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For IEP teams: Considering Educational Needs to Select an Assessment Method

Experts from UNC Charlotte, and part of the NAAC collaborative, were instrumental in contributing to a key piece of thoughtful guidance included in the US Department of Education's recently released "toolkit" for assessing students with disabilities. This document provides a "decision framework for IEP teams related to methods for individual student participation in state accountability assessments" (USDOE, 2005). Researchers suggest considering the following important questions when arriving at a decision for a student's participation in statewide assessment:

- 1) In what way does the student access the general education curriculum?
- 2) What has been the student's response to academic interventions?
- 3) How does the student interact with text?
- 4) Do the supports required by the student to perform or participate meaningfully and productively in the general education curriculum change the complexity or cognitive demand of the material?
- 5) What inferences can be made about the how the student will generalize skills to different contexts?

Go to: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/speced/toolkit/iep-teams.doc> for more information on how answers to these questions can lead an IEP team to a particular assessment recommendation.

Upcoming Activities:

- **February 2-3:** Technical Panel Meeting in Alexandria, Virginia
- **March 1-2:** Advisory Board Meeting in Alexandria, Virginia

Alignment Literature Review: What Does the Research Say?

Improvement in student learning depends upon how well assessment, curriculum, and instruction are aligned to reinforce a common set of academic standards and goals. Under No Child Left Behind (2001), states are required to demonstrate the alignment of their alternate assessments to grade level content standards. Current research at UNC Charlotte, partnering with NAAC, is looking at effective methods of examining the alignment of alternate assessments and academic content standards.

An alignment procedure for alternate assessments has been developed and is scheduled to be implemented in Spring 2006. The use of the

protocol is intended to help states and test contractors determine: 1) degree of alignment of state adopted content standards and alternate assessments as well as 2) the degree of alignment of content standards and classroom instruction by teachers. Presentations of protocol elements and pilot outcomes will be presented at the National Council on Measurement in Education and the American Educational Research Association in April, 2006.

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NATIONAL ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT CENTER NEWSLETTER

Human Development Institute
University of Kentucky
1 Quality St., Suite 722
Lexington, Kentucky 40507

Phone: 859-257-7672
Fax: 859-323-1838
www.naacpartners.org



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:
WWW.NAACPARTNERS.ORG

Creating Access to the General Curriculum for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Several legislative efforts have mandated access to the general curriculum for students with significant disabilities (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). These efforts have evolved into the requirement of establishing a clear relationship between the alternate assessment and the grade level content, although the relationship may be limited in scope or skill level (US Department of Education, 2005). Although some progress has been made by states in creating access for students, this dynamic process can be confusing.

One focus of the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC) is to help provide guidance to states and teachers on how to link to the grade level content for students with significant disabilities. To assist in that effort, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC) is developing a discussion paper that

will clarify the concept of aligning instruction and assessment with grade level content for this population. Several important issues are considered including policy explanations, research on how students with significant disabilities learn academic content, criteria used to evaluate alignment, the definition of academic constructs, and the impact of student symbol use on access. Since understanding how to create general curriculum access is essential for the construction of a valid alternate assessment system, the work of NAAC, including the discussion paper, is intended to provide guidance and support for states in this critical area.

Important Update:

The US Department of Education has compiled a series of documents into a "toolkit" that includes the proposed regulation for alternate assessments judged against modified achievement standards. The following is a link to the entire package of documents: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/spced/toolkit/index.html>