ABSTRACT
        This report describes a decision-making tool designed to
inform English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and bilingual educators of the most
up-to-date participation and test accommodations guidelines and to assist
educators in the process of making informed decisions. It reports on the
results of a study that examined the tool's feasibility. The decision-making
tool is an electronic version of Minnesota guidelines for making test
participation decisions. The Web site design has two branches--one for
students with disabilities and another for students with limited English
proficiency (LEP); both are centered on making decisions about inclusion and
the use of testing accommodations. The Web side design has two branches of
decision making to reflect the dual role of the tests within both the LEP and
disability branches--one for statewide accountability testing for grades
three, five, and eight, and one for graduation requirements testing for
grades eight and beyond. A survey of 14 ESL/bilingual educators, 2 district
ESL coordinators, and 1 administrator found that 14 thought the format was
easy to understand, 10 would use the tool again, and 10 would recommend it to
others. Appendices include an overview of the decision matrix and the survey.
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Feasibility and Practicality of a Decision Making Tool for Standards Testing of Students with Limited English Proficiency

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Feasibility and Practicality of a Decision Making Tool for Standards Testing of Students with Limited English Proficiency

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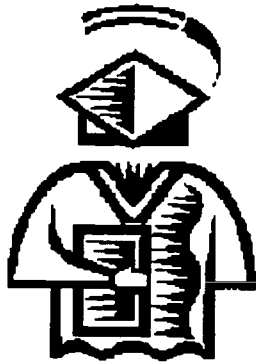
The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students 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

In the 1997-98 school year Minnesota implemented an annual statewide comprehensive assessment plan. This assessment system includes statewide accountability testing and basic graduation requirements testing. In Minnesota, statewide accountability testing currently takes place in grades three, five, and eight. The tests given at grades three and five are called Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and cover the areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. The MCAs are given solely as a measure of system accountability. The eighth grade tests are called Basic Standards Tests (BSTs) and have a dual role. Like the MCAs, they are used for statewide accountability, but they are also used as minimum standards that students must pass by twelfth grade in order to be eligible for a high school diploma. The BSTs are made up of tests of reading and mathematics administered in eighth grade and a writing test administered in tenth grade.

In the past, students with limited English proficiency (LEP) often were excluded from large-scale assessments and accountability systems because educators believed it was not in the best interest of students to take the tests, that is, the testing experience would be extremely frustrating and the test results would be invalid or not useful (Lacelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1994; Rivera & Vincent, 1996). However, many educational researchers and policymakers now believe that LEP students should be included in these assessments to the maximum extent practical so that the needs of these students are not ignored (Lacelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1994; Zehler, Hopstock, Fleischman, & Greniuk, 1994). In 1998, roughly 88% of eighth grade LEP students in Minnesota were included in the BST (Liu & Thurlow, 1999), and a similar percentage of LEP students in grades 3 and 5 participated in the MCAs.

Minnesota has developed guidelines for the use of accommodations for students with limited English proficiency on large-scale assessments. These guidelines are now available for both the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests and the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Written guidelines have been distributed to schools across the state and can be found on the Department of Children, Families, and Learning (CFL) Web site. By themselves, however, written guidelines in standard text format have not been sufficient to help LEP students, who along with their parents, teachers, and administrators, must make informed decisions about whether they should participate in testing and what accommodations should be used. In a survey of English as a second language and bilingual educators across forty-five Minnesota schools, researchers asked how test participation decisions were made for LEP students (Liu, Spicuzza, Erickson, Thurlow, & Ruhland, 1997). Findings indicated that a lack of information flow in large urban districts was preventing ESL and bilingual educators from obtaining the knowledge they needed to be a part of the decision making process for their own students. In spite of repeated training efforts by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning and the existence of written

guidelines, these respondents from urban districts often did not know who made participation and accommodation decisions, and were unfamiliar with the test accommodations and modifications available to LEP students. For each test cycle there were revised guidelines and educators had difficulty keeping track of new information as it was updated. Some respondents mentioned that they had seen early copies of testing guidelines in which some allowable accommodations had not been mentioned. They expressed frustration with the lack of knowledge about who should make participation decisions, about allowable accommodations and modifications, and about which guidelines were current.

Keeping mind the clear need for so much readily accessible information as possible, researchers from the Minnesota Assessment Project, a four-year, federally funded effort awarded by the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, designed a decision making tool to inform English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual educators of the most up-to-date participation and test accommodation guidelines and to assist school staff in the process of making informed decisions with students and their families. In order to make the tool interactive and widely available, it was designed to be used with a Web browser from a World Wide Web site or from a computer diskette. This report describes the decision making tool and reports on the results of a study that examined the tool's feasibility.

Background

Large-scale assessments, and in particular high stakes graduation tests such as Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests (BSTs), are becoming more common throughout the United States. The new Title I legislation requires the participation of all students, including those with limited English proficiency, in large-scale assessments for the purpose of measuring students' progress toward state standards. It also supports the development of appropriate test adaptations for these students (August & Hakuta, 1997). According to August and Hakuta (1997), without a range of test accommodations and modifications that are specific to LEP students, many of these students will not be able to participate in the testing or receive services.

When test accommodations and modifications are available for LEP students, the involvement of ESL personnel, bilingual educators, and other knowledgeable people is required to match the right testing conditions to a particular student. Sometimes the best match for a particular student may be to recommend that he or she not be tested until his or her English language is more fully developed. An important part of making appropriate participation and accommodations recommendations for LEP students is having a set of stable testing guidelines that educators can refer to so that decisions are made on a consistent basis across students, schools, and districts. However, as recently as 1996, many states did not have written guidelines addressing the

participation of LEP students in large-scale assessments and how to make appropriate accommodations decisions (Thurlow, Liu, Erickson, Spicuzza & El Sawaf, 1996). Those states that did have policies often grouped information about students with disabilities and LEP students, making it difficult to know what information applied to which students. Minnesota is one of the few states that has written test guidelines that are specific to LEP students and the BSTs in reading, mathematics, and writing. There are also guidelines available for the MCAs. Both sets of guidelines have been available primarily in paper format and are distributed to schools.

Creation of a Decision Making Tool

Guidelines for the inclusion and use of accommodations with LEP students and students with disabilities are available from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL); however, for some educators a paper format is difficult for understanding the complexities of the decision making process. The purpose of this project was to design a presentation that breaks the guidelines up into smaller pieces of text. There are two reasons to simplify the presentation of the guidelines. First, the new presentation enables someone who is not an expert in assessment to use the decision making process for planning. Second, sequenced guidelines can help parents, teachers, administrators, and students work together in order to make the best participation decisions for the student.

Other issues related to using a paper format for the assessment guidelines surface when discussing accommodation decisions for statewide testing with teachers. First, the Minnesota graduation rule has generated many memos and information reports, and a specific guideline easily gets lost or misplaced before the administrator or teacher receiving the information can plan how to use the news. Therefore, the assessment guidelines are not necessarily available or ready to use when needed. Second, it is difficult to keep documents current and to ensure that everyone involved in making participation decisions is using the same information. For example, a *familiar administrator* is an allowable accommodation for LEP students taking the Basic Standards Test, but this accommodation has not been listed in the paper guidelines (Liu, Spicuzza, Erickson, Thurlow, & Ruhland, 1997).

In order to mitigate these difficulties and to make the decision making process more efficient, a decision making tool, containing the guidelines and a decision matrix (see Appendix A), was designed using the World Wide Web. This tool was created in a Web-based format because the complexities of test decision making can be presented in an understandable and manageable manner. The Web allows for a combination of graphics and text, and uses tools that enable the decision matrix to be broken down into a series of questions that need to be considered during a planning discussion.

A format was needed that would be easily accessible to all people who might be making testing decisions. This includes teachers, administrators, parents, and students. While the availability of computer technology and access to the World Wide Web varies greatly from district to district, and even from building to building and home to home, most schools and families have some access to the Web or will in the near future. A paper format of guidelines will always be needed; however, the Web-based version of the guidelines has several advantages. With the Internet, decision making tools such as this can be made available to everyone in the state and changes in the process can be made instantly since everyone is accessing the same copy. Using the Internet also allows teachers and parents to have access from home or other community sites.

It should also be noted that one does not have to be connected to the World Wide Web in order to use the decision making tool; access to a Web browser (such as Netscape or Microsoft Explorer) is all that is needed. If one has a Web browser, but is not connected to the Web, the decision tool can be run from a diskette. In fact, this is how some of the people who participated in the field test of the tool had access. This format does not allow the diskette copy to be instantly updated, but it does give educators and parents access to the decision making tool.

Finally, the Web tool was designed to be simple in terms of graphics and other features. This allows for quick access, making it easy to maneuver through the site. The design is also straightforward. Since educational teams are often making decisions with several students, the decision matrix is short and simple. People with varying technological backgrounds can become familiar with the tool very quickly.

The Decision Making Tool

The decision making tool used in this study is an electronic version of the Minnesota guidelines for making test participation decisions plus a decision matrix (see Appendix A for an overview of the matrix). The address for the decision making tool is http://www.coled.umn.edu/nceo/map/. The decision matrix has two main branches, one for students with limited English proficiency and another for students with disabilities; both are centered on making decisions about inclusion and the use of accommodations in statewide testing. The first page of the decision making tool ends with this statement and decision request.

> *This web site was designed to help parents and educators make decisions about student participation in different forms of statewide testing. Follow the links below to a decision matrix for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or students with IEP or 504 plans.*

The Web site design has two branches of decision making to reflect the dual role of the Basic Standards tests within each of the LEP and IEP/504 plan branches—one for statewide

accountability testing for grades three, five, and eight, and one for graduation requirements testing for grades eight and beyond. The reason for having these two lines of decision making is that the decision may vary according to the reason a student is taking a test, either for statewide accountability or individual achievement for graduation. The second page for both the LEP and IEP/504 branches ends with the following statement and decision request.

Follow the links below to see if a student should participate in either form of testing and what kinds of accommodations are available for each test.

Graduation Standards   *Statewide Accountability Testing*

As the user enters the decision making matrix, a question is posed about the student for which the test participation decision is being made. The person using the decision matrix responds to this question by clicking on the appropriate answer, LEP or IEP/504. As a result, the user is given information and then asked the second question about which type of test a decision is being made for. Next, the user is asked about student status to help determine whether the student should be included in the standardized test. If the student should be included, the user is given information about accommodations; if not, the user is given information on alternate forms of assessment. At any point in the process, the user can go back a step or to the beginning of the decision matrix. In the end, the user is provided with guidance on how the student could be included in the standardized test so that the student can best demonstrate knowledge within the state guidelines.

Method

To determine whether a computer-based decision making tool is useful for people involved in making decisions about the participation of LEP students in the Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, a survey was developed for educators and administrators who participate in the decision making process. Survey response formats included closed response and open-ended response (see Appendix C).

In December 1998 and January 1999, a total of 102 surveys were sent to seven districts across the state of Minnesota. These districts were chosen from a larger set of districts that had previously agreed to work with CFL during the development and administration of the BSTs. The chosen districts have relatively large English as a Second Language (ESL)/Bilingual Education programs. Some districts that had been recommended were not able to participate because of a lack of the computer resources needed to use the decision making tool.

The CFL classifies all districts in the state of Minnesota into one of four categories based on

size and location. The categories are:
- Cities of the First Class (large, urban school districts)
- Suburban-Metro
- Greater Minnesota > 2000 (rural districts with more than 2,000 students)
- Greater Minnesota < 2000 (rural districts with fewer than 2,000 students)

Three of the districts included in this study were in greater Minnesota with a population over 2,000 students, and four districts were in suburban-metro areas. Urban districts were not included because in many cases, they have too many students to make decisions individually using the decision making tool.

The ESL coordinator in each of the selected districts was sent the World Wide Web address of the decision making tool as well as a copy of the tool on a floppy disk, formatted for Macintosh or IBM PC-compatible computers, whichever was appropriate for their district. Thus, survey respondents had two ways to access the tool: through the Web site if they had Internet access, or from the disk if they had a Web browser but not Internet access.

For each district, the ESL coordinator received 16 surveys to distribute plus one extra survey for making copies if needed. The ESL coordinator was asked to distribute the surveys to those educators and parents who were making decisions about the participation of LEP students in the Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. After surveys were completed, the coordinator was asked to collect the surveys and send them to NCEO for analysis.

In addition to the surveys distributed through school districts, a shorter survey was made available to participants in the 1999 Statewide LEP Conference who would examine the tool during the conference (see Appendix C). Respondents who completed surveys at the conference were from four greater Minnesota districts with a population under 2,000 students and one suburban-metro district.

Once surveys were returned, they were numbered and all quantitative responses were entered into a computer database for analysis. For the qualitative responses, one member of the research team used an inductive qualitative research technique to develop a coding system as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). All of the qualitative data was reviewed holistically for regularities and themes. A system of coding categories based on the themes was developed and verified; all of the participants' responses were clustered under these categories.

Findings

A total of 12 surveys (11.8%) were returned from 4 of the 7 districts (57%). The individual return rate of 11.8% was very low; however, extra surveys had been sent to each coordinator, who also had the option of distributing fewer surveys than were sent or copying the surveys and distributing more. In addition, a number of respondents used the tool to make decisions for more than one student before completing the survey. An additional 5 shorter surveys were returned, for a final total of 17 surveys.

Respondents were primarily ESL or Bilingual Education teachers. In addition, two district ESL coordinators and one administrator completed the survey. Table 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by position. Data from surveys were both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data are addressed first.

Availability and Familiarity of Computer Technology

Of the seven districts that were chosen to participate in the study, one (14%) was unable to do so because potential participants lacked the computer technology to use the decision making tool; that is, there was no computer available where the decision making process took place or the computer that was available lacked the software necessary to run the decision making tool. Another district was loaned a Macintosh laptop computer by the Minnesota Assessment Project in order to be able to use the tool and complete the survey.

Most of the respondents (70%) used the tool on a Macintosh computer, another 24% used the tool on a PC, and one respondent (6%) reviewed a printed version of the tool. Respondents were asked about their familiarity with computers in general, with the specific type of computer they used to look at the tool, and with the Internet. More than half of the respondents (53%, 9 of 17 responses) indicated they were very familiar with computers in general; another 41% (7 of 17) were somewhat familiar with them, and one respondent was a little familiar with computers before using the decision making tool. Of the 16 respondents who used the tool on a computer,

Table 1. Positions Held by Survey Respondents

Position	No. of respondents	% holding this job
ESL/Bilingual Education teacher	14	82%
District ESL Coordinator	2	12%
Administrator	1	6%
Total	17	100%

63% were very familiar with the type of computer they used the tool on, and 37% were somewhat familiar with it. Of these same 16 respondents, 56% were very familiar with the Internet and 44% reported being somewhat familiar with it. All 16 respondents who used the decision making tool on a computer reported having the computer skills needed to use the tool.

Overall, 82% of the respondents (14 of 17) reported that they have access to a computer at home. Of these respondents, 93% (13 of 14) indicated that they have Internet access at home. All 17 of the respondents indicated that they have computer access at school and all but one has Internet access there.

On the longer version of the survey, which was sent to the school districts, respondents were asked what Internet browser they have access to. Seven of the nine (78%) respondents who have Internet access at home use Netscape Navigator while the remaining 22% have Microsoft Explorer. Of the 11 respondents who have Internet access at their schools, 8 (73%) have only Netscape Navigator, 1 (9%) has only Microsoft Explorer, and 2 (18%) have both.

Participation Decisions

Respondents were asked who in their school district usually makes decisions about the participation of LEP students in Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Ten respondents (58%) indicated that some type of committee makes the decision. All of these committees include the ESL teacher, some include the classroom teacher, district ESL coordinator, and administrator; however, only 30% (3 of 10) include the LEP student's parents and none includes the LEP student. The second most common response after "committee decision" was "individual ESL or Bilingual Education teacher decision" with 29% of responses (5 of 17) falling in this category. One respondent (6%) indicated that the district ESL coordinator usually makes participation decisions and another one respondent (6%) did not have an answer for this item.

Overall, 58% (10 of 17) of the respondents said that participation decisions in their districts were made for individual LEP students on a case-by-case basis. Another 18% (3 of 17) said that

Table 2. Respondents' Familiarity with Computer Technology

	Computers in General	Type of Computer	Internet
Very Familiar	9	10	9
Somewhat Familiar	7	5	7
A Little Familiar	1	1	0
Not at all Familiar	0	0	0

participation decisions said that decisions were made for the LEP students as a whole. One respondent (6%) marked both individual and as a whole, and an additional three respondents (18%) did not answer this question.

Using the Decision Making Tool

Of the 12 respondents who reviewed the computer-based tool in the school districts, 9 (75%) looked at it as part of a decision making group. Another two respondents (17%) looked at the computer-based tool alone, and one respondent reviewed a paper version. All five of the respondents who reviewed the computer-based tool at the Statewide LEP Conference did so alone.

Respondents in the school districts were asked how many students they used the tool to make participation decisions for. Responses to this question varied from 33 ("all the students I work with") to 0 (respondents reviewed the tool but did not to make a decision using it). Table 3 shows the breakdown of respondents by the number of students for which they made decisions using the tool.

These respondents were also asked approximately how long it took for them to go through the tool for the first student for which they used the tool and the last student for which they used the tool. For the first student, the respondents' answers ranged from one to thirty minutes while for the last student, they ranged from two to fifteen minutes (see Table 4). The average time to use the tool for the first student was 11.25 minutes, and the average for the last student was 6.7 minutes. In all but two situations, the time needed to use the tool decreased by half or more from the first to the last use.

Overall, 82% (14 of 17) of respondents thought the format of the computer-based tool was easy to understand. Another 12% (2 of 17) thought that it was not easy to understand; one of these respondents commented, "I would have liked to have been walked through this...Make it very easy & very elementary for those of us that are not familiar with this." One respondent (6%)

Table 3. Amount of Tool Usage

No. of Students	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
33	1	8%
5 or more	3	25%
2	2	17%
0	3	25%
Conflicting information	1	8%
No answer	2	17%

used a paper version of the tool and therefore did not comment on the ease of understanding the computerized tool. Respondents were also asked whether the tool was easy to use. A large majority (15 of 17, 88%) thought it was easy to use. One respondent (6%) did not think so, and commented, "I'm not sure if I have seen all the parts." Again, one respondent did not comment on ease of use.

Respondents were asked whether they found the tool helpful in (1) increasing the awareness of testing options for LEP students, and (2) making careful individual decisions. Eleven of seventeen respondents (65%) thought it was helpful in increasing their awareness, one respondent (6%) did not, and the remaining five (29%) did not answer the question. Eleven respondents (65%) also thought that the tool was helpful in making careful decisions while six respondents (35%) had no answer to this question. When asked whether they would use the tool again to make participation decisions for LEP students, 59% (10 of 17) respondents said that they would do so; one commented, "Especially to determine accommodations." Another 6% (1 of 17) said that it would not be used it again, commenting, "I think I understand how to figure it out without the computer." A further 29% (5 of 17) were not sure whether they would use it again. They offered various reasons for their uncertainty: One cited a lack of technology, two said they were already familiar with the participation guidelines, one expressed a desire to see the information on paper, and one was an administrator who said that teachers normally make the participation decisions. In addition, 6% (1 respondent) did not answer this question. Ten respondents (59%) said they would recommend the tool to others who are involved in participation decisions. Three respondents (18%) were unsure whether they would recommend it; one of this group said, "It was helpful in deciding accommodations but I could follow the same train of thought on my own," and another commented that the recommendation would depend on staff familiarity with graduation standards. One respondent was unsure about

Table 4. Time Needed to Use the Tool

Minutes for First Student	Minutes for Last Student	No. of Respondents
No response	No response	2
1	No response	1
2	No response	1
4.5	2	1
10	2	1
10	5	2
10	8	1
10	15	1
25	10	1
30	No response	1

Note: Seven respondents reported using the decision making tool for more than one student.

recommending the tool because of a lack of experience with it. Another 23% (4 of 17) did not provide an answer for this question.

Results

In addition to the quantitative results discussed above, some comments were written in answer to open-ended questions as well as in the margins of the surveys. A list of the comments was compiled and then separated into the following topic categories:
1. Clarity of information in the tool
2. Usefulness of the tool
3. Timing of information
4. Amount of information in the tool
5. Technology issues
6. Testing process issues
7. Clarity of the survey
8. Miscellaneous

Major themes of each category are mentioned below. (For a complete list of comments, see Appendix D.)

Clarity of information in the tool. Although respondents in general seemed to think that the information in the decision making tool was clear, some reported difficulty in distinguishing between Basic Standards Testing and Statewide Accountability Testing, and between modifications and accommodations. In addition, there was concern that the information in the tool is too long and complicated to be used in a meeting with the parents of an LEP student.

Usefulness of the tool. Some of the respondents thought the tool was useful in the decision making process, others believed that they were familiar enough with the state guidelines to make decisions without a tool, and still others thought that they needed the information provided by the tool but wanted to see it on paper.

Timing of information. There was concern expressed about having information about accommodations early enough so that appropriate materials could be ordered for testing. A respondent said, "This tool would have helped me more if I could have used it early enough to order the accommodations my students would benefit from. We had to order earlier in the year—so now I have extra math cassettes but no math translations which would have been better for some of my students."

Amount of information in the tool. A respondent commented that "familiar examiner" should

be listed as a possible accommodation. Another suggested printing a record of the decision at the end of the process.

Technology issues. Issues in this category included inability to access the tool, readability (font size), and how one determines when all the necessary material in the tool has been read.

Testing process issues. This category included questions about the availability of translated mathematics tests and how students' tests are identified as "LEP." There was also concern expressed about the unspoken time limit on tests when LEP students are tested in the same room as mainstream students.

Clarity of the survey. Some respondents were confused by the fact that the tool refers to Basic Standards Testing and Statewide Accountability Testing while the survey uses both those terms and the acronyms BST and MCA.

Miscellaneous. Respondents suggested other uses of World Wide Web technology, including a statewide teachers' discussion page or chat line.

Discussion

The decision making tool was developed to make the process of making decisions about accommodations and modifications for LEP students in Basic Standards Testing and Statewide Accountability Testing easier to understand. Further, it was designed to make the information needed to make such decisions accessible to those involved in the decision making process.

Availability of computer technology. While more than 80% of the survey respondents thought that the tool was both easy to use and easy to understand, and 65% of respondents thought that the tool was helpful in increasing their awareness of testing options and in making careful decisions, it was clear from the survey results that some school districts do not have the technical capability for a Web-based tool. Of the seven districts that were chosen to participate in the study, one was unable to take part because potential respondents did not have computers on which to use the tool. Another district also did not have appropriate computers, but was lent a laptop computer by the Minnesota Assessment Project in order to participate. Although the sample for this study was small, it is assumed that the seven districts are similar to most districts in Minnesota; therefore, the availability of computer hardware for Internet access and appropriate software (i.e., Web browsers) limits the types of tools that can be developed for use in school districts.

The decision making tool is efficient. ESL and Bilingual Education professionals reported

that the decision making tool was simple, clear, and easy to use. These are indicators that the tool as developed was efficient. It appears that the decision making tool was helpful in presenting the critical information and questions for participation and test accommodations. This would seem logical since the tool was designed to include the CFL guidelines for determining level of participation and accommodations for LEP students. This indicates that the tool successfully communicates the CFL guidelines in a user-friendly manner. After the initial investigation of the decision making tool, respondents reported that an average of less than 7 minutes was needed to use the tool for a student, another indicator that the tool is efficient.

The decision making tool and paper guidelines are complementary. In general, respondents found the tool useful, but there were also a significant number of comments indicating that people want to see information on paper. In addition to individual differences in preferred communication style, guidelines on paper as part of a Web-based tool have complementary advantages. A respondent's comment, "I'm not sure if I have seen all the parts," indicates the difficulty of navigating a Web site compared to reading instructions on paper from beginning to end. Paper guidelines have the advantage of a familiar, comfortable format while Web-based guidelines have an advantage in that they can be updated instantly, ensuring that all participants in the decision making process have the same and the most current information. Some respondents suggested another way to use paper and the decision making tool in a complementary fashion by enhancing the tool by adding a printout at the end of the decision making process showing the choices that had been made at each step of the process and the final decision for the student in question.

ESL educators lack important information for decision making. A number of comments indicated that ESL and Bilingual Education teachers and administrators are still struggling with obtaining the knowledge they need to be part of the decision making process. For example, one respondent commented on confusion in distinguishing between Basic Standards Testing and Statewide Accountability Testing. Another commented that the tool needs to explain the difference between accommodations and modifications. Other respondents reported having questions about translations of mathematics tests, the Basic Standards Writing Test, and how LEP students' scores are identified as LEP scores.

In summary, when testing accommodations are made available so that as many students as possible can meaningfully participate in an assessment, it is important to have efficient and accessible guidelines available for the people making accommodation decisions. These people may include administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. When testing decisions are being made on an individual basis, guidelines for making these decisions need to be clear so that decisions are made fairly and accommodations are used to help make the tests more accessible to the student. When students receive the accommodations they need, the validity of the test results increase.
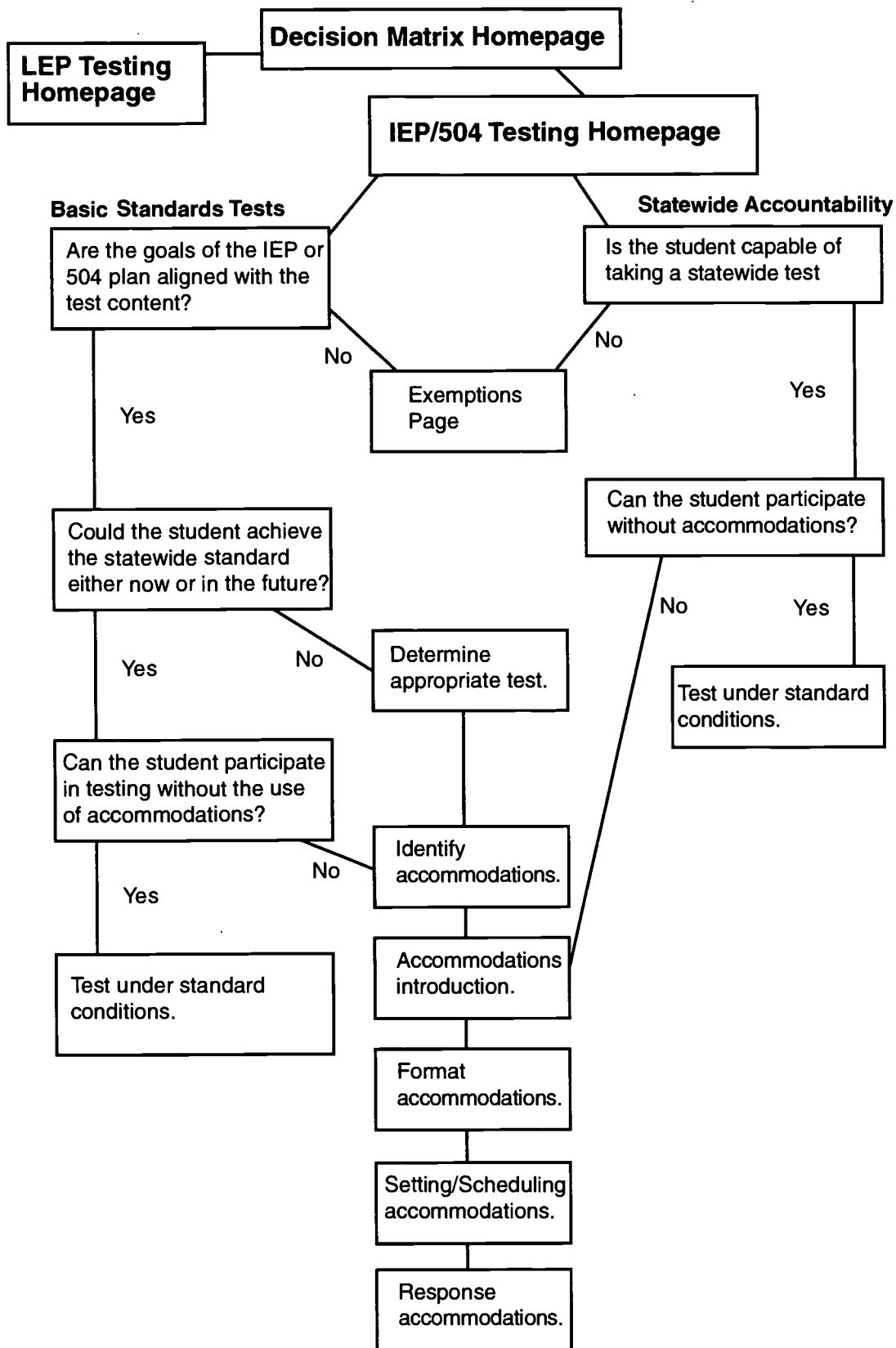
At the present time, most states do not have a decision making process in place that will walk people through this often complicated process. The decision making tool designed for educators in Minnesota and available through the World Wide Web is an attempt at helping streamline this process. Although the tool may not be accessible to some due to technological availability, it does offer many benefits. Most ESL professionals found it to be clear and useful. As technology increases in schools and homes around the state, this tool should become more accessible. The decision making tool is efficient, taking a brief amount of time, and thorough. Using the information gained through the survey data contained in this report, the decision making tool can be improved so that it is even more useful to educators.

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Appendix A

Overview of Decision Matrix

Decision Matrix Homepage

LEP Testing Homepage

IEP/504 Testing Homepage

Basic Standards Tests

Are the goals of the IEP or 504 plan aligned with the test content?

No → Exemptions Page

Statewide Accountability

Is the student capable of taking a statewide test

No → Exemptions Page

Yes

Yes

Could the student achieve the statewide standard either now or in the future?

Can the student participate without accommodations?

Yes   No → Determine appropriate test.

No   Yes

Can the student participate in testing without the use of accommodations?

No → Identify accommodations.

Test under standard conditions.

Yes

Accommodations introduction.

Test under standard conditions.

Format accommodations.

Setting/Scheduling accommodations.

Response accommodations.

Appendix B

Minnesota Assessment Project Decision Making Tool:
Graduation Standards and Statewide Accountability Testing

The Minnesota Assessment Project
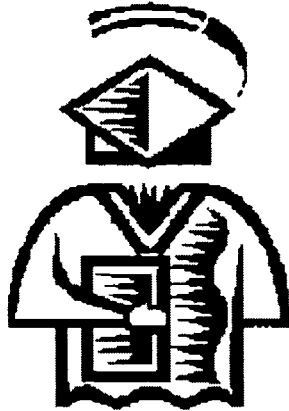
The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards.

This web site was designed to help parents and educators make decisions about student participation in different forms of statewide testing. Follow the links below to a decision matrix for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or students with IEP or 504 plans.

ᴁLEP   ᴁIEP/504

Decision-Making Matrix for Students with IEP or 504 Plans: Graduation Standards and Statewide Accountability Testing

What is Statewide Accountability Testing in Minnesota?

The 1997 legislature mandated a system of Statewide Testing and Accountability (M.S. 121.1113). Beginning in the 1997-98 school year, all students enrolled in grades three, five and eight are to be tested with a single statewide test for the purpose of system accountability.

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments will be used to test reading and mathematics at grade three and reading, mathematics and writing at grade five. The Basic Standards Tests in reading and mathematics will fulfill the testing requirements at grade eight. Testing at the high school level is not scheduled to begin until the 1999-2000 school year.

How is Statewide Accountability Testing different from Basic Standards Testing?

For Statewide Accountability Testing all students will take the same test. Additionally, there is no minimum score required for individual students. The results will be used for school and district accountability information.

All students must pass the Basic Standards Tests to be eligible to receive a high school diploma. Districts may offer students many opportunities to meet the Basic Standards testing requirements in accordance with M.S. 3501.0010-3501.0180. In addition, students with special needs may meet the standards at an individual level according to the requirements of their IEP or 504 plan.

Test	Basic Standards grade 8*	MCA grades 3 and 5 Basic Standards grade 8
Purpose	Graduation requirement to be eligible for a high school diploma.	System Accountability
Results	Individual Student Graduation Results: ● Pass-State ● Pass-Individual ● Pass-Translation	School and District Summary Information Individual Student Reports
Test Administration Options Permitted	● Accommodations ● Modification to the standard	● Accommodations

* The Basic Standards Test of Written Composition is given beginning in grade 10. The Basic Standards Tests of Reading and Mathematics are given beginning in grade 8.

Who must be included in Statewide Accountability Testing?

The progress of all students is important and should be measured to determine how best to teach and improve their learning. The law requires all students to be tested except for those very few students whose IEP or 504 teams determine they are incapable of taking the statewide test.

If students with IEP or 504 plans are exempt from Graduation Standards Testing, are they also exempt from Statewide Accountability Testing?

The exemption criteria are similar; a student may.be exempted from a Basic Standards Test if the student's IEP or section 504 accommodation plan does not and never has included the requirements on which the tests are based. If a team determines that a student is not capable of reaching the state standard, a modified standard for graduation purposes may be created for the student. Modifications for Graduation Standards typically include either an

alternative interpretation of the passing score or the administration of a more appropriate test based on the student's needs.

For Statewide Accountability Testing, all students must take the test if they are capable of testing regardless of their anticipated score. There are no modifications allowed. however, the same testing accommodations permitted for Basic Standards testing will also be permitted for Statewide Accountability Testing.

Testing Accommodations Permitted

Test:	Basic Standards	Statewide Accountability Testing
IEP/504 Students	● Accommodations ● Modification to the standard	● Accommodations

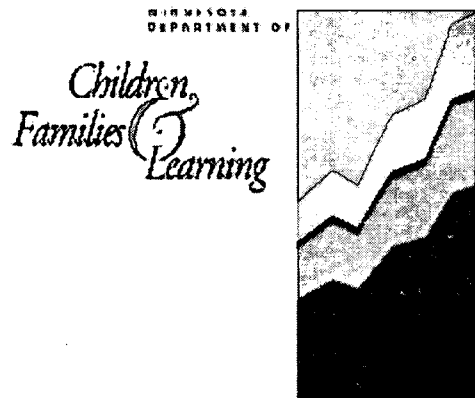## Follow the links below to make a decision about student participation in testing.

Graduation Standards

Statewide Accountability Testing

MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF
Children,
Families &
Learning

Appendix C

Computer-Based Decision Making Tool Survey

Decision Making Tool Survey

Questions marked with an asterisk were on the short version of the survey.

Terms: BST = Basic Standards Tests (grade 8+)

MCA = Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (grades 3 & 5)

Part I: Tell us about yourself

*1. Who are you? (Please check one.)

   a. ___ District LEP coordinator   d. ___ administrator
   b. ___ ESL teacher/Bilingual Ed teacher
   c. ___ regular classroom teacher   e. ___ other (please describe)

   _____

   _____

*2. Is your school district: (Please check one.)

   a. ___ urban (e.g., Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth)
   b. ___ suburban-metro (e.g., Bloomington, Eagan, Roseville)
   c. ___ a greater Minnesota district with more than 2,000 students (e.g.,
          Rochester, St. Cloud, Bemidji)
   d. ___ a greater Minnesota district with fewer than 2,000 students (e.g.,
          Mountain Lake, Owatonna, Windom)

3. How did you look at the Decision Making tool ? (Check one.)

   a. ___ on computer; what kind? _____
   b. ___ on paper
   c. ___ I never looked at it (Another person used the tool.)

*4. How familiar were you with the following equipment <u>before</u> you used the Decision Making tool?

    a. A computer in general (circle one number choice)

        1. not at all familiar   3. somewhat familiar
        2. a little familiar   4. very familiar

    b. The specific type of computer (IBM, Macintosh) you used to look at the tool (Circle one number choice.)

        1. not at all familiar   4. very familiar
        2. a little familiar   5. I didn't look at it on a computer
        3. somewhat familiar

    c. The Internet (Circle one number choice.)

        1. not at all familiar   4. very familiar
        2. a little familiar   5. I didn't look at it on a computer
        3. somewhat familiar

*5. Did you have the computer skills you needed to use the Decision Making tool? (Check one.)

    a. ___ Yes
    b. ___ No; please explain _____
    c. ___ I didn't look at it on a computer (Someone else used the tool.)

*6. Do you have access to a computer in the following places? (Check one answer for each letter.)

    a. at home
        1. ___ yes   If yes, do you have Internet access? a. ___ yes
                                                                              b. ___ no
        2. ___ no

    b. at school
        1. ___ yes   If yes, do you have Internet access? a. ___ yes
                                                                              b. ___ no
        2. ___ no

7. If you answered yes to any of the parts of question 6, which Internet browsers (e.g., Netscape Navigator, Microsoft Explorer) are available on this machine?

    a. (home)
    b. (school)
    c. ___ I don't have access to a computer

Part 2: Tell Us About the Decision Making Tool

*8. In your school or district, who usually makes decisions about the participation of LEP students in Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments? (Check only <u>one</u>.)

    a. ___ the district LEP coordinator
    b. ___ an individual ESL or Bilingual teacher
    c. ___ an administrator
    d. ___ a group of educators; please describe
    e. ___ other; please describe

*9. Does the person or people making testing decisions for LEP students usually make decisions: (Check one.)

    a. ___ for all of the LEP students in the school/district as a whole

    b. ___ for individual LEP students on a case-by-case basis

10. When you looked at the tool, were you: (Check one.)

    a. ___ alone

    b. ___ part of a group

    c. ___ I never looked at the tool (Someone else used the tool.)

11. For how many students did you use the tool to help you make Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment participation decisions? (Check one.)

a. ___ zero	d. ___ three	g. ___ all of the students I work with; How
b. ___ one	e. ___ four	many?_____
c. ___ two	f. ___ five or more	

12. How many <u>minutes</u> did it take for you to go through all the parts of the tool and make decisions for the first student for which you used it? (Fill in the blank with an approximate number of minutes, or fill in "NA" if you did not use the tool.)

_____ minutes to go through it for the first student

13. If you used the tool for more than 1 student, how many minutes did it take for you to go through all the parts of the tool for the last student for which you used it? (Fill in the blank with an approximate number of minutes, or fill in "NA" if you did not use the tool.)

_____ minutes to go through it for the last student

*14. Was the format of the tool easy to understand? (Check one.)

    a. ___ yes
    b. ___ no; why not? _____
    c. ___ I never looked at the Decision Making tool. (Someone else used the
    tool.)

*15. Was the tool easy for you to use?

    a. ___ yes
    b. ___ no; why not? _____
    c. ___ I never looked at the Decision Making tool. (Someone else used the
    tool.)

*16. What additional information about participation in Basic Standards Tests and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments would you like to see included in this tool? (Write your answer below.)

*17. Was this tool helpful in doing the following? (Check one option for each.)

    a. Increasing your awareness of testing options for LEP students?
        1. ___ yes
        2. ___ no

    b. Making careful individual student decisions?
        1. ___ yes
        2. ___ no

*18. In the future, would you use this tool again to make BST and MCA participation decisions for LEP students?

    a. ___ yes
    b. ___ no; why not? _____
    c. ___ I'm not sure; why?

*19. Would you recommend this tool to others making these decisions?

    a. ___ yes

    b. ___ no; why not? _____

    c. ___ I'm not sure; why?

*20. How can this tool be improved so it is more useful for educators making decisions about the participation of LEP students in BSTs and MCAs? (Please write your thoughts below.)

21. What questions do you still have about the participation of LEP students in the BST and MCAs? (Please write your thoughts below.)

Appendix D

Comments from Survey Respondents

Comments from Survey Respondents

Clarity of information in tool

1. It's fine.

2. You might want to distinguish between modifications and accommodations somewhere in the tool. It was very clear that accommodations were the focus, but I couldn't find where "Modification to the standard" was explained (the reference was taken from http.../NCEO/MAP/LEP1.html)

3. I liked the beginning explanation. I think it's confusing to be discussing Basic Standards testing & Statewide Accountability Testing. It seems that they could have been given better names. One is never sure which is which. It's confusing.

4. The language is too complicated and lengthy to be used in a meeting with an LEP parent.

5. Information about students who have been in the English setting for less than 3 years, but do have language skills in English to try the test (BST). It led me to the dead end of exempt without further questions.

6. I would have liked to have been walked through this. #1, #2, #3, etc. Make it very easy & elementary for those of us that are not familiar with this.

7. Not for a LEP student.

8. Good information.

9. It's OK.

Usefulness of the tool

1. (I would use it again) especially to determine accommodations.
2. I think I understand how to figure it out without the computer.

3. I might (use the tool) for certain students, but I'm already familiar with the state guidelines.

4. I think I could make decisions if I had it in writing on paper. Maybe easier for me.

5. Maybe (would use the tool again)–but most of the information needed I know & would not need to go through a flow chart.

6. It was helpful in deciding accommodations but I could follow the same train of thought on my own to decide whether exemption or taking the test should be done.

7. Depends on staff familiarity with graduation standards

8. I will also share it with secondary counselors.

Timing of information

1. This tool would have helped me more if I could have used it early enough to order the accommodations my students would benefit from. We had to order earlier in the year–so now I have extra math cassettes but no math translations which would have been better for some of my students.

Amount of information in the tool

1. Start listing "familiar examiner" as a possibility, even if it is already "legal." Many administrators would be relieved to have us do the testing and it would benefit the kids.

2. Add a means to print a piece of paper at the end with the student's name and what decision was made.

Technology issues

1. Larger font?

2. Thank you for not including images (longer-downloading)

3. I could not access this tool through my computer at home. See attached paper. *(Attached paper shows respondent tried to search for http://www.coled.umn.edu/nceo/map through Yahoo!)*

4. I'm not sure if I have seen all the parts.

5. Don't have internet to use it on yet.

Testing Process issues

1. What is the process for arranging LEP students' written compositions to be evaluated as LEP students?

2. For LEP students in math–If student needs a translation that is not Spanish, Hmong or the other one done by the state, will the state arrange a translated copy? Russian? Farsi? German?

3. Can LEP students' scores be identified as LEP scores even when they take the test without accommodations? It would be useful to see how all my LEP students perform on the test whether they took it with or without accommodations.

4. Issue of unspoken time limit when LEP students are testing with mainstream students

Clarity of the survey

1. Why call the tests BSTs and MCAs when you have Basic Standards and Statewide Accountability Testing as headings on the chart of Exemptions Permitted. Are MCAs the same as Statewide Accountability Testing?

Miscellaneous

1. What to do for students who do poorly–
        – set up a discussion page where teachers can ask questions and others can reply with suggestions

Check out discussion page at eslcafe.com
        – maybe a statewide teacher chat line
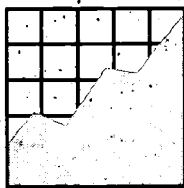
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