
Best practices in educating students with significant cognitive disabilities and alternate assessment: Competing or complementary practices?

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What is alternate assessment?

- way to measure the *performance* of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in general large-scale assessments even with appropriate accommodations or modifications

Assessment Participation Options

Assessment Option	Foundation for Content	How Performance is Evaluated	Who Can Participate
Regular State Assessment	State's Academic Content Standards	Grade-Level Achievement Standards	Any student, including students with disabilities
Regular State Assessment with Accommodations	State's Academic Content Standards	Grade-Level Achievement Standards	Any student with a disability
Alternate Assessment Judged Against Grade-Level Achievement Standards	State's Academic Content Standards	Grade-Level Achievement Standards	Any student with a disability
Alternate Assessment Judged Against Alternate Achievement Standards	State's Academic Content Standards	Alternate Achievement Standards	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities
Alternate Assessment Judged Against Modified Achievement Standards	State's Academic Content Standards	Modified Achievement Standards	Any student with a disability

Alternate Assessment Approaches

In general, there are 3 approaches and hybrids. All have positive and negative attributes.

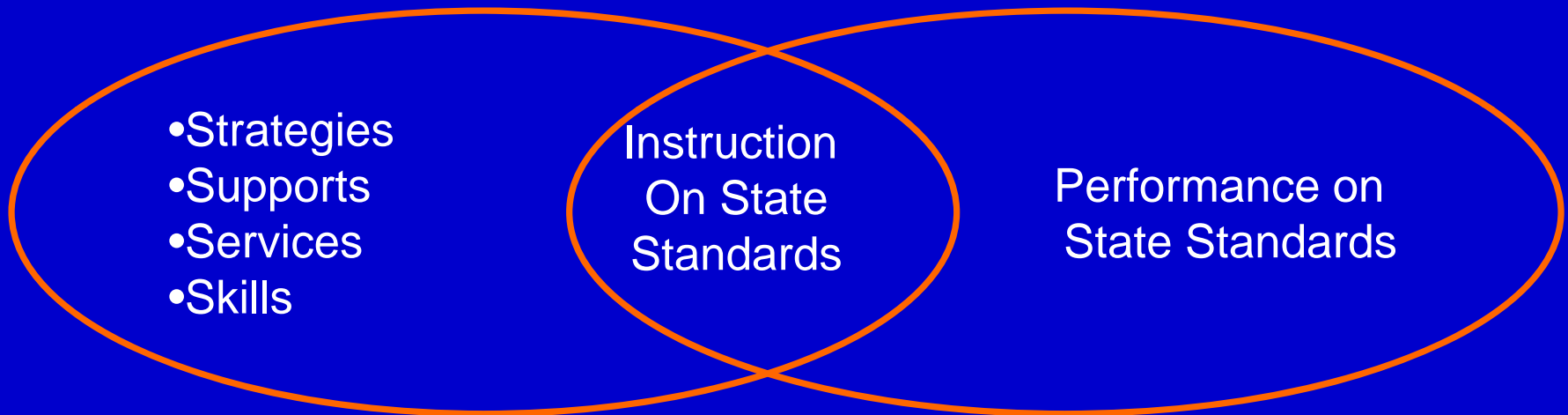
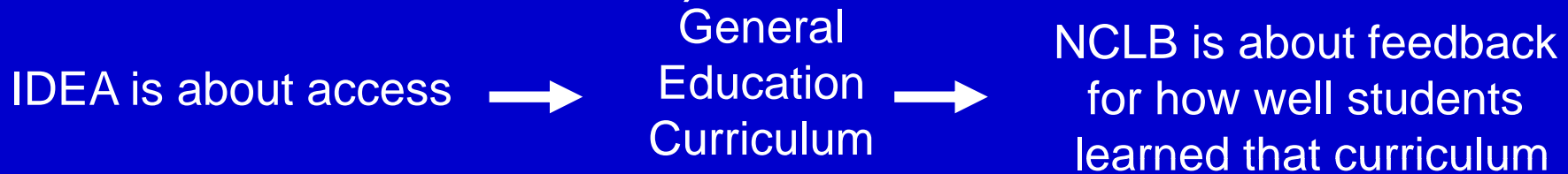
- **Portfolios:** Student portfolios are a purposeful and systematic collection of student work typically over time that is evaluated and measured against predetermined scoring criteria.
 - **Performance Events:** These assessments are direct measures of a skill, usually in a one-on-one assessment. These can range from highly structured one-on-one assessments similar to traditional pencil/paper test, to a more flexible approach that can be adjusted based on student needs. Scoring may report the amount of support needed to perform the skill. Performance events may be collected during a testing window or over time.
 - **Checklists:** This method relies on teacher report of the student's performance of certain skills or activities. Scores are usually based on the number of skills that the student was able to successfully perform. It is typical that teachers provide some evidence to backup the report.
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How do IDEA and NCLB differ?

- Determining how a student participated in assessment is not disability label driven; however it is an IEP team decision.
 - IDEA is focused on individual needs of a student while NCLB is focused on group performance; although NCLB reports are generated for individual students.
 - The assessment is NOT valid at the individual student level.
 - IDEA focus is about supports and access - how will the student access education, make progress in the general curriculum and other unique needs while NCLB assesses what a student knows of the state's academic content standards.
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How is NCLB similar to IDEA?

Promotes the notion of access to general education by giving teachers feedback about how students are doing in the curriculum (i.e., grade-level academic content)



What are we Discovering about Teaching?

- There are inherent incompatibilities of how students with significant cognitive disabilities are taught and how typical students are taught.
 - Spiraling curriculum vs. acquisition/mastery/generalization/maintenance
 - Teaching concepts in content vs. teaching function of content through skills or activities
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If we believe students with significant cognitive disabilities deserve and have the right to

- be educated in the general education classroom with their peers
 - learn academic content
 - develop relationships with their peers
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Why do we question ...

- the importance of learning what they are learning related to the grade-level academic content
- that the content is important to them as a student of the state, district, and school

Isn't this a natural outcome of inclusion?

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- Legal requirements aside, why is it important to include students with disabilities in the state level accountability system?
 - Can students learn grade-level academic content?
 - Should students learn grade-level academic content?
 - How do we reconcile our beliefs about how student's learn (acquisition -> maintenance without narrowing the curriculum [teaching to the test])?
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