

# Accessibility Features and Accommodations

All students should have the same opportunities to learn in class and show what they know on tests. Students who are learning English may need extra support during instruction and assessments to help them succeed. Teachers may use supports called accessibility features and accommodations to help students understand classroom instruction and tests. For example, a child may need extra time to complete a homework assignment or read a test in English. Some students may benefit from having a dictionary to look up English words. The supports that help each student will be different. Parents or guardians have a right to be part of school decisions that affect their child. It is important for parents or guardians to understand how accessibility features and accommodations can help their student.

## What are accessibility features?

Accessibility features are supports given to any student to help the student learn. A student can also use some accessibility features on tests. Here are some examples:

**Example 1:** *In Mrs. Smith's 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom all students have a computer. The class is writing a report about a story they read. Mrs. Smith teaches the entire class how to type the report using the keyboard. She also shows them how to speak to the computer and have the computer write down the words they say. All students must create a report. They can choose the writing method they like best. Students who are learning to use the computer may be given extra time.*

**Example 2:** *Mr. Johnson's 6<sup>th</sup> grade math class is taking a math test on a computer. All students take the test. They can choose to read the test silently or the computer can read the test aloud to them. Students who listen to the computer wear headphones so the noise does not bother other students. New students may be given extra time to finish their test because they are learning to use a new system of testing through technology.*

## What are accommodations?

Accommodations are like accessibility features, but only some students can have accommodations. Usually a school offers accommodations to English learners, students with disabilities, and English learners with disabilities.



Accommodations help students in several ways. First, students may feel more comfortable in class and taking tests. Second, accommodations help them understand content and complete assignments. Third, accommodations help English learners and English learners with disabilities learn English.

**Example 3:** *May is a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student. She is an English learner with a disability. May reads some English. She needs help understanding new words. She also cannot see well. She needs books, papers, and computers with large letters. May has a written plan called an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. The IEP says May can have bigger reading materials for every assignment and test. The IEP also says she can use an electronic dictionary to help her understand new English words. All of May's teachers follow the plan in the IEP. Her parents have agreed to this plan. She can get bigger print and use a dictionary in every class and on tests.*

**Example 4:** *Ahmed is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student. He speaks Arabic, but he does not read it. He is very good at listening and speaking in English. He has a harder time reading and writing in English. Ahmed is taking a science test soon. The test has directions he must follow. Most students read the directions in English. Ahmed can listen to an audio recording in Arabic of the test directions. This will help him understand the test procedures.*

## How can I help my child get accessibility features and accommodations?

Talk with your child's teachers. Each student is different. Each student needs different accessibility features or accommodations to be successful in school. Parents or guardians know their child well. They know how their child learns at home. Parents or guardians have a right to be part of making decisions for their child.

Tell the teacher how your child learns best at home. Ask the teacher how your child learns best at school. Here are some questions you can ask your child's teacher:

- What is my child learning in your class?
- What is my child good at doing in class?
- What does my child have trouble doing in class?
- What are teachers doing to help my child learn better?
- Is there anything else teachers can do to help my child learn better?
- My child needs help with \_\_\_\_\_ in your class. Can she have some accessibility features or accommodations?
- My child gets \_\_\_\_ (accessibility feature or accommodation) in class. Can she use it on tests?
- Can we talk about the accessibility features and accommodations my child is using? I think there may be some different ones that will help my child learn better.

---

The Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Improved Accessibility Decisions project is supported primarily through a grant (#T365Z160115) with the Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education. The project is affiliated with the National Center on Educational Outcomes, Institute on Community Integration at the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

This publication is available in alternative formats. Direct requests to:

Improving Instruction Project  
National Center on Educational Outcomes  
University of Minnesota  
215 Pattee Hall  
150 Pillsbury Dr. SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Phone: 612-626-1530

**See parent-educator toolkit at: [www.nceo.info](http://www.nceo.info)**

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity employer and educator.



Institute on  
Community Integration  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Liu, K. K., Thurlow, M. L., Lazarus, S. S., & Funfe Tatak Mentan, C. (2019). Accessibility features and accommodations: Information for parents. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Improved Accessibility Decisions.