

April 2006

Dear Colleague:

Educating children with disabilities is a central mission of any school. It's also central to your success under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Your students and their families count on you for clear guidance and support. You deserve the same from us. That is the purpose of the *Tool Kit on Teaching and Assessing Students With Disabilities*.

The keys to educating children are instruction and assessment, relying on the most current and accurate information on how children learn, while also measuring student performance to ensure continuous growth and progress. Last April at Mt. Vernon, I said that if states and educators stood up for kids by providing better instruction and assessment, we would stand by them. And we have.

To continue moving forward with the implementation of *NCLB*, we are proposing a commonsense policy on assessing some students with disabilities based on modified achievement standards. Associated with that policy, we have made available \$14 million for technical assistance to states and for long-term research on the assessment of students with disabilities. And now this *Tool Kit* will help you address the needs of more of your students in meeting high expectations.

The *Tool Kit* provides up-to-date guidance on designing and implementing high-quality assessments for students with disabilities. We have also included a set of technical assistance products that offer practical, research-based approaches to the challenges schools are facing in the areas of assessment, instruction, behavioral interventions, and use of accommodations for students with disabilities. In addition, you will find information about research now under way to further expand our knowledge about how best to support teaching, learning, and assessing.

Under *No Child Left Behind*, our nation has committed to providing every single child with a quality education—something that's never been done before. Today, test scores are rising and student achievement is improving. Students with disabilities are receiving more classroom time and attention than ever before. As a result, the decades-old "achievement gap" is finally beginning to close.

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* has also improved the way schools teach students with disabilities. Together, President Bush and Congress have worked to update the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* so that it closely fits the goals and vision of *No Child Left Behind*.

Teachers have made great strides in educating students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are far more likely to stay in school, attend college, and find employment than a quarter-century ago. We want to keep this progress going strong.

As you use this information, the Department of Education will continue to work closely with you. We will base our decisions on proven research and data. We will help you measure performance so that no child is ever ignored or left behind. We are committed to providing more help and information as we move forward together.

Above all, we will never forget our mission and yours: to give every child a quality education so every child can enjoy the brightest possible future.

Sincerely,

/s/

Margaret Spellings

April 2006

Dear Colleague:

In the four years since the *No Child Left Behind Act* was signed into law, states and districts have made significant progress in increasing the participation rates of students with disabilities in assessments and in improving achievement for these students. We applaud these successes. Last April, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced plans for expanding the assessment strategies for some students with disabilities under *No Child Left Behind*. Part of her pledge at that time was a commitment to provide technical assistance on teaching and assessing all students with disabilities to enable states to fully implement the provisions of *No Child Left Behind*.

Today we are following up on that pledge. This *Tool Kit on Teaching and Assessing Students With Disabilities* represents a collaborative effort between the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) to assist states in raising the achievement of all students with disabilities. This *Tool Kit* builds on the technical assistance materials the secretary released on Dec. 14, 2005, which can be downloaded from <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/speced/toolkit/index.html>.

Our initial audiences for this *Tool Kit* are those in state-level leadership positions. Our hope is that they in turn will share these materials with others who have responsibility for improving teaching and assessing for all students. In addition, to facilitate broad dissemination of these materials, today we are launching a Web site, accessible through <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/reports.html>, that includes the materials in this binder. The Web site will be updated with additional materials as they become available.

This *Tool Kit* includes a set of papers titled *Including Students With Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments*, with an executive summary and a glossary of terms, written by experts in large-scale assessments and the education of students with disabilities. These papers, commissioned by OSERS, include topics related to individualized education program team decision-making, professional development for educators, standards and assessment approaches, and validity and reliability of assessments. The *Tool Kit* also includes 14 technical assistance documents developed by OSERS' grantees. These documents were chosen based on their relevance to improving teaching and assessing all students with disabilities.

We appreciate the work you do every day to improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities and hope you find these materials useful as you continue to strengthen accountability and assessments for all students.

Sincerely,

John H. Hager
Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education
and Rehabilitative Services

Henry Johnson
Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and
Secondary Education