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# NICHCY Connections to... Including Students with Disabilities in State & District Assessments

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NICHCY is pleased to connect you with sources of information on including children with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments. This is an area of considerable concern and endeavor for state and local education agencies, educators, and families alike. Federal law--specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)--requires that students with disabilities be included in large state or district assessment programs. In order to enable children with disabilities to participate in such general assessments, appropriate accommodations may be made, as necessary, as well as modifications in how the assessments are administered (including individual modifications, as appropriate). The decision as to whether a particular child will participate in a particular assessment belongs to the IEP team. The IEP team also specifies what accommodations or modifications that child will need in order to participate.

However, a student's IEP team may also determine that the student cannot participate in a particular State or district-wide assessment of student achievement or part of such an assessment, even with modifications. If this is the case, the team must include a statement in the IEP as to why the assessment is not appropriate for the student and how he or she will be assessed. Under the law, the state or local education agency (SEA / LEA) must then assess the child using an alternate assessment.

It's complicated---and yet very important. There is enormous pressure for accountability, and states routinely use high stakes testing programs that require students to reach a specified competency level in order to graduate. Thus, how these tests affect students with disabilities is an area of continuing concern. We hope the resources we've listed below will be useful to parents and professionals alike. They focus upon discussions of what high stakes testing means for students, what types of accommodations and modifications states are using to enable their participation, and what alternate assessments are being designed for students whose IEP teams determine that they cannot participate in a particular state or district test.

The list below isn't intended to be exhaustive of the resources available on including children with disabilities in state and district assessments---it's ever-growing. We'll be adding to this page throughout the year, so check back now and again to see what's new! New entries are marked with a ★.

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## What's Required---and Why?

- *Frequently asked questions--and answers.*  
[www.education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Participation/participation\\_FAQ.htm](http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Participation/participation_FAQ.htm)  
The participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments is a special topic area of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). If this topic is new to you, you'll want to start your investigation with NCEO's FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions). What do you want to know? NCEO tries to answer the questions most people start with.
- *Education reform: What does it mean for students with disabilities?*  
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED440486.pdf>  
This brief will tell you why there's such a fuss about assessments, how students with disabilities participated in the past, and how they'll participate now.
- *All Kids Count: Including students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs.*  
<http://fcsn.org/peer/assess.htm>  
The guide you'll find at the link above is a product of the PEER Project, a technical assistance project formerly funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. *All Kids Count* is intended as a basic primer on the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment systems. Its purpose is to give parents, parent leaders, professionals, and other interested parties basic guidelines and points of reference for participating in discussions around policies and practices related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment programs.
- *Assessing students with disabilities: Issues and evidence.*  
<http://www.cse.ucla.edu/products/reports/TR587.pdf>  
This 2003 report discusses major issues raised by the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments and summarizes pertinent research.
- *Any guidance from the feds?*  
[www.dssc.org/frc/fed/OSEP01-06.FFAssessment.pdf](http://www.dssc.org/frc/fed/OSEP01-06.FFAssessment.pdf)  
*Guidance on Including Students with Disabilities in Assessment Programs* is available from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education. Find the family-free version at the link above. The same information, prepared for state directors of special education, is available at: [www.dssc.org/frc/AssessmentQ%26A.html](http://www.dssc.org/frc/AssessmentQ%26A.html)

- *What are the positive aspects of including students with disabilities in assessment programs?*  
[www.education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Synthesis51.html](http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Synthesis51.html)  
 When investigators document the consequences of high stakes assessments for students with disabilities, many negative consequences are cited. The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) examined both empirical and anecdotal evidence for positive consequences of large-scale high-stakes assessments for students with disabilities. This report synthesizes their findings.

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## Test Accommodations

- *Accommodations: Making it possible for students to show you "what they got."*  
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/TopicAreas/Accommodations/Accomtopic.htm>  
 And we're back at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), because they're the experts! Check out their resources on testing accommodations, which are "changes in testing materials or procedures that enable students to participate in assessments in a way that allows abilities to be assessed rather than disabilities." This NCEO special topic area includes, among other things, an Introduction to Accommodations (the link above) and an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions). Find out what accommodations are, what categories they fall into, and when you'd wanna make one (or two...) for a student with a disability.
- *When you make a change to the test, what happens?*  
[www.ihdi.uky.edu/msrrc/PDF/Tindal&Fuchs.PDF](http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/msrrc/PDF/Tindal&Fuchs.PDF)  
 If you make an accommodation, does it make the student's test results any less valid? This 1999 summary addresses the issue of validity with primary consideration on using this research to implement sound testing practices and to make appropriate educational decisions.
- *A summary of research on test changes.*  
<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/onlinepubs/Technical34.htm>  
 This 2002 paper, entitled "A Summary of Research on the Effects of Test Accommodations: 1999 through 2001," summarizes research on the effects of test accommodations, including: type of assessment, content area assessed, number of research participants, types of disabilities included in the sample, grade-level of the participants, research design, research findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.
- *Try the Online Accommodations Bibliography.*  
<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/AccomStudies.htm>  
 The Online Accommodations Bibliography, at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), allows users to search a compilation of empirical research studies on the effects of various testing accommodations for students with

disabilities. Convenient, eh? The research you'll find is the same as what's summarized in the article cited and linked in the last bullet, plus additional research studies presented or published in more recent years.

- *Need a toolkit or staff development tool on assessment accommodations?*  
*Making Assessment Accommodations: A Toolkit For Educators 2000 [and Videotape]* is a product of the ASPIRE and ILIAD IDEA Partnership Projects, formerly funded by OSEP. An introductory section provides an overview of the toolkit. A 15-minute videotape looks at commonly used assessment accommodations from the perspectives of practitioners, policymakers, administrators, and parents. The *Practitioner's Guide* section briefly describes the most commonly used accommodations in five areas: timing, scheduling, setting, presentation, and response. The *Administrator's Guide* section includes a discussion of implementation along with examples of schools that have made assessment accommodations for students with disabilities. A pamphlet to share with family members is also included in this section. The final section presents suggestions and ideas for using the toolkit in staff development sessions for small study groups. To order, call The Council for Exceptional Children, 1.888.232.7733, or e-mail [service@cec.sped.org](mailto:service@cec.sped.org).
- *State policies: Assessment and accommodations.*  
[www.education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Accommodations/StatesAccomm.htm](http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Accommodations/StatesAccomm.htm)  
Want to know what your state's policy is about including students with disabilities in standardized assessments? Take a look at the link above, courtesy of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), which has been tracking and analyzing state policies on participation in assessments and accommodations for more than a decade now.
- *And then you include the scores of students with disabilities in the state's accountability system, right? No matter what they are?*  
[www.education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Technical33.htm](http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Technical33.htm)  
States want to have good scores on their tests, just like any student does. If the students in the state do well on these large-scale tests, that means the state's education system is working. But what if the scores turn out lousy? No one wants to hear that bad news! Nonetheless, states have to tell us how students are doing (and, by extension, how the state's *system* is doing). But are they *really* including students with disabilities in the overall performance picture? This study, "Are we there yet? Accountability for the performance of students with disabilities," identifies and describes the accountability systems that states are using, and discusses the degree to which publicly available documents clearly articulate whether students with disabilities are included in accountability calculations.
- *Want more resources? Try NICHCY's archived resources.*  
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/resources/>  
You'll get a list of all the publications and products available on the subject that are available from the TA&D (Technical Assistance and Dissemination) network

funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education.

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## Alternate Assessments

- *What we know and need to know about alternate assessment.*  
[http://journals.sped.org/ec/archive\\_articles/VOLUME70NUMBER1Fall2003\\_EC\\_Browder70-1.pdf](http://journals.sped.org/ec/archive_articles/VOLUME70NUMBER1Fall2003_EC_Browder70-1.pdf)  
This 2003 journal article appears in *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 70, No. 1, pp. 45-61.  
It reviews promises, practices, and provisos of using alternate assessments to measure progress of students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs.
- *Alternate assessment: Q & A.*  
[www.usu.edu/mprrc/infoserv/pubs.cfm#aa](http://www.usu.edu/mprrc/infoserv/pubs.cfm#aa)  
This document was created as a tool for state staff, local educators, and other stakeholders who have a vested interest in creating an alternative assessment process for a state and local district. Alternative assessment is defined, and examples are offered.
- *Here's a ton of info on alternate assessment---all in one place.*  
[http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/AlternateAssessments/alt\\_assess\\_topic.htm](http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/AlternateAssessments/alt_assess_topic.htm)  
You'll notice how often this A-Z page takes you to the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)--that's because they're the experts! They offer a gratifying number of resources on alternate assessment, which is "designed to measure the performance of students who are unable to participate in general large-scale assessments used by districts and states." This NCEO special topic area includes, among other things, an Introduction (the link above), an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), and connection to resources on the subject.
- *What are your state's alternate assessment policies?*  
<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/AlternateAssessments/StatesAltAssess.htm>  
If you want to know what your state is up to, take a look at the link above, again courtesy of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), which has been tracking and analyzing state policies on participation in assessments and accommodations for more than a decade now.
- *A standard setting method for alternate assessments for students with significant disabilities.*  
[www.education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis47.html](http://www.education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis47.html)  
Exploration of the rationale and design of the alternate portfolio assessment.

- *Want more resources? Try NICHCY's TA&D Resource Library.*

[www.nichcy.org/search.htm](http://www.nichcy.org/search.htm)

At our "Search for Info" page (the link above), put a check in the box labeled "Resource Library (TA&D Products)," enter the search term "Alternate Assessment" (make sure you put the phrase in quotation marks) and you'll get a list of all the publications and products available on the subject that are available from the TA&D (Technical Assistance and Dissemination) network funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education.

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