

State Testing Accommodations:

A Look at Their Value and Validity



National Center *for* Learning Disabilities
The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed

Foreword



Students with disabilities (those covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) must be provided the appropriate accommodation necessary to participate in the state/district assessments as required for reading and math under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Accommodations are tools and procedures that provide equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. They are provided to “level the playing field.” Without the right accommodations, students with disabilities may not be able to access grade level instruction and have every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in state/district assessments.

There is much variability nationwide in allowing particular accommodations for instruction, testing, or both. Students with learning disabilities can benefit greatly from access to appropriate accommodations; however, without consistent implementation, improved research and improved federal peer review of accommodations policies, our students are at great risk as they fall victim to the inconsistencies and random application of accommodation policy across the country.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities commissioned this important study to shed light on the wide variability in accommodations policy throughout the United States; and, to provide solid policy recommendations to Congress and other policy makers as we discuss how to improve NCLB. We hope it stimulates the important discussion it deserves. For more information on accommodations policies for parents and teachers, visit our Web site at www.LD.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James H. Wendorf". The signature is fluid and cursive.

James H. Wendorf
Executive Director

Without the right accommodations, students with disabilities may not be able to access grade level instruction and have every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in state/district assessments.



State Testing Accommodations:

A Look at Their Value and Validity

Executive Summary

Federal education laws demand that all students, including those with disabilities, be included in all state and district-wide testing. These requirements have resulted in a significant increase in the use of testing accommodations. Every state must have guidelines for test accommodations, which provide information for local school teams on how to select appropriate accommodations for each eligible student.

Although the new requirements have greatly improved the rate of participation for students with disabilities in state and district testing, the increased use of test accommodations has created tremendous variability of policies and guidelines – not only with regard to what accommodations can be used for what test, but also who can use them. These differences across states compromise the validity of what the test results tell us. Results are further compromised by research showing a lack of knowledge by those who make important accommodation decisions as well as lack of consistent implementation of selected accommodations on test day. Several resources have been created to assist states with the development and implementation of accommodations policies, though there is little evidence that such resources are being used broadly and effectively.

Research findings on test accommodations are inconsistent. The individualized nature of accommodations makes research design challenging. Many states do not field-test accommodations prior to test implementation. These shortcomings affect the validity of state accommodations policies and guidelines.

Federal regulations allowing for several types of alternate assessments for special education students seek to provide more flexibility to states. Some of these options could result in more students being assigned to a less rigorous assessment than is truly needed. The variation of accommodations policies across states directly impacts which students might be selected to participate in an alternate assessment rather than a regular assessment.

The U.S. Congress must attend to these issues during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The U.S. Department of Education needs to expand its review of state policies, step up funding for accommodations research and demand better data reporting in order to address these issues so students can have access to the accommodations they need in order to fully demonstrate what they know.

Introduction

Accountability demands, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have accelerated students' use of accommodations on large-scale state assessments. In particular, students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency are often provided with accommodations during testing in order to include them as full participants and provide them with fair testing conditions. Test accommodations include changes in presentation, response, setting, and/or scheduling that allow students with disabilities full access to materials including an opportunity to demonstrate what they know and what they can do on large-scale assessments (Tindal & Fuchs, 1999).

This report describes the variability in the adoption and use of test accommodations across different states. In a similar vein, this report explores a new challenge to the use of test accommodations due to the recently released federal regulations allowing the creation of an alternate assessment, based on modified achievement standards for students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 2007a). An overarching concern is that the creation of another alternate assessment may have negative consequences for students with disabilities, providing them with fewer opportunities to meaningfully participate in the general state assessment. The report concludes with recommendations for policy makers and other decision makers related to possible next steps in policy, practice, and research.

Variability of State Test Accommodation Policies and Guidelines

Why Does Variability Exist?

As of 2001, all fifty states had test accommodation policies and/or guidelines in place (Thurlow, 2007). The variability inherent in these policies has lessened over the past ten years, but still exists. Quenemoen (2007) attributes much of this variability to differences in state content and achievement standards because different standards require different assessments that allow for different kinds of accommodations. One example of this uniqueness across states is the definition of 'Reading' as it appears in state content standards. One component of reading is decoding, which is the ability to sound out words. In Minnesota's Language Arts standards, no explicit reference is made to the decoding of text at *any* grade level (Minnesota Department of Education, 2005). In Delaware, however, the act of decoding is included explicitly in the content standards *throughout* grades K-12 (Delaware Department of Education, 2006).

Quenemoen's discussion of the importance of state standards in making test accommodation decisions is accurate but does not tell the whole story. In reality, states make accommodation decisions based on a number of factors that go beyond alignment to state standards. For example, using presentations made by state department officials at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Large Scale Assessment Conference, Quenemoen describes differences across two states in their use of one controversial test accommodation – the read-aloud accommodation. Specifically, in Massachusetts, an extremely small number of students are allowed to use the read-aloud accommodation on their Reading test, the *Language and Literature* assessment (Wiener, 2006). Students approved to use this accommodation are included in state participation rates and their scores are aggregated with the scores of all other students when calculating Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Unlike the state of Massachusetts, the state of Missouri does not allow the use of a read-aloud accommodation on their Reading test, the *Communication Arts* assessment. Although this accommodation was allowed in Missouri for a number of years, Friedebach (as summarized by Quenemoen, 2007), presented reasons for no longer

allowing the read-aloud including the fact that approximately 50% of third-grade students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) had their Reading test read to them between 1999–2005 and, during the same period of time, the percentage of seventh-grade students with IEPs who had the test read to them increased by 10 percent. “The actual incidence of students who cannot learn to read well even with high quality instruction should be **much** smaller than this, and they worried that this accommodation had the unintended and negative consequence that many students were not expected to learn to read well” (Quenemoen, p. 12). Missouri used state test data to drive changes to their policy; state officials observed a trend in increased use over time. Officials were concerned that teachers were holding students less accountable for learning how to read.

On the other hand, Massachusetts based their policy around the concepts of fairness, access, and equity. By allowing a very small number of students to have the Reading test read to them, Massachusetts includes students in the traditional assessment who otherwise might be relegated to taking the alternate assessment.

In summary, test accommodation policies are driven by a host of factors including, but certainly not limited to:

1. a state’s unique content and achievement standards
2. an analyses of test data including participation rates, accommodation use, and proficiency data, and
3. an ethical and professional balancing act between access and equity for students with disabilities and validity and reliability of test score interpretation and use.

Documenting the Variability of State Test Accommodation Policies

Variability exists in the adoption and use of numerous test accommodations, some of which are as controversial as an oral administration of a Reading test. Martha Thurlow, director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), highlights this variability by providing a count of states allowing particular accommodations with and without restrictions.

Table 1
Test Changes With and Without Restrictions*

Test Change	States Allowing Without Restrictions		States Allowing With Restrictions		States Prohibiting	
	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005
Oral Administration/Read Aloud	3	8	44	37	0	0
Calculator	15	19	28	22	1	0
Proctor/Scribe	32	37	17	11	0	0
Extended Time	29	41	16	4	2	0
Sign Interpret Questions	13	8	29	25	0	0

Note: The 2003 information is from Clapper, Morse, Lazarus, Thompson, & Thurlow (2005). The 2005 information is from Lazarus, Thurlow, Lail, Eisenbraun, & Kato (2006).

Source: Table One is a direct excerpt (excluding the title but including the footnote) from Thurlow, 2007

One trend apparent in the table is the allowance of more test accommodations, without restrictions, in 2005 than in 2003. Another trend is the large number of states placing restrictions on calculator use and oral administration of tests – two fairly controversial accommodations. Controversial accommodations are often those assumed to change the construct being tested and usually are labeled as *non-standard* accommodations.

Further complicating the picture, some states allow *all* students access to test accommodations, while other states require that students have IEPs, 504 plans, or qualify as English language learners (ELLs). Some states allow *all* students access to *some* accommodations while providing students with disabilities and English language learners access to *all* allowable accommodations (e.g., California). Other states allow *all* students access to *all* accommodations (e.g., Oregon), while still others allow use of accommodations only with students on IEPs or 504 plans, or ELLs (e.g., Minnesota). Using information provided on websites for six geographically representative states, the table below further illuminates these differences in who can access a state test with accommodations:

Table 2
Student Groups With Access to Test Accommodations

State	Description of Student Group
California	Only students with disabilities or English language learners. All students have access to “variations” (minor changes in test administration or the way a student responds).
Colorado	All students. Students in general population must have formally documented need.
Massachusetts	Only students with disabilities and English language learners except for students in the general population with a rapid onset of a medical disability.
Michigan	Only students with disabilities and English language learners except for students in general population with a rapid onset of a medical disability.
Texas	All students. Students with disabilities and English language learners are allowed a more comprehensive set of test accommodations.
Wyoming	Only students with disabilities or English language learners.

The validity of what can be inferred from state test data is compromised by the variability across states, as highlighted in Table Two. First, a challenge exists for parents and the public in understanding *their own* state policies and guidelines. Other challenges include, which scores represent tests that were completed with accommodations? And, depending on the inclusiveness of the state system, how might conclusions about the meaning of performance data be affected? Moreover, when discussing participation and performance data, limited comparisons can be made across states. Data on “test scores with accommodations” mean one thing in California and an entirely different thing in Colorado because of differences in the student population represented. And although some states differentiate between groups in their reporting, most do not (VanGetson & Thurlow, 2007).

All of the six states stress the importance of using accommodations in general classroom instruction and assessment. Only two

Data on “test scores with accommodations” mean one thing in California and an entirely different thing in Colorado because of differences in the student population represented.

of the states (Colorado and Wyoming), however, require that accommodations used on the state test are made available to students during general instruction for at least 90 days in advance of the state test and have demonstrated their effectiveness and appropriateness for the particular student for whom they have been assigned.

Finally, variability across states is not limited to variations in state policy but extends into variability across the kinds of information states report. In a synthesis of state reporting practices, VanGetson and Thurlow (2007) reported that only 16 states provided data on the use of test accommodations by students with disabilities. Some states reported only on those students who used standard (allowable) accommodations while other states reported both standard and non-standard (unallowable) accommodations. And, only five states included a description of the specific accommodation used by the students for whom data was shared. The table below uses the same six states as before to summarize the types of information states make easily available through their websites.

Table 3
Test Accommodation Data Made Available to the Public

State	Data on Test Accommodation Use
California	No data available.
Colorado	Participation and proficiency data available by grade and content area.
Massachusetts	No data available
Michigan	Participation and proficiency data available by grade and content area.
Texas	Participation and proficiency data reported only for students tested with dyslexia bundled accommodations (grades 3-5 only).
Wyoming	Participation and proficiency data available for SWD completing state tests with and without accommodations.

Possible Consequences Associated with Variability of State Policies and Guidelines

Although not insurmountable, the variability highlighted in these analyses of six states is fairly typical of the variability across most states. And, although test accommodation policies are aligned with individual state standards and accountability programs, variability across states could pose multiple problems. First, non-regulatory federal guidance (U.S. Department of Education, 2007b) states that use of an accommodation resulting in an invalid score prohibits that score from being counted in school, district and state participation rates (as well as proficiency totals). Therefore, states must decide which accommodations maintain the validity of a score and which do not; accommodations assumed to maintain the validity of a score are allowed. States allowing the use of certain accommodations (e.g., use of a calculator on portions of a mathematics test) are able to count students using these accommodations in their AYP participation rates as well as use the scores from these assessments in their AYP proficiency calculations, while other states who do not allow these accommodations, “lose” these students in their AYP calculations when students use the accommodations during state testing. Again, variability across states in the labeling of standard and non-standard accommodations will impact both participation and proficiency data reported.

Another possible unintended consequence relates to scores at the level of the individual student. Students who may benefit from the use of a specific accommodation may be allowed to use the accommodation in one state but not in another state. Students, therefore, may not be able to demonstrate what they know and can do de-

pending upon where they live. In research circles, and in state department documents, the most accepted definition of a standard accommodation is that it maintains the construct validity of a test item or a set of test items. An accommodation is viewed as non-standard if it changes the construct of what is being measured, or in the Department's words, if it results in an invalid score. Disagreements exist, however, as to how much a construct is fundamentally altered when measured using an accommodation. Due to this uncertainty, seemingly simple accommodations such as graphic organizers (see box) are allowed in some states (e.g., Massachusetts) but not allowed in others (e.g., Colorado).

A graphic organizer is an instructional tool used to illustrate a student or class's prior knowledge about a topic or section of text. Examples include a spider map, series of events chain, compare/contrast matrix, problem/solution outline and network tree.

Third, if teachers know a particular accommodation is not allowed during a state assessment, they may choose not to allow a student to use it during instruction, negatively impacting the learning of a student with a disability who needs this particular accommodation to access the general education curriculum. The pressures of accountability may result in teachers feeling forced to make this decision. Teachers often use released test items found on state department websites as instructional materials or mock quizzes in order to ensure their students are being exposed to the content and the formats found on state tests (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Stecher & Barron, 2001). It is hard to accept that teachers would encourage students to work through these released items, or demonstrate their skills and knowledge through other instructional activities, using accommodations that will not be available to students during state testing.

Finally, considerable variability exists across states in the number of allowable (standard) accommodations made available to students during state testing; some states have shorter lists than others. Lists of allowable accommodations are often accompanied by an invitation to IEP or assessment teams at the building level to apply for use of an accommodation that doesn't appear on the list. For example, in Colorado IEP teams are invited to request the use of a specific accommodation not found on the standard accommodation list and, "Where the CDE representatives determine that the accommodation maintains the integrity of the assessment, the use of the nonstandard accommodation will be approved" (Colorado Department of Education, 2006, p. 49). If approved as a standard accommodation, teams can then use the accommodation with the particular child for whom it is intended. Some teams may request accommodations frequently while other teams may rarely request accommodations. Therefore, it is possible that full and appropriate access to the test for a student with a disability may be more dependent on the actions of a school building team than a student's need as documented on his or her IEP.

Researchers have supported this concern regarding what is documented on an IEP and what is available to students during state testing. A study of schools in Rhode Island, for example, observed that accommodations known to be difficult to implement (i.e., assistive technology) were frequently recommended but rarely seen on test day. Researchers also shared that high school teams tended to allow students to opt out of accommodations even if they were listed on their IEPs (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2003).

The national Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) also reported some discrepancies be-

It is possible that full and appropriate access to the test for a student with a disability may be more dependent on the actions of a school building team than a student's need as documented on his or her IEP.

tween test accommodations listed on students' IEP or 504 plans and those actually used on test day. "Although 76.2 percent of students had [extended time] stated on IEP/504 Plans . . . only 53.3 percent received this accommodation on standardized tests" (Bottsford-Miller, Thurlow, Stout, & Quenemoen, 2006, p. 5). Shriner and

DeStefano (2003) also found that accommodations on IEPs often were not used on test day. Interestingly, the reverse is also true: Students sometimes receive test accommodations even if they are not documented on their IEP/504 plans (Bottsford-Miller, Thurlow, Stout, & Quenemoen, 2006; Educational Policy Reform Research Institute, 2006).

Strategies for Reducing Variability Across States

As previously discussed, variability across states in their test accommodation policies and guidelines has lessened over time. Organizations such as the NCEO have provided guidance to states, districts, and IEP teams in order to ensure sound decision making related to the use of test accommodations (see for example, Bolt & Thurlow, 2004; Christensen, Lail, & Thurlow, 2007). These resources, if used, should continue to lessen the variability across states. In a similar vein, the CCSSO sponsored State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards - Assessing Special Education Students (SCASS-ASES) study group developed a manual designed to assist states with policy making and creation of state assessment systems that integrate test accommodations in a reliable and valid manner (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, & Hall, 2005). When used by states, manuals such as these can contribute toward decreased variability of accommodation policies and guidelines across states.

Impact of Research on Policy and Practice

Select Research on Test Accommodations

Researching the impact of test accommodations has not been restricted to those accommodations viewed by many as controversial. Research also has included important studies on teacher and IEP team decision-making (DeStefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001; Gibson, Haeberlie, Glover, & Witter, 2005), student variables and accommodation use (Katzman, 2004), and knowledge and attitudes of teachers related to the use of accommodations in large scale testing (Gajria, Salend, & Hemrick, 1994; Siskind, 1993). One area of research offering great promise is differential item functioning or the study of how items interact differently with different students. Taking this concept one step further, some researchers have studied how items, in their accommodated formats, interact with different students (see for example, Bolt & Ysseldyke, 2006). Unfortunately, field-testing of accommodated items is an area that has garnered little attention, but it is the next logical step.

Perceived Disconnects Between Research and Policy

One area of disconnect between research and policy is apparent when comparing the focus of research studies and the use of accommodations in the field. Strictly empirical research requires the elimination, or control, of any factors that may affect the research findings; thus in many studies, accommodations are not “packaged” and studied as a whole (see Accommodations Bibliography on NCEO website). State policies and guidelines, however, usually allow for the use of multiple accommodations during the assessment window. For example, if a student needs extended time, and a scribe, and directions read to him, he is often allowed these accommodations. As an example of the use of multiple accommodations, the state of Texas allows for “bundled accommodations” for students with dyslexia. Relying on research related to the multiple challenges students with dyslexia face, the state has packaged those accommodations that address reading challenges into one bundle and require teachers to use the entire bundle as opposed to separating out individual accommodations. Interestingly, in this particular example, there seems to be a strong connection between research and practice; this decision to bundle accommodations aligned with empirical findings reported by Fletcher et al. (2006) demonstrating a “differential boost” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001) for students with dyslexia over their non-dyslexic peers when both groups were provided these accommodations.

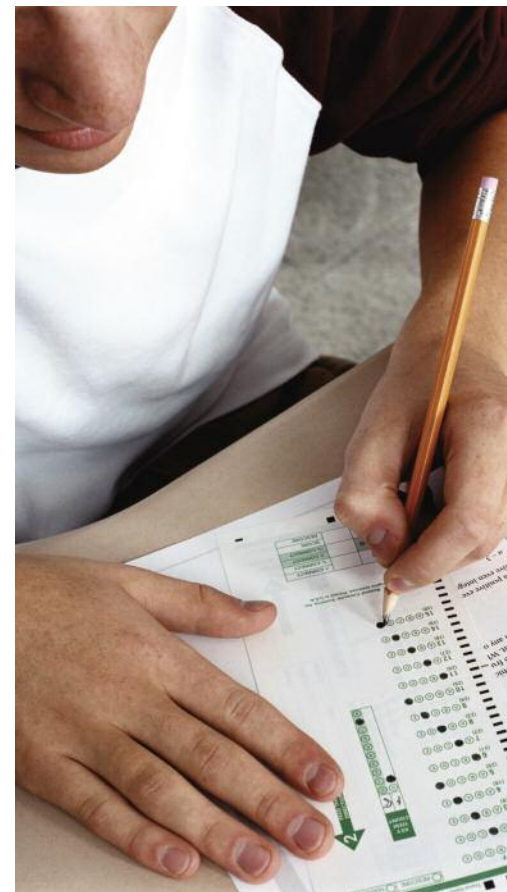
A second perceived disconnect between research and policy has to do with research design. Much like our instructional practices in special education, our test accommodation practices have to be individualized according to a student's unique needs. Much of the research on test accommodations, however, has explored the effect of accommodations within a group design. Fuchs and Fuchs (2001) illustrate one method for investigating the effects of test accommodations that relies less on group design and more on differences in test performances of individual students across standardized and accommodated tests. Individual students are deemed to have benefited from the test accommodation if they demonstrate a “differential boost” in performance as measured by taking the mean difference of the average score of the general education sample from the standardized to accommodated tests and adding one standard deviation to that difference. For example, if the mean score of students in general education is 28 on an accommodated test and 24 on a standard version, the difference is 4 points. If the standard deviation is 2.5, the “boost” criterion becomes 6.5 points. Therefore, if a student scores at least 6.5 points more on the accommodated version, he or she has demonstrated a differential boost.

Innovative approaches to the assignment of test accommodations, such as the accommodation station (Tindal et al., 2007), bundled accommodations, or use of the differential boost criterion for decision-making demonstrate the coming together of research, policy, and practice. Communication across these professional groups is essential in encouraging research studies that are immediately useful to policy makers and practitioners alike.

Possible Impact of a New Alternate Assessment on Appropriate Test Accommodation Use

It is true that a small percentage of students with disabilities have not had full access to state assessment systems in the past. For these students, the behavioral expectations on the general assessment have been deemed too hard while the expectations on the state alternate assessments have been reported to be too easy, with a large majority of students reaching the ceiling on these annual assessments (see for example, data on Colorado's alternate Reading assessment as reported by Measured Progress, 2005). Recently released federal regulations describe these students as “a small group of students whose disability has precluded them from achieving grade-level proficiency and whose progress is such that they will not reach grade-level achievement standards in the same time frame as other students” (U. S. Department of Education, 2007a, p. 17748). These regulations thus allow for the creation of an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards. The number of proficient and advanced scores of students with disabilities assessed in this manner is limited to two percent of all students assessed – roughly 20 percent of students with disabilities. At first blush, this appears to be an easy solution to challenges facing school systems as they attempt to meaningfully include all students in their assessment systems. There exists some concern, however,

At first blush, this (new assessment) appears to be an easy solution to challenges facing school systems as they attempt to meaningfully include all students in their assessment systems.



that creation of another test for students with disabilities may further marginalize them (Colorado 2% Flexibility Committee, 2007).

The possible unintended consequences of the use of an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards are many. First, data does not always support the need for allowing an additional 20% of students with disabilities to be assessed via something other than the general assessment, with appropriate accommodations as needed. For example, a group of respected researchers recently reported that they “. . . could not find sufficient basis, in testimony before the Commission and in extensive research and analysis by our staff, to support a 2 percent cap in this policy; instead, we found that this percentage was often too high” (The Commission on No Child Left Behind 2007, pp. 73-74). More specifically, longitudinal data on the state Reading test in Colorado highlights that less than 1% of students with disabilities would qualify for an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (Colorado 2% Flexibility Committee, 2007). The primary concern with this 2.0 percent cap is possible over-assignment of students into this version of an alternate assessment, thus continuing the trend to separate students with disabilities from the general population and general assessments, creating another exclusive system.

The primary concern with this 2.0 percent cap is possible over-assignment of students into this version of an alternate assessment, thus continuing the trend to separate students with disabilities from the general population and general assessments, creating another exclusive system.

The concerns stated in the preceding paragraph were acknowledged by the

Department in the comments section of the regulations, but it cites a small (though highly

respected) number of research studies to support the establishment of this cap and states that “Ideally, we would have preferred to base the 2.0 percent cap on a greater number of studies across a greater age range and encompassing more math, as well as reading, scores. However, we believe that, given the available evidence, and our desire to protect students with disabilities from being inappropriately assessed based on modified academic achievement standards, the 2.0 percent cap is appropriate . . . As data and research on assessing students with disabilities improve, the Department may decide to issue regulations or guidance on other related issues in the future” (U. S. Department of Education, 2007a, p. 17765).

A description of how to create an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2007a, p. 17750), poses another concern; it sounds quite similar to a number of test accommodations labeled as allowable in many states. For example, regulations cite the use of technology to allow students greater access to test items, and suggest that some students be allowed to respond to test items by dictating responses, or using manipulatives (see box) to demonstrate mathematics procedural or conceptual knowledge. These three suggestions sound very similar to accommodations already defined as standard in many states (see Appendix A). The concern, however, rests primarily with those states allowing a limited number of test accommodations; in these states students may be assigned to take this alternate assessment as opposed to the general test with accommodations, possibly lowering learning expectations. A concern with over assignment of students into a “new” alternate assessment was shared by one commenter who suggested that states require provision of appropriate accommodations to students during the general assessment and then, only if the student cannot reach proficiency, allow them access to the alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards. This suggestion was declined (U. S. Department of Education, 2007a, p. 17759)

Manipulatives are defined as materials that are physically handled by students in order to help them see actual examples of mathematical principles at work. Manipulatives help students convert abstract ideas into concrete models. Some examples are unifix cubes, pattern blocks, color tiles and geoblocks.

The new regulations cause concern in another area, explicitly related to decision making around providing students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in the general education curriculum to the fullest extent possible: “If a student uses an accommodation that results in an invalid score, the student is considered to be a nonparticipant under both Title I and the IDEA” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007b, p. 32). The knowledge that including a student with a disability in a general assessment, using a non-standard accommodation, will result in a non-participation score but including them in an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards will result in a participation score may result in over assignment of students into the alternate assessment.

In summary, the federal government acknowledges the risks involved in allowing states to design an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards. The federal government states, in their publication of non-regulatory guidance on the new regulations:

The potential costs to students would be the harm associated with including the “wrong” children in the group to be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards . . . The risk is that low expectations could impede the ability of these students to perform to their potential. The Secretary believes that the risk of including the “wrong” students in the group to be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards is not high because of the central role that IEP Teams play in determining how individual children will be assessed. (U. S. Department of Education, 2007b, p. 95)

The above statement places most of the decision-making responsibility related to appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities in state assessments on IEP teams. Researchers, however, have highlighted some challenges that IEP teams face when making these decisions; for example, only 29% of special education teachers surveyed across four states indicated that state policies were important to IEP teams when making test accommodation decisions (Educational

Policy Reform Research Institute, 2006). Moreover, early research conducted by Hollenbeck, Tindal, & Almond (1998) reported that 45% of the teachers studied did not know which accommodations were allowable for which tests. DeStefano, Shriner, and Lloyd (2001) found that, prior to the training delivered by researchers, the participation of students with disabilities in state assessments “tended to be an ‘all or none’ phenomenon (p. 18). More often than not students received numerous accommodations or no accommodations. “A more typical pattern was that all students with disabilities received the same set of accommodations” (p. 18).

These examples highlight a concern with leaving these decisions up to IEP teams, not because these teams are not student-centered but because teams are often poorly trained, hindered by limited resources, and at times “trumped” by the system.

And finally, perhaps most disconcerting is a summary statement made by Shriner and DeStefano (2003) about the driving force behind how test accommodation decisions are made: “Although students’ IEPs appeared to reflect individualized decisions, political and logistical factors limited the utility of the IEP and interfered with its actual implementation” (p. 147). These examples highlight a concern with leaving these decisions up to IEP teams, not because these teams are not student-centered but because teams are often poorly trained, hindered by limited resources, and at times “trumped” by the system. If IEP teams are, in reality, given the authority and the training needed to make sound decisions based on each student’s needs, with the goal of full inclusion at the forefront, possible unintended consequences may be kept at a minimum. The hope is that accountability pressures, limited resources, and variable test policies do not impede good judgment about meaningfully including students with disabilities in general assessment programs to the greatest extent possible.

Recommendations

1. Establish a separate federal peer review process (or at the minimum, greatly expand the current process) to thoroughly evaluate each state's decision-making processes for categorizing some accommodations as allowable and others as non-allowable.
2. Require states to disaggregate data related to participation rates and proficiency levels by scores of students using standard accommodations, non-standard accommodations, and no accommodations on all state assessments.
3. Require states to analyze data related to *all* accommodations employed during state testing (not merely the "primary accommodation used"), the effects of these accommodations on student performance, and the impact of accommodation use on state participation and performance-rates and communicate these results in easy to understand formats, made easily available through state department websites.
4. Require states to carefully research the impact of an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards on the participation rates of students with disabilities taking the general assessment. Moreover, states must be vigilant in their monitoring of LEA's use (and possible overuse) of this alternate assessment with students who, with the proper accommodations, could successfully complete the general assessment.
5. Require states to field test items in both standard and accommodated test formats to improve the chances that students have full and appropriate access to state tests.
6. Require an expansion of the research base related to "bundled accommodations," including the effect of bundled, or packaged, accommodations on the construct being measured, on each other, and on individual students.



References

- Bolt, S. E., & Thurlow, M. (2004). Five of the most frequently allowed testing accommodations in state policy. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(3), 141-152.
- Bolt, S. E., Ysseldyke, J. E. (2006). Comparing DIF across math and reading/language arts tests for students receiving a read-aloud accommodation. *Applied Measurement in Education, 19*(4), 329-355.
- Bottsford-Miller, N., Thurlow, M. L., Stout, K. E., & Quenemoen, R. F. (2006). *A comparison of IEP/504 accommodations under classroom and standardized testing conditions: A preliminary report on SEELS data* (Synthesis Report 63). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Christensen, L. L., Lail, K. E., & Thurlow, M. L. (2007). *Hints and tips for addressing accommodations issues for peer review*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Colorado 2% Flexibility Committee (2007, February 2). *Testing students in the Gap: Those not making AYP*. Presentation at the CASE Leadership Conference, Breckenridge, CO.
- Colorado Department of Education (2006). *Procedures manual for the Colorado Student Assessment Program*. Denver, CO: Unit of Student Assessment.
- Delaware Department of Education (2006). *Revised standards and grade-level expectations*. Retrieved May 11, 2007 from http://www.doe.state.de.us/files/pdf/schoolcurr_Standard%202-Reading%208-06.pdf
- DeStefano, L., Shriner, J., & Lloyd, C. (2001). Teacher decision-making in participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment. *Exceptional Children, 68*(1), 7-22.
- Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (2006). *How students access accommodations in assessment and instruction: Results of a survey of special education teachers*. University of Maryland: The Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth.
- Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Boudousquie, A., Copeland, K., Young, V., Kalinowski, S., & Vaughn, S. (2006). Effects of accommodations on high-stakes testing for students with reading disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 72*, 136-150.
- Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2001). Helping teachers formulate sound test accommodation decisions for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 16*, 174-181.
- Gajria, M., Salend, S. J., & Hemrick, M. A. (1994). Teacher acceptability of testing modifications for mainstreamed students. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 9*, 236-243.
- Gibson, D., Haeberlie, F., Glover, T. A., & Witter, E. A. (2005). Use of recommended and provided testing accommodations. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 31*(1), 19-36.
- Hollenbeck, K., Tindal, G., & Almond, P. (1998). Teachers' knowledge of accommodations as a validity issue in high-stakes testing. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 175-183.
- Jones, M. G., Jones, B. D., & Hargrove, T. (2003). *The unintended consequences of high-stakes testing*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Katzman, L. I. (2004). Students with disabilities and high stakes testing: What can the students tell us? *Dissertation Abstracts International, 65*(05), (UMI No. 3134488).
- Measured Progress (2005). *CSAPA 2004-2005 TAC meeting. Grade 4: Reading*.

- Minnesota Department of Education (2005). *Minnesota Academic Standards in Language Arts*. Retrieved May 11, 2007 from http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Academic_Standards/Language_Arts/
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002). Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425.
- Quenemoen, R. (2007, March 29). *How NCLB affects students with disabilities*. Report to the Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Rhode Island Department of Education (2003). *Rhode Island assessment accommodation study: Research summary*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Retrieved May 16, from <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/TopicAreas/Accommodations/RhodeIsland.htm>
- Shriner, J. G., & DeStefano, L. (2003). Participation and accommodation in state assessment: The role of Individualized Education Programs. *Exceptional Children*, 69, 147-16.
- Siskind, T.G. (1993). Teachers' knowledge about test modifications for students with disabilities. *Diagnostic*, 18(2), 145-157.
- Stecher, B. M., & Barron, S. (2001). Unintended consequences of test-based accountability when testing in "milepost" grades. *Educational Assessment*, 7, 259-281.
- The Commission on No Child Left Behind (2007). *Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the promise to our nation's children*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.
- Thompson, S. J., Morse, A. B., Sharpe, M., & Hall, S. (2005). *Accommodations manual: How to select, administer, and evaluate use of accommodations for instruction and assessment of students with disabilities*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Thurlow, M. L. (2007). *Research impact on state accommodation policies for students with disabilities*. Paper presented as part of a Research Symposium entitled, "Research Influences Decisions for Assessing English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities," at the 2007 annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL
- Tindal, G., Carr, T., Siskind, T., Foster, C., & Ketterlin-Geller, L. (2007). *The reliability of teacher decision-making in recommending accommodations for large-scale tests*. Paper presented as part of a Research Symposium entitled, "Research Influences Decisions for Assessing English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities," at the 2007 annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL
- Tindal, G., & Fuchs, L. (1999). *A summary of research on test changes: An empirical basis for defining accommodations*. Lexington, KY: Mid-South Regional Resource Center.
- U.S. Department of Education (2007a, April 9). *34 CFR Parts 200 and 300. Title I – Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); final rule*. Federal Register, 71(67). Washington DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Education (2007b). *Modified academic achievement standards: Non-regulatory guidance (draft)*. Washington DC: Author.
- VanGetson, G. R., & Thurlow, M. L. (2007). *Nearing the target in disaggregated subgroup reporting to the public on 2004–2005 assessment results* (Technical Report 46). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Wiener, D. (2006, June). *How should states handle students with "print disabilities" on state tests*. Presentation at the Council of Chief State School Officers Large-Scale Assessment Conference. San Francisco, CA.

Appendix A:

Test Accommodation Policies and Guidelines for Six States

The tables below explore further the variability in policies and/or guidelines related to the use of controversial accommodations. Six states were selected due to their broad geographic representation. Information about standard test accommodations in the tables below is presented as *allowed* or *not allowed*. It is important to note that the designation of *not allowed* was assigned if state test information (manuals, etc.) explicitly stated the accommodation was not allowed, *or* if no evidence was found allowing the accommodation.

Table A: Oral Administration of Directions and Test Items on State Tests

State	Policy or Guideline on Oral Administration
California	Allowed with conditions (some subjects; some subtests)
Colorado	Allowed on all tests except for Reading
Massachusetts	Allowed on all tests except for Reading. May use as a non-standard* accommodation on Reading test with an extremely limited number of students who meet highly restrictive criteria
Michigan	Allowed on all tests except for Reading
Texas	Not allowed for students in general education (except for 3rd grade Math). Allowed for SWD on all tests except for Reading. Allowed with conditions on Reading test for students with dyslexia (who may or may not be IDEA eligible).
Wyoming	Allowed on all tests except for Reading

**In Massachusetts scores from non-standard accommodations are counted in AYP analyses.*

Table B: Use of Calculators on State Tests

State	Policy or Guideline on Calculator Use
California	Not allowed on any Math and Science tests.
Colorado	Not allowed on any tests.
Massachusetts	Allowed on certain subtests as a standard accommodation. Can use as a non-standard* accommodation on the remaining subtests with an extremely limited number of students who meet highly restrictive criteria.
Michigan	Allowed on some subtests within Math test. Allowed on Science and Social Studies tests.
Texas	Not allowed on Math tests in grades 3-8. Not allowed on Science tests in grades 5 and 8.
Wyoming	Allowed with specific features on specified Math subtests grades 4-8; 11. Not allowed in grade 3.

**In Massachusetts scores from non-standard accommodations are counted in AYP analyses.*

The information outlined in the two tables above illustrates fairly substantial differences in allowance of two controversial accommodations across six states. The three tables below continue to illustrate this variability across other accommodations including use of word-processors, manipulatives (base ten blocks, counting chips, etc.), and graphic organizers (diagrams and outlines through which students may organize their thoughts in writing).

Table C: Use of Manipulatives and other Math Tools on State Tests

State	Policy or Guideline on Use of Manipulatives or Other Mathematic Tools
California	Not allowed
Colorado	Allowed: number lines, touch math, and counting beans. Not allowed: graph paper, raised line paper
Massachusetts	Allowed with approval from state Department: math reference sheets and/or checklists. Manipulatives may be used as a non-standard* accommodation on the other tests with a limited number of students meeting highly restrictive criteria.
Michigan	Allowed: graph paper, lined paper, some manipulatives such as base-ten blocks, and a list of math formulae provided by the state
Texas	Not allowed
Wyoming	Allowed: Graph Paper / Not allowed: manipulatives

**In Massachusetts scores from non-standard accommodations are counted in AYP analyses.*

Table D: Use of Graphic Organizers, Paraphrasing, and Word Prediction Software on State Tests

State	Policy or Guideline on "Other" Test Accommodations
California	Allowed: paraphrasing directions but not questions Not allowed: graphic organizers, word prediction software
Colorado	Allowed: word-prediction software Not allowed: graphic organizers, paraphrasing directions or questions
Massachusetts	Allowed: paraphrasing, graphic organizers with approval Not allowed: word prediction software
Michigan	Allowed: paraphrasing / Not allowed: graphic organizers, word prediction software
Texas	Not allowed: paraphrasing or clarifying any part of the test, graphic organizers, word prediction software
Wyoming	Allowed: paraphrasing of directions but not questions Not allowed: graphic organizers, word prediction software

Our Mission

The National Center for Learning Disabilities works to ensure that the nation's 15 million children, adolescents and adults with learning disabilities have every opportunity to succeed in school, work and life. NCLD provides essential information to parents, professionals and individuals with learning disabilities, promotes research and programs to foster effective learning and advocates for policies to protect and strengthen educational rights and opportunities.

For more information, please visit us on the Web at www.LD.org.

About the Author

Lindy Crawford, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and department chair in the Department of Special Education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Dr. Crawford's research interests include analyzing student performance on large-scale writing assessments, the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide test programs, and effective instructional strategies for English language learners.

© National Center for Learning Disabilities 2007. All rights reserved. This publication is provided free of charge by the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Wide dissemination is encouraged! Copies may be made and distributed in keeping with the following guidelines: The publication must be reproduced in its entirety, including pages containing information about the author and the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Copies of the publication may not be sold.



National Center for Learning Disabilities
The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed

381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1401 New York, NY 10016-8806
Telephone 212.545.7510 Facsimile 212.545.9665

www.LD.org

