

Eligibility Requirements for the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)

The current reauthorizations of both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that students with disabilities participate in statewide assessment systems designed to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of all students.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is responsible for applying the criteria outlined in this document when determining how a student with a disability will participate in statewide testing. Under ESEA, there is no limit on the number of students in a school or district that may be eligible to participate in an alternate assessment.

Participation decisions must be made annually and documented in the student's IEP. The participation decision should be made separately for mathematics, reading and science.

The mathematics, reading and science assessment options for students served by special education are the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS). Students take one test per subject in the grades shown below.

Subject	Grades
Mathematics	3–8 and 11
Reading	3–8 and 10
Science	5, 8 and High School

Appropriate Assessment Selection

The purpose of this document is to help IEP teams determine the most appropriate assessment option for a student with a significant cognitive disability. These are the initial steps in the IEP team's decision-making process:

- **Consider the MCA:** IEP teams must first consider student participation in the MCA, with or without accommodations, before considering student participation in an alternate assessment.
- **Establish that the MCA is not an appropriate measure:** If the IEP team establishes that the MCA is not an appropriate measure of the student's knowledge and skills on grade-level content standards, even when the student is provided allowable and appropriate accommodations, the IEP team may consider the administration of the MTAS.

- **Ensure access:** The IEP team must ensure that the student has access to the general education curriculum, which means the student has opportunities to actively engage in learning the content and skills of the general education curriculum. For students participating in the MTAS, access means instruction linked to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate. It is likely that the general education curriculum will be substantially simplified for this group of students.

MTAS Eligibility Requirements

The IEP team is responsible for making annual decisions about student participation in the statewide assessment program. The MTAS, an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, is one component of that program. The MTAS is designed to appropriately measure progress toward state standards for students who meet each of the criteria listed below.

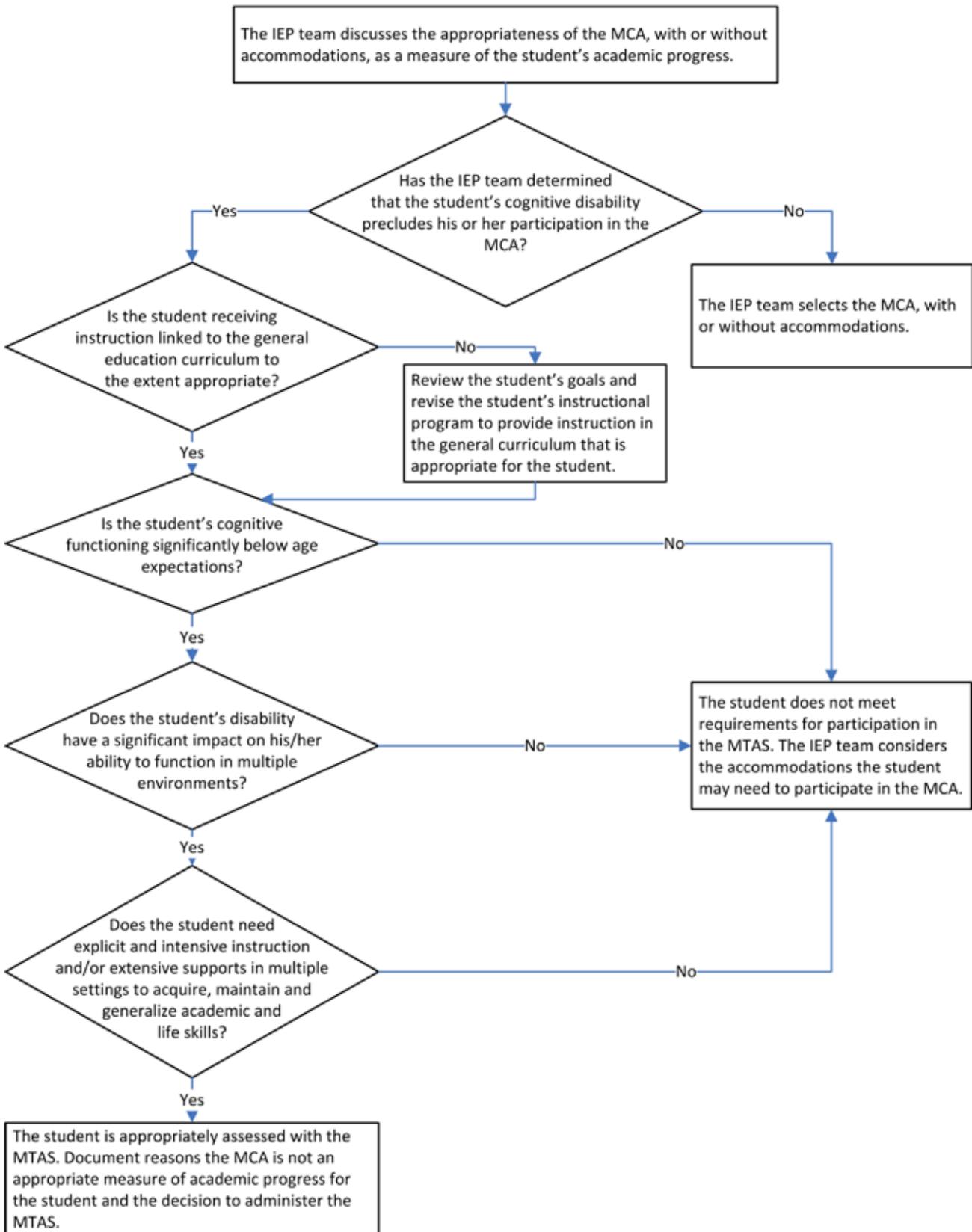
The MTAS may be appropriate for a student with a significant cognitive disability if all of the following requirements have been met:

1. The IEP team first considered the student's ability to access the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA), with or without accommodations.
2. The IEP team reviewed the student's instructional program to ensure that the student is receiving instruction linked to the general education curriculum to the extent appropriate. If instruction is not linked to the general education curriculum, then the IEP team must review the student's goals and determine how access to the general curriculum will be provided.
3. The IEP team determined the student's cognitive functioning to be significantly below age expectations. The team also determined that the student's disability has a significant impact on his or her ability to function in multiple environments, including home, school and community.
4. The IEP team determined that the student needs explicit and intensive instruction and/or extensive supports in multiple settings to acquire, maintain and generalize academic and life skills in order to actively participate in school, work, home and community environments.
5. The IEP team documented, in the IEP, reasons the MCA would not be an appropriate measure of the student's academic progress and how the student would participate in statewide testing.

The careful use of this document will help IEP teams ensure that MTAS participation decisions are *not* made based on the following factors:

- Student's disability category
- Placement
- Participation in a separate, specialized curriculum
- An expectation that the student will receive a low score on the MCA
- Language, social, cultural or economic differences
- Concern for accountability calculations

Decision-Making Process for the MTAS



Glossary of Alternate Assessment Terms

Access

Active engagement in learning the content and skills of the general education curriculum.

Accommodations

Changes in assessment administration such as setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, etc., that do not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of resulting scores. Used for equity, not advantage.

Appropriate Instruction

Instruction that (1) meets the child's unique needs resulting from the disability and (2) allows the child to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum.

Assistive Technology

A device or service that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.

Disability Category

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies 13 disability categories: mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech or language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities and developmental delay.

Explicit and Intensive Instruction

During explicit instruction, skills are taught sequentially and directly. No assumptions are made about what students might acquire on their own. Intensive instruction is most often achieved in an individual and/or small group setting.

Extended Standards

Content standards that have been reduced in depth, breadth and complexity while maintaining the essence of that standard.

Extensive Supports

Supports may include an array of services provided by school personnel, such as augmentative and adaptive communication systems and assistive technology devices. Supports may be considered extensive if they require specific instruction and ongoing teacher support.

General Education Curriculum

The body of knowledge and range of skills that all students in the state are expected to master. Minnesota school districts determine their curriculum, which must align to the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards.

Grade-Level Content Standards

Statements of the subject-specific knowledge and skills schools are expected to teach students at each grade level.

Multiple Environments

Indicates more than one of the environments in which the student spends a typical day (i.e., home, school and community).

Placement

Where a student with a disability will receive special education services; decided by an IEP team.

Proficiency

Level of knowledge or skills that demonstrates a mastery level of achievement. For ESEA accountability purposes, a student who earns an achievement level of meets or exceeds the standards is considered proficient on the Minnesota Academic Standards.

Significantly Below Age Expectations

Significantly below the average cognitive functioning of typically developing peers; determined by:

- At least “two standard deviations below the mean, plus or minus one standard error of measurement” (Minn R. 3525.1333) on a standardized norm-referenced measure of cognitive functioning; OR
- When formal cognitive assessments are inappropriate or invalid, other data-based measures may be used to document functioning significantly below age expectations consistent with IDEA Sec 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VI)(bb)

Specialized Curriculum

A curriculum differing from that for non-disabled students (e.g., a life skills curriculum).