

# Text-to-Speech and Read Aloud Accessibility Features

## ISAT Guidance

### INTRODUCTION

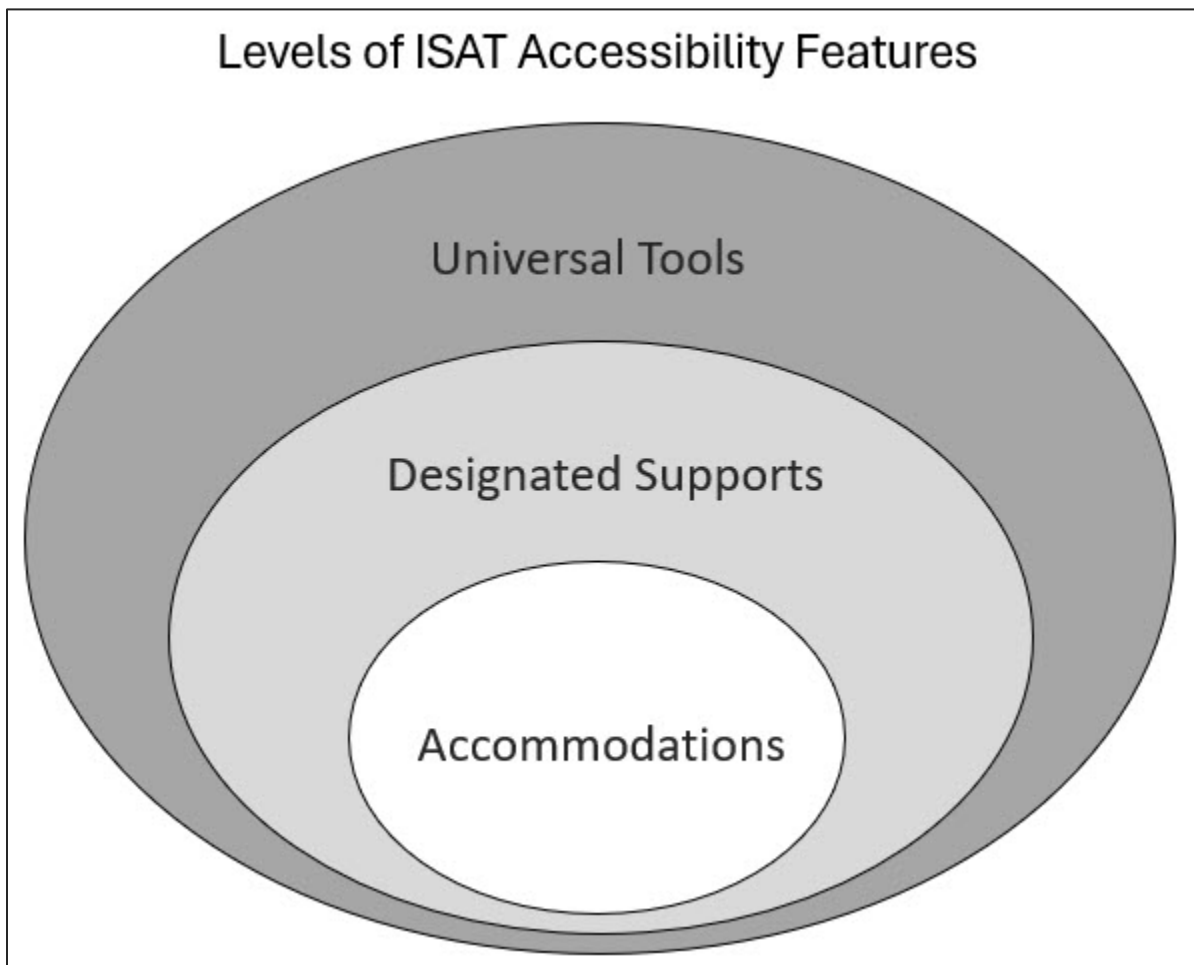
The Idaho Department of Education is committed to ensuring that the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) is accessible to all students. All students [including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and ELs with disabilities] are held to the same expectations for participation and performance on the ISAT.

The purpose of this guidance document is to clarify the distinction between using Text-to-Speech and Read Aloud as **designated supports** and as **accommodations**. It is also to help school educational teams, including teams that develop Individualized Education Programs (IEP), 504 Plans, and Educational Learning Plans for ELs, understand and appropriately assign the allowable text-to-speech and read aloud designated supports and accommodations.

### DEFINITIONS

- **Accessibility Features.** Accessibility features describe the tools and supports that may be used on the ISAT to ensure that all students can have equitable access to the test. Accessibility features are present in three distinct levels on the ISAT as described below and in [Figure 1](#). They may be embedded (a part of the digital test delivery system) or non-embedded (delivered separately and locally).
  - *Universal Tools.* Universal tools are available to all students based on student preference and selection.
  - *Designated Supports.* Designated supports are accessibility features available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators along with the parent/guardian and student. Designated supports may be embedded or non-embedded.
- **Accommodations.** Accommodations are changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access on the ISATs for students for whom there is documentation of the need for the accommodations on an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** or **504 Plan**.

- **Text-to-Speech.** Text-to-Speech (TTS) is an accessibility feature in which text is read aloud to the student via embedded text-to-speech technology.
- **Read Aloud.** Read aloud is an accessibility feature in which text is read aloud to a student via an external screen reader or by a trained and qualified human reader. Read aloud is intended for students taking the paper/pencil version of an assessment or who cannot access embedded text-to-speech via the test delivery system for another reason. Human readers must follow the [Smarter Balanced Read Aloud Guidelines](#).



*Figure 1. A graphic that illustrates Accessibility Features on the ISAT available as Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations.*

## ISAT POLICIES FOR TEXT-TO-SPEECH AND READ ALOUD

[Table 1](#) outlines the definitions, availability, and recommended use of text-to-speech and read-aloud as designated supports and accommodations on the ISAT.

Table 1. Text-to-Speech and Read Aloud Policies

| Category        | Text-to-Speech or Read Aloud as a Designated Support   | Text-to-Speech or Read Aloud as an Accommodation  |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Definition      | Designated supports are accessibility features available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators along with the parent/guardian and student.   | Accommodations are changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access on the ISATs for students for whom there is documentation of the need for the accommodations on an <b>Individualized Education Program (IEP)</b> or <b>504 Plan</b> .  |
| Availability    | ISAT ELA. Text-to-speech and read aloud are allowed <b>only for test items</b> (as illustrated in <a href="#">Figure 2</a> ).<br>ISAT Math. Text-to-speech and read aloud are allowed for <b>test items and stimuli/passages</b> .<br>ISAT Science. Text-to-speech and read aloud are allowed for <b>test items and stimuli/passages</b> . | ISAT ELA. Text-to-speech and read aloud are allowed for <b>ELA passages*</b> (as illustrated in <a href="#">Figure 2</a> ).   |
| Recommended Use | Students who are struggling readers may need assistance accessing the assessment by having portions of the assessment read aloud.<br><br>This support may also be needed by students with reading-related disabilities, or by students who are blind and are advancing toward English braille proficiency.                                 | This accommodation is appropriate for a very small number of students. Text-to-speech is available as an accommodation for students whose need is documented in an IEP or 504 Plan.<br><br>For further detail, please visit the <a href="#">Text-to-Speech and Read Aloud Accommodation Decision-Making Guidance</a> section. |

*\* Students who require text-to-speech or read-aloud as an accommodation for reading passages should receive **both** the designated support and the accommodation.*

The screenshot displays a digital test interface. On the left, a passage titled "Treasure in the Field" by Marilyn Bolchunos is shown. The passage describes a man in Vietnam who must tend a field while his two young sons care for the house. On the right, a "Test Item" section contains a question: "Which detail from the passage **best** explains why the father must stop working in the field?" There are four radio button options: (A) The father needs to return home to cook the dinner; (B) The father asks the neighbor to do the work in the fields for him; (C) The father's sons depend on him to stay home and care for them; (D) The father's age makes it too difficult to do farm work any longer. The interface includes a navigation bar at the top with tabs 1 through 8, and a "GUEST" label.

Figure 2. Illustration of a typical ELA item with the passage and accompanying test item labeled.

## TEXT-TO-SPEECH AND READ ALOUD ACCOMMODATION DECISION-MAKING GUIDANCE

Any ISAT accommodations identified in a student’s IEP or 504 Plan should correspond with accommodations the student receives during classroom instruction. IEP and 504 Plan teams should consider the questions in Table 2 to help determine if the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation (for reading passages) is appropriate for a student.

Table 2. Test-to-Speech and Read Aloud Guiding Questions and Considerations

| Question   | Consideration for Designated Support  | Consideration for Accommodation   |
|--|---|---|
| Does the student read below grade level and does their reading ability impact their ability to engage with instructional content, although the student does <b>not</b> have an IEP, 504, or identified reading disability? | If yes, the text-to-speech or read aloud designated support may be appropriate for the student. | This metric alone does <b>not</b> qualify a student for text-to-speech or read aloud as an accommodation.<br><br>If the student does <b>not</b> have an IEP or 504, then they may not receive text-to-speech or read aloud as an accommodation. |

| Question  | Consideration for Designated Support  | Consideration for Accommodation   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Does the student have an identified reading-based disability that affects the student’s decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills?</p>            | <p>If a student has a reading-based disability, then text-to-speech or read aloud may be appropriate as a designated support.</p> <p>Determining the nature of the student’s reading challenges can help determine the appropriate intervention approaches, as well as needed support during classroom instruction and assessments.</p> | <p>Reading below grade level in and of itself is <b>not</b> a justifiable reason for a student to receive the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation.</p> <p>Rather, the student’s reading-based disability should be significant enough that the student’s ELA instruction and classroom ELA/reading assessments include text-to-speech or read aloud of reading passages as outlined in the IEP or 504 Plan. If this is the case, then the text-to-speech or read aloud may be appropriate as an accommodation.</p> |
| <p>Does the student use text-to-speech or read aloud regularly during instruction and during other classroom formative and summative assessments?</p> | <p>If yes, the text-to-speech or read aloud designated support may be appropriate.</p> <p>If not, the text-to-speech or read aloud designated support may not be helpful to the student and could instead be a distraction that negatively affects their overall performance.</p>   | <p>If yes, the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation may be appropriate, <b>if</b> the use of text-to-speech or read aloud is used <b>regularly</b> during ELA instruction and classroom assessments for reading passages.</p> <p>If not, the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation is not appropriate.</p>   |
| <p>Is the student blind or does the student have a significant visual impairment? If yes, is the student learning to read braille?</p>                | <p>If a student is learning to read braille, they should be assessed with the braille form of the ISAT. If the student has not yet learned to read braille, then text-to-speech or read aloud may be appropriate as a designated support.</p>   | <p>If a student is learning to read braille, they should be assessed with the braille form of the ISAT. If the student has not yet learned to read braille, then text-to-speech or read aloud may be appropriate as an accommodation as outlined in the student’s 504 or IEP.</p>   |

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Alignment between Assessment and Instruction

Accessibility features used on formative and summative assessments should be used routinely during regular classroom instruction. They should **not** solely be used on assessments.

### Practice Tests

Students should have prior exposure to embedded accessibility features on the ISAT platform before the spring summative administration of the ISAT. Teachers, students, and families can apply and practice with accessibility features on the ISAT platform through ISAT Practice Tests available on the [Idaho Portal](#).

### Individual vs. Group Application

Accessibility features, like text-to-speech and read aloud, should be assigned based on a student's individual needs and should not be applied on a whole-group basis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Idaho Department of Education's Assessment and Accountability Department would like to thank members of the Content and Curriculum Department, the Special Education Department, Idaho SESTA, the National Center for Educational Outcomes, and the Connecticut State Department of Education for their collaboration and contributions to the content of this document.

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