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## How Students with Disabilities Can Participate in Assessments

Assessing students with disabilities can be challenging for general education teachers. Although there are good reasons why these students should participate in the assessments given by classroom teachers, there are some significant challenges in including these students in classroom assessments, in obtaining accurate and useful information on their achievement, and in using the assessment results to plan subsequent instruction.

There are several ways in which students with disabilities participate in the assessments administered at the state and local levels. It is the local Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team that makes this decision, based on the level and nature of the student’s disabilities. These choices are as follows:

- Some students participate in state assessments without accommodations, taking the assessments as general education students do.
- Other students with disabilities participate using accommodations that the state or district make available to them. Ideally, these should be ones used daily in instruction.

If these general education assessments are not appropriate for the students with disabilities, even with accommodations, students with disabilities can use alternate assessments based on:

- Modified achievement standards (AA-MAS). These are assessments that cover the same skills as in the general assessments - such as writing an essay - but the task has been simplified in some manner. It might be to write a short paragraph summary of a story that was read instead of a longer essay on the same topic. It is anticipated that about a 2% of the students could take the AA-MAS (if the state decides to create this optional assessment), or
- Alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS). These are assessments of the same standards as the general education assessment, but set at a much lower level. It is anticipated that about 1% of all students - those with the most severe disabilities - will take the AA-AAS.

Teachers should help students access the academic content standards expected of all students,

since Federal law requires all students be taught the same academic standards. Yet, we know that there are students with disabilities for whom the general education standards may not be realistic as written. How should teachers help students with disabilities?

The first step for teachers is to determine the level at which these students can access the content standards and instruction provided for the students in the classroom. For some students, the teacher will need to extend the content standards to level(s) at which the students can work and experience success. The goal is to help these students to achieve as much of the academic standards as written as possible over time. The modified assessment of writing given above is an example of this.

The next step is to determine how to assess the learning of these students. Since these students often display difficulties with language-based tasks, assessments that don't rely on written language are preferred. The following are some examples of these assessments:

- Demonstration - Rather than describe what they have learned (which requires written or oral facility), students might be able to show the teacher their learning through a demonstration.
- Presentation-Students with disabilities may be able to demonstrate their learning by using a PowerPoint presentation to show what they have learned.
- Observation - For some skills, the teacher may be able to observe the student performing the activity, and with a standard observation protocol, reliably and validly assess the student.
- Interviews - One-on-one assessments conducted by the teacher will permit students to use whatever mode of communication that best suits them to respond to the assessment task.
- Individual or Small-Group Performance Assessments - If the teacher assesses the students individually, students can demonstrate their achievement in a variety of ways instead of writing their answers.

Each of these assessment techniques should permit classroom teachers to better assess the achievement of students with disabilities. By better assessment, teachers should be able to improve how they teach these students, which should improve their achievement.

Note: the manner in which the state's academic content standards have been extended for students with disabilities (both the AA-MAS and the AA-AAS) and the assessments designed by the state for these students, are excellent resources for all classroom teachers.

This information may be of assistance for any student (even those without disabilities) in learning these skills. The alternate assessment procedures can also be useful for assessing students with low verbal skills (especially reading and writing) in the classroom. General education teachers should check with their special education colleagues to determine if the state has created these resources for use by local educators.

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