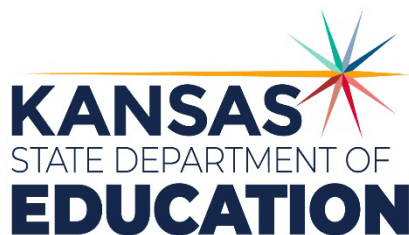


Administering Literacy Assessments for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities and Complex Communication Needs



Guidance for Administering Literacy Assessments



Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.



SUCCESS DEFINED

A successful Kansas high school graduate has the

- Academic preparation,
- Cognitive preparation,
- Technical skills,
- Employability skills and
- Civic engagement

to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.

OUTCOMES

- Social-emotional growth
- Kindergarten readiness
- Individual Plan of Study
- Civic engagement
- Academically prepared for postsecondary
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary success



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To prepare Kansas students for lifelong success through rigorous, quality academic instruction, career training and character development according to each student's gifts and talents.

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Jan. 25, 2025

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This document was modified with permission from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

About this document

This document provides resources and recommendations for accommodations/scaffolds that can be used when conducting district-wide literacy screenings and benchmark or diagnostic assessments. Each section of this document includes a table with detailed information on appropriate access features specific to commonly administered subtests of literacy screeners for several subgroups of students who have complex communication access needs and additional information and resources for these tools and strategies specific to each student subgroup.

The Kansas State Department of Education requires all students, including those with disabilities, are administered a universal screener that identifies reading risk. Guidance provided in the Kansas Dyslexia Handbook then recommends students who are identified at risk are provided additional diagnostic assessments deemed necessary to guide instruction and inform interventions. In general, literacy subtests are used to determine specific components or foundational skills where intervention or supplemental instruction is needed. Approved reading diagnostics will generally use a composite score while the dyslexia screeners may use a set of subtests. However, districts and schools should check with their approved dyslexia screener's technical manual or reading diagnostic to see which subtest(s) should be used.

In the case of students with complex communication access needs, it is important to focus on individual student accommodations and supports to ensure accurate data from all required subtest skills, as opposed to following vendor protocol for administration while not providing access.

Accommodations (including assistive technology and accessible educational materials) provided to students with disabilities need to be discussed with the student's individualized education program (IEP) team and documented on the IEP. Accommodations should be used on a regular basis, not exclusively for screening and testing purposes.

Note that these resources and strategies are only recommendations. Districts should make case-by-case decisions on how students will access screening assessments according to the communication, motor, vision, hearing, sensory and/or cognitive profiles of each student based on individual student data.

When to use this document

This document serves as a guide for districts and schools for specific populations of students. The resources and recommendations for screening should only be used if the following conditions are met:

1. A student cannot access and/or complete one of the [KSDE Dyslexia Screening Protocol](#) as described in the administration manual with protocol specific supports; and
2. The accommodations or accessibility features listed in [The Kansas Accessibility Manual: How to Select, Administer and Evaluate Use of Accessibility Supports for All Students](#) or vendor accessibility manual are not valid or appropriate for that student.

Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired

There are several strategies and approaches that can be used to ensure access to literacy screeners for students who are blind or visually impaired. Table 1 below includes specific recommendations for different types of literacy subtests. A list of additional resources is provided directly below the table.

Table 1. Assessment Access: Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Foundations/Base building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways Towards Reading Readiness for Braille • Center for the Visually Impaired Braille Readiness Grid • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)* AEM Center • Kansas Instructional Resource Center (KIRC) • Deafblind specific strategy: tactile sign language, extended processing time
Phonemic Awareness – Onset, Phoneme Segmentation (<i>First Sound Fluency (FSF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No accommodations needed unless tactile supports are needed as placeholders for sounds in words • Tactile Elkonin boxes • Physically tap out sounds (i.e. arm, head, air, finger, etc.) • Walk out sounds (i.e. steps, hop, jump, etc.)
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)* AEM Center • Assistive Technology, such as large print, magnification, line ruler, appropriate lighting, contrast
Letter-Sound Correspondence (<i>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No accommodations needed unless tactile supports are needed as placeholders for sounds in words • Tactile Elkonin boxes
Real and Non-word Reading, Phoneme Blending (<i>Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)* AEM Center • Large print, magnification, line ruler, appropriate lighting, contrast • Tactile Elkonin boxes
Oral Text Reading Accuracy and Rate (<i>Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)* AEM Center • Large print, magnification, line ruler, appropriate lighting, contrast
Comprehension (<i>Maze</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)* AEM Center • Large print, magnification, line ruler, appropriate lighting, contrast

*Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are print- and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and related core materials that are

designed or enhanced in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of learner variability, regardless of format (e. g., print, digital, graphic, audio, video) [AEM Center](#)

Additional Resources

- [Teaching Braille Reading and Writing](#)
- [Kansas Instructional Resource Center](#) (KIRC)
- [Outreach services from Kansas State School for the Blind Education Services](#) (KSSB)
- [Learning Media Assessment](#)
- [Unlocking the English Code: Assessment for Learners Who are Blind/Visually Impaired](#)

Students with Complex Behaviors

Table 2 below provides strategies and recommendations for supporting access to literacy screeners for students with complex behaviors. Note that these recommendations are general and could be used across multiple subtests within the screener. All suggested accommodations in this document must be discussed with the IEP team, documented on the IEP, and used on a regular basis, not just at testing time.

Table 2. Assessment Access: Strategies for Students with Complex Behaviors

Assessment Strategies for Students with Complex Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory supports (fidgets, lighting) • Extra breaks during testing with possible use of visual timers as needed • Movement breaks • Alternate setting for testing • Token economy or reward systems used during testing • Weighted vests, blankets, etc. • Emotional regulation check-ins during testing • Manipulatives • Familiar test administrator • Testing over multiple days • Time of day consideration for testing • Providing food and drink needs during testing • Testing while standing and/or moving

Additional Resources

- [TASN Autism and Tertiary Behavior Supports](#) (ATBS)
- [Kansas Assistive Technology Guide](#)
- [Assistive Technology for Kansans](#) - The University of Kansas

Students with Complex Communication Needs

There are multiple ways to support access to literacy screeners for students with complex communication needs. Table 3 below lists strategies that would be applicable for different subtests of literacy screeners. Note that information in this table would be appropriate for students who use augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) access, including but not limited to a speech generating device (SGD), American Sign Language (ASL), picture symbols, voice output device, cued language, picture exchange communication system (PECS), object supports, and/or photographs.

Table 3. Assessment Access: Students with Complex Communication Needs

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Foundational Skills/Base skills assessments and checklists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Matrix • Communication Supports Tool (Developed by Kansas Infnitec & TASN ATBS) • Communication: Checklist for Supporting Communication in the Classroom (TASN ATBS) • Supporting Complex Communicators in my Classroom (TASN ATBS) • Modified Bridge Assessment (Erin Sheldon) • Literacy Skills Checklist • Communication Supports Inventory • Expressive and/or receptive communication/language skills inventories • Ways of communicating graphic organizer • Speech Sound Chart • 44 Phonemes of English • Access to Literacy Assessment System (ATLAS) • Assessment of Phonological Awareness & Reading • Heggerty Assessment Tools • Project Core Quick Start Guide
<i>Phonemic Awareness – Onset, Phoneme Segmentation (First Sound Fluency (FSF))</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech sound cards • Phonemic Keyboard (can be found on multiple AAC devices)
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter cards for choice making. • Speech sound cards • AAC device with pictures, letters, letter sounds, and letter names programmed. • Alternate Letter sound assessment

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Letter-Sound Correspondence (<i>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AAC device with mouth sound pictures with sounds programmed. • Tactile representations of sounds (blocks, chips, dots) • Phonemic Keyboard (can be found on multiple AAC devices)
Real and Non-word Reading, Phoneme Blending (<i>Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech sound cards • AAC device with pictures and sounds programmed. • Alternate Letter sound assessment • Phonemic Keyboard (can be found on multiple AAC devices)
Reading Accuracy and Rate/Fluency (<i>Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</i>) <i>Note: because of the possible barrier to verbally reading aloud the fluency/automaticity measure may be challenging to measure with certainty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AAC reading – reading with AAC is more a measure of matching words rather than reading to make meaning. • Allow students to read a specific passage silently to themselves for 1 minute and then ask comprehension questions related to the passage with alternate access modes for responses (choice options - 2 or more, AAC, object choices or tactual graphics representing answer choices, etc.) <i>Note: this combines data for ORF and Maze together into one assessment making it challenging to determine if/when reading accuracy or making meaning from text is compromised.</i>
Independent Reading Comprehension (<i>Maze</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted books. <i>Note: not text adapted but access adapted (i.e., page fluffers, braille, sensory/tactile added, digital format, switch adapted, etc.)</i> • Allow students to read specific passage silently to themselves for 1 minute and then ask comprehension questions related to book.

Additional Resources

- [TASN Autism and Tertiary Behavior Supports \(ATBS\)](#)
- [Supporting Complex Communication Needs Across Environments \(TASN ATBS\)](#)
- [Penn State Literacy Instruction for Individuals with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome and Other Disabilities](#)
- The [Communication Matrix](#) is an assessment tool to help families and professionals easily understand the communication status, progress, and unique needs of anyone functioning at the early stages of communication or using forms of communication other than speaking or writing.
- The [Communication Matrix Intervention Modules](#) are organized so that the three-part “Communication Matrix Life After the Assessment: The Foundation for Intervention”

is viewed first. The “Essential Strategies” should be viewed next, followed by viewing the videos for the one or two levels where the individual is functioning as identified on the Communication Matrix – [Overview Video](#)

- [Language Assessments](#)
- [Understanding the Literacy Learning Profiles of Students with Disabilities](#) (3-part series; each video about 60 min).
- [Building a Toolbox for Literacy Assessment & Intervention for Students with Complex Learning Needs](#) (CLN) anchored in the Science of Reading and Writing

Students with Fine and/or Gross Motor Differences

Students with fine and/or gross motor differences may require specific accommodations to access literacy screeners. Table 4 below provides a list of suggested accommodations that would be appropriate for different subtests of literacy screeners. Links to additional resources are provided directly below the table.

Table 4. Assessment Access: Students with Complex Fine or Gross Motor Differences

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Foundational Skills/ Base building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Sensory checklist • Sample Fine Motor checklist • Sample Gross Motor Seating and Positioning guide • Switch access exploration: touch, grab, pinch, pull, push, etc. • Eye-gaze frame/virtual pencil exploration • Feature match with switch access kit, Assistive Technology (AT) assessment • Switch scanning trial – one or two-step, with or without visual or auditory cues • Communication Supports Tool (Developed by Kansas Infinitect & TASN ATBS) • Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) and NIMAS
Phonemic Awareness <i>Onset, Phoneme Segmentation (First Sound Fluency (FSF))</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech sound cards/Mouth cards • Letter cards with direct select, AAC, or eye-gaze

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Letter Naming Fluency-LNF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter cards for choice making Speech sound cards (mouth cards) for choice making Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)/Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA) device with letters, letter sounds, letter names, and/or mouth pictures programmed
Letter-Sound Correspondence (<i>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AAC/VOCA device with mouth cards and phonemes programmed Letter tiles/cards/blocks Reverse protocol where teacher gives sound and student selects the letter(s)
Real and Non-word Reading, Phoneme Blending (<i>Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AAC/VOCA device with mouth cards and phonemes programmed Letter tiles/cards/blocks Reverse protocol where teacher gives sound and student selects the letter(s) When given sounds student blends and selects whole word on voice output device or gives sign For non-sense words teacher gives each sound – student selects each letter and then selects read display to produce blended sounds
Reading Accuracy and Rate/Fluency (<i>Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</i>) <i>Note: because of the time delay for motor planning the fluency/automaticity measure may be N/A</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted books (Note: not text adapted but access adapted i.e., page fluffers, braille, sensory/tactile added, AEM digital format, switch adapted, etc.)
Independent Reading Comprehension (<i>Maze</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted books/passages (switch accessible, page fluffers, wand and magnet, etc.,) Communication cards, device. objects, etc. for answering choice-based comprehension questions about the passage or book

Additional Resources

- [AT Domains](#) Document

Students with Multi-Sensory Needs

Students with multi-sensory needs may require specific accommodations to access literacy screeners. Table 5 below provides a list of recommended accommodations that would be appropriate for different subtests of literacy screeners. Links to additional resources are provided directly below the table.

Table 5. Assessment Access: Students with Multi-Sensory Needs

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Base Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Sensory checklist • Sample Fine Motor checklist • Sample Sensory processing checklist • Informal Sensory Processing checklist • Tangible symbols or objects used for communication • Weighted vests, blankets, etc. • Noise filtering headphones • Manipulatives with tactile features preferred by student
Phonemic Awareness Onset, Phoneme Segmentation (First Sound Fluency (FSF))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark first sound with highlighter or Wikki Stix • Whole word with first sound manipulatives
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter manipulatives • Letter parts for building letters • Letter cards for choice making • Speech sound cards • Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)/Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA) device with oral pictures, letters, letter sounds, and letter names programmed • Make/write letters using sand, paint baggies, Wikki Stix, etc.
Letter-Sound Correspondence (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elkonin boxes with manipulatives • Tactile manipulatives • Whole body movement while segmenting • Sounds with blocks, cards, magnets, Velcro, or chips for manipulation
Real and Non-word Reading, Phoneme Blending (Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech sound cards and/or mirrors to show oral motor placements • Hand gestures to blend individual sounds • Blocks or chips representing each sound – push together to blend – say new word

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Reading Accuracy and Rate/Fluency (Oral Reading Fluency (ORF))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading phone • Recording own oral reading • Line by line highlighting • Tracking chip or finger • Compare oral reading of different text types (decodable, patterned, predictable, etc.,)
Independent Reading Comprehension (Maze)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted books (not text adapted but access adapted (i.e., page fluffers, sensory/tactile added to graphics, digital format, etc.) • Tactile books • Multi-sensory experience books • Interactive books • Digital text • Story boxes with objects representing the concepts in the text provided in sequence with the text • Storyboard with objects, tactile graphics, or pictures paired with text

Additional Resources

- Assistive Technology for Kansans (ATK) Equipment Loan System (KU)
- Kansas Deaf-Blind Project
- AT Domains

Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

When administering literacy screeners to students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, there are specific accommodations that are appropriate, depending on the literacy subtest, as seen in Table 6 below.

Links to additional resources and information to support the use of visual phonics, cued speech, and fingerspelling can be found below the table.

Table 6. Assessment Access: Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

<https://www.communicationmatrix.org/>

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Phonemic Awareness <i>Onset, Phoneme Segmentation</i> (First Sound Fluency (FSF))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual Phonics, Cued Speech and/or fingerspelling
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fingerspelling

Assessment Subtests	Assessment Strategies and Resources
Letter-Sound Correspondence (<i>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual Phonics, Cued Speech and/or fingerspelling
Real and Non-word Reading, Phoneme Blending (<i>Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual Phonics, Cued Speech and/or fingerspelling
Reading Accuracy and Rate/Fluency (<i>Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual Phonics, Cued Speech and/or fingerspelling, signed language Administer in student's primary medium at grade level.
Independent Reading Comprehension (<i>Maze</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fingerspelling, signed language Administer reading comprehension subtest as listening comprehension. Ask the comprehension questions to assess progress on listening comprehension. Use silent reading fluency subtest as a measure of reading comprehension. Use large print, contracted braille, and uncontracted braille if appropriate. Choice of single spaced or double spaced to address crowding.

Additional Resources

General Resources

- [Center for Literacy and Deafness](#)
- [Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss](#)
- [Webinar on Language and Literacy of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#) | Center for Literacy and Deafness

Visual Phonics:

- [What is See the Sound-Visual Phonics](#) (YouTube)

Cued Speech:

- [What is Cued Speech?](#)

Fingerspelling:

- [Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading](#)
- [The Importance of Fingerspelling for Reading](#)
- [Outreach services from Kansas School for the Deaf](#) (KSD)

Considerations When Administering Phonological Awareness Subtests to Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

When administering phonological awareness and phonics screeners, it is important to know what all students know and need related to early reading and writing skills in the areas of:

- Letter knowledge
- Letter sound connections for decoding and encoding new words
- Rapid and automatic decoding and encoding of new words
- Independent reading with comprehension
- Independent writing including independently spelling (encoding) words from mental thoughts to paper

The degree to which students who are deaf or hard of hearing have access to phonological information using the auditory pathway is highly variable. To ensure full access to foundational literacy skills, educators may need to provide access to accommodations such as using a visual tool, strategy, or system. The tool, strategy, or system used may differ from student to student and progress monitoring can be used to assess the effectiveness of each tool for each student during foundational literacy instruction to build the skills to read and write in English. For a very small subset of this population, visual support tools may not be effective in long term access to, and use of, phonological information used during reading and spelling and thus a different path to literacy may need to be utilized. Decisions should not be made until all strategies, systems, and tools have been attempted to create the easiest path to literacy achievement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Students Who Experience Language Deprivation

Language deprivation can occur due to a chronic lack of full access to natural language during the critical period of language acquisition from birth to age seven. Students who experience language deprivation may enter school without a fully formed first language. These students will require intensive language intervention, while simultaneously receiving instruction/intervention in foundational skills. Due to the cognitive load this requires and not yet having formed a first language, it may take more than eight weeks to see progress when implementing interventions and educators may need to prolong the trials of access strategies such as Visual Phonics, Cued Speech, or Fingerspelling to assess if progress is being made.

This document has been modified with permission from the Ohio Department of Education's *Administering Literacy Assessments for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities and Complex Communications Needs*.

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