

Office of Assessments, Accountability, and Analytics

LEAP Connect: Accessibility for Students who are Visually Impaired

Accessibility and fairness are relevant for valid score interpretations for all individuals and subgroups in the intended population of test takers (NRC, 2014, p. 4). The LEAP Connect *Procedures for Assessing Students Who Are Visually Impaired, Deaf, or Deaf-Blind* (Procedures manual) includes accommodations that the Test Administrator (TA) can provide for a student who has a visual impairment and includes directions for creating tactile graphics and symbols, and considerations for object replacement. Accessibility features, built into the assessments for all students, and accommodations, as described in the *Procedures* manual, allow students who are visually impaired to access the LEAP Connect tests for all content areas and grade levels. To allow opportunities for more support during testing, the *Procedures* manual provides recommendations on which test graphics to enhance for students with visual impairment.

Using a principled design approach, the LEAP Connect assessments minimize accessibility challenges by taking into consideration test characteristics, such as the choice of content and topics, response processes, and administration procedures that may impede test takers' access to the construct. Specifically, the assessments are read aloud to all students through DRC's INSIGHT online text-to-speech (TTS) or by the TA. All directions, passages, items, and answer options are read aloud using standardized descriptive statements for tables, charts, graphs, and timelines. This includes providing a sign language interpreter or tactile sign language intervener, as necessary for a student to access the tests.

Graphics needed to respond to items include graphic descriptions that are read to students and describe the critical components of the graphic without clueing the correct response. Three state education agencies studied the use of graphic descriptions for students with a visual impairment (Gould, B. et. al., 2012) and significant findings concluded that braille readers were more likely to select the correct answers when given image description without tactile graphics and that image description is an unbiased accessibility feature. The American Printing House (Allman, 2009) states that for some individuals the reading process using braille is not efficient and that a test should use the appropriate accommodations for the assessed skill.

In accordance with the noted research, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) believes that students with visual impairments may be more successful on the LEAP Connect assessments given auditory supports rather than braille, and so, does not provide braille test forms. Furthermore, the LEAP Connect assessments measure students' skills and abilities with grade-level academic content knowledge, and not students' varying abilities to read braille.

The use of read aloud and graphic descriptions paired with the additional accommodations provided in the *Procedures* manual aligns with multiple states' accessibility policies for alternate assessments as evidenced in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment 2021-2022 Test Administrator Manual (MSAA, 2022).

References

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