RESEARCH NOTES FOR OCTOBER, 2007

UDL AA-AAS EVALUATION TOOL

The IDEA Reauthorization of 2004 states: "The state educational agency shall to the extent feasible, use universal design principles in developing and administering any assessments under this paragraph" (IDEA PL 108-446, Section 612, 16E, 2004). Despite these IDEA requirements, there has been little consideration of what universal design means for AA-AAS. Insight for application of universal design principles was sought by using CAST's framework for Universal Design for Learning (UDL, Rose & Meyer, 2002). To support the application of UDL principles to AA-AAS development and administration by state education agencies and their test vendors so as to more accurately assess diverse learners, NAAC in collaboration with CAST, has created a draft of an evaluation tool applicable to portfolio, performance event, and checklist assessments. The intent of the UDL AA-AAS EVALUATION TOOL is to identify potential gaps in a state's AA-AAS vis-à-vis UDL and hence reveal opportunities for improvement. Review of a state's AA-AAS materials with the UDL AA-AAS Evaluation Tool provides a basis for discussion of how and where UDL is currently evident in state technical adequacy documentation. This can then serve as a springboard for discussion of expansion and refinement of state reference to UDL strategies and principles in subsequent updates to state publications which could assist with meeting the mandates of IDEA as well as facilitate teachers' understanding of how UDL principles can be included within classroom instruction and AA-AAS.

The draft UDL AA-AAS Evaluation Tool is currently being field tested by the NAAC/CAST workgroup with three different NAAC state's AA-AAS materials, each state representing one of the three primary AA-AAS formats (i.e., portfolio, performance event and checklist assessments). Results from each review will be shared and discussed with the participating state to ascertain their usefulness and to obtain state input on how the UDL AA-AAS Tool might be further refined or revised to improve its utility. Findings from this interactive process with each state will be used to derive a new version of the tool. Once the tool is again updated, the NAAC/CAST workgroup will offer each of the remaining NAAC member states opportunity to have the tool applied to their AA-AAS materials, with written findings provided. After further dialogue with these states regarding the design and implementation of the tool, a final UDL AA-AAS Tool will be created and made available nationally. The complete development process is expected to be accomplished by June of 2008.

The Alternate Assessment Impact Survey for Principals: Research, Results, and Implications for the Field

In order to judge the influence of the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) on students, teachers, and schools, two partner states chose to survey principals' perceptions of the AA-AAS in partnership with the NAAC. The purpose of conducting the Alternate Assessment Impact Survey for Principals (AAISP) in both states* was to investigate principals' perceptions of the influence the alternate assessment may be having on teaching and learning for students who participate in the AA-AAS. In addition, the survey investigated curriculum perceptions held by principals specifically related to teaching students with the most significant cognitive disabilities grade-level academic content. (*To maintain anonymity, the states are named State 1 and State 2.)

All principals with at least one student completing an AA-AAS during the 2006-2007 school year were sent an invitation through email to participate in an online survey investigating their perceptions of the influence of the AA-AAS on teaching and learning. In state 1, the response rate was 42% (280/665). In state 2, the response rate was 29% (105/339).

An overwhelming majority of principals in both states reported their most important role as a principal was instructional leadership. In addition, principals agreed they contributed actively to making decisions about the curriculum for ALL students in their school, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In both states, principals reported they agreed less with the statement that it is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum, and they agreed more with the statement that it is more important for students to learn functional skills than academic content. Positively though, principals did report they agreed that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in academic instruction through the grade-level curriculum. These findings directly point to the needs of educators in understanding how to provide instruction on grade-level academic content while also embedding important functional skills into instruction for these students. Implications for the field (in particular teachers and principals) are outlined in a report that will be posted on the NAAC website at www.naacpartners.org by the middle of October. Please check there at a later date if interested in the specific findings and implications of this study.

Towles-Reeves, E. & Kearns, J. (2007). *Alternate assessment impact survey for principals report.* Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, National Alternate Assessment Center.

IMPORTANT UPDATE

Eighth Annual Maryland Assessment Conference-October 11-12, 2007 in College Park, Maryland: Inquiries regarding registration and attendance should be directed to Mr. Ricardo Morales at 301-405-3629 or RMorales@umd.edu.