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## INCLUDING ALL STUDENTS IN ASSESSMENTS

*NCLB* places great emphasis on the inclusion of all students in statewide assessments. In the case of students with disabilities or limited English proficiency, this inclusion is an essential foundation for ensuring equal opportunity to achieve the state's common high standards. When large groups of students go untested, the school and the larger system lack needed information to monitor progress, detect low performance, and adjust educational strategies.

Testing all students in a valid, fair, and reliable way presents challenges. While most students with disabilities or limited English proficiency can participate in the general statewide assessments with or without accommodations, others require alternate assessments. In fact, *NCLB* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* require such assessments for students with disabilities; whether alternate assessments are at grade-level or based on alternate academic achievement standards is left up to each state to decide. (With the issuance of final regulations in April 2007, states may also develop alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards; information on the development of such assessments is not included in this report.)

### Students with disabilities

Federal law requires states to include all students with disabilities in their assessment and accountability systems in a manner that allows these students to receive valid test scores. While federal guidance does not require a particular type of assessment, it does require states to have at least one alternate assessment. Students with disabilities typically participate in proficiency assessments in one of two ways: Participation in the general assessment (with or without accommodations) or participation in an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards.

**All states allowed testing accommodations to enable the majority of students with disabilities to take the general state assessments.**

Accommodations are changes made to standard test conditions that mitigate problems unrelated to knowledge of content that a student with a disability may face when taking a test. These changes do not affect the integrity and purpose of the test. In 2006–07, all states allowed testing accommodations for students with disabilities taking the general state assessments. The accommodations most frequently approved by states in 2004–05 included the following (Lazarus et al., 2006):<sup>19</sup>

- presentation accommodations—large-print tests (48 states), sign interpretations of questions (43 states), Braille (44 states), instructions read aloud to student (41 states);
- equipment and material accommodations—magnification equipment (42 states), amplification equipment (39 states), light or acoustics accommodations (33 states);
- response accommodations—computer or machine (25 states), Braille (34 states), write-in test booklets (35 states);
- scheduling and timing accommodations—test administration with breaks (40 states), multiple sessions (23 states), time beneficial to students (37 states);
- setting accommodations—small-group administration (45 states), individual administration (45 states), carrel administration (35 states).

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<sup>19</sup> This study did not track the frequency of use of specific accommodations.

There are several types of alternate assessments (see Exhibit 9), and these assessments may use different methods of measuring student achievement, such as portfolios of student work demonstrating student performance relative to the content standards. With these methods, the progress of students with varying levels of cognitive disabilities can be evaluated based on achievement standards appropriate for their intellectual development, giving states the opportunity to more accurately gauge their academic progress.

<b>Exhibit 9 Characteristics of Types of Assessments and Participating Students</b>				
	<b>General Assessment</b>	<b>Alternate Assessment Based on Grade-Level Achievement Standards</b>	<b>Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Achievement Standards</b>	<b>Alternate Assessment Based on Alternate Achievement Standards</b>
Content standards taught and assessed	Grade level	Grade level	Grade level	Grade level extensions
Achievement standards	Grade level	Grade level	Modified level	Alternate level
Participating students	All general education students, most students with disabilities (with or without accommodations)	Students who need alternate ways to show mastery of grade-level content	Students with disabilities who can make progress toward, but may not reach, grade-level achievement standards in the time frame covered by their IEP	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities
Source: Adapted from National Alternate Assessment Center, Warlick, K., & Towles-Reeves, E. (July 2005). <i>Current issues in alternate assessment on alternate achievement standards</i> . Presentation at the annual meeting of the Office of Special Education Programs Project Directors' Conference, Washington, D.C. <a href="http://www.naacpartners.org/products/presentations/national/OSEPprojectDirectors/10000.pdf">http://www.naacpartners.org/products/presentations/national/OSEPprojectDirectors/10000.pdf</a> (accessed Oct. 17, 2008).				

**Alternate assessments have been required since 2000, and by 2005–06, all states administered some form of alternate assessment for students with disabilities.**

The 1997 reauthorization of *IDEA* required that states include students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs and administer alternate assessments for students with disabilities who cannot participate in the state’s general assessment even with appropriate accommodations. Prior to this federal mandate, such students were frequently excluded from large-scale testing programs. In 1999–2000, 12 states had alternate assessments in place, and 35 were in the process of developing them (Goertz and Duffy, 2001).

Under *NCLB*, alternate assessments must be “aligned with the [s]tate’s content standards, must yield results separately in both reading/language arts and mathematics, and must be designed and implemented in a manner that supports use of the results as an indicator of AYP.”<sup>20</sup> Alternate assessments may be needed for students who have a broad variety of disabilities; consequently, a state may employ more than one type of alternate assessment (see Exhibit 9). Alternate assessments can measure proficiency based on grade-level achievement standards and can also measure proficiency based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Indeed, a “1 percent rule” permits up to 1 percent of students in a state or district to be counted as

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education, (2005). *Non-Regulatory guidance: Alternate achievement standards for the students with the most significant cognitive disabilities*. Washington, D.C.: Author. p. 15. <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/altguidance.doc> (accessed October 2008).

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proficient (for AYP purposes) on an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards that are aligned with grade-level content standards. States may also develop modified academic achievement standards and assessments based on those standards for certain students with disabilities. The participants in the alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards would be the small group of students with disabilities for whom an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards would not be appropriate, but whose disability has precluded them from achieving grade-level proficiency on the assessment based on grade-level academic achievement standards and whose progress is such that they will not reach grade-level achievement standards in the current year. Under federal regulations, states and districts are allowed to include in AYP determinations the proficient and advanced scores from assessments based on modified academic achievement standards, subject to a 2 percent cap at the state and district level based on the total number of students in the grades assessed [34 C.F.R. § 200.13 (c)(2)(ii)].

*NCLB* required all states to have full assessment systems in reading and mathematics in place by 2005–06, including one or more alternate assessments for students with disabilities who could not take the general assessments even with accommodations. Similarly, *IDEA* requires states to develop an alternate assessment for all statewide tests, not just those required for determining AYP under *NCLB*. All states made efforts to comply with these statutory requirements. By 2005–06, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico had alternate assessments in reading and mathematics, although three (Kentucky, Maine, and New Jersey) were missing some of the required grades, that is, grades 3–8 and at least one grade in high school. Thirty states administered alternate assessments in science as well.<sup>21</sup> Some states were still developing alternate assessments in other academic subjects (e.g., science and social studies) as well as topics such as interpersonal skills, technology and recreation or leisure activities (see Exhibit 10).

**As of July 2006, peer reviews of state assessment systems found that 38 states had not demonstrated that their alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) met all *NCLB* requirements. By January 2009, only 13 states had not yet received approval of their AA-AAAS.**

Developing AA-AAAS that met peer review standards proved to be a challenge for states. As of late 2006, 38 states had not yet received approval for their AA-AAAS; shortcoming of alternate assessments were among the most common reasons that states' assessment systems did not receive full approval (however, AA-AAAS were not the only reason that states did not receive full approval). In January 2009, only 13 states continued to face challenges with regard to their AA-AAAS, and two of these had opted to overhaul their assessment systems entirely. The main challenges still faced by states concerned alignment (linkage) with grade-level content and the technical quality of the alternate assessments (including validity and reliability as well as achievement standards setting).

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<sup>21</sup> Based on a review of policy documents available on state education agency Web sites, January 2007.