

Panelists' Responses

Student 1

Student 1 needs a quiet environment to focus when taking high stakes assessments. This student also needs to use audio notetakers in class to avoid missing any of the class lecture by trying to listen to the professor and take notes at the same time. Barriers to digital materials include a lack of highlighting features and the ability to cross off answer choices. The student uses Snap and Read to highlight and organize thoughts. This student prefers to use paper for high stakes assessments and have the ability to mark through answers and write in the test booklet to help support focus.

1. Please describe your digital access needs.

- a. [Sonocent Audio Notetaker](#)
- b. [Snap and Read](#)
- c. Internet connection
- d. Computer for exam

2. What do you have to do when your access needs are not met?

- a. I was not able to use Sonocent during eLearning as I had to use my computer to listen to lectures which prohibited me from using my audio notetaker at the same time. I then asked my professors to send me the recorded zoom meeting so I was able to go back and listen to my lectures.
- b. Reach out to my professors explaining what I needed and reiterate what my accommodation needs were

3. Please describe a time when your grades were affected because your access needs were not met.

As I only had eLearning for 2 weeks, I did not notice an impact in my grades.

4. Please describe a time when your access needs were not met for a high stakes assessment. What impact did that have on your assessment results and did that impact your ability to pursue an academic or vocational goal?

- a. My sophomore year I had to take a standardized test in a room with 50 other students and was not allocated my accommodation of a separate testing space. The solution was to wear headphones unplugged to help eliminate background noise. The headphones did not help eliminate the noise. It made it more distracting. I found myself more distracted by students getting up who finished than the actual assessment in front of me. The impact on my assessment results, performing very low.
- b. This motivated me to learn how to self-advocate. I knew I needed a separate testing room in order for me to concentrate, not get distracted and to perform to my best ability. In this situation, I took no as a solution and did what my professor said was allowed. I learned that I would fight for what I know I need. After this situation, I always focused on myself and didn't take no for an answer.

5. How have your access needs been met during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a. Talking with my professors on adding accommodations like wearing headphones with white noise to help provide a quiet environment.
- b. Coming up with new ways to implement my accommodations.

6. Please describe the importance of self-advocacy in getting the support you need in school. If possible, please share a personal story about a time when you were successful as a self-advocate and talk a little bit about why self-advocacy can sometimes be difficult.

- a. Self-advocacy to get the support you need is important because you know yourself the best and what YOU need to be successful. No one else knows what accommodations or learning methods are helpful for you unless you advocate what you need to be successful.
- b. A time I had to be a self-advocate was when I had to take a standardized nursing test called ATI. I got my accommodations for extra time, but my professor said I could not get my accommodation in a separate room, that I could only use ear plugs to help cancel out the noise. So, I took the exam in a big room with other students present, multiple distractions, and I couldn't read out loud. I ended up doing awful on the test. After this situation occurred I realized I need to advocate for what I need to be successful and for this situation not to happen on the next exam. So, then I advocated for myself by explaining to my professor that according to my accommodations I needed a separate testing room to eliminate distractions and allow me to read out loud. I was still told I couldn't have a separate room, so I went to the accommodation office and told them my situation and they provided me a separate room for every ATI exam after that situation.
- c. Another time I was a self-advocate was when my professor said that every class there will be questions and I will randomly pull a student's name to read the question and answer the question in front of the entire class. When I heard this I immediately got anxiety because I struggle at reading and vocabulary and I would now have to read it in front of 80 of my classmates. After my professor announced that, I immediately went to her office and told her my accommodations and my anxiety towards reading out loud in class. She then worked with me to come up with a plan. The plan we made was that she would provide me with the question I would be asked prior to the class, so I was able to prepare, know I could read the question, and have the answer to decrease my anxiety of reading the question wrong. After advocating for myself my anxiety decreased.
- d. Self-advocacy is VERY difficult and I didn't know how to be an advocate for myself until my sophomore year of college. In this situation it was difficult because I didn't know that my accommodation would allow. I know during standardized tests they are very strict with accommodations, so at first I didn't even think it was an option. After this situation I learned that any one of my accommodations can be an option. All I need to do is advocate for them. I also found it difficult to self-advocate when being around my peers. Until my sophomore year of college, I was embarrassed of my disability. I didn't want anyone to know that I had one. If a problem ever happened and the only way to

bring it to my professors' or teachers' attention was to talk to them while my other peers were around, I wouldn't ask for what I needed.

- 7. Please describe how your access needs vary across subject areas. How does access to math and science differ from access to other subjects and do you use different tools for different subjects? Do you have suggestions or recommendations for how students can get the support they need for subject areas that have complex access needs?**

Being a college student, I didn't have different subjects that I had to use different tools for. I did find a tool that really assisted me during lectures that allowed me to focus on the content, not worrying if I wrote all the material down

- 8. What would you like for educators to know about meeting the needs of people with special access needs in remote learning or assessment situations?**
 - This is a big learning curve with students with accommodations as they may have to learn new techniques and try different things out to figure out how to best accommodate themselves. I wish an educator would have asked me "What do you need to be successful", "If you could have any accommodations, what would they be and how would those help you?" I used to be afraid to ask for accommodations thinking, "oh they won't let me have that accommodation," or I wouldn't know if that accommodation would help me or not. Being able to trial different accommodations made me learn about what I needed to be successful.
 - Giving the option to provide assessments in a paper copy. I struggled with online assessments because I like crossing off answers, highlighting and circling. If paper can't be provided, allowing these features on the online assessment. In college I had to switch from paper to online format and with these accommodations and features, I was able to be successful.
 - Finally, some students need that support and guidance, as I had my mom as a huge advocate and supporter, yet I have had friends who struggled in school and did not know how to use their accommodation because they didn't have that advocate or support. Having educators with tools that are accessible to students to try out to see if that will help them will help accommodate students' needs. A lot of times, students don't know there is a tool that could help them, so having that guidance will give them the support they need.

Student 2

Student 2 totally blind and cannot read print materials. In order to access print materials, this student uses electronic or braille copies of the materials and uses a combination of assistive technologies to read and complete coursework. These assistive technologies include a Braille Sense refreshable braille notetaker, a Macintosh computer with VoiceOver screen reader and a phone with screen reader feedback that is accessible through gesture commands.

- 1. Please describe your digital access needs.**

I primarily use a screen reader, meaning any Materials I receive need to be compatible in order for me to access them.

- 2. What do you have to do when your access needs are not met?**

When my access needs are not met in an academic setting, I have to contact the instructor or disability services on my campus to get the materials converted to a format that is accessible.

3. Please describe a time when your grades were affected because your access needs were not met.

Most recently, my Spanish final was proctored online, and the platform was inaccessible. I completed the work to the best of my ability, however my score was much lower than it would have been had the materials been accessible.

4. Please describe a time when your access needs were not met for a high stakes assessment. What impact did that have on your assessment results and did that impact your ability to pursue an academic or vocational goal?

The math placement exam for my college was inaccessible. My campus offered to let me take it in person, in a hard braille format. It was only when I arrived to take the exam that they realized their brailier was not working, which resulted in my taking the exam entirely without scrap paper, or a way to write my answers myself. The score was much lower than my math abilities as a result, and I ended up unable to take a math course my first year of college.

5. How have your access needs been met during the COVID-19 pandemic?

During the pandemic, my professors were very helpful in that they listened to my concerns. The disability services office also worked hard to ensure that any assignments or quizzes that were now proctored online would be accessible. This worked to varying degrees, however I was very fortunate in that I had few problems.

6. Please describe the importance of self-advocacy in getting the support you need in school. If possible, please share a personal story about a time when you were successful as a self-advocate and talk a little bit about why self-advocacy can sometimes be difficult.

Self-advocacy is important because no one knows better what the student needs, access-wise than the student. Recently, while completing online homework, I encountered a bug in the canvas app. I reported this bug to my professor and explained how it posed a barrier to my completing homework, and I asked to receive a digital copy instead. My professor contacted the assistive technology center on campus explaining the issues I had described, and rather than listen to my concerns about the application, the department called into question my technology proficiency – despite my having over 10 years of experience using technology. Furthermore, they went on to suggest to my professor that I needed more training, thus invalidating my concerns about the application being inaccessible. It took a week of emailing back-and-forth with my professor and this department, as well as an in-depth description of my exact problem and a screen recording before I was taken seriously. My homework was then converted into a word file, and I finished the semester strong. Self-advocacy can be extremely difficult, especially within the education system. This is because students are socialized to be the ones being taught, and when the rules need to be reversed in the case of an access need, students may struggle to educate and advocate for what they need.

7. Please describe how your access needs vary across subject areas. How does access to math and science differ from access to other subjects and do you use different tools for different subjects? Do you have suggestions or

recommendations for how students can get the support they need for subject areas that have complex access needs?

My access needs vary in different subjects because some subjects require more sight-related information. For instance, I need models and graphics for math and science to be in a hard copy braille file. This is because my technology does not have the capability to display these images. In order to make sure a student has what they need in each subject, professors and other administrators should listen to the student as well as think ahead to predict any issues before they arise.

8. What would you like for educators to know about meeting the needs of people with special access needs in remote learning or assessment situations?

I would like educators to know that when we ask for accommodations in regards to access needs, we are simply trying to access the materials. This is not giving us an advantage over other students – it's only evening the playing field. In addition, we know what works best for us, and generally it saves a lot of time and work if we are asked for our perspective on how to make an inaccessible material accessible.

Student 3

Student 3 reads braille and therefore cannot use normal print. This student is able to read electronic print using screen reading software on a computer or on an iPhone with VoiceOver.

1. Please describe your digital access needs.

My digital access needs are for books, either in braille or audio formats. These help me in studying for school or just reading for pleasure. Having accessible books and other materials allow me to have a full life and a rewarding school career. I currently attend West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. My digital needs have so far been met successfully as I am attending classes online. To me, digital needs are very different for me than for others because I can know when I need anything accessible. Online accessibility is difficult because websites do not always have accessibility features that work with my screen reader.

2. What do you have to do when your access needs are not met?

If my digital access needs are not met, I have to become my own advocate. I cannot always rely on someone to be there to advocate for me. I also would have to go talk to whoever was not giving me the digital access I need. Self-advocacy is important because sometimes you are the only one you can rely on. I feel that advocacy in digital access is good for all companies to keep in mind because there are a lot of different kinds of digital access needs.

3. Please describe a time when your grades were affected because your access needs were not met.

In the spring 2019, I was taking an online elective class on economics where we had to use a separate system for worksheets and homework. This system was very inaccessible. I worked with the Office for Students with Disabilities and the professor. I could use the system but only if the information was straight text. If images were involved, I could not access the information I needed. Because of this, I failed the class and I had to retake the class. I took it that time without the online homework system.

- 4. Please describe a time when your access needs were not met for a high stakes assessment. What impact did that have on your assessment results and did that impact your ability to pursue an academic or vocational goal?**

In Fall 2019, I was taking a final exam for one of my classes when the system crashed in the middle of my exam. I had to get access from my professor to allow me to retake the final. Once I had the opportunity to finish the exam, I completed it and finished the semester. This problem did not hinder me from completing the exam on the second try and I am still working on my degree in Business.

- 5. How have your access needs been met during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

During the Covid-19 pandemic my access needs have still been met because since all of my classes are online and I can email the professor or the OSD (Office for Students with Disabilities). Any questions I have had have been answered promptly even though everyone has been at home. I have been happy with the service during the pandemic.

- 6. Please describe the importance of self-advocacy in getting the support you need in school. If possible, please share a personal story about a time when you were successful as a self-advocate and talk a little bit about why self-advocacy can sometimes be difficult.**

I was in my second year of college and trying to take an English class my first week. I had someone with me, but I was the one mostly explaining what I was going to need to be able to successfully pass the class. I was able to carefully get across what I was needing so that I could take this class. Self-advocacy can sometimes be difficult for a couple of reasons. First, for me, my speech problems can sometimes make self-advocacy more difficult. Second, self-advocacy can be hard when you have to deal with an instructor who is being difficult. Getting information across with either of these issues can be very difficult, but I have been able to get past these issues. If you have a speech problem, take everything slow and do not get nervous or too angry. These emotions will just make the problem worse. Self-advocacy is very important for getting support in school because quite often you are the only voice you have when talking to professors or other faculty about questions or concerns. Topics can range from something about a professor or member of staff, to questions or concerns about the school or college you are attending.

- 7. Please describe how your access needs vary across subject areas. How does access to math and science differ from access to other subjects and do you use different tools for different subjects? Do you have suggestions or recommendations for how students can get the support they need for subject areas that have complex access needs?**

For me, access needs differ a lot across subject areas. In college, I use a tutor in both math and science because they are two very visual classes. As a person who is blind and has Cerebral Palsy, having access to math and science materials is easier with a tutor's help. Most of the time, other subjects are ok for me because it is easier to hear what is said and take notes. I use the same tools for all subjects except math. The only suggestions I have for students in college is to get help from either a tutor or the Office for Students with Disabilities. If the student is in high school or below, they need to get help from a teacher or a technology specialist.

- 8. What would you like for educators to know about meeting the needs of people with special access needs in remote learning or assessment situations?**

I think that educators should know that all students are different, and every disability is different. But as a general rule of thumb all testing platforms used in education should be able to be used by all. Text or checkboxes should be the norm, not the exception. If images are needed, they need to have text somewhere explaining the image.

Student 4

This student finds all printed text to be a barrier to learning - whether in hard copy or electronic format. The student also has a lot of difficulty with spelling. The student uses:

- Learning Ally to access audiobooks
- Snap and Read Universal chrome extension and app for electronic text and when reading handouts
- A Scanning Pen for short amounts of printed text
- Speech to text to "write"
- Co:Writer Universal and built-in spell check for editing
- Speech-to-text is a necessity for communication with others via text

1. Please describe your digital access needs.

I use speech to text for writing and looking things up. At home I started using snap and read app to read and write on worksheets. I also use Snap and Read to help me read on the computer or on my iPad. I am obsessed with learning ally for reading books.

2. What do you have to do when your access needs are not met?

First, I wanna punch somebody because I'm mad. 😞 I need a lot of help from an adult. If I cannot use technology to help read and write then an adult has to do it for me.

3. Please describe a time when your grades were affected because your access needs were not met.

I don't Even know how to describe it because it was all of last year at least while we were at school. My teachers don't always seem to know what the technology is and how it helps me.

4. Please describe a time when your access needs were not met for a high stakes assessment. What impact did that have on your assessment results and did that impact your ability to pursue an academic or vocational goal?

I am not old enough for all of that yet but because I did not get support (either technology to read or an adult to read for me) for my math district assessment my grades were bad. But I'm really good at math. When we realized what the problem was we fixed it before our state test. My accommodations were changed to allow math to be read to me and I did much better.

5. How have your access needs been met during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a. At home I use my own laptop, iPad and phone. I use more helpful things at home because my mom actually knows how use the technology. At school I only used technology for major writing grades or to listen to books on learning ally. I would say I'm lucky because my mom knows and everyone's mom doesn't know how it all works.
- b. I have a caring heart and don't want my (former) school to look bad or get anyone in trouble, but they definitely did not meet my needs. I don't know what I

would have done if I didn't have my own technology and my own mom to help me.

- 6. Please describe the importance of self-advocacy in getting the support you need in school. If possible, please share a personal story about a time when you were successful as a self-advocate and talk a little bit about why self-advocacy can sometimes be difficult.**

If you're shy, it is really difficult. It (self-advocacy) is the most difficult of all things besides reading. It is important to tell teachers what you need because everybody is different. I know what works for me and they know what works for them.

- 7. Please describe how your access needs vary across subject areas. How does access to math and science differ from access to other subjects and do you use different tools for different subjects? Do you have suggestions or recommendations for how students can get the support they need for subject areas that have complex access needs?**

At school, I use the teacher to help with questions and reading the words to me in math and science. In reading and writing I definitely used the teacher too but also some technology. Any paper activities in math and science are boring but when I get to do an experiment or interact with it, it's more fun and I understand it better. Wherever I can touch stuff to move it around it makes me understand better. Reading and writing sucks any way I do it. Students should figure out what works best for them and then tell the teachers what they need and how they need to be taught. Also get your parent to do it because teachers don't always pay attention to what kids say.

- 8. What would you like for educators to know about meeting the needs of people with special access needs in remote learning or assessment situations?**

Pay attention for what the student asks for and do it for more than "just that one time". Hearing other students say "The only way you get good grades is because the teacher reads it to you" doesn't feel good. I would like to be able to do more on my own, but if I use technology they (kids) would say even more that I cheated. School is really stressful for me. When COVID hit, I was actually relieved to not have to go to school.

Parent Participant

This parent is an Occupational Therapist who works with assistive technology as a part of her job.

- 1. Who is providing your child's technology?**

We as a family have provided the hardware-her laptop, iPad and iPhone. Our school district has provided Co:Writer Universal and Snap and Read Universal extensions and apps to all students in the district. When my daughter was at school, she used her personal iPhone for Learning Ally and the classroom desktop computer infrequently for major writing. Learning Ally is provided for students with print disabilities by Texas Education Agency.

- 2. If the school is providing the tech, are you in a 1:1 district or provided through IEP?**

See above; the apps/extensions are provided by the district but we have provided the hardware.

3. Do you feel the technology and support has been adequate?

Not really. As my daughter said she feels “lucky” because AT is what I do. Despite our best efforts, teachers are still a large implementation obstacle. Oftentimes teachers are “scared” of the technology or feel that it offers student’s an unfair advantage and do not provide the opportunity or encouragement to use the tools. The reliability of devices at school also led us to provide our daughter with her own laptop/iPad/iPhone so she would always have something available that would be charged and ready to use. Parent technology support could have been significantly improved when we were all thrust into virtual learning in the spring.

4. How could support be improved?

Ideally, we would become a district with 1:1 technology, and not just with the same device for everyone, but give some flexibility in what each student needs and prefers. The expectation and accountability for teachers to not just receive the list of accommodations but actually become educated on the specific tools student’s require and then expected to implement with fidelity.

5. How does your child’s use of technology influence their independence and the assistance you or another adult provides?

Having not been really expected nor supported to use technology at school, Olivia was pretty resistant to using it at home when I became the teacher last spring. With some consistency and expecting her to use the tools she recognized that they are simple and helpful for her; giving her the ability to complete more of her schoolwork without as much “mommy help”. Since it’s looking more and more like virtual instruction will continue into this next school year, technology will be even more critical to student’s independent work habits to allow parents to do what they need to do as well.

6. Have you experienced resistance from school staff regarding your child’s use of technology and if so, please describe?

Yes, we’ve experienced resistance. Not so much for text-to-speech support as it has been for writing supports. Even as a professional, I had an administrator tell me for my own child that she could not have a goal for spelling and also an accommodation for spelling support. We were also told that while speech-to-text (dictation) is most successful for her for writing, that it was too disruptive and there was no good “place” for her to do it. We’ve also experienced the flipside of this too-where because of accommodation of text-to-speech my daughter is able to do much better and make good grades. As a result, the school doesn’t see the need for instruction-just use the tech. The lack of knowledge is vast and our kiddos are paying the price.