



Memo

To: Special Education Directors

From: Melissa Colman, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner, Student Learning

Paul Foster, Ed.D., Executive Director, Exceptional Student Services

Joyce Zurkowski, Chief Assessment Officer, Assessment Division

Date: September 1, 2020

Re: CMAS ELA Accommodation Policy Updated to Align with Colorado Academic Standards Expectations

We hope that the beginning of your school year is off to a good start despite the challenges and uncertainties that leaders across Colorado districts and schools are inevitably encountering this fall. Your extraordinary dedication to ensuring that Colorado students are receiving the best education possible is deeply appreciated by CDE. This message is intended to provide clarity on an updated CMAS ELA accommodation policy that was made to bring ELA assessment accommodation practices within the expectations of the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS).

While COVID-19 delayed sharing of the updated ELA accommodation policy, with the full implementation of the 2020 CAS this year, the policy reflects the standards' expectations that students read (decode a printed or tactile code) and comprehend (make meaning of) literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. Students may continue to use accommodations that do not change this expectation. Assessment administration adjustments that change this expectation (e.g., auditory/sign language presentation of the CMAS English language arts assessment) will result in invalid scores starting in spring 2022.

Over the last few years, CDE advised districts that the policy surrounding unique accommodations for the CMAS English language arts assessment was under review following adoption of the CAS 2020 and that updates may be needed to ensure tighter alignment between the standards and CMAS. We also sought feedback and guidance from district assessment coordinators last winter, inquiring about what additional information might be helpful in clarifying the differences between accommodations and modifications, the role of the unique accommodations request process, and conditions required to generate valid assessment scores. Conversations external and internal to CDE revealed differing understandings of the appropriate role and implementation of assisted reading of the ELA assessment as an accommodation. Conversations across educational professionals who work in standards, literacy, special education and assessment also revealed the problematic nature of the misalignment between the standards' expectations and the adjustment that incorporated assisted reading into CMAS ELA assessment administration.

The CMAS ELA accommodations policy update is grounded in IDEA requirements that only accommodations that do not invalidate a score may be considered as accommodations on the state assessments (34 CFR § 300.160). Accommodations generally refer to adjustments to standardized testing materials or procedures which allow students to demonstrate their learning without changing what the assessment intends to measure. Accommodations maintain the expectations and rigor of the content of the assessment. They do not change what is intended to be measured by the assessment. Scores resulting from accommodated administrations are considered valid, may be interpreted the same way, and aggregated with results from non-accommodated assessments. For purposes of accountability, students using accommodations are considered participants in the assessment.

Adjustments to the administration of an assessment that change what the assessment measures are considered modifications rather than accommodations because they fundamentally change the assessment's intended measure and therefore do not result in valid scores. Modifications produce scores that cannot be interpreted through the same lens as, compared to, or aggregated together with results from other modified or non-accommodated assessments. Because the CMAS ELA assessment measures the reading components of the CAS, providing auditory presentation of printed text changes the assessment's focus from reading and comprehension of text to listening and comprehension of text, which falls under different, unassessed listening standards.

Consistent with IDEA requirements, following state guidelines, IEP teams are instructed to identify the assessment in which a student will participate as part of the state assessment system (general assessment, general assessment with accommodations, or for students who qualify, alternate assessment) and select only valid accommodations, those accommodations that do not invalidate the score (34 CFR § 300.160).

Any IEP team meetings that are held in 2020-2021 should follow the new policy. Given the cancellation of spring 2020 testing and the restart in 2021, IEP teams are encouraged to revise as appropriate any current IEPs that were written without taking this policy into consideration. This will allow for increased comparability and potentially support growth calculations between 2021 and 2022, especially for students in lower grade levels. DACs should contact the Assessment Division for direction on how to proceed for cases in which a student's IEP is not updated and indicates auditory or sign language presentation for use in spring 2021.

The Assessment Division and Exceptional Student Services Unit will provide district assessment coordinators and special education directors with technical assistance on the updated policy, including transition strategies, and the Standards and Instructional Support Unit is available to support understanding and interpretation of CAS reading expectations. CDE contacts are included in the following table.

CDE Contacts		
Support Area	Contact	Email
2020 CAS Reading, Writing and Communicating Support and Interpretation	Olivia Gillespie Literary Content Specialist Standards and Instructional Support	Gillespie_O@cde.state.co.us
Instructional Accommodations and IEP Support	Veronica Fiedler Specific Learning Disability Specialist Exceptional Student Services	Fiedler_V@cde.state.co.us
State Assessment Accommodations Support	Arti Sachdeva Students with Disabilities Assessment Principal Consultant Assessment Division	Sachdeva_A@cde.state.co.us

To review the updated CMAS ELA policy statement, please visit:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/accommodations>.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the content included in this message and for thoughtfully considering the rationale behind the updated policy. Independent reading is essential to 2020 CAS expectations, and more importantly, is a critically important foundational skill to ensure the overall academic success of Colorado students. The updated policy will help provide Colorado districts, schools, parents and the community with a more valid indicator of how well Colorado students are meeting the state's reading expectations outlined in the CAS and emphasized by the Colorado READ Act. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the identified CDE contacts.