

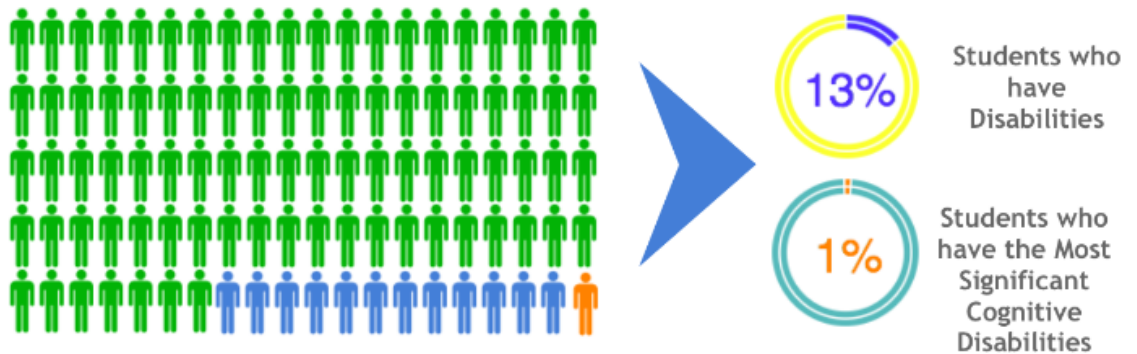
Since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted, we have witnessed the powerful role policy can have in shaping the future college and career opportunities for America’s six million students with disabilities: scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have risen and high school graduation rates have increased.

With the pending Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, there is an opportunity to maintain a policy based on high-expectations. To accomplish this, students with disabilities must continue to be meaningfully included in the assessment system;¹ the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards must be reserved only for 1% of the total student population who have the most significant cognitive disabilities.

10 REASONS WHY AN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR UP TO 1% OF ALL STUDENTS

Reason #1:

The overwhelming majority of students with disabilities can – and do – take the general assessment with or without accommodations.²



Reason #2:

The current 1% policy – which has been in place for over a decade – has allowed students to be assessed using the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) – under specific parameters. This policy has worked and must be maintained.

Reason #3:

Every state tests only a fraction of students using an AA-AAS.³ The data strongly supports the conclusion that a cap of 1% of all students is sufficient to include all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Reason #4:

Research from the Centers for Disease Control and other sources corroborate current assessment practice: that no more than 1% of all students (which equates to approximately 10% of students with disabilities) have the most significant cognitive disabilities.⁴

Reason #5: For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities – who are no more than 1% of the total student population – their parents and teachers can decide at an Individualized Education Program meeting whether they can be better assessed by an AA-AAS.

¹ In fact, NCLB required state assessments are “designed to be valid and accessible for use by the widest possible range of students, including students with disabilities and Students with limited English proficiency.” 34 CFR 200.2 (b)(2)

² Examples of accommodations include: extended time, read aloud, calculator, scribe, sign language interpretation.

³ IDEA Part B assessment data, 2012-2013 available at: www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/part-b-data/assessment/bassessment2012-13.csv

⁴ Federal Register / Vol. 68, No. 236 / Tuesday, December 9, 2003, page 68700

Reason #6:

An AA-AAS is an assessment reduced in complexity focusing on a targeted sample of priority grade-level content standards and was not designed for students who *do not* have the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Reason #7:

Taking the AA-AAS has significant long-term effects on students: it puts them at risk for being taken off track to earn a regular high school diploma; it limits their postsecondary education/career opportunities;⁵ and it restricts their freedom to choose their future. A central goal of education for all students should be to open doors, not close them.

Reason #8:

The majority of students with disabilities have learning disabilities (such as dyslexia) or speech, language, and communication disorders – they do not have significant cognitive disabilities.⁶

Reason #9:

New assessments have been designed and are being launched this year to incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and accommodations that will allow students with disabilities far greater access and opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge on the general education assessment. This will further reduce the need for students to take an AA-AAS.

Reason #10:

Limiting the AA-AAS to no more than 1% of all students will greatly diminish the potential for its overuse and misuse.⁷

Megan's Story: The Power of High Expectations

Megan is a 26 year-old young woman from Kentucky. She completed high school under No Child Left Behind. She has Down syndrome and was identified as having an Intellectual Disability.

With strong, integrated supports and high expectations, she graduated from high school with honors. Through her *own* high expectations, tutoring and mentoring supports and a great deal of determination on her part, she completed an Associate's Degree in Education at her local Community and Technical College, again with honors.

She is currently employed in two local schools working with children with and without disabilities, and she is also pursuing coursework at a major university towards a regular four year degree.

Had she been placed in the Alternate Assessment in her state, she would *not even have been allowed* to have earned a regular high school diploma.

Who are students with significant cognitive disabilities?

Most students with significant cognitive disabilities have intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, or autism, but not all do. And, not all students with these disabilities are considered to have a "significant cognitive disability." Students demonstrating academic deficits or difficulties due to learning disabilities, speech-language impairments or emotional-behavioral disabilities are not considered to have significant cognitive disabilities.

Performing 3-4 grade levels below peers without disabilities is not, by itself, evidence of a significant cognitive disability. Academic deficits or difficulties alone do not indicate that a student has a significant cognitive disability. Further, a significant cognitive disability will be pervasive, affecting student learning across content areas and in social and community settings.

Source: National Center and State Collaborative: www.ncscpartners.org/resources

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. For additional information, please contact:

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⁵ Thurlow, M. L., Albus, D. A., Lazarus, S. S., & Vang, M. (2014). Graduation policies for students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in states' AA-AAS (Synthesis Report 97). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes

⁶ Cortiella, Candace and Horowitz, Sheldon H. The State of Learning Disabilities: Facts, Trends and Emerging Issues. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014. Retrieved, March 24, 2015: <http://www.nclcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf>

⁷ Federal Register / Vol. 68, No. 236 / Tuesday, December 9, 2003, page 68700