

The Assist

Helping Students Access and Make Progress in the General Curriculum

August 2006

(Volume 6, Number 1)

MI-Access Functional Independence External Alignment Study

One criterion the U.S. Education Department (USED) uses to determine if state assessments have sound technical adequacy is the extent to which the content embedded in the assessments intersects, or aligns, with the content embedded in the state's content standards. This "alignment" is a critical factor in determining the validity of assessments because it helps ensure that students are being measured on the content the state expects them to be taught.

The MI-Access Functional Independence English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments—which measure Michigan's extended grade level content expectations (EGLCEs) for grades 3 through 8 and extended benchmarks (EBs) for grade 11—underwent an alignment study in July 2006. The study was conducted at Michigan State University by Norm Webb from the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Webb model—which has been used with more than ten states for English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies—combines qualitative expert judgments with quantified coding and analysis of the content standards and assessments.

Participants in the MI-Access Functional Independence external alignment study included three Michigan mathematics educators and three Michigan ELA educators, all of whom were very familiar with the state's EGLCEs/EBs. In addition, there were six external reviewers (three for each content area) who, by requirement, were unfamiliar with the EGLCEs/EBs and the MI-Access Functional Independence assessments. Staff from the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) were also present during the study, but acted only as observers. The facilitators for the meeting, as well as the external reviewers, had all participated in alignment studies for other states using the same process.



During the study, participants individually identified the EGLCEs/EBs that matched each assessment item. They started by determining the depth of knowledge required by each

EGLCE/EB and coded them using one of four levels, or types, of knowledge: (1) recall, (2) skill/concept, (3) strategic thinking, and (4) extended thinking. Then reviewers determined the object of the EGLCE/EB represented by each item or task on the assessment being reviewed, and rated the level of knowledge necessary for a student to successfully complete the item or task.



The results for each reviewer were entered into a spreadsheet by tracking the corresponding objectives for each item and whether the level of knowledge for the item was below, at, or above the level of knowledge for the corresponding EGLCE/EB. The content ratings and codes were statistically analyzed across reviewers to produce statistics and tabular reports on four criterion: (1) categorical concurrence, (2) depth-of-knowledge consistency, (3) range-of-knowledge correspondence, and (4) balance of representation. These criteria were used as lenses through which to examine other variables, such as the number of items that assess each EGLCE/EB, the range of complexity of the items, and the proportion of EGLCEs/EBs represented on the assessments. The process also helped answer such questions as

- are the assessments for one content area more complex than the other,
- is there a consistent or inconsistent increase in the complexity level across grade levels, and
- which content standards are over- or under-represented on the assessments?

The OEAA staff anticipates having the results of the alignment study very soon, and will post the final report at <http://www.michigan.gov/mi-access>. The results will be used to refine existing EGLCE/EB documents so that they are clear, of high quality, and can be used more effectively for instruction and assessment purposes. Notifications will be sent out by the OEAA staff once the EGLCE/EB revisions are complete.



To further study alignment between the MI-Access assessments and Michigan's content standards, the OEAA was invited to participate in another study, this one conducted by the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC). The NAAC is researching the alignment of alternate assessments, content standards, and instruction through a hybrid alignment protocol using the Achieve, the Survey of Enacted Curriculum (SEC), and the Webb models. The NAAC has already implemented the protocol with a performance-based assessment state, and is currently implementing it with a portfolio state. They have plans to study two more states—in addition to Michigan—over the next two years. All of the MI-Access assessments will be reviewed in the NAAC study, including the Participation,



Supported Independence, and Functional Independence assessments for English language arts, mathematics, and science.

For more information on the NAAC, go to <http://www.naacpartners.org>. To learn more about the Achieve, the SEC, and the Webb analysis models, go to http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Alignment_Analysis/models/.