Making Appropriate Decisions for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities in State Assessments: Considerations for IEP Teams
Intended Outcomes

• Increase knowledge about special ed students’ participation in state assessments
• **Inspire** teachers to use IEP team tools and increase the number of appropriate student placements in state assessments
Because teachers are the heart of IEP teams
The Agenda

• Review background information:
  o Federal and state requirements
  o New Mexico’s assessment system

• Accommodating special ed students in general ed assessments

• Factors to consider for alternate assessments

• Hands-on! Applying guidelines to IEP team practice
What do you know about NMAPA and alternate assessments?
What do you want to know about NMAPA and alternate assessments?
REVIEW OF REQUIREMENTS: 
WHAT WE HAVE TO DO
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and New Mexico statute require:

• The inclusion of students with disabilities, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, in the state assessments.

• States must implement an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.
  
  ○ In New Mexico, the current alternate assessments are the New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA) and Alt-ACCESS for ELLs.

Federal Statute: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 1111, (b), 3, C
New Mexico Statute: 22-2C-4 NMSA 1978
ESSA continued:

• Limits the participation of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in the alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS).

• For each subject, the total number of students assessed in such subject using the alternate assessments does not exceed 1 percent of the total number of all students in the State who are assessed in such subject.
Language of Federal Requirements

- A State may NOT prohibit an LEA from assessing more than 1% of its assessed students with the alternate assessment.

**BUT**

- A State MUST require an LEA that assesses more than 1% of its assessed students in any subject with an alternate assessment to submit information justifying the need to exceed the 1%.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- The requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A); 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Sec. 300.114.]
What we want to do

• Provide an appropriate standardized assessment where all students can “show what they know”

• Gather accurate information about students, so we can make informed decisions
PARTICIPATION IN STATE ASSESSMENTS
New Mexico Statewide Assessment Program

Transition Assessment

SBA

NMAPA

Istation

New Mexico Statewide Assessment Program

ACCESS & Alt-ACCESS

NAEP

Early Child. Obs. Tool (ECOT)

EOCs & Precision Exams

New Mexico State Assessment System
Accessibility and Accommodations in the General Ed Assessments: Less Restrictive Options
Accessibility and Accommodations for English Learners

- Accommodations for ELs with disabilities
- Flexible administrative considerations and universal tools for all students
- Linguistic scaffolding and Universal Design principles designed into the test items
Administrative Considerations for All Students

- Timing: Before lunch
- Scheduling and pacing of content areas
- Setting and locations
- Group size
- Frequent breaks
What Are Accessibility Features in Assessments?

- Can be used by any student (i.e., students with and without disabilities, gifted students, ELs, and ELs with disabilities)
- Not classified as accommodations
- Students should be exposed to these features prior to testing,
- They are not necessarily appropriate for every student.
- Practice tests that include accessibility features are available for teacher and student use throughout the year.
# Examples of Accessibility Features for All Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Computer Based</th>
<th>Paper Based</th>
<th>Either Mode</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math: Text to Speech</td>
<td>Math: Read or Sign</td>
<td>Redirect Attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highlighter tool</td>
<td>Highlighter</td>
<td>Blank scratch paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spell check</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read aloud, clarify instructions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pop up glossary</td>
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<td>Headphones/noise buffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnification</td>
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Students Who May Receive Accommodations in the General Ed Assessments:

• Students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP);
• Students with a Section 504 plan who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, but who do not qualify for special education services;
• Students who are ELs; and
• Students who are ELs with disabilities who have an IEP or 504 plan are eligible for both sets of accommodations.
Compare the General Ed Assessments and the Alternate Assessments

• Both are standards-based
• Both count in the accountability system
• Both measure content areas:
  o English language arts (ELA)
  o Mathematics
  o Science
  o Social studies
Contrast

Transition and ACCESS

• Based on the Common Core State Standards
• **Example**: 9-12 Benchmark I-A—New Mexico: Analyze how people and events of New Mexico have influenced United States and world history since statehood.

NMAPA and Alt-ACCESS

• Based on alternate content standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities
• **Examples**:
  • 1-a attends to an object which might be found at a national park (Engagement)
  • 7-a describes the impact of a NM citizen on world history since statehood e.g., Native Code Talkers (Extended Symbolic)
When accessibility features and accommodations are not appropriate, IEP teams should consider a student’s eligibility for the alternate assessment.
PARTICIPATION IN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS
Eligibility for Alternate Assessments – NMAPA or Alt-ACCESS

- Severe cognitive impairment
- Must affect student in multiple settings (school, home, and community)
- Must be determined by an IEP team, a group of individuals with a clear understanding of the student’s needs

6.31.2.11€(3) NMAC
Guiding Questions for IEP Teams

1. Does performance in multiple settings (home, school, community) indicate a significant cognitive disability?

2. Does the student need intensive, pervasive, or extensive levels of support in school, home, and community?

3. Do the student’s current cognitive and adaptive skills and performance levels require direct instruction to accomplish the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of skills in multiple settings?
Questions 1-3 responses demonstrate to the team that this student “cannot participate in the regular assessment; and the particular [alternate] assessment selected is appropriate for the child.”

Parents informed of the potential consequences of having their student assessed against alternate achievement standards (such as potential limitations to postsecondary opportunities).
Other Factors to Consider

• Student’s curriculum is based on alternate content standards
• Even with accommodations the student is unable to meet the general academic content standards
• Student's learning cannot be measured using the general assessment
Factors NOT to Consider

- Students with cognitive impairments working toward the general content standards with numerous, intensive accommodations
- Predicted performance on the general assessment shows little chance of scoring proficient
- Social, cultural, or environmental factors
- English Language proficiency
- Classroom placement, services, or eligibility category
- Poor attendance
- Students with **emotional and behavioral** concerns who may disrupt the assessment
- **Administrative decisions** or calculations of 1% cap
Students Who Should NOT Take the Alternate Assessment: Most common confusing issues

- Students without an IEP
- Students with a Section 504 plan
- Students who only receive English Learner services
- Students not yet eligible for special education services, such as students participating in a tier II intervention in a multi-tiered system of support
- Students with disabilities that may impact academics but generally do not affect cognitive or adaptive function, e.g., speech-language impairments or most students with a specific learning disability
- Students with cognitive impairments who are working toward the general content standards in regular classes with accommodations should take the general assessment
QUESTIONS?
Which assessment should this student take?

APPLYING WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED
Case Studies

• Read each case study. You will be assigned to a group.

• In your group, discuss the following questions:

1. Based on the limited information given, what assessment would you assume this student would take and why?

2. On which guideline(s), rule(s), etc. are you basing this assumption?
Where does the student go?

General Ed Assessment, no accommodations

Alternate Assessment
Resources

• NMAPA Participation Guidelines

• NMAPA FAQs for Families

• Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual: provides guidance to LEAs and decision-making teams to ensure that assessments provide valid results for all participating students. Use this manual to understand how to assign and deliver accommodations and accessibility features to students.
  https://parcc.pearson.com/manuals-training/

• Extended Grade Band Expectations
References

- Federal Statute: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 1111, (b), 3, C
  
  http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html

- New Mexico Statute: 22-2C-4 NMSA 1978
  
Who should I contact if I have questions about my students?

- Your principal
- Your District Test Coordinator
- Your District Special Education Director