

Questions to Ask to Determine How to Move Closer to Universally Designed Assessments From the Very Beginning, by Addressing the Standards First and Moving on From There

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Question: How should a state or district handle a situation in which a student's disability precludes the performance of a skill required by a reading assessment? Examples might include the following:

- Students who are deaf are required by the state or district assessment to match the sounds of words.
- Students who are blind are required by the state or district assessment to select objects of the same color.
- Students who are dyslexic are required by the state or district assessment to decode a passage about which the questions are ones of understanding.

Answer: There are several issues for the state or district to address. Each of these issues should be considered in turn to determine how to deal with this situation.

1. **Does the skill in question reflect a standard that is to be assessed?** It is possible that a skill has slipped into an assessment that is not reflective of a state or district standard, so this possibility should be checked first. If it does not reflect a standard, then remove measurement of the skill from the assessment. If it does reflect a standard, then go to Consideration 2.
2. **Is there a clear match between the breadth and depth in the standard and how the standard is reflected on the test?** It may be that the assessment is not adequately aligned to the standard and that the standard development committee would agree that the skill should not be included in the way it is currently assessed. If this possibility is the case,

then remove measurement of the skill from the assessment. If it is not, then go to Consideration 3.

3. **Is there an accommodation that can be used by a student, even though it might not be used for other aspects of the assessment?** For example, could a student read a Braille version of a question, have the question presented in sign language, or use a text reader instead of proceeding in the manner that had originally been intended? If such an accommodation is possible and the same skill is still measured, then assess the standard using an appropriate accommodation for the skill in question. If it is not possible, then go to Consideration 4.

4. **Is there an alternative skill that could be used for students whose disability precludes performance of the skill?** For example, instead of identifying words that sound the same, could students who are deaf identify words that have similar meanings? If there is an alternative skill and it is considered feasible, then allow the alternative skill to be on the assessment for certain students. If alternative skills are not considered appropriate and feasible, then go to Consideration 5.

5. **Is there a way to score the assessment so the student and the school are not punished because the student's disability precludes performance on the skill?** For example, do not simply assign an automatic zero or lowest possible score to the student, but consider other scoring possibilities instead. One scoring possibility to consider is imputing a score for the missed skill.

Measuring English proficiency in areas such as speaking and listening when assessing students with disabilities who are also English language learners will have similar challenges. Decisions about how to include English language learners with disabilities whose English proficiency and disabilities preclude the skill being measured in exactly the same way as other students (e.g., an English language learner who is deaf taking the listening test) require careful consideration of the questions identified above. Just as it is for other students with disabilities, the critical decision

point will be whether decision makers are willing to recognize that a skill may have to be accommodated (e.g., taking information in from sign language can be considered listening for those who cannot hear). The difficulty becomes how far along a continuum a skill can be considered the same when a disability is considered. For example, can responding by means of a sign language be considered “spoken language” for those students who have been deaf since birth? These kinds of policy decisions require much discussion among personnel responsible for assessment, curriculum, special education, and English as a second language or bilingual education.