

To: Directors of Schools and Special Education Supervisors
From: Lori Nixon, director of assessment design for special populations
Date: October 14, 2015
Subject: **Guidance on Selecting Accommodations**

Directors:

The IDEA regulation regarding participation in assessments (34 C.F.R. § 300.160(b)), requires that states ensure children with disabilities are included in all state- and district-wide general assessments with appropriate accommodations, if necessary and as indicated in their IEPs, or in alternate assessments. The regulation also directs the state to develop guidelines for the use of appropriate accommodations. These guidelines must identify the specific accommodations for each assessment that do not invalidate the score and instruct IEP teams to select only the appropriate accommodations for each assessment that do not invalidate the test score.

The Tennessee Department of Education has developed and communicated these guidelines to local education agencies (LEAs) for the provision of appropriate accommodations. IEP teams were also instructed to identify only the accommodations that do not invalidate test scores.

Since ELA, math, and social studies assessments have a new design, there are new accessibility features and accommodations to consider. Decisions regarding the provision of accommodations for these new assessments should be made based on the new design. The guidelines for making decisions about accommodations are posted on the TNReady accessibility webpage ([here](#)); please note that social studies should follow TNReady's ELA guidelines.

Changes in accommodation guidelines, just as changes in state law, regulation, or policy, do not require individual IEP meetings for every affected student. In these instances where all students with disabilities are affected by changes to accommodation guidelines, dispute resolution procedures, including written administrative complaints, mediation, and due process hearing, are not available to parents. The LEA is required to notify parents of the revised, allowable test accommodations via written notification prior to administration of a particular assessment.

If an IEP contains an accommodation that is no longer allowed based on the current accommodation guidelines, the accommodation will not be allowed on the specific assessment in question. The IEP team must determine accommodations based on the most current guidance from the state.

IEP and 504 Plan team members are responsible for selecting accommodations for both instruction and assessment based on the guidelines set forth by the state to ensure valid and reliable scores. The process of selecting accommodations is one in which members of the IEP and 504 teams attempt to "level the playing field" for a student with a disability so that he or she can participate in the general education curriculum. Accommodations are intended to reduce, or even eliminate, the effects of a student's disability. Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations and should not give a false picture of what a student knows and can do. Reliance on accommodations should never replace appropriate and rigorous instruction in the content area. Additional information about accommodations and available accessibility features can be found [here](#).

Several questions have been asked regarding the accommodations that are addressed on the next page of this memo. Please review this information and share with appropriate stakeholders in your district.

Text-to-Speech Accommodation for English Language Arts & Social Studies

The decision to provide the text-to-speech accommodation for both the TNReady English language arts assessment and the social studies assessment must be made based on a student's ability to access text. Below are key questions to ask when determining the need for the text-to-speech accommodation.

504 Plan	IEP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does student have a documented decoding or fluency deficit which precludes access to printed text?• Is student engaged in intense Tier III intervention to address specific deficit?• Does student need supported reading in core academic instruction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does student have a documented decoding or fluency deficit which precludes access to printed text?• Does student have a goal to address deficit listed in the present level of educational performance?• Is student engaged in intense intervention to address specific deficit?• Is inability to access printed text included in the impact statement?• Does student need supported reading in core academic instruction?

Calculator Policy

For **all** grade levels and courses, the TNReady math assessment will include both calculator permitted sections and calculator prohibited sections. These sections are designed to align to the expectations of the standards. Part I will allow calculator use for students at all grade levels. Part II will include a calculator-permitted section and a calculator-prohibited section for students at all grade levels. All of the calculator-prohibited questions will be within the same section of Part II. Please reference the previously shared guidance document ([here](#)) regarding the calculator-prohibited questions.

The calculator policy applies to **all** students, including students with disabilities. TNReady is aligned to our state standards, and the calculator-prohibited subtest is designed to assess whether students truly understand the expectations of those standards. Therefore, calculator use during the calculator-prohibited section is not allowed on TNReady mathematics assessment, and the IEP must comply with the policy. The IEP should not address calculator use for the calculator-prohibited subtest of TNReady's mathematics assessment.

Calculator use for the TCAP assessment in science continues to be an IEP team decision, and if applicable, the IEP should reflect calculator use in the content area of science.

Word Prediction

Due to current technology limitations on the testing platform, MIST, the embedded word-prediction accommodation for assessments will not be live for the 2015-16 school year. Students who require the word-prediction accommodation may use the word-prediction feature on their stand-alone assistive technology devices, and then, an adult may transcribe their responses into the MIST platform.

If you have questions regarding accessibility features and accommodations, please contact Lori.Nixon@tn.gov.