



# News Release

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February 22, 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Michigan Launches New Assessment For Students With Disabilities

Responding to federal mandates and State Board of Education goals, the Michigan Department of Education has launched a new statewide program and is leading the nation in its efforts to address the assessment needs of students with disabilities.

MI-Access, Michigan's alternate assessment program, is being administered to students across the state for six weeks. The testing window began on February 19. Michigan is the first state in the nation to align its assessment program for students with disabilities to federal requirements.

"We believe every student deserves the opportunity to reach their optimum level of achievement," said Kathlee Straus, State Board of Education President. "One way we can help students to achieve is to decide what we want them to learn and provide assessment opportunities to measure that they are learning. With MI-Access, we can provide students with disabilities a significant and appropriate assessment opportunity designed specifically for them.

In Phase 1, MI-Access will assess students with severe and moderate cognitive impairment. In Phase 2, scheduled for implementation in 2005, MI-Access will include alternate assessments for students with mild cognitive impairment.

A student's Individualized Education Program Team (IEPT) will determine which assessment - the MEAP, the MEAP with assessment accommodations, MI-Access Participation, or MI-Access Supported Independence - is most appropriate for that student.

MI-Access was developed, in part, to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 (Title 1). These laws, in their own ways, require the inclusion of students with disabilities in both state and district-wide assessment systems.

"MI-Access is really part of Michigan's overall education reform effort, which focuses on accountability for all kids and all schools," said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. "We need to know what we want kids, including those with disabilities, to learn and have mechanisms to determine whether they are learning it. In Michigan, MI-Access is one key mechanism. It is a tool for teachers, a progress report for schools and parents, and facilitates achievement for students with disabilities."

The new assessment was developed through a rigorous process dating back to 1998. The process involved Michigan Department of Education staff as well as numerous other Michigan stakeholders ranging from special and general education classroom teachers, administrators, and special education specialists to service providers, legal experts, and parents. The assessment design process also received input from a specially convened group of renown technical assessment and research experts.

Together, these diverse representatives developed a performance assessment that relies upon teacher observation. Teachers watch students carry out a standard set of activities during the normal course of a school day and score them on a 1-4 scale. The results can then be used to help: (1) parents better understand their child's level of performance; (2) teachers improve programs and instructions; and (3) IEP Teams make informed decisions. Most importantly, it should enhance the ability of all students to experience and benefit from the total school experience.

The new assessment is just one part of the Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS). By creating these different assessments within the state's overall system, Michigan seeks to raise the level of achievement for all students.

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