

## STILL IN THE WORKS



The computer-based tests created by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers will have built-in accessibility features. But a number of them will be unavailable when the tests are field-tested in spring 2014. They include:

- Notepad
- Compass
- Graphic organizer tool
- Pencil tool
- Highlight tool
- American Sign Language video of human interpreter
- Closed captioning
- Descriptive video
- General masking
- Refreshable Braille displays
- Word prediction

SOURCE: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

guage arts portion of the test. Students using the read-aloud accommodation on PARCC's tests will have notations on their score reports indicating that no claims can be made about their ability to demonstrate foundational print skills such as decoding and fluency. The read-aloud accommodation is currently prohibited for students in grades 3-5 using Smarter Balanced tests.

# PARCC Field Tests to Lack Some Accommodations

has said that states must offer their current tests to students with disabilities instead of the common-core field tests if those students use accommodations or technology not yet compatible with the new assessments.

The built-in accommodation technology of both PARCC and Smarter Balanced expands test access beyond what is now available for students in some states. For example, accessibility features such as repeating instructions and magnifying text are among the supports available to any student, even those who are not formally identified as students in special education. Both of those accommodations will be ready for field-testing by both consortia in the spring.

### Expanded Access

Other accessibility features that will be ready for the field tests include pop-up glossaries, which have been of particular interest to advocates for English-language learners, and built-in calculators.

PARCC tests operating on computers using Windows and Apple operating systems will also be able to handle the text-to-speech accommodation built into the tests during field testing. That accommodation has been one of the more controversial parts of the accessibility framework, because it will allow text passages to be read to students taking the English/Lan-

under the rug will only delay dealing with a serious issue for students with disabilities in the move to PARCC/SEAC while ensuring that the field tests will not include an adequately representative sample of students with disabilities."

### Developing 'Workarounds'

Accommodations is just one of many issues states conducting field tests are grappling with, said Dan Wiener, the administrator of inclusive assessment at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the chairman of PARCC's accessibility and accommodations working group. He is directing schools to note a student's accommodation needs, and if there isn't one available, "we will figure out a workaround."

Trinell Bowman, the PARCC "state lead" for accessibility and accommodations, said the group would be providing more information within the next four to six weeks.

In addition to built-in technology, the two consortia are developing a certification process for students who use assistive technology to access academic material. Even the built-in accommodations may not meet those students' needs. Consortium representatives have said they are balancing access with a need to maintain test security.

The U.S. Department of Education

test developers are still in the process of evaluating Chrome and plan a future update.

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia are members of PARCC. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which is made up of 25 states, plans to have its built-in accommodations ready for its own field tests, said a representative from that consortium. Smarter Balanced also plans its field tests for spring 2014.

Such accommodations are intended to enable students with disabilities and English-language learners to take part in assessments tied to the Common Core State Standards. The two consortia are the main groups creating tests for the common core, which covers English/language arts and mathematics and has been adopted by all but four states.

### Potential Problems

Not having all the accommodations ready for students to try them out could lead to problems when the tests launch formally for the 2014-15 school year, said Candace Cortella, the director of the Advocacy Institute in Marshall, Va., in an email message to *Education Week*.

"A conflict in accommodations is a sure-fire way for schools to exclude a whole bunch of students with disabilities," she said. "Why not confront those issues during the field testing? Sweeping them

## Features would aid special populations

By Christina A. Samuels

Some built-in student accommodations planned for the common-core tests under development by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers will not be available during spring 2014 field tests. That means one less chance for developers to head off problems before the online tests officially launch in the 2014-15 school year, some analysts and advocates warn.

The accommodations still under development include a notepad tool for students; word-prediction software, which PARCC describes as a "bank of frequently or recently used words onscreen as a result of the student entering the first few letters of a word," and general masking, which allows students to create a customized mask to cover portions of the test items, if needed to eliminate distraction.

Many accessibility features will also not be ready for computers that are using the Chrome operating system, created by Google and launched in 2009. In a document outlining the technology requirements schools must have to administer the test, PARCC says that the