



State Participation Guidelines for AA-AAS

Each state is charged with the development of their own participation guidelines for the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS), which has created variety and inconsistency in these guidelines across states (Thurlow, 2004). Well-defined participation guidelines are essential for maintaining the validity of an alternate assessment and the well-being of the student participants. For this reason, it is important that all states' participation guidelines be analyzed to investigate the current status and common themes of these guidelines.

Warlick and Olsen (1999) examined the participation guidelines of 12 states and noted the following major themes: participation decisions were made by the IEP team and based on longitudinal data, participating students were typically working toward an alternate curriculum and required direct instruction, and certain criteria (e.g., student disability category) could not be used as the sole basis for inclusion in the AA-AAS. In 2004, the Alliance for Systems Change/Mid-South Regional Resource Center compiled all 50 states' participation guidelines into a document to be used as a resource for states still developing AA-AAS, but no specific analyses were conducted on the compiled guidelines.

Current Study

NAAC researchers at the University of Kentucky recently conducted a qualitative study to explore all 50 states' participation guidelines for AA-AAS to investigate common themes across states. The participation guidelines were gathered through the state department of education websites. The researchers created a list of 12 categories (based on NCLB's *Alternate Achievement Standards for Students With the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Non-Regulatory Guidance* (U.S. Department of Education, 2005), input from two alternate assessment experts, and reviewing participation guidelines of four leading states) that were used to investigate the commonalities and differences among states (see Table 1). All states' participation guidelines were reviewed for the 12 categories by two raters, and were rated as either using the specific terms included in the category, discussing the topic in the category but not using the specific terms, or not including the category at all. Inter-rater reliability was 83%; discrepancies were discussed by the two raters until a consensus was reached.

Key Findings

Several main themes emerged from this examination of states' participation guidelines. First, very few states mentioned IQ cutoff scores or disability categories. This finding was expected, as NCLB's *Non-Regulatory Guidance* (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) specifically states, "The State must communicate to IEP teams that they should make decisions for each individual student, and that those decisions should not be based on disability category or other

similar qualities" (p. 25). Second, almost all states discussed or included the term "significant cognitive disability" (98% of states) and that the IEP team determines a students' participation in the AA-AAS (88% of states). This was again unsurprising, being consistent with previous research and included in federal law and recommendations (U.S. Department of Education). A majority of states (74%) mentioned adaptive behavior, either as something that limited the students' access to the general curriculum or as skill component included in the students' curriculum. Some categories that were evenly distributed between being included and not included in states' participation guidelines were the students' needs for individualized instruction and instruction in multiple settings, and inability to participate in the regular state assessment even with accommodations. Two categories yielded a high number of discrepancies across the two raters: "working toward grade-level academic content standards but proficiency judged against alternate achievement standards" and "requires individualized instruction." These discrepancies were due to inconsistency and variety in wording across states when addressing these categories.

Table 1: Twelve Categories (Ordered from Most Included/Discussed in States Participation Guidelines to Least Included/Discussed)

1.	Significant cognitive impairment or disability
2.	Determination of AA eligibility by an IEP team
3.	Has a current IEP
4.	Adaptive, functional, life, or daily skills*
4.	Additional instruction necessary for generalization*
6.	Unable to participate in regular state assessment
7.	Requires individualized instruction
8.	Requires instruction in multiple settings
9.	IQ level*
9.	Existing disability categories*
11.	Least restrictive environment
•	Working toward grade-level academic content standards but proficiency judged against alternate achievement standards**

Note: From Musson, J. E., Thomas, M. K., Towles-Reeves, E., & Kearns, J. F. (in press). An analysis of state alternate assessment participation guidelines. *Journal of Special Education*.

\*This category was included/discussed the same amount as another category.

\*\*This category was excluded from analyses due to rater inconsistency.

Implications

Future research on states' AA-AAS participation guidelines should investigate trends in these guidelines over time and the fidelity with which the guidelines are followed when making participation determinations. The results of this study can help individuals who are developing and revising their states' participation guidelines by informing them of what other states are including and providing them with a better understanding of the intended population for AA-AAS.



# NATIONAL ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT CENTER NEWSLETTER

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## National Profile on Alternate Assessments

The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE) at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) recently released the National Profile on Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards. The report was mandated by Section 664(c) of IDEA to examine several aspects of alternate assessments: states' eligibility guidelines to participate in alternate assessments; the validity and reliability of alternate assessment instruments and procedures; alignment to state academic content standards; and the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments. The National Profile is based on document analysis and data verification activities in the 50 states and the District of Columbia during the 2006-07 school year, as well as teacher surveys.

The report contains five sections: an overview on general approaches and procedures; a section on alternate achievement standards and methodologies used to develop them; information about validity, reliability, fairness/accessibility, implementation procedures, and alignment; eligibility and administration; and scoring and reporting.

View the report here:

Cameto, R., Knokey, A.-M., Nagle, K., Sanford, C., Blackorby, J., Sinclair, B., and Riley, D. (2009). [\*National Profile on Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Achievement Standards. A Report From the National Study on Alternate Assessments\*](#) (NCSE 2009-3014). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

### Thank you!

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and NAAC would like to thank you for participating in the 2009 Survey of State Directors of Special Education. We received feedback from all 50 states and 8 special entities about practices and procedures regarding large-scale accountability testing, accommodations, English language learners (ELLs) with disabilities, and alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) and modified achievement standards (AA-MAS).

Preliminary results from the 2009 survey will be presented at the 2009 TASH meeting in Pittsburgh, PA.

#### New Book

*Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards: Policy, Practice, & Potential* (2009).

Edited by William D. Shafer & Robert W. Lissetz. Forward by Martha Thurlow.

Baltimore: Paul Brookes.

#### TASH 2009 Conference

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