

What Have We Learned About Student Characteristics, Accommodations, and AA-MAS?

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Abstract

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and a consortium of five states joined together to form the Multi-state GSEG Toward a Defensible Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Achievement Standards (AA-MAS). This paper reports the results of one study conducted by this GSEG project. The purpose of this study was to learn more about the extent to which low performing students used accommodations. A longitudinal data set from one state was used for this analysis. The results indicated that students who performed at the 10th percentile or above on the statewide test typically used fewer accommodations than lower performing students. And, regardless of performance level, that students instructed in less inclusive settings typically used more accommodations than other students.

Keywords: Accommodations, accountability, low performing students, special education

What Have We Learned About Student Characteristics, Accommodations, and AA-MAS?

All students, including students with disabilities, are required to participate in state assessments used for accountability purposes. Most participate in the general test, with or without accommodations. A few with significant cognitive disabilities participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS). A small group of students with disabilities may not be appropriately assessed with these options and several states offer an additional assessment option—alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards (AA-MAS).

According to federal regulations students who participate in AA-MAS must be served by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). They also must be able to make significant progress, but not be expected to reach grade-level proficiency, within the year covered by their IEP. The regulations require that students who participate in AA-MAS have access to grade-level content.

The AA-MAS is an optional assessment, and states need to have a clear understanding of who the students are who may be candidates for AA-MAS as they make decisions about this option (Quenemoen, in press; Thurlow, 2008). The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and a consortium of five states² investigated the characteristics of the students who may be candidates for AA-MAS.

The goal of this analysis was to learn more about the extent to which low performing students use accommodations. For this analysis, **persistently low performing (PLP)** students were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. **Potentially persistently low performing (PPLP)** students were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. **Low performing (PLP)** students were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. **Tenth percentile or above (10th or above)** were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

A previous study by NCEO found that male students, minority students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to be PLP. PLP students included both students who qualified for special education services and general education students (Lazarus,

² *The Multi-State GSEG Toward a Defensible AA-MAS* and the *Alabama GSEG Project* includes Alabama, Hawaii, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

Wu, Altman, & Thurlow, 2010). We conducted the study reported in this paper because we wanted to get a deeper understanding of the characteristics of one subgroup of struggling learners— struggling learners who also have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We also wanted to learn more about the use of accommodations by this group of students.

Methods and Data Sources

Descriptive analyses were conducted to: (1) explore the characteristics of PLP students who qualified for special education services; and (2) learn more about their accommodations use on the statewide assessment. The demographic groups we used are presented in Table 1. In order to compare differences across groups, several two-way ANOVAs were performed. The dependent variable was the number of accommodations used on the statewide assessment. The demographic category and performance group were treated as independent variables. The significance level was set at .01.

We conducted this analysis using data from one of the GSEG states—South Dakota. South Dakota was selected because it had detailed data sets that included accommodations information. Data were from the 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07 school years. Data were compiled for students in grades 5 and 8 during the 2006-07 school year. Since we were interested in learning more about accommodations use, this study included only students with disabilities. However, as previously noted, many persistently low performing students do not have disabilities.³

Results

Demographics. The results varied somewhat by grade and content area, but as shown in Table 2, approximately 60% of *PLP* students with IEPs were male. Approximately 40% had minority status in grade 5; and approximately 35% had minority status in grade 8. *PLP* students who received special education services were more likely to qualify for free or reduced price lunch when compared to the overall group of students who received special education services. Approximately 50% of *PLP* students with IEPs were taught in a regular classroom setting.

Accommodations. Tables 3-6 and Figures 1-2 present the average number of accommodations used by *PLP*, *PPLP*, *LP* and *10th or above* students. Students in the *10th or*

³ For example, according to Lazarus, et al. (2010), in South Dakota 45% of PLP students in 5th grade do not have IEPs; 42% of PLP students in 8th grade do not have IEPs.

above group used fewer accommodations compared to the other groups (see Figure 1). Also, students instructed in the regular classroom used fewer accommodations than students in the resource room and in other placements⁴ (see Figure 2).

Tables 7-10 show that there were statistically significant differences in the number of accommodations used by performance groups and different demographic characteristics. The significant differences were found across performance groups. We also found statistically significant differences for placement. Students in a regular classroom setting typically used fewer accommodations on the statewide assessments than students in the resource room setting.

As indicated in Tables 11 and 12, test items read aloud and small group administration were the most frequently used accommodation for all analyzed grade levels and content areas.

Discussion

This study found that PLP students with IEPs were more likely to be male, have minority status, and live in poverty than other students. Students who performed at the 10th percentile or above on the statewide test typically used fewer accommodations than lower performing students. And, regardless of performance level, students instructed in less inclusive settings typically used more accommodations than other students.

This analysis suggests that the accommodations decisions that IEP teams make may have implications for student performance. This study focused on assessment accommodations, but IEP teams need to make good accommodations decisions for both instruction and assessment. Professional development may be needed to help educators learn how to develop and implement standards-based IEPs that appropriately include accommodations (Thurlow, 2008; Holbrook, 2007). Focusing on ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, are being taught well should also be a top priority.

⁴ Other placements included Self contained classroom, Day program and 24 hour program.

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Table 1
Description of Demographic Groups

Demographic	Subgroups
Gender	Female
	Male
Ethnicity	Majority
	Minority ^a
Poverty	Free/Reduced lunch
	Non-free/Reduced lunch
Placement	Regular classroom
	Resource room
	Other Placements ^b

^a Minority included Asian/Pacific Islands, African American, Hispanic, and Indian/Native students.

^b Other placements included Self contained classroom, Day program, and 24 hour program.

Table 2
Percentage of Students Who Qualify for Special Education Services by Performance Groups

Grade/Subject	Characteristic	PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above	Overall
Grade 5 Reading	Male	62.8	64.2	69.7	67.5	66.5
	Minority Status	42.0	27.4	17.6	13.9	22.2
	Free/Reduced Lunch	55.3	60.9	43.1	41.6	47.8
	Regular Classroom ^a	50.5	57.0	73.4	85.6	71.8
	n	188	179	188	459	1014
Grade 5 Math	Male	62.1	62.7	62.9	70.6	66.5
	Minority Status	39.5	32.7	23.4	11.7	22.0
	Free/Reduced Lunch	59.0	60.1	48.5	39.4	47.7
	Regular Classroom ^a	48.7	56.9	76.6	83.8	72.0
	n	195	153	167	513	1028
Grade 8 Reading	Male	63.2	64.8	68.6	64.3	64.9
	Minority Status	34.1	29.7	10.9	10.2	19.8
	Free/Reduced Lunch	46.4	49.1	49.7	41.4	45.7
	Regular Classroom ^a	51.8	59.4	66.9	75.7	65.1
	N	220	165	175	333	893
Grade 8 Math	Male	58.9	62.0	64.2	70.9	65.0
	Minority Status	37.0	23.7	13.9	9.0	19.8
	Free/Reduced Lunch	50.7	50.0	42.4	41.5	45.7
	Regular Classroom ^a	47.5	54.8	68.5	81.1	65.1
	n	219	186	165	323	893

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

^aThe other groups of students were either in the resource room or other settings. More than 96% of students not in the regular classroom were in resource rooms. Students in other settings were less than 4% overall (at grade 5 level, 2.2% in reading assessment and 1.9% in math assessment; at grade 8, 3.7% for both reading and math assessments).

Table 3
Average Number of Accommodations Used on Statewide Assessment by Subject and Demographic Group for Grade 5, Reading

		PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above	Total
Gender	Male	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.0	1.4
	Female	1.9	2.1	1.4	1.2	1.6
Ethnicity	Minority	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.2	1.5
	Majority	2.1	2.1	1.6	1.0	1.5
Poverty	Free/Reduced lunch	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.1	1.7
	Non-free/Reduced lunch	1.8	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.3
Placement	Regular classroom	1.4	1.7	1.3	0.9	1.1
	Resource Room	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.4
	Other	1.8	2.8	3.3	1.5	2.2
	Total	1.9	2.0	1.6	1.1	1.5

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 4
Average Number of Accommodations Used on Statewide Assessment by Subject and Demographic Group for Grade 5, Math

		PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above	Total
Gender	Male	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.1	1.4
	Female	2.1	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.6
Ethnicity	Minority	1.8	1.7	1.2	1.0	1.5
	Majority	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.5
Poverty	Free/Reduced lunch	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.3	1.7
	Non-free/Reduced lunch	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.1	1.4
Placement	Regular classroom	1.6	1.3	1.4	0.9	1.1
	Resource Room	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.4
	Others	2.2	3.2	2.7	1.9	2.4
	Total	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.2	1.5

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 5
Average Number of Accommodations Used on Statewide Assessment by Subject and Demographic Group for Grade 8, Reading

		PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above	Total
Gender	Male	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.3	1.6
	Female	2.0	1.5	1.7	1.2	1.5
Ethnicity	Minority	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.4
	Majority	2.2	1.8	1.7	1.2	1.6
Poverty	Free/Reduced lunch	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.2	1.6
	Non-free/Reduced lunch	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.6
Placement	Regular classroom	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.4
	Resource Room	2.2	1.9	2.0	1.7	2.0
	Others	2.4	1.2	0.8	0.9	1.3
	Total	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.3	1.6

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 6
Average Number of Accommodations Used on Statewide Assessment by Subject and Demographic Group for Grade 8, Math

		PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above	Total
Gender	Male	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.3	1.6
	Female	1.8	1.4	1.7	1.3	1.5
Ethnicity	Minority	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.1	1.4
	Majority	2.1	1.7	1.8	1.3	1.6
Poverty	Free/Reduced lunch	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.3	1.6
	Non-free/Reduced lunch	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.3	1.5
Placement	Regular classroom	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.1	1.4
	Resource Room	2.1	1.8	2.2	1.9	2.0
	Others	1.8	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.3
	Total	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.3	1.6

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 7
The Two-way AONOVA Summary Table on Number of Accommodations Used by Performance groups and different Demographic Characteristics for Grade 5, Reading

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Post-hoc test
Performance	3	46.66	23.57***	10 or above <LP=PPLP=PLP
Gender	1	.05	.03	
Performance × Gender	3	2.71	1.37	
Error	1006	1.98		
Performance	3	26.56	13.48***	10 or above <LP=PPLP=PLP
Ethnicity	1	6.00	3.04	
Performance × Ethnicity	3	4.16	2.11	
Error	1006	1.97		
Performance	3	51.28	25.94***	10 or above <LP=PPLP=PLP
Poverty	1	12.28	6.21*	
Performance × Poverty	3	.34	.17	
Error	1006	1.98		
Performance	3	7.19	4.02**	10 or above <LP=PPLP=PLP
Placement	2	92.94	51.90***	Regular<Resource=Others
Performance × Placement	6	2.47	1.38	
Error	1002	1.79		

Note. Performance refers to the performance groups: PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 8
The Two-way AONOVA Summary Table on Number of Accommodations Used by Performance groups and different Demographic Characteristics for Grade 5, Math

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Post-hoc test
Performance	3	34.50	16.15***	10 or above <PPLP; 10 or above <PLP
Gender	1	.26	.12	
Performance × Gender	3	1.64	.77	
Error	1020	2.14		
Performance	3	31.81	14.96***	10 or above <PPLP; 10 or above <PLP
Ethnicity	1	14.16	6.66**	
Performance × Ethnicity	3	.76	.36	
Error	1020	2.13		
Performance	3	37.27	17.49***	10 or above <PPLP; 10 or above <PLP
Poverty	1	6.12	2.87	
Performance × Poverty	3	1.30	.61	
Error	1020	2.13		
Performance	3	3.14	1.66	
Placement	2	104.32	55.13***	Regular<Resource=Others
Performance × Placement	6	2.49	1.32	
Error	1016	1.89		

Note. Performance refers to the performance groups: PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 9

The Two-way AONOVA Summary Table on Number of Accommodations Used by Performance groups and different Demographic Characteristics for Grade 8, Reading

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Post-hoc test
Performance	3	20.85	9.97***	10=LP=PPLP<PLP
Gender	1	1.25	.60	
Performance × Gender	3	1.48	.71	
Error	885	2.09		
Performance	3	6.46	3.15	
Ethnicity	1	11.08	5.40	
Performance × Ethnicity	3	5.82	2.83	
Error	885	2.05		
Performance	3	23.10	11.07***	10=LP=PPLP<PLP
Poverty	1	.93	.45	
Performance × Poverty	3	2.87	1.38	
Error	885	2.09		
Performance	3	9.10	4.43	
Placement	2	17.72	8.63***	Regular < Resource
Performance × Placement	6	1.63	.79	
Error	881	2.05		

Note. Performance refers to the performance groups: PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 10

The Two-way AONOVA Summary Table on Number of Accommodations Used by Performance groups and different Demographic Characteristics for Grade 8, Reading

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Post-hoc test
Performance	3	13.60	6.20 ^{***}	10<PLP
Gender	1	4.00	1.82	
Performance × Gender	3	2.11	.96	
Error	885	2.19		
Performance	3	7.39	3.40	
Ethnicity	1	11.07	5.10	
Performance × Ethnicity	3	3.79	1.74	
Error	885	2.17		
Performance	3	16.16	7.35 ^{***}	10<PLP
Poverty	1	1.27	.58	
Performance × Poverty	3	1.39	.63	
Error	885	2.20		
Performance	3	1.72	.80	
Placement	2	22.55	10.54 ^{***}	Regular < Resource
Performance × Placement	6	3.24	1.51	
Error	881	2.14		

Note. Performance refers to the performance groups: PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

Table 11
Percentage of Student with Disabilities Using Selected Accommodations by Content Area and Group, Grade 5

Content Area	Accommodations	PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above
Reading	Large-print test booklets and/or answer documents	– ^a	0.3	– ^a	– ^a
	Sign language (ASL, cued speech)	0.3	0.3	– ^a	– ^a
	Braille Test Booklets	0.3	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a
	Test Items read aloud	37.3	37.0	39.2	32.6
	Repeating and/or simplifying directions	7.6	8.6	6.9	10.8
	Amplification equipment (hearing aid, auditory trainer)	0.3	0.3	– ^a	0.8
	Responses marked in test booklet or on large print document	0.8	1.4	2.3	1.5
	Visual organizers	– ^a	– ^a	0.3	0.6
	Environmental modifications	12.6	13.4	13.7	13.9
	Small group administration	26.1	27.0	24.8	25.7
	Individual administration	2.2	3.1	4.2	3.3
	Flexible schedules	12.6	8.6	8.5	10.8
	n		357	359	306
Math	Large-print test booklets and/or answer documents	– ^a	– ^a	0.4	– ^a
	Visual aids	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Sign language (ASL, cued speech)	0.5	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a
	Braille Test Booklets	– ^a	– ^a	0.4	– ^a
	Test Items read aloud	37.0	34.2	36.8	34.1
	Repeating and/or simplifying directions	8.6	8.9	7.5	9.1
	Amplification equipment (hearing aid, auditory trainer)	0.5	– ^a	– ^a	0.7
	Talking calculators used by individual or using headphones	0.3	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a
	Responses	0.5	2.1	2.6	1.3
	Visual organizers	1.8	2.9	1.5	1.3
	Environmental modifications	11.9	13.5	12.0	14.1
	Small group administration	26.8	25.6	26.7	24.5
	Individual administration	2.5	1.8	3.0	3.4
	Flexible schedules	9.4	10.7	8.3	10.6
	Other	0.3	0.4	0.8	0.8
n		395	281	266	596

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

^a There are no students in the cell.

Table 12
Percentage of Student with Disabilities Using Selected Accommodations by Content Area and Group, Grade 8

Content Area	Accommodations	PLP	PPLP	LP	10 th or above
Reading	Large-print test booklets and/or answer documents	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a	1.0
	Visual aids (magnifiers, templates)	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Sign language (ASL, cued speech)	0.5	– ^a	0.3	– ^a
	Braille Test Booklets	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Test Items read aloud	35.8	34.7	35.2	28.5
	Repeating and/or simplifying directions	12.3	11.9	10.9	12.1
	Amplification equipment (hearing aid, auditory trainer)	– ^a	0.4	0.3	0.5
	Responses marked in test booklet or on large print document	0.2	– ^a	– ^a	0.7
	Use of dictionaries, wordlists, glossaries	0.2	– ^a	0.3	0.2
	Visual organizers	0.5	– ^a	0.7	0.2
	Environmental modifications	5.9	10.5	10.2	12.8
	Small group administration	31.3	29.5	29.4	27.1
	Individual administration	3.1	2.8	3.4	5.7
	Flexible schedules	10.2	10.2	9.2	10.7
	n		422	285	293
Math	Large-print test booklets and/or answer documents	– ^a	– ^a	0.7	0.5
	Visual aids	– ^a	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Sign language (ASL, cued speech)	0.3	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Braille Test Booklets	– ^a	– ^a	0.4	– ^a
	Test Items read aloud	35.2	34.5	33.5	32.0
	Repeating and/or simplifying directions	11.3	11.8	14.1	10.4
	Amplification equipment (hearing aid, auditory trainer)	– ^a	0.3	0.4	0.5
	Responses	0.3	0.3	– ^a	0.5
	Use of dictionaries, wordlists, glossaries	0.3	– ^a	– ^a	0.2
	Visual organizers	1.3	1.2	0.7	0.2
	Environmental modifications	7.8	8.1	12.0	12.1
	Small group administration	31.7	30.4	27.1	27.4
	Individual administration	2.8	3.4	3.2	4.4
	Flexible schedules	8.5	9.9	7.8	10.0
	Other	0.8	– ^a	0.4	1.2
n		398	322	284	412

Note. PLP = Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below on the statewide assessment for three consecutive years. PPLP = Potentially Persistently Low Performing students who were defined as students who scored at the 10th percentile or below for two out of three years. LP = Low performing students who were students who scored at the 10th percentile or below in any one of the three years. 10th or above = students were defined as students who scored above the tenth percentile for three years.

^a There are no students in the cell.

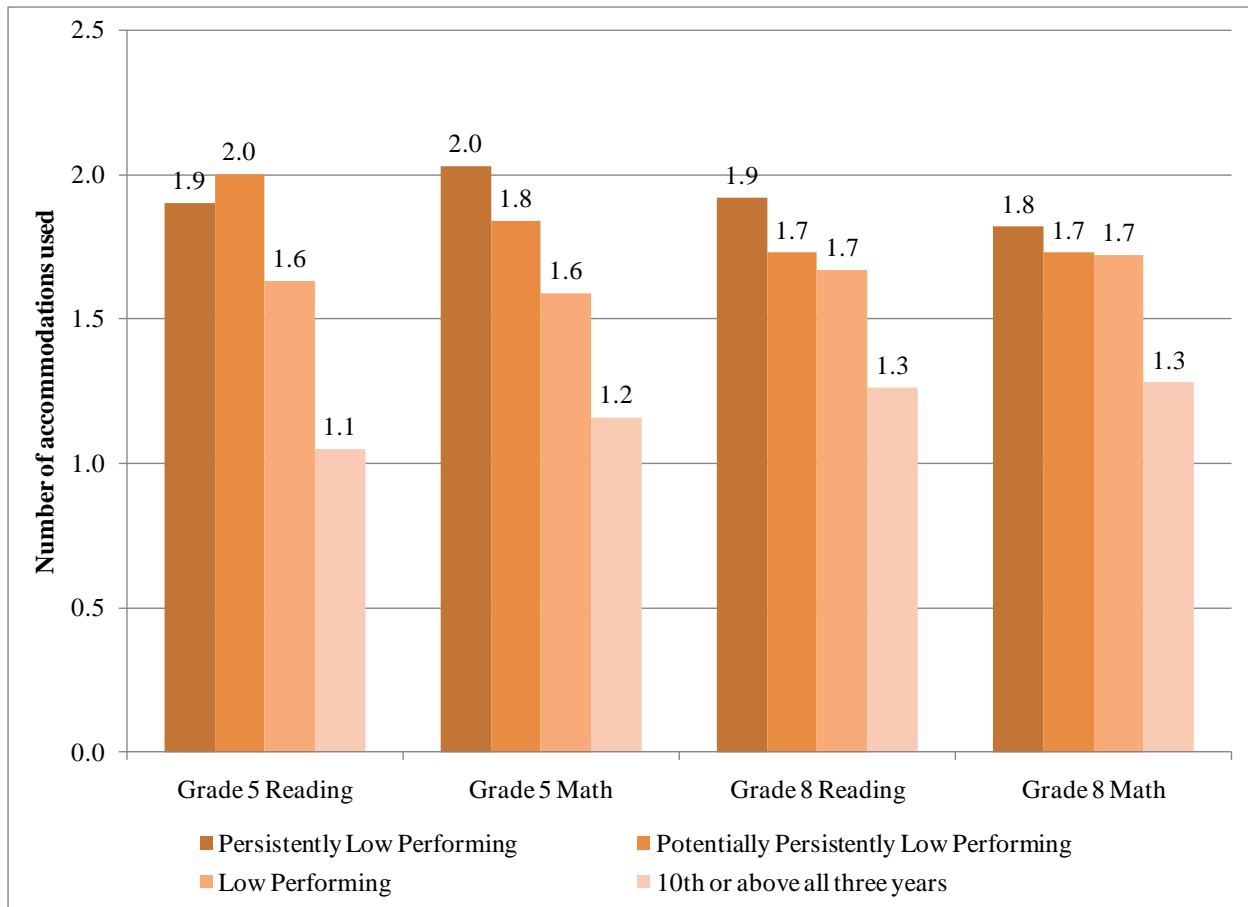


Figure 1. Average Number of Accommodations Used in the Statewide Assessment by Different Performance Groups

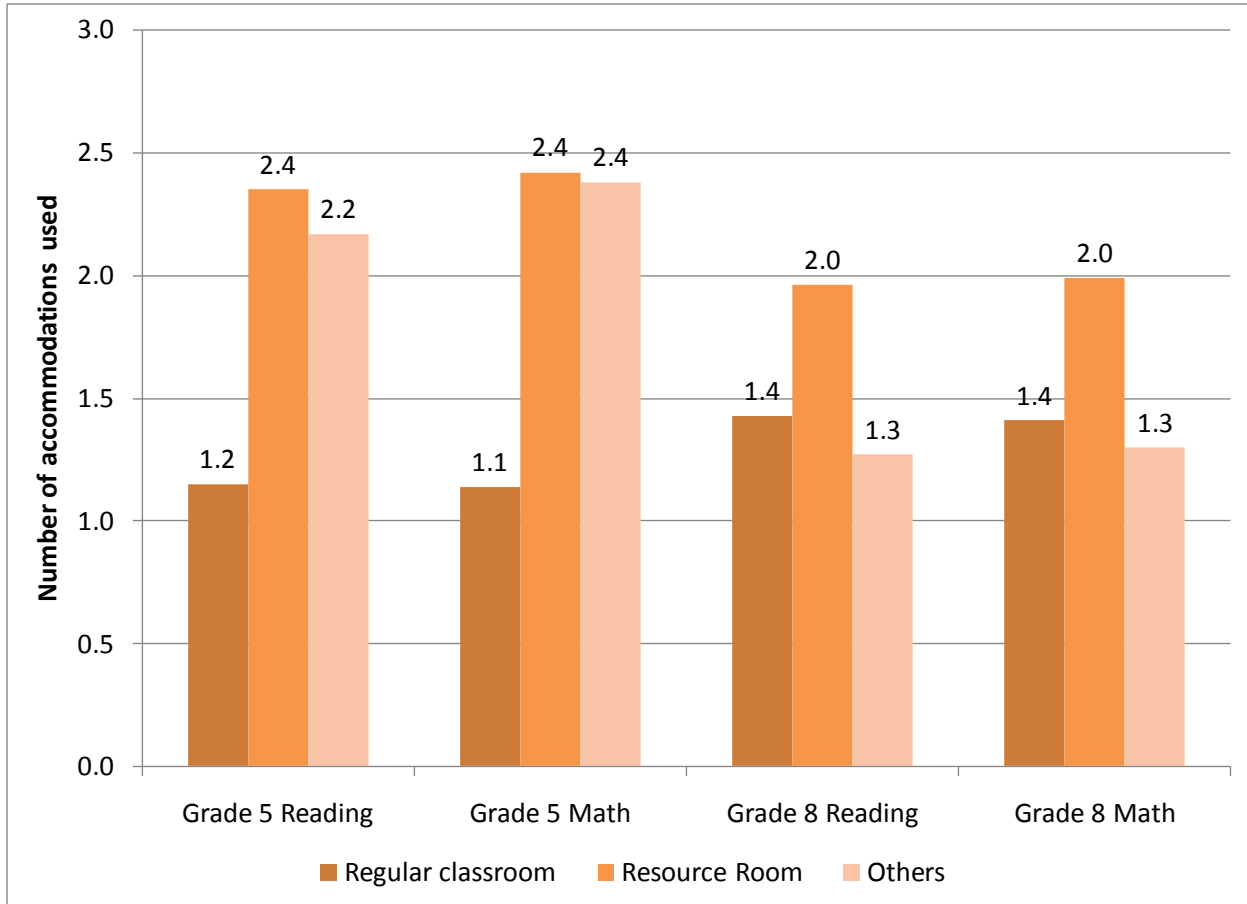


Figure 2. Average Number of Accommodations Used in the Statewide Assessment by Different Educational Placement