



National Center on Educational Outcomes

University of Minnesota

AA-AAS: Performance Descriptors

Rachel Quenemoen

Senior Research Fellow

Contact

quene003@umn.edu



WHO can advise you?



-
- Who KNOWS what it looks like when students with significant cognitive disabilities have been “taught well” in the grade-level mathematics and reading/English language arts curriculum?
 - Who can sit on the standard-setting panel with insight into “how good is good enough?”

The choice of who is on your panel, the choice of who your advisors are is critical.



Partners in your work...

- In most states, you will find willing partners in the special education office to work with you on identifying educators and parents who will contribute greatly to your standard-setting efforts. These partners must have experience with how these students access and make progress in the general curriculum, linked to grade-level content.
- In a few states, you may find resistance to the idea that these students **SHOULD** be taught the grade-level content, let alone be assessed on it, even in the state level special education office.

WHY is that the case?



Context: What SHOULD be taught?

- IDEA 1997 reauthorization: all students – were to be taught the same challenging curriculum as their peers, and not only have access to that curriculum, as stipulated in educational laws for students with disabilities since the mid 1970s, but clarified that they should make meaningful progress in the curriculum.
- NCLB 2001 and IDEA 2004 further clarified that “curriculum” for students with disabilities must be built on the same goals and standards as set for all other students, as defined by states for purposes of AYP, based on the enrolled grade-level content standards.



What about the IEP?

These laws clarified that the “curriculum” for students with disabilities is NOT defined by the IEP team; the curriculum for students with disabilities is built on the SAME content targets as for all other students. The IEP team’s role is to identify the specially designed instruction, services, and supports that each student needs to be successful in the same content as all other students.



Changing Curricular Context

- **1970s**
 - Adapting infant/early childhood curriculum for students with the most significant disabilities of all ages
 - READY meant NEVER
- **1980s**
 - Functional, community-referenced skills emerged
- **1990s**
 - **Social inclusion focus**
 - **Self determination focus**
 - **Advent of assistive technology**
- **2000s**
 - **General curriculum access (academic content)**
 - **Plus earlier priorities (functional, social, self determination)**
 - **Digitally accessible materials**

NAAC



How good is good enough?

- We are not sure yet how good is good enough for achievement of students with significant cognitive disabilities in the grade-level content when they have been taught well (or even pretty well).
- Some people who work closely with the students have a pretty good idea of what it may be.



Where are these people?

- Find the teachers, parents, and researchers who have been working with these shifts.

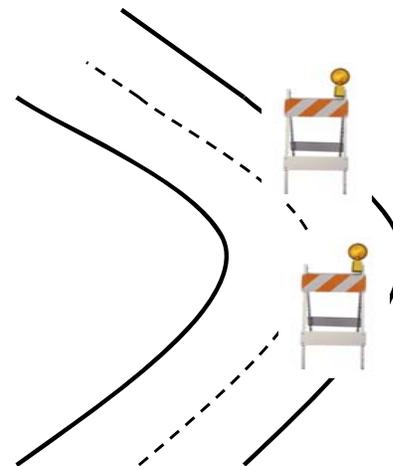
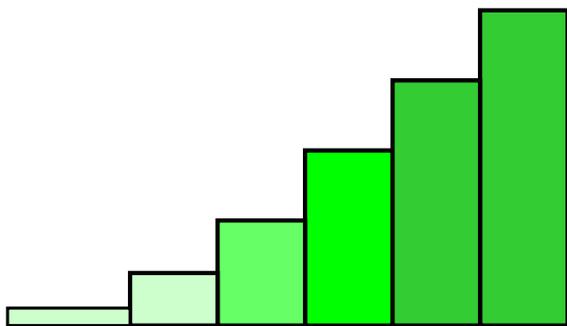
In a few cases, you may have to import them from other states to get you started, but you can pretty rapidly develop your own “experts.”

- Jacqui will speak to recent experience in a state with 12 years of history.
- Melissa can tell you about Georgia’s experience, where two years ago they recruited two of their best teachers to help them shift the thinking in the field, and the story of their journey.



Processes: Adopt or adapt?

Do the best practice models of regular assessment performance descriptors adequately describe what achievement looks like over the grades or grade spans for all of these students?





Heterogeneity Issues

- Is more than one standard the answer?
- What about comparison to student baseline data, and discussion of growth over baseline?
- What is “appropriately challenging?” How do we KNOW?
- How can we create opportunities for data-based discussions from systematic study?



Competing or complementary views?

- There are educators (and their states) who support a K-12 focus on development of basic skills in mathematics and reading for this small group of students.
- Although many of them also support the concept of this group of students working on these basic skills in the context of grade level materials and activities, the key outcomes they value are the basic skills mastered by more typical peers in grades K-4.



Competing or complementary views?

- Another view is that although these basic skills are unarguably important, there are other interesting and powerful academic skills and knowledge that enrolled grade peers are expected to learn that will engage and motivate these students as well.
- Especially as the students enter grades 5-12+, these educators and parents believe we have an obligation to not only “let” these students participate in materials and activities at grade level, we have an obligation to teach and assess these “other” rich academic targets in the domains of mathematics and English language arts.



Competing or complementary views?

- Truth most certainly rests somewhere in a balance of basic skills and rich and varied “other” academic content targets, and the blend probably changes over the years of schooling.
- You need to grapple with this and other issues as you work with your panel. Choosing diverse but knowledgeable people – but who support the basic premises of academic instruction – is essential.



Questions for the panel to consider

- Are we confident that our current understanding is the best we can do for children?
- Have we grappled with whether high achievement for these students is simply a quantitative difference – or is it a qualitative difference as well?
- Have we grappled with what is the appropriate blend of basic skills and rich and varied “other” content, and how that may change over the years of schooling?
- Do we have student work that we know has resulted from high quality teaching of the grade-level content to illustrate what we say in our performance descriptors?
- Are we committed to monitoring effects over time, and changing directions to promote higher achievement?



Document the procedures

Rigney, NCEO March 2005 teleconference

- Number of participants, how selected
- Qualifications of participants
- Qualifications of those designing methodology
- Materials used
- Instructions to participants
- Frameworks developed by participants
- Timeline, schedule of events, actual agenda
- Any deviations from intended procedures



Checklist for performance standards

Rigney, NCEO March 2005 teleconference

- Understandable and useful for stakeholders
- Clearly differentiate among levels
- Grounded in student work [in math and reading/ELA] but not tied to status quo
- Built by consensus
- Focused on learning



Peer Review looks for

Rigney, NCEO March 2005 teleconference

- Formal adoption by Board?
- How linked with grade-level content?
- Involvement of diverse stakeholders?
- Alternate achievement standard available for each grade level [or grade span]?
- Documentation of process used?
- Results reported in terms of the alternate achievement standards?