- [Alex] Hi, my name is Alex Harris, and I'm the State Director for Adult Education at the Department of Education, and I would like to share a little bit, as core partners in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, our responsibilities and opportunity to serve all eligible participants including those with disabilities.

In today's presentation, I'll go through a little bit of the background and talk a bit about the provider responsibilities and the student responsibilities and discuss the accommodations that are available to participants in adult education. It should be noted that all of Iowa's adult education and literacy providers receive public funds through state and federal sources. As a result of that, they are responsible to ensure that all of their services, their programs, and their physical capabilities are aligned with ADA section 504 and section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

All providers must ensure that their program services are accessible and that includes physical accessibility. And this will look different based on the services offered and the locations in which they're administered. All programs have responsibilities to ensure that their programs are open to all individuals regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, and disabilities, as cited in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. This information must also be on all the brochures and fliers, as well as being publicly posted in a central location at each program site.

Our providers also ensure that otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities are not excluded, taking into account the needs of such persons in determining the services to be provided. Our programs work diligently to ensure that all program services are accessible and barrier-free. This may be accomplished in a number of different ways, by redesigning equipment, reassigning classes, ensuring that pathways to programs and classes are fully accessible, or providing equitable services at alternate accessible sites.

Our programs also ensure that notification is given to both students and staff regarding grievance procedures for civil rights and any sexual harassment complaints. Written documentation that students and staff have been informed of the grievance procedure is maintained.

Our goal for adult education and services in Iowa is to provide a free and appropriate education for each student who is disabled, regardless of the nature and severity of the disabilities. While there might be some program costs, those cost are kept to a minimum because of the funding that we do receive from the state and federal sources.

There are several stages of services that are offered by adult education, and the first such service is the intake and orientation procedure. This procedure is maintained to ensure non-discrimination and bias for participants, making sure that access to the forms, information about the programs, and how to access services is available and freely offered to all.

It's important to note that all academic information obtained while a student, either disabled or not disabled, is maintained confidentially and is not shared with any other provider or services unless there is a signed release of information on file for that participant. This information is stored in a secure location with limited access to only those individuals that need that information to be able to better serve the participants in the program.

Part of the services that adult education provides includes assessments. These assessments help to determine the services a participant needs. They help to be able to measure gains and educational functions for the student, both in math, reading, listening, writing. These assessments need to be administered in the best possible way for the student to achieve an accurate score. Therefore, assessment accommodations are available. Depending upon the vendor that is used for the assessments, a range of services, both for paper-based and computer-based assessments, will be available to any applicant upon their request.

In order to provide the best possible services, our adult education providers should identify individual differences through appropriate screenings and through those assessments, then bind and implement the appropriate adaptations, accommodations, and instructional strategies to help the participants progress. Only if a provider is selective in their screening process will a specific consent form for each participant need to be completed before legally proceeding. Those consent forms are also kept confidential.

Screening is intended to make sure that the best instructional strategies are being utilized for each participant that is being served. As in all education programs, instruction should be designed to meet the student's individual needs, be based on the student's strengths, and be flexible. Towards that end, our programs are dedicated to ensuring that their services are universally designed, that services for individuals with or without disability will be successful in acquiring the skills that they've come to an adult education program to learn. Towards that end, our adult education providers and the Department of Education is dedicated to ensure that staff development opportunities are provided and recommended for instructors to help build their teacher effectiveness.

Likewise, there are certain responsibilities that a student has when coming into an adult education program. Most importantly, that is to voice and to articulate their request and need for an academic accommodation. It's important to be able to be up front and to share your need so that you're receiving the best possible services. In addition, providing documentation, current documentation of that disability and the need for academic accommodation helps to ensure that those accommodations can be met, that those accommodations are reasonable, and that those accommodations will be made available. Some information on documentation. Must be prepared by an appropriate professional stating the current disability and how that diagnosis was reached. We're also looking for how that disability might affect your major life activities and most especially affect academic performance. The documentation can also include recommendations regarding appropriate accommodations.

Each local adult education provider can assist a participant with collecting that documentation, with reviewing that documentation, and ensuring that each of these elements has been included in that documentation. It's important to note that if a student does self-disclose but cannot provide the requested documentation, accommodations will be made in good faith in order for the student to benefit from the educational experience. The adult education providers are there to help serve. And in order to do that, they are looking for the accommodations that will offer effective, reasonable opportunities for those students to perform at their best level.

Some of these accommodations will come from the student themselves as they review the needs and reflect upon the services and work that's being expected for that educational program. There will be opportunities to assess the effectiveness of each accommodation. And most importantly, they're looking for the appropriateness of that accommodation. The accommodation is not intended to help perform above and beyond, but it is to make sure that you are able to access all the range of services and that you're able to demonstrate your mastery of the subject.

Some questions that can be asked in the process of identifying accommodations would be will a reasonable adjustment or modification provide an opportunity for a person with a disability to achieve the same level of performance and to enjoy benefits equal to those of an average, similarly situated person without a disability? As those questions are reviewed for the various educational opportunities that are being pursued, the best type of accommodation will be adapted to ensure that equal rights are available to all participants in the adult education program.

This has been a very high-level look at the services that adult education and literacy programs provide in the state of Iowa. This has also been a very brief overview of the requirements and opportunities that adult education has to serve all participants within our programs. It's important to note that individuals are our primary point of service, and as such, we'll make sure that access to our programs and access to an equal opportunity to learn is made available to all. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me at the Department of Education. Thank you.