ELPA21 for All: Accessibility for ELLs With Disabilities or Documented Access Needs

ELPA21
English Language Proficiency
Assessment for the 21st Century

ELPA21 believes that all English language learners (ELLs) should have access to assessments that accurately measure the skills they need to progress toward English language proficiency. Equitable access to the ELPA21 assessment ensures valid data and useful information that help parents, educators, and school administrators meet the needs of each student.

That's why, from the very beginning, ELPA21 has focused on providing an extensive array of accessibility tools and accommodations for ELLs, including those with disabilities and documented access needs. ELPA21's Administration, Accessibility, and Accommodations Task Management Team (AAA TMT) spearheads these efforts. The team's work has included policy analysis, educator outreach, a review of the federal government's ELL definition, participation in the ELPA21 item development and review processes, platform accessibility reviews, and the development of ELPA21's Field Test Accessibility and Accommodations Manual. This document explains what ELPA21 has done and will continue to do to ensure that our assessment system is accessible to— and meets the needs of—all ELLs.

Accessibility Is a Top Priority

ELPA21 established the AAA TMT to prioritize the needs of students with disabilities or documented access needs throughout the design and development of the assessment system. The team is comprised of policy experts, ELL education specialists, and advocates for students with disabilities from three ELPA21 states. It is led by Martha Thurlow, director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), and her team. NCEO is among the nation's leading organizations and voices on designing assessments and accountability systems that appropriately and thoughtfully monitor educational results for ELLs and for all students with disabilities.

Accessibility and Accommodations and the Field Test

ELPA21 field-tested its summative assessment in early 2015. This "test of the test" provided ELPA21 with data that will be analyzed to make sure that the assessment is an accurate measure of English language proficiency and that no student is unfairly disadvantaged or advantaged by how it is configured and administered. In addition, the Field Test gave participating schools an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new technology and computer-based assessment tools. Most of the approved accessibility features and accommodations were available during the Field Test, and the AAA TMT monitored how well they met students' accessibility and accommodations needs.

A Constant Commitment

The AAA TMT has kept accessibility and accommodation considerations at the forefront of the development of the ELPA21 assessment system by:

- **Ensuring** that accessibility features were integrated into the test and item design from the earliest stages of item development
- **Providing** feedback on the test format and content by participating in item development, as well as in content and bias review panels on accessibility and accommodations issues
- **Conducting** research on accessibility and accommodation options
- **Examining and analyzing** accommodations, policies, and practices used by individual states and large-scale assessment consortia
- **Establishing** the process for building consensus among the ELPA21 consortium states on the access features and accommodations every state should use
- **Making recommendations** for accessibility features and accommodations to the ELPA21 Consortium Council and Executive Board
- **Helping develop** plans for the ELPA21 Field Test and cognitive labs, including a cognitive lab focused on blind and low-vision students
- **Crafting** the ELPA21 Accessibility and Accommodations Manual

Accessibility and Accommodations Manual

The ELPA21 Field Test Accessibility and Accommodations Manual, available at *elpa21.org*, describes the accessibility features and accommodations that ELPA21 offered to students during the 2015 Field Test. This manual will be updated for the first operational administration of the ELPA21 assessment in school year 2015–16.

This manual underwent many rounds of review, first within the AAA TMT and then by stakeholders in the field. Based on these reviews, the team revised the manual. It will continue to evolve: In the coming months and years, ELPA21 will systematically update the manual with the lessons we learn from research, or if findings from the use of the assessment warrant changes in the features and options provided.

Ongoing Work

ELPA21's AAA TMT will make annual recommendations and updates to the Accessibility and Accommodations Manual based on lessons learned during the testing and input from students, parents, educators, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The benefits of a well-made assessment are more widely shared when accurate results can be produced for all students, especially those who may need alternate ways to equitably access assessment content. That is why meeting the needs of ELLs with disabilities and other documented access needs is a top priority at ELPA21.

A Tiered Approach to ELPA21's Accessibility and Accommodations Features

Universal Features

These features are available to all students, usually based on student preference and selection.

Designated Features

These are additional features that can be provided to individual students. Educators familiar with their students' characteristics and needs should decide who would benefit from these options.

Accommodations

These are changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans. IEP teams and educators for 504 plans make the decisions about these accommodations. For English language learners with disabilities, these teams should include an expert in the area of second-language acquisition.

Embedded vs. Nonembedded Features

Some of the features of the ELPA21 assessment are embedded, which means that they are part of the technology platform and can be selected or deselected by school personnel who are familiar with a student's specific needs. Others are nonembedded, which means that test administrators can give individual students external materials and devices or personal assistance.