

GUIDE

Print Disabilities: 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 student with a print disability is unable to gain information from standard printed materials at an anticipated level for their grade 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 (TTS) 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 appropriate for students whose IEP, or 504 plans explicitly indicated the student's primary mode of accessing printed materials is through text-to-speech. 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 Educational Materials and Assistive Technology

Individualized Education Program (IEP) 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 Educational Materials (AEM) 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 for AIM 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 help eliminate the most frequent barriers that students with print disabilities encounter when accessing



Maine Department of Education Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education



the general education curriculum and enable them to gain access to and progress in the general education curriculum. AEM and AT help students gain independence and access to grade-level material, which transforms learning for students with print disabilities. The Protocol for Accommodations in Reading (PAR) or (uPAR)¹ and the AEM Navigator² guide the work of a team as they work through an individual student's need for specialized formats of printed instructional materials.

Consideration of Accommodations

Consideration of accommodations for students who need AEM 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 educational materials as the **primary mode** of accessing text, 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 TTS accommodations for all state assessments, including English Language Arts (ELA) passages. TTS nonvisual (ELA passages) should only be requested for students who are blind, visually impaired, or non-reader. A non-reader is a student that has a specific documented disability that severely limits or prevents his or her ability to decode text, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so.

To qualify, the student must have an IEP or 504 plan to identify 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. Section 3 of the student's IEP/504 plan must explicitly indicate the student has access to TTS or a screen reader as the primary mode of accessing text in **ALL** subjects. These students may have membership in organizations like Bookshare or Learning Ally. 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 and fluency. If students aren't accessing TTS accommodations as the primary mode of accessing text during instruction, they shouldn't be provided during assessment. 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 access print the opportunity to demonstrate content knowledge in all subject areas by mitigating the effects of the print disability. Text-to-speech for ELA passages requires documentation in the form of the **Print Disability Text-To-Speech Checklist** which must be completed, authorized by the site test coordinator and SAU Special Education Director, and placed in the student special education file.

Sample Profiles of Students Appropriate for TTS nonvisual (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. TTS is John's primary mode of accessing text in ALL subjects. His IEP indicates he receives TTS for all classroom assignments and assessments, as well as for district and state assessments. He is also a member of Bookshare. When provided TTS accommodations in class, he can comprehend grade-level 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 to participate in instruction and assessments involving print. She is currently using a screen reader as her primary mode of accessing text in ALL subjects.

1 Protocol for Accommodations in reading. (2014). Retrieved from <https://learningtools.donjohnston.com/product/upar/request-1/>
2 AEM Navigator. (2015). Retrieved from <https://aem.cast.org/get-started/resources/2021/aem-navigator>

Maine Department of Education

23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0023
www.maine.gov/doe/home

Maine Comprehensive Assessment System (MECAS)

Jodi Bossio-Smith
Director of Assessment
207-530-1462
jodi.bossio-smith@maine.gov

Krista Averill

Assessment Coordinator
207-215-6528
krista.averill@maine.gov

Maine Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education

ossie@maine.gov



Adapted with permission from [Print Disabilities and the Consideration for Accommodations \(ksde.org\)](#)

Kansas State Department of Education

900 S.W. Jackson Street, Suite 102
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1212
www.ksde.org

For more information, contact:
Cary Rogers
Education Program Consultant
Special Education and Title Services
(785) 296-0916
crogers@ksde.org

