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Position Paper: Use of Extended Time

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Introduction

In addition to braille and large print, the use of extended time is also a commonly used accommodation for students with visual impairments. This position paper provides a brief summary of the results of research on the use of extended time in testing students, while suggesting best practices for implementing this accommodation.

Research

For several years, researchers have suggested that students with a visual impairment need more time to complete assignments and tests (Harley & Lawrence, 1984; Kederis, Nolan, & Morris, 1967; Morris, 1974; Spungin, 2002; Bradley-Johnson, 1994).

Moreover, some researchers have reported results indicating that students with a visual impairment generally read at a slower rate than students without a visual impairment (Packer, 1989; Legge, et. al., 1985, 1989; Wetzel & Knowlton, 2000). Not only does the reading of braille and large print generally require more time than reading regular print, but the time needed to explore and interpret pictorial information presented as tactile or enlarged graphics can be a tedious and time-consuming process. Therefore, extended time seems to be an obvious accommodation for this population. Some suggested time extensions based on classroom experience or research include

- 1.5 to 2 times for students with low vision (Gompel, van Bon, & Schreuder, 2004),
- 2.5 times for braille and 1.5 times for large print (Morris, 1974),
- 1.5 times for all students with a visual impairment (Spungin, 2002),
- 2 times for braille (Kederis, Nolan & Morris, 1967),
- more than 2 times for braille and a little less than 2 times for visually impaired readers who read print (Packer, 1989), and
- .5 times for experienced adult braille readers (Wetzel & Knowlton, 2000).

The most recent synopsis of research on accommodations demonstrates the wide range of results among studies seeking to validate the use of extended time during testing. Based on the varied results, authors recommend that a well-designed test for standard administration be untimed. (Tindal & Haladyna, 2002).

Research conducted by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) summarizes at least four studies in which the use of extended time had a positive effect on student test scores. NCEO provided preliminary results of a Universal Design Research project which suggest that unlimited time reportedly helps students "think better," a conclusion drawn after interviewing students who had completed a universally designed test (with no time limits) and a regular test (with time limits). (Presentation: Universal Design Research, C. Johnstone & A. Morse, June 24, 2003 at CCSSO Large Scale Assessment Conference, San Antonio, TX).

Several authors seem to agree that timed conditions may not allow students to reflect their full abilities on achievement tests (Tindal & Fuchs, 1999) and that adequate time should be provided for all students. Parr, et. al. (1996) argue that extended time examinations taken under ideal circumstances can be more equitable and practical than timed examinations. In another investigation, Marquart (2000) found that extended time failed to significantly improve the test scores of disabled students. The author, however, does conclude that extended time likely produces a more accurate measure of a student's skill by helping to reduce test anxiety and by allowing a greater opportunity to use good test taking strategies.

Best Practice

To implement extended time or adequate time for students with visual impairments, four basic steps should be followed:

1. Assess the need for extended time.
2. Include specific information about extended time on the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
3. Ensure that the extended time accommodation is implemented during testing.
4. Monitor the student's use of extended time to assure that the student uses extended time appropriately and that the student is on task.

Conclusions

Extended time is a commonly used accommodation for students with visual impairments. Some literature concerning the subject recommends that the accommodation of extended time be of specific duration, e.g., 2.5 times for braille readers and 1.5 times for large print readers. Certainly, a topic in need of additional information is a comparison of time used among the following: a braille reader who must explore and interpret tactile graphics, a large print reader who must visually examine and synthesize enlarged graphics, and a sighted student using a regular print test. Moreover, several current researchers suggest placing less emphasis on designating a uniform, "one size fits all" duration of extended time as an accommodation for disabled students during testing. Rather, these researchers suggest that the accommodation of extended time consist of "adequate time." That is, a specific length of time, which must be determined by educators through careful assessment of the student's physical disability, skills, and needs. In lieu of extended time, some test administrators are finding that more frequent breaks are

effective for braille and large print test takers. Once the need for, and duration of, adequate time and/or breaks has been assessed, educators should include that information on the student's IEP, ensure use of the accommodation, and monitor its use.

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