# Assessments Friday Focus 2026-2027: Accessibility for Alternate Assessments



**Spangenberg, Bethany** 0:12

All right, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our Friday Focus webinar. The topic today is alternate assessment accessibility. And my name is Bethany Spangberg. I'm the Deputy Associate Superintendent of Assessment. Thank you so much for joining us today. All right, to get started.

There we go. The presentation is being recorded. It will be posted to our website. AI note takers will not be admitted into the Friday Focus webinars. And if you have questions throughout this presentation, please enter those into the chat and I will answer them kind of as they come in because usually it's the topic that is currently on the screen.

All right, so we're going to look at accessibility for MSAA, we're going to look at accessibility for Alt ELPA, and we're also going to look at some resources to help support you.

All right, Alternate Assessment participation is based on IEP team determination for eligibility for alternate assessment. Those are the three eligibility criteria that we have here in Arizona. Does the student have a significant cognitive disability? Is the student learning linked to grade level state content standards? And does the student require extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial support to achieve measurable gains in the grade appropriate curriculum?

For more information on eligibility, we did have a previous Friday Focus webinar, so you can go ahead and listen to that recording. And if you need additional support, you can reach out to us. The e-mail address will be on the last slide today.

All right, so alternate assessments are for students with the most significant cognitive disability. So, we need to make sure that we are thinking about accessibility throughout the process. So, from the beginning to the end of developing the test, administering the test, and making sure that we're meeting the very individual needs of these students that are participating.

So a lot of practices that are not allowed for some of our other assessment, AASA, AZELLA, not allowed for ACT, they can be allowed for alternate assessment. So, we kind of designed this as the most valid data is going to be the one that has accessibility features for this population. Some common supports that we have in

place and not necessarily specific to this program, but just thinking more generally. Students can take breaks as often as they need. They can take a five-minute break. They can take a 20-minute break. They can take a three-hour break. They could take a one-week break. However, the student needs to be able to complete the test, and they have the entire testing window to do that for alternate assessments.
For alternative assessments, you don't need to do things like covering the walls. If students are using resources that they have available to them, please allow them to use those resources on the assessments. There are some very specific things that are not allowed. Don't need to go into a lot of details because those are very individualized for students.
For the most part, if they have manipulatives, if they have graphic organizers, things like that, as long as the student, as long as the test can be administered using the directions that are provided with that assessment, you can go ahead and use the supports, have them available for students. Students are able to use any mode of communication, including presentation and response modes. Our definitions of reading, for example, are different than kind of what you'd see in the general standards, that we allow students to have the entire test read to them for alternate assessment. For Alt ELPA, the reading portion, that is an accommodation but it is allowable. And then for all other content and assessments, for alternate, that is the mode of communication. If that's what they're using in the classroom, that's what you're able to use with them on the assessment. And students, it's a one-on-one administration and they may need frequent redirection. They need some verbal support and encouragement. You can build in reinforcement. So
you can give them, you know, they work for a little while and earn some time or break time, they can have a toy sitting there with them, they can use food if that's something that you're using for that reinforcement in the classroom. So, whatever that looks like during instruction, for the most part, it should look like that during the day of test administration as well.
All right, we're going to talk a little bit about our assessments, just so you have some context and then a little bit more specific for each one of these. But you're going to see some similar themes and common flexibility and accommodations and accessibility features. Alternate assessments measure academic context. So MSAA is an alternate assessment that measures academic content. It's aligned to our state content standards. So, it is aligned to ELA, math, and it is designed specifically to assess students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. There's a lot of

different types of information. You might be curious about MSAA with a new contract. That's not for this topic for today, but it's still we're going to have the same accessibility features and we're going to have the same flexibility that we've had for MSAA administration previously.

So a little bit about how MSAA is designed. So not just about how the student is sitting down and taking the test. There are definitely some parts of that. But even backing up before that, on the test design, there's reduced text complexity. So, passages are shorter than a general education assessment. Typically, somewhat below grade level. It is a grade level assessment. The standards are grade level, but some of that stimulus and support that we put into the assessment might have some lower complexity so that students can access the content. Shortened passage stimulus. Fewer answer options, so MSAA has three answer options, sometimes even just two answer options. There's a lot more detail about that design that I can share with you at a different time, but definitely not going to see the four or even sometimes 5 answer options that you see on other assessments. Graphic support, so a lot of pictures of the kind of included both with text passages that students are presented for their ELA items, but even response options have graphics with them for a lot of them. Some of them, again, the test design is a little bit different. They don't all have picture supports, but a lot of them do. And as I mentioned, the student can use the mode of communication or modes of communication that they use typically.

So, students who may not be physically writing, but their writing instruction looks a little bit different, whether it's using picture boards, whether it's dictating, all those kinds of other supports that they have, they're not necessarily physically writing something. So, when they get to our writing items, they are able to use those modes of communication. Again, as long as the test directions can be read exactly how they are for that standardization. The students can use those modes of communication. We also have students that participate in the assessment. They choose answer options using an eye gaze system. So there are lots of different ways that we can help the student be able to show what they know and can do on the. on the assessment.

Also, part of the way that our items are made, they're scaffolding and reminder statements. So that support built in saying, remember this term means this thing. Or remember you have already looked at this in the two-part items where we gave you a question, you answered it. Now we're going to.

bring you to the next part of that question, and we're going to remind you of what happened before so that you have a chance to answer that second part of the question, even if you got the first part incorrect. So different things like that where it's kind of scaffolded for the student. The writing prompt is not just here's some information, go read it and write something. It really walks the student through the writing
process. So, one sentence at a time, really just saying, okay, you're going to choose your characters. Okay, you're going to choose your topic. You're going to choose these types of things, walking them through so that they have a finished product. So definitely a lot of supports built into that assessment.
So, and then again, I kind of touched on this because they overlap the design and the test administration. So, it is a one-on-one administration. So, you can use that redirection for engagement, encouragement, helping keep managing the time. So, when they need breaks, when, how long they're going to.
work on the assessment until you are at a stopping point. one-on-one, so that read aloud, usually students seem to prefer the read aloud from the test administrator directly rather than from the system. It's more natural and it's a familiar voice to them, but both options are available. And there's very few things that cannot be read. There are some very
basic foundational rating items in grades three and four on MSAA, but for the most part, the entire test can be as often read to the students. In the system, in the platform, there's universal features that are also available. We are switching platforms this year. I know we haven't shared a lot of information yet. We just awarded the contract, but
These types of features are going to be the same on the new assessment and the new assessment, the same assessment on the new platform. So, you're going to have color themes available, alternative text. So, for students who need to hear something described to them, that's available, answer masking, line reader, just all these things that are built into the platform themselves. But also, like I mentioned, those manipulatives. If they're using
something in the classroom that they have used before, you can absolutely allow them to use those types of manipulatives. So, it's very familiar and they can actually do the tasks that you're asking them to do instead of giving them something new to try to figure out.
Tactile graphics, object replacement, those are available. Those are allowable as a

universal feature for students. So, if they need that visual representation of something as an object replacement, you can do that. Students who need that tactile, if they're not necessarily reading braille, but they have something that they can kind of orient themselves to tactile, they're able to use that as well.
and transcription. So students do not have to put anything into the system themselves. You can transcribe that. So they're choosing an answer and you're putting it into the system for them. That happens often with the writing prompt where they're dictating their response. You can transcribe that into the platform.
And then MSAA just has a few accommodations because almost everything is built in and we do allow a lot of flexibility for students to be able to access the assessment. But there are some that have been identified specifically as accommodations. And that's assistive technology, paper testing, paper testing for MSAA has always been large print as well. So if you need large print, it's the paper test. There's just one version of it. It's a large print and a paper test
combined. And even within the paper based testing, if you have that large print, but you need it even larger, you are able to do that too. You can expand that. It would just be the same ratio kind of, but just expanded.
A scribe accommodation, so if you need to actually write something for the student, not word for word or not exactly how the student presented it, but you need to describe that for the student, you can do that as well. Our state specific guidance for alternate assessment does describe the difference between transcription and scribe. So if you need some clarification, we do have a resource available to help you understand if you need that transcription universal feature, if you need the scribe accommodation.
We also allow sign language as an accommodation as needed for students. And for the alternate assessment for MSAA, sign language is not embedded into the platform. It's something that would be signed live. And there's some sign language guidance available if you're using that option as well. But typically, again, the kind of things where the student needs to be familiar with who's signing, how they sign, different things.
the way that they sign so that sign language is an accommodation and something that we allow for provision in the during test administration. It's not something that we provide at our state level so that the student has that individuality and understanding of what they're seeing. And then we do have braille available for foundational reading items. Those reading items are only in grades three and four.

And it's just students who are very basic learning braille. So essentially they are learning, they're practicing on the test. They are trying to read like one word, like a sound out word kind of thing, a CVC or something like that, where they're just saying, okay, do I have that foundational braille reading?
That's the only time in the assessment where the student cannot necessarily read. You're not reading something aloud to the student, but again, it's usually like a word that they either have to identify or that they have to read themselves.
All right. Before I move on to Alt ELPA, I don't see anything in the chat yet, but I'm just taking a moment to see if you have any questions on accessibility for MSAA.
All right, we'll move on. If you have anything else to add, please make sure you're putting that in the chat, and we'll make sure we address it today. So, for Alt ELPA, that's our alternate English language proficiency assessment. So that's our alternate assessment for AZELLA. So instead of taking AZELLA, if a student is taking an alter assessment, they take Alt ELPA. That is based on the alternate English language proficiency standards.
And that resource is available on the website. So, if you need some support with the standards, it is standards-based assessment as well.
And the Alt ELPA determines English language proficiency based on language expectations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. So when this assessment was designed, the comparison group with students with significant cognitive disabilities who are not English learners, so that we can kind of really understand the expectations of language and understand language development for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. So this
assessment was entirely designed for the population of students that is taking it.
So looking at some of the accessibility that was built into the Alt ELPA design, again, reduced text complexity. You're going to see that for students with significant cognitive disability, shortened passages and stimulus, fewer answer options, graphic support. So a lot of these things that we know students with the most significant cognitive disabilities needs is already included.
This one for the mode of communication used by the student, it kind of goes with the next one, revised definitions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. So understanding that the expectation like we saw with MSAA is not necessarily that students are reading a lot of things independently. So our definition of reading looks a little bit different. It's a lot more comprehension based and a lot less fluency based. So when we are allowing those things on the assessment, like read aloud, it is that

accommodation for reading, knowing that this population of students were not expecting them to read grade level or close to grade level text.
And I mentioned kind of like the writing for MSAA, very similar, where we're not expecting students to really produce a lot of writing. They're not physically writing something. And then for Alt ELPA, the way that it's reported, we do report at that domain level, but we really focus on the modality level so that
that reading and listening, that's kind of used in combination for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, what that means and what that looks like for an individual student, which kind of vary from student to student, but also looking at, okay, what does reading and listening look like? And how do we help support them? How do we know if they're on track, if they're getting that?
the supports that they need and where they're at with their language development. So really focusing more on that modality level.
And then I already mentioned the comparison group is students with significant cognitive disabilities who are not English learners. So you're going to see the expectations of language development look a lot different the way that Alt ELPA was designed compared to the way that AZELLA was designed.
And then additional supports, and again, very, very similar. This is a one-on-one administration, so you can use that redirection, making sure that students are engaged with the assessment, giving them encouragement, reinforcements, time management, being able to read anything that you need to read to the student. Very similar with embedded universal features.
call it a little bit different things on the test. And part of that is just the vendor that we're working with when this was created. But very similar, just universal features. Some of them are embedded into the assessment platform. Some of those are designated supports that are used outside of the platform. That's really the only difference is you can use those for all students. They're just called something a little bit different.
So universal features, just the way the platform is set up that you can kind of expand passages or make them look a little bit different on the page, depending on what the student might need. They have a highlighter, a line reader, zoom or magnification. There's a notepad for Alt ELPA, the platform that we have, you can mark something for review. So if a student really seemed to engage in that,
particular question, the topic is not very engaging for students, you can move on to it and come back. So you can just mark it and kind of flag it and then go back and

look at it again. Strikethrough is an option. And then as far as support, the color choices, masking, mouse printer,
Again, oh, sorry, the non-embedded features at the bottom as well, but yeah, designated support. So just things that are available for students just to kind of help interact with the assessment in the platform. And then I'll skip to the bottom, the non-embedded features, things that you are able to give them and just called out, not that they're not available
in MSAA as well, but just things that we just kind of have documented that you can use for students. So those breaks, tactile graphics, scratch paper if they need it, if they're doing anything that would help them to have additional paper with them, helping them navigate through the test. So it's a one-on-one administration, just like MSAA, different ways to help navigate the student, but
definitely available and allowed for students who take all DELPA. And then as far as accommodations, again, not a lot of them, but because we try to build a lot of accessibility just in and allow things for all students, there is the possibility of a domain exemption. It is very, very rare because we do allow pretty much any mode of communication that the student needs. And there is an early stopping rule for both
of them. I didn't put that on these slides. There is an early stopping rule for students who have not yet determined or do not have a consistent mode of communication yet. So domain exemptions, usually those are covered either by allowing the type of communication that they are using, or if they're not
don't have one established yet. They usually just do the early stopping rule.
Yeah, paper based testing, that one is print on demand. So MSAA, you can do a print test and kind of print the whole thing. This one is print through the platform still. It's usually item by item, which is not ideal, but it is available and allowed for students. So if you need to print one thing to help engage the student, you could do that kind of like a hybrid.
or you could print every item. Word prediction is also allowed for Alt ELPA.
All right, I think we have questions, but if you could put that into the chat, if you have that available, that would be helpful.
As we are.
Working on those questions, getting those entered, anything that you have for today, we'll move on to the next slide, accommodation requests. So our other programs do require accommodation requests to be submitted and approved to

ADE for very specific accommodations. For alternate assessment, it's a little bit, is very much a different process. So of course, as always, accommodations must be documented in the IEP. That's not different. That is exactly the same.
all accommodations must be documented in the IEP. But for alternate assessments, they're not submitted to ADE. We know that students, this population of students have lots of needs and varying needs. And so however it is documented in the IEP, for the most part, that is what you would use on the assessment. And we don't need to collect that. We just want you to be able to make the assessment as accessible as possible.
So the alternate assessment district test coordinator is responsible for designating those accommodations in the platform. So I know we do have a little bit of some platform changes coming up here, but that role is responsible for marking them, for confirming. So there could be a modal that pops up that says, hey,
just please confirm that the student has the paper-based test accommodation in their IEP and then you just click yes and go ahead and print it. So they're collected differently. They're collected that way. We did have a tab where you could put in what you thought the student's accommodations might be as far as what they're actually using on the test. So whatever's documented in the IEP, you just go in there and mark
They need these accommodations. Just a way for us to collect what students are using and what they're needing and making sure that we're providing that, but not as a way for us to go back in and say, oh, does this match what you have in your IEP? That is entirely the responsibility of the alternate assessment district test coordinator.
All right, we do have several resources available as well. We do have accessibility guidelines. That's just general guidelines for selecting, administrating, and evaluating accommodations. So if you're trying to figure out what does this process look like, how do I know if they need an accommodation, that accessibility guidelines document kind of walks you through the process.
and then you select them, you use them, then you come back and say, hey, did that work? Is that really what the student needs? So that's more of a process type document to help support you in making those decisions. There's also an alternate assessment accessibility manual that is just kind of generally for alternate assessment, what you can expect, probably more detail, just like this.
webinar, but more detail on alternate assessment and how we approach accessibility. And then the Alt ELPA actually did create their own accessibility manual, so that

walks through every single detail specific to Alt ELPA. All of those embedded features, non-embedded features, universal, everything like that, and the accommodations, and those are by domain.
Like I mentioned, the reading, the read aloud is an accommodation for reading, but it's a universal feature for the other domains. So that has a nice table in there to kind of walk you through what's allowable for which tests, what you need to document as an accommodation, and what you might need to document as an accessibility feature.
So we've done a lot of work on making sure you have some manuals available. MSAA didn't ever create an accessibility manual, but we started to have the conversations about what that could look like for us, because again, a lot of these things are universal across how we design the test. It'll be universal across how the platform is set up.
So we are working on making an accessibility manual specific to MSA, similar to what you would see in the Alt ELPA accessibility manual. It's not available yet, but it should be soon.
All right, there, I don't know if Candace or Anjali or Sherry, can you help? It looks like there's a lot of hands up and I'm not sure if that's because people are having difficulty with the chat or if there is any other issues that are coming up with that. It's, yeah, I have a message that chat was turned off for the meeting.



**Middlebrook, Candis** 24:22
Okay, let us take a look at that.



**Spangenberg, Bethany** 24:22
Okay, okay.
So it looks like maybe you might be able to type into the chat now. Thank you so much for your patience. I didn't realize that was on. I'm going to keep going, but please put your questions in the chat.
All right, and then really just some kind of thoughts, best practices for identifying supports and accommodations. Using those accessibility guidelines to kind of walk through that process and make sure you're going through the entire thing and the manuals to identify what those options are. And then kind of along with that, don't rely on your online IEP systems in those dropdowns for accommodations because What I've noticed, what I've seen is that they don't match which state assessment the

student is taking. So a lot of times those are uploaded saying, oh, okay, we're just going to load the AESA accommodations list. And then the student takes an ultra assessment and they don't have options of what is specifically available for that assessment.
So use those accessibility guidelines in the manuals and say, okay, what will the student need on which test, whichever test they're taking? And make sure that's documented, even if it's not in that dropdown for your accommodations on your system.
As always, accommodations and all the supports must be used in daily instruction. So we're not going to give students something to use or something to do differently that they are not familiar with. So it's partially because if they need it, they should be using it in instruction, but partially we don't want to introduce something new to them during a tested
and testing experience. They should be familiar with that already.
And then making sure you're documenting everything, not just the accommodations, but all of those features supports accommodations in the IEP. So I know there's usually like the separate, you have an accommodations that you're specifically saying, hey, these are the actual accommodations of what we're calling that in the IEP, but make sure that if you're using another support. So for example, if the student uses a highlighter,
they use it during instruction, you want them to use it on a test, that might be a universal feature, but document that they're using it. Not necessarily that it is an accommodation. Typically in the IEP, it wouldn't necessarily have to fall in one place or another. But make sure you're writing that down because if that's a support that the student is using, no matter where they go, where their educational path takes them.
you have that documentation and other people will, when it's relevant, would be reading that and understanding that they need those types of features. So make sure you're including all of the supports that the student needs. So I see a question, when would a domain exemption apply? So very similar to what you would see for
Um, Azella, if a student had...
typically a sensory impairment, but they did not have a mode of communication that they would use instead of that. So first, for example, a student who is blind, who is not reading braille for this population of students, we typically don't expect them to be able to read braille. Yes, they can hear

read aloud, you know, you have those built in, but for some reason, if the student doesn't have a different mode of communication, like I said, it hasn't really come up. It's not really something because of the way that the test is designed, but it is available in case there is a student that, you know, has something where they cannot physically access the content and they haven't had a mode of communication to make up for that.
So typically, again, the early stopping rule could very much apply if it's that they haven't determined a mode of communication. This would be if just part of the mode of communication was not accessible.
Thank you. So that was what I had for today. Just kind of an overview, making sure we're thinking about accessibility for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Hopefully you saw that there is a lot that is offered for students or allowed for students who would participate in alternate assessments. If you have any specific questions, hey, the student is working on this. They're using the.
this specific device, this specific manipulatives, typically that is allowed, but if you have any questions about that or as you're going through documentation, if you're saying, hey, I'm not sure if or how or if I should be documenting a specific support or feature or something like that, you can always reach out to us as well.
Okay, yep. Question about the difference between transcription and a scribe accommodation. So transcription is typically when the student gives you a specific answer that you're going to put directly into the platform exactly the way that they did it. So that could be like a student who uses eye gaze.
They're not typing, they're not clicking on the answer in the platform, but they are choosing the answer very specifically. I'm choosing answer A by my eye gaze, and the test administrator can put A into the computer.
Scribe is a little bit different, so, for example, if a if a...
if a student is using like a picture board and they are selecting words, but the words don't make a complete sentence. So in MSAA, if you look at the writing rubric, there's a lot of things that are not included. They do have to have subject-verb agreement for at least one.
sentence, for example. But if you want to fill in the, a, and, those kinds of things, just to make it a complete sentence, you know what the student is trying to say, but they aren't putting all of the words in there because those words in between are not part of the rubric. So you'd be able to fill that in.
Um...

for the student when you enter that into the computer. So with one is not exactly how the student is presenting it to you. And there's, yeah, a lot about the writing specifically where there's a lot of flexibility. I talked about, you know, kind of walking through the process one step at a time, but also just the way that they're communicating and what actually is measured. So I'd encourage you to look at our writing rubrics for those.
And it it's very.
Very basic as far as the expectations for how students communicate big picture ideas. That's kind of what we expect. So a lot of those types of details are not included. I think there is some. I know there's some punctuation kind of things. But it's not like they always have to have a capital letter and an end punctuation there. There doesn't ever have to be a comma in between if you're setting
a clause or something like that. So those types of things that help scoring make it easier for scoring, but not necessarily changing what we're measuring for the student.
So there's some more specific examples, but the state-specific policy kind of lists more of a definition of the difference between the two.
Great questions. What other questions do you have today?
All right, yep. So you can go ahead and contact us at alternate assessment at azed.gov if you have any questions about accessibility or anything related to alternate assessments. As we are kind of closing out here, if you need to get back to other work that you have today, you are absolutely welcome to do that. I will stay on. I see a few more questions coming in.
So I will see, I will stay on to answer those questions. So feel free to get on with your day as you need to and stay on as long as you need to until we have all of these questions answered. All right, permissive mode. Yeah, so I kind of didn't really, I think I mentioned it, I didn't really describe it a lot.
So in the Cambium portal specifically, there are different features that are allowed for students that you can have them access directly.
So that is, that's a feature that's available. Again, the training and the accessibility manual really describe exactly what that looks like for the student. What features are available for them to be able to manipulate things around the screen or access different features.
Looks like it's a little bit different related. The testing window, I'm guessing for MSAA you're asking about, because that's the only one that we are just starting to get

published. The testing window for MSAA is...
Sorry, March 8th, let me look at the calendar. It opens March 8th and it's a seven week window. So exactly what we've been doing every single year. We just had to have the vendor to confirm that's what we are going to continue to do.
March 8th to April 23rd.
And we're going to be posting everything, all of those updated, everything that where you used to see the testing windows, those will be added to our websites very, very soon. That was literally just confirmed this week, so we'll make sure we get all of that information out.
If an EL student takes MSAA, they probably also qualify for Alt ELPA. You just need both assessments in the IEP. So, the eligibility determination document is for alternate assessment. So, you're only making the decision for alternate assessment, not for a specific alternate assessment. So yes, either they are eligible for all of them or neither of them as far as alternate assessment participation.
their grade level and their EL status or the home language survey is going to tell you which of those assessments they take. But yes, the criteria are not specific to a test. It is for the student. Does the student meet the eligibility criteria for alternate assessments? And then we decide based on the demographic information which they take.
So yes, we should not see, we should not be seeing that a student takes MSAA and AZELLA or the student takes Alt ELPA and AASA or ACT, unless there was a change in a decision from when they took one test to when they took the other test. Typically, for alternate assessment eligibility, we have that.
window is right now. So, by the end of November, that decision needs to be made so that you can really plan that instruction and be very intentional. But sometimes it goes the other way where you might have an IEP meeting in March and the student has already taken Alt ELPA and then you talk and you just say, hey, we really don't have evidence to support eligibility. The student needs to take the general assessment.
So that's a case where they would take one and not the other, but it's really an intentional change when that happens. It's not setting it up.
in a way that they would take one not the other, one alternate and one not the other alternate.
Thank you so much for joining today. I'm still going to give us maybe two or three more minutes, see if any other questions come in. I really appreciate your time.

All right, I'm not seeing any other questions. If you do have any, please reach out to us at AlternateAssessment@azed.gov. Otherwise, I think we can conclude this webinar. Thank you all so much for attending.