

What Parents Need to Know About Accommodations for Statewide Assessments

All students in Minnesota, including students with disabilities, are required to participate in state and district-wide assessment. Decisions regarding your child's participation in these tests require discussion at your child's annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting.

A very few students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may take an alternate assessment. Most students, however, will participate in the regular assessments, either with or without accommodations. The information in this handout applies to students who will be taking the MCA II's (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II) for school accountability and either the BST's (applies to those students who entered grade 8 in 2004-05 or earlier) or the GRAD (Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma) to meet diploma requirements. Special education students who are also Limited English Proficient (LEP) will participate in the LEP State Assessments for Accountability.

Many students with disabilities need accommodations to accurately show what they know and can do. The IEP team, including the parent, decides what accommodations a child needs. Whenever possible and appropriate, the student should also be included.

In order to make well-informed decisions about accommodations for testing, it is important for parents to know the following information:

When does the IEP team need to address the need for state or district-wide testing accommodations?

For each grade in which the student will be participating in state and/or district assessments, the IEP team must discuss and document decisions regarding the student's participation and appropriate accommodations.

What is an accommodation for testing?

An accommodation is a change in the testing conditions to help students demonstrate their knowledge without lowering or changing the standard or level of the test. Accommodations "level the playing field" by reducing or eliminating the effect of the disability.

Adjustments may be made in the way the information is presented; the way the student responds; the setting in which the test is taken; or in the timing and scheduling of the test. For example, a student with a fine motor impairment might need a note taker to write their answers. A student with attention difficulties may need to have the test broken into segments. The test is the same, only the conditions under which it is taken are different.

What is a modification? Are modifications ever allowed on statewide tests?

A modification is a change in the testing conditions that results in a change in the level of difficulty. After the first attempt at either the Basic Standards Test or the Graduation Test Required for Diploma, the IEP team may determine a "Pass Individual" score for the retest. No other modifications are allowed.

How will the team determine what accommodations are needed for my child?

Keeping in mind the student's unique needs, the team should consider a variety of factors:

What accommodations are routinely used by the student in daily classroom instruction? Consider adjustments made to the ways information is presented; the ways the student responds, and setting, timing and scheduling.

What accommodations has the student identified as being needed and helpful?

What accommodations increase the student's access to the general education curriculum

(the subject content that all students are taught at that grade level, based on state and district academic standards)?

What about the test itself might be a barrier to my child's participation? (For example, a "fill in the bubble" answer sheet format may require an accommodation for a student with handwriting difficulties.)

Can the IEP team decide to provide any accommodation they wish for a student?

Accommodations must not invalidate the student's score on the test. Minnesota provides a list of state approved accommodations in the "IEP Team Guide to Statewide Assessments" and the "Procedures Manual for the Minnesota Assessments" each school year. In addition, the team may contact the Minnesota Department of Education to check that a suggested accommodation will not invalidate the assessment.

Will the accommodations for statewide testing be the same as the accommodations my child receives in the classroom during the regular school day?

Accommodations provided for a student during statewide testing must also be provided during classroom instruction and assessments. However, there may be some other classroom instructional accommodations that will not be appropriate for statewide assessments. For example, a student with a learning disability may have someone read materials to them during class, but will not be allowed to have the reading portion of the test read to them, because the test measures their ability to read.

What if I disagree with the school about what accommodations are needed?

If the team cannot come to an agreement, all the options for IEP dispute resolution are available, including Facilitated IEP meeting and Mediation.

As long as I know the accommodations are being made, why is it important to record the accommodations on my child's IEP?

In order for accommodations to be effective, they need to be consistently provided. School personnel changes frequently, so it is important to have a record of the agreed-upon accommodations. In addition, documentation of testing accommodations may be required for a student requesting accommodations for ACT, SAT or other post-secondary entrance requirements.

Where are the agreed upon accommodations listed in my child's IEP?

Forms vary by school district. Depending upon the IEP form used, you may find classroom and instructional accommodations documented under the heading "Adaptations in Regular and Special Education" or "Supplementary Aids and Services." Accommodations for accountability and diploma-required testing will be documented in a separate section of the IEP specific to the state or district-wide assessment.

Additional Resources

For more information on accommodations in testing, please see PACER's "A Guide for Minnesota Parents to the Individualized Education Program (IEP)" and accommodation information links on PACER's Web site, www.PACER.org.

Additional information on statewide assessments, including alternate assessments, can be found on the Minnesota Departments of Education's Web site at www.education.state.mn.us, "Assessment and Testing."