



FACTS

from OSEP's National Longitudinal Studies

April 2004

Standardized Testing among Secondary School Students with Disabilities

Policy developments in the last several years have put mandated standardized testing in the spotlight of education reform. To increase the accountability of schools for improving academic performance, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandates that 95% of all students, including students with disabilities, participate in tests for reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12. This requirement reinforces a stipulation of the 1997 Amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) that students with disabilities participate in state and district testing programs, with appropriate accommodations when necessary. Alternate assessments must be provided for students with significant cognitive impairments or other conditions that make participating in the standardized testing program inappropriate.

Implementation of the IDEA '97 testing mandate has been examined regularly at the state level,¹ but until now, little information has been gathered about how individual students with disabilities actually participate in mandated standardized tests. Which students are exempted from testing, and who decides? When students with disabilities are tested, what types of accommodations do they receive?

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education, provides answers to these important questions.² In the spring of 2002, NLTS2 surveyed the school personnel who were most knowledgeable about the individual school programs of the more than 11,000

NLTS2 sample members, who were ages 14 through 18 at the time. Questions were included about whether and how students with disabilities participated in state or district mandated testing and about their receipt of testing accommodations or modifications, if any. Information also was collected from school staff who could describe the schools students were attending and their policies regarding testing and other matters. The information reported here is weighted to represent students with disabilities nationally.

Most secondary school students with disabilities took mandated standardized tests.

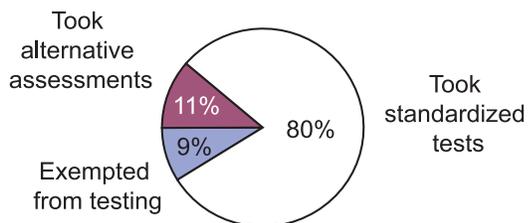
Virtually all secondary students with disabilities (99%) went to schools that gave mandated standardized tests for some students, and 85% were at grade levels in which standardized tests were administered. Among secondary students with disabilities at those grade levels, 80% took mandated standardized tests (see pie chart, next page), 11% were given alternate assessments, and 9% were exempted from testing. There were no differences in participation rates for students at different grade levels.

When students were exempted, it was almost always the IEP team that made the decision; 95% of students with disabilities attended schools that exempted students with disabilities on the team's recommendation. Approximately one-fifth of students

¹ See, for example, Thompson, S., & Thurlow, M. (2003). *2003 State special education outcomes: Marching on*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Retrieved April 5, 2004, from <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/2003StateReport.htm>

² NLTS2, which is being conducted by SRI International for OSEP, has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth who on December 1, 2000, were ages 13 through 16, receiving special education, and in at least 7th grade. Information from NLTS2 is weighted to represent youth with disabilities nationally as a group, as well as youth in each of 12 federal special education disability categories. The information reported here was gathered from three mail surveys of schools in the 2001-2002 school year. See <http://www.nlts2.org> for more information about NLTS2 and the surveys.

STANDARDIZED TESTING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*



*Includes only students at grade levels that were tested.

attended schools that honored parental requests for exemptions. Only 6% of students with disabilities attended schools in which the principal or a teacher could exempt a student from testing.

Most secondary school students with disabilities who took mandated standardized tests received some type of accommodation or modification.

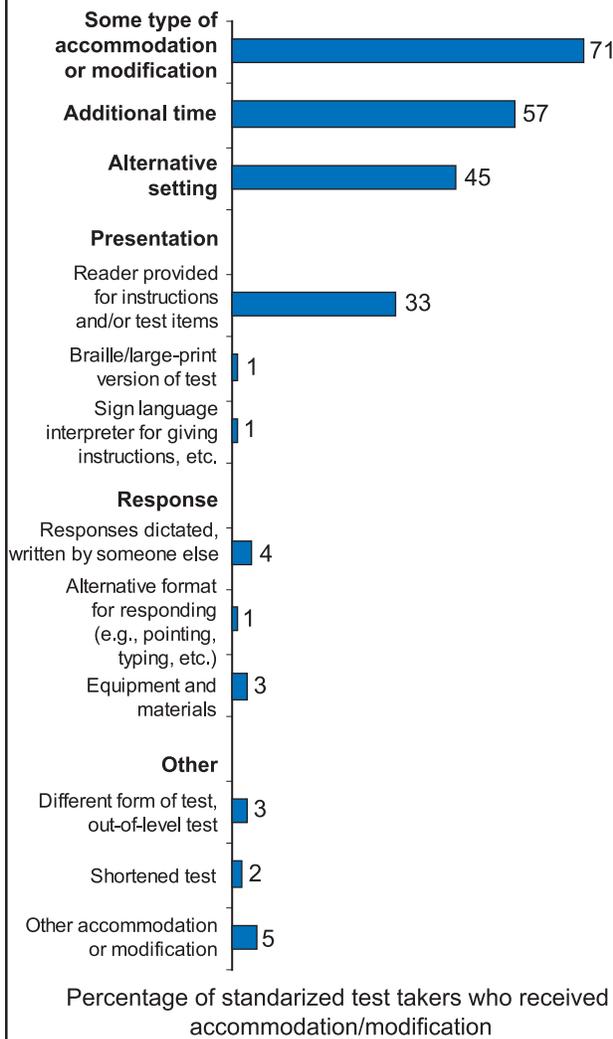
Almost three-fourths of secondary school test takers with disabilities received some type of accommodation or modification. These may relate to time (e.g., the student is given additional time to complete the test), setting (e.g., the student takes the test in an individualized or small-group setting), presentation (e.g., test items or instructions are read aloud to the student; the test is in Braille), response (e.g., the student dictates answers to a scribe or uses a computer), equipment and materials (e.g., the student uses a calculator, magnifying equipment, or an audio or video cassette), or different forms of the test or shortened tests.

By far, the most common accommodation was additional time to take the test (see bar chart); 57% of students with disabilities received this accommodation when they took mandated standardized tests. Other fairly common accommodations were taking the test in an alternative setting or having someone read instructions and/or test items aloud to students; 45% and 33% of students with disabilities received these accommodations, respectively. Other accommodations and modifications were provided to no more than 5% of students.

Testing experiences differed widely for secondary school students with different disabilities.

Participation. More than 95% of secondary students with speech or hearing or other health

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS PROVIDED TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



impairments who were at grade levels at which standardized testing occurred participated in some type of mandated assessment (see first table, next page), as did more than 90% of students with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, visual impairments, or traumatic brain injuries. Participation of students in other categories ranged from 77% to 83%.

Many students in some categories who participated in testing did so by taking an alternate assessment rather than the regular standardized test. For example, more than 40% of students with autism or multiple disabilities took alternate assessments, compared with about one-third who took the regular standardized test. In contrast, 80% or more of students with learning disabilities; speech, hearing, or

**PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDIZED TESTING BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS,
BY DISABILITY CATEGORY**

	Learning Disability	Speech/ Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities	Deaf-Blindness
Percentage of students in grades tested who:												
Participated in mandated standardized testing at all	94	97	79	93	97	92	83	96	79	91	77	80
Took alternate assessment	8	5	28	6	13	13	14	9	44	17	42	27
Took regular standardized test	86	92	51	87	84	79	69	87	35	74	34	53

other health impairments; or emotional disturbances who participated in testing took the regular standardized test.

Accommodations and modifications. The likelihood of taking standardized tests with accommodations or modifications also differed for students in different disability categories (see table below). Whereas about half of test takers with speech impairments and about two-thirds of those with learning disabilities or emotional disturbances received accommodations or modifications, almost all students with mental retardation, multiple disabilities,

or deaf-blindness who participated in standardized testing received accommodations or modifications.

Regardless of a student’s disability, being granted extra time to take tests was the most common accommodation, ranging from 44% of students with speech impairments to approximately 75% of students with mental retardation or traumatic brain injuries and 82% of students with multiple disabilities. Between 27% and 65% of test takers received the next most common accommodation—taking the test in an alternative setting. As with additional time, youth with mental retardation, traumatic brain injuries, or multiple

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS PROVIDED TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

	Learning Disability	Speech/ Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities	Deaf-Blindness
Percentage of standardized-test takers who received:												
Any accommodation or modification	70	53	95	63	76	87	72	72	83	84	95	96
Additional time	57	44	74	51	59	62	59	55	67	76	82	69
Alternative setting	43	36	62	43	39	28	43	49	58	65	63	27
Presentation	32	24	69	20	27	75	32	25	38	53	70	56
Response	3	3	9	3	6	21	27	6	17	4	22	12
Different form of test	3	2	11	2	5	1	5	3	4	9	14	19
Shortened test	2	1	7	2	4	3	3	3	3	1	9	6

disabilities were the most likely to receive this accommodation.

Between 20% and 40% of youth with most types of disabilities received presentation accommodations; however, these were more common for youth with mental retardation, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness. For youth with mental retardation, traumatic brain injuries, or multiple disabilities, the presentation accommodation usually consisted of someone reading the instructions or test items aloud; for youth with visual impairments, it usually was tests in Braille or large print; and for youth with hearing impairments, it usually was a sign language interpreter.

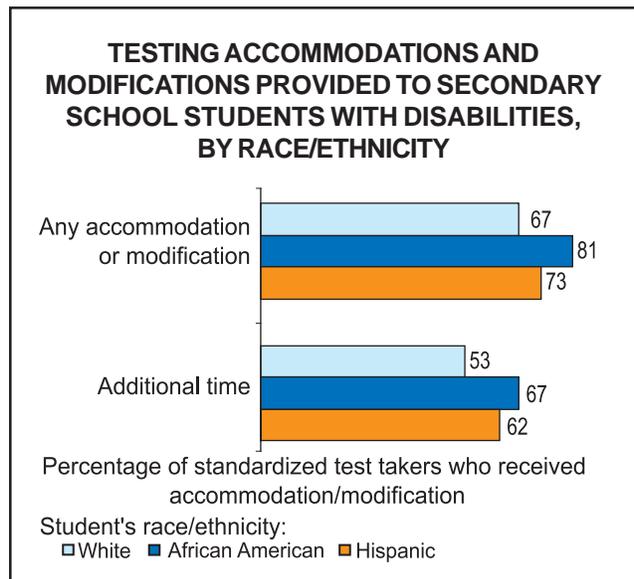
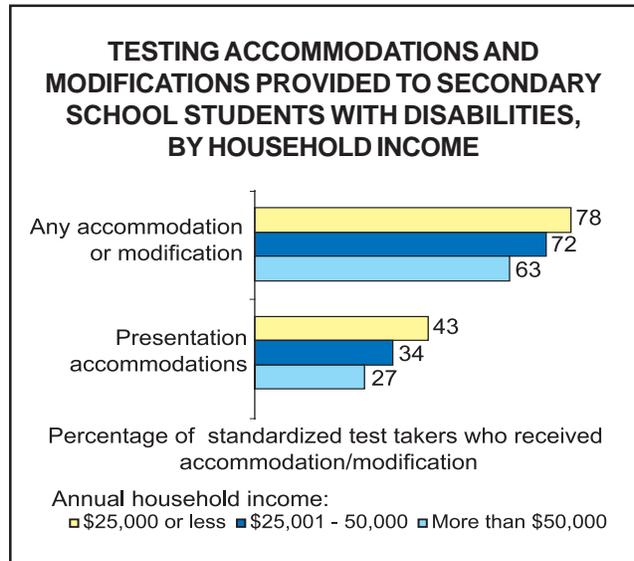
Response accommodations were the least common type of accommodation for all groups; fewer than 10% of youth with most types of disabilities received them. However, unlike presentation accommodations, youth with orthopedic impairments were the most likely to receive response modifications.

Receipt of accommodations and modifications differed by students’ household income and racial/ethnic background.

The rates at which students with disabilities participated in mandated standardized testing at all or in regular or alternative assessments did not differ for students from households at different income levels or from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, there were differences in the likelihood that test takers received accommodations or modifications, favoring lower-income and African-American students (see bar charts).

Almost 80% of test takers with household incomes of \$25,000 or less received some type of accommodation or modification, compared with 63% of those with household incomes above \$50,000. Most of this difference is accounted for by presentation accommodations; 41% of youth from low-income households received these, compared with 27% of youth from the most affluent households. Rates of receiving other kinds of accommodations or modifications did not differ significantly across the income groups.

Because African-American students with disabilities were more likely than white students to come from lower-income households, it is not surprising that they also were more likely to receive testing accommodations or modifications. The accommodation that differed for youth of the various races/ethnicities was additional time; approximately two thirds of African-American test takers received additional time, compared with approximately half of white test takers.



This project is being conducted by SRI International with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-01-CO-0003. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.