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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the findings of a study that examined the participation and performance of students with disabilities in the 1996 Minnesota Basic Standards Tests in reading and mathematics. Results indicated that approximately 70 percent of Minnesota's 8th grade students with disabilities participated in the Basic Standards Tests during the 1995-1996 school year, compared to participation rates of about 85 percent overall for students without disabilities. Participation varied by disability category, as well as by content area. In reading, the lowest participation rate was demonstrated by students with moderate-severe mental impairments, followed by students with autism. The higher participation rates in reading were demonstrated by students with speech/language disabilities, followed by other health impairments, and students with learning disabilities. In math, the lowest and highest participation rates were found in the same categories as for reading. The overall passing rate for students without disabilities was approximately 70 percent. In contrast, only 24 percent of the test-takers with disabilities passed the Basic Standards Test in reading. For the Basic Standards Test in math, 83 percent of students without disabilities passed the test, while students with disabilities passed the test at a much lower rate, at about 38 percent. (Contains 11 references.) (CR)

STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 16

Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities: Minnesota's 1996 Basic Standards Tests in Reading an Math

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF
Children, Families & Learning

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Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities: Minnesota's 1996 Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Math

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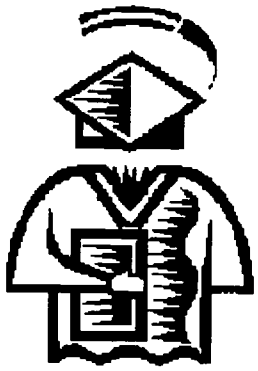

The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards. Specifically, the project will examine ways in which students with limited English and students with disabilities can participate in the Basic Standards Exams of reading, mathematics and written composition and in the performance-based assessments of the high standards in the Profile of Learning.

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Overview

Statewide testing is one of the primary vehicles being used today to document the status of education in our nation. Increasingly, policymakers are requiring state departments of education to report on the performance of students, and often this performance is linked to some type of consequence, ranging from public awareness to school takeovers (Education Commission of the States, 1997). Almost universally, educational accountability systems are charged with including all students in educational systems (e.g., Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Gutman, & Geenen, 1998).

One of the primary challenges in implementing statewide testing is the ability to ensure that all children actually participate in the evaluation of student academic progress.

One of the primary challenges in implementing statewide testing is the ability to ensure that all children actually participate in the evaluation of student academic progress. Unfortunately, in the past, the literature indicated that between 40% and 50% of school-aged students with disabilities were not participating in statewide tests (McGrew, Thurlow, Shriner, & Spiegel, 1992; Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995). In fact, during the 1990 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial State Assessment, 33% to 87% of students with disabilities were left out of these assessments (McGrew et al., 1992). It is important to continue to look at the rates of participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, and to document the extent to which states begin to approach the suggested minimum rate of 85% participation for students with disabilities (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Shriner, 1994).

One issue in increasing the rate of participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments has been the use of accommodations. These changes in setting, scheduling, timing, presentation, or response (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998), while recognized as necessary for increased access to assessments (McGrew et al., 1992; Olson & Goldstein, 1997), have also been viewed as presenting major challenges to the technical characteristics of assessments (Phillips, 1995). It is, therefore, imperative that as states implement their assessments, data are collected on the use of accommodations and on the performance of students taking tests under accommodated conditions.

Minnesota is working toward the comprehensive collection and reporting of data on students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency (Liu, Thurlow, Thompson, & Albus, 1998) in the implementation of new statewide assessments. In response to federal and state legislation, Minnesota has developed an assessment system that provides state-level reports on student performance. The assessment system includes both Basic Standards Tests, designed to assess basic skills, and Profiles of Learning, designed to assess high-level instructional standards of learning. This two-tiered approach is an effort to ensure that Minnesota students meet both Basic skills requirements and challenging standards before graduating from high school.

The purpose of this report is to present data from the 1996 administration of the Basic Standards Tests.

The Basic Standards Tests in reading and mathematics were first implemented throughout the state on a voluntary basis during the 1995-1996 school year. School districts were encouraged to participate in the assessment process and to include all eligible 8th grade students. The first testing cycle in April, 1996, was both legislated and conducted within a short timespan. Thus, relatively sparse guidelines were provided to districts about how to include students with disabilities or about possible accommodations students could receive to encourage maximum participation.

Minnesota's 1996 testing results provide baseline data on the participation and performance of students with disabilities in the Basic Standards Tests. Since district participation in the 1996 testing cycle was voluntary, the data were expected to underestimate future mandatory participation rates.

The purpose of this report is to present data from the 1996 administration of the Basic Standards Tests. Future reports will present data on the participation and performance of students with disabilities in subsequent years. These analyses provide participation and performance data on all students who took the Basic Standards Tests, including those with disabilities. Data on students with disabilities were also analyzed by category of disability.

Method

The participation and performance data on the 1996 Basic Standards Tests provided in this report were obtained from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. Test data were linked for analysis to a data base that identified students receiving special education services.

Data on students with disabilities were analyzed by disability category. Statistics were run on SPSS based on the total number of students with disabilities who took the 1996 tests in reading and math, in order to determine the number of students who received passing scores. For the first testing cycle, the passing score was set at 70% on both the reading and math tests, although individual districts had the option of raising their requirements for passing scores. Students scoring at least 70% were given the designation "Pass State" on their transcripts. Students receiving special education services may have had an individual criterion set for a passing score. These individualized passing levels are not reflected in this report.

Approximately 70% of Minnesota's 8th grade students with disabilities participated in the Basic Standards Tests (reading and math) during the 1995-96 school year.

Findings

Participation

Approximately 70% of Minnesota's 8th grade students with disabilities participated in the Basic Standards Tests (reading and math) during the 1995-96 school year. This compared to participation rates of about 85% overall for students without disabilities.

Participation varied by disability category, as well as by content area (see Table 1). In reading, the lowest participation rate was demonstrated by students with moderate-severe mental impairments (3%), followed by students with autism (29%). The highest participation rates in reading were demonstrated by standards with speech/language disabilities (86%), followed by other health impairments (84%), and students with learning disabilities (81%).

In math, the lowest participation rates were found in the same categories

as for reading: students with moderate to severe disabilities (3%) and students with autism (26%). Similarly, the same categories as for reading showed the highest participation rates in math: students with speech/ language disabilities (87%), other health impairments (85%), and learning disabilities (83%). In most cases, participation rates were higher in math than in reading.

Participation varied by category of disability, with similar variations among categories for reading and math.

Table 1. Participation of Students with Disabilities in 1995-1996 Basic Standards Testing

Total Number of 8th grade students with disabilities in 1995-1996		Tested in Reading		Tested in Math	
		No.	%	No.	%
Autism	34	10	29%	9	26%
Deaf/Hearing Impairment	151	92	61%	95	63%
Emotional/Behavioral	2456	1326	54%	1365	56%
Learning Disability	4139	3371	81%	3430	83%
Mild-Moderate	688	347	50%	357	52%
Moderate-Severe	208	7	3%	6	3%
Other health impairment	322	271	84%	275	85%
Physical Disability	98	74	76%	77	79%
Speech/Language	693	598	86%	602	87%
Traumatic Brain Injury	19	13	68%	13	68%
Visual Impairment	38	20	53%	24	63%
Total Special Education	**8846**	**6132**	**70%**	**6256**	**70%**

Performance

Students passed the Basic Standards Tests in 1995-96 if they scored 70% correct or higher. Passing rates for students with and without disabilities are shown in Table 2 for the Basic Standards Tests in reading. The overall passing rate for students without disabilities was approximately 70%. In contrast, only 24% of the test takers with disabilities passed the Basic Standards Test in reading.

Table 2. 1996 Performance of Students with and without Disabilities on the Basic Standards Reading Test

	Students with disabilities	Students without disabilities	Total
Number Tested	6,132	52,899	59,032
Number Scoring at or above 70%	1,476	36,886	38,362
Percentage Scoring at or above 70%	24%	70%	65%

The overall passing rate for students without disabilities was approximately 70%. In contrast, only 24% of the test takers with disabilities passed the Basic Standards Test in reading.

For the Basic Standards Math Test (see Table 3), 83% of students without disabilities passed the test in 1995-96. This passing rate was higher than for reading. Again, students with disabilities passed the test at a much lower rate, at about 38%. Like students without disabilities, the passing rate for students with disabilities was higher on the math test than on the reading test.

The performance of students with different categories of disabilities (looking only at those disabilities for which at least 10 students took either the reading or math test) varied greatly (see Table 4). On the reading test, passing rates varied from 1% (students with mild-moderate mental impairments) to 55% (students with visual impairments). Only for the visual impairments and physical disabilities categories did at least half of the students taking the test pass.

Table 3. 1996 Performance of Students with and without Disabilities on the Basic Standards Math Test

	Students with disabilities	Students without disabilities	Total
Number Tested	6,256	53,553	59,810
Number Scoring at or above 70%	2,352	44,316	46,668
Percentage Scoring at or above 70%	38%	83%	78%

Table 4. 1996 Performance of Students by Disability on the Basic Standards Reading Test

Students by Disability	Total Taking Reading Test	Reading Total Passing	
		No.	%
Autism	10	5	50%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	92	33	36%
Emotional/Behavioral	1326	411	31%
Learning Disability	3371	596	18%
Mild-Moderate	347	5	1%
Other Health Impairment	271	86	32%
Physical Disability	74	39	53%
Speech/Language	598	286	48%
Traumatic Brain Injury	13	4	31%
Visual Impairment	20	11	55%

On the math test (see Table 5), passing rates varied from 3% (mild-moderate mental impairments) to 67% (autism). For math, in four categories at least half the students taking the test passed: autism (67%), speech/language (62%), visual impairment (54%), and physical disability (52%).

Table 5. 1996 Performance of Students by Disability on the Basic Standards Math Test

Students by Disability	Total Taking Math Test	Math Total Passing	
		No.	%
Autism	9	6	67%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	95	40	42%
Emotional/Behavioral	1365	571	42%
Learning Disability	3430	1167	34%
Mild-Moderate	357	11	3%
Other Health Impairment	275	124	45%
Physical Disability	77	40	52%
Speech/Language	602	372	62%
Traumatic Brain Injury	13	6	46%
Visual Impairment	24	13	54%

For the Basic Standard Math Test, 83% of students without disabilities passed the test in 1995-96. Students with disabilities passed the test at about 38%.

Discussion

The participation rates of students with disabilities in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests are important to track, especially in light of the 1997 reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This Act sets the expectation that nearly all students with disabilities will participate in statewide assessments, beginning in 1998. In Minnesota, as in most states, IDEA sets the stage for the initiation of

increased participation expectations and goals for students with disabilities. The identification of statewide goals will help evaluators to align feedback on how well expectations are being met.

Although there is no "acid test" available to discern the correct number or percent of students with disabilities who should or could participate in statewide assessments, these findings allow Minnesota's state and local policymakers to set goals for future participation in the Basic Standards Tests. For example, although Kentucky originally called for an audit if more than 2% of all students in a school did not participate in the regular state assessment, they found that less than 1% actually were not taking the regular assessment. This finding makes a target having 99.5% of all students participating in the regular assessment a reasonable target goal.

The low passing rates of Minnesota's students with disabilities suggest a need to examine both testing accommodations and the content and quality of each student's educational experience.

These findings also give individual districts an opportunity to examine in more detail who is and who is not participating in the Basic Standards Tests. With this background information, they can begin to put in place guidelines at the district level that ensure that no student is excluded without strong compelling educational justification.

The low passing rates of Minnesota's students with disabilities suggest the need for examination of both testing accommodations used to "level the playing field" with their peers without disabilities, and the content and quality of each student's educational experience. For example, school districts may find it particularly alarming that only 18% of the 1996 test takers with learning disabilities passed the Basic Standards Reading Test. In light of this information, districts may decide to set goals that increase the intensity of instruction on reading and test-taking strategies for younger students with learning disabilities, increase the availability and use of accommodations in the testing environment as well as in day-to-day instructional situations, and increase the participation and support of students with learning disabilities within the general education curriculum.

Recommendations

In order to accurately assess the participation of students with disabilities in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in the future, it will be important to count every student enrolled in school, regardless of participation status. This will allow more meaningful information about which students with disabilities are participating, and more importantly, how they are performing. Additionally, it will be important for special education case managers and teachers to be involved in: (a) recording and verifying special education status for each student with a disability eligible to take a Basic Standards Test, and (b) indicating the type of accommodations offered and used by test takers with disabilities. This information could be recorded on each student's answer sheet in designated fields for later tracking purposes. This level of information will not only enhance the accuracy of the data analyzed by the state, but will also increase the impact these findings have on the field in general.

In order to accurately assess the participation of students with disabilities in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in the future, it will be important to count every student enrolled in school, regardless of participation status.

In closing, we are guided by two principles cited in *Educating One and All* (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997). First, all students should have access to challenging standards. Second, policymakers and educators should be held publicly accountable for every student's performance. With these principles in mind the following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

Data creation and recording. As accountability and standards-based reform continue to be implemented, it will be important to create specific guidelines for reporting to the public and educators within the field.

Unequivocal announcement that all children participate in regular or alternate assessment. The overall presumption should be that each student with a disability will participate. Any decision not to include a student with disabilities in Basic Standards Testing must have compelling educational justification and must be made on an individual basis. Participation in a form of alternate assessment should be confirmed for those not in the regular testing.

Decision making procedures. There continues to be a fair amount of

misinformation about how to make participation and accommodation decisions for students with disabilities in the Basic Standards Tests. Taking a leadership role to create a systematic prototype of how IEP teams should and could make meaningful decisions should be pursued.

Aligning IEP content with graduation standards. Continued training and monitoring of IEPs should be conducted to ensure that individual goals and objectives are aligned with state standards. In Minnesota, consideration will have to be given to both the Basic Standards Tests and the Profile of Learning (the latter reflecting Minnesota's higher standards).

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Monitoring unintended consequences. Tracking referral rates to, and placement into special education should be monitored for each grade, as well as for students who fail the Basic Standards Tests more than once. Additionally, dropout rates of students with disabilities should be monitored before and after implementation of the Basic Standards Tests.

Research. It is important for the Minnesota Assessment Project to continue ongoing analysis and evaluation of the effects of the implementation of the graduation standards for students with disabilities.

It will be especially important in the future to examine and compare the actual scores of students who take the Basic Standards Tests over multiple years to determine factors that may assist students in increasing their individual scores and passing the tests.

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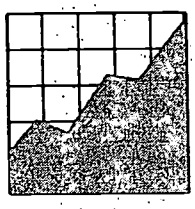

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