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# Guidelines for Selection and Use of Accommodations on State Assessments

PSSA and Keystone Exams  
2024-25

# Overview

- Understanding the Accommodations Guidelines for PSSA/Keystone Exams
- Updates for 2025
- Unique Accommodations Assurance Process
- Frequently Used Accommodations
- Online Testing and Accommodations
- Supplemental Resources for PSSA/Keystone Accommodation Selection
- Accommodations for Other Pennsylvania Assessments

# Accommodation Considerations

- Effective decision making about the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with making good instructional decisions.
- Every IEP team member and student instructional team member must be knowledgeable about state and local educational agency (LEA) academic content standards and assessments.
- Accommodations should always be chosen based on individual student need and what works for the student during typical instruction and assessment.
- More is not always better.

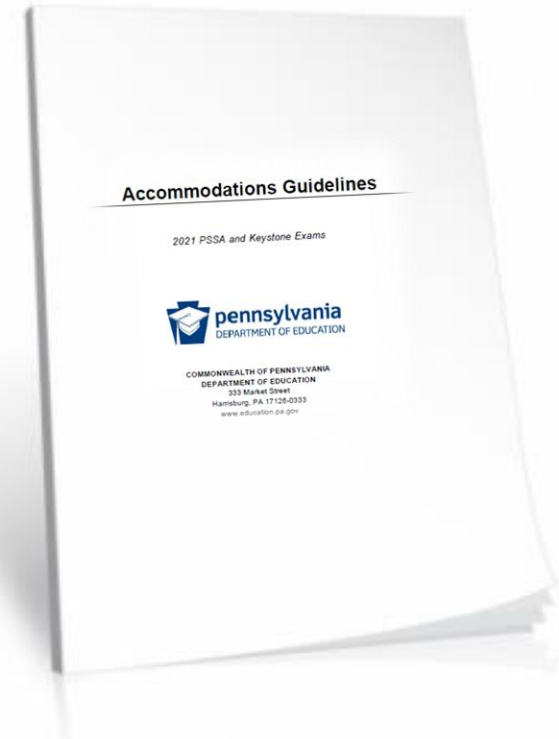
# Test Features vs. Accommodations

- All state assessments are universally designed.
- Teams must understand what accessibility features are built-in to the test and what may be needed as an accommodation.
- If the IEP/504 team determines an accommodation is needed for the student to participate, it must be documented, typically in the student's IEP or 504 Plan.

# Accommodations Guidelines

Schools must use the Accommodations Guidelines for full information and details on allowable accommodation options for the PSSA/Keystone Exams

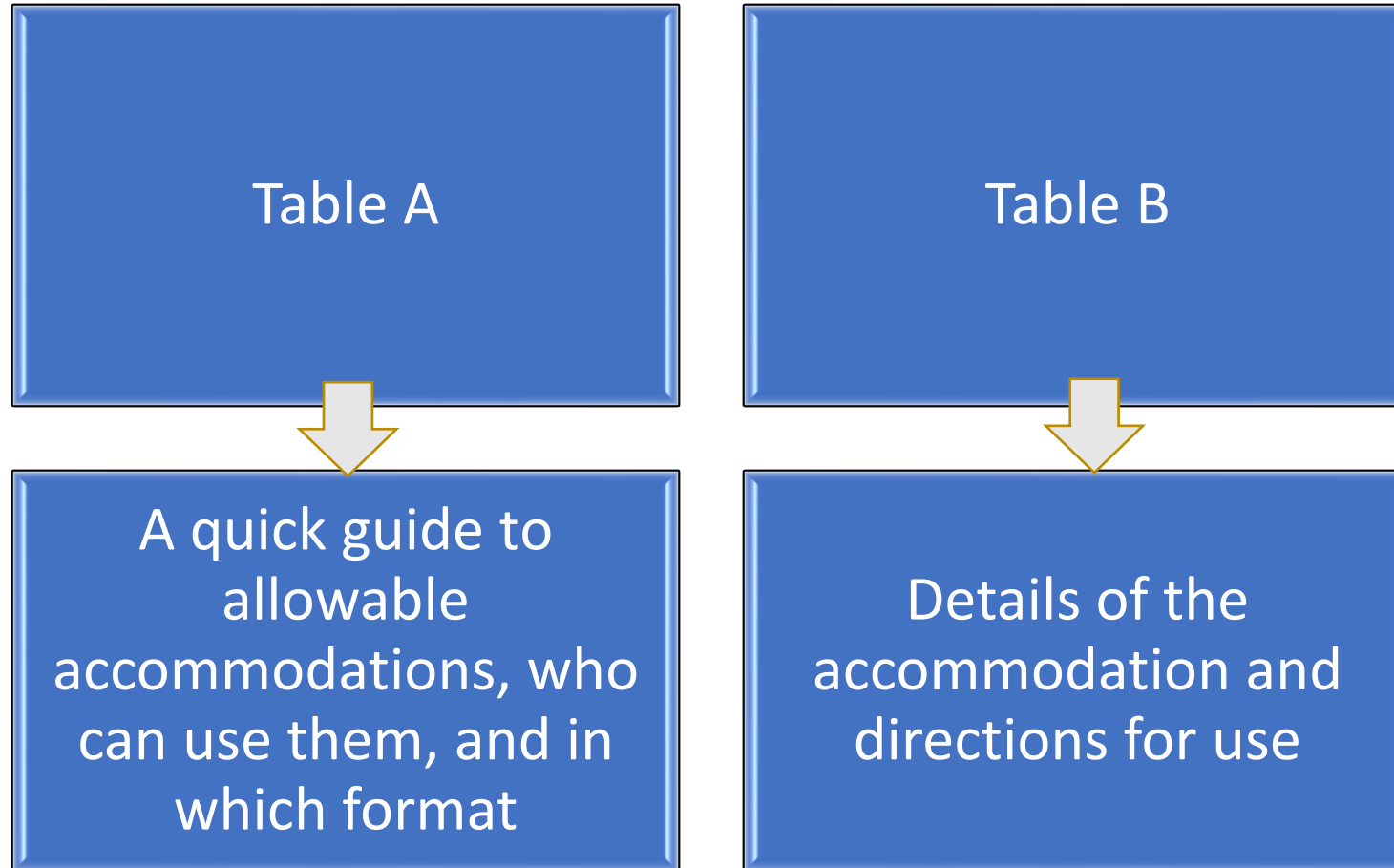
[2025 Accommodations Guidelines](#)



# Accommodations Guidelines Overview

- What's New\*
- General Guidance on Selecting, Implementing, and Evaluating Accommodations
- Accommodations Tables A and B\*
- Appendices
  - Unique Accommodations\*
  - Confidentiality Agreement
  - Sample Vignettes for ELA and Literature Full Read Aloud\*
  - Multiplication Table
  - Device Lockdown Guidance
  - Federal and State Laws for Accommodations and Test Participation
  - Assessment Accommodations Toolkit\*
- Contact Information\*

# Accommodation Tables



# Table A

Accommodation/Identified Need	Allowable for IEP/504 and Documented Need	Allowable for IEP/504 only	Allowable as a Stand-Alone Accommodation for English Learners	Available for Paper and Pencil Test	Available for Online Test	Provided by Online System	Unique (requires Assurance to PDE)
<a href="#">Amplification Device</a>	X			X	X	X Volume Control Only	
<a href="#">Assistance with Selecting Response</a>	X			X	X		
<a href="#">Assistive Technology Device (formerly Computer Assistive Technology)</a>		X		X	X		X
<a href="#">Audio for Math, Science, and Writing Items</a>	X		X		X	X	
<a href="#">Audio for Full ELA PSSA/Literature Keystone</a>		X			X	X	X
<a href="#">Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC)</a>		X		X			X
<a href="#">Braille, Refreshable Braille, Braille, Note Taker</a>		X		X	X	X Presentation Only	
<a href="#">Broken Arm/Injury</a>	X			X	X	X Keyboarding	X 4-8 ELA Scribing ONLY
<a href="#">Calculators (Adaptive)</a>	X			X	X	X	X For calculator apps on devices ONLY



# Table B

TABLE B

## Accommodation Definitions and Procedures (Alphabetical Order – see Table A)

### **Amplification Device**

#### *Presentation*

A device used to amplify the test administrator’s voice and/or the audio feature of the online test, such as a personal sound amplifier or classroom sound field FM system. For online testing with audio, students can control the volume.

The LEA must ensure that the use of the system does not interfere with other test takers. A one-to-one setting should be used if necessary.

Select “Amplification device” as a Presentation Accommodation.

### **Assistance with Selecting Response**

#### *Response*

Intended for students who are unable to physically select multiple choice answers (including technology enhanced items) due to disability or injury. This accommodation must occur in a one-to-one setting. The test administrator can in no way prompt, cue, or influence the student’s response.

**Paper/pencil:** The test administrator marks the multiple-choice response at the student’s direction in the answer booklet or test/answer booklet.

**Online:** The test administrator marks the multiple-choice response at the student’s direction. This may include answering a technology enhanced item (drag and drop, drop-down box, hot text selection, etc.) at the student’s direction. Students should practice responding to multiple choice and technology enhanced Items in the Online Training Tools. If a student has difficulty independently responding to technology enhanced items due to a visual or motor disability, an accommodated online form is available. Contact PDE at [RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov).

Select “Test administrator marked selected responses at student’s direction” as a Response Accommodation.

If a student needs assistance with open-ended items, see [Scribing](#) or [Transcribing](#).

# 2025 Accommodations Guidelines

## What's New?

Audio for Full ELA PSSA/Literature Keystone and Read Aloud for Full ELA PSSA/Literature Keystone	pg. 22 or pg. 39
Changes to using audio with Braille	pg. 24
Sensory/Self-Regulation Tool	pg. 42
Updates to Unique Accommodations Assurance Process: See changes to streamline the process.	pg. 59



# New for 2025: Audio/Read Aloud for Full ELA PSSA and Keystone Literature

## How is this accommodation different from the typical audio/read aloud accommodation?

- Beginning with the 2024-25 Spring PSSAs, a separate Audio and Read Aloud accommodation will be available for the full ELA PSSA and Literature Keystone.
- This unique accommodation is intended only for a very small number of students who meet the definition set forth in the Accommodations Guidelines.
- This accommodation is intended for a student who is a non-reader, not simply reading below grade level. For this reason, Audio or Read Aloud of the Full ELA PSSA/Literature Keystone will not be appropriate for every student who receives the Read Aloud or Audio of All Math, Science, and Writing Items accommodation on the math and science PSSAs/Algebra and Biology Keystones.



# New for 2025: Audio/Read Aloud for Full ELA PSSA and Keystone Literature

## Eligibility

- Audio of the full ELA test is appropriate as a **unique accommodation** for the student who meets the specific criteria outlined in the Accommodations Guidelines.
- This accommodation is intended for a student who has a disability that precludes the student from accessing printed text.
- The accommodation must be documented in the IEP/504 plan and through locally administered diagnostic evaluations and used consistently in classroom instruction and assessment.
- A student who uses the audio/read aloud of full PSSA ELA/Literature Keystone accommodation must:
  - Have a documented disability that severely limits or prevents that student's ability to decode text and derive meaning from text even when repeated and varied evidence-based interventions and instruction are used to teach the student to decode.
  - Only access print materials with a screen reader, audio, a human reader, or other Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) during classroom instruction and assessment.



# New for 2025: Audio/Read Aloud for Full ELA PSSA and Keystone Literature

## Considerations for Human Read Aloud

- Testing with this accommodation will increase testing time and create an artificial pace for the student.
- A student who does not regularly receive this accommodation in the classroom as part of regular instruction and assessment may experience frustration or lack of motivation because of the time and pacing.
- Human readers may not read aloud ALL allowable test items for online testers.
- If using a human read aloud for the FULL ELA/Keystone Literature test, the student must be tested in a separate room (1:1 environment).
- If using the audio function in the online platform, the student can test in a group with a set of headphones.
- **Note:** The ‘full’ audio function for Literature will be available beginning with the Spring testing. Students who need this unique accommodation for the 2024 Winter Keystone Exams may utilize a human reader.



# New for 2025: Braille Update

The online audio accommodation will no longer be compatible with the paper braille form. Students requiring the paper braille test and audio will need to utilize a human reader.



# New for 2025:

## Sensory/Self-Regulation Tool

- A student who requires an object or tool for sensory and/or self-regulation (i.e. a fidget) may use a small item during state assessment.
- The sensory/self-regulation tool should not make noise or be a distraction to the student or other students in the room. If the team feels the tool will create a distraction, a separate one-to-one setting must be used.
- Students may not use a sensory/self-regulation tool that could double as a manipulative or visual aid on the test (e.g., a 10x10 pop-it grid could be used as a math manipulative and therefore may not be used on the test).





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# Unique Accommodations





# Unique Accommodations

## What is a unique accommodation?

- Allowable only for a student who would not otherwise be able to access the test material
- Intended for students with an IEP/504 Plan or in the formal evaluation process
- In order to implement a unique accommodation, the school must follow specific procedures to ensure test security is maintained and the construct of what the test is measuring is not altered or modified.
- Examples: voice to text, full ELA/Literature read aloud or audio, use of a separate device, scribing for the Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA)

# Unique Accommodation Assurance

## How do I submit to PDE?

- Use the link provided in the Accommodations Guidelines (p.51) to submit to PDE:
  - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/24-25-UniqueAccom>.

## When must the assurance be submitted to PDE?

- At least 6 weeks prior to the opening of the test window
- Exceptions can be made for scribing requests due to recent student injury



# Unique Accommodation Assurance

## How do I know if the unique accommodation is approved?

- PDE does not 'approve' IEP accommodations. Rather, it is the role of PDE/BSE to ensure that accommodations are carried out in a manner that maintains test security and test construct. Information submitted in the assurance is subject to further PDE/BSE review.

## What documentation should I keep?

- The submitter will receive a confirmation of receipt and a copy of responses to keep for records within **5 business days** of submission.
- The submitter is responsible to ensure the SAC, TA and any other relevant personnel are notified of the unique accommodation submission. The SAC should retain a copy of the assurance submission.
- 2025 Unique Accommodation Assurance Submissions are good for one school year, including Winter 2024-2025 Keystones, Spring 2025 PSSAs and Keystones, and Summer 2025 Keystones.



# New for 2025:

## Unique Accommodation Updates

- There is no longer a Unique Accommodation PDF form. The questions that will appear on the electronic submission can be accessed on page 52 of the Accommodations Guidelines.
- Schools should preview the questions and gather the required information before accessing the electronic link to submit.
- The Unique Accommodation Confidentiality Agreement previously signed by principals, school assessment coordinators, and test administrators is no longer required.
- All principals, school assessment coordinators, and test administrators should continue to sign the PSSA or Keystone Test Security Certification.





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# Frequently Used Accommodations



# Read Aloud

## Test Feature

(not a pre-planned small group accommodation)

- Student must request (test taker's initiative)
- Intended to ensure that the measurement of non-reading content is not influenced by a student's inability to decode words
  - In other words, the student knows how to do the math, but cannot decode the word "perpendicular"
- Permissible to read aloud a word, phrase, sentence or test item(s) for the Mathematics, Algebra I, Science, and Biology tests; multiple choice Conventions of Standard English items, and the TDA prompt (as requested)

## Accommodation

- Student is evaluated and accommodation is documented
- *Read Aloud and Scribing Guidelines* manual provides detailed guidance
- Readers may **not** clarify, elaborate, paraphrase, assist, or cue a student through uneven voice inflection.
- May include reading of Math, Science, and Writing sections by a human reader or the audio feature enabled in the online test



# Read Aloud Considerations

- Test directions only
- Some math, science, and writing items at student request (may need a small group)
- All math, science, and writing items - no more than 5 in a group if using a human reader. Consider enabling the audio function of the online test and allow the student to use headphones to avoid the need for small grouping
- Read aloud for full PSSA ELA/Keystone Literature. This requires testing in a one-on-one setting and a unique accommodation assurance submission.



# Assistance with Selecting a Response

- Intended for students who are unable to physically select multiple choice answers (including technology enhanced items) due to disability or injury.
- This accommodation must occur in a one-to-one setting.
- The test administrator can in no way prompt, cue, or influence the student's response.
- **Paper/pencil:** The test administrator marks the multiple-choice response at the student's direction in the answer booklet or test/answer booklet.
- **Online:** The test administrator marks the multiple-choice response at the student's direction. This may include answering a technology enhanced item (drag and drop, drop-down box, hot text selection, etc.) at the student's direction. Students should practice responding to multiple choice and technology enhanced items in the Online Training Tools. If a student has difficulty independently responding to technology enhanced items due to a visual or motor disability, an accommodated online form is available.
- Contact PDE at [RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov)





# Scribing Accommodation

- Must follow *Read Aloud and Scribing Guidelines for Operational Assessments*
- Allowable for students with a physical disability that severely limits motor process of writing, typing, or recording responses, including pain and/or fracture
- Allowable for students who have a documented disability in written expression which results in significant interference in their ability to express their knowledge in writing/keyboarding, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so
  - Student uses scribing on day-to-day basis for instruction & assessment
  - IEP team, Section 504 Services Plan team, or educational team determines that scribing (dictation) is essential for student access to test

**The online test version is recommended to allow students as much independence as possible.**



# Scribing as a Unique Accommodation

## When to submit Unique Accommodation Assurance to PDE

**Only submit a scribing Unique Accommodation Assurance for:**

- grades 4-8 PSSA ELA TDA response(s)

**Do not submit a scribing Unique Accommodation Assurance for:**

- Keystone Literature, Algebra, and Biology
- PSSA Mathematics and Science
- grade 3 PSSA ELA multiple choice and short answer(s)

For any usage of scribing, the appropriate bubble or online checkbox must be marked to indicate the student received a scribing accommodation.



# Read Aloud and Scribing Guidelines

- Test administrators reading aloud any allowable part of the test or scribing any open-ended part of the test must following the [Read Aloud and Scribing Guidelines for Operational Assessments](#).



# Voice-to-text Accommodation

- Requires submission of unique accommodation assurance
- Request only when student is not able to complete the assessment by any other means
- Ensure that the necessary technology parameters can be met by the LEA
- Use a school-issued or school-approved device during testing
- Follow PDE's transcribing guidelines in the Accommodations Guidelines manual
- Lock down the device during the assessment, allowing no connectivity to the internet, cloud, or other device
- Consult school or LEA technology personnel to restrict devices using the provided supplemental guidelines for iPads and Chromebooks in the Accommodations Guidelines manual



# Concussion Policy

- Medical documentation within **two weeks** of the start of the current testing window stating the student may not participate in standardized testing
  - code as **Recent Medical Emergency**
  - documentation must be kept in student record
- No current medical documentation involving concussive injuries and student nonparticipation
  - the student should be coded as **Other**
  - marking **Other** has a negative impact on participation rate



# English Learner Accommodations

- Word-to-word translation dictionaries, without definitions **and without pictures** for PSSA Mathematics, Keystone Algebra I, PSSA Science, and Keystone Biology only; **not for any part** of the PSSA ELA and Keystone Literature Exam
- Qualified interpreters/sight translators for PSSA Mathematics, Keystone Algebra I, PSSA Science, and Keystone Biology only; **not for any part** of the Keystone Literature Exam or PSSA ELA test (except for the TDA prompts).
- Spanish versions of PSSA Mathematics, PSSA Science, Keystone Algebra I, and Keystone Biology Exams
- **Translation of Non-Secure Assessment Materials (New for 2025)**

For more information on EL participation in state assessments, please see the current [Accommodations Guidelines for ELs](#).



# Small Groups

- Small group of 1-5 must be used for read aloud, signing, or translation of ALL Mathematics, Algebra, Science, Biology, multiple-choice Conventions of Standard English items and TDA prompt
  - A human read aloud of all allowable test items sets an artificial pace and some students may be reluctant to ask the TA to slow down or repeat the question in a group setting.
  - If the student is using the online version, this accommodation can be implemented through the audio feature selected ahead of time. The student can simply use a set of headphones and navigate the read aloud themselves. They do not need to be in a small group if using this option.
  - De-spiraling the test forms is a special exception that must be documented and may NOT be done by the test administrator (i.e., the classroom teacher). Only test coordinators are permitted to de-spiral any test booklets. De-spiraling is only appropriate when all test items must be read aloud, and only in a small group (no more than 5 students) setting.
- Small groups of 1-12 can be used for students who require a separate setting to reduce distractions, provide scheduled extended time, or provide a read aloud for SOME allowable test items.
- For any accommodation where a student's responses are verbalized aloud, a one-to-one setting must be used. This includes scribing, use of AAC, voice-to-text, etc.



# Enlarged Print/Magnification

- The enlarged print test can be ordered from DRC for the paper/pencil PSSA/Keystone Exams. They appear at 18 pt. Arial font.
- CCTV, handheld, and desk models of magnifiers are allowable to use with the paper/pencil exams.
- For online, everything appears at 12 pt. Arial font. The test automatically enlarges to fit an oversized monitor screen. The zoom function on a student's device still functions with the test engine. In addition, the online tools include a magnifier. Use the online test tutorial posted on eDirect to determine if the online test items are suitable for your student.







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# Online Testing

# Transition to Online Assessments

- 2024-2025 school year and Winter Keystone 2025-2026
  - Paper/pencil still available
  - LEAs are encouraged to begin moving groups to online testing (e.g., all science testing, all Keystone testing, all grade 8, etc.).
- Spring 2026 and later
  - All tests will be administered online
  - Paper/Pencil will still be available as an accommodation that must be documented in the student's IEP or 504.

# Online Testing Benefits

- enables independent test taking
- provides online tools
- guarantees standardized provision of some accommodations
- provides a digital format which appeals to many students
- enlarges test page to fit an oversized monitor
- does support refreshable Braille
- reduces the number of test administrators
- eliminates managing two booklets
- allows access for individuals, small groups, or entire class/school

# Using Accommodations Online

- When an online accommodation (audio, color chooser) is selected for a student in eDirect, the accommodation will appear on the student's test ticket.
- If the student starts the test without the accommodation, you will not be able to go back and turn the accommodation on.
- Always be sure the required accommodations appear on the student's test ticket before beginning the exam.

# Online Training Tools

- The Online Training Tools offers practice opportunities for students to become familiar with the tools available in the online testing platform.
- Students can practice with Audio and Color Chooser accommodations by choosing the accommodated form.
- Student can also practice with imbedded tools, including magnification, highlighter, masking, line guides, and notes.
- It is important for students to practice using the online tools prior to using them during the assessments.
- [PA Online Testing \(drcedirect.com\)](https://drcedirect.com)



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# Supplemental Resources

Tools for selecting appropriate accommodations on the PSSA and Keystone Exams

# Supplemental Tools and Resources

Tools are located in the Appendix of the Accommodations Guidelines:

- Tool 1: Guidelines for Selecting Accommodations
- Tool 2: Guidelines for Using Accommodations
- Tool 3: Accommodations from the Student's Perspective
- Tool 4: Parent Input in Accommodations
- Tool 5: Accommodations Use in the Classroom
- Tool 6: After-Test Accommodations Questions
- Tool 7: Assessment Accommodation Plan

# Low Incidence Resources/Options

## Accommodated Item Samplers

- UEB Item Samplers
  - contact Julie Breneman [jbreneman@pattan.net](mailto:jbreneman@pattan.net)
- Item Samplers
  - the VSL online tutorial is accessed through eDirect
- **Refreshable Braille Option**
  - online test engine is compatible with a refreshable Braille device that works with Job Access With Speech (JAWS)
  - contact for information regarding enrollment for this option:
    - Data Recognition Corporation: Customer Service
    - 1-800-451-7849
    - [pacustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com](mailto:pacustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com)





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# Accommodations for Other PA Assessments

# Diagnostic and Benchmark Assessments

- [CDT \(Classroom Diagnostic Tools\)](#) - set of online assessments designed to provide a student's areas of need and strengths to build upon
- Firefly Benchmark – a new online assessment designed to measure end-of-year grade-level learning goals
- Online Training Tools for CDT are also included in the OTT training and practice site (Firefly coming soon)
- Because of the adaptive nature of these tests, some imbedded accommodations may not be available.
- [PA Online Testing \(drcedirect.com\)](https://drcedirect.com)

# PASA DLM

The PA Alternate System of Assessment Dynamic Learning Maps ([PASA DLM](#)) is the state summative alternate assessment designed for only those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet all 6 of the state criteria to participate.

- [PASA Eligibility Criteria: Decision Making Companion Tool \(dynamiclearningmaps.org\)](#)
- The specific accommodations available for this assessment can be accessed in the [Accessibility Manual 2024–2025 \(dynamiclearningmaps.org\)](#)

# Contact Directory

- Data Recognition Corporation: Customer Service 800-451-7849
  - [pacustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com](mailto:pacustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com)
- PDE: Unique Accommodations
  - [RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EDUNIQUEACCOM@pa.gov)
- Dr. Beth Gannon, ELA Assessment and Assessment Accommodations Advisor: [egannonrit@pa.gov](mailto:egannonrit@pa.gov)
- Lisa Hampe, Special Education Advisor: [lihampe@pa.gov](mailto:lihampe@pa.gov)
- Brian Truesdale: Chief, Division of Assessment and Accountability; [btruesdale@pa.gov](mailto:btruesdale@pa.gov)

# Contact/Mission

For more information on testing accommodations, please visit PDE's website at [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)

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