

NWEA Read Aloud Accommodation Update

Q & A September 20, 2021

Q: Is there a link to the slides?

A: The slide deck is available: [NWEA 2021-2022 Read Aloud Training](#). The recording of the 9/20/21 Read Aloud training is available:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBLZvj5YoHw&list=PL-cO8lcaOYu1VmsheoFHcj1fRZLhW7bof&index=14>

Q: Can you help us understand how you came to this decision? This puts users who use text to speech/AEM and text to speech as outlined in their IEP at a disadvantage. Help me understand this decision please.

A: The NWEA website has a disclaimer regarding [TTS Limitations](#): *Reading tests do not stop you from assigning Text-to-Speech, so be careful if your policies prohibit it.* An IEP may state "TTS for state assessments", however as per NWEA TTS Limitations the [Maine DOE NWEA Accessibility Guide](#) is the policy that prohibits TTS for the NWEA reading passages.

Historically Text To Speech (TTS) has not been allowed for any components of the reading sessions in past Maine assessments. Allowing TTS for reading passages changes the construct of the assessment and is measuring listening comprehension rather than decoding and reading comprehension. Determining when to allow a read-aloud accommodation on a reading assessment continues to be an issue across the country and a national survey indicates that states have differing policies. The Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) / National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA) conference held a session June 2021 entitled "*Revisiting the Read Aloud Accommodation on Assessments of Reading Comprehension*", and state-wide discussions continue.

Q: Can you please clarify the difference between Text to Speech and a Human Reader?

A: Text To Speech (TTS) is prerecorded, computerized voice output and embedded within the (NWEA) assessment platform kiosk. Read Aloud accommodation mirrors the same text available via TTS in the platform but is provided by an external (non-embedded) human reader.

Q: What if students use human readers in classroom assessments? Should they still have a separate line for the NWEA?

A: If the child has the accommodation for a Human Reader/Read Aloud in section 6 of their IEP, and it is documented in the corresponding Written Notice, there does not need to be a separate line specific to the NWEA.

Q: Many of our accommodations state, "Read Aloud for all allowable portions". Is the expectation that we will amend IEPs to match your sample? Do we need to amend all IEPs to use this wording before the testing?

A: The MDOE is not expecting IEP's to be amended to include this information. This is "change of practice moving forward", and the accommodation should be added to section 6 and documented in the Written notice at the students next IEP Team meeting. The example given in the slide deck, is just that, an example, it is not our expectation that this would be written in exactly the same way for every IEP.

Q: We give the NWEA three times. Can we write it as a yearly timespan with the specification " during the NWEA window"?

A: Yes, this would be compliant.

Q: In the NWEA Accommodations, you CAN check TTS for directions, questions and answers only, so the laptop will only read those without the need for a human reader, correct?

A: The NWEA platform has the functionality to have TTS enabled for some components of an item (directions, questions and answers only) and not others however, this function is disabled during the 4-week assigned state testing window. That functionality becomes available again outside the Maine window. E.G. 8/15 – 10/3, and 10/30 – 11/30.

Q: When the staff enters accommodations for a NWEA assessment, will they see ALL NWEA accommodations, or will they see only the ones allowed by the MDOE for this assessment?

A: All accommodations available in the NWEA platform will be shown, so please ensure only accommodations permitted by MDOE are assigned and used by students in accordance with their IEP. During the Maine testing window, Text to Speech will be greyed out and unable to be chosen.

Q: What about Blind and visually impaired uses who use screen readers/braille?

A: For Blind or Visually Impaired students who utilize screen reader programs (such as JAWS), there is an Accessible version of the test available. When assigning the test within a test session, locate and assign the test that says **ACCESSIBLE** at the end of the name for students with this need. If no Accessible tests are available, you can contact NWEA support to request access at: 855-430-1777. When a screen reader is enabled, all text and alt tags on any images/non-text parts on the NWEA assessment is produced with voice output. Depending on the student's IEP and the [state accommodation policy](#) (e.g. Read Aloud/voice over NOT allowed for reading passages), JAWS may be muted for specific components. For Braille users, functionality would depend on the specific refreshable Braille device the student is using.

For more information about NWEA's Accessible test, please visit the following:

- [Testing Visually Impaired Students in MAP Growth](#)
- [How to test with JAWS Screen Reader](#)
- [What is the difference between Accessible MAP Tests and Standard MAP Tests?](#)

Q: Does NWEA plan on updating their TTS accommodation to meet the needs of the reading section (excluding the reading passage)?

A: In the NWEA Accommodations, you CAN check TTS for directions, questions and answers only as the platform has this functionality and is still available for Math and Language Use sessions. The determination to disable this functionality, and TTS completely on the Reading Session was made to eliminate the burden on the SAU/school for needing to individually set these parameters individually in the NWEA accommodations.

Q: Will TTS be turned off for all of NWEA during October, or just the required grade levels?

A: Disabling the TTS functionality for the reading session during the state window(s) (10/4/21 - 10/29/21) also disables TTS for all grade levels using the MAP GROWTH Reading 2-5 and Reading 6+. TTS remains available for Math all grade levels, and Language Use all grade levels.

Q: If we administer the NWEA outside of the window with accommodations does the score still show up on the student report in NWEA?

A: In the comprehensive data file of fall/spring results, NWEA only provides to Maine DOE the results during the time frame of the state window – e.g. 10/4-10/29/21, and 5/2-2/27/22. If there are duplicates, or 2 scores for any of the 3 required sessions in that file, the reportable score determination follows the protocol for re-administration policy. If the local/SAU data contains duplicate scores, the district should determine the appropriate score for local progress monitoring purposes and follows guidelines for [Excluding Test Result in Reports](#) to remove the duplicate.

Q: Meaning 2nd graders should test before Oct. 4th to use TTS, correct?

A: NWEA K-2 sessions have audio support available and the state decision rule on disabling TTS does not impact this level. However if a student taking the K-2 session reaches an upward adaptive progression tapping into items from the

2-5 level, these items may not include audio support. The Reading 2-5 session will have TTS available before or after the state designated 4-week window.

Q: So we are actually going to be able to read [aloud] the questions, and answer choices?

A: For the NWEA reading session, you may read aloud the directions, questions, and answer choices, but not the reading passages.

Q: Can parents opt out of taking the NWEA?

A: Per ESEA as amended by ESSA of 2015, students are required to participate in state assessments in grades 3 – 8 and 3rd year of high school in math and ELA and in Maine, grades 5, 8 and 3rd year of high school in science. Also outlined in statute is the requirement for 95% participation. The Maine DOE does not prevent nor promote the non-participation of students in the assessment – we do not have a policy in place. A parent however can elect for their student to not participate in the assessment. In this instance, the Maine DOE does recommend having a local process in place in order to document this. We have heard from other districts that some have required a formal letter to be submitted to the school principal and a subsequent meeting with the principal so concerns can be better understood, misconceptions addressed and questions answered. We are hopeful that as we are using the NWEA assessment and the data is more immediately available to educators (and technically families) non-participation may be reduced.