Alternate Assessment Impact Survey (AAIS) Report

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Introduction

The two participating states in this research function as partner states to the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC). In order to investigate the influence of the alternate assessment judged against alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) on students, teachers, and schools, the two partner states chose to survey teachers' perceptions of the AA-AAS. Both states' Departments of Education partnered with NAAC as an external agency to conduct this survey. The purpose of conducting the AAIS in both states* was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the influence the alternate assessment may be having on teaching and learning for students who participate in the AA-AAS. (* to maintain anonymity, the states will be named State 1 and State 2).

Methodology for State 1

The Educational Data Advisory Committee (EDAC) in State 1 reviewed and approved the study to be conducted in their state. The survey was developed by the NAAC based on a set of questions that were originally intended to investigate the influence of the alternate assessment on teachers' daily instruction and Individual Education Program (IEP) development. Demographic information, questions related to curriculum perceptions, and an investigation of the changes related to daily instruction and IEP development (as a result of the implementation of the alternate assessment) were included on the survey to gather a range of rich data. Upon approval, researchers at NAAC distributed an email to all teachers who participated in State 1's AA-AAS administration trainings in the years of 2003, 2004, and 2006. Unfortunately, teachers' information from the 2005 trainings was not available. Only those teachers with a student completing an AA-AAS during 2005-2006 administration were asked to complete the survey.

As a result, 1396 teachers were invited to participate in the study. Of those participants, 95 emails were undeliverable, resulting in 1301 total teachers invited to participate in the study. Teachers received an email inviting them to participate by clicking on the link that directed them to the online survey. Upon completion of the survey, teachers' answers were included in a database with all teachers who completed the survey in order to assure anonymity.

Methodology for State 2

Researchers at NAAC distributed an email through the Assistant Director of Assessment in the Office of Assessment at State 2's Department of Education to a group of teacher leaders with students participating in the AA-AAS. They utilized a teacher listserve and distributed an email inviting teachers to participate by clicking on the link that directed them to the online survey. As a result, 100 teachers were invited to participate in the study. Upon completion of the survey, teachers' answers were included in a database with all teachers who completed the survey as in order to assure anonymity.

Instrumentation

The AAIS was developed by researchers at the NAAC. The survey was then piloted with ten teachers. Teachers were asked to make recommendations on the AAIS concerning topics such as content, user-friendliness, clarity, understandability, etc. The original version of the AAIS was revised based on the teacher recommendations. (Please contact researchers for a final copy of the AAIS used in this research.)

Data Analysis for State 1

The AAIS was distributed to 1301 teachers. Surveys were returned from 237 teachers. The response rate was approximately 18.22%. Descriptive statistics and frequency analyses were performed on each of the 28 items. The following information will provide a detailed description of the sample and highlight unique findings from the other survey items.

Description of the sample:

The sample that responded to the survey included 219 female teachers and 19 male teachers (one teacher did not respond to this demographic question). Most respondents were White (N=214) while 13 were Hispanic or Latino.

There was a range of experience in the number of years respondents reported teaching special education prior to the 2005-2006 school year. Most teachers (N=70) had taught more than 15 years while 40 teachers had taught 4-6 years. Thirty-four teachers had taught 1-3 years, 25 had taught 7-9 years, 24 had taught 13-15 years, and 19 had taught 10-12 years. Only 23 teachers had taught less than a year.

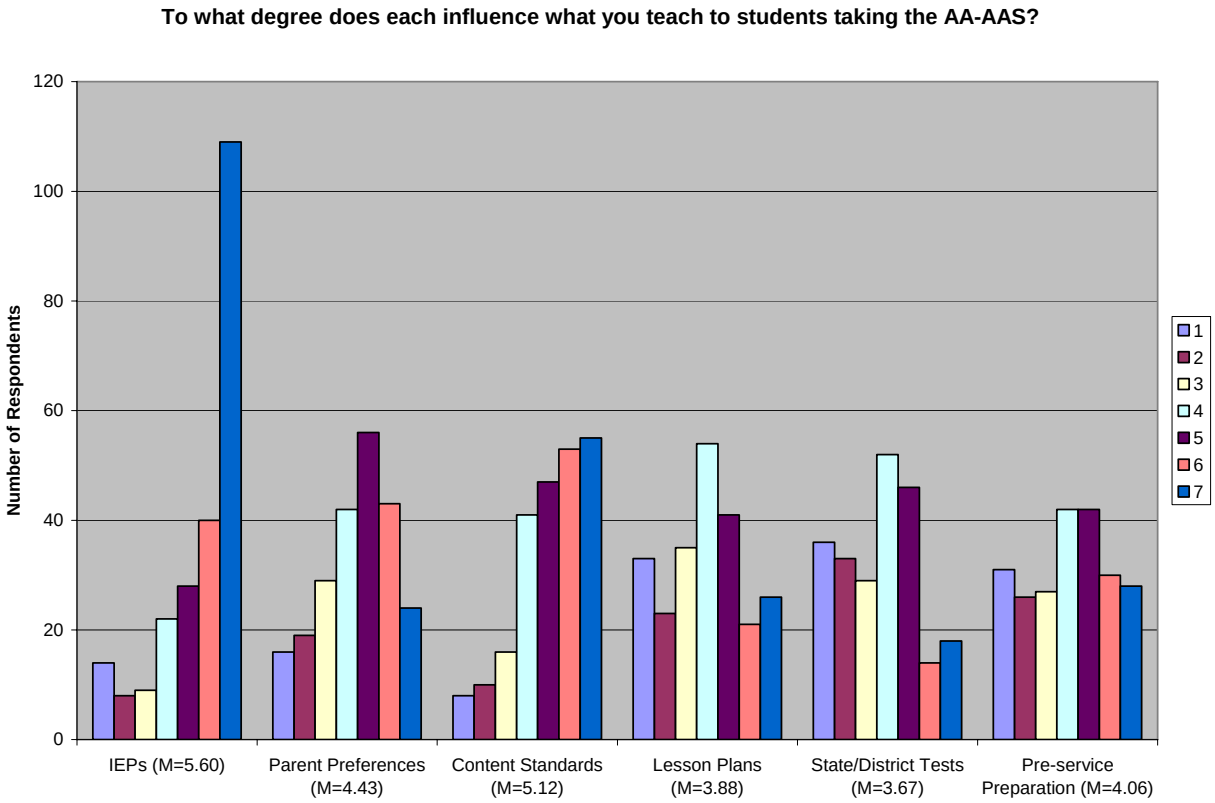
Of the 237 teachers who responded, 137 held an MA or MS degree, 69 held a BA or BS degree, and 28 held multiple MA or MS degrees. When asked to provide their major field of study for the bachelor's degree, teachers most often reported a combination of fields (N=88) varying greatly between the combinations. Fifty-eight teachers' major field of study for the bachelor's degree was special education while 28 teachers' major field of study was elementary education. Thirty teachers reported their major field of study for the bachelor's degree was a combination of special education and elementary education.

For those teachers reporting a field of study for the highest degree beyond a bachelor's, 69 were special education (high incidence) and 52 were special education (low incidence). Teachers were also asked to provide their current certification. For singular certifications, most teachers (N=89) reported K-12 Special Education certification. Eighty-one teachers reported a combination of certifications.

Unique Findings and Results:

When asked to rate the degree to which certain variables influenced what was taught to students taking the AA-AAS where 1 equals lowest degree of influence and 7 equals highest degree of influence, teachers rated students' IEPs as being the most influential (M=5.60), their state or district's curriculum framework or content standards as second (M=5.12), and parental or community preferences as third (M=4.43) followed by experience in the teacher's undergraduate/graduate program (M=4.06), unit or daily lesson plans from general education (M=3.88), and state/district tests or results from those tests (M=3.67). Figure 1 details the number of respondents who rated each of the variables along the scale of influence.

Figure 1



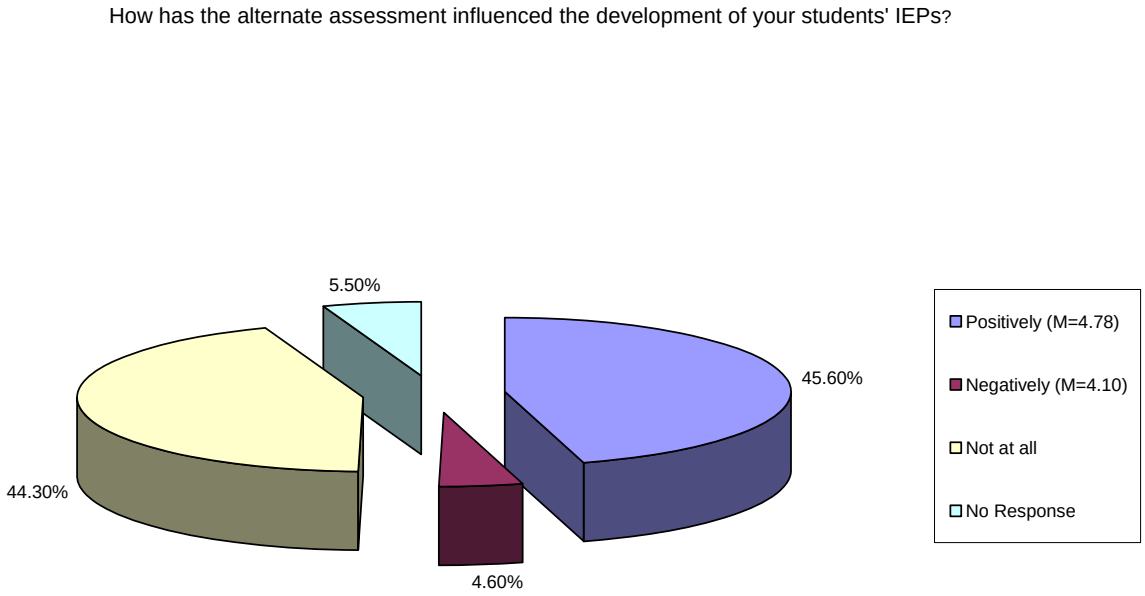
Teachers were also asked to identify changes in the way the AA-AAS influenced the development of students' IEPs in certain areas. Overwhelmingly, most teachers reported no change in any of the areas. However, 65 teachers or more reported an increase in: 1) team effort within the IEP team; 2) supports available to and used by students; 3) service delivery options for students; 4) the type and number of goals related to learning academic content; and 5) the type and amount of assistive technology used by students. Positively, few teachers (N<10) reported decreases in any of the variables.

Similar to the question reported above, teachers were asked to identify changes in the way the AA-AAS influenced teachers' daily instruction. Again, most teachers reported no change in any of the areas, but 66 teachers or more reported an increase in: 1) instruction on grade-level academic content; 2) expectations from other students, parents, or teachers; 3) instructional responsibilities shared with other educators or school personnel; 4) understanding of academic content standards by teachers; 5) opportunities to embed functional skills in daily instructional routines; 6) opportunities to teach self-determination skills; and 7) opportunities to generalize skills to other settings. Once more, few teachers (N<17) reported decreases in any of the variables.

Teachers were asked to report how the AA-AAS influenced the development of their students' IEPs. Overall, 108 teachers reported positively, 11 reported negatively, and 105 reported no influence on the development of their students' IEPs. The degree of positive influence reported by the 108 teachers was a mean of 4.78 on a scale of 1 (lowest influence) to 7

(highest influence). Most often, teachers responded the reason for reporting positive influence of the AA-AAS on the development of students' IEPs was that all students should be represented in school accountability. This answer was also most often coupled with other answers to this question creating multiple combinations of reasons why teachers reported positive influence of the AA-AAS on students' IEPs. Qualitative answers revealed teachers felt the "Alternate Assessment was well written and allowed for a true assessment of each student". Teachers also reported they felt "students' goals were written better to align with state standards and benchmarks". Figure 2 outlines the percentage of respondents who reported positive, negative, or no influence on students' IEPs.

Figure 2

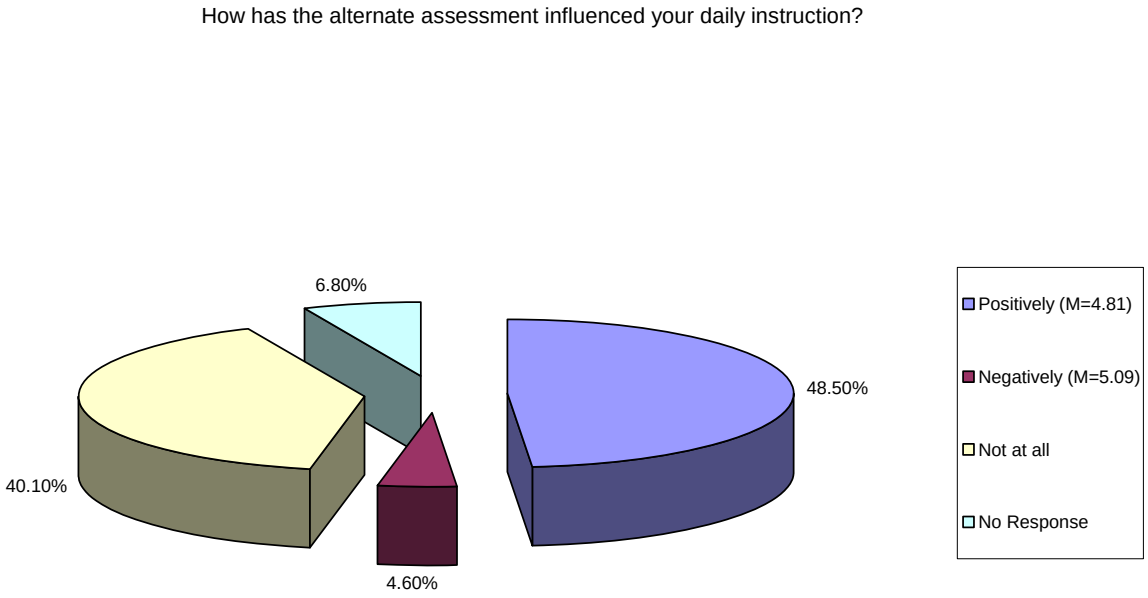


Of those 11 teachers reporting negative influence of the AA-AAS on development of students' IEPs, the mean degree of negative influence was 4.10. When asked why teachers reported negative or no influence of the AA-AAS on IEP development, teachers most often reported they had always been doing what was required by the AA-AAS. Teachers also reported they felt the AA-AAS required them to emphasize skills that were not most important for their students to learn.

Teachers were also asked to report how the AA-AAS influenced their daily instruction. Overall, 115 teachers reported positively, 11 reported negatively, and 95 reported no influence on daily instruction. The degree of positive influence reported by the 115 teachers was a mean of 4.81 on a scale of 1 (lowest influence) to 7 (highest influence). Most often, teachers responded the reason for reporting positive influence of the AA-AAS was because access to the general curriculum was important for all students. Qualitative answers revealed teachers felt the

"alternate assessment has helped to give direction in what to cover and work toward". Teachers are using information gathered through observing and watching their students take the test to influence what and how they teach. Figure 3 outlines the percentage of respondents who reported positive, negative, or no influence on teachers' daily instruction.

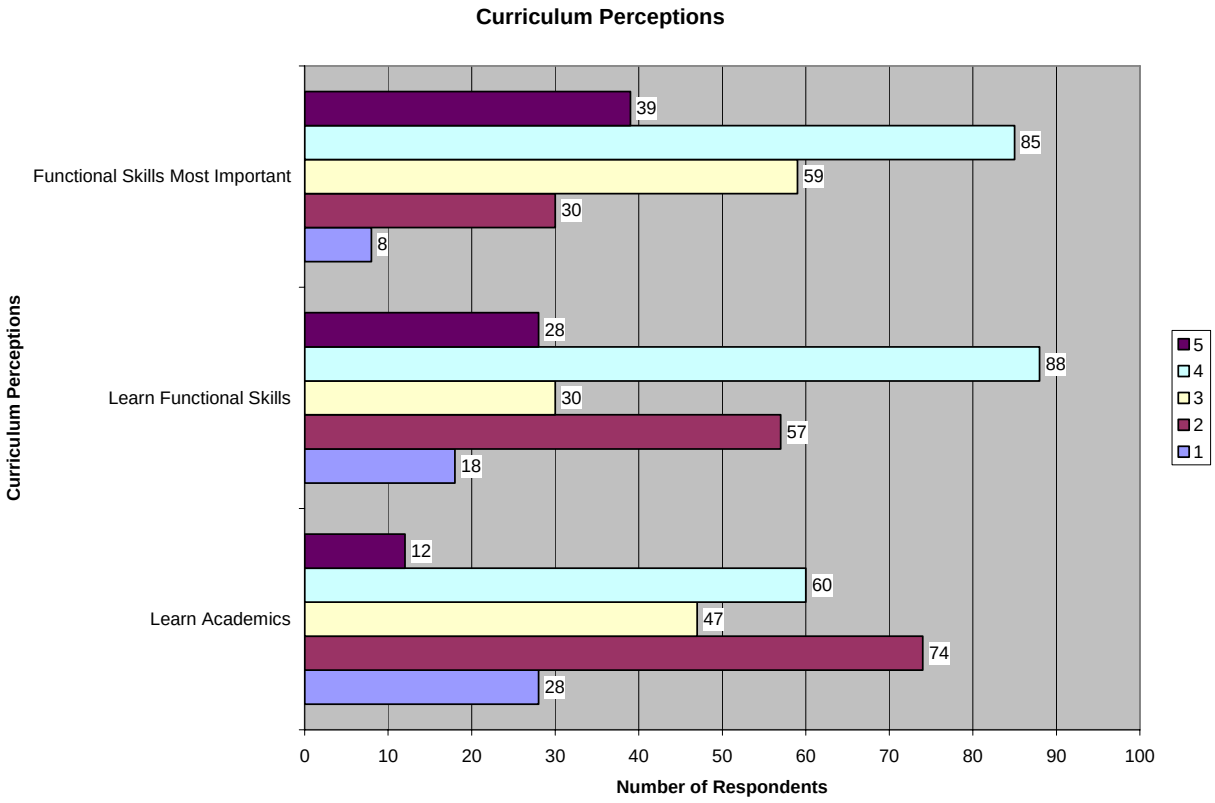
Figure 3



Of those teachers reporting negative influence of the AA-AAS on daily instruction, the mean degree of negative influence was 5.09. When asked why teachers reported negative or no influence of the AA-AAS on daily instruction, teachers again reported they had always been doing what was required by the alternate assessment. Qualitative answers revealed teachers felt the alternate assessment takes too much time to set up and to administer which takes away from much needed instructional time.

This research also investigated curriculum perceptions held by teachers in this state. Teachers were asked to provide their level of agreement with three statements about curriculum for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities on a scale of 1 being the lowest degree of influence and 5 being the highest degree of influence. Overall, teachers reported they agreed less with the statement that it is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum (M=2.79) and they agreed more with the statement that it is more important for students to learn functional skills than academic content (M=3.53). Positively though, teachers did report they agreed that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in daily school routines with typical peers, including academic instruction through the grade-level curriculum (M=3.23). Figure 4 details the number of respondents who rated each of the curriculum perception variables from 1 to 5.

Figure 4



Correlational Analyses:

Correlational analyses were also conducted to investigate significant relationships between certain demographic variables and scaled questions. In particular, a statistically significant inverse relationship was yielded between years teaching special education and the curriculum perception that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in school routines. Consequently, the longer teachers reported they had been teaching special education, the less they agreed with the statement that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in daily school routines with typical peers, including academic instruction through the grade-level curriculum ($r=-.14$, $p< .05$).

Also, a statistically significant relationship was identified between various curriculum perceptions. Those teachers who agreed with the statement that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in daily school routines with typical peers, including academic instruction through the grade-level curriculum, also agreed that it is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum ($r=.48$, $p< .01$). At the same time, another statistically significant inverse relationship was identified between two other curriculum perceptions. For those teachers who believed it was more important for students to learn functional skills than academic content, they also reported it less important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum ($r=-.15$, $p< .05$)

Data Analysis for State 2

The AAIS was distributed to 100 teachers during the 2005-2006 school year. Surveys were returned from 79 teachers. The response rate was 79%. Descriptive statistics and frequency analyses were performed on each of the 28 items. The following information will provide a detailed description of the sample and highlight unique findings from the other survey items.

Description of the sample:

The sample that responded to the survey included 72 female teachers and 7 male teachers. Most respondents were White (N=73) while 5 were Black or Africa American (one person did not respond to the question). There was a range of experience in the number of years respondents reported teaching special education prior to the 2005-2006 school year. Most teachers (N=32) had taught more than 15 years while 10 teachers each had taught 1-3 years, 7-9 years, and 13-15 years. Nine teachers had taught 4-6 years and 6 had taught 10-12 years. Only 1 teacher had taught less than a year.

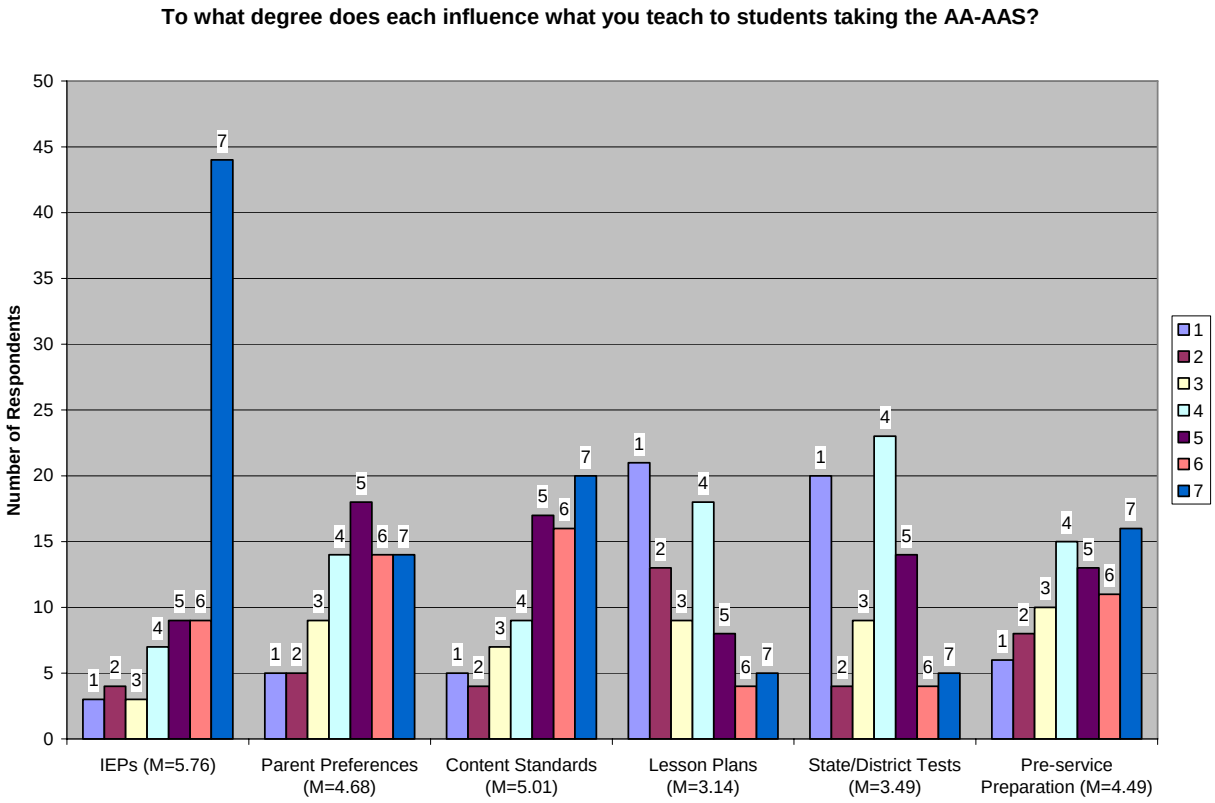
Of the 79 teachers who responded, 52 held an MA or MS degree, 19 held a BA or BS degree, and 5 held multiple MA or MS degrees. When asked to provide their major field of study for the bachelor's degree, teachers most often reported special education (N=39). Nine teachers' major field of study for the bachelor's degree was elementary education and special education while 8 teachers' major field of study was elementary education. Four teachers reported their major field of study for the bachelor's degree was secondary education with a concentration in another area.

For those teachers reporting a field of study for the highest degree beyond a bachelor's, 27 were special education (low incidence) and 15 were special education (high incidence). Ten teachers reported their field of study beyond a bachelor's degree was elementary education. Teachers were also asked to provide their current certification. For singular certifications, most teachers (N=22) reported K-12 Special Education certification. Forty-one teachers reported a combination of certifications.

Unique Findings and Results:

When asked to rate the degree to which certain variables influenced what was taught to students taking the AA-AAS where 1 equals lowest degree of influence and 7 equals highest degree of influence, teachers rated students IEPs as being the most influential (M=5.76), their state or district's curriculum framework or content standards as second (M=5.01), and parental or community preferences as third (M=4.68) followed by experience in the teacher's undergraduate/graduate program (M=4.49), state/district tests or results from those tests (M=3.49), and unit or daily lesson plans from general education (M=3.14). Figure 5 details the number of respondents who rated each of the variables along the scale of influence.

Figure 5



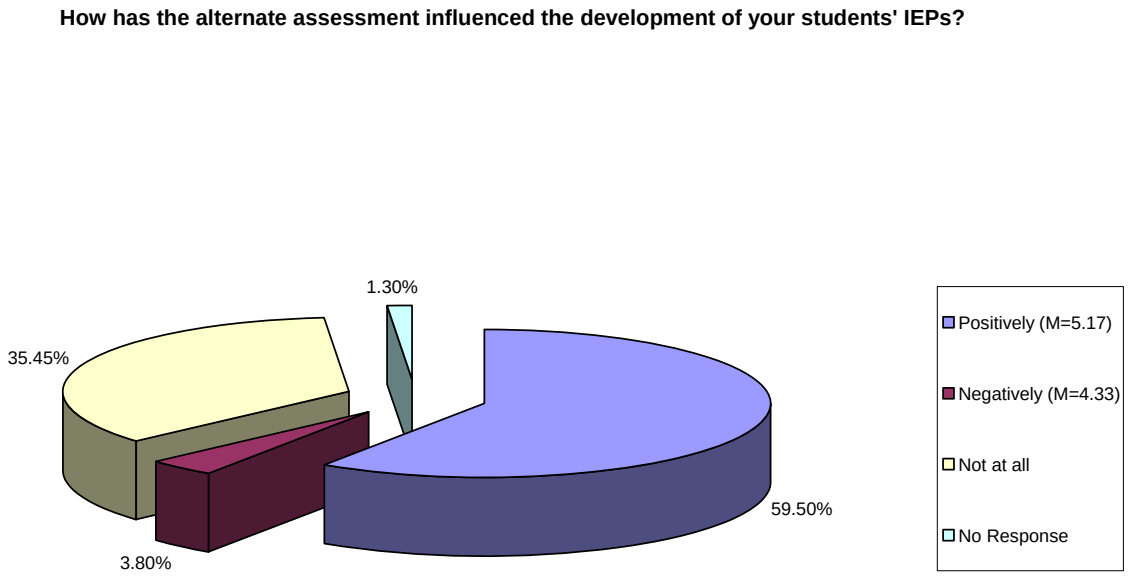
Teachers were also asked to identify changes in the way the AA-AAS influenced the development of students' IEPs in certain areas. Overwhelmingly, most teachers reported no change in any of the areas. However, 25 teachers or more reported an increase in: 1) team effort within the IEP team; 2) supports available to and used by students; 3) the type and number of goals related to learning academic content; and 4)the type and amount of assistive technology used by students. Positively, few teachers (N<2) reported decreases in any of the variables.

Similar to the question reported above, teachers were asked to identify changes in the way the AA-AAS influenced teachers' daily instruction. Again, most teachers reported no change in any of the areas, but 30 teachers or more reported an increase in: 1) instruction on grade-level academic content; 2) expectations from other students, parents, or teachers; 3) instructional responsibilities shared with other educators or school personnel; 4) understanding of academic content standards by teachers; 5) opportunities to embed functional skills in daily instructional routines; 6) opportunities to teach self-determination skills; and 7) opportunities to generalize skills to other settings. Once more, few teachers (N<5) reported decreases in any of the variables.

Teachers were asked to report how the AA-AAS influenced the development of their students' IEPs. Overall, 47 teachers reported positively, 3 reported negatively, and 28 reported no influence on the development of their students' IEPs. The degree of positive influence reported by the 47 teachers was a mean of 5.17 on a scale of 1 (lowest influence) to 7 (highest influence). Most often, teachers responded the reason for reporting positive influence of the AA-AAS on the development of students' IEPs was that all students should be represented in school

accountability or that access to the general curriculum was important for all students. These answers were also coupled with other answers to this question creating multiple combinations of reasons why teachers reported positive influence of the AA-AAS on students' IEPs. As well, teachers reported that "standards have served as a guide for IEP objectives and academic instruction". Figure 6 outlines the percentage of respondents who reported positive, negative, or no influence on students' IEPs.

Figure 6

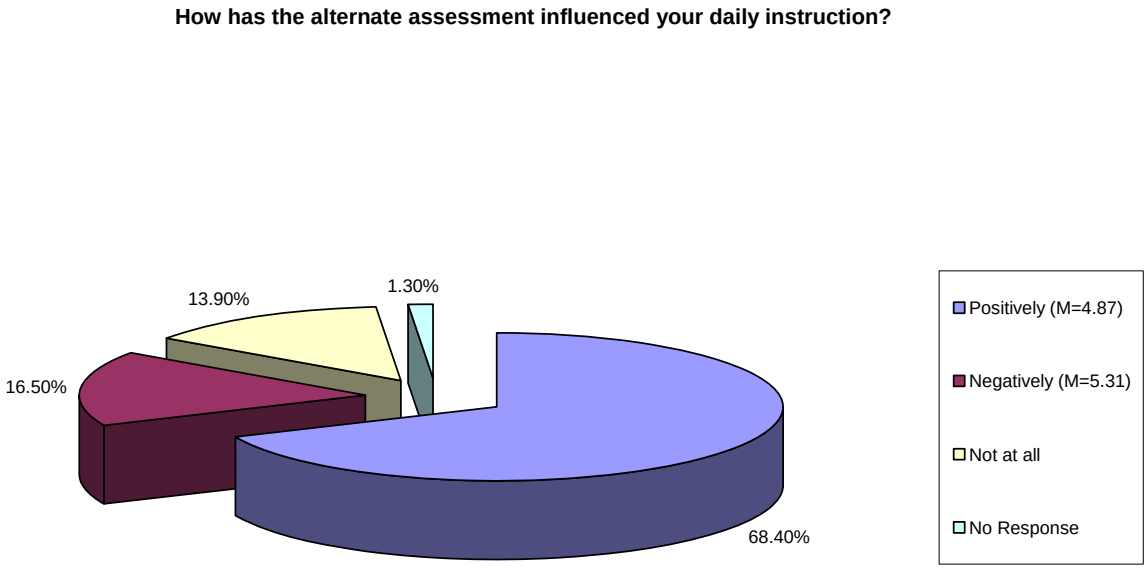


Of those 3 teachers reporting negative influence of the AA-AAS on development of students' IEPs, the mean degree of negative influence was 4.33. When asked why teachers reported negative or no influence of the AA-AAS on IEP development, teachers most often reported they had always been doing what was required by the AA-AAS. Teachers also reported they felt the AA-AAS required them to emphasize skills that were not most important for their students to learn.

Teachers were also asked to report how the AA-AAS influenced their daily instruction. Overall, 54 teachers reported positively, 13 reported negatively, and 11 reported no influence on daily instruction. The degree of positive influence reported by the 54 teachers was a mean of 4.87 on a scale of 1 (lowest influence) to 7 (highest influence). Most often, teachers responded the reason for reporting positive influence of the AA-AAS was because access to the general curriculum was important for all students. Qualitative answers revealed teachers felt the "alternate assessment has kept me on target with accessing the regular education standards and adapting them; it helped us make sure age appropriate content was being introduced to the

students". Figure 7 outlines the percentage of respondents who reported positive, negative, or no influence on teachers' daily instruction.

Figure 7

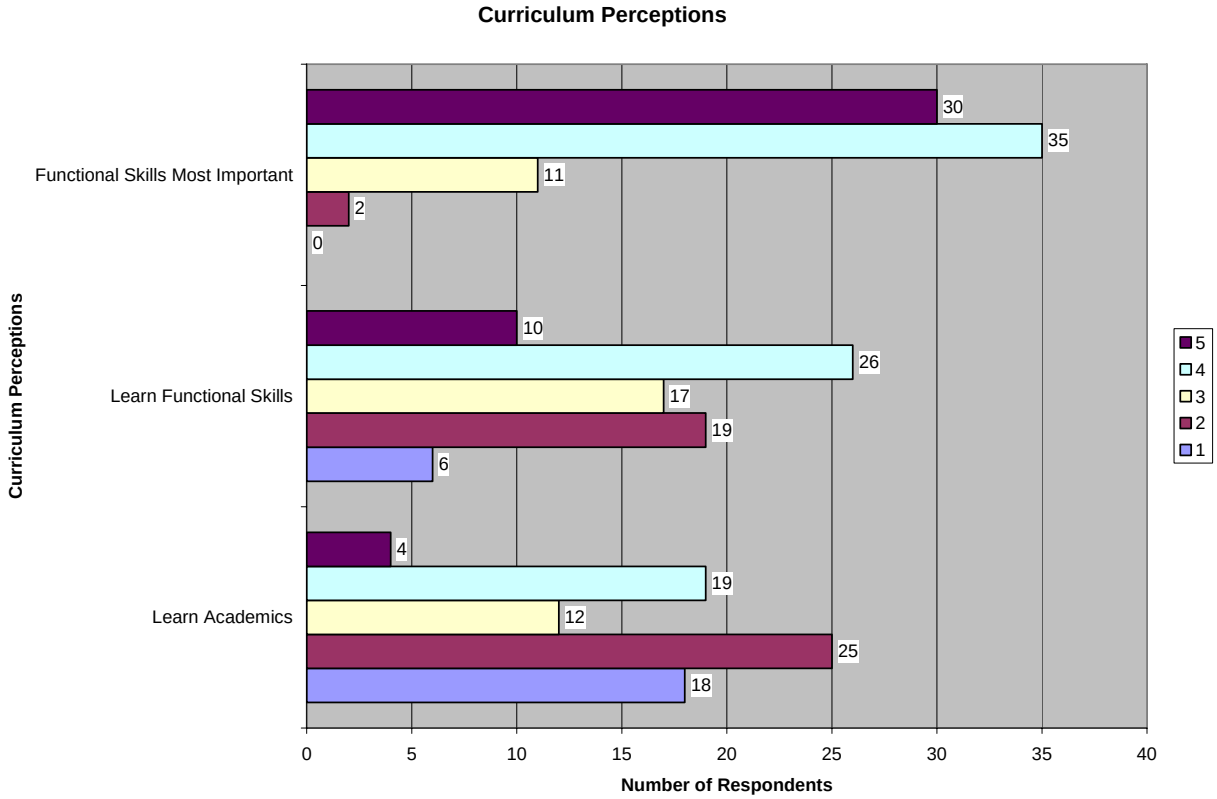


For those 13 teachers reporting negative influence of the AA-AAS on daily instruction, the mean degree of negative influence was 5.31. When asked why teachers reported negative or no influence of the AA-AAS on daily instruction, teachers again reported they had always been doing what was required by the alternate assessment but they also reported they felt that the alternate assessment takes time away from instruction on important skills. Qualitative answers revealed "the alternate assessment does not assess or represent the totality of the IEP or the skills each student possesses".

This research also investigated curriculum perceptions held by teachers in this state and tables outlining the results of these three questions are below. Teachers were asked to provide their level of agreement with three statements about curriculum for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities on a scale of 1 being the lowest degree of influence and 5 being the highest degree of influence. Overall, teachers reported they agreed less with the statement that it is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum (M=2.56) and they agreed more with the statement that it is more important for students to learn functional skills than academic content (M=4.19). Positively though, teachers did report they agreed that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in daily school routines with typical peers, including academic instruction through the

grade-level curriculum (M=3.19). Figure 8 details the number of respondents who rated each of the curriculum perception variables along the scale of influence from 1 to 5.

Figure 8



Correlational Analyses:

Correlational analyses were conducted to investigate significant relationships between certain demographic variables and scaled questions. Only one statistically significant relationship was found between the three curriculum perceptions. Those teachers who agreed with the statement that students effectively learn functional skills when embedded in daily school routines with typical peers, including academic instruction through the grade-level curriculum, also agreed that it is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum ($r=.65$, $p< .01$). At the same time, another statistically significant inverse relationship was found between two other curriculum perceptions. For those teachers who believed it was more important for students to learn functional skills than academic content, they also reported it less important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to learn academics through grade-level curriculum ($r=-.35$, $p< .01$).

Limitations of this study

One limitation of this study for both participating states is that it did not encompass the entire sample of teachers with students participating in the AA-AAS during the 2005-2006 school year. Results should be interpreted with caution in that approximately 82% of the sample

was not represented in one state and only teacher leaders were represented in the other state. However, the results from the surveys in both states were very similar adding validity evidence to the responses in both states.

Recommendations

1) Conduct the AAIS again with hopes of securing a larger sample by gathering the data in close proximity to the time of AA-AAS submission. Also, consider gathering data longitudinally (each year or every other year) to monitor changes in teacher perceptions across time due to changes in the assessment as a result of state/federal policy implications.
2) Consider the results of this survey for implications on teacher training (i.e., training teachers on the importance of students learning academics through grade-level curriculum, and that functional skills can still be taught when embedded in daily instruction of the grade-level curriculum).