



Terms Related to Statewide Assessment

Terms Minnesota parents of students receiving special education services need to know

As a parent of a child receiving special education services, you know that you and the others on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team annually make decisions about new goals and objectives for your child. The team must also make decisions about your child's participation in regular education, as well as participation in state and district-wide assessments. All students in public schools must have access to instruction linked to state academic content standards and must be included in state accountability assessments. This handout will help parents understand terminology used by professionals at the IEP meeting. It is a good idea to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand. (Underlined terms are terms used in **both** regular education and special education.)

Academic achievement standards: level of proficiency (or ability) students demonstrate about what they know and are able to do in the areas of reading, math and science. In Minnesota, most students take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) to see if the school is helping students become proficient on the state academic content standards in these areas. There are four levels of proficiency: exceeds standards, meets standards, partially meets standards and does not meet standards.

Academic content standards: grade-level expectations for all students. They are statements adopted by the state that describe what all students in a particular grade are expected to know and be able to do by the end of the grade. Minnesota standards are set for language arts (including reading), math, science, social studies and English language proficiency. These are sometimes called "grade-level content standards."

Access: when the student has instruction on grade-level academic content standards and active involvement in the subjects and skills of the general education curriculum in whatever setting(s) the student receives instruction. For a student who will be assessed using alternate achievement standards, access means instruction linked to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate for the student.

Accommodations: a change in classwork or testing conditions to help students with disabilities have access to learning and be able to demonstrate their knowledge without lowering or changing the standard or level of the classwork or of a test. Accommodations reduce or eliminate the effect of the disability. Examples include extended time for project completion, various types of assistive technology, and preferential seating.

Accountability assessments: tests to measure how well students, as a group, are meeting the state academic content standards. They also measure how well individual schools and school districts are delivering instruction to all students.

Alternate achievement standards: grade-level academic content standards that are less complex or modified in other ways to show developing skills and knowledge in the areas of reading and math. In Minnesota the alternative assessment, Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS), is available for students with cognitive functioning significantly below age expectations.

Assistive technology device: any item, piece of equipment or product system that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability. Examples include devices ranging from pencil grips to laptop computers.

Gap analysis: a process that compares a student's current level of performance with grade-level standards in reading and math for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

General education curriculum: the curriculum that the school uses to teach students in the school district. This includes lessons, materials and activities routinely used by the general population of students in the school and aligned with state grade-level academic content standards. The curriculum used in your child's classroom prepares your child to meet the standards.

Least restrictive environment (LRE): an educational setting that provides an appropriate program, including any necessary special supports, in as typical a school environment as possible based on the needs of the student with a disability. The assumption is that students with disabilities will have full participation with non-disabled students in the regular classrooms and other activities, unless the IEP team determines this is not appropriate based on the needs of the student.

Modification: a change in classwork or testing conditions that lowers or changes the level of difficulty or focus of classwork or of a test. The expectation is modified or changed.

Modified achievement standards: are standards with the same grade-level content in reading and math, but with a level of skill or expected achievement that is modified or lowered from the regular academic achievement standards. The modified achievement standard assessment, Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment–Modified (MCA-Modified), is an option that IEP teams may consider for students.

Persistent low performance: this occurs when a student performs at the lowest achievement levels on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment in one or more content areas for the last two years.

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP): a statement that describes the level at which a student is working academically and functionally. The statement also explains how the student's disability affects participation in the general education curriculum.

Progress monitoring: a process used to determine whether the instructional strategies and accommodations are working as intended. Typically it involves administering short tests (1-5 minutes) one or more times a week. When progress monitoring shows that a student is not making expected progress, instructional changes are needed.

Progress report: reports the progress on each IEP goal (and sometimes objectives) to parents. The method and frequency of this reporting is documented on the student's IEP.

State assessments: tests that measure student achievement against Minnesota academic content standards, measure proficiency of Minnesota public school graduates, and measure student progress over time.

Standard: level of proficiency, skill or achievement.

Standards-based IEP: an IEP in which the IEP team has included grade-level academic content standards in the development of at least one IEP goal in reading and/or math.

Supplementary aids and services: any aids, services or other supports that are provided in regular education classes or other education-related settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled students to the maximum extent appropriate. Examples include paraprofessional services, large print textbooks, a sign language interpreter and extra time to complete a project.