



# International Reading Association

*A membership organization of literacy professionals*

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## RESOLUTION

### **On Assessment for Children in Special Education Experiencing Reading Difficulties**

#### **Background**

Children are frequently identified for special education because of difficulties in learning how to read. These children deserve access to reading assessments that both inform instruction and monitor program effectiveness.

Students in special education have the right to reading assessments that provide sound information to the teacher, pupil, and family that can be used to guide and improve instruction and learning. Assessments used for this purpose should include a variety of measures that accurately reveal a student's strengths and weaknesses with the multiple processes of reading.

Educators must protect the rights and needs of special education students to ensure that assessments do not discriminate against them. Students identified with difficulties in reading should have access to a variety of accommodations to ensure that the assessment provides valid and accurate information about the student's abilities. These accommodations might include adjustments in time and administration that provide students with disabilities a fair opportunity to demonstrate their proficiencies.

Nevertheless, testing accommodations are only appropriate as long as they do not interfere with the fundamental nature of the skill, process, or content being tested. Care needs to be taken that accommodations do not mask children's needs for further instruction in essential competencies. As an example, for children with reading problems it may be appropriate to read test items aloud to them when assessing knowledge of content in areas such as science and social studies to ensure that the reading problems do not lead to an underestimation of the child's actual knowledge. However, reading test items aloud should not be used with assessments of reading proficiency because this accommodation fundamentally alters what is being assessed.

Students with difficulties in reading should be included in national and local reading assessments although they might require appropriate accommodations. Just as students in special education should not be denied access to the general education curriculum, they should have an equal opportunity to participate in and attain the benefits of large-scale assessment programs. Yet, as with all children, data from national and local assessments should never be used as the sole criterion for high-stakes decisions about promotion and high school graduation.

Moreover, reading programs for children in special education must be held to the same high standards of excellence as other areas of the curriculum. Information from local assessments can be used as a partial indicator of program effectiveness. Data from local assessments should be used in combination with other measures for examining whether a program is meeting a child's instructional needs.

#### **Resolution**

Be it resolved that children in special education identified with reading difficulties deserve

- access to assessments that accurately describe their reading abilities in ways that can be used by their teachers to design instruction that best helps them develop as readers
- inclusion in national and local assessments
- access to accommodations and alternative assessment systems appropriate to their needs and which preserve the fundamental nature of the skill, process, and content being tested.

Be it further resolved that national and local assessments should not be used as the sole, or even the main criterion, for high-stakes decisions about promotion and high school graduation of children in special education.

*Note: This is a revision of the 2000 resolution on “Assessment in the U.S. for Children in Special Education Experiencing Reading Difficulties.” This resolution is more globally applicable.*

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