

Print Disabilities

THE CONSIDERATION FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

Print Disabilities

Teachers traditionally rely upon printed materials as the main tool for teaching students. However, for students with print disabilities it can be difficult or impossible to access this type of instruction. A print disability refers to an individual's ability to interact with printed material. **A student with a print disability is unable to gain information from conventional printed materials at grade level and needs alternate access to the information.** This may be in the form of Braille, large print, audio or digital text. Print disabilities commonly affect individuals with blindness, visual impairments, specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) and physical disabilities. Students with visual impairments or blindness can't read standard print from a textbook. Students with physical disabilities may have difficulty holding a textbook or turning the pages. Students with severe learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, have a difficult time processing written text.

Text to Speech removes the barriers for students who struggle with decoding and understanding printed words on a page by providing them access to the text. This accommodation is intended for a small number of students (1-1.5% of the states total student population) who have a disability that severely limits or prevents them from decoding written text. These students often show evidence of a reading-based disability documented in grades K-2 and strong evidence suggesting the reading disability will persist despite intensive, targeted instruction. The intent isn't to make up for being a slow reader.

Accessible Instructional Materials and Assistive Technology

Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams, student improvement teams and 504 teams are responsible for determining a student's educational supports and services. **Consideration of the need for accommodations including assistive technology (AT) or Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) is required for all students with disabilities.** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that student evaluations cover all areas of a suspected disability, use a variety of assessment tools and strategies and obtain information to assist the team in developing an IEP. The team should determine if the student has a print disability and identify what type of accommodations are required. Key considerations are the student's functional ability to use and learn from standard print materials. Teams should consider the extent to which a student can:

- See text on a page.
- Hold and turn pages of a book.
- Read for required lengths of time without fatigue.
- Decode letters and words, and read with fluency.

The consideration and use of accessible instructional materials helps eliminate the most frequent barriers that students with print disability encounter when accessing the general education curriculum and enable them to gain access to and progress in the general education curriculum. AIM and AT help students gain independence and access to grade-level material, which transforms learning for students with print disabilities. The AEM Navigator guides the work of a team as they work through an individual student's need for specialized formats of printed instructional materials.¹

¹ AEM Navigator. (2015). Retrieved from <http://aem.cast.org/navigator/page/132>

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Consideration of Accommodations

Consideration of accommodations for students who need AIM and AT to access the general education curriculum is necessary to ensure students continue to receive the appropriate accommodations not only in the classroom but also on district and state assessments.

If a student has a print disability and uses accessible instructional materials during classroom instruction and tests, taking these accommodations away for district and state assessments prevents the student from being able to communicate what they know.

Students with print disabilities may be eligible to receive Text-To-Speech (TTS) accommodations for all state assessments, including English Language Arts (ELA) passages. TTS for ELA passages should only be requested for students with reading-based disabilities or visual impairments/blindness.

To qualify, the student must have a plan in place (IEP, 504 or student improvement plan) identifying the student as blind, having a significant visual impairment or having a reading-based disability that affects the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills. The student also must be receiving TTS or read-aloud supports on a regular basis during classroom instruction and assessments. These students may have membership in organizations like Bookshare or Learning Ally or regularly use AT to access text.

The purpose of TTS accommodations should be because it was determined that the student will lack access to important information because of significant barriers to decoding, fluency or comprehension. If students aren't accessing these accommodations during instruction, they shouldn't be provided during assessment.

Students with a reading-based disability must be receiving interventions to improve their decoding, fluency or comprehension and must be reading at least two grade levels below. Continued reading instruction should strive to increase a student's independent reading. TTS for ELA passages (nonvisual) allows students with disabilities that limit their ability to decode print the opportunity to demonstrate content knowledge in all subject areas by mitigating the effects of the reading or print disability. Text-to-speech for ELA passages requires the approval of the Kansas State Department of Education, and results in a valid test score once approved. Districts should complete the TTS checklist and submit it to crogers@ksde.org for approval by Jan. 31 each year.

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Sample Profiles of Students Appropriate for TTS for ELA Passages

SAMPLE 1:

John is a student with a learning disability. He is in eighth grade. John has been consistently receiving research-based, specially designed reading instruction. He has made slow progress as evidenced by progress monitoring on IEP goals. Recent evaluation results indicate his decoding and fluency skills are significantly below grade level. His instructional reading level is consistent with skills shown at the fourth-grade level. He receives auditory supports for classroom assignments and assessments. When provided auditory accommodations in class, he is able to demonstrate grade-level comprehension and content knowledge.

SAMPLE 2:

Amaya is a sixth-grade student who is blind. She has been identified as a student with a disability and is receiving instruction in Braille. However, she isn't yet proficient in Braille, as her blindness resulted from an accident she experienced over the summer. She requires auditory accommodations in order to participate in instruction and assessments involving print.

SAMPLE 3:

Chris is a third-grade student currently on a student improvement plan. Chris has struggled with decoding and fluency. He was referred to the student improvement team last spring for potential interventions. Chris has been receiving tier two interventions and is responding to the interventions and accommodations in the classroom. His interventions include specially designed instruction, as well as TTS accommodations for reading in his general education classroom. His instructional reading level is currently K-1 grade. However, with TTS, he is able to read and comprehend grade-level text.

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