

TOPICAL REVIEW EIGHT

The Role of Accommodations in Educational Accountability Systems

December 2005

**The Institute for the
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The Role of Accommodations
in Educational Accountability
Systems

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EPRRI, funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, investigates the impact of new educational accountability systems on students with disabilities and on special education. EPRRI addresses the research needs of policymakers and other key stakeholders by identifying critical gaps in current knowledge, seeking promising strategies, and publishing Topical Reviews, Policy Updates, and Issue Briefs. The Institute is a joint venture of the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland, the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota, and the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative.

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Many students with disabilities need to use accommodations to meaningfully access instruction and to be appropriately assessed. During the past decade, the use of assessment accommodations has dramatically increased the participation rates of students with disabilities in statewide testing. Assessment accommodations can be defined as “changes in materials used for testing” (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 2003, p. 30). The purpose of this topical review is to analyze how accommodations are used by students with disabilities on statewide tests, and their implications for accountability systems. This topical review also analyzes the state accommodations policies in four core states in which the Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI) is conducting research (California, Maryland, New York, and Texas) to illustrate a range of accommodation policies.

Ideally there are linkages between the accommodations that a student uses in the classroom and the accommodations that the student uses during assessment. Many teachers, however, do not currently have the knowledge and skills to appropriately make decisions about the use of accommodations for students with disabilities during instruction and assessment. This topical review demonstrates how Innovation Configurations (IC) can be used to improve current practice. An IC is a written description of a preferred practice that contains the variations that may occur when the practice is implemented.

The appropriate use of accommodations is an important aspect of ensuring that all students are able to access currently available large-scale assessments. The authors conclude that all students would benefit from well-designed tests that minimize the need for accommodations.

This topical review addresses the use of accommodations for students with disabilities on state-wide tests and their implications for educational accountability systems. The review is part of a series developed by the Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI) in order to investigate issues related to accountability and special education. This paper will:

- Analyze policy issues involving the use of accommodations for assessment and accountability purposes;
- Discuss research findings, policy considerations, and the possible linkage between policy and practice;
- Highlight some possible steps that might be taken to move the use of accommodations from policy and push it toward everyday practice in school districts.

Accommodation policies from California, Maryland, New York, and Texas were analyzed to find examples of how accommodations are being used. These states were selected because they are the four core states in which EPRRI is conducting research. The examples are not considered representative of all states but are illustrative of a range of accommodation policies.

The Law

In the past the educational outcomes of students with disabilities were individualized, private, and based on the IEP process, but the 1997 and 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and the Title I of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) now indicate that all students are expected to participate

in large-scale assessments and in state accountability systems. According to McLaughlin and Thurlow (2003), “for the students who receive special education, the new demands for public accountability for student achievement represent a major shift from an accountability model that was grounded in individually referenced Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and school systems’ compliance with procedures to an accountability system based on benchmarks and on scores assessed and publicly reported in aggregate” (pp. 435-436).

Introductory remarks to NCLB state that the purpose of the law is “. . . to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Assessments are a key component of educational accountability systems, which is a major change from previous practices that seldom connected educational inputs and processes with student achievement. Schools now face consequences if they fail “to meet or sustain specific levels of performance” (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003, p. 433).

NCLB recognizes that there is a need for the appropriate use of accommodations for some students with disabilities in order to increase the validity of assessment of academic achievement. Table 1 contains the portions of NCLB that address participation and accommodations. As indicated in the figure, NCLB requires that all students participate in statewide assessments. If at least 95 percent of all students in each identified subgroup (including students with disabilities) in a school do not participate, then that school is identified as a school in need of improvement. NCLB views accommoda-

Table 1. Selected Sections of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 That Pertain to the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Accountability Systems.

<p>The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) states that:</p> <p>A. ...each state accountability system shall</p> <p>(i) be based on the academic standards and academic assessments adopted...and shall take into account the achievement of all public elementary and secondary students (Part A, Sec. 1111, 2)</p> <p>C. ‘Adequate yearly progress’ shall be defined by the State in a manner that—</p> <p>(i) applies the same high standards of academic achievement to all public elementary school and secondary school students in the State (Part A, Sec. 1111, 2,C) . . .</p> <p>(v) includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for each of the following:</p> <p>(I) the achievement of all public elementary school and secondary school students;</p> <p>(II) the achievement of –</p> <p>(aa) economically disadvantaged students;</p> <p>(bb) students from major racial and ethnic groups;</p> <p>(cc) students with disabilities, and</p> <p>(dd) students with limited English proficiency (Part A, Sec. 1111, 2).</p> <p>(ii) not less than 95 percent of each group of students described in subparagraph (C)(v) who are enrolled in the school are required to take the assessments, consistent with paragraph (3)(C)(xi) and with accommodations, guidelines, and alternative assessments provided in the same manner as those provided under section 612(a)(17)(A) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education act and paragraph (3) . . .(Part, A, Sec. 111, 2).</p>
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Source: U. S. Department of Education (2002)

tions as one part of the accountability puzzle that will ensure that more students with disabilities will be able to participate in large-scale assessments (Thurlow, 2003).

Assessment Accommodations

Despite federal mandates, many states have grappled with how to include students with disabilities in large-scale assessments. Some students with disabilities are able to take the regular test under standard conditions, but many take the regular test

under accommodated conditions. Elliott, Braden, and White (2001) noted that an important way to increase the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments is to permit changes in testing procedures. These changes are often referred to as accommodations.

Assessment accommodations are “changes in materials used for testing” (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 2003, p. 30). According to the American Psychological Association (1999), large-scale tests are intended to be administered in a specified

Table 2. Selected Assessment Accommodations.

<i>Accommodations Category</i>				
Presentation Accommodations	Equipment & Material Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Scheduling/ Timing Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Print • Braille • Read Aloud • Read Aloud Directions • Read Aloud Questions • Sign Interpretation of Directions • Sign Interpretation of Questions • Read/Reread/Simplify/Clarify Directions • Visual Cues on Test/Instructions • Administration by Other • Additional Examples • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnification Equipment • Amplification Equipment • Light/Acoustics • Calculator • Template/Graph Paper • Audio/Video Cassette • Noise Buffer • Adaptive or Special Furniture • Abacus • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proctor/Scribe • Machine or Computer • Write In Test Booklets • Tape Recorder • Communication Device • Spellchecker/ Assistance • Sign Responses • Braille • Pointing • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Time • With Breaks • Multiple Sessions • Time Beneficial to Student • Over Multiple Days • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Administration • Small Group Administration • Carrel • Separate Room • Seat Location/ Proximity • Minimize Distractions/Quiet/ Reduced Noise • Student’s Home • Special Ed. Class • Other

Source: Clapper, Blount, Lazarus, Thompson, and Thurlow (2005).

manner. Only under standard administration conditions can the scores of educational and psychological tests be appropriately interpreted. Although a test accommodation is a change to standard test conditions that eliminates extraneous problems that a student with disabilities may have when taking a test, it maintains the integrity and purpose of the test. Thus, accommodations are test changes that do not change the construct that the test was designed to measure. Thurlow and Bolt (2001) defined accommodations as “changes in

assessment materials or procedures that address aspects of students’ disabilities that may interfere with the demonstration of their knowledge and skills on standardized tests. Accommodations attempt to eliminate barriers to meaningful testing thereby allowing for the participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments” (p.1). Accommodations can “level the playing field” for students with disabilities by eliminating barriers that are irrelevant to the construct being assessed (Thompson, Blount, & Thurlow, 2002).

All 50 states have policies that list which assessment accommodations can be provided for students with disabilities when they take statewide assessments. According to Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, and Robey (2002), in the early 1990's about 25 states had no written accommodation policies; however, by the end of the decade all states had accommodation policies in place. As shown in Table 2, accommodations can be organized into five categories: a) presentation accommodations, b) equipment and material accommodations, c) response accommodations, d) scheduling/timing accommodations, and e) setting accommodations (Clapper, Blount, Lazarus, Thompson, & Thurlow, 2005).

Standard and Nonstandard Accommodations

Federal legislation requires that accommodations be provided for students with disabilities if they need them, but the law does not list any specific accommodations. Every state in the United States has written policies or guidelines about the specific accommodations that can be used by students with disabilities during statewide assessments. These state policies often list assessment accommodations that can be provided for students when they take the statewide assessment. Terminology differs between states to the extent that different terms may mean the same thing or in some cases the same term may have opposite meanings. Generally, each state has a pair of terms that distinguish between test changes that are acceptable and those that are not acceptable (e.g., standard/nonstandard, accommodation/modification, allowed/not allowed, reportable/not reportable, etc.) (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 2003).

Most states use the term “accommodation” for changes that are not considered to alter the con-

struct of the test; however a few states use the term “modification” for changes that produce valid test scores (Clapper et al., 2005). Some accommodations/modifications are considered to change what is being tested to an extent that invalidates a student's score. Many states call such changes modifications, non-standard accommodations, invalid accommodations, or other similar terms (Clapper et al., 2005). Currently there is much debate about which accommodations are “okay” and which are “not okay”—even psychometricians who make a career out of studying such issues often cannot agree. Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (2003) asserted that individuals' fundamental belief systems have a major impact on which accommodations they consider acceptable and which they consider non-acceptable. Common questions include:

- How might accommodations be used to enable certain students with disabilities to access a large-scale assessment?
- Might accommodations use threaten the meaning of a test score?
- How should scores of students who use accommodations be reported and included in accountability systems?

Controversies

Chubb and Moe (1990) reported that the collection and dissemination of information about school performance can lead to better schools. Care must be taken, however, so that the accountability system does not just point out flaws in the system. Instead the information should lead to better learning experiences for all children, including students with disabilities. The use of testing and the reporting of results make it possible to identify schools that

meet the needs of students and schools in need of improvement. According to Thurlow (2003), unless large-scale assessments are properly designed and implemented, testing can have unanticipated negative consequences. Accommodations play a key role in enabling many students with disabilities to access the current statewide tests.

Thurlow (2003) argued that “many states have gone boldly forward—setting policy and guidelines that have challenged traditional measurement assumptions about standardization, about what we are really measuring and what we should be measuring, and about what we need to do to design better tests for all students” (p. 2). In the early 1990s, states often used accommodations merely to give some students with disabilities access to the testing situation. Thurlow et al. (2003), for instance, gave the example of how many people wear eyeglasses to accommodate for a visual disability. The glasses permit an individual who cannot read without them to access and demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills. The glasses permit an individual to demonstrate his or her ability rather than the limitations of his or her disability. Another example would be that of a student with a physical disability who might need to use a scribe to access a writing test.

Thurlow et al. (2003) emphasized that “little controversy surrounds accommodations for sensory and physical disabilities . . . The controversy generally arises for those accommodations that are used for less visible disabilities, such as learning disabilities and emotional disabilities” (p. 32). Today, states and policymakers are “honing in on the need to clarify the purpose of the test and construct being tested” (Thurlow, 2003, p. 4).

Exit Exams and Legal Issues. Twenty-seven states have or soon will have high school exit exams (Krentz, Thurlow, Shyyan, & Scott, 2005). Students in those states are generally required to pass the exit exam to receive a standard diploma. Advocates for students with disabilities have challenged these regulations. A few states currently offer exemptions for students with disabilities that allow them to graduate with a standard diploma even if they do not pass the exit examination (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003; Krentz et al., 2005). For example, it can be argued that students who cannot obtain meaningful information from printed text, such as students who are blind or who have learning disabilities, are discriminated against because they cannot “read” the test. However, these students may be able to complete classroom assignments with the assistance of talking computers or books-on-tape. Forbidding the use of these accommodations on the state assessment, assigning a score of zero or the lowest score, or not counting the score when the accommodation is used by the student, places these students at a disadvantage. Without passing high-stakes assessments, these students may not be able to obtain a diploma and may be denied access to college or other postsecondary opportunities.

States have wrestled with how to include the scores of students who need to use an accommodation that is considered nonstandard or non-approved. In 2001, 21 states did not plan to include the scores of students using nonstandard accommodations in the accountability system, 10 states planned to report the scores separately, and 15 states planned to aggregate the scores with those of other students (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001). In two states, the scores were to be reported both

separately and aggregated with the scores of other students; while three states planned to include the scores of students who took the test using nonstandard accommodations, they planned to enter them into the system as the lowest possible score or as a zero score regardless of how the students actually performed (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001). Thurlow (2003) concluded:

What states are going to do with the scores of students who participate in tests using “not okay” accommodations requires serious reconsideration... Whether the solution involves gathering additional evidence . . . or it involves specialized scoring programs, the options of simply excluding students or even just giving students zero scores are probably options of the past (pp. 9-10).

Several lawsuits have emerged from state policies that restricted the use of certain accommodations during their exit exams. For example, in 1999 in the state of Oregon, a lawsuit was filed by parents of students with disabilities who believed that standardized state tests had violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (Fine, 2001). That case, *Oregon Department of Education vs. Advocates for Special Kids (A.S.K.) (2001)*, resulted in a settlement that permitted the use of any and all accommodations on statewide tests that students with disabilities had previously been provided during classroom instruction as long as the accommodations had not been empirically shown to interfere with the test score interpretation (Hutson, Foote, Wolinsky, & Aubry, 2001; McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003).

Two more recent court decisions have also grappled with the role of accommodations on large-scale assessments. A Federal Court of Appeals in *Rene vs. Reed (2001)* upheld a lower court ruling that permitted the state of Indiana to limit the types of accommodations that could be used on the high

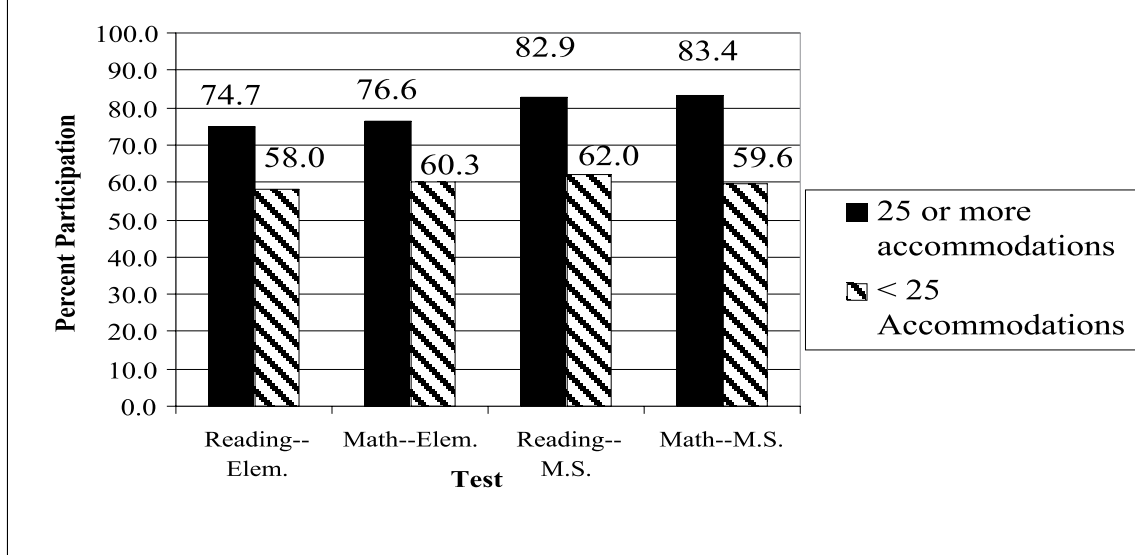
school exit exam if the use of those accommodations would invalidate the results. The ruling also indicated that three years was a sufficient time period for the state to provide notice as to whether a student is required to take the exam (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). In 2002 a federal district court decision in California, *Chapman et al. vs. California Department of Education*, required school districts to permit students to use accommodations during assessment if the use of accommodations was indicated on the students’ IEPs or if students had previously used accommodations during instruction. This court case arose after 91 percent of special education students failed the California High School Exit Exam (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Panel: Florida, 2002).

Other states also feel pressure from parents and advocates for students with disabilities to extend their list of acceptable accommodations on their exit exam. For example, the Florida Department of Education requires that reading items on the state assessment “must be read by the student through visual or tactile means” (Dyckman, 2002). Students who are blind must therefore learn Braille even if they use talking computers on a daily basis in the classroom. Florida policies state that accommodations must not compromise the “validity” of the test (Dyckman, 2002); at the same time other laws and policies require that students be permitted to use needed accommodations in order to be able to access the test.

State and District Accommodation Policies

The use of accommodations has dramatically increased the participation rates of students with disabilities in statewide testing during the past decade (Thurlow, Thompson, & Lazarus, in press; Thompson & Thurlow, 1999, 2001, 2003). The

Figure 1. The Percentage of Elementary and Middle School Students Who Participate in Regular Statewide Reading and Math Tests Based on Number of Accommodations Available in the State, 2000-01.



Source: The data used to create this figure is from SAAS (2003).

achievement of sufficient participation rates, a critical aspect of current accountability systems, needs to be balanced against the need for scores that are considered to be reliable and valid—which many of the current scores are not considered to be. At the same time, however, it must be noted that there is a desperate need for a research-based definition of which accommodations are appropriate to use and when their use is appropriate (Thurlow, 2003).

The Role of State Policies

Project SAAS (State Accountability for All Students) (2003) conducted a comparative analysis on how state accommodation policies affect the outcomes of students with disabilities.

The project’s purpose was primarily to analyze the impact of accommodations on participation rates in statewide testing. The secondary purpose was to examine the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing on students with disabilities. As shown in Figure 1, the SAAS study found that students with disabilities in states that have accommodation policies allowing the use of a large number of unrestricted accommodations are more likely to participate in the regular reading and math tests at the elementary and middle school levels. SAAS defined unrestricted accommodations as “accommodations that can be used under any circumstances” (p. 3). For example, almost 75 percent of students with disabilities participated in the elementary reading test in states with 25 or more

unrestricted accommodations, while in states with fewer than 25 unrestricted accommodations only 58 percent of students with disabilities participated in the same test.

The Role of School District Policies

Abt Associates, Inc. (2002) analyzed how 17 school districts implemented IDEA and the impact that IDEA has had on the manner in which students with disabilities are educated. The study examined school district policies to determine how students with disabilities were expected to participate in large-scale assessments. The study then checked to see whether district practices were aligned with policy guidelines and what types of resources were available (including training activities and support staff).

Abt Associates, Inc. (2002) placed each of the 17 school districts in a category based primarily on “the extent to which district policies expected that students with disabilities would take the same assessments as students without disabilities. Categories were also distinct according to the availability of alternative assessments and the extent to which stakeholders supported the full participation of students with disabilities” (p. 61). The categories that Abt Associates, Inc. (2002) identified are described below:

- *Category I school districts* generally did not have clear policies that described how students with disabilities were expected to participate in assessments. District teachers and administrators often had negative attitudes toward students with disabilities, held low expectations for them, and did not believe that these students benefited from inclusion in state and district assessments.

Often few resources (e.g., staff training and availability of support staff) were devoted to supporting the participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments.

- *Category II school districts* generally had policies in place that required students with disabilities to fully participate in the assessment system. The policies often did not explicitly discuss the use of specific accommodations, even though their use was implicitly implied. Some of the Category II districts had alternate assessment systems in place for those relatively few students with severe disabilities. District educators had been provided with some training on how to make participation decisions. Teachers in Category II schools, however, reported a need and desire for more training on how to use assessment accommodations. School staff in Category II districts sometimes questioned the benefits of including students with disabilities in assessments.
- *Category III school districts* consistently “included *all* students in state-wide and district-wide assessments” (p. 65), even if they did not have district policies that explicitly required them to do so. Implicit policies supported the full participation of students with disabilities in assessment, the provision of assessment accommodations, and the use of alternate assessments when an IEP team determined that this was appropriate. Category III schools were located in states with a history of high expectations for students with disabilities. Staff in Category III schools had received more training and guidance in the use of accommodations than

staff in Category I and Category II schools; however, they still desired additional training to help them better implement the use of assessment accommodations.

Thirty-five percent of the school districts that participated in the Abt Associates, Inc. (2002) study were identified as Category I schools, 47 percent as Category II schools, and 18 percent as Category III schools. Thus, more than 80 percent of the schools in the study had not fully implemented the assessment or participation requirements of IDEA or NCLB. Educators in all three categories needed and desired additional training on how to appropriately use accommodations in order to include students with disabilities in assessments.

Research on the Effects of Accommodations on Large-Scale Assessment Results

Policymakers generally agree that the primary purpose of using accommodations is to increase the validity of a test score and make the measurement of a specific construct comparable across students with and without disabilities. However, research results to date have not provided clear guidance about the validity of some accommodations, such as the impact of the read-aloud- questions accommodation on test results. In an extensive review of test accommodations literature, Sireci, Li, and Scarpati (2003) stated:

Our review indicates that many accommodations have positive, construct-valid effects for certain groups of students. The remaining challenge is to implement these accommodations appropriately and identify which accommodations are best for specific students. Another challenge is developing more flexible tests that would make accommodations unnecessary. These challenges appear surmountable (p. 68).

In a similar study, Thompson, Blount, and Thurlow (2002) reviewed literature from 1999 through 2001 to determine the effects of accommodations on the large-scale test scores of students with disabilities. The 46 research studies under review included journal articles, dissertations, papers presented at conferences, and reports. In many studies, there was no clear definition of the construct being measured. Furthermore, little was known about the individual students who used accommodations. Much of the research was conducted with data from norm-referenced tests, yet NCLB requires the use of criterion-referenced or standards-based tests. The authors noted that NCLB has made it urgent that a consensus be reached as to whether various accommodations threaten test validity or score comparability. The conclusions drawn in the various studies were not clear-cut. However, three general conclusions were reported:

- Computer administration, oral presentation, and extended time showed a positive effect on student scores across at least four of the studies, yet other studies did not find any significant effect on scores or alterations in item comparability.
- Accommodations use is based primarily upon educators' beliefs.
- The results of some test items are influenced more than the results of other test items when a test is administered under accommodated conditions.

Tindal (2003) identified two problems with the majority of the past research: consistency and effectiveness. First, the results of accommodations research have not been consistent across studies. Most of the research studies on the use of accommodations presented the results of a single study that analyzed a unique population; thus, it might be expected that the results would differ between studies even though it is still possible to generalize the results. The second problem is that in past studies researchers have found it difficult to measure the effectiveness of accommodations use. The use of some accommodations may improve the performance of all student groups (students with disabilities, English language learners, and general education students) rather than the performance of students with disabilities only.

In order to develop a better understanding of how accommodations use affects students' performance, it becomes necessary to analyze the test construct. As Tindal (2003) noted, emphasis should be placed "on the meaning of the construct (and the accommodation) and not just the score" (p. 4). One method to analyze how the use of accommodations may have an impact on student performance is differential item analysis (DIF). For example, Bielinski, Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Freidebach, & Freidebach. (2001) used DIF analysis to examine the impact of the read-aloud accommodation on reading test validity. Bielinski et al. (2001) concluded:

The results from the reading test indicated that item difficulty was substantially different from the reference group for students with a reading disability taking the test without an accommodation. In other words, in the absence of an accommodation, reading comprehension test scores will not mean the same thing for students with a reading disability as they do for other examinees (p. 15)

The authors also concluded that there is a need for continued research on the use of assessment accommodations.

Universal Design

It is possible that the need for accommodations would be reduced if future tests are designed in ways that permit more students to easily access them. *Universally designed assessments* are developed to permit the participation of the widest range of students without compromising the reliability or validity of assessments. Thompson, Johnstone, and Thurlow (2002) identified seven elements of a test that meet universal design criteria:

- Inclusive assessment population;
- Precisely defined constructs;
- Accessible, non-biased items;
- Amendable to accommodations;
- Simple, clear, and intuitive instructions and procedures;
- Maximum readability and comprehensibility;
- Maximum legibility.

The authors (2002) asserted that universal design provides a new way of thinking about assessments that will minimize the need for accommodations. A universally-designed assessment is a well-designed assessment that can better measure the knowledge and skills of all students, including students with disabilities.

In a summary of the results of several surveys and studies of state special education directors, teachers, counselors and school administrators, Thurlow and Thompson (2004) found many positive consequences resulting from the participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments. Those positive consequences included:

- Students in special education are receiving more rigorous, standards-based instruction.
- Students are being taught more challenging material based on states' standards.
- The performance of students with disabilities on many state assessments is improving.
- Teachers of students with significant disabilities see themselves as professionals—not babysitters—once they realize that their students can reach much higher expectations than in the past.
- Standards and assessments bring together the best skills of both general and special educators.
- Assessment ensures that students are represented in the school accountability systems.
- Some students with disabilities report feeling more involved in general education activities.

- Parents and special educators support raising the level of expectations for students with disabilities (Thurlow & Thompson, 2004, p. 172).

States and school districts across the United States have found widespread consensus on the need for accommodations, but have also often found it very difficult to put the beliefs into practice. Based on the results of a survey of state directors of special education, Thompson and Thurlow (2001) found that there are challenges resulting from the inclusion of students with disabilities in accountability systems. The challenges reported were the following:

- Some school district administrators are concerned that including scores of students with disabilities will lower their overall district scores, and consequently, their district ratings.
- Some people question how students with disabilities can access or reach the state learning standards.
- Some administrators are not abiding by the requirements regarding accommodations and modifications because of the time and paperwork required.
- Parents are concerned that their children won't graduate (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001, p. 6).

The standards-based reform movement has been challenging; a key component of that challenge is the “development of inclusive assessment

systems to measure progress toward standards” (Thurlow & Thompson, 2004, p. 174). Thurlow (2003) noted that policy is pushing practice in the area of accommodations, and identified three major questions:

- What happens to *students* who need “not okay” accommodations to participate in assessments?
- What happens to the *scores of students* who need “not okay” accommodations to participate in assessments?
- How do/should IEP teams decide who gets which accommodations and how do they align assessment and instructional accommodations? (p. 7).

Teacher Reactions

Educators often appreciate the guidance that standards and curriculum frameworks provide them. The guidelines alert teachers to materials they need to cover in order for their students to succeed; therefore, the teachers feel rewarded when their students do well on large-scale tests (Capper, 1996). However, teachers sometimes find that they do not know how to provide all students, including students with disabilities, with the needed educational opportunities so that they can succeed academically. Teachers also reported that sometimes tests can be intrusive. Finally, many teachers have had little or no training in how to make appropriate decisions about the use of accommodations. As a result, IEP team members may not know how to choose which assessment accommodations a student should use. Shriner and DeStefano (2003) found that even when accommodations are included in students’

IEPs, the decision made by the IEP team often is not implemented on the day of testing.

Linkage Between Instructional Accommodations and Assessment Accommodations

Ideally there is a link between the accommodations that a student uses in the classroom and the accommodations that the student uses during assessment. Classroom accommodations can assist students in accessing the curriculum. Students, however, need to learn how to use an assessment accommodation appropriately rather than having something unfamiliar provided to them on the day of a test. For example, if a student does not use a spellchecker during instruction, he or she may have no idea how to use the accommodation even if it is allowed in a testing situation (Thurlow et al., 2003).

Thirty-nine states require students to have used accommodations for instruction before allowing those accommodations to be used for assessment (Thurlow et al., 2002). For example, if a student uses a read-aloud accommodation in mathematics class, then the use of that accommodation may be permitted on the statewide mathematics assessment. According to IDEA, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members are responsible for making accommodations decisions for both instruction and assessment.

Thompson and Thurlow (1999) found that middle and high school students are less likely to use accommodations for assessment than elementary students. Additionally, they found a wide variation in the way accommodations are used. Students with similar characteristics may use very different accommodations whereas some students may not

even have access to appropriate accommodations. Langley and Olsen (2003) noted that “students are sometimes over-accommodated, inappropriately accommodated, or under-accommodated” (p. 7). There is a need to link assessment accommodations with the instructional accommodations contained in a student’s IEP (Langley & Olsen, 2003).

Logistical Nightmare

The Paul Sherlock Center on Disabilities (2002) used several methodologies to study accommodation practices in Rhode Island. The research summarized the results of an accommodation questionnaire completed by 246 randomly selected teachers in the state. Data were also collected from the IEPs of 107 students in 9 schools. In addition, the researchers observed a sample of these students in their classrooms during their participation in the 2002 Rhode Island assessments. Finally, the researchers held informal interviews with test staff, proctors, and school administrators to learn more about their knowledge of accommodations and their perspectives on the use of accommodations.

According to the Paul Sherlock Center study (2002), in Rhode Island the assessment accommodations most frequently provided to students with disabilities were extended time, alternate location, oral administration of directions, clarified or repeated directions, and frequent breaks. Preferential or proximity seating was the most commonly provided instructional accommodation. The accommodations actually used in the testing situation often differed from what was in a student’s IEP. Testing location was a more important determinant of the accommodations provided to students than what was contained in their IEPs. For example, if one student at a test site needed the directions read aloud, the directions would be read aloud for all students at

that location, whether all students needed the accommodation or not, and regardless of whether the accommodation was in their IEP.

The Paul Sherlock Center study (2002) concluded that “we almost always saw the same set of accommodations and that they often came bundled, rather than in more individualized measures, [which] may indicate that the accommodations of choice met institutional needs as well as fulfilling student requirements” (Paul Sherlock Center on Disabilities, 2002, p. 5). For example, “extended time” was a commonly used accommodation, yet “flexible scheduling,” which might have extended testing over several days and met similar students’ needs was seldom used. The study also found that often students had access to different accommodations during instruction from those they did during testing. One reported reason for this discrepancy was that educators often only wanted to allow a student to use “permissible accommodations” (i.e., “okay” accommodations) on large-scale tests. For example, spellcheckers and dictionaries are commonly used during instruction but are not permitted on the Rhode Island statewide assessment.

Professional Development

Currently there is great variability among states, school districts, schools, and even classrooms in how and when accommodations are provided. Many educators have never learned how to make good decisions about the use of accommodations for students with disabilities either for instruction or for assessment (Shriner & DeStefano, 2003). Many also do not know how to implement accommodations that are included in a student’s IEP. Teacher and administrator training programs typically provide little training to prepare educators to be

knowledgeable about accommodations for instruction and testing (Thurlow, 2003).

Innovation Configurations. Given the potential for great variability among states, school districts, and schools in how and when accommodations are provided on assessments for accountability, EPRRI conducted a national symposium on accommodations. State and district level personnel from four core research states and representatives from the U.S. Department of Education attended the symposium in October 2003 and identified ideal practices for the use of accommodations on assessments for accountability. The practices identified were used to develop Innovation Configurations.

An Innovation Configuration (IC) is a written description of a preferred practice that contains all variations that may occur when the practice is implemented. The concept of IC grew out of research conducted to determine how teachers implement new educational programs (Hall & Hord, 2001). One of the key findings from those studies was that while it was important for teachers and others to know the goals of a particular program or practice, just describing something in those terms alone did not help teachers to implement the practice in the classroom. According to Hall and Hord (2001), “In each case, when the so-called users were asked to describe what they were doing, a surprising range of practices was outlined, but in all cases the interviewees would claim to be using the same innovation” (p. 38). Hall and Hord (2001) concluded that if effective implementation of a particular practice was to occur, then the developers must be able to describe what the specific practice would look like when actually used in the classroom.

The process of developing ICs at EPRRI’s symposium (October 2003) began with participants identifying the major components of the practice. Those components were:

1. Decision-making processes regarding which accommodations students should use on assessments employed for accountability purposes.
2. Counting and reporting of the scores of students who use accommodations on assessments employed for accountability purposes.
3. Determining procedures for the actual provision and use of accommodations on assessments employed for accountability purposes.

Next, the participants generated a list of ideal practices for each of the IC’s components based on the symposium’s readings, presentations, and individual experiences. Some of the ideal circumstances generated by the symposium participants included:

- a. Students have access to accommodations on test day.
- b. Students are familiar with the accommodations used on test day.
- c. Students can advocate for themselves in order to obtain needed accommodations.
- d. Students use accommodations during the instructional process.
- e. District administrators understand the accommodations process and ensure their provision on test day.

- f. General and special education teachers understand accommodations and the use of accommodations during the instructional process.
- g. General and special education teachers understand the difference between “okay” and “not okay” accommodations.
- h. General and special education teachers use standards-based IEPs to link instruction to assessment.
- i. Assessment coordinators plan for the logistics necessary in order to provide accommodations prior to test day.

After the ideal practices were generated, symposium participants designed an IC for each practice or cluster of practices. This was done by placing the ideal practice on the left end of a continuum, identifying the related, unacceptable practice and placing it at the right end of the continuum, and then writing “intermediate steps” describing the practices necessary to move from the unacceptable to the ideal practice. A draft version of an IC is provided in Table 3. Some of the ICs applications may include conducting self-assessments to determine how well accommodations on assessments for accountability are being implemented and then using the results to target staff development, training, or other interventions.

Table 3. Innovation Configuration.

Component: Deciding which accommodations students should use on assessments for accountability

Sub-component: Students’ use of accommodations on statewide assessments

Role: Student

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Explains learning needs in each subject area and advocates for the appropriate accommodation(s). Uses appropriate accommodations during classroom instruction and assessment. Uses appropriate accommodations for each portion of the statewide assessment.	Uses appropriate accommodations during classroom instruction and assessment. Uses appropriate accommodations for each portion of the statewide assessment.	Uses appropriate accommodations during classroom instruction and assessment. Uses generic accommodations provided to students with disabilities during statewide assessment.	Does not use needed accommodations during classroom instruction and assessment. Uses generic accommodations provided to students with disabilities during statewide assessment.	Does not receive any accommodations during statewide assessment.

Training. A survey of 22 states was designed and conducted to learn how states provide training on the use of accommodations to school district employees (Langley & Olsen, 2003). The role of State Education Agencies (SEAs) in this training could be placed into several general categories:

- Development of guidelines and policies related to accommodations;
- Training for Local Education Agency (LEA) (i.e., school district) staff on the provision of accommodations;
- Production of materials to use for training;
- Monitoring of compliance;
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of training programs;
- Source of encouragement to teachers as they grew as educational professionals who were in the process of becoming more knowledgeable about the use of accommodations (i.e., cheerleading) (Langley & Olsen, 2003).

Langley and Olsen (2003) found that SEAs played a key role in providing training in the use of both instructional and assessment accommodations in 41% of the states and in the use of assessment accommodations only in 32% of the states. SEAs were not conducting training in 27% of the states. In most states, the special education division of the SEA was the primary responsible agent for providing professional development opportunities and not the curriculum and instruction division or one of the “title” programs. Langley and Olsen (2003)

also found that special education teachers and LEA large-scale assessment experts were the main targets of training. Only 27 percent of the states reported general education teachers to be the primary target of training and only one state mentioned para-educators as the primary target. Curriculum and instruction experts in the LEA seldom were included in the training.

The content of SEA training sessions for LEA staff typically covered the definition of accommodations, the legal requirements, and the selection of appropriate accommodations (Langley & Olsen, 2003). Other topics included the relationship of accommodations to instruction, the impact of assessment accommodations on the construct being measured, the decision-making process, ethical issues, and the “nuts and bolts” of how to complete forms. Training often failed to cover how to make collaborative decisions about accommodations use and how to explain the use of accommodations to different audiences (Langley & Olsen, 2003).

According to Langley and Olsen (2003), most states provided one day or less of training in the use of accommodations. The provision of workshops and the dissemination of materials and resources were the most common format of offering the training. Websites are becoming an increasingly popular way to disseminate information to LEA staff and the placement of downloadable materials on SEA websites is generally considered to be a very useful training tool. The use of case studies and situations that encouraged interactive learning was reported as particularly effective.

SEAs faced a number of challenges in providing professional development opportunities concerning

the use of accommodations. According to the states, the two most significant challenges were:

- **Lack of system capacity to provide training to the LEA personnel who needed it the most.** The SEA respondents noted that it was often difficult to reach general education teachers with information on the use of accommodations. There were many fiscal constraints (e.g., the need to get release time, provision of substitute teachers, and pay for travel expenses). Wide geographic dispersion of school staff also made it difficult to provide training in a cost-effective manner.
- **Limited SEA staff time to engage in professional development activities.** Many SEAs have faced severe staff cutbacks in recent years. Staff is often stretched very thin and deals with many issues related to standards, accountability, and special education. For example, Langley and Olsen (2003) quoted one respondent, “I am the only person doing any sort of training or in-service on accommodations and this is just a small blip on my radar screen” (p 24).

What is Happening in the Four Core States?

To illustrate the variations in the assessment accommodations provided for students with disabilities, we analyzed the state accommodations policies of California, Maryland, New York, and Texas. This analysis used data collected in 2003 by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). NCEO conducted a document analysis of the test participation and test accommodations policies of the above states using publicly available documents. The four states permit the use of a range of accommodations and consider different accommodations to be “okay” and “not okay.” Similar information is available for other states in a paper published by NCEO entitled *2003 State Policies on Assessment Participation and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities* (Clapper et al., 2005). That paper is available on the NCEO website at: <http://education.umn.edu/nceo/Online-Pubs/Synthesis56.html>.

Accommodation Decision-Making Criteria

States often address how decisions should be made concerning the use of assessment accommodations for students with disabilities in their accommodations policies. The four EPRRI states,

and all other states, require that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) be used as the basis for the decision-making process. Table 4 lists several additional criteria that were used in the four EPRRI states during 2003. See Appendix A for definitions of the accommodations decision criteria. Both the California and Texas accommodations policies indicated that accommodations used for assessment should have previously been used for instruction. California, New York, and Texas required consideration of individual students’ needs or characteristics, while the Maryland, New York, and Texas policies indicated that the nature of the assessment should be taken into consideration as well. Some state policies listed “maintains the validity of the test and the resulting scores” as a decision-making variable; however, none of the four EPRRI states used this criterion.

As indicated in Table 5, both California and Maryland prohibited consideration of a student’s disability category in the accommodations decision-making process. Maryland also prohibited consideration of the instructional program or program setting, while California prohibited individual teacher determination of accommodations.

Table 4. Variables That *Can* be Included in Accommodations Decision Criteria, Selected States, 2003.

Variable	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Individual Student Needs/Characteristics	X		X	X
Maintains the Validity of the Test and the Resulting Scores				
Purpose/Nature of the Assessment		X	X	X
Used for Classroom and Instruction	X			X

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Table 5. Variables That *Cannot* be Included in Accommodations Decision Criteria, Selected States, 2003.

Variable	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Administrative Convenience				
Instructional Program/Program Setting		X		
Nature/Category of Disability	X	X		
Parent Request				
Percent Time/Amount of Services Received		X		
Other	Individual teacher determination.			

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Neither the New York nor Texas accommodations policies listed any specific criteria that could not be considered when decisions were made about accommodations. None of the four EPRRI state policies specifically prohibited parental request or administration conveniences as a consideration during the decision process even though this is an accepted practice in other states.

Types of Accommodations

In this section, we provide tables that summarize the accommodations policies implemented by the four EPRRI states. Definitions of the accommodations are provided in Appendix A. For each accommodations category (e.g., presentation accommodations, equipment and material accommodations, response accommodations, scheduling timing accommodations, and setting accommodations) we provide first a table that lists whether or not a certain accommodation is permitted or prohibited in a state accommodations policy. An “A” in a cell means that the specific accommodation is allowed; an “AI” means that the accommodation is allowed with implications for scoring (e.g., that

accommodation is considered nonstandard and the score is not aggregated if the accommodation is used); an “AC” means that the accommodation is permitted in certain circumstances (e.g., allowed on the math test but not on the reading test or allowed on tests at certain grade levels but not others); and a “P” means that the state policy prohibits the use of the accommodation. Additional details to more completely explain an accommodation’s specification are provided in a second table.

Presentation accommodations change the manner in which a test is presented to a student. Table 6 provides a summary of the presentation accommodations permitted in 2003 in the state policies of the four core EPRRI states. Each of the four EPRRI states permitted the use of the following accommodations: large print, read-aloud directions, sign interpret directions, and Braille. The read-aloud questions accommodation was more controversial. All four states permitted its use only in certain circumstances, whereas in California and Maryland there were also some scoring implications. For example, as indicated in Table 7, the state

Table 6. Presentation Accommodations Documented in State Policies, Selected States, 2003.

Accommodation	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Additional Examples			A	
Administration by others		A	A	
Braille	A	A	A	A
Familiar Examiner				
Large Print	A	A	A	A
Read Aloud Directions	A	A	A	A
Read Aloud Questions	AC/AI*	AC/AI*	AC*	AC*
Repeat, Reread, Clarify Directions	A		A	P*
Sign Interpret Directions	A	A	A	A
Sign Interpret Questions	AC/AI*	A	A	AC*
Visual Cues		A	A	
Other			1) Increased spacing between lines; 2) Reduce the number of test items per page; and 3) Arrange multiple choice items in vertical format with answer bubble to the right of each possible choice.	

* See Table 7 for specifications.

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Note: A = Allowed; AI = Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation; AC = Allowed in certain circumstances; P = Prohibited

of Maryland allowed the use of the Kurzweil™ to deliver the read-aloud questions accommodation on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), the High School Assessment (HSA), and the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPA).

According to Table 6, the California and New York accommodations policies allowed the direc-

tions to be repeated, reread, or clarified, while the Texas policy specifically prohibited the use of this accommodation, and the Maryland policy did not mention it. Both Maryland and New York permitted the use of visual cues on the test or instructions as well as allowing the test to be administered by someone other than the regular test administrator. New York also permitted a test administrator to

Table 7. Specifications for Presentation Accommodations, Selected States, 2003.

State	Specifications and Descriptions
CA	Read Aloud Questions – Allowed on non-reading/ELA tests and allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation on the CAT6 and CST reading tests; Sign Interpret Questions - Allowed on non-reading/ELA tests and allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation on the CAT6 and CST reading tests.
MD	Read Aloud Questions – Use of the Kurzweil™ is permitted to deliver this accommodation on the MSA, HSA, and IPT, Not permitted on the reading portion of the MFPT, Any verbatim reading accommodation invalidates criterion-referenced reading scores for grades 3 and 4 MSA, verbatim reading is only permitted on Part 3 (“Reading for Understanding”) and Part 4 (“Reading for Life Skills”) portions of the test—other test sections assess decoding skills for which verbatim reading is not appropriate or permitted.
NY	Read Aloud Questions – Allowed in certain circumstances (All directions/items/questions within the Grade 4 ELA Session 2, Part 1 and Grade 8 ELA Session 1, Part 2: Listening part of the test may be read aloud to the student - No other parts of the student test books may be read to students.
TX	Read Aloud Questions – Not allowed for reading or writing tests; however, allowed for examinees who are identified as having dyslexia or a related disorder in the mathematics, social studies, and science; Repeat/Re-read/Clarify/Directions – Directions must be read verbatim; Sign Interpret Questions – Allowed on mathematics, science, and social studies tests.

Source: Clapper et al., 2005.

provide the student with additional examples to clarify the type of questions in response to a student request for additional information.

Equipment and Material accommodations listed in the accommodations policies of the four core states in 2003 are summarized in Table 8. These accommodations use equipment or materials to change the manner in which the test is presented or to change the manner in which the student responds. Presentation equipment accommodations include magnification or amplification equipment, special lighting or acoustics, templates/graph paper, special/adaptive furniture, calculators, and abacuses.

The two most controversial accommodations in this group were the use of a calculator and the use of templates or graph paper. The use of the calculator accommodation was allowed in Maryland, allowed

with implications for scoring in California, allowed on certain tests in New York, and prohibited in Texas. As indicated in Table 9, a calculator’s use in California was considered non-standard and the test score was not aggregated. The template or graph paper accommodation was permitted without restriction in New York and Texas, was only allowed on certain tests and with scoring implications in Maryland, and was prohibited in California.

Response accommodations are accommodations that affect the manner in which a student responds to the test. As shown in Table 10, the use of a proctor or scribe was permitted in all four EPRRI core study states, although this accommodation had some restrictions placed on its use in California. Each state permitted students to write in the test booklets with no restriction.

Table 8. Equipment and Material Accommodations Documented in State Policies, Selected States, 2003.

Accommodation	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Abacus			A	
Adaptive/ Special Furniture			A	
Amplification Equipment	A	A	A	
Audio/Video Equipment	A		A	
Calculator	AI*	A	AC*	P
Light/Acoustics	A		A	
Magnification Equipment	A		A	
Manipulatives				
Noise Buffer	A		A	
Templates/Graph Paper	P	AC/AI*	A	A
Other	1) On task reminders/verbal encouragement, 2) Turn pages for student, 3) Use of an arithmetic tables (Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation), 4) Use a marker to maintain place, 5) Colored overlay	Written copies of orally presented materials that are found only in examiner's manual.		

* See Table 9 for specifications.

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Note: A = Allowed; AI = Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation; AC = Allowed in certain circumstances; P = Prohibited

Table 9. Specifications for Equipment and Material Accommodations, Selected States, 2003.

State	Specifications and Descriptions
CA	Calculator – Considered to fundamentally alter what the test measures and is available only to students with documentation in IEP or 504 Plan; the waiver policy for the CA High School Exit Exam applies.
MD	Audio/Video Equipment – Verbatim audiotape of test content is allowed for content areas other than reading; verbatim audiotape is not permitted on the grades 3 and 4 general reading processes part of the MSA; if the audiotape accommodation is used at other grade levels, the test administration is considered to be nonstandard—however, the score is invalidated only for certain portions of the MSA directly related to general reading processes.
NY	Calculator – If all students are not permitted to use a calculator (or a type a calculator), the accommodation is available only to students with documentation in IEP or 504 Plan.

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Table 10. Response Accommodations Documented in State Policies, Selected States, 2003.

Accommodation	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Braille	A	A	A	
Communication Device	A	A	A	
Computer or Machine	AI*	A	A	A
Pointing	A	A	A	
Proctor/Scribe	AC/AI*	A	A	A
Spellchecker/Assistance	AI*		A	P
Sign Responses	A	A		
Tape Recorder			A	A
Write in Test Booklets	A	A	A	A
Other	Use dictionary (Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation).		1) Delete spelling, punctuation and paraphrasing requirements; and 2) Grammar checker.	

* See Table 11 for specifications.

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Note: A = Allowed; AI = Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation; AC = Allowed in certain circumstances; P = Prohibited

Table 11. Specifications for Response Accommodations, Selected States, 2003.

State	Specifications and Descriptions
CA	<p>Computer or Machine – Considered a standard accommodation if spellchecker turned off (otherwise there are implications for scoring/aggregation); Proctor/Scribe – Allowed for multiple-choice items for writing test if student provides spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Allowed with scoring/aggregation implications for writing if scribe provides spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, etc.; Spellchecker/Assistance – Considered to fundamentally alter what the test measures and is available only to students with documentation in IEP or 504 Plan; the waiver policy for the CA High School Exit Exam applies.</p>

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Table 12. Scheduling/Timing Accommodations Documented in State Policies, Selected States, 2003.

Accommodation	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Extended Time	A	A	A	
Multiple Sessions	A	A	A	
Time Beneficial to Student	A	A	A	
Over Multiple Days		A	A	
With Breaks	A	A	A	A

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Note: A = Allowed; AI = Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation; AC = Allowed in certain circumstances; P = Prohibited

Table 13. Setting Accommodations Documented in State Policy, Selected States, 2003.

Accommodation	State			
	CA	MD	NY	TX
Carrel	A	A	A	
Individual Administration	A	A	A	A
Minimize Distractions	A		A	
Seat Location/Proximity	A	A	A	
Separate Room	A		A	
Small Group	A	A	A	A
Special Ed. Classroom	A		A	
Student's Home	A	A		
Other		General education classroom with additional school support.		

Source: Clapper et al., 2005

Note: A = Allowed; AI = Allowed with implications for scoring and/or aggregation; AC = Allowed in certain circumstances; P = Prohibited

Spellcheckers were a controversial accommodation. The use of spellcheckers was not addressed in the Maryland accommodations policy, was allowed without restriction in New York, had implications for scoring in California, and was prohibited in Texas. As indicated in Table 11, the use of a spellchecker in California resulted in a nonstandard administration of the test whereas the accommodation was required to be listed in a student's IEP or 504 Plan.

Scheduling/timing accommodations are summarized in Table 12. Most of these accommodations were considered noncontroversial, though in 2003 some of the four EPRRI core states placed limitations on their use. Breaks were permitted in all four states. California, Maryland, and New York also permitted: a) the use of extended time, b) tests segments that are normally administered in one session

to be broken into multiple sessions, and c) for the tests to be administered at a time beneficial to the student. Maryland and New York permitted tests that normally would be administered in one day to be administered over multiple days as well.

Setting accommodations are summarized in Table 13. These accommodations change the test location or environment. There is little controversy about most of the accommodations included in this category. Each of the four states permitted individual and small group administration of the test. California and Maryland permitted tests to be administered in a student's home; California and New York permitted tests to be administered in the special education classroom; and the Maryland policy indicated that tests could be administered in the general education classroom "with additional school support."

Legislation indicates that students with disabilities are to be included in accountability systems. Some of these students are able to take the general, large-scale assessment with no accommodations, but others require the use of accommodations to meaningfully access those assessments. There needs to be a close linkage between the accommodations that a student uses in the classroom and the accommodations that the student uses during assessment.

Classroom accommodations can assist students in accessing the curriculum and provide them with the opportunity to learn how to use an accommodation prior to taking a large-scale assessment (Thurlow et al., 2003). The appropriate use of accommodations is a critical aspect of ensuring that all students are able to access both the curriculum and statewide assessments. The bottom line, as suggested by Sireci et al. (2003) and Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow (2002), is that all students would benefit from well-designed tests that minimize the need for accommodations.

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Appendix A: Participation and Accommodation Definitions

(Sources: Thurlow et al., 2002; Clapper et al., 2005)

Accommodation Decision Definitions

IEP Team Determines = general guideline indicating that the IEP team identifies needed accommodations.

Individual Student Needs/Characteristics = decisions based explicitly on the specific needs and learning characteristics of the student.

Instructional Program/Program Setting = decisions based on where the student receives special education services, what kind of services, or the percentage of time that the student receives them.

Maintains the Validity of the Test and the Resulting Score = decisions based on evidence (opinion or research) that resulting score will be valid and not provide an unfair advantage.

Nature/Category of Disability = decision is based, in whole or in part, on the disability category of the student.

Parent Request = decision based specifically on the parents' desires or decision; must be specifically signed off by the parents.

Receiving Spec Ed Services/Percent Time = decision is based, in part or in whole, on whether the student receives special education services, what kind of services the student receives, or the percentage of time that the student receives special education services.

Used for Classroom and Instruction = accommodation must be used for instruction before it can be considered for use during an assessment.

Accommodation Definitions

Abacus = abacus or similar counting tool.

Adaptive or Special Furniture = any furniture the student requires for sitting upright, holding a writing instrument, etc.

Additional Examples = in response to student request for more information or clarification, the test administrator can supply additional examples to assist the student in understanding the intent of the question.

Administration by Other = someone other than regular test administrator gives test to the student (e.g., special or regular education teacher or other school personnel).

Amplification Equipment = equipment that increases the level of sound during the test (e.g., FM systems, hearing aids).

Audio/Video Cassette = audio or video equipment.

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in Braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in Braille.

Calculator = standard calculator and special function calculators (sometimes one is allowed but not the other).

Carrel = student assessed while seated in a study carrel.

Communication Device = various devices for the student to use in giving responses (e.g., symbol boards).

Computer or Machine = computer or other machine (e.g., typewriter), which are often accompanied with instructions to disable spellcheckers, etc.

Extended Time = student may take longer than the time typically allowed, sometimes with the time specifically designated in some way.

Familiar Examiner = someone other than the regular test examiner who the student knows and has worked with in the past gives the test to the student (e.g., special education teacher, regular education teacher, or para-educator who has worked with student previously).

Individual (Administration) = student assessed separately from other students.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in large print.

Light/Acoustics = changes to the amount or placement of lighting or special attention to the acoustics of the test setting.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Minimize Distractions/Reduced Noise = student assessed in a quiet environment where auditory distractions can be kept to a minimum.

Multiple Sessions = assessments generally given in a single session can be broken into multiple sessions.

Noise Buffer = ear mufflers, white noise, and other equipment used to block external sounds.

Over Multiple Days = administered over several days when it is normally administered in one day.

Pointing = student points to response and staff member translates this onto an answer sheet.

Proctor/Scribe = student responds verbally and a proctor or scribe then translates the response to an answer sheet; for writing extended responses, specific instructions about spelling or punctuation may be included.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Read/Re-read/Clarify Directions = directions may be clarified through restatement for the student either in response to the administrators' decision that clarification is needed for all directions, or in response to student questions.

Seat Location/Proximity = student is assessed in a specifically designated seat location, usually in close proximity to the test administrator.

Separate Room = student assessed in a separate room, usually also requires individual or small group accommodation.

Sign Interpret Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is presented to the student with sign language (or other version such as cued speech, signed English, etc.)

Sign Interpret Questions = the assessment items are presented to the student with sign language (or other version such as cued speech, signed English, etc.).

Sign Responses = student signs responses to sign language interpreter who then records the responses.

Small Group (Administration) = student assessed in a small group separate from other students.

Special Education Classroom = student assessed in a special education classroom, usually also implying small group or individual administration.

Spellchecker/Assistance = spellchecker either as a separate device, within a word-processing program, or printed materials (e.g., glossary, dictionary).

Student's Home = student assessed at home, usually when the student is out of school for illness or similar reasons.

Tape Recorder = student's verbal responses are tape recorded, generally for later transcription.

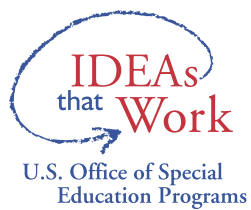
Templates/Graph Paper = Placemarkers or templates are used to mark location of focus on the test.

Time Beneficial to Student = administered at a time that is most advantageous to the student, often related to a medication schedule.

Visual Cues = additional visual cues are provided for students (e.g., arrows, stickers, or stop signs), highlighting of key words or verbs, or supplementing text with pictures.

With Breaks = time away from test allowed during tests typically administered without breaks, sometimes with specifications about when this can occur (e.g., not within subtests) and how long the breaks can be.

Write in Test Booklet = responses may be written in the test booklet rather than on answer sheets and school personnel then transcribe to answer sheets.



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Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)
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