

SECTION 2 — OVERVIEW OF MI-ACCESS

Program Description

MI-Access is one component of the Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS), which was adopted by the State Board of Education in November 2001. Other components of the MEAS include the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), which has been in place for more than thirty years, the Michigan Merit Examination (MME), and the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA). The MEAS is designed to provide opportunities for *all* students—including those with disabilities and limited English language proficiencies—to participate in appropriate and meaningful state assessments.

Within the MEAS, MI-Access is the state's standardized assessment program designed specifically for students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams have determined that the MEAP is not appropriate for them, even with assessment accommodations.

The purpose of MI-Access is to provide teachers, parents, and other stakeholders with a point-in-time picture of what students with disabilities know and are able to do in certain content areas. To make the assessments more meaningful to students, all items selected for inclusion (1) were designed with input from classroom teachers, and (2) are applicable to

real world situations (that is, they reflect the knowledge and skills students need to be successful in school and as adults).

In the beginning, MI-Access was part of the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services. Then, when the governor moved the MEAP from the Michigan Department of Treasury back to the MDE, a new office was established, called the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA). That office oversees four programs: (1) the MEAP/MME, (2) the Assessment for Students with Disabilities Program (ASWDP), (3) the Assessment of English Language Learners Program, and (4) the Accountability and Accreditation Program. MI-Access is now part of the ASWDP, which oversees statewide assessment for all students with disabilities.

MI-Access Partners with Questar Assessment, Incorporated

Because developing a new assessment program is a huge undertaking, the MDE partnered with Questar Assessment, Inc., an educational assessment design and development publishing company located in Brewster, New York. It was the company's comparatively small size, dedication to

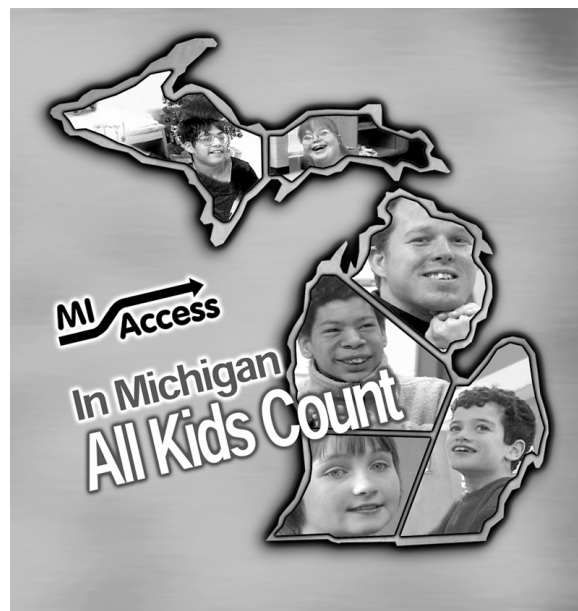
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customer service, and extensive assessment expertise that led the MDE, in November 2000, to award it the MI-Access contract.

In the role of operational contractor, Questar is responsible for providing numerous services—all of which help make MI-Access work. Those services include

- designing and printing MI-Access assessment materials, including cover letters, scan sheets, and assessment booklets;
- collating, compiling, and shipping assessment materials to Michigan districts;
- receiving, inventorying, and scanning returned assessment materials;
- scoring assessments and producing reports; and
- shipping results back to Michigan districts.

In addition to performing operational functions, Questar's assessment development experts serve as advisors to OEAA staff, providing advice and assistance on all technical aspects of the assessments, such as item development, standard setting, reliability, and research.



Program Development

MI-Access was developed, in part, in response to the overriding belief that all students deserve full access to achievement. One way to help students achieve is to decide what they need to learn and develop assessment opportunities to determine whether they are learning it.

For many years, the only statewide assessment available to students in Michigan was the MEAP, which even with assessment accommodations is not appropriate for all special education students. As a result, the MDE began developing an alternate assessment program, which is now called MI-Access.

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Given the enormity and importance of creating a new assessment program, the MDE decided to develop and implement MI-Access in several phases.

The first phase included the development and implementation of the original MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence Assessments, which were administered to selected districts in 2001 and administered statewide in 2002. These two assessments underwent considerable revision during 2006 and early 2007, and the new versions became operational in spring 2007.

The second phase of development included the creation and implementation of the MI-Access Functional Independence Assessments, which were administered for the first time statewide in fall 2005.



MI-Access is now entering the third phase of development, during which an assessment will be created for students for whom none of the current MI-Access assessments or the MEAP/MME with accommodations are appropriate. More detailed information on that assessment will be provided in future handbooks.

Current MI-Access Assessments

At present, MI-Access has three alternate assessments, each of which is targeted at a distinct student population. This reflects the MDE's intent to develop a continuum of assessments that are appropriate for students with disabilities based on their differing cognitive functioning levels, curriculum, and instruction.

Participation

The MI-Access Participation Assessments are designed for students who have, or function as if they have, severe cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require extensive, ongoing support in adulthood. They may also have considerable cognitive and physical impairments that make determining their abilities and skills difficult.

Supported Independence

The MI-Access Supported Independence Assessments are designed for students who have, or function as

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if they have, *moderate* cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require ongoing support in adulthood. They may also have both cognitive and physical impairments that impact their ability to generalize or transfer learning; however, they usually can follow learned routines and demonstrate independent living skills.

Functional Independence

The MI-Access Functional Independence Assessments are designed for students who have, or function as if they have, *mild* cognitive impairment. They also have a limited ability to generalize learning across contexts and their learning rates are significantly slower than those of their age-level peers. In adulthood, however, these students will most likely be able to meet their own needs and live successfully in their communities without overt support from others. They also will be able to assess their personal strengths and limitations, and access resources, strategies, supports, and linkages that will help them maximize their independence.

Item Formats and Assessment Links

It was determined that all students participating in MI-Access could benefit from assessments that (1) presented items in the real-world contexts of daily

living, employment, and community experience and (2) used different item formats—including selected response, extended response, and activity-based observation—to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways.

In addition, it was determined that all MI-Access assessments, as required by federal law, would be explicitly linked to the Model Content Standards contained in the *Michigan Curriculum Framework*; however, the English language arts, mathematics, and science content would be reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity to make it appropriate for the students being assessed.



Annual Administration

The MI-Access assessments are administered each school year in two different assessment cycles: The grade 3 through 8 assessments are administered in the fall and the grade 11 assessments are administered in the spring. They also cover three different content areas: English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. As Table 1 (below) shows, ELA and mathematics are assessed in grades 3 through 8 and 11, and science is assessed in grades 5, 8, and 11. Table 2 (below) shows which "grade" assessment students should take if they are ungraded in the state's Single Record Student Database (SRSD).

TABLE 1 Grades and Content Areas Assessed with MI-Access

Content Areas	Grades							
	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	11th
English Language Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Science			X			X		X

The grades shaded in light grey are assessed in the fall MI-Access assessment cycle and the grade shaded in dark grey is assessed in the spring MI-Access assessment cycle.

TABLE 2 MI-Access Assessments for Ungraded Students

Ungraded Student Age*	Corresponding MI-Access Assessments
9	Grade 3
10	Grade 4
11	Grade 5
12	Grade 6
13	Grade 7
14	Grade 8
17	Grade 11

*Students must be these ages on or before December 1st of the school year in which the assessment is administered.

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IEP Determinations

Given the range of state assessments available, it is the responsibility of a student's IEP Team to determine which one (the MEAP/MME, the MEAP/MME with assessment accommodations, MI-Access Participation, MI-Access Supported Independence, or MI-Access Functional Independence) is most appropriate for the student to take.

In addition, because statewide alternate assessments are not currently available for social studies, it is up to IEP Teams to determine how their students will be assessed in that content area. Social studies is assessed in grades 6, 9, and 11.

Stakeholder Input

MI-Access assessments are developed through a rigorous process involving OEAA staff as well as numerous other qualified Michigan stakeholders, including special and general education teachers, administrators, specialists, related services providers, legal experts, parents, and academics. The assessment development process also benefits from the input of a specially convened group of nationally known psychometricians (educational assessment and research experts) and special educators.



Stakeholders involved with MI-Access have participated on a variety of committees, each of which is charged with specific assessment development tasks and responsibilities.

Alternate Assessment Advisory Committee (AAAC)

The AAAC was the group established in the early years to provide advice on the overall development, implementation, and reporting of the MI-Access assessments. The responsibilities held by this committee were later transferred to Assessment Plan Writing Teams.

Assessment Plan Writing Teams (APWTs)

APWTs are comprised of former members of the AAAC as well as additional general and special education practitioners familiar with the students being

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assessed. These teams are responsible for developing proposed assessment plans that describe who will be assessed, what will be assessed and how, when the assessment will take place, the assessment formats (including prototype items), and how the assessments will be reported.

APWTs also make recommendations regarding which Michigan State Board-approved content standards should be assessed at the state level and which ones are better assessed at the district and local levels.

In addition, APWTs review the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs), High School Content Expectations (HSCEs), and Benchmarks contained in the *Michigan Curriculum Framework* and "extend" them, as needed, for the target student populations.

Content Advisory Committees (CACs)

CACs, like APWTs, are comprised of former members of the AAAC and additional general and special education practitioners familiar with the students being assessed. The CACs, however, are responsible for reviewing all assessment items prior to their use. The review process ensures that the items included in the assessments are valid because they (1) accurately reflect the identified content stan-

dards, Extended Benchmarks (EBs), Extended GLCEs (EGLCEs), and Extended High School Content Expectations (EHSCEs); (2) meet specifications for conceptual accuracy and completeness; and (3) are appropriate for the students being assessed.

Sensitivity Review Committees (SRCs)

SRCs are responsible for reviewing all MI-Access assessment items to help prevent bias or discrimination based on disability, age, race, gender, and so forth. In addition, they look for issues that, because of their sensitive nature, may not be appropriate for a statewide assessment.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC provides the OEAA with technical and research advice related to the development, implementation, reporting, and ongoing evaluation of all MI-Access assessments. TAC members are drawn from a pool of national assessment and special education experts and are instrumental in providing technical assistance and direction during the assessment development and implementation process.

The OEAA involves these many and diverse stakeholders in developing MI-Access to ensure that its alternate assessments (1) are as broad-based as

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possible, and (2) accurately reflect the ideas and experiences of the people directly involved with the students participating in MI-Access.

Personnel Development Efforts

Because MI-Access is a relatively new state assessment program, the OEAA actively communicates with professionals, parents, and other interested parties to keep them apprised of new developments. MI-Access staff members have made numerous presentations at meetings and conferences (in Michigan and nationally); developed two award-winning educational videos; and prepared a variety of professional development tools, such as online learning programs and training materials.

In addition, it has developed

- *The Assist*, a bi-monthly newsletter (available electronically at www.mi.gov/mi-access and www.mi-access.info);
- a Listserv dedicated to state assessment of students with disabilities;
- a District MI-Access Coordinator Listserv;
- a MI-Access Toll-free Hotline (1-888-382-4246)
- a MI-Access e-mail address (mi-access@questarai.com);
- a MI-Access page on the MDE Web site (www.mi.gov/mi-access);
- the MI-Access Information Center, which hosts the MI-Access online learning programs ([www. mi-access.info](http://www.mi-access.info));
- media briefing packets;
- informational and instructional interactive CD-ROMs;
- this reporting handbook;
- annual administration manuals for coordinators and assessment administrators;
- annual calendars;
- presentations on how to use and communicate about assessment results;
- annual MI-Access conferences; and
- annual assessment administration Webcasts.

The OEAA staff will continue to use these communication tools and develop others in an effort to ensure that all parties involved in MI-Access have the information they need to make it an effective assessment program.