

Appropriateness & Effectiveness of Accommodations

The state assessment system comprised of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) and the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities (WAA-SwD) was fully approved by the United States Department of Education in December 2008. As part of this rigorous evaluation, DPI submitted evidence that specifically addressed concerns regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of the accommodations it provides to students with disabilities and English Language Learners in state assessments.

Part of the evidence submitted was a committee report on the state's accommodations. DPI formed a committee comprised of staff from assessment, special education, and English Language Learner (ELL) services to develop a matrix of allowable testing accommodations. The goal of this committee's work was to develop guidelines for the use of accommodations that provide for inclusiveness and access without jeopardizing the validity of test results. This committee reviewed recent research conducted by Wisconsin's assessment contractor, CTB/McGraw-Hill, as well as national experts in the field of testing and accommodations. As a result of this research, the committee developed a list of allowable accommodations. Accommodations conclusively identified in the research as reasons for test invalidation were excluded from the list; these include practices such as the use of calculators for the computation portion of mathematics assessments and reading questions and content to students on reading assessments.

In addition to excluding accommodations shown conclusively by research to impact test validity, DPI concluded that additional data and research would be helpful in examining the use of accommodations where the research on validity was mixed. The use of these "Category 2" accommodations, used mostly by students with disabilities as specified in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and English Language Learner (ELL) students, has been tracked through test booklets since Fall 2005 and on the new WAA-SwD since January 2008.

Furthermore, accommodation usage is one of the criteria used by DPI's Special Education Team in evaluating Wisconsin school districts and schools for selected requirements pertaining to students with disabilities as part of IDEA and state law. Indicator I-20 investigates whether the IEP includes a statement of necessary accommodations for participation in state and district-wide assessments, and includes both an explanation of what appropriate accommodations are and a link to a list of DPI – approved accommodations. In addition, ELL accommodations have been evaluated through surveys, statistical analysis, and feedback from stakeholder groups.

In conjunction with our testing contractor, participation in the U.S. Department of Education's LEP Partnership, and a multi-state collaboration through CCSSO ASES group, DPI has continued to monitor research on accommodations in order to ensure sound testing practice. DPI updates the list of allowable accommodations on an annual basis, as necessary, and posts the accommodations matrix online (<http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/accomtrx.html>). DPI is developing a corresponding manual on the use of accommodations in both instruction and assessment. This manual will also be provided to the districts in Spring 2010 and posted to the DPI website.