



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES

Policy Positions on Alternate Assessment on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAS)

In 2011, the U.S. Congress began discussions on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), federal law that was last reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act. Final regulations were issued in 2003 to guide states on the use of alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAS) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for the purpose of determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). These regulations place a cap on the number of scores of students who take assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards that can be counted as proficient for accountability purposes. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) separately cannot count as proficient the scores of more than 1 percent of all students in the grades assessed. Although an alternate achievement standard can be used for these students, the content standards remain the same as for all other students.

The Consortium for Citizens (CCD) with Disabilities Education Task Force supports the provisions in ESEA that provide all students with high academic standards, valid assessments, meaningful graduation requirements and system accountability. Students who take an AA-AAS must also benefit from these provisions, consistent with the intent of ESEA.

In order to provide a framework for how the needs of students with disabilities should be addressed moving forward in ESEA, the CCD Education Task Force developed key Principles for the ESEA Reauthorization (see: http://www.c-c-d.org/task_forces/education/tf-education.htm). In addition, the CCD Education Task Force recently released a position paper on computer adaptive testing (http://c-c-d.org/task_forces/education/CCD_Computer_Adaptive_Testing_final.pdf). Both of these documents apply to policy regarding the AA-AAS.

The Education Task Force wants to provide federal policy makers with additional guidance on the appropriate use of alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards due to common misperceptions about this assessment and the students who take it.¹

Our policy positions fall into two general categories: instruction and placement; and accountability.

Academic Content Standards

Every state is required to have challenging academic content standards in reading/language arts, math and science. Each state's academic content standards contain what students need to know. Many states have content standards in other academic areas as well. These standards must be the same for all schools and all students and all students should have access to and be assessed on their enrolled-grade-level content. (Most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards.)

Academic Achievement Standards

Academic achievement standards spell out how well students need to know the academic content standards. Each state's achievement standards must provide at least three levels of achievement: advanced, proficient and basic. Many states have more than three levels and may use different names for the levels.

¹ Quenemoen, R., Kearns, J., Quenemoen, M., Flowers, C., & Kleinert, H. (2010). Common misperceptions and research-based recommendations for alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (Synthesis Report 73). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes and Kleinert, J., Holman, A., McSheehan, M., & Kearns, J. (2010). The Importance of Developing Communication Competence for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. National Alternate Assessment Center

Instruction and Placement

- Students who take an AA-AAS must be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum for the grade in which they are enrolled.
- Participation in the AA-AAS must not determine a student's placement. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations, "a child cannot be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum."
- Students who take an AA-AAS must be provided instruction from special and general educators who have the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching academic content for the grade in which the student is enrolled in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and who are able to effectively administer the AA-AAS.
- Children and youth who have disabilities that affect their ability to communicate must be provided access, at the youngest age possible, to the language and communication supports and services they need in order to participate in instruction, demonstrate their knowledge and determine placement in most appropriate state assessment.
- All children and youth who require related services and supports, including assistive technology, to make progress in the general education curriculum must have the services provided to them in a timely manner.
- Students who take an AA-AAS must not be precluded from attempting to complete the requirements, as defined by the state, for a regular high school diploma.

Accountability

- The alternate academic achievement standard (AAS) must be aligned to the state content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.
- The cap on using proficient and advanced scores from the AA-AAS for accountability purposes at the SEA and LEA must be based on current incidence data for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and must not exceed 1% of all students in the grades assessed.
- The student's Individualized Education Program must not be used for accountability purposes.
- College and career readiness for students who take an AA-AAS means readiness for postsecondary programs, including transition programs for students with intellectual disabilities located on college campuses, and readiness for competitive integrated employment.
- Participation in the general assessment should always be the starting point for decisions about how a student will participate in the state assessment system, including for those students who have performed at proficient or advanced levels on the AA-AAS in the past.
- The performance of students who take an AA-AAS must be fully included in every aspect of a State's accountability system, including growth measurement.

This statement is supported by the following organizations:

ACCSES

ARC of the US

Association of Assistive Technology Act Program

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Autism National Committee

Council for Exceptional Children

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf.

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates

Easter Seals

Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Disability Rights Network

National Down Syndrome Society

National Down Syndrome Congress

School Social Work Association of America

The Advocacy Institute

The National Council on Independent Living