
2007 Accommodations Guidelines

2007 PSSA Fact Sheet: Accommodations for English Language Learners

This fact sheet answers some of the commonly asked questions about accommodations for English Language Learners (ELLs) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. This fact sheet should be used in conjunction with the *2007 Accommodations Guidelines* posted on the PDE website.

Who are English Language Learners (ELLs)?

A limited English proficient student (LEP) or English Language Learner (ELL) is one who:

1. was not born in the United States or whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant, or
2. is a Native American or Alaska Native who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on (the student's) level of English language proficiency, or
3. is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant,

and

1. has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language, and
2. has difficulties that may deny (the student) the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society.

Who should administer the PSSA to ELLs?

District and school personnel should decide the best way to administer the PSSA to ELLs. The most important things are to try to reduce as much anxiety as possible for students and to help them feel comfortable on the day of the test. Having a teacher familiar to the students administer the test often reduces test anxiety and is an allowable accommodation for ELLs.

Who determines which accommodations to use?

Each school must involve the appropriate school personnel in the determination of appropriate accommodations for ELLs. The ESL/bilingual teacher, the ESL/bilingual education coordinator, other classroom teachers, the test administrator or coordinator, a parent, the principal or counselor and the student (when appropriate) may be involved in this determination. Identifying the appropriate accommodations should be a collaborative process and should include content area teachers consulting with ESL/bilingual teachers.

This determination must be done at least annually on an individual basis and must not be done for groups of ELLs.

Are ELLs required to take the PSSA?

In 2004, the USDE released guidance on participation of LEP students in state assessments.

This flexibility allows LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools an option of taking the Reading PSSA. A student's enrollment in a school in Puerto Rico is not to be considered as enrollment in a U.S. school. If students choose to participate in the Reading assessment, their performance level results will not be included in the AYP calculations for the school/district.

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All LEP students are still required to take the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs English Proficiency Test.

All LEP students are still required to participate in the Mathematics PSSA, with accommodations as appropriate.

The Mathematics scores of LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools, not including Puerto Rico, will not be used to determine the percent proficient or higher for AYP status.

LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools are not required to take the Writing PSSA.

The new guidance also provides flexibility in determining who can be included in the LEP subgroup. Since LEP students exit the LEP subgroup once they attain English language proficiency, schools/districts may have difficulty demonstrating improvements on state assessments for these students. The USDE is now allowing schools/districts/states to include in the LEP subgroup those students *who have exited an ESL/bilingual education program within the past two years.*

When completing the demographic pages, school personnel should code the “Yes” oval for “Student exited an ESL/bilingual education program within the past two years” if the student has exited an ESL/bilingual education program within the past two years as determined by the local district’s ESL Program Plan. The two-year monitoring period begins from the date the student exits the ESL program as defined by the district’s multiple exit criteria in its ESL Program Plan.

The PSSA data will be analyzed with and without exited students and the higher percentage will be used for AYP purposes.

School personnel should consider the following in determining the appropriate accommodations:

- ❑ The student’s familiarity with the accommodations to be used. Current accommodations used in day-to-day instruction and assessment are appropriate. New accommodations unfamiliar to students should not be introduced to students for the first time when they are taking the PSSA.
- ❑ An annual review of the student’s progress in English language proficiency and academic achievement. Knowing this information will help teachers, supervisors, parents, and administrators determine which accommodations are still appropriate given the student’s current knowledge.

All accommodations should be documented in the student’s file and recorded on the demographics pages of the PSSA (for sample see Appendix III of the *2007 PSSA Accommodations Guidelines*).

If a student has already exited an ESL or Bilingual Program, can they still receive these accommodations?

Once a student has exited an ESL or Bilingual Program, that student receives the same accommodations available to non-ELL students.

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What accommodations are allowable for ELLs?

The accommodations most appropriate for ELLs are described in the *2007 PSSA Accommodations Guidelines*.

Three separate accommodations are allowed:

1. Word-to word (without definitions) translation dictionaries (**not for the multiple-choice/passages on the Reading test or on any part of the Writing test**)
2. Qualified interpreters
3. Spanish/English Mathematics test

All of these accommodations are voluntary and not mandatory.

Test administrators/teachers should only use these accommodations if they are typically used with students during the school year. Accommodations that have not previously been used with a student should not be introduced for the first time during the assessment, as the change could be distracting or confusing to the student.

When selecting accommodations for ELL, consider the needs of the student in daily instructional situations and in a secure testing situation.

Keep in mind that students may require multiple accommodations such as interpreted directions and a small group setting.

How does the Pennsylvania Department of Education ensure that items on the PSSA are accessible to ELLs?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is committed to providing the broadest array of accommodations possible without jeopardizing the validity and integrity of the test. Using accommodations is only one way PDE tries to make the PSSA more accessible. Even before an item appears on the PSSA, that item has already been screened for linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and other forms of bias. After items have been field tested, PDE and teacher committee representatives also look for irregularities in how different types of students performed.

What kinds of dictionaries can be used and who provides them?

Districts may provide students with word-to-word translation dictionaries if students use them as part of their regular curriculum. Students should not be using word-to-word dictionaries for the first time on the PSSA. They should be comfortable with them and have used them in the past at school and/or at home. Students may use a dictionary as long as it is a word-to-word dictionary with no definitions and no pictures.

Can electronic word-to-word dictionaries be used?

Electronic dictionaries that provide word-to-word translations may be used, but again no devices that provide definitions or pictures can be used.

When can students use dictionaries?

Word-to-word dictionaries may be used on any portion of the Mathematics test and the open-ended section of the Reading test.

Word-to-word dictionaries cannot be used on any portion of the Writing test or for multiple-choice/passages on the Reading test.

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What is the role of the interpreter?

- Interpreters may have access to the mathematics test one day prior to administration to aid them in preparation for translating the assessment. Interpreters may only access the assessment in a secure setting; the assessment may not leave the building (note-taking is strictly prohibited); interpreters must sign a Confidentiality Agreement (sample form in Appendix IV of the *2007 PSSA Accommodations Guidelines*). Interpreters must be of legal age to sign the Confidentiality Agreement. Directions for all assessments are provided to districts prior to the testing window.
- Interpreters may work with one student or small groups of students depending on the test setting. Interpreters can:
 - Translate the directions on the Writing, Mathematics, and Reading assessments.
 - Translate words or phrases (including test questions) for the Mathematics assessment at the students' request.
- Only directions can be translated on the Reading assessment. Interpreters may not interpret any of the reading questions and/or the reading passage.
- Interpreters may not interpret any of the Writing multiple-choice items and/or stimulus passage.
- Interpreters may not answer clarifying questions that may be asked about test questions. They may only clarify directions in the native language.

How do districts find qualified interpreters and what makes them “qualified”?

Districts should determine the criteria for qualified interpreters. Districts must document the process and/or criteria used to select interpreters. Keep in mind that the use of qualified interpreters and word-to-word dictionaries is voluntary, not mandatory.

Districts should try to provide these accommodations to the extent practicable and to the extent that they are typically used with students during the school year. For a description of these accommodations, see the *2007 PSSA Accommodations Guidelines*.

Can districts use a community member as a “qualified interpreter”?

Yes, however, the district must certify that the community member is a qualified interpreter through a local process/criteria and the community member must follow interpreter guidelines as outlined in the above question describing the role of the interpreter.

Community members might need additional training about what is allowable and not allowable on the PSSA. It is the district's responsibility to ensure that community members who are deemed qualified interpreters have this training.

Why can't interpreters translate any portion of the Reading test?

Allowing anyone to read any portion of the Reading test for ELLs and/or other students with IEPs or 504s is controversial among technical testing experts.

The purpose of the Reading assessment is to determine if the student can comprehend what has been read. Reading any portion of the assessment to the student would alter what is being assessed and could potentially compromise the integrity of the test.

Based on the recommendations of our Technical Advisory Committee, PDE has tried to consistently apply this policy for all students in all accommodation situations. As with all accommodations, PDE plans to review them annually and make adjustments based on current or new research.

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Why can't the interpreters translate the PSSA Writing multiple-choice and stimulus passages for students?

As with the Reading test, allowing anyone to read any portion of the multiple choice items for editing and revising or the stimulus passage might alter what is being assessed and could potentially compromise the integrity of the Writing test.

Based on review and consultation with experts in the field, PDE has developed this policy that is consistent for all students in all accommodations situations. As with all accommodations, PDE plan to review this policy annually and make adjustments as needed.

Is there a difference between an interpreter and a translator?

There may be semantic differences in the ESL/ELL community between an interpreter and a translator. This document has tried to consistently use the word interpreter, which would mean a person who could translate (word-for-word), orally or signed, the allowable parts of the PSSA and/or clarify directions, orally or signed, to students.

Will these accommodations be allowable every year?

There is a growing body of research on accommodations for ELLs. PDE will update this policy as new research about accommodations arises and will evaluate the success of the accommodations allowed this year. PDE will inform administrators of any changes prior to next year's PSSA.

Is a Spanish Version of the PSSA available for Mathematics for Grades 3-8 and 11?

Yes. A Spanish version of the Mathematics PSSA is available for students who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for fewer than three years. The local educational agency may make a determination to assess students with this accommodation when the student has not yet reached a level of English language proficiency sufficient to yield valid and reliable information.

Spanish language students should be literate in their native language for this accommodation to benefit them.

How do we order the Spanish Version?

This booklet must be requested from Data Recognition Corporation when booklet orders are submitted to DRC from schools. Only students who have a need for this assistance are to receive this accommodation.

What will the Spanish Version look like?

The special test form is provided for Grades 4-8, & 11 includes the PSSA Reading test in English, along with the English/Spanish mathematics test. The English/Spanish Mathematics form is issued in side-by-side English/Spanish format with identical test questions presented on opposing pages in the two languages: left-facing pages present questions in Spanish and right-facing pages present the same questions in English.

A corresponding Student Answer Booklet, in which students mark their answers in English or Spanish will also be provided for use with this special form for the Mathematics section only. For the English/Spanish Mathematics test ONLY, answers can be in English OR Spanish.

Grade 3 students will be issued an English/Spanish Mathematics form that will allow answers to be marked in the test booklet.

For the regular English Mathematics test, answers can ONLY be in English.

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The PSSA Reading section is only provided in English and the answers must be in English to be scored. Test administrators should remind students of this.

Who is eligible to take the Spanish Version?

Only students who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for fewer than three years may take the English/Spanish PSSA Mathematics test. The local educational agency may make a determination to assess students with this accommodation when the student has not yet reached a level of English language proficiency sufficient to yield valid and reliable information. Spanish language students should be literate in their native language for this accommodation to benefit them.

ELLs who have exited the program and/or are being monitored for up to two years should not receive this accommodation.