DETERMINING EXPECTED LEVEL OF INDEPENDENCE

The Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS) is designed to assess *all* students in the state. The MEAS includes the Michigan Educational Assessment Program; MI-Access, Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program; and ELL-Access (English Language Learners Alternate Assessment). The MI-Access assessment administered to students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is based on student performance and the level of independence the student will most likely achieve upon leaving school. In order to determine the appropriate level of independence for each student, a general set of questions should be asked:

1. Where will this student live and with what supports?
2. In what type of daily activities will this student be involved and with what supports?
3. In what type of community experiences will this student be involved and with what supports?
4. In what type of post-secondary opportunities will this student be involved and with what supports?
5. In what type of environment will this student be employed and with what supports?

(These questions relate directly to a student's transition from school to adult life roles. For additional information about transition contact the Transition Services Project at (517) 332-3587 or visit their website at www.mitsp.org.)

The *Addressing the Unique Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities* (AUEN) documents provide four levels of expected independence in adult life roles, which an IEP Team (IEPT) may use to determine the appropriate State assessment for the student. The titles of the levels are Full Independence, Functional Independence, Supported Independence, and Participation. Each level of independence is described below, followed by key considerations for determining the appropriate State assessment for a student. Please note that the "considerations" answer the five questions asked above.

Full Independence

Full Independence addresses the educational needs of students with physical, emotional, or learning disabilities who function in the normal range of intelligence. These students are capable of becoming fully independent as adults. These students are able to apply their knowledge to any task, problem, or activity that they may confront in life.

For a "fully independent" student, the IEP Team would consider the five general questions posed above and would most likely provide answers or considerations similar to the following:

Considerations:

1. This student may be able to find suitable living arrangements, complete rental or purchase agreements, and arrange for services (electricity, gas, etc.) independently.

2. This student may be able to maintain a household, launder clothing, plan meals, and manage finances independently.

3. This student may be able to vote, obtain a driver's license, join community clubs, and access recreation facilities independently.

4. This student may be able to apply to and attend college, trade school and other educational opportunities independently.

5. This student may be able to independently complete a job application, interview, and be competitively employed.

Further, it is expected that these students receive comprehensive instruction relating to the Michigan's Model Content Standards and would participate in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) or MEAP with assessment accommodations.

Functional Independence

Functional Independence addresses the educational needs of students with mild mental impairment or those who function as if they have such impairment. These students are capable of meeting their own needs and living successfully in their communities with occasional support from others. Through this support these students should be able to assess their personal strengths and limitations and access resources, strategies, supports, and linkages that will help them maximize their potential effectiveness.

For a "functionally independent" student, the IEP Team would consider the five general questions posed above and would most likely provide answers or considerations similar to the following:

Considerations:

1. This student may be able to find suitable living arrangements, complete rental or purchase agreements, and arrange for services (electricity, gas, etc.) with minimal support.

2. This student may be able to maintain a household, launder clothing, plan meals, and manage finances with minimal support.

3. This student may be able to vote, obtain driver's license, join community clubs, and access recreation facilities with minimal support.

4. This student may be able to apply to and attend college, trade school and other educational opportunities with minimal support.

5. This student may be able to, with minimal support, complete a job application, interview, and be competitively employed.

Students whose expected level of independence is "Functional" in major life roles (post-secondary education, adult living, community participation and employment) will typically receive instruction based on a combination of the Michigan's Model Content Standards and strategies provided in a tool such as AUEN. Student progress toward those standards could be assessed through the MEAP and/or the MEAP with assessment accommodations. If the MEAP or the MEAP with assessment accommodations is *not* the most appropriate assessment for these students, they may be assessed using an alternate assessment procedure.

Currently, the IEPT determines what is to be used as an alternate assessment for these students'. The MI-Access Functional Independence assessment (Michigan's alternate assessment) is under development and will replace any such temporary assessments determined by the IEPT when it is implemented statewide in approximately 2005.

Supported Independence

Supported Independence addresses the educational needs of students with moderate mental impairment, or those who function as if they have such impairment. These students will require ongoing support in major life roles (post-secondary, adult living arrangements, community participation, and employment). They also may have cognitive limitations that impact their ability to generalize or transfer learning: they may, however, be able to follow previously learned routines and demonstrate a variety of independent living skills.

For a "supported independent" student, the IEP Team would consider the five general questions posed above and would most likely provide answers or considerations similar to the following:

Considerations:

1. This student may be able to live in a supported or supervised environment such as their family house, or a supported independent living arrangement with ongoing support or supervision.

2. This student may be able to cook, clean, care for self, and launder clothing with ongoing support or supervision.

3. This student may be able to access community programs and facilities, shop for pleasure and go out to eat with ongoing support or supervision.

4. This student may be able to participate in post-secondary options for their own personal growth with ongoing support or supervision.

5. This student may be competitively employed or employed with various levels of support and supervision (such as supported employment).

Students whose expected level of independence is Supported Independence may receive instruction based on Michigan's Model Content Standards using strategies provided in tools, such as AUEN. Student progress is to be assessed using the MI-Access Supported Independence assessment.

Participation

Participation addresses the educational needs of students with severe or profound mental impairment or those who function as if they have such impairment. These students are expected to require extensive ongoing support in adulthood. These students have significant cognitive and may have physical limitations that impair their ability to generalize or transfer learning, and render determining their actual ability and skills difficult. Their impairments cause them to be dependent on others for most, if not all, of their daily living needs and will impact any future involvement with major life roles (post-secondary, independent living, community participation, and employment).

For students whose expected level of independence is "Participation", the IEP Team would consider the five general questions posed above and would most likely provide answers or considerations similar to the following:

Consideration:

1. This student will need a supervised supported living environment.

2. This student may participate in routine tasks, such as brushing teeth and sorting laundry, but only with extensive ongoing support.

3. This student may participate in community activities, such as attending a sports event, movie, and going out to eat, but only with extensive ongoing support.

4. This student may participate in post-secondary options, but only for their own personal pleasure with extensive ongoing support.

5. This student may participate in some type of work activity, but with extensive ongoing support, such as supported employment.

Students whose expected level of independence is Participation will typically receive instruction focused on the Michigan Model Content Standards using strategies provided by tools, such as AUEN. Students' progress is to be assessed with the MI-Access Participation assessment.

Following is a table showing the similarities and differences between the four levels of independence in adult life roles.

FUNCTIONAL LEVEL AT A GLANCE				
	FULL	**FUNCTIONAL**	**SUPPORTED**	**PARTICIPATION**
Cognitive	Students with disabilities who function in the **NORMAL** range of intelligence	Students with **MILD** mental impairment or who function as if they do	Students with **MODERATE** mental impairment or who function as if they do	Students with **SEVERE** mental impairment or who function as if they do
Support	Students capable of **FULLY INDEPENDENT** living	Students capable of meeting own needs with **OCCASIONAL ASSISTANCE**	Students who require some **ONGOING SUPPORT** in major life roles	Students who require **EXTENSIVE ONGOING SUPPORT** in adult roles
Skills and Knowledge	Students who can **APPLY KNOWLEDGE TO ANY TASK**, problem, or activity	Students who can **ASSESS THEIR STRENGTHS AND ACCESS RESOURCES**	Students who can **FOLLOW LEARNED ROUTINES AND DEMON-STRATE SKILL** although they may be limited by impairment	Students whose cognitive and physical **LIMITATIONS SIGNIFICANTLY IMPAIR ABILITY TO GENERALIZE AND TRANSFER LEARNING**

In addition to the above information, there are two important concepts or ideas to keep in mind when determining a student's expected level of independence. First, this is not an exact science. There will be many gray areas and unanswered questions, particularly during the early stages of administering the MI-Access assessments. To that end, it is recommended that those who know the student best use their own professional judgment to decide the appropriate alternate assessment.

Second, the level of independence an IEPT chooses will not be written in stone. In other words, if the Team finds that a student could have been more appropriately assessed at a different level of independence, the assessment can be changed for future years. Developing and becoming familiar with these new assessments will surely include making some errors in judgment. These errors in judgment are correctable and will not, in any way, harm the student.