

Appendix G

Frequently Asked Questions

Smarter Balanced states identified frequently asked questions (FAQs) and developed applicable responses to support the information provided in these guidelines. The questions and responses were derived for the Smarter Balanced interim and summative assessments, but may allow the opportunity for generalizing to other state-administered assessments.

States may use these FAQs to assist districts and schools with transitioning from their former assessments to the Smarter Balanced assessments. In addition, the FAQs may be used by districts to ensure understanding among staff and schools regarding the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations available to students. Schools may use them with decision-making teams (including parents) as decisions are made and implemented with respect to use of these Guidelines. Additional information to aid in the implementation of the Guidelines is available in the *Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP) Module*, the *Test Administration Manual*, and the *Implementation Guide*.

The FAQs are organized into four sections. First are general questions. Second is a set of questions about specific universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations. Questions that pertain specifically to English language learners (ELLs) comprise the third set of FAQs, and questions that pertain specifically to students with disabilities comprise the fourth set of FAQs.

GENERAL FAQs

1. What are the differences among the three categories of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations?

Universal tools are access features that are available to all students based on student preference and selection. **Designated supports** for the Smarter Balanced assessments are those features that are available for use by any student (including English language learners, students with disabilities, and English language learners with disabilities) for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators (with parent/guardian and student input as appropriate). **Accommodations** are changes in procedures or materials that

increase equitable access during the Smarter Balanced assessments by generating valid assessment results for students who need them and allowing these students the opportunity to show what they know and can do. These Guidelines identify accommodations for students for whom there is documentation of the need for the accommodations on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 accommodation plan.

Universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations may be either embedded in the test administration system or provided locally (non-embedded).

2. Which students should use each category of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations?

Universal tools are available to all students, including those receiving designated supports and those receiving accommodations.

Designated supports are available only to students for whom an adult or team (consistent with state-designated practices) has indicated the need for these supports (as well as those students for whom the need is documented).

Accommodations are available only to those students with documentation of the need through either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan. Students who have IEPs or 504 accommodation plans also may use designated supports and universal tools.

What Tools Are Available for my Student?

Category	All Students	English Language Learners (ELLs)	Students with Disabilities	ELLs with Disabilities
Universal Tools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Designated Supports	Yes ¹	Yes ¹	Yes	Yes
Accommodations			Yes	Yes

¹ Only for instances that an adult (or team) has deemed the supports appropriate for a specific student's testing needs.

3. What is the difference between embedded and non-embedded approaches? How might educators decide what is most appropriate?

Embedded versions of the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations are provided digitally through the test delivery system while non-embedded versions are provided at the local level through means other than the test delivery system. The choice between embedded and non-embedded universal tools and designated supports should be based on the individual student's needs. The decision should reflect the student's prior use of, and experience with, both embedded and non-embedded universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations. It is important to note that although Print on Demand is a non-embedded accommodation, permission for students to request printing must first be set in Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE).

4. Who determines how non-embedded accommodations (such as Read-Aloud) are provided?

IEP teams and educators make decisions about non-embedded accommodations. These teams (or educators for 504 plans) provide evidence of the need for accommodations and ensure that they are noted on the IEP or 504 plan. Members are responsible for ensuring that districts and schools follow Smarter Balanced and state guidance on the implementation of these accommodations.

5. Are any students eligible to use text-to-speech for ELA reading passages on the Smarter Balanced assessments?

For students in all grades, Read-Aloud is available on ELA reading passages as a non-embedded accommodation for students whose need is documented on an IEP or 504 plan, subject to each member's laws, regulations, and policies. Text-to-speech is available on

reading passages in all grades. Text-to-speech and Read-Aloud for ELA reading passages is not available for ELLs (unless the student has an IEP or 504 plan). Whenever text-to-speech is used, appropriate headphones must be available to the student, unless the student is tested individually in a separate setting.

6. Why are some accommodations that were previously allowed for my state assessment not listed in the Guidelines?

After examining the latest research and conducting numerous discussions with external and state experts, Smarter Balanced member states approved a list of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations applicable to the current design and constructs being measured by its tests and items within them. Upon review of new research findings or other evidence applicable to accessibility and accommodations considerations, the list of specific universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations approved by Smarter Balanced may be subject to change. The Consortium will establish a standing committee, including members from Governing States, to review suggested adjustments to the list of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations to determine whether changes are warranted.

Proposed changes to the list of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations will be brought to Governing States for review, feedback, and approval. Furthermore, states may issue temporary approvals (i.e., one summative assessment administration) for unique accommodations for individual students. Member leads will evaluate formal requests for unique accommodations and determine whether the request poses a threat to the measurement of the construct. The formal requests will include documentation of the

student need, the specific nature of the universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations, and the plan for follow-up monitoring of use. Upon issuing a temporary approval, the State will send documentation of the approval to the Consortium. The Consortium will consider all state-approved temporary accommodations as part of the Consortium’s accommodations review process. The Consortium will provide to member states a list of the temporary accommodations issued by states that are not Consortium-approved accommodations. In subsequent years, states will not be able to offer as a temporary accommodation any temporary accommodation that has been rejected by the Consortium.

7. Under which conditions may a state elect not to make available to its students an accommodation that is allowed by Smarter Balanced?

The Consortium recognizes that there should be a careful balance between the need for uniformity among member states and the need for states to maintain their autonomy. To maintain this balance, individual states may elect not to make available an accommodation that is in conflict with the member state’s laws, regulations, or policies.

8. Can states allow additional universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations to individual students on a case by case basis?

Yes, only in certain restricted and emergent circumstances. To address emergent issues that arise at the local level, authorized staff in member states will have the authority to approve temporary unique testing conditions for individual students. Because it is unknown whether a temporarily provided universal tool, designated support or accommodation actually belongs in the defined categories, all such temporary testing conditions are considered to be unique accommodations. Authorized state staff includes only those individuals who are familiar with the constructs the Smarter Balanced assessments are measuring, so that students are not inadvertently provided with universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations that violate the constructs being measured. The unique accommodations approved by a state for individual students will be submitted to Smarter Balanced for review.

Temporary unique accommodations accepted by Smarter Balanced will be incorporated into the official guidelines released in the following year. Authorized state staff members are not to add any universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations; only the Smarter Balanced Consortium may do so.

9. What is to be done for special cases of “sudden” physical disability?

One exception to the IEP or 504 requirement is for students who have had a physical injury (e.g., broken hand or arm) that impairs their ability to use a computer. For these situations, students may use the speech-to-text or scribe accommodations (if deemed appropriate based on the student having had sufficient experience with the use of the accommodations).

10. Who reviewed the Smarter Balanced Guidelines?

In addition to individuals and officials from the Smarter Balanced governing states, several organizations and their individual members provided written feedback on the guidelines:

- American Federation of Teachers
- California School for the Blind
- California School for the Deaf
- Californians Together
- California State Teach
- Center for Applied Special Technology
- Center for Law and Education
- Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf
- Council for Exceptional Children
- Council of the Great City Schools
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Learning Disabilities Association of Maryland
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
- Missouri School Boards’ Association
- Missouri Council of Administrators of Special Education
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- The Advocacy Institute
- The National Hispanic University

11. Where can a person go to get more information about making decisions on the use of designated supports and accommodations?

Practice tests provide students with experiences that are critical for success in navigating the

platform easily. The practice tests may be particularly important for those students who will be using designated supports or accommodations, because the practice tests can provide data that may be useful in determining whether a student might benefit from the use of a particular designated support or accommodation. The practice tests are available at <http://wa.portal.airast.org/>

In addition, it is recommended that decision makers refer to professional development materials provided by Smarter Balanced or state offices on the Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP) or state-developed process, as well as other state-developed materials consistent with the Smarter Balanced Implementation Guide.

Additional information on the decision-making process, and ways to promote a thoughtful process rather than an automatic reliance on a checklist or menu, is available through materials developed by groups of states.

12. What security measures need to be taken before, during, and after the assessment for students who use universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations?

Test security involves maintaining the confidentiality of test questions and answers, and is critical in ensuring the integrity of a test and validity of test results. Ensuring that only authorized personnel have access to the test and that test materials are kept confidential is critical in technology-based assessments. In addition, it is important to guarantee that (a) students are seated in such a manner that they cannot see each other's terminals, (b) students are not able to access any unauthorized programs or the Internet while they are taking the assessment, and (c) students are not able to access any externally-saved data or computer shortcuts while taking the test. Prior to testing, the IEP team should check on compatibility of assistive technology devices and make appropriate adjustments if necessary. When a non-embedded designated support or accommodation is used that involves a human having access to items (e.g., reader, scribe), procedures must be in place to ensure

that the individual understands and has agreed to security and confidentiality requirements. Test administrators need to (a) keep testing materials in a secure place to prevent unauthorized access, and (b) keep all test content confidential and refrain from sharing information or revealing test content.

Printed test items/stimuli, including embossed Braille printouts, must be collected and inventoried at the end of each test session and securely shredded immediately. **Do Not** retain printed test items/stimuli.

The following test materials must be securely shredded immediately after each testing session and may not be retained from one testing session to the next:

- Scratch paper and all other paper handouts written on by students during testing;
 - Please note, for mathematics and ELA-performance tasks, if a student needs to take the performance task in more than one session, scratch paper may be collected at the end of each session, securely stored, and made available to the student at the next performance task testing session. Once the student completes the performance task, the scratch paper must be collected and securely destroyed to maintain test security.
- Any reports or other documents that contain personally identifiable student information;
- Printed test items or stimuli.

Additional information on this topic is provided in the *Test Administration Manual (TAM)*.

13. Who is supposed to input information about designated supports and accommodations into the *Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE)* or into a state's comparable platform? How is the information verified?

Generally a school or district will designate a person to enter information into the TIDE .

or the state's comparable platform. Often this person is a test coordinator. For those students for whom an IEP team (or educator developing the 504 plan) is identifying designated supports as well as accommodations, that team or educator is responsible for ensuring that information from the IEP (or 504 plan) is entered appropriately so that all embedded accommodations can be activated prior to testing.

Entry of information for IEP and 504 students can be accomplished by identifying one person from the team to enter information or by providing information to the person designated by the school or district to enter data into the TIDE. For students who are ELLs, an educator who knows the student well and is familiar with the instructional supports used in the classroom should provide information to the person designated to enter information into the TIDE.

14. Are there any supplies that schools need to provide so that universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations can be appropriately implemented?

Schools should determine the number of headphones they will provide (for text-to-speech, as well as for the listening test) and other non-embedded universal tools (e.g., thesaurus), designated supports (e.g., bilingual dictionary), and accommodations (e.g., multiplication table) for students. An alternative is to identify these as items that students will provide on their own.

15. What happens when accommodations listed in the *Guidelines on Tools, Supports, and Accommodations* do not match any accommodations presented in the student's IEP?

IEP teams should consider accommodations a student needs in light of the Guidelines. If it is decided that a specific accommodation is needed that is not included in the Guidelines, the team should submit a *Non-Standard Accommodation/Designated Support Request* form to the state. The state contact will judge whether the proposed accommodation or designated support poses a threat to the constructs measured by the Smarter Balanced assessments; based on that judgment the state contact will either issue a temporary approval or will deny the request. Temporary approvals

will be forwarded to a standing committee; this committee makes a recommendation to the Governing States about future incorporation of new accommodations into the Smarter Balanced Guidelines.

16. What is the process and timeline for updating and making changes to the *UAAG*? Smarter Balanced asks members to request changes to the *UAAG* once each year. The process for making changes to the *UAAG* is initiated by a survey that Smarter Balanced administers in April. Member leads or designees then submit requests via the survey. Upon collecting the survey results, Smarter Balanced engages in a process during May to examine research, solicit feedback from external experts and advisory committees, and discuss the requests with the *UAAG* Committee. Any new policy and/or change to existing policy that the *UAAG* committee recommends is brought to member leads for a vote. Smarter Balanced then updates the *UAAG* as necessary and posts the updated version the first week of June.

17. Why are calculators only allowed in Smarter Balanced grades 6-8 and 11?

The development of computational fluency in the Common Core Standards in grades 3-5 is grounded in the use of strategies to perform operations taken together with the accuracy of the results. The focus and coherence described in the standards document requires that aligned assessments include items that measure the connections across standards. After grade 5, the primary focus of the standards shifts from students' understanding of operations to expanding how they use them in domains such as ratios and proportional relationships and algebra.

18. What is the difference between an item, passage and stimuli?

A stimuli (also referred to as passage for ELA) is what a student will see on the left hand side of the screen. Most items/tasks for assessment include a stimulus along with a set of questions (items) to which the student responds. Stimulus materials are used in ELA assessments to provide context for assessing the knowledge and skills of students. These stimuli are diverse. They can be traditional passages but viewed on a computer screen; audio presentations with images for students to listen to; simulated

