

**Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team Guide
for Participation in the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)**
Minnesota's Alternate Assessment Based on Alternate Achievement Standards

The purpose of this document is to assist IEP teams in making annual decisions about student participation in the MTAS, an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. It consists of requirements, a flowchart, a case study and a glossary of frequently used terminology. Decisions about how a student will participate in statewide testing must be made on an individual basis and should be made separately for each subject area test. The *IEP Team Guide for Participation in the MTAS* is designed to help IEP teams select an assessment that most appropriately measures the student's progress toward state standards.

The MTAS may be appropriate for a student with a significant cognitive disability if all of the following requirements have been met:

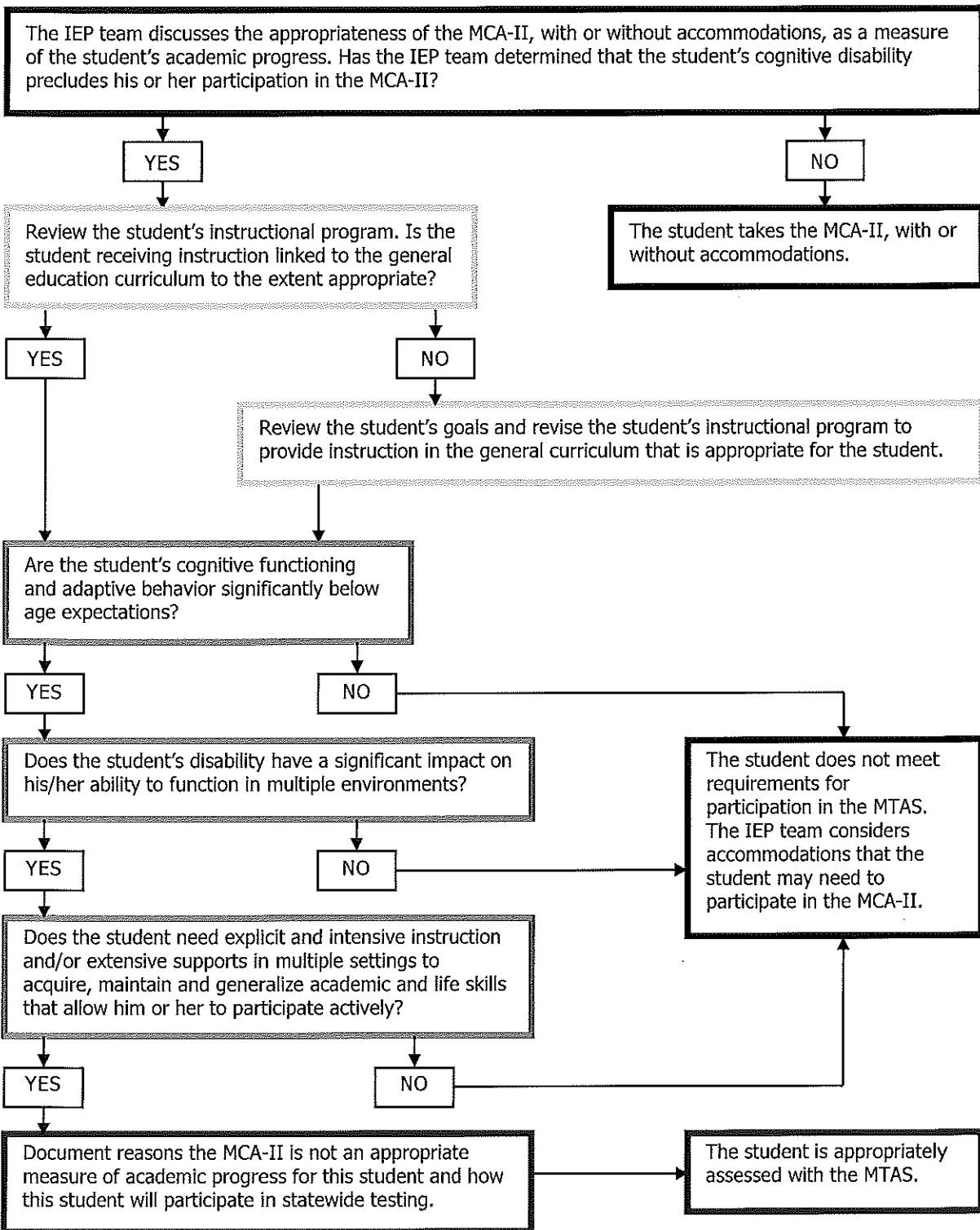
1. The IEP team first considered the student's ability to access the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment-Series II (MCA-II), with or without accommodations.
2. The IEP team reviewed the student's instructional program to ensure that the student is receiving instruction linked to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate. If instruction is not linked to the general education curriculum, then the IEP team must review the student's goals and determine how access to the general curriculum will be provided.
3. The IEP team determined the student's cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior to be significantly below age expectations. The team also determined that the student's disability has a significant impact on his or her ability to function in multiple environments, including home, school and community.
4. The IEP team determined that the student needs explicit and intensive instruction and/or extensive supports in multiple settings to acquire, maintain and generalize academic and life skills in order to actively participate in school, work, home and community environments.
5. The IEP team documented, in the IEP, reasons the MCA-II would not be not an appropriate measure of the student's academic progress and how the student would participate in statewide testing.

The careful use of this document will help IEP teams ensure that participation decisions are **NOT** made based on the following factors:

- the student's disability category;
- placement;
- participation in a separate, specialized curriculum;
- the expectation that the student may not receive a passing score on the MCA-II;
- language, social, cultural or economic differences; or
- a concern for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR IEP TEAMS

IEP teams may use this decision-making process when selecting appropriate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities.



CASE STUDY

Andrea is a student in grade 6. Her IEP team followed the decision-making process as outlined in the IEP Team Guide to determine how she would participate in the statewide assessment program.

The IEP team considered Andrea's present levels of performance. In mathematics, Andrea performs basic operations (i.e., addition and subtraction) on one- and some two-digit numbers with assistance. In reading, Andrea is working on comprehension skills such as recall, sequencing and main idea with fictional and nonfictional texts at the second-grade level.

The IEP team considered whether **the MCA-II would be an appropriate measure** of Andrea's skills. They determined that while Andrea has made significant progress on academic skills with intensive instruction, her skills are still more than four years below grade level. The IEP team believes that the MCA-II would not provide meaningful information about Andrea's reading and mathematical skills and is therefore is not likely to be an appropriate measure of her academic progress.

The IEP team considered Andrea's **access to the general education curriculum**. They evaluated Andrea's instruction and determined that she is actively engaged in learning activities that are linked to the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to master. The IEP team determined that Andrea was receiving appropriate instruction in the general curriculum, which was greatly reduced in complexity as reflected in the extended standards, or essence statements.

The IEP team reviewed a valid assessment summary when considering Andrea's **cognitive functioning**. Andrea was assessed with the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition 2003 (WISC-IV). The results indicate intellectual functioning that is significantly below average. The IEP team determined that Andrea meets the requirement for "cognitive functioning significantly below age expectations."

The assessment summary also aided the IEP team when considering Andrea's **adaptive behavior skills**. Andrea was assessed with the Vineland and was found to have deficits in adaptive behavior. Based on this information, the IEP team determined that Andrea meets the requirement for "adaptive behavior significantly below age expectations."

The IEP team considered the impact of Andrea's disability across **multiple environments**. In particular, they discussed the supports Andrea needs to function in the school, home and community. Andrea's mother stated that Andrea is making progress on her social skills at home, but overall, she agreed with other IEP team members that the impact of Andrea's disability on school, home and community environments is significant.

The IEP team discussed whether Andrea receives **explicit and intensive instruction**. They agreed that, in the area of mathematics, Andrea has made significant progress in her development of basic operation skills. In reading, Andrea is making progress on comprehension skills at the second-grade level. This progress, the IEP team members agree, would not be possible without the explicit instruction she receives in individual and small group settings. They agreed that the instruction Andrea receives meets the definition of "explicit and intensive."

Finally, the IEP team reviewed the list of factors that should not be the basis for participation in the MTAS:

- The IEP team considered a variety of factors beyond Andrea's disability category of Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD) in its decision.
- Andrea's placement in a Federal Setting Three was not a factor in the IEP team's decision.
- Andrea participates in a specialized curriculum, but the IEP team assures that the curriculum was not the basis for Andrea's participation in the MTAS.
- The IEP team determined that the decision to assess Andrea with the MTAS was not due to an expectation that Andrea would receive a low score on the MCA-II.
- The IEP team agrees that Andrea's participation in the free and reduced lunch program, an indicator of an economic difference, was not the basis for Andrea's participation in the MTAS.
- The IEP team agrees that the MTAS is an appropriate measure of Andrea's academic progress and that AYP concerns were not a factor in their decision.

The IEP team determined that Andrea is appropriately assessed with the MTAS.

MTAS GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED TERMINOLOGY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Changes in assessment administration such as setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, etc. that do not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of resulting scores. Used for equity, not advantage.

ACCESS

Active engagement in "learning the content and skills that define the general education curriculum."¹ Simply placing a student in the general education classroom does not ensure access. Placement in a separate setting does not necessarily prohibit access.

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR

A broad set of skills required for independent living, including "daily living and independent living skills; social and interpersonal skills; communication skills; academic skills; recreation and leisure skills; community participation skills; and work and work-related skills."² Impairment may be present in some but not necessarily all categories.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP)

A provision of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation that requires schools, districts and states to demonstrate, based on test scores, that students are making academic progress.

APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

Must be "specially designed to meet the unique needs resulting from the child's disability and must enable the child to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum."¹

DISABILITY CATEGORY

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies 13 disability categories: mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech or language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities and developmental delay.

EXPLICIT AND INTENSIVE INSTRUCTION

Explicit instruction "does not leave anything to chance, and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire on their own."³ Skills are taught sequentially and directly. Intensive instruction is most often achieved in an individual and/or small group setting.

EXTENDED STANDARDS

Content standards that have been reduced in depth, breadth and complexity while maintaining the essence of that standard.

EXTENSIVE SUPPORTS

Supports may include an array of services provided by school personnel, augmentative and adaptive communication systems and assistive technology devices. Supports may be considered extensive if they require specific instruction and ongoing teacher support.

GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The body of knowledge and range of skills that all students in the state are expected to master. Minnesota school districts determine their curriculum, which must align to the Minnesota Academic Standards.

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Indicates more than one of the environments in which the student spends a typical day (i.e., home, school and community).

PLACEMENT

Where a student with a disability will receive special education services; decided by IEP team.

SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW AGE EXPECTATIONS

Significantly below the average intellectual functioning or adaptive behavior of typically-developing peers; at least "two standard deviations below the mean, plus or minus one standard error of measurement"² on a test of intellectual ability. When formal intellectual assessment or measures of adaptive behavior are inappropriate or invalid, other data-based measures may be used to document functioning significantly below age expectations consistent with IDEA Sec 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VI)(bb).

SPECIALIZED CURRICULUM

A curriculum differing from that for non-disabled students (e.g., a life skills curriculum).

¹ National Center on Educational Outcomes (2006). *What Parents of Students with Disabilities Need to Know and Do*. Available at <http://cehd.umn.edu/nceo>, July 2008.

² MN Rule 3525.1333

³ Browder, Diane and Fred Spooner, eds. (2006). *Teaching Language Arts, Math, & Science to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities* (p. 100). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.