I AM

Indiana's Alternate Measure

Passage Specifications

English/Language Arts

07/2018
Purpose of the Passage Specifications Document

Passage Specifications are utilized in the writing and selection of passages associated with reading comprehension items on the English/Language Arts I AM. It is also provided to educators to evaluate passages during committee review. This document outlines elements of high quality passages, considerations for selecting passages (e.g., art and text features, bias and sensitivity), and text complexity expectations.

The Purpose of I AM Assessments in Grades 3–8 and 10

The purpose of an alternate assessment is to measure student achievement for all students with significant cognitive disabilities in the subject areas of English/Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for grades 3-8 and 10, Science for grades 4, 6 and 10, and Social Studies for grade 5 based on alternate academic achievement standards.

Because students with significant cognitive disabilities are a diverse population with a variety of needs, it was important to develop items across a broad range of abilities. Three levels of items were created, called "tiers".

- **Tier 1** - Tier 1 questions and answer choices include low structural level items with a range of item difficulty and complexity. Graphics are provided for most answer choices, along with text, which give students a visual support to answer the questions.
- **Tier 2** - Tier 2 questions and answer choices include medium structural level items with a range of item difficulty and complexity. They may include more introductory phrases in the questions and fewer graphics in the answer choices than in Tier 1. They also include a greater level of complexity in how students respond to the questions than in Tier 1.
- **Tier 3** - Tier 3 questions and answer choices include high structural level items with a range of item difficulty and complexity. There is more text and few to no graphics in the answer choices. There may be more abstract ideas and inferencing. There is more complexity in how students respond to the questions than in Tier 2.

Characteristics of Passages

The I AM passages meet the needs of the Content Connectors and the Indiana Academic Standards. Passages utilize original works across all grade levels while some grade levels may have one passage that has been published from another source. They are age-appropriate for students, free from bias, and stereotyping. They present a variety of topics of interest to both genders, as well as themes that are familiar to students. The passages bring a range of diversity to the assessment, reflecting the variety of interests and backgrounds that make up the I AM student population.
Elements of High Quality Passages

In order to select the highest quality passages for I AM, they should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Complex literary development and selection of word choice that hooks readers, even emerging or non-readers
- Nurturing cultural and socio-economic diversity
- Topics, themes, and imaginative elements common to grade level curriculum
- Underlying realities of human nature and life and authentic real-life contemporary experiences
- Figurative language that is appropriately placed within the passage
- Language accessible to students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds
- Multisensory details

Commissioned Passage Considerations

During the assessment experience, Indiana students should ascertain no difference between, passages from published sources and commissioned passages, which are original passages written specifically for I AM, in terms of authenticity and quality. In addition to adhering to all expectations for high quality, every commissioned passage must be an original work by the writer and include all referenced sources showing verification of facts and originality of the commissioned text. This applies to both literature and nonfiction passages.

Art and Text Feature Considerations

The purpose of art and text features in I AM passages is to engage students in the assessment task, supplement understanding of the passage, and/or provide complementary context relevant to the content. Passages may include art and/or text features such as illustrations, tables, charts, and maps. Text features such as maps, tables, and other graphic stimuli will have appropriate labels, legends, keys, and/or titles.

Universal Design

English/Language Arts passages for I AM adhere to the principles of Universal Design. Passages are accessible to the widest range of students, allowing all students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of tested content connectors.

Bias and Sensitivity Considerations

Passages must be relevant, interesting, and meaningful to students, clearly reflecting cultural diversity. They must accurately represent types of reading that students encounter in their classrooms and
everyday lives. Students should be able to understand passages without dependence on student-led or teacher-led discussions. Passages will be free of bias and sensitivity issues that may be upsetting or distracting to students or that may unfairly disadvantage any group of students. Passages will seek to highlight ethnicities specific to Indiana, people with different exceptionalities as well as males and females in non-traditional roles.

In general, any passage selected for I AM should avoid the following topics:

- alcohol, tobacco, or all drugs
- luxury amenities that may be unfamiliar to some children
- cancer and other diseases, death, or serious injuries
- catastrophes or near catastrophes
- evolution
- expensive gifts, birthdays, vacations, or prizes
- extreme emotions (grief, despair, terror, or crippling shame)
- bullying
- gambling
- politics, controversial issues, criticism of democracy or capitalism
- religion (includes all religious holidays)
- sex, sexuality, or sexual preference or orientation
- slavery
- stereotypes of ethnic groups, genders, age, geographical regions
- disrespect of authority
- violence, nuclear weapons, weapons, war, and bloodshed
- witchcraft, sorcery, the occult, superstition, Halloween, parapsychology
- unfavorable family and/or adult-child interactions
- adoption/foster-care
- law enforcement interactions
- cursing and bad language
- anything that can be interpreted as smug, moralistic, or preachy
- weight or height as related to body image

Consider the questions below to help avoid bias and sensitivity issues.

Does the passage contain —

- any reference or language that might cause a student to have an emotional reaction during the test administration and prevent the student from being able to accurately demonstrate knowledge and skills?
- any controversial, inflammatory, or insensitive context?
- language that is familiar to most students regardless of socioeconomic status, region, language proficiency, cultural background, or gender?
- apparent patronizing language, stereotypical art descriptions, or stereotypical actions/beliefs present?
- any content that would give students of a particular group, background, or region a distinct advantage or disadvantage?

Types of Literature and Nonfiction Passages on I AM

Literature topics include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Band</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>Common activities: school, friends, family, animal stories, folk tales and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Realistic fiction about school, friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–8</td>
<td>Realistic fiction about school, friends, and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Realistic fiction about school, friends, and family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonfiction topics include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Band</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>Animals, plants, fruits, vegetables, community, weather, simple how-to articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Animals, plants, how-to articles, weather, conservation, Indiana, health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–8</td>
<td>Inventions, space, historical figures, recycling, conservation, persuasive topics, animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music, historical events, persuasive topics, conservation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text Complexity

Text complexity plays a strong role in evaluating student readiness for both the college and career environments. Typically, three constructs are utilized to determine text complexity: quantitative measures, qualitative measures, and the reader and task considerations. Quantitative measures include word frequency and sentences length, and typically utilize computer software to determine these.
measurements. Qualitative measures include the level of meaning and the knowledge demands of the reader, and evaluating the text characteristics to determine whether they are developmentally appropriate for the intended reader. Reader and task considerations include personal interests of the student. As text complexity has risen over the years in the college and career environment, it is worthy of consideration when selecting passages for standardized assessments reflecting the expectations of our standards and content connectors.

Passages selected for I AM will be evaluated quantitatively for content and vocabulary, using:

- Lexile Framework
- ATOS
- Flesch-Kincaid
- EDL Vocabularies

The *Lexile Framework for Reading* has been developed by MetaMetrics, Inc. and employs a scientific formula to calculate the Lexile level of a text based on the semantic and syntactic elements of a text.

The ATOS takes into account the most important predictors of text complexity—average sentence length, average word length, and word difficulty level. The results are provided in a grade-level scale.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level measures sentence length by the average number of words in a sentence and word length by the average number of syllables in a word to provide a U.S. grade level of education that an average student would require to be able to understand the text.

The EDL Core Vocabularies is used for all grades to determine the readability of vocabulary words. The EDL is composed of words introduced in reading instruction and found on frequency lists. This resource is used to determine the grade level when selecting vocabulary to assess.

Recommended readability ranges for each I AM grade are shown in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I AM Grade(s)</th>
<th>Lexile</th>
<th>Flesch-Kincaid</th>
<th>ATOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>300-740</td>
<td>1.5-2.0</td>
<td>1.5-2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>300-820</td>
<td>1.5-5.7</td>
<td>2.0-4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>300-925</td>
<td>2.0-6.5</td>
<td>2.5-6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>400-1050</td>
<td>2.3-7.0</td>
<td>2.8-6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Count**

Passages of varying lengths should be included in Literature and Nonfiction developed for I AM. Passage length should be commensurate with the number of associated items. Passages will host between 2-4 items on a test. Passages chosen for I AM will not exceed the following word count.
Each I AM passage will also be evaluated qualitatively. The complexity of the passages is reduced through the three tiers, from most to least complex (Tier 3 being the most complex and Tier 1 being the least complex). It is assumed that students have experience with text in their grade spans or those of earlier grade spans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Passage topic is grade and age appropriate</td>
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<td>• Passage topic is grade and age appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sentences are short and use primarily simple structure, with concrete language and clearly connected pronouns</td>
<td>• Sentences may include compound subjects and predicates and introductory phrases</td>
<td>• Sentences may be a mix of simple and compound structures, as well as some complex constructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Passage is comprised of high frequency, commonly used vocabulary</td>
<td>• Passage is comprised of mostly high frequency, commonly used vocabulary and some basic subject-specific vocabulary</td>
<td>• Passage includes some common expressions, controlled vocabulary, and some subject-specific language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Topic is directly stated and supported with concrete details</td>
<td>• Topic may be directly stated or require simple inferences</td>
<td>• Topic may include more inferential concepts and themes with multiple characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dialogue is either not used or limited, with no more than one or two people speaking in brief interactions</td>
<td>• Dialogue is limited, with two people speaking in brief interactions</td>
<td>• Dialogue may include two or more people speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Illustrations are used to support the concepts in the passage</td>
<td>• Illustrations are sometimes used to support the concepts in the passage</td>
<td>• Illustrations are sometimes used to support the concepts in the passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Text features have simple information with limited detail</td>
<td>• Text features have information with few details</td>
<td>• Text features have information with complex ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Figurative language, if assessed, is simple</td>
<td>• Figurative language, if assessed, is simple</td>
<td>• Figurative language, if assessed, is simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessed vocabulary is two or more grades below the assessed grade</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visual Supports (illustrations, graphics, etc.) serve three functions in all tiers:

- to focus student attention
- to introduce visual support to be used in the response options
- to provide information to connect to the passage to assist in answering the question

For students with visual impairments, alternate text is available to describe the graphics or illustrations.

Reviewers evaluate both Literature and Nonfiction selected for I AM based on the following four questions:

How familiar is the topic/scenario for most students?

How clear is the theme or main/central idea?

What are the language features of the text?

How are illustrations/graphics (if included) used?