be used regularly in the classroom to help promote equal access to the content so optimal learning will take place. An accommodation should never be used solely during state assessments.

Accommodations on State Assessments

Once decisions have been made about providing accommodations to meet individual student needs, the logistics of providing the actual accommodations during state assessments must be planned. IEPs/504 Plans/I-ELPs must be checked in advance to determine which students are to be tested with accommodations.

Planning for Test Day

School staff must communicate with the Building Test Coordinator (BTC) to ensure students will receive the state assessment accommodations they qualify for or have been approved to receive. Thus, it is essential for all IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee members to know and understand the requirements of state assessments, including the use of accommodations. It is important to engage the appropriate personnel to plan the logistics and provisions of state assessment accommodations on test day.

Prior to the day of a test, be certain test administrators and proctors have been trained, know what accommodations each student will be using, and know how to administer the state assessment and accommodations properly.

Administering State Assessments and Accommodations

State policies specify practices to ensure test security and the standardized and ethical administration of state assessments. Test administrators, proctors, and all staff involved in test administration must adhere to these policies. Failure to follow administration and security procedures promulgated by the Alabama State Board of Education and published in the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), the Student Assessment Handbook, the test administrator’s manuals, and this manual may result in disciplinary action by the local board of education and/or revocation of the teaching certificate issued by the ALSDE.
Test Security

Test security involves maintaining the confidentiality of test questions and answers and is critical in ensuring the integrity and validity of a state assessment. Test security can become an issue when a reading accommodation is provided, when someone other than the student is allowed to see the test (e.g., interpreter, scribe), or someone’s actions call into question the results of the test.

The Test Security Policy (AAC 290-040-020-.04) must be read and signed by all individuals involved with the state testing program. This policy identifies specific actions which are inappropriate and violate test security. Violation of the Test Security Policy could result in disciplinary action. A copy of the Test Security Policy can be found on the Student Assessment Webpage.

The Alabama State Department of Education provides educational data through the World Wide Web system as it relates to student assessment. This data system contains confidential information about students including test scores and other personal information. This system is password protected and requires a user ID and an assigned password for access. The system is not for public use, and any student information from the system must not be disclosed to anyone other than a state, system, or school official as defined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). A copy of the Confidentiality Statement can be found on the Student Assessment Webpage.

Standardization

Standardization refers to adherence to uniform administration procedures and conditions during a state assessment. Standardization is necessary in order to produce valid and reliable information about student learning. Strict adherence to guidelines detailing instructions and procedures for the administration of accommodations is necessary to ensure test results reflect actual student learning. Guidelines for administering specific accommodations on state assessments can be found on the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures of Special Populations Webpage.
Step 5: Evaluate and Improve Accommodations Use

Accommodations must be selected on the basis of the individual student’s needs and must be used consistently for instruction and state assessments. Collecting and analyzing data on the use and effectiveness of accommodations are necessary to ensure accessibility to content and learning and the meaningful participation of students of special populations on state and local assessments. Data on the use and impact of accommodations during instruction and on classroom assessments may reveal questionable patterns of accommodations use or support the continued use of some accommodations or the rethinking of others. Examination of the data may also indicate areas in which the IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee and teachers need additional training and support.

In addition to collecting information about the use of accommodations within the classroom, information also needs to be gathered on the implementation of accommodations during state assessments. Observations conducted during test administration, interviews with test administrators, and talking with students about the accommodations used will likely yield data that can be used to guide the evaluation process.

Questions to Guide Evaluation of Accommodation Use on State Assessments at the School Level

1. Are there policies in place to ensure ethical testing practices, the standardized administration of assessments, and that test security practices are followed before, during, and after testing?
2. Are there procedures in place to ensure test administration procedures are not compromised with the provision of accommodations?
3. Are students receiving accommodations as documented in their IEPs/504 Plans/I-ELPs?
4. Are there procedures in place to ensure that test administrators adhere to directions for the implementation of accommodations?
5. How many students with IEPs/504 Plans/I-ELPs are receiving accommodations?
6. What types of accommodations are provided and are some used more than others?
7. Are students provided accommodations tailored to their individualized needs or are all students receiving the same accommodations?
8. How well do students who receive accommodations perform on classroom tests, local assessments, and state assessments? If students are not meeting the expected level of performance, is it due to the students not having had access to the necessary instruction, not receiving the accommodation, or using accommodations that were not effective?

Student-level questions need to be considered by the IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee to evaluate the use of accommodations. It is critical to continually evaluate the use of accommodations to ensure that the most appropriate and successful accommodations are being used.
Questions to Guide Evaluation of Accommodation Use on State Assessments at the Student Level

1. What accommodations are used by the student during instruction and on classroom assessments?
2. What are the results of classroom assignments and classroom tests when accommodations are used verses when accommodations are not used? If a student did not meet the expected level of performance, is it due to not having access to the necessary instruction, not receiving the appropriate accommodations, or ineffective use of accommodations?
3. What accommodations are used by the student during state assessments?
4. What are the results of state assessments when accommodations are used? Does this performance mirror performance on classroom tests? If a student did not meet the expected level of performance, is it due to lack of access to the necessary instruction, not receiving the appropriate accommodations, or ineffective use of accommodations?
5. What is the student’s perception of how well the accommodation worked?
6. Which accommodations seemed to be least effective or ineffective?
7. What combinations of accommodations seem to be effective?
8. What are the difficulties encountered in the use of accommodations?
9. What are the perceptions of teachers and others about how the accommodation appears to be working?

School-level questions should be addressed by a committee responsible for continuous improvement efforts. It is critical to stress that evaluation is not the responsibility of just one individual. The entire IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee should contribute to the information gathering and decision-making processes.
Guidelines for Administering Specific Accommodations

This information must be used by the test administrator in providing these accommodations on state assessments. If questions arise regarding the use of accommodations or these guidelines, contact your STC.

Reading Accommodation

Reading accommodations are provided to students individually (1:1) testing by the use of headphones for online testing or a human reader using a reader’s script that has been provided. Individualized administration of reading accommodations is best practice. A proctor is required during individual test administrations. At no time may a proctor provide a reading accommodation or a reading accommodation be recorded.

Rationale

- Different students work at different paces. They think about an item in different ways and have different parts of the text they need repeated at different times. Student are distracted and often impeded by each other when sitting in any size group where even one person is receiving a human read-aloud support.

- If, in a small group, all are receiving this same support from one reader, then all are confined to process the same text stimuli at the same rate with the same number of repetitions, and thereby experience even less control than in the individual administration, where they already are fully dependent upon another person assisting them to read.

- Further, when any student is verbalizing his or her needs aloud for reading support and specifying which sections need to be reread, the student’s needs are publicly displayed to all others—including the reader, any teacher, and all peers nearby. This often creates a situation where the student who truly requires the support is discouraged and embarrassed from asking for it or for the natural repetition needed to clearly understand the text.

Online Testing

Online delivery of a reading accommodation support, when headphones are used, provides a powerful solution to virtually all of these concerns and gives the experience of personal control back to the student, resulting in a standardized, cost efficient, long term solution that is consistent with 21st century social, academic, and workplace technologies. Using online testing there is no concern about the delivery of this support to students within large-groups-assuming students are using headphones. Online delivery produces a virtual 1:1 experience, with privacy and dignity.
Reader

The use of a Reader may be provided for a student who has a documented reading disability that is two or more grade-levels below the student’s enrollment grade and that severely limits the student from decoding at any level of difficulty. The deficit should be addressed throughout the student’s IEP or 504 Plan, and the student should be working toward mastery of those deficit skills. The criteria for determining the use of a Reader shall not be solely dependent upon the student’s grade level performance or his/her cognitive ability.

Test administrators (certified) providing a reading accommodation must ensure the student understands what is expected of them when receiving a reading accommodation. The student may need extended time or extra time in conjunction with the human reader. The student must have an opportunity to ask questions and understand how to mark their answers before they begin taking the test. However, test administrators cannot answer questions about specific test items. When reading test items aloud, test administrators must be careful not to inadvertently give clues that indicate the correct answer or help eliminate some answer choices. Test administrators should use even inflection so that the student does not receive any cues by the way the information is read. It is important for test administrators to read test items/questions, answer choices, and graphics (tables, charts, graphs, and illustrations) verbatim (word-for-word), exactly as provided in the reader’s script, if provided, or test booklet. Test administrators may not clarify, elaborate, or provide assistance to students. Refer to the current Alabama Student Assessment Program Handbook for Test Administration for further specifications regarding reader responsibilities.

Sign Language Interpreter

A sign language interpreter may be used for either directions and/or as a reading accommodation. If using a sign language interpreter during the time oral directions are given, the interpreter can only interpret the directions for the student. If a sign language interpreter is allowed for a reading accommodation, the interpreter is to interpret the test administrator as he/she is reading from the appropriate reader’s script. The sign language interpreter must not clarify, elaborate, paraphrase, or provide assistance with the meaning of words, intent of test questions, or responses to test items. Refer to the current Alabama Student Assessment Program Handbook for Test Administration for further specifications regarding sign language interpreter responsibilities.

When a student needs a sign language interpreter, consider also the likely need for additional supports that must be planned and documented on the accommodations checklist for the appropriate assessment.

- Extended or Extra Time
- Supervised breaks (allowed for interpreter to rest)
- Small group
- Individual administration
Native Language Interpreter

A native language interpreter can only be used during the time oral directions are given. The native language interpreter must not clarify, elaborate, paraphrase, or provide assistance with the meaning of words, intent of test questions, or responses to test items. The interpreter is to interpret the test administrator as they read verbatim from a reader’s script, if provided, or test booklet that has been provided for the appropriate assessment. Refer to the current Alabama Student Assessment Program Handbook for Test Administration for further specifications regarding native language interpreter responsibilities.

Marking Answers in Test Booklet

Students may be allowed to mark answers in the test booklet instead of marking the answers on an answer document. Answers to open-ended responses must be written in the answer document or recorded by a scribe (certified). Two certified individuals must transcribe the answers verbatim to a regular test booklet containing the student’s demographic information.

Scribes

Scribes must be fulltime, certified employees. Although scribes may be necessary in emergency situations, this support should only be used when no other options are available. Scribes may be provided for students with disabilities that significantly impact the area of written expression or that have a physical disability that impedes their motor process or ability to write. The use of a scribe must be provided in an individual setting. This administration must include the scribe along with a test administrator (no proctor required). Scribes should be impartial and must write exactly what the student dictates. Scribes should not affect the outcome of a test in any way. Scribes must not add or take away from the dictation of the student. They cannot answer or explain anything to the student during testing and must be careful not to give hints of any type. The scribe must not alert the student to mistakes (i.e. in spelling, grammar, or punctuation, etc.). The student must be allowed to review and edit what the scribe has written. If the scribe has difficulty understanding what the student dictates, he/she may say “Please say the last sentence again.” This is the only verbal communication allowed between the student and the scribe. If the dictation contains a homophone, the scribe will ask the student to spell the word. Refer to the Guidelines for use of a Proctor and Scribe. Refer to the current Alabama Student Assessment Program Handbook for Test Administration for further specifications regarding scribe responsibilities.

Extended or Extra Time

Students who are regularly given extended time on classroom activities, classroom assignments, and classroom tests may qualify for a specified amount of extended or extra time on selected state assessments. Extended or extra time varies depending on the particular state assessment. Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind all the accommodations or accessibility features being provided and the nature of the assessment. For example, if a read-aloud accommodation or scribe is being used, extended or extra time may be necessary. Usually “unlimited” time is not appropriate or feasible. Students with extended or extra time accommodation should test either individually or in a small group with other students who need the same amount of time. Refer to each specific state assessment accommodations checklist.
Large Print

Students who regularly use large-print materials in the classroom may qualify for large-print materials on state assessments. The use of a large-print answer document for students testing with a large-print test booklet is required on selected state assessments. Two certified individuals must transcribe the answers verbatim to a regular test booklet containing the student’s demographic information. Online testing may support large fonts or magnification to accommodate a student’s need for large print.

Braille

Students who regularly use braille materials in the classroom qualify for braille materials on selected state assessments. Two certified individuals must transcribe the answers verbatim to a regular test booklet containing the student’s demographic information. Alabama state assessments are provided in Contracted Braille including all graphics.

Templates or Line Readers

Templates are used by students to aid in reading or writing. A template is not a graphic organizer. Templates are the size of an index card or larger with a “cut out” area to allow the student to see or write one word, multiple words, or a line of print at a time. The template is moved down the page or answer document as the student reads, writes, or works.

Administered by a Specific Teacher

There are situations where it is appropriate for the IEP Team/504 Committee/EL Committee to specify a teacher to serve as the student’s test administrator. Care, however, should be given in selecting this accommodation. There are situations where it is impossible to provide this accommodation (e.g., when the decision for an individual administration by the student’s special education teacher has been selected for five different students in the same teacher’s classroom).

Assistive Technology/Communication Device

Assistive Technology/Communication Device is defined as any item, piece of equipment, product, or system whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. The use of assistive technology/communication device must be appropriate so that it does not invalidate a state assessment or supplant the skill that the state assessment is designed to measure. Extreme caution must be taken to ensure that when using any type of Assistive Technology/Communication Device the cognition is performed entirely by the student unless the device is allowed on a state assessment. (e.g., the use of a calculator).
With Other Accommodations Needed Due to the Nature of the Disability or the Level of Language Proficiency

The accommodations checklists, although not exhaustive, have been provided to identify approved accommodations available to students for use on state assessments. In the event that an accommodation used during instruction and on classroom tests is requested for use on a state assessment, and the accommodation is not listed on the accommodations checklist, the accommodation may be requested by selecting the “With other accommodations needed due to the nature of the disability and the nature of the assessment”.

When this accommodation is selected, the LEA completes the “Form Requesting Testing Accommodations Needing ALSDE Approval”. The form is completed in its entirety and submitted by the STC to the ALSDE no later than four weeks prior to the assessment to be administered. Additional documentation (prior practice documentation in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP, proof of prior practice in the classroom on a regular basis, and proof of success of the accommodation) must be provided.

**Remember: Some supports should be selected together....**

Typically, once the needed accommodation has been identified there is usually some form of general testing condition support that needs to be selected along with the first support to enable the testing session to work properly and securely.

- Will the student also need extended or extra time if this support is used?
- Will the student need an individual test administration if this support is used?
- Will the student need a small group or special setting if this support is used?
- Will the student need additional supervised breaks?
- Something else?

Consider the student’s experience of the test. Be careful **NOT** to overdo it by providing too many supports. This will hurt the student performance. Seek only those supports that work for **THIS** student.
A List of Do’s and Don’ts for Selecting Accommodations

Do get input about accommodations from teachers, parents, and students, and use it to make decisions at the IEP/504 Plan/EL Committee meetings.

Don’t make decisions about instructional and state assessment accommodations based on one individual’s request.

Do select accommodations that reduce the effect of the disability or the limited-English proficiency.

Don’t select accommodations unrelated to documented student learning needs or accommodations that are intended to give students an unfair advantage.

Do make accommodation decisions based on individualized student needs.

Don’t make accommodations decisions based on whatever is easiest to do (e.g., small group).

Do refer to state accommodations policies and understand implications of selections.

Don’t check every accommodation possible on a checklist simply to be “safe.” Students must be eligible for accommodations on state assessments.

Do select instructional and state assessment accommodations based on specific individual needs in each content area.

Don’t assume certain accommodations, such as extra time, are appropriate for every student in every content area.

Do be certain to document instructional and state assessment accommodation(s) in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP.

Don’t use an accommodation that has not been documented in the IEP/504 Plan/I-ELP.

Do be familiar with the types of accommodations that can be used as both instructional and state assessment accommodations.

Don’t assume that all instructional accommodations are appropriate for use on state assessments.

Do be specific about the “where, when, who, and how” of providing instructional and state assessment accommodations.

Don’t simply indicate an accommodation will be provided “as appropriate” or “as necessary.”

Do provide state assessment accommodations that are used regularly in classroom instruction.

Don’t provide a state assessment accommodation for the first time on the day of the test.

Do select state assessment accommodations for the appropriate reasons.

Don’t provide a state assessment accommodation at the last minute because the student cannot pass the test.

Do evaluate accommodations used by the student.

Don’t assume the same accommodations remain appropriate year after year.