Reader Options for Smarter Balanced and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessments

Slide 1: Reader Options for Smarter Balanced and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessments

Welcome to the CSDE Learning Series for Planning and Placement Teams and Section 504 Teams!

This training focuses on accessibility supports that enhance text and print access for eligible students participating in Connecticut's Statewide Assessments, specifically Smarter Balanced and NGSS.

During this session, you'll explore a variety of embedded supports available within the test platform, along with non-embedded reader supports that test administrators can provide to students with documented barriers to access.

We'll introduce the **Accessibility Supports Pyramid**, a framework that organizes supports based on student need, as outlined in their English Learner Plan, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plan, or SRBI Plan (if applicable).

In addition, we'll highlight specific reader supports for English Learners/Multilingual Learners and share resources and training opportunities to help meet the diverse needs of all students.

Please note: A separate PowerPoint training focused on language supports for eligible ELs/MLs is available. To access it, visit the Training tab on the **Sensible Assessments webpage** via the Connecticut Student Assessment Main Page.

Slide 2: Expect Students to Achieve Grade-Level Standards

Expect Students to Achieve Grade-Level Standards. High expectations for all students are essential. John Hattie's research on *Visible Learning* identifies collective teacher efficacy as the most impactful factor in student achievement. As educators, we must not only ensure all students have access to grade-level standards but also believe they can achieve them. To support this goal, consider the following:

- Apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Embrace a strengths-based planning mindset.
- Use accessibility supports to promote equity, offering students choices that build confidence and independence.

- Recognize that assessments vary in what they measure—content, skills, and constructs.
- Collaborate across general education, EL/ML, and support teams to foster inclusive, effective instruction.

Slide 3: Who qualifies for reader supports and accommodations and how are they determined?

The Accessibility Supports Pyramid is a framework that illustrates how accessibility supports are aligned to students' specific needs and purposes.

At the base of the pyramid are **Universal Tools**, which are available to *all* students. These tools—such as scratch paper or a highlighter—are intended to support any student who may benefit from them, regardless of the content area or activity. They can be used at any time during instruction or assessment.

The second tier represents **Designated Supports**, which are intended for a smaller group of students. These supports are identified through a review of the student's strengths and barriers by the educational team. Examples include tools that enhance visual access to text, such as streamlined presentation, zoom, or text-to-speech features that help orient the student to the content on the online assessment. Additionally, there are a variety of language supports for eligible ELs/MLs included in this category.

The third tier includes **Accommodations**, which are reserved for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP**)** or a Section 504 Plan. These supports are documented in the student's plan and are necessary for accessing instruction and assessments. For example, a student may receive text-to-speech for English Language Arts reading passages to provide access due to a visual or print disability.

At the top of the pyramid are **Special Documented Accommodations**, which are considered when universal tools, designated supports, and standard accommodations are not sufficient to provide access. These supports are highly individualized and may include a human reader or a human signer as appropriate depending on the student's documented needs.

Because these accommodations require the highest level of support from educators or test administrators, they must be carefully reviewed to ensure the student meets eligibility criteria. Educators providing these supports must receive specific training and follow established protocols to maintain test security and fidelity. Additionally, students using special documented accommodations must test in an individual setting. Please note that the CSDE has a separate training available on the Sensible Assessments training page that focuses on Special

Documented Accommodations. For more information, refer to the Special Documented Accommodations brochure.

Slide 4: Classifying Accessibility Supports

Technology empowers educators to implement computer-based instruction and assessment accessibility supports that promote individualized learning experiences. These supports are designed to reduce or eliminate barriers that may prevent students from demonstrating their knowledge and skills.

Importantly, accessibility supports used in the classroom do not lower learning expectations.

Across the three tiers of the Accessibility Supports Pyramid, supports fall into two main categories:

- Embedded supports are integrated into the digital testing platform.
- Non-embedded supports are external tools provided by the test administrator to the student.

Slide 5: Accessibility Supports Versus Modifications

Accessibility supports—which include designated supports or accommodations—are tools provided to help students access Tier 1 (general education) instruction or the learning environment. These supports do **not** change the expectations for what students are expected to learn; rather, they change **how** the material is presented or accessed.

Modifications, on the other hand, involve changes to the Tier 1 or general education curriculum itself. They alter what is being taught by adjusting the content, instructional level, or performance expectations for an individual student. Modifications are not allowed on statewide assessments. Their use is considered a test irregularity and will result in the invalidation of test scores.

Slide 6: How are accessibility supports determined?

Educators should document each student's strengths and barriers within their SRBI Plan, English Learner/Multilingual Learner (EL/ML) Plan, Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 Plan. By identifying and leveraging a student's strengths, teams can better support areas where barriers to learning exist.

When reviewing a student's profile, teams should consider critical data that demonstrate both the need for support and the effectiveness of strategies in helping the student meet specific goals and objectives.

Key components to consider when developing or reviewing a plan include:

- What are the student's instructional needs and barriers?
- How can the student's strengths be used to support access to learning?
- What access points are needed during instruction, and what strategies are currently working well?
- Has an evaluation been conducted to determine the need for assistive technology?
- What cognitive and psychological evaluations have been completed?
- What are the findings from these assessments?

These evaluations provide valuable insights into the student's unique learning profile, which can serve as foundational elements for designing effective supports.

Special Documented Accommodations are determined by Planning and Placement Teams (PPT) and Section 504 Teams based on a preponderance of evidence found throughout the student's plan. These accommodations must align with the student's documented disability or disabilities.

The team should clearly identify:

- The student's learning and access barriers
- The specific access points required
- The supplemental aids and services needed across both academic and non-academic settings
- The accommodations necessary for the student to access district and statewide assessments

Slide 7: Quick Reminders

Educator Teams, including IEP and 504 Teams, and those planning designated supports for students without formal plans (such as Els/MLs) should have a clear understanding of both the purpose and functionality of each accessibility within the online testing environment. This understanding should be grounded in the student's documented plan before making any determinations.

Key considerations include:

- Accessibility supports are not a one size fits all.
- More supports do not necessarily lead to a better test experience.
- Conflicting supports can cause confusion during the test set up and administration and may result in test irregularities.

Common examples of conflicting accommodations include:

- Embedded Text-to-Speech vs. Non-Embedded Read Aloud
- Embedded Speech-to-Text vs. Scribe
- Embedded Color Contrast vs. Non-Embedded Color Contrast or Color Overlay
- Print Size vs. Large Print (Note: *Large Print* refers to a separate Large Print Test Booklet. Students using Large Print do not take an online assessment.)

Below are key resources:

- Accessibility Considerations
- CSDE Assessment Guidelines
- Description of Designated Supports and Accommodations for Smarter Balanced and Next Generation Science Standards Assessment (abridged description of accessibility supports)
- Accessibility Chart
- Assessment Resources for Planning and Placement and Section 504 Teams Quick Guide

Slide 8: When identifying student need, teams should use a systematic and continuous process that considers barriers such as:

There are many ways to support students who experience barriers to learning—particularly those related to reading—by applying the principles of **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** and adapting instructional and communication strategies to promote meaningful access to content.

Below are some common barriers that may impact reading:

- Executive Functioning Challenges (e.g., attention, cognitive control, processing difficulties)
- Persistent Calculation Disability / Dyscalculia
- Reading Disability / Print Disability / Struggling Reader
- Language Disability
- Language Acquisition Needs
- Significant Motor Difficulties or Recent Injury
- Visual Impairments / Blindness
- Hard of Hearing / Deafness

Depending on a student's unique learning profile, some may benefit from reader-designated supports and accommodations to improve access to instructional content and assessments.

Based on the student's unique learning profile, some students may benefit from reader designated supports and accommodations to provide greater access to the content taught during instruction and on assessments.

Slide 9: To determine appropriate reader supports, review the following:

Does the student have a print disability? To illustrate what is meant by "print disability," teams should consider the following:

- Does the student have an identified reading-based disability that affects their decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills?
- Is there evidence of the persistence of the reading-based disability despite intensive, targeted instruction in the Science of Reading? (Note: There should be documentation of the interventions used and formative assessment data on the effect of each intervention or specialized instructional goal/objective within the student's plan.)
- Are interventions and instructional programing that is based in the Science of Reading being utilized to improve the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills?
- Does the student use assistive technology software, audio books, Bookshare, Accessible Educational Materials, or receive a read-aloud accommodation (human reader) during instruction?

Slide 10: Using Accessibility Supports During Instruction and Assessments

Provide opportunities for students to practice with accessibility features during instruction (e.g., Google Read/Write, Bookshare, accessible educational materials (AEM).

Prior to summative testing, provide opportunities for students to practice with accessibility features using grade and subject specific Practice Tests or Smarter Balanced/NGSS Interim Assessments.

Below are some resources:

- AEM Center: The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning at CAST
- Bookshare
- Smarter Balanced/NGSS Practice Tests

- LAS Links Practice Tests: Connecticut DRC LAS Links Website | LAS Links
- Interim Assessment webpage; Connecticut Sensible Assessment System--Interim Block Assessments

Slide 11: Accessibility Tools to Support Struggling Readers and Students with Related Reading, Print, and Visual Disabilities

No script.

Slide 12: Accessibility Chart for Smarter Balanced and NGSS Assessments

The Accessibility Chart, shown here, was developed specifically for the Smarter Balanced and the Next Generation Science Standards Assessments. It provides 3 tiers of support ranging from Universal Tools (shown to the far left in blue), designated supports (shown in orange and located in the center of the chart), and accommodations shown in red to the far right. You will notice that within each section, embedded and non-embedded tools are listed along with hyperlinks to additional information if applicable. Please note the user Key, located on the far right, that includes symbols noting tools that are not available on science versions, those accommodations that are non-standard and require additional teacher training, along with other tools that might be appropriate for ELs/MLs.

While the Accessibility Chart is a great reference, details about each of these accessibility features are documented in the CSDE Assessment Guidelines.

Accessibility Charts, also available for the LAS Links Assessment and the Connecticut SAT School Day, are posted to the CSDE web page.

Below are some resources:

- Accessibility Chart for Smarter Balanced/NGSS
- Accessibility Chart for the LAS Links
- Accessibility Chart for the CT SAT School Day

Slide 13: Universal Tools to Support Struggling Readers and Students with Print/Visual Disabilities

There are a variety of ways to support struggling readers by offering tools designed to enhance access to content. These supports are not one-size fits all – while some students may not find certain tools helpful, others may benefit from one or more as part of their test-taking strategies or as aids for focusing on content in a meaningful way.

Let's begin by reviewing the accessibility supports found in the bottom tier of the Accessibility Supports Pyramid, which are available to all students and serve as foundational tools for access.

Below is a list of embedded universal tools, each accompanied by a brief description:

- Digital Notepad: Available in all subjects, this tool is used for making notes about an item. The digital notepad is item specific and is available through the end of the test segment. Notes are **not** saved when the student moves on to the next segment or after a break of more than 20 minutes.
- English Glossary (Default) (Not available for science): Grade-and context-appropriate definitions of specific construct-irrelevant terms are shown in English on the screen via a pop-up window. The student can access the embedded glossary by clicking on any of the pre-selected terms. The use of this universal tool may result in the student needing additional overall time to complete the assessment.
- Expandable Passages: Each passage or stimulus and test items can be expanded so that it takes up a larger portion of the screen.
- Highlighter: This is a digital tool for marking desired text, item questions, item answers, or parts of these with a color. Highlighted text remains available throughout each test segment.
- Line Reader: The line reader adds a dark gray background to test content, except for the line that is being highlighted. This tool provides the straightforward functionality of the line reader, with the distraction-removing benefits of the masking tool.
- Mark for Review: Allows students to flag items for future review during the assessment. Markings are not saved when the student moves on to the next segment or after a break of more than 20 minutes.
- Strikethrough: Allows users to cross out answer options. If an answer option is an image, a strikethrough line will not appear, but the image will be grayed out.
- Writing Tools: Interim ELA Performance Task Only: Selected writing tools (i.e., bold, italic, bullets, undo/redo) are available for all student-generated responses.

Below is a list of non-embedded universal tools:

- Breaks: Breaks may be given at predetermined intervals or after completion of sections of the assessment for students. Sometimes individual students are allowed to take breaks when needed to reduce cognitive fatigue as they experience heavy assessment demands. The use of this universal tool may result in the student needing additional overall time to complete the assessment.

- Scratch paper: Students may use blank scratch paper to make notes, write computations, record responses, or create graphic organizers. Plain paper, paddy paper, lined paper, or graph paper may be used for ELA, Math, or Science. Graph paper is required beginning in Grade 6 for Math and may be used on all sections of the Math assessments.
- Whiteboard with Marker: A whiteboard with a marker may be used as scratch paper. However, if providing students with access to a whiteboard, provide sufficient spacing in between testers to maintain test security or test in a separate setting. Content on whiteboards should not be visible to other testers, Additionally, keep in mind that work created on a white board may not be able to be collected and securely stored as is done with student scrap paper in between test sessions. In these cases, ensure that students complete all work on the test page before pausing a test session.
- If the construct being measured is not impacted, assistive technology devices, including low-tech assistive technology (Math Window), are permitted to make notes. The assistive technology device needs to be consistent with the child's IEP or Section 504 Plan. Internet access must be disabled on assistive technology devices.
    - To maintain test security, all scratch paper must be collected and securely destroyed at the end of each Computer Adaptive Test (CAT session. Additionally, any notes on whiteboards or assistive technology devices must be erased at the conclusion of each session. If a student needs to complete the Math Performance Task over multiple sessions, materials such as scratch paper, whiteboards, and assistive technology devices may be collected at the end of each session, securely stored, and then returned to the student at the start of the next session.
    - Once the student has completed the performance task:
        - Scratch paper must be collected and securely destroyed.
        - Whiteboards should be thoroughly erased.
        - Notes or data on assistive technology devices must be deleted.
        - These steps are essential to maintaining test security and ensuring a fair testing environment.

Slide 14: Designated Supports for Struggling Readers and Students with Print/Visual Disabilities

Below is a list of embedded designated supports, each accompanied by a brief description:

- Color Contrast: Enables students to adjust screen background or font color, based on student needs or preferences. This may include reversing the colors for the entire interface or choosing the color of font and background: Black on White; Red on White; White on Red; Yellow on Blue; Medium Gray on Light Gray; Yellow on Black; Reverse Contrast and Black on Rose.
  - Illustration Glossary (Math) (This may also be beneficial to ELs/MLs): As part of the Translation Glossary (Math) designated support, illustration glossaries offer an embedded language support feature that displays pictures for selected construct-irrelevant terms on the Math assessment. When a glossary is available for a term, it will appear with a faint gray dotted border, allowing the student to click and access the illustration. *(Note: Not all items will include glossary translations.)*

Students can resize and reposition the illustration on the screen for better visibility and usability. This support can be paired with the English glossary or with the native language, if available through the embedded Math Translation Glossary.

Illustration glossaries may be especially helpful for:

- Students progressing toward English language proficiency, including ELs/MLs, non-ELs/MLs, and ELs/MLs with disabilities
- Students whose native language is not available for translation
- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing but not proficient in American Sign Language (ASL)

This support enhances access to content by providing visual representations that clarify unfamiliar terms without altering the construct being assessed. For more information, refer to What is the illustration glossary?

- Masking: Masking involves blocking off content that is not of immediate need or that may be distracting to the student. Students can focus their attention on a specific part of a test item using masking. Masking allows students to hide and reveal individual answer options, as well as the context menu.
- Streamline: This feature allows any test to be presented without a split screen. Items are presented sequentially below the stimuli.
- Text-to-Speech (Items, NOT ELA Reading Passages) (This may also be beneficial to ELs/MLs): Allows text to be read aloud to the student via embedded text-to-speech (TTS) technology. The student can control the speed, as well as raise or lower the volume of the voice via a volume control. Text-to-speech is available as

an embedded designated support for Science, Math, and ELA items **(not for ELA reading passages).** Text-to-speech is available only in English for Smarter Balanced ELA items, and in English and Spanish for Math and Science. For text-to-speech in Spanish to work, Presentation must be set to Spanish toggle in TIDE for each appropriate content area.

- Text-to-Speech Spanish (Math, Science) (Note: Text-to-Speech and Spanish toggle must be activated in TIDE.)
- Spanish Presentation (Math, Science) (Math, Science Toggle): This Spanish presentation will allow the literate Spanish-speaking student to toggle between a full Spanish translation of the item and the English version of the item. By default, all test directions, navigation buttons, and test content will be presented to the student in the Spanish language. For students whose primary language is not English and who use dual language supports in the classroom, the use of this designated support (dual language) translation may be appropriate. This support should only be used for students who are proficient readers in Spanish and who are not proficient in English. The use of this support may result in the student needing additional overall time to complete the assessment and may increase reading and cognitive load. Unless the student also has an IEP or Section 504 Plan, this designated support must be batch uploaded or manually entered in the Embedded Accommodation section of the student's test settings in TIDE within the Presentation (Designated Supports and Accommodations) tab for Math and/or Science. Select Spanish toggle. Districts may also select this support in TIDE using a batch upload. Refer to your DA for Testing for details related to local procedures.
- Translation Glossary (Math) (This may also be beneficial to ELs/MLs): The translated glossaries are provided in some languages for selected construct-irrelevant terms for Math. (Note: not all items will include a glossary translation.). When there is a term for which a glossary is available, there will be a faint gray dotted border around the term for the student to select. Students may also select the audio icon next to the glossary term and listen to the audio recording of the word.

Non-embedded designated supports include:

- Printed Test Directions (Student Version from the Test Administration Manual): This language support provides the student with a visual reference in English for test directions/script within the SAY boxes in the interim/summative Test Administration Manual (TAM) for Smarter Balanced and NGSS. The test administrator must download the directions from the Printed Test Directions

webpage in advance of testing and print and distribute to the student at the time of testing.

- Read Aloud for Math and ELA (Items, NOT ELA Reading Passages): This non-embedded designated support is intended to provide eligible students with print, visual, or language/communication needs access to the Math and/or Science stimuli and test items. While many students with these identified needs benefit from using the embedded text-to-speech designated support for Math and Science stimuli and test items, some students are better supported with the provision of a human reader. The provision of the Read Aloud designated support should be consistent with reader support provided to the student during daily instruction across academic areas. Therefore, if the student does not use a Read Aloud provided by a human reader during instruction, it should not be recommended for use on statewide assessments.
- Read Aloud for Science: Teachers providing this designated support must review and follow the Smarter Balanced Assessments: Read Aloud Guidelines and/or the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessment: Guidelines for Read Aloud of Stimuli and Items for policy and procedural information about providing this support during testing.
- Read Aloud of Math and Science Items in Spanish (Note: Spanish toggle must be activated in TIDE).
- Separate Setting: Students who are easily distracted—or who may distract others in group testing environments—may require an alternate setting to successfully complete assessments. This separate setting could be:
  - A different room where the student can work individually or in a smaller group
  - A designated location within the same room, such as:
    - Away from windows, doors, or pencil sharpeners
    - In a study carrel
    - Near the teacher's desk
    - At the front of the classroom
    - Using tools like a whisper phone

Some students may benefit from environments that allow for movement, such as the ability to walk around during testing. In certain cases, students may need to interact with instructional or test content outside of school, such as in a hospital or at home.

In these situations, a trained adult, employed by the school and familiar with the Interim/Summative Test Administration Manual and its security procedures, may serve as the test proctor (test administrator).

Additionally, some designated supports or accommodations require students to be assessed individually, which also necessitates a separate setting. Examples include:

- Read Aloud designated support or accommodation
- Talking calculator
- Scribe or Speech-to-Text support

Providing an appropriate testing environment is essential to ensuring equitable access and maintaining test integrity.

- Simplified Test Directions (Math, ELA) (Not Available for Science): The test administrator simplifies or paraphrases the test directions found in the interim/summative TAM according to the guidelines for Simplified Test Directions. Only the script in the TAM may be simplified. Test content, including test items, words from items, or instructions for individual items may NOT be simplified or paraphrased. This support may be beneficial for those students who need additional support understanding the test directions, including ELs/MLs who needed additional language accessibility. This support may require testing in a separate setting to avoid distracting other test takers.

Slide 15: Embedded Illustration Translation Glossary for Math

We are now going to share a few examples of designated supports to support struggling readers and those with language/communication barriers.

As part of the Translation Glossary (Math) designated support, illustration glossaries provide an embedded language support feature that displays visual representations of selected construct-irrelevant terms on the Math assessment. When a glossary is available for a term, it will appear with a faint gray dotted border, allowing the student to click and view the illustration. *(Note: Not all items will include glossary translations.)*

Students can resize and reposition the illustrations on the screen to improve visibility and usability. This support can be used alongside the English glossary or a native language glossary, if available through the Math Translation Glossary.

Illustration glossaries may be particularly beneficial for:

- Students progressing toward English language proficiency, including ELs/MLs, non-ELs/MLs, and ELs/MLs with disabilities
- Students whose native language is not available for translation

- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing but not proficient in American Sign Language (ASL)

By providing visual representations of unfamiliar terms, this support enhances access to content without altering the construct being assessed.

Slide 16: Embedded Text-to-Speech of ELA Items and Math/Science Stimuli and Items

Text-to-Speech (TTS) is an embedded support that allows on-screen text to be read aloud to students using built-in TTS technology. Students can adjust the reading speed and volume to suit their preferences, enhancing accessibility and focus during testing.

TTS is available as an embedded designated support for science, math, and ELA items—except for ELA reading passages, which are only accessible via TTS for students with an active IEP or Section 504 Plan and a documented significant visual or print disability. In those cases, TTS is provided as an embedded accommodation.

For Smarter Balanced ELA items, TTS is available only in English. However, for math and science, students can choose between English and Spanish language options.

Slide 17: Embedded Text-to-Speech Options for ELA Math, and Science

To activate Text-to-Speech (TTS), students select the task model icon (as shown on this slide) and use the drop-down menu to choose either “Speak Question” or “Speak Option.” For math and science stimuli, the same task model icon is used to initiate TTS.

Once activated, students can:

- Right-click on specific text to have it read aloud
- Highlight a section of text to hear it spoken
- Follow along as the text is highlighted in sync with the voice reader

These features allow students to control how and what content is read, supporting better engagement and comprehension during testing.

Slide 18: Embedded Text-to-Speech in Spanish for Math and Science

Text-to-Speech (TTS) is available in Spanish for the math and science assessments and is intended for students who are fluent and literate in Spanish and who use and benefit from TTS during instruction.

Here are some important reminders to ensure proper setup and functionality:

- Coordinate with your technology department to download and install the appropriate Spanish voice pack on the student's testing device.
- Confirm in TIDE that TTS for stimuli and items is enabled for math and science.
- Ensure the Spanish Toggle is activated in TIDE for math and science prior to testing. These features will not function if enabled after the student has started the test.
- To use TTS, students can place the mouse cursor in front of the desired text, right-click, and select "Start Speaking from Here." TTS will read questions, response options, and designated portions of stimuli or items.

Slide 19: Non-Embedded Read Aloud of Items (NOT ELA Reading Passages)

For this support, the math and science stimuli and test items are read aloud in English to the student in an individual test setting by a trained and qualified human reader. The qualified individual acting as the reader should review the Smarter Balanced Assessments: Read Aloud Guidelines (located on the Connecticut Comprehensive Assessment Program Portal) and sign the Security/Confidentiality Agreement to ensure standardization and proper administration during testing.

- Smarter Balanced Assessments: Read Aloud Guidelines
- Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessment: Guidelines for Read Aloud of Stimuli and Items

Students who are advancing toward English language proficiency, including identified English learners/multilingual learners (ELs/MLs) whose native language is Spanish and is fluent and literate in Spanish, may benefit from using reader supports if text-to-speech is not appropriate. Refer to the Smarter Balanced Mathematics and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessments: Guidelines for Spanish Read Aloud of Stimuli and Items and sign the Security/Confidentiality Agreement to ensure standardization and proper administration during testing.

Slide 20: Non-Embedded Read Aloud Options for ELA (NOT Reading Passages), Math, and Science

Read Aloud Guidelines for Smarter Balanced and NGSS must be carefully reviewed to confirm both student eligibility and the appropriateness of the support. These guidelines also provide essential instructions for test administrators to ensure standardization and maintain test security.

All teachers and district administrators involved must complete and sign the Security/Confidentiality Agreement, which should be filed locally in accordance with district procedures.

Slide 21: Accommodations for Students with Visual/Print, Disabilities

No script.

Slide 22: Accommodations to Support Students with Print/Visual Disabilities

The Text-to-Speech (TTS) accommodation for ELA Reading Passages is intended for a small group of eligible students**.** To confirm eligibility, the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) or Section 504 Team must complete and maintain the 2025–26 Decision Guidelines for Text-to-Speech of Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages locally.

When TTS is used, students must have access to appropriate headphones, unless they are tested individually in a separate setting**.**

Additional Accessibility Accommodations for Open-Ended Items

Word Prediction

- Available for open-ended responses on Smarter Balanced Math and ELA items
- Often used in combination with speech-to-text
- Allows students to begin typing a word and select from a list of single-word predictions based on word frequency and syntax rules
- Delivered via Cambium Assessment's embedded software
- Note: The tool supports only single-word prediction; features like phrase prediction, predictive text, or next-word suggestions are not available

Speech-to-Text

- Designed for students with motor or processing disabilities**,** such as dyslexia.
- Allows students to orally dictate responses to open-ended items using Cambium Assessment's internal speech-to-text software.
- Applicable to open-ended items on the Math Performance Task and ELA Reading and Writing assessments.
- Students activate the speech-to-text icon to begin dictation.
- Students must review and edit the transcribed response to ensure accuracy.
- Students using this accommodation must test individually in a separate setting.

- Districts are strongly encouraged to provide practice opportunities using the Practice Tests prior to summative testing.

Slide 23: Student Eligibility for Text-to-Speech for ELA Reading Passages

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recommends that Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) and Section 504 Teams use the Decision Guidelines for Text-to-Speech of ELA Passages as a screening tool to determine student eligibility for this accommodation.

To support eligibility, responses must demonstrate a preponderance of evidence that the student has a vision or print disability and that text-to-speech is consistently used during daily instruction to access instructional materials.

Importantly, text-to-speech should not be considered solely for use on statewide assessments—it must be part of the student's regular instructional experience.

Slide 24: Student Eligibility for Text-to-Speech for ELA Reading Passages - Continued

Additionally, students who qualify for this accommodation are those who, despite receiving intensive and targeted instruction or intervention—such as in the science of reading or braille acquisition—are still unable to access print materials without the use of extensive accommodations. These may include tools such as audiobooks, screen readers/text-to-speech, Bookshare, or other forms of alternate educational materials.

Eligibility is not limited by a student's primary disability category. If there is documented evidence of a specific word reading disability—such as difficulty with decoding, encoding, or phonological processing—then text-to-speech may be an appropriate support for both instruction and assessment. However, characteristics of a word reading disability or dyslexia must be clearly reflected in the student's current evaluation results and educational programming.

When used on statewide assessments to support reading comprehension, text-to-speech of passages should be provided only as an access tool to the text. If used beyond that purpose, it may alter the construct being measured—shifting the focus from reading comprehension to listening comprehension.

Slide 25: Decision Guidelines for Text-to-Speech of the Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages

Planning and Placement Teams and Section 504 Teams must complete the Decision Guidelines for Text-to-Speech of the Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages to ensure eligibility and

appropriateness. They must also sign the form to acknowledge the completion and accuracy of the determination. Forms should be maintained locally with the student's record per district procedures.

Slide 26: Embedded Text-to-Speech for Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages

Text-to-speech (TTS) in English is available for ELA Reading Passages by selecting the speaker icon. Before testing, be sure to:

- Verify in TIDE that TTS for items is documented for ELA.
- Confirm in TIDE that TTS of stimuli & items is enabled for math and science.

To activate TTS, students select the task model icon, as shown on this slide. The text reader will read questions, response options, and designated portions of stimuli or test items. Students can place the mouse cursor in front of the desired text, right-click, and choose "Start Speaking from Here."

Note: Certain ELA grammar and editing items are not enabled for TTS, as the oral presentation may unintentionally cue the student and compromise the integrity of the construct being measured.

Slide 27: Special Documented Accommodations for Students with Visual/Print Disabilities

No script.

Slide 28: Special Documented Accommodations for Students with Visual/Print Disabilities: Read Aloud

For students with the most complex disabilities where non-standard accommodations are insufficient, teams may consider whether the special documented accommodation of Read Aloud of ELA passages is appropriate.

Slide 29: Determining Eligibility for a Read Aloud Special Documented Accommodation

In alignment with the eligibility criteria for TTS of ELA Reading Passages, students who qualify for the special documented Read Aloud accommodation are those who, despite receiving intensive and targeted instruction or intervention—such as in the science of reading or braille acquisition—are still unable to access print materials, even through the provision of text-to-speech, and require a more extensive non-embedded accommodation of read aloud.

Due to the nature of their disability, these students consistently rely on having text read aloud to them during instruction and other environments rather than through technology. They may also use tools such as audiobooks, screen readers, Bookshare, or other forms of alternate educational materials to access print content.

Eligibility is not limited by a student's primary disability category. If there is documented evidence of a specific word reading disability—such as challenges with decoding, encoding, or phonological processing, and text-to-speech does not meet the complexity of the student's needs, a read aloud may be appropriate. Characteristics of a word reading disability or dyslexia must be clearly reflected in the student's current evaluation results and educational programming.

To determine eligibility for the Read Aloud accommodation of Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages, teams should begin by completing the Documented Evidence for Read Aloud of the Smarter Balanced ELA Reading Passages form. This serves as a screening tool to establish a preponderance of evidence that the student requires this accommodation due to a documented disability.

In the context of the Smarter Balanced Reading assessment, the Read Aloud of ELA passages should be used only as an access tool to support the student's interaction with the text. If used beyond this purpose, it may alter the construct being measured—shifting the focus from reading comprehension to listening comprehension.

To support this determination, teams should review:

- The student's present levels of performance in the IEP
- Reading and communication goals and objectives
- The Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Accommodations section of the plan

Teams should also examine documentation from psychological and academic performance assessments included in the IEP or 504 Plan. These should show evidence of processing disabilities related to visual, print, or reading challenges, as well as difficulties with language comprehension and use. Skills in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, or spelling may also be reflected and should be considered in the decision-making process.

Slide 30: Determining Eligibility for a Read Aloud Special Documented Accommodation – Continued

A human reader is a trained and certified teacher who provides an oral presentation of the assessment text to an eligible student. The student depends on the human reader to read the

test questions accurately, pronounce words correctly, and speak in a clear voice throughout the test. The human reader must be trained and qualified and must follow the Smarter Balanced Read Aloud Guidelines. The guiding principle in reading aloud is to ensure that the student has access to test content.

The teacher and administrators must also complete and sign the Security/Confidentiality Form to verify their understanding of responsibilities as human reader for state testing. Forms should be maintained locally with the student's record per district procedures.

Slide 31: Optional Resources to Use with Students on a Practice or Interim Assessment

The CSDE has developed several tools to help teachers introduce students to accessibility features available during assessments. These resources can be used to model or demonstrate features, such as the line reader or zoom tool, during practice or interim assessments, helping students become familiar with the icons and their functionality.

Please note: These resource guides are not permitted for use during the summative assessment.

Slide 32: Student Training Resources

This resource can be used by teachers to model text-to-speech of the ELA Reading Passages for those students that qualify.

Shown on this slide: Student-Template-for-TTS-of-Passages.pdf

Slide 33: Student Training Resources – Continued

Teachers can model or introduce universal tools for Math, ELA, and science using a practice or interim assessment helping students become familiar with the icons and their functionality.

Shown on this slide: Student-Global-Test-Tools.pdf

Slide 34: Student Training Resources – Universal Context Tools

Teachers can model or introduce universal context tools using a practice or interim assessment to show students how to use embedded tools such as a digital notepad and other features.

Shown on this slide: Student-Resource-Context-Tools.pdf

Slide 35: Student Training Resources – TTS for ELA Items and Math/Science Stimuli & Items

This resource can be used by teachers to model text-to-speech for items and Math/Science stimuli for those eligible for this designated support.

Shown on this slide: Student-Template-for-TTS-of-Items.pdf

Slide 36: Student Training Resources – Spanish Toggle and TTS in Spanish for Math/Science

This resource can be used by teachers to model Spanish Toggle and Text-to-Speech in Spanish for eligible students.

Shown on this slide:

- Student-Template-for-Spanish-TTS-and-Toggle.pdf
- Student-Template-for-Spanish-TTS-and-Spanish-Toggle.pdf

Slide 37: Resources

In the final slides of this presentation, we will review available resources.

Slide 38: The Reader Options Table

Planning and Placement Teams and Section 504 Teams should be familiar with available resources to better understand which supports are appropriate for students based on their identified needs. Adhering to specific policies and procedures is essential to ensure both the accurate measurement of student learning and the valid reporting of student performance.

The Connecticut Smarter Balanced and NGSS Assessments Reader Options Table offers a detailed overview of the various reader supports and accommodations available for Smarter Balanced and NGSS assessments. It outlines:

- The purpose of each support
- Test requirements
- Required documentation, if applicable
- Differences between embedded and non-embedded reader options

This tool helps educators make informed decisions about the most appropriate accessibility features to support student access to print and text during assessments.

Slide 39: Reader Designated Supports and Accommodations for Smarter Balanced and NGSS Assessments Brochure

Reader Designated Supports and Accommodations for Smarter Balanced Mathematics and English Language Arts and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Assessments provides an explanation of reader designated supports and accommodations with corresponding screeners and guidelines to support student eligibility and administration on statewide assessments.

Slide 40: Additional Resources

Key Resources:

- CSDE Assessment Guidelines
- Accessibility Considerations
- Embedded and Non-Embedded Designated Supports for English Learners/Multilingual Learners

The CSDE Learning Series includes the following PowerPoint Presentations and are located on the Training tab of the Sensible Assessments webpage:

- Special Documented Accommodations [PPT] New!
- English Learner Designated Supports and Accommodations [PPT] New!

Slide 41: CSDE Performance Office Contacts

Here are CSDE contacts from the Performance Office and Bureau of Special Education. Please reach out with any questions.

We are here to support you and your teams.

Slide 42: Thank you for your participation!

Thank you for your participation and for all you do for your students!