



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS OF PROGRESS IN EDUCATION (DC CAPE) ACCESSIBILITY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS SUPPLEMENT





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Background

Audience and Purpose

The *DC CAPE Accessibility Decision-Making Process Supplement* is a comprehensive document that provides guidance to local education agencies (LEAs) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to ensure that the DC CAPE assessments provide valid results for all participating students.

For a detailed description of available accessibility features, administrative considerations, and accommodations available on the DC CAPE assessments, please refer to the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, available at dc.mypearsonsupport.com.

Introduction

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) regards assessments as tools for enhancing teaching and learning, and is committed to providing all students with equitable access to high-quality, 21st century assessments. By applying principles of universal design, using technology, embedding accessibility features, and allowing a broad range of accommodations, DC CAPE provides opportunities for the largest possible number of students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. DC CAPE sets and maintains high expectations that all students will have access to the full range of grade-level and course content standards.

DC CAPE's goals for promoting student access include:

- Applying principles of universal design for accessible assessments during every stage of the development of the assessment items and performance tasks;
- Minimizing/eliminating features of the assessment that are irrelevant to what is being measured so that all students can more accurately demonstrate their knowledge and skills;
- Measuring the full range of complexity of the standards;
- Using technology for the accessible delivery of the assessments;
- Building accessibility throughout the test without sacrificing assessment validity;
- Using a combination of accessible authoring and accessible technologies from the inception of items and tasks; and
- Engaging state and national experts throughout the development process through item review, bias and sensitivity review, policy development and review, and research.

The *DC CAPE Accessibility Decision-Making Process Supplement* has been created to ensure that:

- Participation in the assessments is consistent across LEAs for students with disabilities and English learners (ELs);
- Appropriate tools are used by students to address their individual learning needs, and that accommodations are provided to eligible students (including students with disabilities, ELs, and ELs with disabilities); and
- Accessibility features and accommodations used on the DC CAPE assessments are generally consistent with those used in daily instruction.

Use of Technology to Deliver Assessments

DC CAPE assessments use a computer-based assessment delivery platform that is easy for students to learn, intuitive to use, and provides an opportunity for results to be reported quickly and accurately. The assessment delivery platform is compliant with the Accessible Portable Item Profile (APIP) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. Technology guidelines are available to inform schools and districts as they make technology decisions to best meet the instructional and

assessment needs of their students.

The DC CAPE Technology Guidelines can be found here:

<https://dc.mypearsonsupport.com>.

Universal Design

Universal design, when applied to assessment, is analogous to universal design in architecture where, for example, ramps and curb cuts designed for people in wheelchairs are also considered essential for people without disabilities, such as parents pushing strollers or people moving heavy furniture.¹ Universal design² describes a concept or philosophy that, when applied to assessments, provides all students with equal opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned. The purpose of universally designed assessments is to provide access for the greatest number of students during assessment, and to minimize the need for individualized design or accommodations. Universal design acknowledges differences among individuals, and that for accurate assessment to occur, a range of methods and materials are needed to measure learning. Universal design builds flexibility into assessments at the development stage, which enables flexible adjustments for a broad range of students. All students are intended to benefit from assessments that are universally designed, including students who are gifted and talented; ELs; students with physical, cognitive, and/or sensory disabilities; students with emotional or language/learning disabilities; students with more than one of these characteristics; students with unique linguistics needs; other underperforming students; and students without disabilities.

The principles of universal design for assessment are described by Thompson, et al.:

“Universally designed assessments are designed and developed from the beginning to allow participation of the widest possible range of students, and to result in valid inferences about performance for all students who participate in the assessment. Universally designed assessments are based on the premise that each child in school is a part of the population to be tested, and that testing results must not be affected by disability, gender, race, or English language ability. Universally designed assessments are not intended to eliminate individualization, but they may reduce the need for accommodations and various alternative assessments by eliminating access barriers associated with the tests themselves.”³

Universal design emphasizes that in order to increase access, assessment designers cannot use a “one size fits all” approach, but must build in and make available opportunities for choice and create multiple alternatives and approaches for individuals to express their knowledge. Using these principles, item writers consider the full range of students in the assessment population and develop items, tasks, and prompts that measure the desired construct for the greatest number of students without the need for accommodation or adaptation. Guided by universal design, assessment developers design the assessment to meet the specific needs of as many students as possible and minimize the number of necessary accommodations, while

1 Maryland State Board of Education. (2011). “A Route for Every Learner Report.”

2 The term “universal design” is defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) as having the same definition as that found in the Assistive Technology Act of 1998: The term “universal design” means a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities, which include products and services that are directly accessible (without requiring assistive technologies) and products and services that are interoperable with assistive technologies. (20 U.S.C. §1401(35)(IDEA); 20 U.S.C. §1003(23) (HEOA), both referencing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended, 29 §3002).

3 Thompson, S. J., Johnstone, C. J., & Thurlow, M. L. (2007). Universal design applied to large scale assessments (Synthesis Report 44). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Retrieved [April 1, 2013], from the World Wide Web: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED467721>

acknowledging that the need for accommodations cannot be eliminated entirely.”

DC CAPE includes the following universal design requirements for item development:

- The item or task takes into consideration the diversity of the assessment population and the need to allow the full range of eligible students to respond to the item/stimulus.
- Constructs have been precisely defined and the item or task measures what is intended.
- Assessments contain accessible, non-biased items.
- Assessments are designed to be amenable to accommodations.
- Instructions and procedures are simple, clear, and intuitive.
- Assessments are designed for maximum readability, comprehensibility, and legibility.⁴
- The item or task material uses a clear and accessible text format.
- The item or task material uses clear and accessible visual elements (when essential to the item).
- The item or task material uses text appropriate for the intended grade level.
- Decisions will be made to ensure that items and tasks measure what they are intended to measure for EL students with different levels of English proficiency and/or first language proficiency.
- All accessibility features have been considered that may increase access while preserving the targeted construct.
- Multiple means of item presentation, expression, and student engagement have been considered with regard to items/tasks for both students with disabilities and ELs.
- Changes to the format of an item will be considered that do not alter the item/task meaning or difficulty.

In addition to the universal design requirements, DC CAPE item developers use comprehensive accessibility guidelines for writing items to ensure that all items/tasks are bias-free, sensitive to diverse cultures, stated clearly, of appropriate linguistic complexity, and consistently formatted.

Principles of universal design, when applied to assessment, may provide educators with more valid inferences about the performance levels of students with disabilities and ELs, as well as the performance of their peers.

Universally designed general assessments cannot eliminate, but may reduce the need for accommodations and alternate assessments.

Participation Guidelines for DC CAPE Assessments

All public elementary and secondary students enrolled in tested grades and courses, including students with disabilities, ELs, and ELs with disabilities, are required to participate in statewide testing in accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and DC Official Code. Additional details regarding participation requirements are found in the annual OSSE Statewide Assessments Participation and Performance Policy, available at osse.dc.gov/assessments.

All students can receive accessibility features on DC CAPE assessments. Accessibility features are tools or preferences that are either built into the assessment system or provided externally by Test Administrators. Even though accessibility features are available to every student, that doesn't necessarily mean they are appropriate for every student. Consideration should be given to the supports a student consistently uses and finds helpful during instruction and when engaging in individual work.

⁴ Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow (2002). The National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO).

Accommodations are adjustments to the test format or test administration intended to provide equitable access for students with disabilities, ELs, and ELs with disabilities. Four distinct groups of students may receive accommodations on DC CAPE assessments:

1. **Students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP);**
2. **Students with a Section 504 plan** who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, have a record of such an impairment, or are regarded as having such an impairment, but who do not qualify for special education services;
3. **Students who are ELs;** and
4. **Students who are ELs with disabilities who have an IEP or 504 plan.** These students are eligible for both accommodations for students with disabilities and accommodations for ELs.

Some accommodations are built into the test, and others must be provided by the Test Administrator. All accommodations must be approved and documented in advance in an IEP, 504 plan, or an English Learner Plan.

The following definitions will help users of this supplement to understand and implement accommodations appropriately:

- **Student with a disability:** A student who has been found eligible based on the definitions provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- **English learner (EL):** English learner (EL) is a term used to describe students who often come from non-English-speaking backgrounds and are in the process of acquiring English language skills in an English-speaking educational context. In the District of Columbia, students are identified as EL through the use of a state-defined process (see <https://osse.dc.gov/page/english-learner-policy-and-programs>). The term “English learner” is formally defined in ESSA; that definition appears in Appendix K of the DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations (AF&A) Manual, available at dc.mypearsonsupport.com.
- **EL Monitored:** A student who is no longer classified as an EL, although progress will continue to be tracked after they have achieved the standards of fluency as identified by WIDA ACCESS for ELLs, the English language proficiency assessment used in the District of Columbia. Students in their first two years of EL monitored status are eligible to receive a small number of accommodations available to ELs on the DC CAPE assessments (extended time and word-to-word dictionary only).

For a detailed description of available accessibility features, administrative considerations, and accommodations available on the DC CAPE assessments, please refer to the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*, available at dc.mypearsonsupport.com.

Section 1: Decision-Making Process for Selecting, Using, and Evaluating Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, English Learners, and English Learners with Disabilities

Including All Students in State Assessments

English Learners

Federal law requires that students not be excluded from assessments with the intention of holding schools accountable for the academic performance of all students, with a narrow exception granted to recently arrived ELs in their first year of instruction in a U.S. school. ELs whose parents or guardians have waived services may not be excluded from statewide assessments and are still eligible to receive accommodations allowed to ELs on DC CAPE assessments. Refer to the OSSE Statewide Assessments Participation and Performance Policy for additional information on participation requirements for recently arrived ELs.

Students with Disabilities

The ESSA and IDEA require that all students with disabilities be administered state assessments, either with or without accommodations, or through an alternate assessment. The results of those assessments are intended to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of all students. It is important that IEP teams and 504 Plan Coordinators actively engage in a planning process that includes:

- Participation of all students in the assessments at the grade level or course in which they are enrolled;
- Assurance of the provision of appropriate accommodations to facilitate student access to instruction and assessments based on grade-level or course standards; and
- Use of alternate assessments based on the content standards, where necessary to assess the academic performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Equal Access to Grade-Level Content

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are DC's educational standards for English language arts, mathematics, and science. These educational standards establish targets for students to learn at each grade level or course. Teachers should regularly ensure that students are working toward grade-level learning standards by using instructional strategies that are appropriate for each student based on individual needs, strengths, and challenges. Providing appropriate accommodations during instruction and assessments is likely to promote equal access to grade-level and course content.

To accomplish the goal of equal access, educators (including general educators, special educators, educators specializing in English language acquisition, other members of IEP teams, 504 Plan Coordinators, and EL teams, if applicable) should:

- Be familiar with the CCSS and NGSS and the accountability system, including applicable assessments, at the state and LEA level;
- Be familiar with the DC CAPE assessment administration procedures and the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*; and
- Collaborate regularly to maximize and ensure the student's access to grade-level or course standards.

All students must have access to grade-level or course academic learning standards. Most of these students will be able to achieve these standards when the following three conditions are met:

1. Classroom instruction is provided by teachers who are qualified to teach the CCSS and NGSS and who know how to differentiate instruction and provide educationally appropriate instruction for diverse learners;
2. IEPs and 504 plans for students with disabilities, and EL plans for ELs, where appropriate, are developed to ensure the provision of equal access to the general curriculum and state- and district-wide assessments; and
3. Appropriate accessibility features and/or accommodations are determined and provided to help students access grade-level or course content.

The Common Core State Standards can be accessed here:

<https://www.thecorestandards.org/read-the-standards/>.

The Next Generation Science Standards can be accessed here:

<https://www.nextgenscience.org/understanding-standards/understanding-standards>.

Selecting Accessibility Features and Accommodations for DC CAPE Assessments

Step 1: Expect All Students to Achieve Academic Grade-Level and Course Content Standards

In accordance with the ESSA, IDEA, and DC Official Code, it is expected that all students who are not taking an alternate assessment will participate in the DC CAPE assessments. The DC statewide assessment system sets and maintains high expectations that all students will have access to the full range of grade-level and course content standards.

Several laws require the participation of students with disabilities and ELs in standards-based instruction and assessment. Refer to [Appendix K: Legal Background](#) in the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* for additional information.

Step 2: Learn About Accessibility Features and Accommodations

It is critical that educational teams learn about accessibility features and accommodations that provide increased access for students or reduce or eliminate the effects of a student’s disability, or EL status, and provide equitable access to grade-level or course content for diverse learners. For information on which accessibility features and accommodations are available on the assessments, refer to the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* available at dc.mypearsonsupport.com.

Step 3: Select Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Individual Students

The team or group responsible for selecting accessibility features for all students, and accommodations for ELs and/or students with disabilities should:

- Discuss which accessibility features and accommodations might assist a student during daily instruction in the classroom;
- Determine which accessibility features and accommodations to “try out” with the student during instruction in each content area;
- Document and evaluate the effectiveness of the accessibility features and accommodations used over time;
- Adjust the use of accessibility features and accommodations as needed for the future; and

- Based on the effectiveness of the supports used in the classroom, determine which accessibility features and accommodations should also be used on assessments, and whether they are allowed.

In selecting appropriate accessibility features and accommodations for assessments, it is important that educators be aware of the following:

- Accessibility features and accommodations should be considered and discussed separately for each content-area assessment (ELA, math, and science).
- Students should receive the accessibility features and accommodations they need to participate in the assessment, but should not receive more accessibility features and accommodations than are necessary to participate meaningfully.
- Accessibility features and accommodations are intended to increase a student’s access to the assessment but will not compensate for a student’s lack of academic/content knowledge and skills.
- Students need opportunities beforehand to try out accessibility features and accommodations and learn which are most helpful in classroom instruction, as well as on large-scale assessments.
- The more input students have in selecting their accessibility features and accommodations, the more likely the accessibility features and/or accommodations will be used.
- Accommodations that provide access to students on assessments should be based on their needs as students with disabilities or ELs, not their lack of content knowledge or skills.
- Teams should be careful to avoid selecting accessibility features and accommodations using a “kitchen-sink” approach that provides the student with unnecessary or mutually- contradictory accommodations in an attempt to provide every possible advantage on the assessment. This approach could make accessing the test more difficult and confusing for the student.

Modifications for DC CAPE Assessments

Modifications, as contrasted with accessibility features and accommodations, involve changes in the DC CAPE assessments or in the conditions in which a student takes the assessments that would result in unacceptable changes in what the assessment is designed to measure (e.g., reducing or changing expectations for students), or provide an unfair advantage to a student. Therefore, modifications are not permitted on the DC CAPE assessments.

Examples of modifications that would result in invalidated results on include:

- Allowing a student to be assessed off grade-level;⁵
- Instructing a student to skip selected items, reducing the scope of assessments, so a student completes only a limited number of problems or items;
- Modifying the complexity of assessments to make them easier (e.g., deleting response choices on a multiple-choice assessment so that a student selects from two or three options instead of four);
- Providing hints, clues, or other coaching that directs the student to correct responses;
- Defining vocabulary on the assessment, or explaining assessment items;
- Allowing the student to complete an assessment of English language arts/literacy (ELA) in a language other than English; and
- Using a bilingual dictionary that provides definitions (rather than an acceptable word-to-word dual-language dictionary).

5 OSSE has received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to allow students taking advanced mathematics in grades 7 and 8 to take the DC CAPE assessment aligned to the high school math course in which they are enrolled (Algebra I or Geometry).

Providing a student with modifications during an assessment constitutes a test irregularity and may result in an invalidated score (i.e., the score will not be counted) and/or an investigation by the state into the school's or LEA's testing practices. Moreover, providing modifications to students during statewide assessments may have the unintended consequence of reducing their opportunities to learn critical content and may result in adverse effects on the student throughout their educational career.

The Decision-Making Process

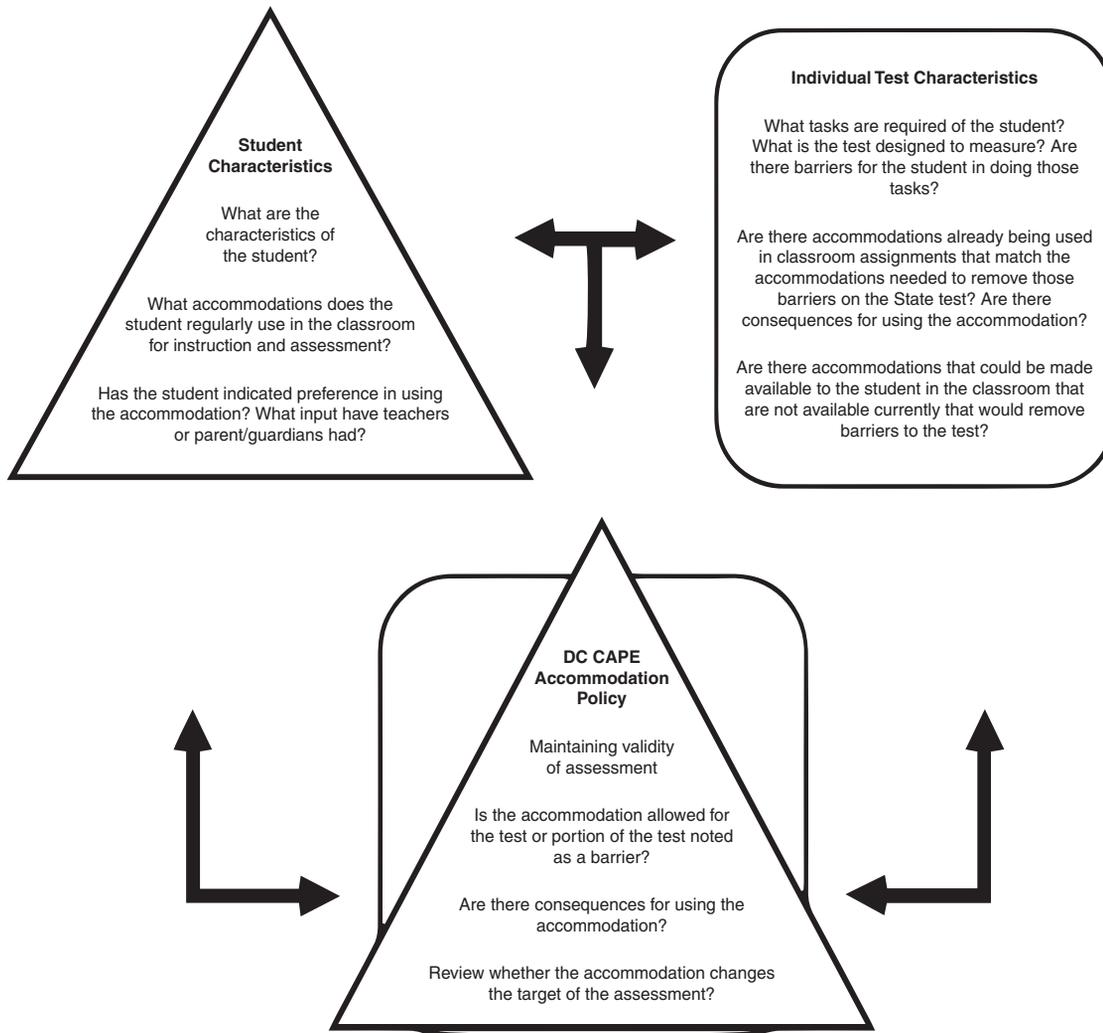
Figure 1 shows considerations for selecting assessment accommodations for students with disabilities, ELs, and ELs with disabilities. This process could be replicated for selecting accessibility features. The decision-making process should include consideration of at least the following three factors:

Factor 1: Student characteristics and learning needs (e.g., disabilities, language proficiency, accommodations used in classroom instruction/assessments to access and perform in academic standards and assessments).

Factor 2: Individual assessment characteristics (i.e., knowledge about what tasks are required on DC CAPE assessments and ways to remove physical and other barriers to students' ability to perform those tasks).

Factor 3: Accessibility features and accommodations policies that maintain the validity of assessment results.

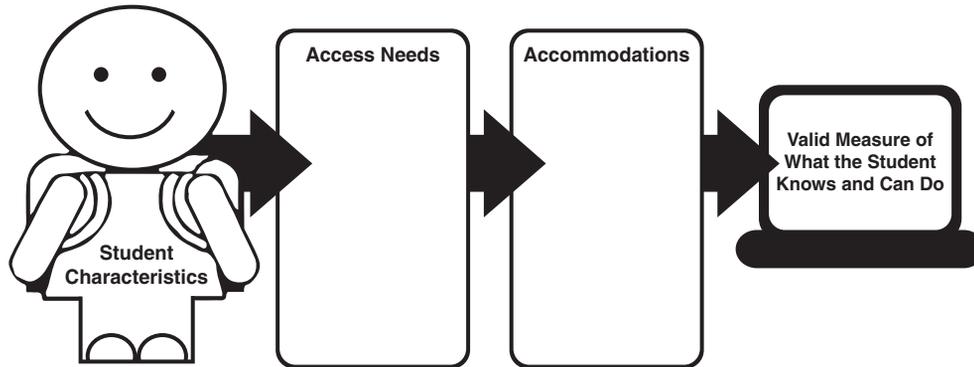
Figure 1: Considerations When Making Decisions for Assessment Accommodations



Decision-Making Process – Factor #1: Student Characteristics and Learning Needs

Figure 2 shows the process of how student characteristics and access needs impact the selection of accessibility features and accommodations. Accessibility features and accommodations should remove barriers to learning.

Figure 2: Student Characteristics and Learning Needs



Decision-Making Process – Factor #2: Individual Test Characteristics

It is important to examine the tasks students are being asked to do on the DC CAPE assessments by asking the following questions. These questions should be considered separately for each content area:

- What are the characteristics of the assessment and what will the tasks and items look like?
- Are the assessment tasks similar to classroom assessment tasks, and does the student have the opportunity to practice similar tasks prior to testing?
- Does the student use an accessibility feature and/or accommodation for a classroom task that is allowed for similar tasks on the assessments?
- Do other barriers exist that could be removed by using accessibility features and/or accommodations that are not already offered or used by the student?

Decision-Making Process – Factor #3: Accessibility Features and Accommodations Policies That Maintain the Validity of Assessment Results

It will be important for educators, caregivers, and teams selecting accommodations for the assessments to review the test security, test administration, and test accommodation policies in order to determine whether the accommodation is allowed on the assessment(s), and if there will be any consequences for the school, district, or student if the accommodation is used. For example, if certain instructional accommodations are used for testing, the validity of assessment results may be compromised if the accommodation involves modifying the assessment, giving assistance to the student to respond to questions during testing, or providing an accommodation that gives the student an unfair advantage on all or part of the assessment. Assessment policies must be reviewed thoroughly before accommodations are selected for the assessments, and any discrepancies between instructional and assessment accommodations should be communicated to the parent and the educators working with the student.

Questions to Guide Accessibility Feature and Accommodation Selection for Students with Disabilities

Teams should use these questions to guide the selection of appropriate accessibility features and accommodations for students with disabilities:

- What are the student’s learning strengths and challenges, and are these based on language needs, a disability, or both?

- How do the student’s learning and/or language needs affect the achievement of grade-level or course content CCSS or NGSS?
- What specialized instruction, if any (e.g., learning strategies, organizational skills, reading skills) is required by the student to achieve grade-level or course content CCSS or NGSS?
- Which accessibility features and/or accommodations are regularly used by the student during instruction and assessments?
- Which new accessibility features and/or accommodations, if any, would increase the student’s access to instruction and assessment by addressing the student’s learning needs and reducing the effects of the student’s disability?
- Should an existing accessibility feature and/or accommodation be implemented differently?
- What were the outcomes when accessibility features and/or accommodations were used and when they were not used during classroom assignments and on assessments?
- What is the student’s perception of how well an accessibility feature and/or accommodation “works”?
- What difficulties did the student experience when using accessibility features and/or accommodations?
- What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and specialists about the effectiveness of the accessibility feature and/or accommodation?
- Should the student continue to use an accessibility feature and/or accommodation “as is,” are changes needed, or should use be discontinued?

The following should also be considered in the selection of accessibility features and/or accommodations:

- Whether the accessibility feature and/or accommodation is respectful of a student’s age and grade (e.g., older students may prefer accessibility features and/or accommodations provided through use of technology, rather than those administered by an adult);
- Student’s willingness to learn to use the accessibility feature and/or accommodation;
- Explicit instruction in how to use the accessibility feature and/or accommodation in classroom and testing settings; and
- The conditions for use of the accessibility feature and/or accommodation on assessments.

Individuals Involved in Selecting Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Effective decision-making on how a student will participate in the assessments, including the provision of appropriate accessibility features and accommodations, begins with gathering and reviewing information about the student’s disability, present level of academic achievement, and functional performance in relation to the CCSS or NGSS. This process is best accomplished by a team of people who know the student best. The team should include individuals who can present information to the discussions about providing the student equal learning opportunities, and identifying practices and approaches intended to help the student overcome learning obstacles during instruction and assessment.

Statewide assessment accessibility features and accommodations should not be assigned broadly to all students with the same disability. Accessibility features and accommodations should be selected based on the student’s learning preferences, previous record of success using the accessibility feature or accommodation, disability-related needs, and level of the student’s comfort using the accessibility feature or accommodation in question. The selected accessibility features and accommodations must be listed in the student’s IEP or 504 plan and consistently provided in the classroom in order to obtain useful feedback on their effectiveness. Providing accessibility features and accommodations that the student does not need may actually adversely impact their performance on the test and interfere with the test’s ability to measure the student’s achievement. IEP teams and

504 Plan Coordinators should consider whether the recommended accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodation(s):

- Are necessary to access the test items;
- Have been useful to other students with similar profiles; and
- Will negatively affect the integrity, validity, and security of the assessment.

All IEP team members/504 Plan Coordinators, and other key individuals should provide information and perspectives for the entire team to consider during team meetings regarding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of appropriate accessibility features and accommodations.

Students

Students can provide valuable information to the IEP team or 504 Plan Coordinator on their strengths and areas of challenge, the effectiveness of the accessibility features and accommodations they use, and their degree of comfort in using them. This information can greatly assist team decision-making regarding which accessibility features and/or accommodations to recommend. Including students in the decision-making process will enhance their self-advocacy, their understanding of the need for the accessibility feature and/or accommodation, and may result in an increased willingness to use the accessibility feature and/or accommodation consistently. Students can also signal when they are outgrowing the need for an accessibility feature and/or accommodation.

School Administrator (Principal/Assistant Principal)

The School Administrator promotes the expectation that students with disabilities are capable learners who can and will achieve at high levels in all local, state, and assessments if they are included in high-quality standards-based instruction. The principal is responsible for:

- Implementing the district’s policies that provide equal access to instructional and assessment programs for all students;
- Ensuring that assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations are fully, consistently, and appropriately implemented during the administration of DC CAPE assessments, as specified in each student’s IEP or 504 plan; and
- Exercising leadership and discretion in resolving circumstances in which last-minute changes occur in a student’s status. For example, if a student no longer is eligible for special education services, changes in accessibility features and/or accommodations for the assessment may be needed.

Principals should be familiar with the policies and procedures outlined in the *Test Administrator Manuals* and the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual* available at dc.mypearsonsupport.com.

General Educator (Content Area Teacher)

General education teachers are important team members who should be familiar with and knowledgeable of the accessibility features and/or accommodations required by each student, and how to administer them appropriately.

The general education teacher plays an active and significant role in the determination and use of instructional and assessment accessibility features and accommodations for students with disabilities. General educators are familiar with curriculum content and the purposes of the assessments. In collaboration with special education teachers, general educators provide appropriate instructional and assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations to ensure that students with disabilities have full access to grade-level and/or course content that is available to their nondisabled peers. The

result of the assessments, in turn, can provide teachers with information that will support individual students in achieving the CCSS or NGSS.

Special Educator

The special education teacher plays an important role in providing information on how to match the learning characteristics of students to the appropriate instructional and assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations, ensuring that the student is able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills without barriers or restrictions due to their disability.

Related Service Providers

Related service providers, such as speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists, serve essential roles in supporting the education of students with disabilities in school environments. As members of IEP teams (and 504 Plan Coordinator discussions, as appropriate), related service providers can lend their unique expertise and perspectives to discuss how to improve learning and assessment opportunities for students with disabilities.

Parents/Guardians

Students who use accessibility features and/or accommodations will often need them at home, in the community, and as they get older, in postsecondary education and at work. Caregivers are familiar with the strengths and needs of their children and can provide valuable information to enhance discussions about the appropriateness of selected instructional and assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations. Parents also have information and perspectives on the strategies their child uses routinely to complete homework assignments and other tasks around the home. To enable parents to participate in meaningful discussions, it is important that they receive information in a language that is accessible to them about the:

- Need and rationale for assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations;
- Types of available assessment accessibility features and accommodations and how assessments will be administered; and
- Purpose of assessments, what they measure, and how the results will be used.

Documenting Accommodations on a Student’s IEP

For students with disabilities served under IDEA, determining appropriate instructional and assessment accommodations should not pose any particular problems for IEP teams that follow good IEP team practices. With information obtained from the required summary of the student’s “present levels of academic achievement and functional performance,” the decision of identifying and documenting accommodations is a fairly straightforward process. The term “present levels of achievement and functional performance” refers to a federal requirement in which 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 nondisabled children” [20 USC § 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(I)].

There are three areas in which accommodations can potentially be addressed in the IEP:

1. “Participation in Assessments” [20 USC § 1412(a)(16)]. This section of the IEP documents accommodations needed to facilitate the participation of students with disabilities in statewide and district assessments.
2. “Consideration of Special Factors” [20 USC § 1414(d)(3)(B)]. This is where communication and assistive technology supports are considered.
3. “Supplementary Aids and Services” [20 USC §1401(33) and 20 USC §1414(d)(1)(A)(i)]. This area of the IEP includes “aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular

education classes or other education related settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate.

Documenting Accommodations on a Student’s 504 Plan

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifies that no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of their disability, be excluded from participating in federally-funded programs or activities, including elementary, secondary, or postsecondary schooling. “Disability” in this context refers to a “physical, sensory, or mental impairment, which substantially limits one or more major life activities.” This can include physical impairments; illnesses or injuries; communicable diseases; chronic conditions like asthma, allergies and diabetes; and learning problems. A 504 plan spells out the accommodations that will be needed for these students to have an opportunity to *access the test* to the same extent as their nondisabled peers, and might include such things as wheelchair ramps, blood sugar monitoring, interpreting/transliteration services, preferential seating, an extra set of textbooks, a peanut-free lunch environment, home instruction, or a tape recorder or keyboard for taking notes.

Each student who meets the eligibility guidelines for accommodations under Section 504 will have a Section 504 plan developed for them to use in school. The plan specifies the nature of the impairment, the major life activity affected by the impairment, accommodations necessary to meet the student’s needs, and the person(s) responsible for implementing the accommodations. It is recommended that accommodations be listed separately in the 504 plan for instruction and for assessments, since they may differ or be allowed for one and not the other.

Individuals Involved in Selecting Accessibility Features and Accommodations for ELs

Determining appropriate linguistic support for ELs during classroom instruction and on assessments is facilitated by gathering and reviewing information about the student and the student’s level of performance in relation to district and state academic standards and current English language proficiency level. The process of determining the amount and types of instructional and assessment supports involves attempts by members of the educational team to remove barriers and “level the playing field” for the student so that they can participate in the general education curriculum and assessments.

Decisions about assessment accessibility features and accommodations for ELs should be made by a group of individuals familiar with the student who can identify the appropriate accessibility features and accommodations for each EL. In some states, this is called an “EL team;” in other states, it will be an informal group of educators familiar with the student who makes decisions. In either case, the educators working with the student should document the accessibility features and/or accommodations made available to the student.

Individuals involved in the decision-making process may include any of the following:

Students

Students can provide valuable information on their strengths and areas of challenge based on linguistic needs, the effectiveness of the accessibility features and/or accommodations they use, if any, and their degree of comfort in using them. This information can greatly assist decision-making regarding which accessibility features and/or accommodations to recommend. Including students in decision-making will enhance their self-advocacy, their understanding of the need for the accessibility feature and/or accommodation, and may result in an increased willingness to use the accessibility feature and/or accommodation consistently. Students can also signal when they are outgrowing the need for an accessibility feature and/or accommodation due to their maturation or increased language proficiency.

ESL/Bilingual Educator

The ESL/bilingual educator can apply their knowledge of language acquisition with familiarity with the individual student's linguistic needs to devise strategies and supports that facilitate learning the English language during instruction and provide accessibility during assessment.

School Administrator (Principal/Assistant Principal)

The School Administrator promotes the expectation that ELs can and will achieve at high levels in all local and statewide assessments if they are included in high-quality standards-based instruction. The principal is responsible for:

- Implementing the district's policies that provide equal access to instructional and assessment programs and resources for all students;
- Ensuring that assessment accessibility features and accommodations are fully, consistently, and appropriately implemented during the administration of DC CAPE assessments; and
- Exercising leadership and discretion in resolving circumstances in which last-minute changes for assessment are needed. For example, allowing a student to be tested in a separate setting apart from other students.

General Educator (Content Area Teacher)

General education teachers are important team members who should be familiar with and knowledgeable of the linguistic accommodations required by each student, and how to administer them appropriately. They are familiar with curriculum content and the purposes of the assessments. In collaboration with ESL/bilingual teachers (and special education teachers, if appropriate), general educators provide appropriate instructional and assessment accessibility features and accommodations to ensure that ELs have full access to the programs and services that are available to their native English speaking peers. The results of the assessments, in turn, can provide teachers with information that will support individual students in achieving the CCSS or NGSS.

Special Educator

If the EL student has a disability, the special education teacher plays an important role in providing information on how to match the learning characteristics of the student to the appropriate instructional and assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations, ensuring that the student is able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills without barriers or restrictions due to their disability.

Parents/Guardians

Students who use accessibility features and/or accommodations will often need them at home, in the community, and as they get older, in postsecondary education and at work. Caregivers are familiar with the strengths and needs of their children and can provide valuable information to enhance discussions about the appropriateness of selected instructional and assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations. Parents also have information and perspectives on the strategies their child uses routinely to complete homework assignments and other tasks around the home. To enable parents to participate in meaningful discussions, it is important that they receive information about the:

- Need and rationale for assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations;
- Types of available assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations and how assessments will be administered; and
- Purpose of assessments, what they measure, and how the results will be used.

Educators responsible for selecting accessibility features and accommodations for ELs can use the guidance found in this section to make appropriate decisions on assigning accessibility features and

accommodations to ELs in the Accommodations Registration File. To be effective, accommodations must address the unique linguistic needs of the students for whom they are provided and should assist the student in overcoming the language barriers that prevent them from learning in the classroom and accessing the content of the assessments. Educators should also review and select appropriate accessibility features available for ELs on the computer-based assessments and design an Accommodations Registration File for the student.

Decision-making teams are encouraged to determine and assign accessibility features and accommodations to ELs as early as possible in the school year to ensure that the student is familiar with their use. Accessibility features and accommodations should be evaluated over time for their effectiveness. The student should not be introduced to an accessibility feature and/or accommodation on the day of the assessment.

Guidelines for Selecting Appropriate Accessibility Features and Accommodations for ELs

Because EL status itself is transitional in nature, there are accessibility features and accommodations specific to ELs that provide different degrees and types of linguistic support to ELs as they progress through levels of English language proficiency. Appropriate accessibility features and accommodations enable ELs to more effectively demonstrate their knowledge of the content.

The following process can be used to select accessibility features and accommodations for ELs:

1. The classroom teacher examines the types of support that help a student access the curriculum, and tries them out to determine whether they meet the student's needs: Does the accessibility feature and/or accommodation help the student overcome the barrier posed by their developing English language proficiency? Is the student comfortable using the accessibility features and/or accommodation?

The student's teacher should observe the student in the classroom (or range of classrooms/school settings) using the accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodation(s) and inform members of the team of educators as to which accessibility features and/or accommodations are most appropriate and effective.

2. The teacher should document and provide information on a student's use of linguistic accommodations during classroom instruction and assessment.
3. Once classroom information and data are compiled about the student's background, instructional needs, and use of the accessibility features and/or accommodation(s), the educators selecting accessibility features and/or accommodations for the EL can help the classroom teacher and student evaluate whether to continue using the accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodation and/or suggest additional accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodations, supports, or approaches that may be effective for use with the student.

Based on the accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodations used successfully in the classroom, and the list of Allowable Accommodations for ELs on assessments (see Table 6 in the *DC CAPE Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual*), educators can select appropriate accessibility features and/or accommodations for use on the assessments.

These considerations should also be used to match each EL's unique linguistic needs with EL accessibility features and/or accommodations:

When selecting accessibility features and/or accommodations for ELs, consider the student's:

- 1. Level of English language proficiency (ELP) on the ACCESS for ELLs assessment**
 - Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced
- 2. Literacy development in English and/or the native language**
 - Native language literacy
 - Interrupted schooling/literacy background
- 3. Background factors that impact effective accommodations use**
 - Grade/age
 - Affective filter (i.e., level of student anxiety/comfort with English)
 - Time in U.S. schools

Additional considerations for selecting accommodations include:

1. Level of English language proficiency (ELP) on statewide ELP test.

Determine the student's Composite ELP Level based on the overall performance level on the state's ELP test (Table 1), and select appropriate EL accessibility features and/or accommodations for each content area assessment that is most likely to benefit students at that ELP level.

Table 1: Composite ELP Levels Linked with English Proficiency Assessments

WIDA ACCESS for ELLs® English Language Proficiency (ELP) Levels		Composite ELP Level (Acosta et al., 2008)
Level 1	Entering	Beginning
Level 2	Emerging	
Level 3	Developing	Intermediate
Level 4	Expanding	
Level 5	Bridging	Advanced
Level 6	Reaching	

Guidelines for Matching Accommodations to a Student's Overall ELP Level

ELs with Beginning ELP

ELs at the Beginning level have very limited proficiency in reading and writing. These students tend to experience the greatest need for accommodations but are often least equipped to use them. In general, the use of oral supports (in English) is recommended, rather than written accommodations, but even oral accommodations may not produce an effect for students at the lowest proficiency levels.

ELs with Intermediate ELP

ELs at the Intermediate level typically have developed some literacy in English and can benefit from a wider range of written and oral accommodations. Decision makers should note that the need for accommodations at this level varies considerably depending upon the unique background and characteristics of the student, as well as the literacy demands of the test. Research suggests that native language accommodations, such as bilingual word-to-word dictionaries, as well as English-language accommodations, are useful at the Intermediate level. Where possible,

and as needed, it may be beneficial to have the text on the mathematics assessments read aloud to these students. Scribing responses may also be appropriate for these students.

ELs with Advanced ELP

ELs at the Advanced level would be expected to have a decreased need for most accommodations. Native language support such as bilingual word-to-word dictionaries (and extra time to use them) may be helpful if the EL is literate in their native language and has received recent instruction in that language (whether in the United States or abroad).

2. Literacy Development in English and/or the Native Language

Factors that influence the selection of accommodations include the following:

- **Native Language Literacy**

For students with literacy in their native language, consider providing the student with a word- to-word bilingual dictionary, along with extended time in which to use it.

- **Interrupted Schooling/Literacy Background**

For students who have experienced interrupted formal education and, as a result, have comparatively low levels of literacy in both their native language and in English, it is likely that the EL will be more orally-dominant in their developing English language proficiency. In this case, consider providing the EL with oral language support accessibility features and/or accommodations that are more likely to benefit ELs at the Beginning ELP, such as verbatim reading of the mathematics assessment.

3. Background Factors that Impact Effective Accommodations Use

Selecting accessibility features and/or accommodations based on the background of the student increases the likelihood that use of the accessibility feature and/or accommodation will be successful. Such factors include: grade/age of student, time in U.S. schools, and the affective needs of the student (i.e., comfort level and/or anxiety with English). In addition, the following may also impact a student's ability to use and benefit from EL accommodations:

- Students who have recently arrived in the U.S. will need to gain familiarity with U.S. testing practices and expectations.
- Anxiety can increase the student's "affective filter" and adversely impact test performance.
- Older students may refuse an accessibility feature and/or accommodation because they do not want to draw attention to themselves in front of classmates for receiving special attention or consideration.

Eligibility for EL Accommodations

Only students currently classified as ELs or EL monitored, in their first two years of monitored status, are eligible to receive accommodations designated for ELs on assessments, including students classified as ELs whose parent/guardian has refused language support program services. Refer to Section 3 of the AF&A manual for accommodations that are allowable on assessments for ELs. Students who are EL monitored are eligible to receive the extended time and word-to-word dictionary accommodations only.

Selecting Accessibility Features and/or Accommodations for ELs with Disabilities

ELs with disabilities are eligible for accessibility features and/or accommodations allowed for ELs, as well as accessibility features and/or accommodations allowed for students with disabilities. The IEP team or 504 Plan Coordinator should collaborate with school EL (i.e., language) staff and

evaluation professionals to determine the English language development needs of an EL with an identified disability.

Making assessment accessibility features and accommodations decisions in isolation can result in providing inappropriate access to the student. Therefore, an EL staff familiar with the student should be a member of, or collaborate with, the IEP team or 504 Plan Coordinator in order to:

- Determine the appropriate accommodation(s) that address both the student’s linguistic needs and disability;
- Discuss the effective implementation of the accommodations; and
- Determine the effectiveness of such accommodations.

Step 4: Administer Accessibility Features and Accommodations during DC CAPE Assessments

Planning to Administer Accessibility Features and Accommodations during DC CAPE Assessments

Once decisions have been made about which accessibility features and accommodations will be provided, the logistics of providing the accessibility features and accommodations during assessments must be coordinated well ahead of the test administration. It is important to engage the appropriate personnel in planning the logistics regarding the provision of assessment accessibility features and accommodations on test day. Student Accommodations Registration File information should be compiled with the names of students, the accessibility features and/or accommodations they require, test locations, and staff responsible for administering tests with accessibility features and accommodations. Special educators and English language educators are often given the responsibility for arranging, coordinating, and providing assessment accessibility features and/or accommodations in a school and to assist general educators in understanding how to properly provide specific accessibility features and/or accommodations. It is essential for Test Administrators to know and understand the requirements for providing accessibility features and/or accommodations on assessments. Staff must adhere to specific guidelines for correctly administering accessibility features and accommodations to the correct students so that scores are valid. Test Administrators should also anticipate whether a student will be allowed extra time to complete the test once the official testing time is ended.

For the assessments, school or LEA staff will need to enter data into a student’s Accommodations Registration File in advance of testing to enable all necessary accessibility features and accommodations and ensure they are provided on test day. Finally, it is important to monitor the provision of accessibility features and accommodations on test day to ensure that they are delivered properly and that the technology is operating appropriately.

Involving Students in Using Accommodations

The more students are involved in the accommodation selection process, the more likely the accommodations will be used, especially as students reach adolescence and the desire to be more independent increases. Students need self-advocacy skills to learn how to make certain those accommodations are provided on the assessments, in instructional settings, and outside of school. Teachers and other team members can play a key role in working with students to advocate for themselves in the context of using their accommodations.

Introducing Students to Accessibility Features and Accommodations

Whether a student has a specific accessibility need, a disability, is an EL, or all of the above, accessibility features and accommodations should be introduced to students long before the assessments

are administered, during routine instruction to determine their effectiveness. Typically, accessibility features and accommodations should never be used for the first time on an assessment.

It is highly recommended that students who need accessibility features and accommodations on the assessments be provided time to interact with the accessibility features and/or accommodations on the available practice assessments. Allowing this practice time will help the student learn to use the accessibility features and/or accommodation in a new environment and can help determine if the available accessibility features and/or accommodations are effective for the student.

Monitoring Accommodations Use

During the DC CAPE registration process, OSSE collects information on which accommodations are being used on state assessments by individual students via the Accommodations Registration File. During administration, OSSE monitors test administration practices at individual schools, including the administration of accommodations, to ensure they are implemented appropriately. LEAs are also expected to send representatives to their schools to observe the administration of assessments and accommodations.

Step 5: Evaluate and Improve Accessibility Features and Accommodations Use

It will be necessary to collect and analyze data on the use and effectiveness of accessibility features and accommodations to ensure that the participation of all students in assessments is meaningful, and to carefully document decisions and information on the selection, use, and evaluation of accessibility features and accommodations. Data on the use and impact of accessibility features and accommodations during assessments may support continuing use while rethinking others, and may also reveal patterns of accommodation use in a school or district. Examination of the data may also indicate areas in which the IEP teams, 504 Plan Coordinators, and EL educators and/or Test Administrators need additional training and support.

Observations conducted during test administration, interviews with Test Administrators, and talking with students after testing is likely to yield data that can be useful in guiding the formative evaluation process of accessibility features and accommodations use at the LEA, school, and student levels. Information on the use of accessibility features and accommodations is collected through the Accommodations Registration File along with other demographic information. The following questions should guide the analysis of accessibility features and accommodations data at the LEA, school, and student level.

Questions to Guide Evaluation of Accessibility Features and Accommodations Use at the LEA and School Levels

1. Are procedures in place to ensure that test administration procedures are not compromised due to provision of accessibility features and accommodations?
2. Are students receiving accessibility features and accommodations as documented in their IEP, 504 plan, EL plan (if applicable), or other documentation used for ELs?
3. Are procedures in place to ensure that Test Administrators are trained in and comply with directions for the administration of accessibility features and accommodations?
4. What is the frequency of use of different types of accessibility features and accommodations?

Questions to Guide Evaluation at the Student Level

1. What accessibility features and accommodations are used by the student during instruction and on assessments? Did the student use all the accessibility features and accommodations they were assigned on assessments?
2. What are the results of classroom assignments and assessments when accessibility features and accommodations are used versus when accessibility features and accommodations are not used?
3. If the student is not meeting the expected levels of performance, is it because they are not receiving access to the necessary instruction; did not receive the accessibility feature and/or accommodation; or is using an accessibility feature and/or accommodation that was not effective?
4. What is the student's perception of how well the accessibility feature and/or accommodation worked?
5. What combination of accessibility features and/or accommodations seems to be effective?
6. What are the perceptions of teachers, parents, and others about how the accessibility feature and/or accommodation appears to be working?
7. What difficulties, if any, were encountered in the use of the accessibility feature(s) and/or accommodation(s)?

The responses to these questions can guide an ongoing (formative) process to evaluate the use and effectiveness of accessibility features and accommodations used by students. It is critical that, to the extent possible, all individuals involved in selection and delivery be involved in gathering information and making subsequent decisions on whether to continue, modify, or discontinue the use of an accessibility feature and/or accommodation.

Gathering information on selected accessibility features accommodations use on technology-based assessments will be accomplished largely through the collection of information on each student's Accommodations Registration File. However, educators and teams at the local level may have additional questions they want researched based on the collection of this data, which will assist in applying LEA- and school-based resources effectively in the future.