

Volume 1

February, 2009

## Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS): Portfolio, Performance Tasks, Rating Scales, Checklists....A Rose by Any Other Name.....

Which assessment format is “best” for use in AA-AAS? NAAC staff continue to hear discussions about whether performance tasks, portfolios, checklists, or rating scales are the best approach. In 2005, results of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) State Survey suggested that 25 states (50%) reported using a body of evidence or portfolio format, 7 (14%) reported using a rating scale or checklist approach, 8 (16%) were under revision, 7 (14%) reported in the “Other” category, and 2 states identified that they were using an IEP analysis. Further analyses showed that of the 25 states reporting in the category of portfolio, 7 described structured performance tasks as integral components of the portfolio. In addition, of the seven states reporting the use of a rating scale or checklist, 3 states described their system as “performance on a standardized set of events, tasks, or skills” (Thurlow & Thompson, 2005). In other words, the nominal category a state used for its approach did not reflect absolute differences among the categories, and overlap of methods within each assessment regardless of nominal category was common.

Since the 2005 NCEO survey, eight states volunteered to participate with a team of measurement, special education and content experts in reviewing the technical documentation of their respective state AA-AAS. The cross-disciplinary expert team examined states’ technical documentation and met with state staff to clarify any missing information. The intent was to determine not only the structural format but the extent to which the assessment was being used as intended, the extent to which the purposes were being achieved, and the resulting consequences of the assessment.

Findings revealed that while the data collected on purpose, use, and consequences were at best minimal for these relatively new assessments, this critical look confirmed the findings of the NCEO survey and concluded that the nominal category is not very useful for understanding or describing alternate achievement standards assessments. Indeed, we found that best way to describe an alternate assessment format was to describe the nature of the content targets, the flexibility in selecting the content targets, and the interaction between the student and teacher. For example, are the content targets set for all participants or does the teacher select content targets? Does the teacher develop the task or read a script? Does the student give an independent response, or can the response be prompted? What flexibility is given for student responses? Who scores **those responses**? The answers to these questions have implications for controlling error and thus for the validity of the assessment design.

As an example, in one assessment named a “performance

“Here are shelters or homes that people lived in a long time ago or may still use”.

Show each item to the student and describe (e.g., “This shelter is made from leaves, bark, branches and mud...”) 2 (log cabin) and 3 (white house with red shutters).

“Show me the shelter or home used by the Woodland Indians.”



task”, the teacher reads a script and provides picture answer choices. The student must independently choose the correct picture choice. The teacher codes the student’s answer choice.

While this assessment is named a “performance task”, the characteristics are more similar to an individually administered multiple choice format with picture choices. A performance task would typically require the student to execute a task or implement a procedure which generally requires cognitive processes at a higher level than simply choosing an answer from an array. Similarly, rating scales and checklists may require that a “body of evidence” be maintained for each student. Finally, even portfolios may include checklists, scripted or non-scripted tasks, or even individually administered multiple choice measures.

### The Bottom Line.

All AA-AAS are individually administered to students, generally by the teacher or other building personnel, all of whom have a vested interest in results in a system stakes context. This level of involvement of the teacher in an accountability environment represents an inherent validity problem which must be accounted for in the assessment design. Nominal categories are of less importance in sorting out quality of an AA-AAS than how the assessment design controls for sources of error in the interactions between student and test administrator. The “best” AA-AAS approaches are those that document carefully the purposes and uses of the test, that are built from design choices that minimize error given the individualized administration of these assessments, and that provide for systematic ongoing study of whether the claims made are defensible. An AA-AAS approach can be studied through carefully planned and documented validity studies. The NAAC hosted GSEG Consortia is working with CT, KY, GA, DC, and PR to test out different designs for these studies. Stay tuned!

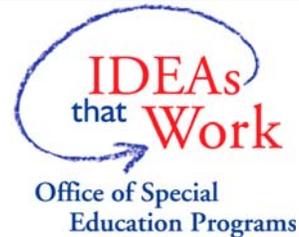


## NATIONAL ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT CENTER NEWSLETTER

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](http://www.naacpartners.org)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:  
[WWW.NAACPARTNERS.ORG](http://WWW.NAACPARTNERS.ORG)



### **NCEO Survey Coming Your Way**

The purpose of the NCEO survey is to gather information on trends in the large-scale assessment of students with disabilities including the topics of student participation, performance, accommodations use, and alternate assessment.

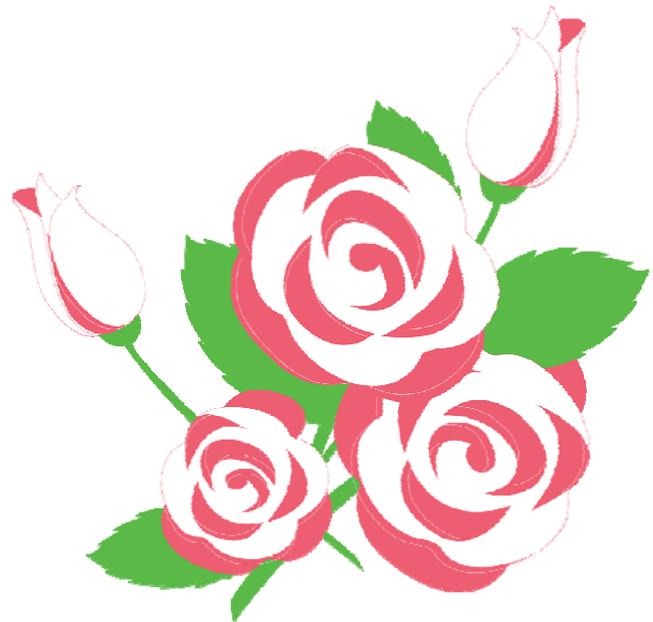
NCEO has conducted a similar state survey for many years and has been grateful to have 100% of states respond the past eight years.

This year, the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC) collaborated with NCEO to identify key questions to improve our understanding of alternate assessments.

**The 2009 survey will be an online survey with approximately 23-32 questions, and will be due on March 20, 2009.**

**If the survey is in your IN-BOX...**

**Don't Delay, Do it today!**



### **ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT HISTORY**

*A Brief History of Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards* can be found at:  
<http://cehd.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Synthesis68/Synthesis68.pdf>.

### **Curriculum Summit Materials Available**

<http://www.naacpartners.org/upcomingEvents/090122Summitt/default.aspx>