

# *The Assist*

Helping Students Access and Make Progress in the General Curriculum

**August 2006**

**(Volume 6, Number 1)**

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## **Peer Review Update**

All general and alternate state-level assessments used for calculating No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) undergo a peer review process at the federal level to ensure that they meet (1) high standards of technical adequacy, and (2) the requirements set forth in NCLB.

To facilitate the process, states “submit evidence” on their assessments and content standards. The evidence is then thoroughly examined by peer reviewers specially trained by the U.S. Education Department (USED). There are seven distinct areas of review, each of which contains several “critical elements” that are defined by the USED. All states must provide documentation showing the efforts they have made towards meeting the critical elements, including comprehensive indications of reliability, validity, and evidence that each assessment and content standard within a state’s system was developed with opportunities for input from diverse stakeholders. After the peer review process is complete, the USED sends a letter back to each state (1) indicating whether their assessment system was approved, and (2) if not, providing guidance on how to make improvements to those parts of the system that did not meet peer review criteria.

In fall 2005, Michigan submitted evidence on its state-level assessments that are used to calculate AYP, including the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and MI-Access assessments. This summer, the state received an official feedback letter from the USED—dated June 20, 2006—indicating that approval was pending because peer reviewers needed to see additional evidence before they could determine the technical adequacy of the MEAP and MI-Access assessments. (To see the official USED letter, which is commonly referred to as the “Michigan 2” letter, go to <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbfinalassess/index.html>.)

This feedback was not a complete surprise since Michigan was unable to submit comprehensive technical reports in fall 2005 because the MEAP and MI-Access were not yet fully administered nor were technical reports for all grades completed until after the spring 2006 assessment window. Therefore, in response to the official “Michigan 2” letter, the state submitted a second round of evidence, including the now completed technical reports and evidence on two new areas of development requiring peer review and USED approval—Participation and Supported Independence Version 1.5 and the Michigan Merit Examination.

### ***Participation and Supported Independence Version 1.5 (P/SI v1.5)***

During the fall 2005 peer review process, the USED determined that the operational Participation and Supported Independence (P/SI) assessments did not meet all the requirements of NCLB. In particular, (1) they were not explicitly linked to the state's English language arts (ELA) and mathematics content standards, and (2) they did not report scores separately for ELA and mathematics. At that time, the development of the P/SI version 2.0 assessments—which were being designed to explicitly measure ELA and mathematics and would report scores accordingly—was already underway. Unfortunately, the version 2.0 assessments were not ready for statewide implementation in the 2006/2007 school year. As a result, the USED response necessitated the development of new MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence ELA and mathematics assessments that could be administered during the 2006/2007 school year if approved by the USED. These new assessments—hereafter referred to as P/SI v1.5—(1) are clearly linked to Michigan's content standards via the ELA and mathematics extended grade level content expectations (EGLCEs) and extended benchmarks (EBs) drafted by the P/SI Assessment Plan Writing Team, and (2) will yield separate ELA and mathematics scores.

Since the P/SI v1.5 assessments are new, evidence for many critical elements subject to peer review needed to be generated and submitted to the USED. Thus, this July, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) submitted evidence on the P/SI v1.5 assessments for USED review, including examples of assessment activities, the draft EGLCEs/EBs, draft item specifications, and a draft assessment plan. The draft plan contains (1) a proposed blueprint outlining the number of activities for each content area by strand, (2) new scoring rubrics, and (3) an updated timeline describing the steps needed to ensure that the P/SI v1.5 assessments will meet all the NCLB criteria for an operational assessment for the 2006/2007 school year.

If the P/SI v1.5 assessments meet all the criteria and are approved as valid alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards, they will be administered statewide as operational assessments in spring 2007 along with the MI-Access Functional Independence Grade 11 ELA and mathematics assessments. The ASWDP will share information on the results of the peer review process in future issues of *The Assist*.

### ***Michigan Merit Examination (MME)***

In spring 2007, the Michigan Merit Examination (MME) is scheduled to replace the current MEAP High School Test (HST). The MME will be administered in the spring *if* it is approved by the USED by November 1, 2006. Evidence describing all aspects of the MME was submitted to the USED in July 2006 to ensure that each component would be reviewed and any issues addressed by the Michigan Department of Education in order to secure approval no later than November 1. As was the case for P/SI v1.5, this necessitated comprehensive responses to each of the USED critical elements and a great deal of evidence gathering and compilation to ensure that NCLB criteria were met. If approval is not received by November 1, the MEAP HST will be administered in spring 2007.



As noted in the April 2006 issue of *The Assist*, the MME approval schedule has implications for Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams since they will not know until late fall whether their high school students will be administered the MME or the MEAP. As a result, IEP Teams will need to plan for both assessments. MI-Access, of course, will continue to be available to students; however, as in the past, the percentage of students who participate in MI-Access will be small, as those assessments are designed only for students who have, or function as if they have, mild to severe cognitive impairment. Please see the article called “Michigan Merit Examination Update” for a more comprehensive look at issues related to the MME, including planning for assessment accommodations.