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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

College of Education

Research Highlights of Current Faculty Projects

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Project PAR: Investigating Participation, Accommodation, & Reporting Practices with the Illinois Standards Achievement Test

The age-old adage of “what gets tested gets taught” has a more modern variation—“those who get tested get taught.” In an era where large-scale testing prevails and educational reform relies on assessment to ensure accountability, researchers Lizanne DeStefano and James Shriner are studying how students with disabilities are included and accommodated in large-scale testing and reporting. They designed a study to investigate participation, accommodation, and reporting for students with disabilities on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

Having found that local teachers who decide whether students with disabilities will take the state assessment and what accommodations they receive are often untrained to do so, the researchers tested the effectiveness of a teacher training intervention. They first examined teachers’ strategies for participation and accommodation decisions. They then designed and implemented an intervention based on determining access to the general curriculum and on needed instructional accommodations, that is, changes in the way material is presented (such as large print) and/or in how a student demonstrates what he or she knows (i.e., giving oral answers). Finally, they considered the effect of their intervention by looking at changes in teacher decision-making and student participation and accommodation following the training. Their underlying intervention principle was that students who receive instruction in an area of the general curriculum should participate in its assessment, and also that testing accommodations should be selected from those received during routine instruction and classroom assessment. The intervention presented six alternative combinations of student participation and accommodation. The researchers tested it in an urban district with six high schools and over 100 regular and special education district teachers and administrators.

What this research can tell us:

Before the intervention, students generally either participated in the entire assessment or were not tested at all. Less than 10% of the students took only parts of the ISAT, although that is allowed and encouraged. Students tended to receive many accommodations or none. Test accommodations were not closely linked to those received by students during instruction. Typically, all students with disabilities received the same set of accommodations.

After training, teachers recommended full participation with no accommodation less often. Their recommendations drew on more varied options, like full participation with accommodation for all parts, or partial participation with accommodation and alternate assessment. Accommodations using target skills—reading the reading test to students or allowing students to dictate the writing test, for example—became more rare. Teachers assigned blanket accommodations to all students less often. The teachers’ confidence in making participation and accommodation decisions rose.

What this research means for schools and students:

- ◆ Training may help teachers make decisions about assessment participation and accommodation that better consider students’ access to the general curriculum and needed instructional accommodations.
- ◆ Training can help teachers avoid accommodations that interfere with the skills being tested.
- ◆ Training may help teachers feel more confident in making decisions about accommodations.
- ◆ Training may produce more consistent, coherent, and legally defensible bases for decisions.
- ◆ Thorough training requires a significant investment of time and resources and requires major transformations in understanding. This highlights the need for significant professional development for both teachers and administrators.

To learn more about this research:

DeStefano, L., & Shriner, J. (April, 2000). *The Role of Teacher Decision-Making in Participation and Accommodation of Students with Disabilities in Large Scale Assessment*. Session presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Publication Contact Information

Lizanne DeStefano
Director
Bureau of Educational Research
217-333-8520

Elizabeth Grosshandler
Director
Research Opportunities Office
217-244-3564