



## **Georgia Milestones Assessment System Test Administration Accommodations Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are test administration accommodations?**

Test administration accommodations are changes to the manner in which a test is administered or how a student responds to a test. Accommodations provide access for select groups of students (students with disabilities and English learners) to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned as a result of instruction. Importantly, accommodations do not alter the constructs (i.e., the knowledge and skills) the test is designed to measure, nor do they reduce or change learning expectations.

### **How does the state evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of accommodations?**

Georgia has a strong commitment to ensuring appropriate and effective accommodations are provided to students with disabilities and English learners. To that end, Georgia annually reviews its accommodations policies, trains stakeholders on appropriate accommodation use, and analyzes data from the assessment process. Within the Department of Education there is very strong collaboration between the curriculum, assessment, special education and the Title III offices. Decisions about accommodations involve discussions about student needs, curriculum standards, and the constructs (knowledge and skills) measured. Additionally, guidance is sought from Georgia's Technical Advisory Committee, which is comprised of six nationally renowned measurement experts. Accommodation usage is monitored during each administration and inappropriate use and/or failure to provide accommodations must be reported. Test scores resulting from accommodated administrations are analyzed on an annual basis.

### **What are conditional accommodations?**

Conditional accommodations are more expansive and are designed to provide access for the small number of students with more serious, severe disabilities or students

with very limited English proficiency. Conditional accommodations may be provided to students who meet specific eligibility criteria. The criteria are outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook*. Only students who meet the eligibility criteria are eligible for conditional accommodations. Importantly, the committee considering the use of a conditional accommodation for an individual student must ensure that the student's disability-based need for the conditional accommodation is addressed during classroom instruction.

### **Why is the state concerned with the number of students who participate via conditional accommodations?**

Conditional accommodations were never intended to be used with large numbers of students. These accommodations have always been referred to as something other than 'standard' in an effort to communicate that they were different. Because these accommodations are more expansive than standard accommodations, it is imperative that they be used only when appropriate. Since the early 2000s, the State Board Testing Rule has set forth the expectation that only a small percentage of students will participate in the state assessment program through conditional/non-standard accommodations.

In November 2006, the Georgia Department of Education introduced guidance to help IEP teams make sound and appropriate decisions about accommodations, including conditional accommodations. In August 2007, guidance for appropriate decisions about EL students' use of accommodations was issued. The guidance for both groups of students can be located in the *Student Assessment Handbook*.

It is important to note that federal laws and regulations require that states develop comprehensive accommodation policies for students with disabilities and English learners. States are charged with ensuring the appropriate inclusion of these students in their assessment systems, resulting in valid and meaningful measurement of student achievement. States are also charged with monitoring those policies. Federal regulations released in April 2007 require that states direct IEP teams to select only approved accommodations.

### **Can an IEP team consider other accommodations that are not listed on the state's list of allowable accommodations?**

Both federal regulation and Georgia State Board of Education rules direct IEP teams to consider only state-approved accommodations. The rationale behind this requirement is to ensure valid measurement of student achievement. The purpose of test administration accommodations is to provide access for students while protecting the constructs (knowledge and skills) the tests are designed to measure. The paramount goal of state assessment is meaningful measurement of what students have learned

as a result of instruction. Approved accommodations are listed annually in the *Student Assessment Handbook*, including guidance on the appropriate selection and use of approved accommodations.

**What if the IEP team members determine that a student needs an accommodation days prior to the opening of a student’s scheduled test administration?**

With the exception of the rare instance where there is a new condition or diagnosis, no accommodation should be considered for the first time immediately prior to or during a state assessment window. Simply because a student may benefit from the use of an accommodation it does not mean he/she will know how to use it during the test. Students need training and practice in using accommodations. A student’s familiarity with designated accommodations is critical in ensuring their successful and meaningful participation in the assessment process.

**Should students be involved in the selection, use, and evaluation of their accommodations?**

Yes. Students with disabilities should understand their disabilities and learn to advocate for themselves inside and outside of classroom. Some students have limited experience initiating this type of communication with adults. Stating preferences, particularly to “authority figures,” may be a new role for students, one for which they need guidance and feedback. Teachers and other educational team members play a key role in helping students advocate for themselves in the context of selecting, using, and evaluating accommodations.

**What if an IEP includes an accommodation that is not on the state’s list of allowable accommodations?**

If an IEP includes an accommodation that is not listed as state approved, the best course of action may likely to be amend the IEP. When a non-approved accommodation is used on a state-mandated test, it must be reported to the Georgia Department of Education as an irregularity. Depending on the circumstances, the Department may invalidate the scores resulting from the assessment. It is important to note that federal regulations stipulate that if the results of an assessment are considered invalid, the student may not be considered a participant for accountability purposes.

Without a doubt, the IEP is an important document that guides a student’s educational program. What is written in the IEP must be followed. For this reason, it is essential that IEP teams have knowledge of the allowable accommodations and guidance issued by the state. It is also important that all parties involved in making

decisions about accommodations understand the potential consequences of including accommodations that are not on the state’s approved list.

### **What is a non-reader?**

A non-reader is a student whose disability prohibits him/her from decoding at any level of difficulty and, therefore, from reading and comprehending text at any level of difficulty. These students are unable to move from parts (individual letters and words) to whole (phrases and sentences) and gain meaning from text. Often the cognitive effort expended on decoding words is such that they do not gain meaning from the text, and therefore are unable to demonstrate comprehension of what they have read. Non-readers have access to text only through assistance (i.e., a human reader or assistive technology).

A non-reader is not a student who reads below grade level. Students who read below grade level are reading, although they may struggle to fully comprehend grade-level text. Nonetheless, these students are able to comprehend text and each test contains a range of reading passages so that struggling readers can demonstrate their reading skill. For struggling readers (those who read below grade level), the provision of the oral reading accommodation by an examiner can serve to reduce the reading load and allow the student to focus his/her cognitive effort on the English Language Arts passages.

Students who meet the criteria outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook* may be eligible for the conditional accommodation of oral reading of the English Language Arts passages.

### **Can the questions, responses, and any associated text be read in the other Georgia Milestones content areas?**

Yes. Because the tests in the other content areas (Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) are not designed to measure reading comprehension, reading text associated with an item, including the item itself and the response options, is permissible and is a standard accommodation.

### **Is using a basic function calculator an accommodation on the Georgia Milestones?**

Use of a basic function calculator is a conditional accommodation for students with disabilities in grades 3 through 5 who meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook*. In grades 6 – high school, calculators are allowed for all students on certain sections of the mathematics test. No student may use a calculator on the designated no-calculator subsection in grades 6 – 12.

## **What is a basic function calculator?**

A basic function calculator has four computational functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division). Many basic function calculators also have square root and percentage functions. A basic function calculator is not a scientific, graphing, or programmable calculator. These calculators have additional functions that encroach on the concepts and skills inherent in the content standards. Importantly, students who use the calculator should still be taught the mathematical processes and reasoning behind the procedures they perform on the calculator.