



# RESEARCH NOTES

## Topic of Interest: Alignment for AA-AAS

### *Validation of the Links for Academic Learning Alignment Methodology*

To address a need for an alignment methodology that is appropriate for alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS), UNC Charlotte, a partner in NAAC, developed *Links for Academic Learning* (LAL). This methodology specifically targets criteria to determine the degree of overlap between AA-AAS and grade-level content standards. The LAL alignment method provides a description of the item/task fidelity, content coverage, depth of knowledge, age and grade appropriateness, and additional dimensions that describe the alignment of AA-AAS to academic content standards.

As the conceptual framework for this model has been outlined (Browder et al., in press), it was important that the criteria within the model were validated with stakeholders for content and utility. A series of validation studies were conducted using a method that included a presentation of the information, a potential discussion between the team and participants for clarification purposes, and a survey for written feedback. Participants included measurement experts, special education experts, and state practitioners who were responsible for AA-AAS issues. Results of the validation studies found that while the criteria were on target to meet their purpose, minor revisions to the original criteria (e.g., clarification of terminology, order of criteria) and one additional criterion was necessary. Overall, ratings of importance (1 being *not important* to 5 being *very important*) on the criteria ranged from 3.6 (measurement and special education experts for criterion 7) to 5.0 (special education experts for criterion 2) for all responders across all criteria. Table 1 summarizes the criteria.

Table 1: Criteria for Instruction and Assessment that Links to Grade Level Content

- The content is academic and includes the major domains/strands of the content area as reflected in state and national standards (e.g., reading, math, science).
- The content is referenced to the student's assigned grade level (based on chronological age).
- The focus of achievement maintains fidelity with the content of the original grade level standards (content centrality) and when possible, the specified performance.
- The content differs from grade level in range, balance, and depth of knowledge, but matches high expectations set for students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- There is some differentiation in content across grade levels or grade bands.
- The expected achievement for students is for the students to show learning of grade referenced academic content.
- The potential barriers to demonstrating what students know and can do are minimized in the assessment.
- The instructional program promotes learning in the general curriculum.

Flowers, C., Wakeman, S. Y., Browder, D. M., & Karvonen, M. (2007). *Links for Academic Learning: An alignment protocol for alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards*. Charlotte, NC: National Alternate Assessment Center, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Browder, D. M., Wakeman, S. Y., Flowers, C., Rickelman, R., Pugalee, D., & Karvonen, M. (in press). Creating access to the general curriculum with links to grade level content for students with significant cognitive disabilities: An explication of the concept. *Journal of Special Education*.

## *Validation of the Curriculum Indicators Survey as an Instrument to Capture the Enacted Curriculum for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*

One aspect of the Links for Academic Learning alignment methodology considers the relationship between what students are taught in the classroom and the content of alternate assessments. Information about this relationship comes in part from the Curriculum Indicators Survey (CIS). The CIS was developed to measure the enacted curriculum for students who participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards. The CIS is intended for use both in large-scale alignment studies to document opportunity to learn the assessed content and in teacher professional development interventions to improve access to the general curriculum for students with significant disabilities. As with any new instrument, it is important to establish its technical quality (i.e., reliability and validity). A series of three validation studies have recently been conducted to investigate (1) relationships between CIS responses and two external curriculum measures; (2) cognitive interviews to assess teacher response processes, and (3) comparison of responses on CIS short and long forms. Results suggest that the CIS is a tenable measure of the enacted curriculum. Daily instructional surveys and observational data corresponded to teachers' CIS responses. In cognitive interviews, teachers accurately differentiated in the intensity of instruction and the depth of knowledge but some problematic areas were found. Preliminary results of the agreement between the long and short forms of the CIS indicate high agreement for most of the academic strands in mathematics.

Karvonen, M., Wakeman, S. Y., Flowers, C., & Browder, D. M. (in press). Measuring the enacted curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*.

## *Comparison of Alignment Results for Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Achievement Standards: Performance-based and Portfolio Formats*

One important issue for alignment methods for AA-AAS is their application across assessment formats. While traditional alignment methods require a common set of standards and standardized assessment items, LAL allows for flexibility within assessment systems. One outcome of the application of LAL was the unique opportunity to study two assessment formats used within one state using the same grade level and alternate achievement standards (the portfolio assessment was being phased out and the performance based assessment was being piloted for initial use). LAL was applied to two different types of AA-AAS, performance-based and portfolio to consider how the methodology might be adapted to each. The performance-based AA-AAS consisted of 44 tasks that were designed by content experts and required standardized administration by special education teachers. Portfolio AAs provided flexibility in the content and assessment items/tasks allowing teachers the opportunity to select the targeted skills in ELA and math. Teachers were instructed to select one ELA and one math target skill to assess their students. An example of an adaptation made in the application to the portfolio is that a sampling framework was used to randomly select portfolios as each item within the portfolios may have been unique to each student. Because the two assessments had been developed in different eras (pre/post NCLB), comparison of alignment outcomes were used to generate hypotheses about how the formats may impact alignment. Outcomes support previous research (Mislevy & Haertel, 2006) that policy decisions regarding an assessment may appear to improve the assessment from one vantage point but could create conflicts with other parts of the system.

Flowers, C., Karvonen, M., Wakeman, S. Y., and Browder, D. (April 2007). *Comparison of alignment results for alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards: Performance-based and portfolio formats*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education, Chicago.

### IMPORTANT UPDATES

**1) Alignment Seminar** "How To" Conduct Alignment Studies for AA-AAS! Register at: [www.naacpartners.org/alignmentseminar](http://www.naacpartners.org/alignmentseminar). **2) Make sure that the National Study on Alternate Assessments** has the most current information about Alternate Assessments in your state! Researchers from the U.S. Dept. of Education study are contacting states to set up telephone interviews. **3) Eighth Annual Maryland Assessment Conference:** Inquiries regarding registration and attendance should be directed to Mr. Ricardo Morales at 301-405-3629 or [RMorales@umd.edu](mailto:RMorales@umd.edu).