





# What Is a “Print Disability?”

- “A specific disability that **severely limits or prevents** a student from decoding printed text, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so;

AND

- The student has access to printed materials only through a reader, or is provided with spoken text on audiotape, video, or other electronic format during routine instruction.”

--Massachusetts “Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (2006)”



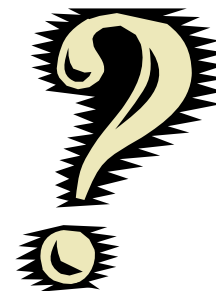
# Who Are the Students?

## *Individuals with...*

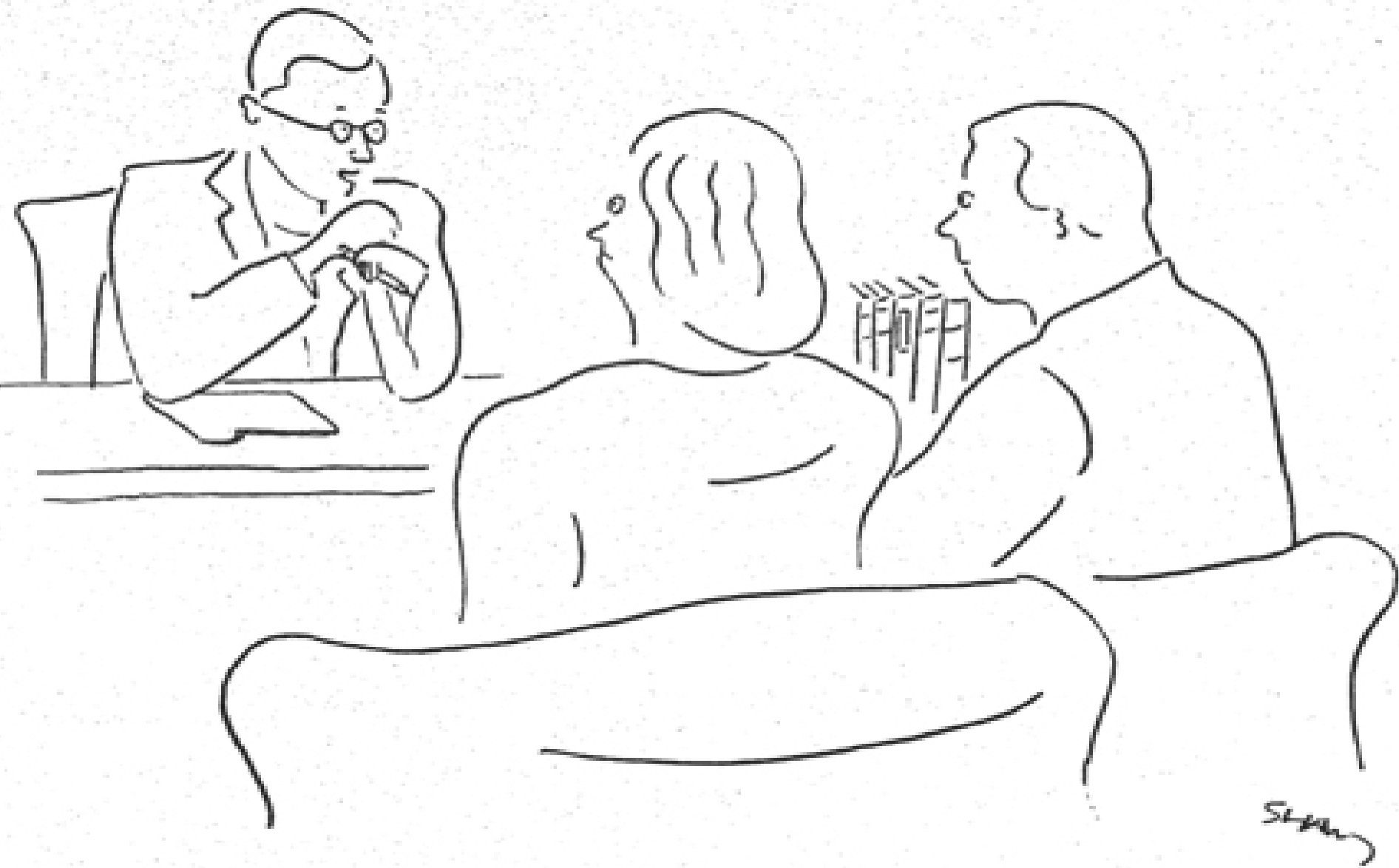
- blindness or vision impairments
- specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)
- stress disorders, TBI, or ADHD
- deafness (with or without other disabilities)
- intellectual disabilities
- other disabilities



# What Happens to a Student...



- Who has a disability that greatly limits or prevents the skill needed to answer a test question (e.g., decoding)
- For whom varied and repeated attempts have been made to teach the skill
- Who already receives the accommodation (e.g., read-aloud, spell-check, calculator) during routine instruction
- For whom no other means of access to the test exists (i.e., last resort)



*"The Feds have authorized me to leave your child behind."*

From *The New Yorker*, September 6 2004



# “Students are caught between assessments”

– GA D.O.E.

**A small but significant number of students are prevented from demonstrating knowledge and skills on general assessments using “acceptable” accommodations.**

## *But what alternatives exist?*

- Alternate assessments based on **alternate achievement standards** are inappropriate.
  - ◆ Student is working at or near grade-level
- Assessments based on **modified achievement standards** are inappropriate.
  - ◆ Student doesn’t need modified (lower) standards, only an accommodation to access higher standards
- Alternate assessments based on **grade level achievement standards** are inappropriate.
  - ◆ Student doesn’t need an alternate format—he can take a test!
  - ◆ Same result as on the test: We find out the student cannot decode



# Assessment and Accountability:

## *"We Have a Definite Type of Situation"*

In states that do not approve the read-aloud accommodation on the ELA test:

- ***If the student participates using the necessary accommodation...***
  - ◆ Counted as non-participant and non-proficient
- ***If the student participates without the necessary accommodation...***
  - ◆ Access to assessment is effectively blocked
  - ◆ Counted as a participant
  - ◆ Presumably, score will be non-proficient



# Why invalidate the score?

*We already know these students cannot decode, but...*

- Most state tests claim to measure problem-solving, application, interpretation, and analysis
- Most tests do not only measure basic decoding (or spelling, or calculating)

*So,*

- When the disability itself becomes the barrier to accessing those higher-level skills...

***Why not let students show what they know?***



# Rationale for Allowing Flexibility

- Accommodations environment is rapidly changing (M. Thurlow, 2006)
- Thanks to technology, range of options for accessing text is expanding
- Definition of “literacy” is broadening, but still contested
- Accommodations should improve our interpretation of test results (Sireci, 2006)
  - ◆ Why tell parents what they already know?
  - ◆ Instead, inform them of how well their child comprehends text with necessary accommodation?
- Validity research on accommodations is often inconclusive and contradictory—and what does the test measure?



# NCEO Study: State Literacy Standards (2004)

- What is the focus of Reading standards in most states? Is it broader than simply decoding print?
- Identified 4 possible modes of interaction with print
  - ♦ **Visual, Tactile** (Braille), **Auditory, Multi-modal** (see/hear/feel, including technology)
- Grouping and analysis of 27 “themes” found in Reading standards from 48 states
- All but 3 of 27 themes could be addressed by students using other than visual modes of print interaction
  - ♦ **Yes:** Comprehension, conventions, context, organization, interactive/thinking, problem-solving, personal growth, etc.
  - ♦ **No:** Fluency, phonemic knowledge, and word recognition



# Oregon Blue Ribbon Panel

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## **Sets a new standard:**

- Accommodations should be considered allowable, valid, and scorable until research provides evidence that the accommodation alters the test construct or measure.



# What About Parents?

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- Increasingly rejecting IEP's when accommodations have been denied
- Raising public awareness about a range of accommodations issues
  - ◆ Large print that isn't large enough
  - ◆ Test security and scheduling issues when these conflict with a student's disability
  - ◆ Accommodations in the IEP, but not provided (or allowed) on tests



# States have authority to...

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- Determine the accommodations policy for students in their state
- Determine which accommodations are “valid”
- Make educators and the public aware of:
  - ◆ state accommodations policy
  - ◆ consequences (if any) of their use
- Determine how scores will be reported and used



# States Have an Obligation...

To ensure the read-aloud accommodation will be:

- Used only by small number of students who need it
- Used as a last resort, when no other access to the test exists
- Used only when already used for routine instruction
- Used when necessary to allow participation in grade-level tests, rather than alternate assessments

How?

- Training, materials, and support for IEP teams
- Monitoring



# States Are Also Obligated to Explain Their Policy to the Public

- Why this accommodation should be allowed, under certain conditions
- Who should be considered for this accommodation
- Define the “threshold” for consideration
  - ◆ “Severely limited or prevented” does not mean simply reading below grade level
  - ◆ Struggling readers need extended time, not read-aloud
- What the results mean:
  - ◆ A score on a *Language and Literature* test
  - ◆ Not saying their kids can read
  - ◆ Not saying schools shouldn’t continue teaching reading



## If a State Allows This Accommodation...

- Should results be footnoted or explained
  - ◆ “Interpret results with caution”
- Should tests separately measure decoding?
- More students will be given access to general assessments, but...
  - ◆ Is that desirable?
  - ◆ Does the alternate unintentionally lower the standard?
  - ◆ Should they take an alternate assessment in order to highlight their need for this accommodation?
- Does it help only the students who need it?
  - ◆ Time and additional research will tell



# In the End...

- What will happen to students who are chronically assessed inappropriately?
- What have we learned about their performance?
- Should states with **high stakes graduation tests** be especially worried if the accommodation is NOT allowed?  
(Hint: YES!)



# For More Information...

## On the web:

- Accommodations Policy
- Participation Requirements
- Alternate Assessments

[www.doe.mass.edu/mcas](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas)

## Contact:

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