

ACCESS for ELLs® 2.0



ACCESS 2.0: Key Implementation Strategies for the Operational Test

*The New Online English Language Proficiency
Assessment for Grades 1-12*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to offer suggestions and recommendations for state and local education agencies for the successful implementation of the operational ACCESS 2.0, the new technology-delivered annual summative assessment of academic English language proficiency. These suggestions and recommendations are based on the experiences of member states that have previously implemented technology-delivered summative assessments. The topics addressed include:

- Preparation for technology needs
- Logistics
- School staff and student training
- Test security
- Communication

PREPARATION FOR TECHNOLOGY NEEDS

Computer/Student Ratio

It is important to determine the number of computers in the district and each building that will be available for testing and then to work out the computer/student ratio that those computers will facilitate. This ratio will affect issues that impact smooth test administration, such as computer lab scheduling, test administrator assignment, and others.

Involvement of District and/or School Technology Directors

District and/or school technology directors and their staff should be fully integrated in the preparation and implementation process of the technology-delivered assessment. This may be an added responsibility for them, but their expertise is invaluable and would be necessary in the following tasks:

1. Ensuring that the minimum technical requirement specifications are met for school-based technology.
2. Adjusting network settings as needed for optimum conditions for technology-based testing.
3. Completing preparations at network, school, and individual computer levels.
4. Configuring anti-virus software that may be necessary to allow access to programs associated with the test.
5. Ensuring acceptable Internet connectivity, for example, giving consideration to the signal strength of wireless access points, if applicable.
6. Setting up and maintaining the computer labs before and during test administration.
7. Providing technical assistance to staff and student users during testing.
8. Communicating with the test contractor to solve technical problems that might arise during installation or testing.

Restricting High-Bandwidth Usage

High bandwidth usage elsewhere in the school may cause computers being used for testing to run slowly or interfere with computer connections to a network. It may therefore be necessary to restrict bandwidth usage in schools during testing time so that computers used in testing can have maximum bandwidth access. Classroom video and audio streaming, online gaming, and excessive Internet use are some activities that may need to be restricted during testing. Intervention by the principal or other designated administrator is sometimes necessary to regulate the scheduling of teacher or student activities that could prevent uninterrupted test administration.

Load Testing

When available, technology personnel should take advantage of opportunities to test system functionality. This aids in the identification of potential issues prior to testing.

LOGISTICS

The logistics of training of staff and students, scheduling of computer labs for practice testing and operational test sessions, and the deployment of sufficient staff for administering and monitoring tests can make technology-delivered testing challenging without careful planning and management. Some suggestions to make the process smooth and to avoid disruption are noted below:

Cooperation

The organization of the testing process necessitates the cooperation of many staff members, some of whom are not directly involved in ELL instruction or testing. It is therefore advisable that the principal and/or designated administrators be an integral part of the planning and organization process to support an awareness drive, urge cooperation, and if necessary issue directives where cooperation is needed (for example with bandwidth use, computer lab use, or use of other space, assisting with monitoring or substitution, etc.).

Timing and Use of Space

Districts should begin organizing months ahead of the test administration window. Advance notice should be given to school staff regarding the times that computer labs and other testing space(s) will be used for online testing, and of any bandwidth restrictions that may be required, so that teachers can plan accordingly. Involve staff members in brainstorming what may be the best use of school space to accommodate testing. Ensure that sufficient time is scheduled in the computer lab, or in other testing spaces, for each test. Districts should also consider ways to maximize space and reduce disruption to computer lab schedules by using laptops. District and school testing schedules must also consider other district assessments and other statewide testing that may be happening concurrently.

It is important to plan the use of computer labs and other testing spaces carefully to ensure smooth test administration and avoid too much disruption to the regular school schedule. It is helpful to determine the number of ELL students that need to be tested and the number of times each student will need to be in the computer lab based on the number of sessions each student will take. Include time for practice testing and for each section or domain of the test.

Consideration should also be given to determining the number of students who need accommodations that will require setting up a number of computers in another room. In addition, students who have an accommodation that requires individual testing will need to be included in the planning.

Test Administrators, Monitors and Substitutes

Determine the number of adults that will be needed to monitor the total number of students at a ratio of one monitor for about 10 or 15 students per session. After making calculations, have a brainstorming session on the best personnel to use as test administrators, monitors and substitutes in classrooms where the regular teacher is involved in testing during particular sessions.

TRAINING

Training Plan

Although practice using the testing system is time-consuming for test administrators and students, it will make the process run smoothly, as well as assure that testing logistics do not negatively affect students. Test coordinators might find it useful to develop and implement a training plan that allows school staff and students time to practice using the online testing system.

Training School Staff

Staff training should be early enough to allow sufficient time for staff members to become familiar with the testing system and comfortable using it. Test administrators should be competent enough (understand system vocabulary, security, possible administration issues, etc.) to be able to assist students in their training and use of the system. In order to have all staff competent, districts and schools should take full advantage of state and ASSETS training opportunities and materials when they are made available.

Preparing Students

Students should be given access to the computer (or other device) they will use for operational testing, before the test, in order to become familiar with the way it operates with the testing system. Ideally they should use the same device for training, practice testing, and operational testing. It may be necessary for some students to practice keyboarding, starting months before the test. It may also be necessary to have technology instructors and other teachers try to teach computer skills during the year to students who need it. If necessary, in advance of testing, remind younger students how to make upper-case letters and create punctuation on the computer and have them practice doing this for short-answer and constructed response items.

TEST SECURITY

Technology-delivered testing can present certain challenges not typical in paper-based testing. The size of a computer screen on a desk, rising about 18 inches or more from the surface of the desk, for example, with students sitting one or even two feet apart, makes it much easier to view their neighbor's work on the screen, than to view work on an 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper lying flat on a desk. Students may only need to shift their eyes to be able to view and copy answers. A student staring straight ahead may be able to view the work on the computer of a student sitting three feet in front of them. To avoid risk to the integrity of the assessment, creative solutions should be planned to eradicate the problem of copying.

Monitoring by Test Administrators

It is important to monitor student testing in order to mitigate possible student cheating, address student questions, and ensure technology is working appropriately. When available, please refer to the specific administration procedures for the ASSETS assessment.

Seating Configurations

It may be possible to arrange seating so that computers are placed at angles and at distances that make it impossible for students to view each other's screens. This is, however, dependent on the size and layout of the testing space.

Privacy Screens

Privacy screens may be purchased and placed over the screen of each computer. Privacy screens narrow the viewing angle so that the screen is only visible to the person directly in front of it. When viewed from the side, at more than a 30-degree angle, the screen appears dark or blank. Privacy screens generally cost approximately \$80.00 each.

Partitions between Computers

Schools may wish to make use of materials that they already have on hand to place physical barriers between computers that are side by side on a table. Cardboard, plastic, or cloth can be used to make barriers. Some suggestions are: vertical cloth or paper "curtains" that isolate each computer; cardstock (e.g. manila folders) that can be taped to the sides of computer monitors; flattened cardboard boxes that can be cut, folded, and taped to form a visual barrier between computers; and tri-fold display boards (such as those used for science project exhibits) that can be placed between or around computers. Districts should take care to ensure that the home-made solutions themselves are not distracting to students in any way.

Cardboard Carrels



Cardboard carrels are tri-fold partitions that fit completely around a computer, and can be purchased in bulk at a cost of about \$2.00 each. They are sturdy, collapsible, and can be stored to last through two or three years of test administration if they are well cared for. They are also available in different sizes for laptops, desktops, and larger computers. These are generally the most popular security measures in states where they are used because of their effectiveness and affordability.

COMMUNICATION

In the implementation of a new state required test, it is generally necessary for state education agencies to provide information on policies, procedures, and practices to schools. This information sometimes goes to superintendents, principals, or state ELL directors, and is not necessarily filtered down to technology coordinators, test coordinators and teachers. This can adversely affect the participation of schools and students in necessary activities for the success of technology-delivered testing. State education agencies should therefore make every effort to streamline the communication process to ensure that communications are received at all levels.