

Alternate Assessment Eligibility Requirements

The current reauthorizations of both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that students with disabilities participate in statewide assessment systems designed to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of students.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is responsible for applying the criteria outlined in this document when determining how a student with a disability will participate in statewide testing. Decisions should not be based on factors such as AYP calculations. There is no limit on the number of students in a school or district that may be eligible to participate in an alternate assessment.

Participation decisions must be made annually and documented in the student's IEP. The participation decision should be made separately for mathematics, reading and science.

These are the Title I assessment options for students served by special education:

Assessment	Subject	Grades
Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA)	Reading	3 – 8 and 10
	Mathematics	3 – 8 and 11
	Science	5, 8 and High School
Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments-Modified (MCA-Modified)	Reading	5 – 8 and 10
	Mathematics	5 – 8 and 11
Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)	Reading	3 – 8 and 10
	Mathematics	3 – 8 and 11
	Science	5, 8 and High School

These are the initial steps in the IEP decision-making process:

- **Consider the MCA:** IEP teams must first consider student participation in the MCA, with or without accommodations, before considering student participation in an alternate assessment.
- **Establish that the MCA is not an appropriate measure:** If the IEP team establishes that the MCA is not an appropriate measure of the student's knowledge and skills on grade-level content standards, even when the student is provided allowable and appropriate accommodations, the IEP team may consider the administration of the MCA-Modified or the MTAS.
- **Ensure access:** The IEP team must ensure that the student has access to the general education curriculum, which means the student has opportunities to actively engage in learning the content and skills of the general education curriculum.
 - **MCA-Modified:** For students participating in the MCA-Modified, access means instruction on grade-level content standards. Because students taking the MCA-Modified demonstrate persistent academic difficulties, they are likely to need specialized services and supports to access grade-level curriculum.
 - **MTAS:** For students participating in the MTAS, access means instruction linked to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate. It is likely that the general education curriculum will be substantially simplified for this group of students.

The purpose of this document is to help IEP teams determine the most appropriate assessment option for a student with a disability. It consists of the eligibility requirements and decision-making flowcharts for the MCA-Modified and MTAS and a glossary of frequently used terminology.

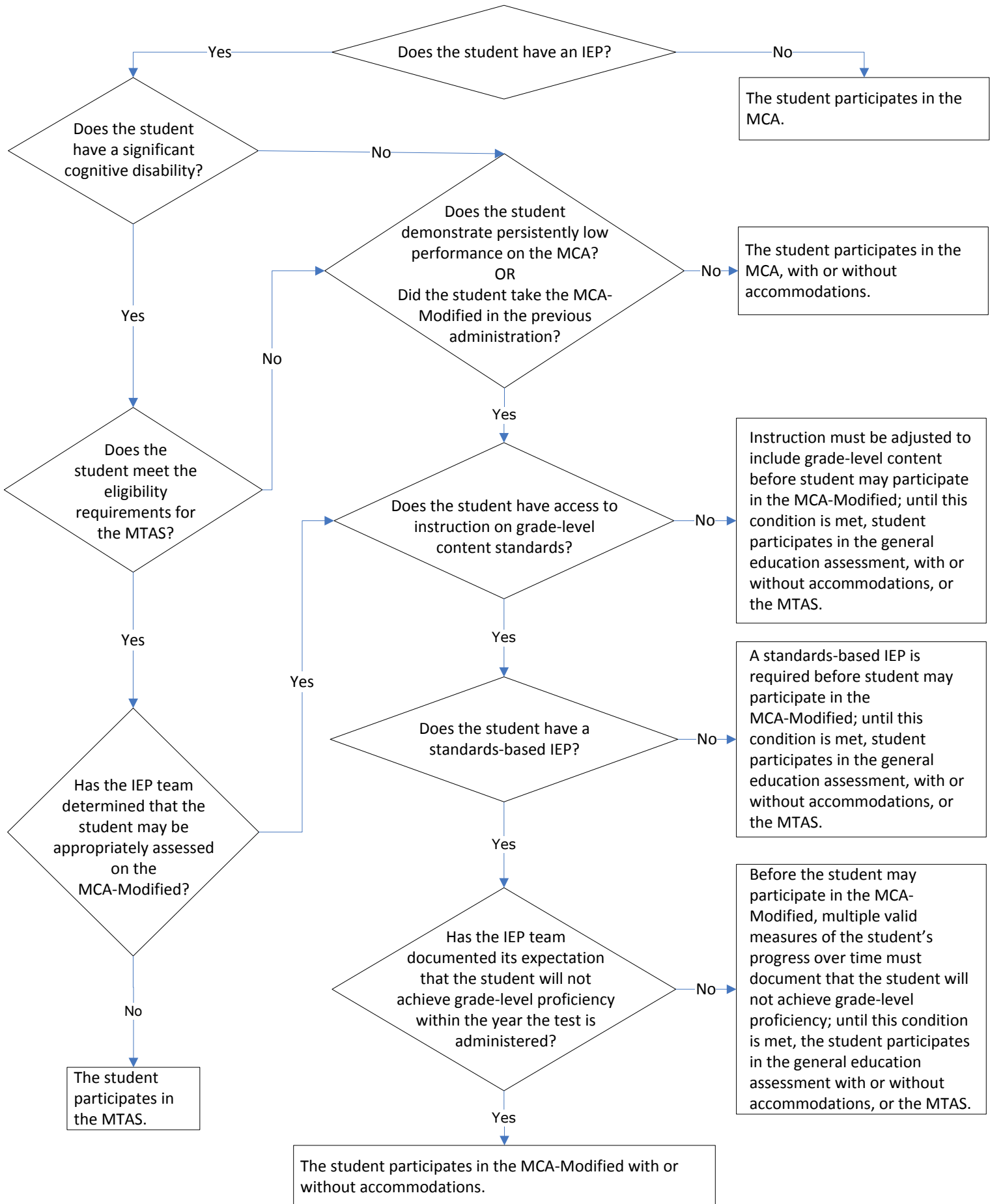
MCA-Modified Eligibility Requirements

The IEP team is responsible for making annual decisions about student participation in the statewide assessment program. The MCA-Modified, an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards, is one component of that program. The MCA-Modified is designed to appropriately measure progress toward state standards for students who meet all of the criteria listed below.

Eligibility for the Reading and Mathematics MCA-Modified is determined for each subject separately. The MCA-Modified may be appropriate for a student with disabilities if all of the following requirements have been met:

1. The student demonstrates persistently low performance as defined by performance at the lowest achievement level (Does Not Meet the Standards) on the two most recent administration years of the MCA and/or MTELL.
 - For students who met the eligibility requirements and took the MCA-Modified in the previous administration, IEP teams may consider the MCA-Modified as long as other eligibility requirements are met.
 - Although not a requirement, IEP teams may also consider students who were administered the MTAS in the previous administration if other eligibility requirements are met; generally, students considered for the MCA-Modified achieved Meets or Exceeds the Alternate Achievement Standards in the previous MTAS administration.
2. The student has access to instruction on grade-level content standards.
3. The student has an IEP based on grade-level content standards in the content area(s) being assessed by MCA-Modified.
4. The IEP team determines that the student is highly unlikely to achieve proficiency on the grade-level content standards within the year the test is administered, even with specially designed instruction.
 - Objective and valid data from multiple measures should be collected over time to confirm that the student is not likely to achieve proficiency on grade-level content standards within the year. Examples of objective and valid measures include state assessments, district-wide assessments, curriculum-based measures and other repeated measures of progress over time.
 - Appropriate accommodations, such as assistive technology, are provided as needed on evaluations of classroom performance, and the student's accommodation needs are carefully considered before the IEP team makes a determination that the student is not likely to achieve proficiency on grade-level content standards.

Decision-Making Process for the MCA-Modified



MTAS Eligibility Requirements

The IEP team is responsible for making annual decisions about student participation in the statewide assessment program. The MTAS, an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, is one component of that program. The MTAS is designed to appropriately measure progress toward state standards for students who meet each of the criteria listed below.

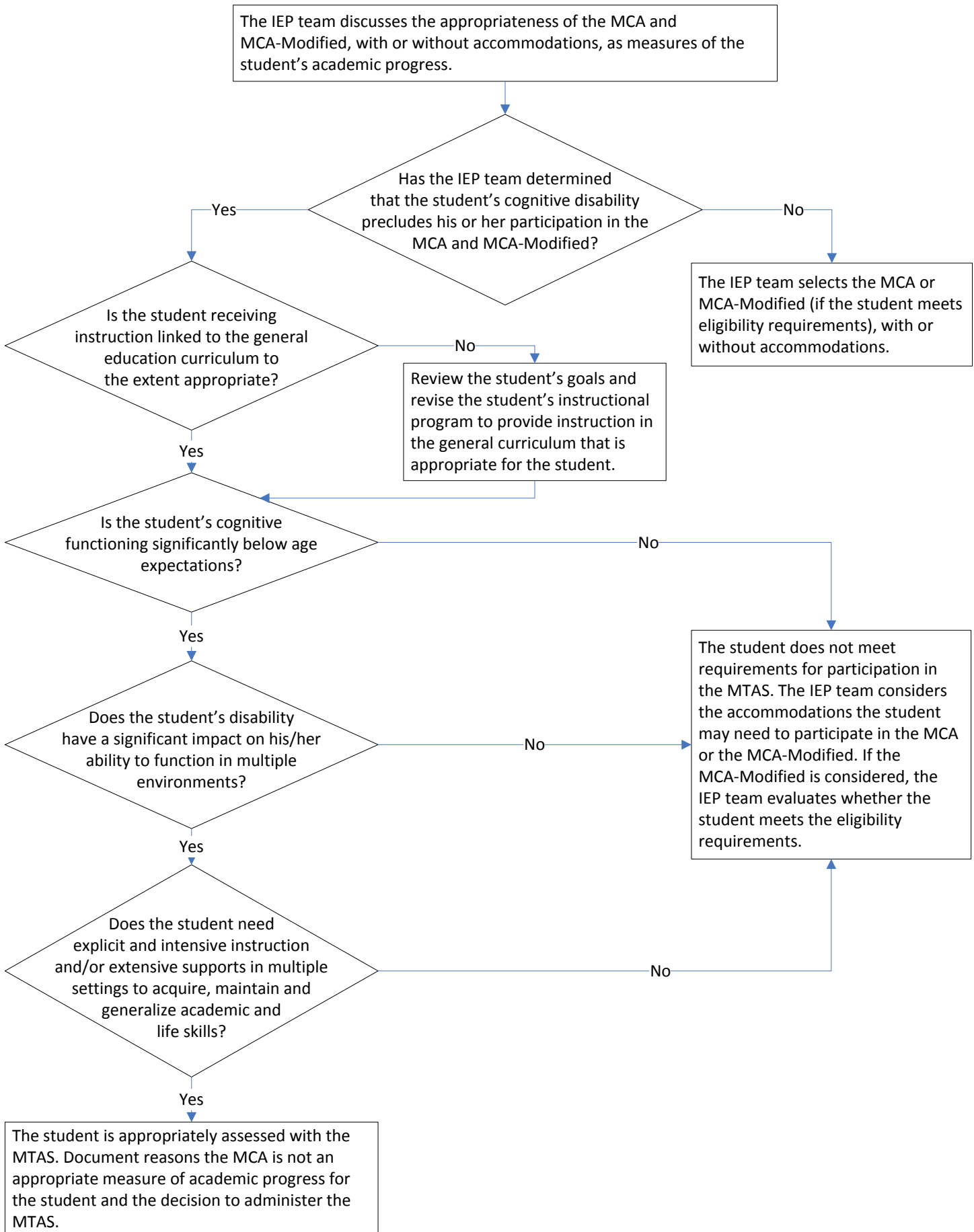
The MTAS may be appropriate for a student with a significant cognitive disability if all of the following requirements have been met:

1. The IEP team first considered the student's ability to access the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA), with or without accommodations. For reading and mathematics, the IEP team also considered the student's eligibility for the MCA-Modified.
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 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 would not be 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 will receive a low score on the MCA or MCA-Modified;
- language, social, cultural or economic differences; or
- a concern for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations.

Decision-Making Process for the MTAS



Glossary of Frequently Used Terminology

ACCESS

Active engagement in learning the content and skills of the general education curriculum.

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.

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP)

A provision of the federal ESEA legislation that requires schools, districts and states to demonstrate, based on test scores, that students are making academic progress.

APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

Instruction that (1) meets the child's unique needs resulting from the disability and (2) allows the child to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

A device or service that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.

CURRICULUM-BASED MEASURES

Assessments that mirror instructional materials and procedures related to the curriculum resulting in an ongoing process of monitoring progress in the curriculum and guiding adjustments in instruction, remediation, accommodations or modifications provided to the student.

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

During explicit instruction, skills are taught sequentially and directly. No assumptions are made about what students might acquire on their own. 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, such as 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 K-12 Academic Standards.

GRADE-LEVEL CONTENT STANDARDS

Statements of the subject-specific knowledge and skills schools are expected to teach students at each grade level.

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

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

PERSISTENTLY LOW PERFORMANCE

For the purposes of eligibility for the MCA-Modified, persistently low performance is defined as performance in the lowest achievement level on the MCA and/or MTELL in one or more content areas for the two most recent administrations.

- For students taking the grade 10 reading assessment or the grade 11 mathematics assessment, the most recent previous assessment records are used, usually from grades 7 and 8.
- For a student who does not have an MCA or MTELL score in one or two of the past two years (not enrolled, absent, medical excuse, test invalidated, student moved in from out of state), IEP teams must consider all other eligibility requirements and the assessment results available to them before concluding that the MCA-Modified is the appropriate assessment for this student. The district should maintain all documentation supporting decisions to administer the MCA-Modified.
- If the student has an MCA or MTELL test record for either of the two most recent administrations with an achievement level of Partially Meets Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards, the student is not considered persistently low performing and cannot take the MCA-Modified.

PLACEMENT

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

PROFICIENCY

Level of knowledge or skills that demonstrates a mastery level of achievement. For ESEA accountability purposes, a student who earns an achievement level of meets or exceeds the standards is considered proficient on the Minnesota Academic Standards.

SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW AGE EXPECTATIONS

Significantly below the average cognitive functioning of typically developing peers; determined by:

- At least “two standard deviations below the mean, plus or minus one standard error of measurement” (Minn R. 3525.1333) on a standardized norm-referenced measure of cognitive functioning; OR
- When formal cognitive assessments 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).

STANDARDS-BASED IEP

A process and a document that is framed by the state standards and that contains goals aligned with, and chosen to facilitate, the student’s achievement of grade-level academic achievement standards.

VALIDITY

The appropriateness or correctness of inferences, decisions or descriptions made about individuals, groups or institutions from test results. There is no such thing as a generally valid test. Validity must be considered in terms of the correctness of a particular inference.