



**A Mixed Methods Study on Teaching Students  
Who Moved From the AA-AAAS to General State  
Assessment**

## **MIDAS Report 102**

# **A Mixed Methods Study on Teaching Students Who Moved From the AA-AAAS to General State Assessment**

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## Executive Summary

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The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act put a 1% cap on participation in the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. As states lowered their AA-AAAS participation rates, some students moved to the general state assessment used for accountability. This transition meant that these students, who previously may have learned academic content at less depth, breadth and complexity, now needed to learn the full range of rigorous grade-level standards-based content.

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a study that examined the successes and barriers that teachers faced when instructing students with disabilities who have moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. This study used a convergent mixed methods single-subject design to identify successes and barriers in educating these students. Classroom observations and interviews were conducted in 10 schools and 14 classrooms in three states.

This study found evidence that the transition from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment was more successful when:

- Teachers had high expectations for the students who transitioned.
- Grade-level, standards-based instruction was made more accessible via the use of scaffolds, supports, and accommodations.
- Schools were structured in ways that supported belonging and the building of teacher capacity.
- Teachers had a sense of self-efficacy, and believed that they could instruct students who transitioned assessments.
- Teachers were provided with supplemental instruction and professional development for areas of need (e.g., supporting student communication needs, organizational skills, etc.).

The study also found barriers to the successful transition of students from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. These barriers included:

- Some teachers had low expectations for students who transitioned, and predominately a focus on safety and caring for those students (e.g., ableism).
- School-related factors, such as historic delivery models (e.g., segregated classrooms) and scheduling issues, sometimes limited access to grade-level standards-based instruction for students who transitioned.

- Some teachers had skill gaps that affected their ability to confidently meet the instructional needs of students who transitioned.

This report concludes with several **implications for practice**:

- **Develop systems that support access to grade-level standard-based instruction.** Educational organizations are complex, and change is not easy; however, to create sustainable, more inclusive learning environments that meet the needs of all students, including those who transition from the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards) AA-AAAS to the general assessment, there is a need to develop policies and procedures that support access to grade-level, standards-based content.
- **Ensure that instruction and assessments are accessible.** Students who move from the AA-AAAS need to be able to access grade-level standards-based content. Currently instruction, as well as assessments (e.g., classroom assessments, district assessments) may not be accessible. Scaffolds, supports, and accommodations can provide access to instruction. Similarly accessibility features and accommodations can provide access to assessments.
- **Provide high-quality focused professional development.** There is a need for high-quality focused professional development on topics such as:
  - o Ensuring content and materials are accessible to students during instruction and assessments
  - o Addressing gaps in student learning while simultaneously providing access to grade-level standard-based instruction
  - o Using data from multiple sources for instructional decision making

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The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), put a 1% cap on student participation in the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). The AA-AAAS is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to take the general statewide assessment used for accountability, even with accommodations. Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams use participation guidelines developed by states to make participation decisions about which assessment a student should take (Quanbeck et al., 2023; Thurlow & Lazarus, 2017). Many states were above the 1% cap when ESEA was reauthorized, and state education agencies (SEAs) provided guidance to their local education agencies (LEAs) to help them work with IEP teams to make appropriate assessment participation decisions (Quanbeck et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023). As states lowered their AA-AAAS participation rates, students moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment, and a new issue emerged. Many special and general educators were not prepared for this transition and did not know how to confidently plan classroom instruction and assessment for students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment.

Students who participate in the AA-AAAS may be taught grade-level content at less breadth, depth, and complexity than their peers who participate in the general assessment (Hinkle et al., 2021; Thurlow et al., 2024). Once students move to the general assessment, they need to learn content at the same level of rigor as other students who participate in the general assessment. Researchers have found that most students who participate in the AA-AAAS are assigned to self-contained classrooms, separate schools, or home settings; only 7% were in general education or resource room classrooms (Kleinert et al., 2015). Some students who shifted to the general assessment were moved to a general education classroom at the same time. For most students, this is a substantial change in their placement; and, for many teachers, this is a substantial change in their responsibilities.

Although IEP teams make assessment participation decisions, SEAs are responsible for monitoring the appropriate students who are identified for the AA-AAAS (Hinkle et al., 2022). SEA staff have anecdotally noted that some LEAs have pushed back, and their IEP teams may not always follow state participation guidelines because of the challenges teachers are encountering in instructing students who once took the AA-AAAS. In some cases, these students have been moved back to the AA-AAAS, not because it was the appropriate assessment for them, but because teachers did not know how to provide the supports for students to be successful with the new level of instruction and assessment. On the other hand, other students who no longer took the AA-AAAS were remaining in segregated settings along with students still taking the AA-AAAS. Consequently, these segregated students often receive instruction that leaves them unprepared for the general assessments.

Participation in the AA-AAAS has major implications for students. A short-term implication is that once assigned to the AA-AAAS, students may participate in instruction and assessment at less depth, breadth, and complexity than their peers assigned to the general assessment. Long-term implications are that students who take the AA-AAAS may not be on track to meet the requirements for a regular high school diploma, or they may not be eligible for some postsecondary institutions, military service, or employment (Hinkle et al., 2021).

When students move from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment there may be a need for an “onboarding” process that will enable them to smoothly transition to instruction based on grade-level academic achievement standards and probable general education classroom placement. Teachers need strategies for supporting students who shift from instruction that may have been solely based on alternate academic achievement standards to instruction based on general education academic achievement standards.

## **Purpose**

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The purpose of this study was to identify the successes and barriers that teachers face when educating students with disabilities who have moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What instructional successes and barriers exist in classrooms that include students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment?
2. How are instructional successes and barriers similar or different across various classroom contexts?

## **Methods**

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In this convergent mixed methods study (Leko et al., 2022), the research team collected quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to answer the research questions (Love et al., 2022). A convergent mixed methods design allowed the research team to combine and compare qualitative and quantitative data to come to a joint understanding across the two sources of data (Love et al., 2022). The team observed classroom instruction and collected data on:

- Teacher use of evidence-based instruction practices
- Use of instructional materials
- Access to the general education curriculum

- Student engagement, interactions, and access to specially designed instruction (SDI)

Once classroom observation data were collected, teachers were interviewed to review the observation with the teacher and ask overarching questions about what they viewed to be their successes and barriers to including the student with a disability in their instruction. The intent of the data collected was to identify successes and barriers across classrooms and to use the data to develop relevant professional development materials.

## Data Sources

Project staff worked alongside state representatives to identify districts and teachers who were educating students with disabilities who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. Data sources included observation data (quantitative and qualitative) of classroom instruction where the identified student was a member as well as teacher interview data (qualitative).

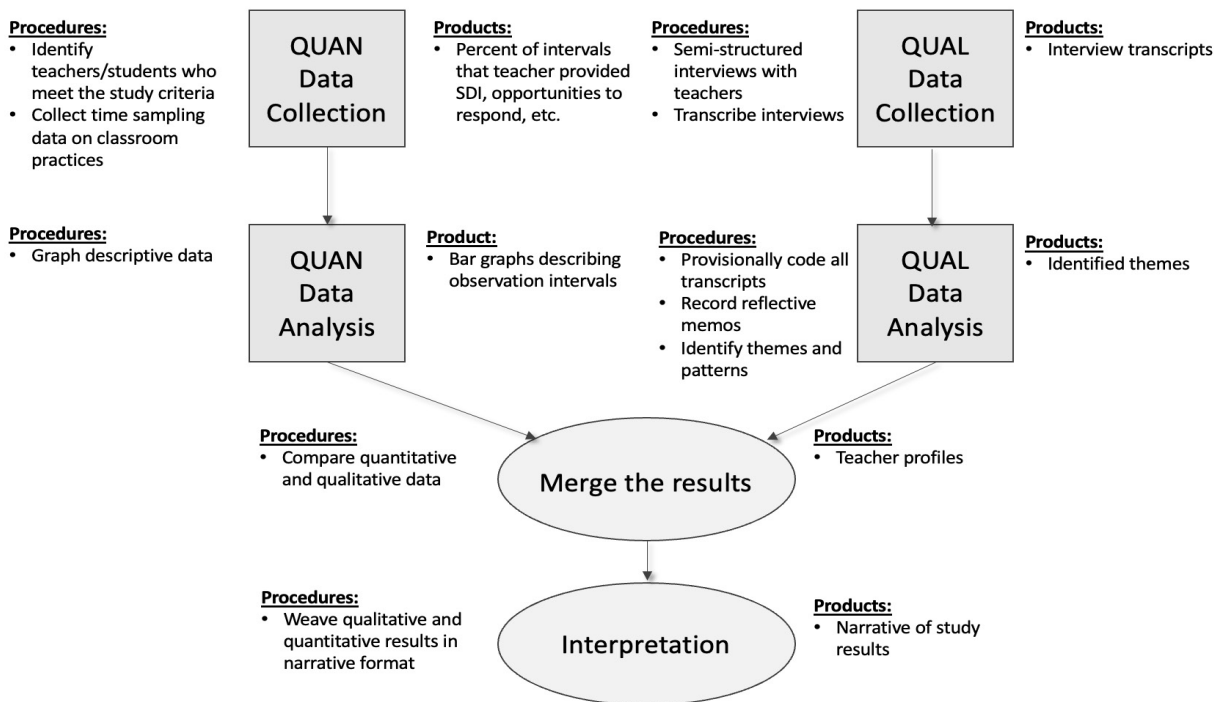
## Study Design

A convergent mixed methods single-subject design (Leko et al., 2022) was employed to determine the successes and barriers in educating students with disabilities who have moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment (see Study Design Diagram in Figure 2). A mixed methods design was chosen to better understand the methods educators were using, and the impact of the strategies on student engagement and access to high-quality instruction. Quantitative time sampling observation data and qualitative data describing the lesson and materials were collected concurrently during a 30-minute lesson in a core class (e.g., mathematics, English language arts, science). One observation was completed in a transition class. Qualitative data were collected during post-observation interviews to elicit teacher perspectives on the successes and barriers to instruction for the focus students.

Leko and colleagues (2022) suggest that high-quality mixed methods research is characterized by integration, synergy, strong component designs, and legitimation. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data were integrated through the research questions, simultaneous data collection and data transformation, and interpretation through making joint meaning across both sets of data. Synergy was established by using both quantitative and qualitative research designs in complementary ways. While quantitative data provide important information about the presence or absence of particular components in an observation, they do not capture the full picture of why a teacher may or may not implement a specific practice, what they have tried before, and how they currently approach providing effective instruction. Conversely, qualitative designs do not give a full picture of the level of student engagement or opportunities to respond, but they provide researchers a way to collect open-ended data on teacher's perspectives. In this

way, quantitative and qualitative designs demonstrate synergy by complementing the strengths (and weaknesses) of one another. Legitimacy indicators are described in the subsection labeled Mixed Methods Legitimacy.

**Figure 1: Study Design Diagram**



## Participants

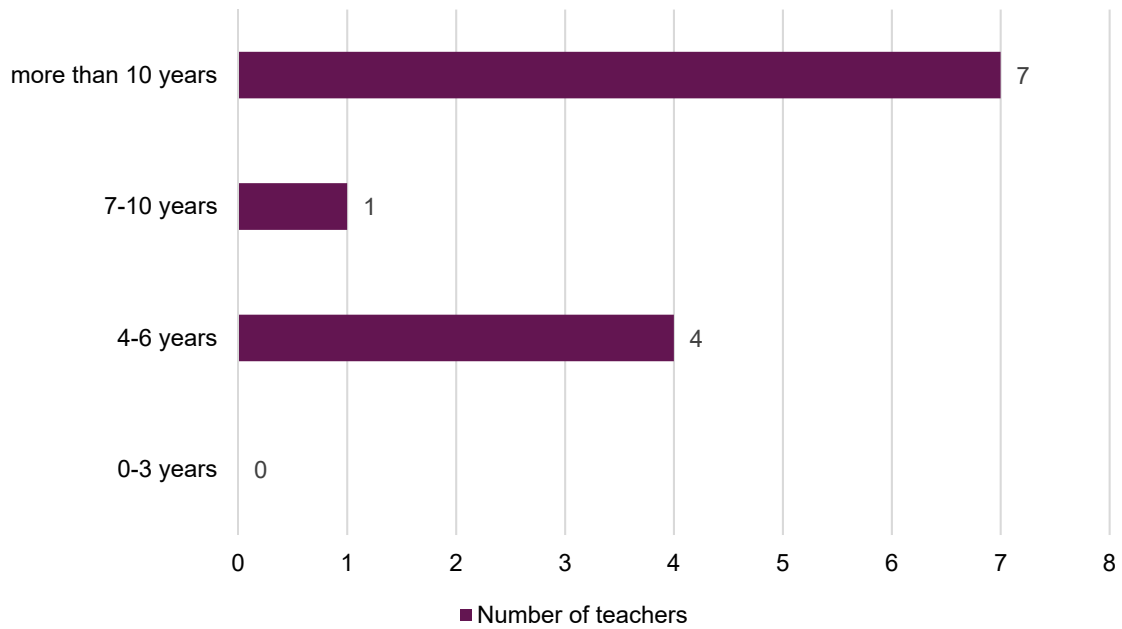
Participants were recruited through SEA staff nomination. The research team reached out to nominated educators to obtain both teacher and parent/guardian consent (see Appendix A and B). Once both consent forms were received, the team scheduled the observations and interviews according to times that were convenient for the teachers. Sixteen educators participated in the study, including five general educators, six special education resource teachers, and five special education self-contained teachers. The teachers were in three states, from two elementary schools, six middle schools, and two high schools. Each teacher filled out a demographic survey. All survey items were optional. See Table 1 and Figures 2 and 3 for descriptive information on the participants, including their years of experience and teaching certifications, and the geographic locale of each school. Thirteen students participated in the study.

**Table 1: Educator Participants**

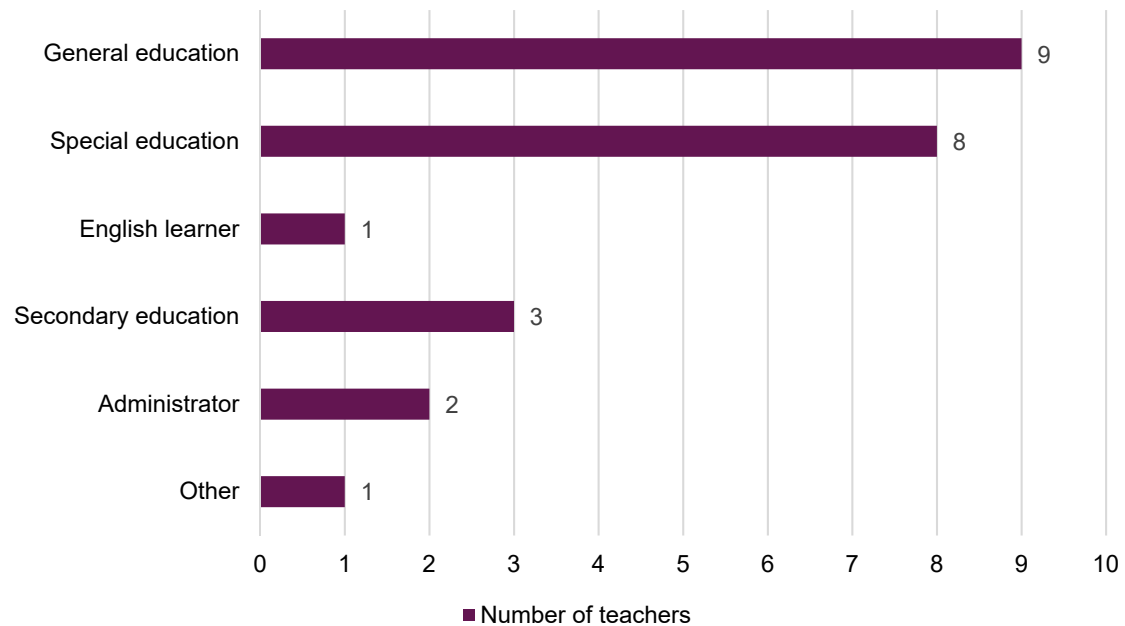
State	School	Role	Gender	Level of education	School level/locale*
1	1	General educator	Female	Bachelor's degree	Middle School/City
	2	Special educator	Female	Master's degree	Middle School /City
	3	Special educator	Female	Master's degree	Middle School/Suburb
	4	Special educator	Female	Master's degree	High School/Rural
	5	General educator	Female	Some graduate school	High School/Rural
		Special educator	Female	-	
2	6	General educator	Female	Bachelor's degree	Elementary/Rural
		Special educator	Female	Master's degree	
		Special educator	Female	-	
	7	Special educator	Female	Master's degree	High School/City
	8	General educator	Female	Bachelor's degree	Middle School/Rural
		Special educator	Female	Master's degree	
	9	General educator	Female	-	Middle School/Rural
		Special educator	Female	Master's degree	
3	10	General educator	Male	Bachelor's degree	Middle School/Suburb
		Special educator	Female	Master's degree	

Note: - indicates that the data were not obtained. \* School locale information was obtained from [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov).

**Figure 2: Participants' Years of Teaching Experience**



**Figure 3: Participants' Teacher Certifications Held**



Note: Participants could hold more than one certification.

## Data Collection Methods

### Observations

Research staff observed and collected data on student and teacher actions using the Classroom Snapshot tool (see Appendix C) which included the collection of qualitative data related to the content being taught. Quantitative data were collected in two 15-minute observations using one-minute interval recording on student engagement, interactions with others, access to specially designed instruction, and opportunities to respond.

**Qualitative data.** Qualitative data were collected for the first 15 minutes of each observation. Observers recorded the instructional evidence-based practices observed (e.g., co-teaching, explicit instruction, positive/corrective feedback), evidence of whether the content being taught was aligned with grade-level standards, evidence of SDI (e.g., adapted content, methodology, or delivery), evidence that the focus student was grouped with grade-level classmates without disabilities, and evidence of co-planning, co-teaching, or co-assessing for the lesson.

**Quantitative time sampling data.** Time sampling data was collected in one-minute intervals with 45 seconds of observation and 15 seconds of recording, similar to studies reporting ecobehavioral analysis (e.g., Zagona et al., 2022). Each observer would observe for 45 seconds, and using a timer, look down at their data collection sheet for 15 seconds and record data for each of the six measures described below. After 15 minutes, the time sampling ended.

- ***Communication supported.*** The extent to which the focus student was supported to communicate was recorded as either “Yes,” “No,” or “Not applicable.” “Yes” was recorded if the student was supported to communicate during instruction or social interactions that could include a communication partner using wait time, modeling or aided modeling of augmentative or alternative communication, reading body language, or communication prompts.
- ***Instructional evidence-based practice use.*** Use of evidence-based instructional practices were recorded by marking a “Yes” or “No.” The observer marked “Yes” if there was an educator interacting with the target student (either individually or part of a group) and the educator provided access to evidence-based instructional practices such as co-teaching, explicit instruction, or flexible grouping. “No” was recorded if there was no interaction or participation in evidence-based instructional practices.
- ***Specially designed instruction.*** Use of SDI was recorded by marking a “Yes” or “No.” The observer marked “Yes” if it was evident that the focus student had access to specially designed instruction, such as adapted content, methodology or delivery of instruction. This could have included additional intensive instruction or opportunities for repeated practice that most other students did not receive.

- **Engagement.** Engagement in the general education curriculum and in class routines were recorded separately. Engagement in the general education curriculum was recorded by marking a “Yes – Active” if the student was actively engaged (e.g., writing, reading, counting, answering questions), “Yes – passive” if they were passively engaged (e.g., listening, watching), or a “No” if the focus student was not engaged in the general education curriculum because they were transitioning or managing materials, doing an alternate activity, no instruction or expectations were provided, or the student was out of the room or on a break. Engagement in class routines was recorded by marking a “Yes” if the student was engaged in a similar activity or routine that the rest of the class was engaged in (e.g., making a lunch choice, class work, lining up) or a “No” if the focus student was engaged in an alternate or unrelated activity or routine than the rest of the class (e.g., practicing writing their name while the rest of the class was engaged in a discussion).
- **Interactions.** Interactions with teachers, peers, or instructional assistants were recorded as either a “Yes,” “No,” or “Not applicable” if a teacher, peer, or instructional assistant was not present during the interval.

## Interviews

After each observation, the teacher or co-teaching team was interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D). Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and focused on discussing what was immediately observed and extended to the successes and barriers teachers experienced related to instruction, collaboration, assessment, and individual student and whole class learning. All interviews were conducted in-person within one day of the observation based on teacher availability.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by an online transcription tool ([rev.com](https://www.rev.com)). Transcribed interviews were reviewed by members of the research team for misspellings and inaccurate segmentation of sentences, then sent to all teachers for edits, corrections, or to add any additional information that expanded on their thoughts. After being confirmed for their accuracy, the interviews were downloaded into a word processing document and uploaded to a qualitative data analysis software tool (NVivo). The research team conducted two rounds of coding, using a deductive approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The first round of structural coding centered on the research questions. The second round of coding focused on placing the initial codes into categories or subcodes. In this round of coding, the research team identified major themes within each structural code. Once coding was finished, a final profile was developed for each interview and sent to the teachers for feedback (member checks, Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The profile included quantitative observation data as well as the major instructional successes and barriers they reported in the interview with applicable interview excerpts. This allowed

the research team to compile teachers' data individually, while also allowing for comparison to identify similarities and differences across contexts.

### **Methodological Integrity**

**Quantitative inter-observer agreement.** Inter-observer agreement (IOA) was measured in 23 out of 25 observations, where a second observer independently collected time sampling data. The codes for each measure were compared minute by minute. If the coding matched, it was scored as an agreement and if it did not match, it was scored as a disagreement. When disagreements occurred, the two observers discussed the disagreement before data collection resumed for the next teacher. IOA was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the number of agreements plus disagreements multiplied by 100. The overall mean of IOA was 97% with a range of 95.0-98.9%.

**Qualitative data integrity.** The research team engaged in several efforts to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data: triangulation, member checks, and expert review (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). During data collection probes where multiple observers were present (92% of the observations), observers compared their qualitative observation data on lesson content, materials, and instructional strategies to ensure accurate documentation (triangulation). Once observations were completed, the research team reviewed them with the teacher during their interviews to ensure that they reflected what occurred during the lesson (member checks). Interview transcripts were sent to the teachers to provide edits or corrections (member checks). Finally, data summaries (teacher profiles, code counts) underwent expert review with the research team to ensure that findings were accurately interpreted.

**Mixed methods legitimacy.** The study demonstrated several components of *legitimation* proposed by Leko et al. (2022), including sample integration (data collected with the same set of participants), weakness minimization (use of quantitative and qualitative data collection/analysis addressed the weaknesses of each individual methodology), and multiple validities (data were validated using multiple strategies; Leko et al., 2022).

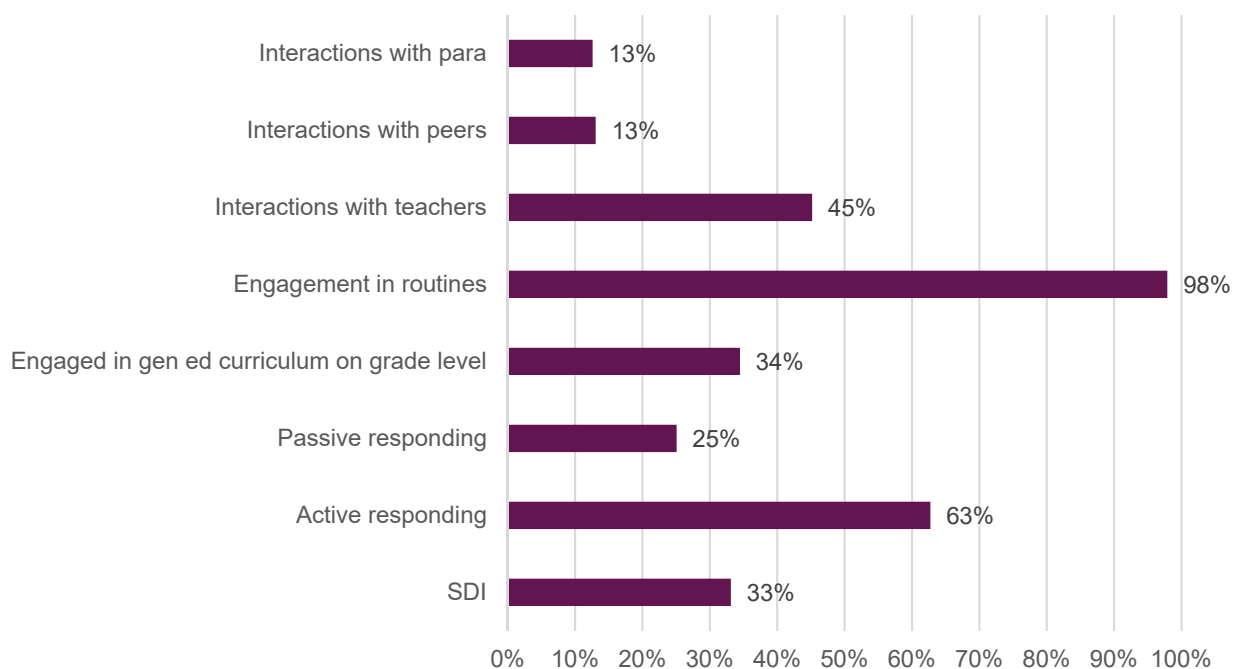
## **Results**

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The research team conducted 26 30-minute observations with 13 students and their teachers. Students ranged from 3rd grade to 12th grade, with one student in 3rd grade, two students in 4th grade, two in 5th grade, two in 6th grade, one in 7th grade, two in 8th grade, one in 9th grade, one in 11th grade, and one in 12th grade. Ten observations included mathematics instruction, three observations included reading instruction, one observation included science instruction, and three included only non-core content instruction (e.g., test-taking strategies, transition skills).

As shown in Figure 4, for the time sampling data, the largest percentages of student time were spent in engagement in routines and active responding. In the following sections, quantitative (time sampling observation data) and qualitative (interview data interpretations) data were integrated and woven together to address both research questions, and report the instructional successes and barriers that were found in the classrooms that included students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. The results also captured how those successes and barriers differed between classroom types.

**Figure 4. Observation: Average Time Sampling Data**

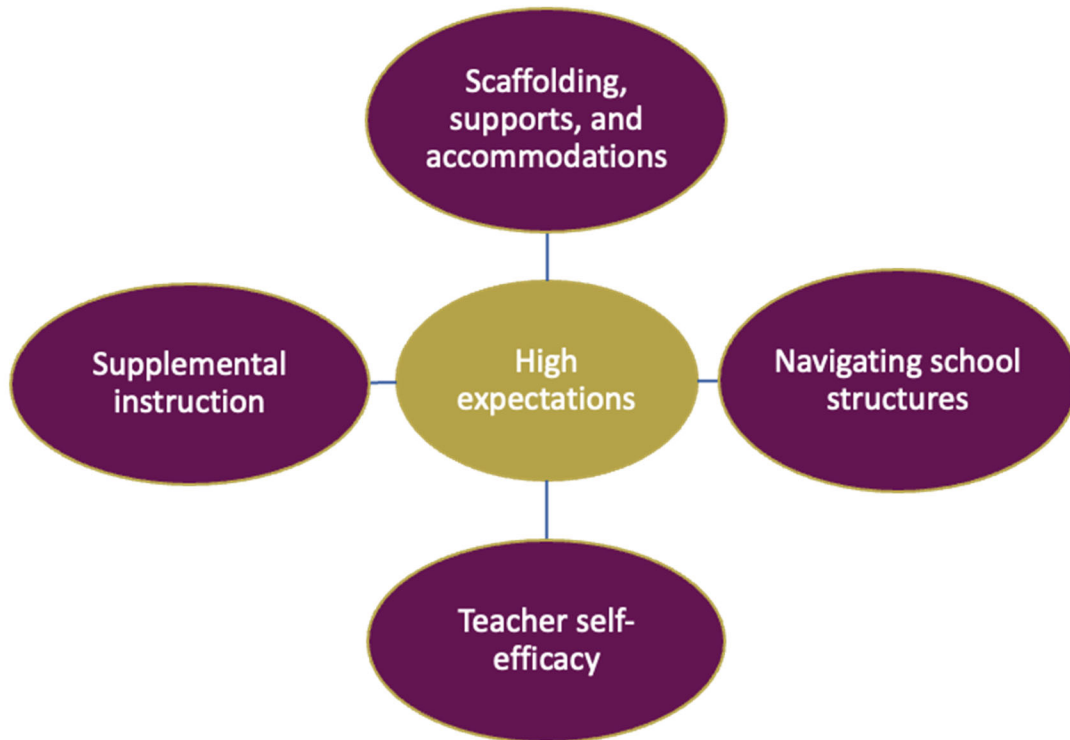


In addition to the findings that addressed the identified research questions, many of the educators discussed parents during the interviews. Where applicable these data are integrated into the emerging themes.

### Instructional Successes

Classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed some prevalent instructional successes that educators experienced when teaching students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. These instructional successes clustered into the following themes: high expectations; flexible scaffolding, supports, and accommodations; navigating school structures; teacher self-efficacy; and, supplemental instruction (refer to Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Instructional Successes**



### **High Expectations**

Several teachers reported that their students who had switched from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment were being given new opportunities in school, whether that was access to increasing instructional rigor or general education settings. Most of the students had previously received their educational programming in self-contained special education classrooms, which suggested different learning experiences compared to special education resource or general education settings. Teachers reported expecting students to engage in new kinds of instruction, including participating in classroom discussions (“He’s perfectly capable of this.”), engaging in learning related to their interest areas (“He’s on it, he’s going to do it. You don’t have to prompt him or anything. He’s going to do it.”), and participating in schoolwide expectations. One special education teacher reported:

Years ago we used to have graduation projects where the seniors had to do a big project. You had to do some kind of product and you had to present in front of judges and it was at night...(with) community judges. And so that’s when we just started, I said, “You know what? If you’ve got to do this as a senior...we’re just got to start presenting in class...The more we present in class, the more you’re [going to] be familiar. You’re [going to] feel comfortable.

Teachers communicated various actions they were taking to support the students in achieving the higher expectations, including providing scaffolded questions during discussions, ensuring peers offered appropriate amounts of support, and teaching students grade-level content as opposed to content from lower grade levels.

### **Scaffolding, Supports, and Accommodations**

General and special educator participants reported a great deal of success using scaffolding, supports, and accommodations to ensure instruction was presented in ways students were able to respond to and engage in the learning. These scaffolds, supports, and accommodations involved the presentation of content, flexibility in student responses or participation, and environmental supports (setting), as well as timing and scheduling adjustments. Next scaffolds, supports, and accommodations are described in detail.

**Presentation.** Educators reported a wide variety of scaffolding, supports, and instructional accommodations related to the presentation of content. They included using strategies like visuals, making connections to student interests, providing students with copies of the notes, providing access to audiobooks or adapted texts, as well as building background knowledge through pre-teaching. One special education resource teacher reported this regarding the use of adapted texts to make content more accessible for her students:

Some of the successes I've had... I was talking just now about the Holocaust unit that we're doing right now in Resource English, which is part of our curriculum to read the *Diary of Anne Frank* play. And we do read an abridged version, the accessible Leveled Text version of the play. So it doesn't require quite as much attention and it summarizes different parts of it within. So they're still getting all the same information, but just in a "less dialogue" way.

Another general education teacher reported the power of working with parents to provide scaffolding, supports, and accommodations related to the presentation of content. The teacher, a literature teacher, described reaching out to parents said,

We're [going to] be reading the *Count of Monte Cristo*, ..., if you're interested you [can] watch the movie with him. Normally we would just use [the movie] as a fun follow up and then talk about the differences.

The teacher then described how it went. "I told [the focus student], 'you know what, let's see how this goes.' And [the focus student] watched it [at home] and then in class he was more engaged."

She said the focus student had that little twinkle in his eye and said, "I know what happens next."

She then told the student, "Don't tell everybody, don't do it." <laugh>

**Student Responses.** General and special education teacher participants discussed various ways that they found success with providing response scaffolding, supports, and accommodations to students. First, they provided access that allowed students to participate or complete assignments in flexible ways. These included scaffolding, supports, and accommodations that were prepared ahead of time as well as provided in the moment. Accommodations and supports teachers reported that required preparation ahead of time included developing or procuring leveled or scaffolded assignments, providing graphic organizers or a framework for organizing review notebooks, scaffolded problems, and the use of technology. When discussing providing leveled assignments to different students, one educator discussed the sensitivity required to do this discretely:

A lot of times I'll give them different assignments, even though they're in the same class as a whole [group], so we're keeping on task together. Sometimes I'll give them a different level worksheet, but have it all mixed in. I'm handing them all out at the same time so they don't realize they are getting something different, they don't always notice that they're getting something different.

Another teacher mentioned ensuring that everyone received packets with the same problems on the cover sheet and only leveling the subsequent pages.

Scaffolding, supports, and accommodations that teachers provided in the moment included options to work with peers, extended work time, working on a white board, or providing additional and targeted prompting or coaching to support the student to engage in discussions or complete assignments. One general education mathematics teacher discussed how she worked to engage her student who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment in class discussions when he struggled to communicate his thinking:

If he raises his hand for a more complex [question], then I just know he's not quite there. I'll find something about it that I know he can answer and I'll morph my question to give him that success, to give him that engagement. Every once in a while when I have a student completely frozen up, I'll try to get them to do something. I never want to let them just completely off the hook because that's life where you have that moment where you're like, "Oh gosh, I don't know what to do," and you [have to] push past it. We talk about perseverance.

**Setting.** General and special educators reported various setting features they could use to make the environment more accessible or how they offered the student an alternative environment. Some setting accessibility strategies were universally available for all students, such as flexible grouping, options for emotional regulation, paraprofessional supports, strategic teacher movement or proximity, access to school clubs, and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) structures and strategies. One teacher reported she had success:

...putting [the focus student] in classes where the teachers are really structured. Veteran teachers who have good behavioral management. Because these students get very upset when the other kids aren't following the rules. If there's a behavior outburst in class, they get mad and so they're going to react and stuff.... I've been very fortunate [administration] let me handpick [students'] classes.

Another accessibility strategy was options for emotional regulation. One team reported that they saw the benefit of having calm-down corners in their class with “bean bags and bubble timers and fidgets and, just trying to give kids those opportunities to say things like, ‘Hey, I’m struggling. I need a break.’” These universally available setting accessibility strategies were important, especially in general education classrooms where students, especially at the higher grade levels, wanted to fit in and not be seen as different. One general education teacher shared about the importance to the focus student of being perceived as being just like the other students:

He just doesn't want to be seen as different, is the biggest thing he wants to have.... He wants to have his locker just like everybody else. He wants to go eat just like everybody else. He just wants to fit in. And that's been an issue since he was in sixth grade when he was in the self-contained room and now that he is, he's full-fledged, but he's also not grown up with these kids. He just got switched over to general standards last year.

**Timing and Scheduling.** Many of the scaffolds, supports, and accommodations that educators reported as being successful revolved around timing and scheduling for student and class schedules, as well as for completing assignments and assessments. Frequently, concurrent changes of placement from the self-contained classroom for most of the school day to the general education classroom for most of the school day occurred when a student moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. Teachers communicated that a change of placement was necessary so that students had access to instruction in their grade-level general education curriculum and standards. One educator discussed the gradual release process they moved through in changing one student's placement over a two-year period:

<Student> was moved out of the self-contained classroom last year into one resource class, then two resource classes, and then kind of all together. And he was just going for home base in the morning, to the autism classroom. And then by the end of the year, ... he was spending [the rest of the day] out in general ed or special ed resource. Now this year he's in a regular home base. He doesn't go to the autism room at all, and he's in all regular classes except the resource classes, which is still with his peers, not in self-contained. Next year, I think all four core classes [will be] in the resource setting for <student>. And then the rest of his classes will be in the general education setting for PE and health and the other things they have to get for graduation with a regular diploma.

Another co-teaching team reported success with scheduling students in additional content area classes in high school. They said that for “kids that have a lot of difficulty with math or scored pretty low in the middle school [math assessment], we try to give them some extra math class or a math class before we put them in [the more difficult class].”

Other scheduling scaffolds, support, and accommodations that teachers reported using were scheduling opportunities for small group instruction, scheduling students in general education classes where they know they have positive peer relationships, and adjusting how small groups are organized in classes. One educator reported that they use small groups to meet a diverse array of student needs, not just for their student who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment:

I pull a group because he’s not the only one that struggles. So, there’s quite a few. So I pull a small group. There’s normally like three or four, five; and, I work with them or we do stations, and I’m one of the stations and I try to start him off with me and then let him run through the stations.

At a more micro-level, timing and scheduling scaffolds, supports, and accommodations that educators successfully used focused on student completion of assignments and assessments. These included providing more time to complete assignments, frequent breaks, and opportunities for movement. One educator reported, “I have to just give him more time. And I have to redirect him probably more than the average kid.”

### **Navigating Schoolwide Structures**

Study participants referred to various schoolwide structures and opportunities throughout their interviews. These included typical offerings that previously might not have been thought about for a student, including participation in school clubs, access to a variety of class offerings, and supporting general education teachers in teaching students with disabilities. When schoolwide structures were discussed, two primary successes were most evident in the data: using schoolwide structures to promote belonging and using schoolwide structures to build teachers’ instructional capacity.

**Belonging.** Teachers reported successes with navigating schoolwide structures to ensure that students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment felt a sense of belonging in their school community. One teacher discussed at length how she was working in her school to change how services were offered to students with disabilities. This middle school teacher was designated as a self-contained teacher, yet very few of her students were in her class most of the day because she was working collaboratively with general education teachers to ensure students had access to instruction in the grade-level classrooms. She mentioned how her student who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment was so close with his peers:

It's really cool how close he is with a lot of his peers that he's had since kindergarten . . . And I mean, like, he walks into a classroom and there's so and so that's like, <student>, come on, come sit by me buddy.

She attributed this closeness to the student being involved in everything the school offered:

He is fully immersed in everything that's happening [at the school]. And I think a lot of that is due to his involvement within the gen ed, in core [classes] and things that are just fun in clubs and, kiddos just being able to see him not in an academic setting.

**Building General Education Teachers' Capacity.** Another instructional success related to school structures was special educators finding ways to help general education teachers feel supported in teaching students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. One special education teacher mentioned the importance of initial communication between general and special education teachers:

[When a team member is saying] "Hey, this kid's [got to go] to regular ed. He's got to move. He needs to move. He's too high. Just put him in there." Well you can't just put him in there. You have to say like this is how it works best, this is what he uses.

One prevalent issue that teachers mentioned needing to address was increasing general educators' capacity to address behavior and communication. One special education teacher reported how she speaks to general education teachers about behavior:

[It's important to] talk to teachers about how to problem solve what they look at as behaviors, but is not always. Every behavior is some form of communication. So like, it's not always bad behavior even though it might look like that. It might have a reason. So just trying to help those regular ed teachers before it gets so far that they can't fix it.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Teachers reported increased confidence in their own practices as evidenced by comments about improved student outcomes as well as their own professional growth. Many teachers indicated that the students the research team observed who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment had been successful with changes in their placements, instruction, and increased expectations. One teacher said, "I think a lot of [the students with disabilities] really don't think of themselves [as] need[ing] special ed anymore." Educators reported the students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment had experienced increased confidence, a reduction in behavior incidents over time, learned new routines quickly when they changed placement, and kept up with the work in general education classes.

<Student> actually did a little better than I thought he would do. He was moving at a good pace. He doesn't always do that, but I'm thinking that he probably was kind of interested in the story. I think that he probably did make a connection. You know, he's got a great little mind and he probably really understood what an Egyptian market was. And that probably kind of helped kind of reel him in, because he was focused.

One general education teacher who was part of a co-teaching team expressed this about students with disabilities who were taking her high school mathematics class:

I think the special ed kids have been exposed to so much more [in this class] and I think it's good for them. I just, I don't know these kids. This is my first year with them. To see where they were at the beginning of school and now, it's a big thing. It's kind of amazing to me.

This general education teacher's co-teaching partner also reported how she had grown since entering into the co-teaching relationship. She mentioned that her knowledge of the general education curriculum increased as a result of this partnership:

You know, I feel more comfortable because you know, as a resource teacher, we only get to a certain limit and it's the true thing. If you don't use it, you lose it. So like radicals and stuff. Well you see me taking notes for <laugh>, I mean, and I'm watching [the general education teacher providing instruction]. I'm asking questions and I think that kind of through the kids when I ask them questions on some things and she teaches it different than what I do and...we've bounced that [around an] awful lot this year, too. The kids will be like, "You're taking notes like, y'all [don't know] how to do this." Yeah. I'm like, "I've haven't done this before." And so, I think that's helped because [the general education teacher] is awesome with her teaching of it and I like seeing the way she does things. And so, and like yeah. I haven't done quadratic functions in a long, long time.

This special education teacher continued to discuss how she brought that increased mathematics knowledge to inform the instruction she provided to students in the resource setting in her resource math class.

Now that I'm so much more involved in...what they're hitting heavy in the regular class, I'm really trying to apply the same thing in that resource classroom and try to, I may not go as in depth, so, but like we did division of exponents a while back, so I've hit on that. You know, that's what they're working on in the resource room right now. And so just that way they have an idea.

## **Supplemental Instruction**

Educators working with students who had switched from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment reported success with finding times to meet students' needs for supplemental instruction. Given student skill gaps, teachers reported continued needs for intensive instruction in foundational academic skills, communication, social skills, and self-management. One major finding was providing prompts and coaching for middle and high school students to be able to independently check their learning management system account for grades, due dates, and assignments. One of the general education teachers reported that they use class time each week to review their learning management system with students who need it during independent work time:

Two days a week... I'm pulling kids up individually to my desk and I have noticed that's helpful for him. I pull them up, I open up . . . our learning management system, and then we scroll through every class, click the class, click the grade, and I say, "Okay, so we're missing this. You can retake this. Right now you have 67. If you turn in, you're missing and you retake, you'll probably not have a D, you'll post C."

Another special education teacher reported how she worked on a student's communication skills that were needed to be successful in general education classes:

One of the things that we do with the speech pathologist [is work on] direct versus an indirect opening. With direct openings, you know exactly what's happening and...you really don't have to ask questions when somebody gives you direct information. But if you get indirect information, you have to ask more questions. You have to, probe; [use] probing questions. You have to probe to get more information. It's really, I'll just try to get the social skills, get those communication skills with those kids.

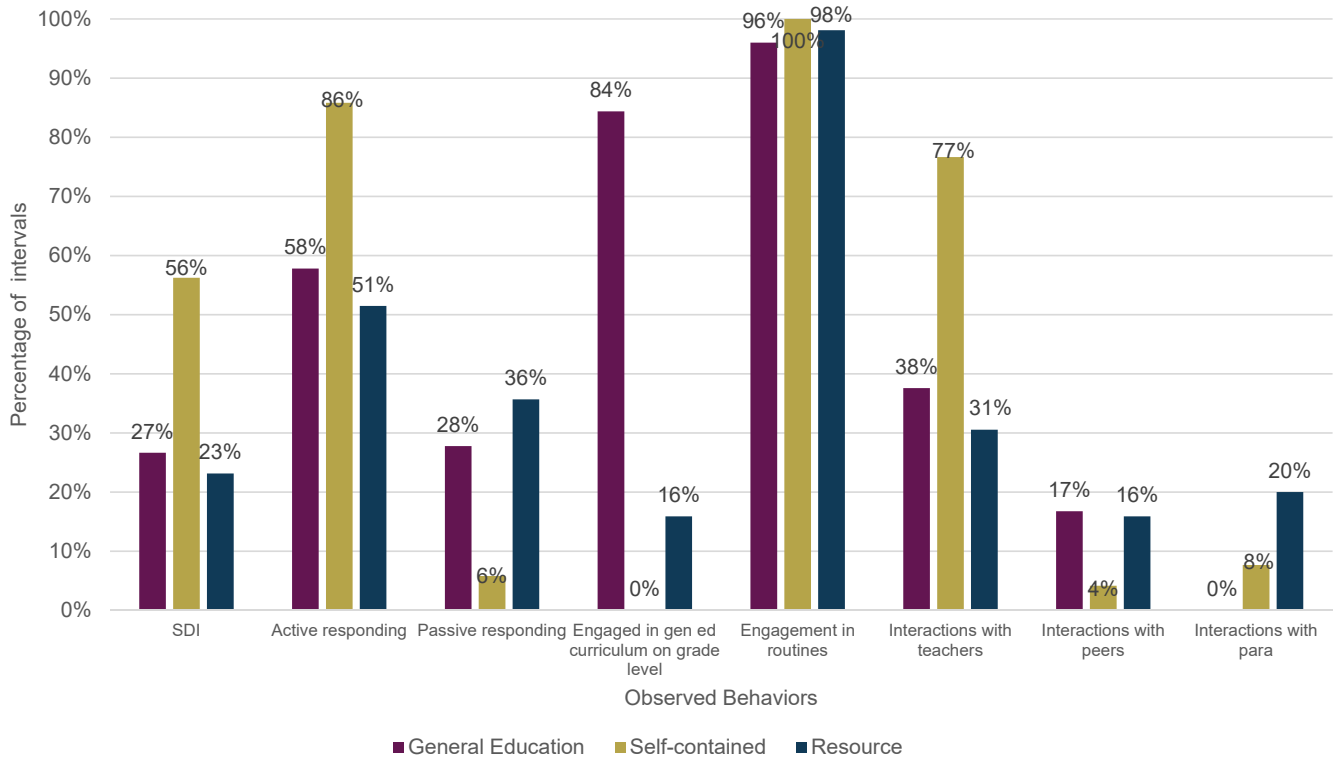
## **Instructional Successes by Classroom Type**

Results indicated that teachers experienced a variety of successes no matter what classroom type. Observation data by classroom type is displayed in Figure 6.

### **Special Education Classes**

Special education resource and self-contained classroom teachers demonstrated high use of evidence-based practices (e.g., explicit instruction, technology-based instruction, prompting) as well as higher levels of data collection and progress monitoring. Self-contained classrooms had higher provision of SDI, with over 80% of intervals with active responding, and high engagement with teachers.

**Figure 6. Classroom Observation: Time Sampling Data by Classroom Type**



### General Education Classes

General education classes had consistently high engagement in the general education curriculum. General education teachers seemed to have success in showing flexibility in how students demonstrated their learning, including accepting re-takes of academic assessment questions that students got incorrect, scaffolding problems, and soliciting verbal or in-the-moment assessment of student learning.

### Instructional Barriers

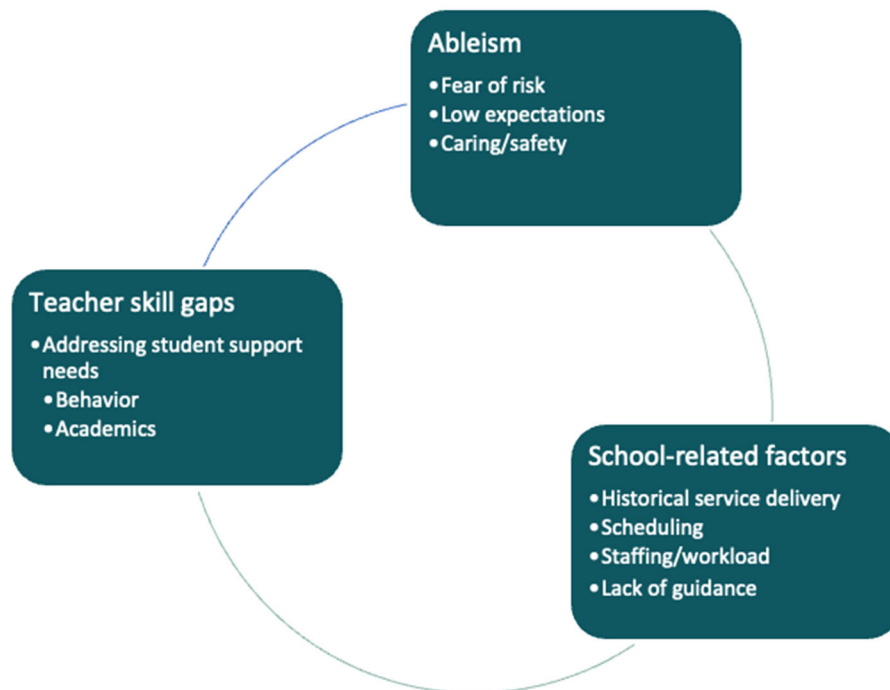
In addition to a variety of successes, classroom observations and teacher interviews also revealed significant barriers educators experienced when teaching students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. These instructional barriers clustered into the following themes: ableism, school-related factors, and teacher skill gaps (See Figure 7).

### Ableism

Many of the difficulties that teachers experienced related to low expectations or fear of risk for students with disabilities in some way. Low expectations and fear of risk could both be forms of

ableism. Ableism is defined as “a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other.” (Center for Disability Rights, n.d.).

**Figure 7: Instructional Barriers**



**Fear of Risk/Low Expectations.** One special education teacher reported some fear and cognitive dissonance in placing her student who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment into a more inclusive placement. She stated:

I’m scared that if I let her go, of course she’s [going to] do great. But what if she doesn’t? And how is that [going to] affect her in the long run? But I also feel like I’m hindering her, holding her back because I do think [student] is somebody who can hold a job and live by herself and do all the things one day. And I don’t think that staying in a [self-contained] class like in [alternate achievement] standards is [going to] do her a bit of good.

This sentiment seemed to be shared by other teachers as well. Many of the middle and high school teachers and teams reported that previous teachers did not prepare their students who moved from the alternate to the general state assessment for more rigorous programming as evidenced by these quotes from two different teachers:

- I know they’re good teachers but then when they come to middle school, it’s like we... teach [them], we love them...but they’re changing classes and they’re here and there and

it, it seems to, I think, be a lot harder simply because of what happened previously [in elementary school].

- I think my colleagues, we love [them], but sometimes I think we might do them a little injustice. <laugh>. (We) need to have [them] fly a little bit, especially if they're coming, you know, get [them] prepared before they get [to middle school].

Another general education teacher mentioned that it is a risk to spend time trying to teach some students with disabilities because it would not impact their state test scores as much, which in turn, impacted teacher evaluation. She stated:

If you're in the top 25% of the state [in test scores], you get a nice little chunk (of money) and...it's not for everybody. And you know, some look like [names other student], he's probably reading on a first grade level and I worry, I just worry because I don't have the time to pull him and work, work, work with him because I've got to worry about these others who are solid kids and they can really grow, where he's got some issues that he's not [going to] grow that fast, he might still show growth but he's not [going to] grow like they can.

### **School-related Factors**

Teachers reported barriers related to school-related factors such as historical service delivery for students with disabilities who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, issues with scheduling in their school, staffing and workload difficulties, and a lack of guidance regarding what to do when a student is moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment.

**Historical Service Delivery.** Many of the educators reported barriers with student's prior experiences in school. They felt that previous teachers did not prepare the students for more rigorous instruction in middle or high school and may have unintentionally limited what instruction students received. One general education teacher reported that even when a student excelled in a self-contained class, the gap between what the student has done in the self-contained setting and what they need to be able to do in the grade-level curriculum was very different:

Oftentimes in the self-contained classroom...if they're in there and they can do timetables, that's like [a celebration]. [Because] a lot of kids in there don't. But 6th grade math is more than normal timetables. So although he was the head of his class in self-contained, he's not the head of his class in 6th grade curriculum. Because...he was not doing sixth grade work. And, I think that's oftentimes...where the gap is... Whenever a child is in a self-contained class and they're going to be moved to regular ed, [I'm] not saying the teacher isn't preparing them, but I don't think the preparation is enough. I think they

should probably talk to [the] regular ed teacher, see what, look at the curriculum for themselves, see what's [going to] be needed.

**Scheduling.** Given the need for more collaborative service delivery when a student is moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, teachers reported that there was no time in the school schedule to co-plan or collaborate for both general and special education teachers. Many schools did have professional learning community (PLC) structures, but often there was only time built in for general education teachers to collaborate with other general education teachers or for special education teachers to collaborate with other special education teachers. One special education teacher said time can sometimes be found to discuss student needs with general education teachers:

Usually if we share some of the same students, we might talk about what they're doing in class and that kind of stuff. But as far as collaborating and having common planning, we don't do that. We don't plan together.

Many of the special educators interviewed had some planning time and access to PLCs, but not necessarily with general education teachers. One special educator said, "We have a PLC together as an Exceptional Children (EC) team. But like, we don't necessarily meet with regular ed." Another special education teacher said:

Our resource teachers do participate in PLCs. But we do it for separate settings, just as our group. And actually that's something we are working towards next year trying to find a better system for...collaboration and PLCs, because I was talking with my principal the other day... about how it's so hard to schedule all the co-teaching and the pullout and like when I need to get my max resource kids and when I can talk to teachers.

One specific benefit a special education teacher mentioned was being able to tell what was being worked on in general education classes ahead of time. She said, "It would be incredible to be able to do PLCs, . . . [if ] I just go on and look at, their folders and go, okay, they're about to move into [this topic]."

Another issue reported with scheduling was inconvenient timing for special education teachers to come into general education classes to support students with disabilities. One general education teacher discussed that the special education teacher was not always present at the time most needed:

When she comes to me in the mornings, that's during, we have what's called non-negotiables. Like we start announcements at eight o'clock. We start with a [social-emotional learning] lesson. Then we go right into Haggerty, which is a phonics program. And then we go right into Letterland. And that's all whole group. So that's a big chunk of the in-

clusion time...So it was so not her fault, but it was like, it just wasn't a good time. You know, [names another student] needs Haggerty. He needs the social emotional learning [SEL] desperately, you know, and Letterland, he needs to have that whole group, you know, these are your words this week, let's talk about them. Let's do activities with him. He, you know, so it was frustrating. But that was a scheduling issue.

**Staffing/Workload.** Educators reported additional barriers related to school factors in the area of staffing and workload. In addition to staff turnover, special educators reported feeling stretched thin without staffing (paraprofessionals) to support students in general education classes, and the workload they experienced moving students from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment sometimes seemed overwhelming. One teacher said:

Just trying to figure out like, hey, what do we need to get done? How do we make sure that . . . we're taking this content, we're pulling it into goals, and then from there we need to do blah, blah, blah. And so I feel like at the beginning of the year, I'm working 80-hour weeks just to try and get everything settled.

**Lack of Guidance.** Some teachers whose students had moved from more restrictive special education settings reported barriers with how abrupt the transition was to a general education setting and how often these transitions took place at inopportune times. These abrupt transitions required students to acclimate quickly to new classroom routines, expectations, and instructional pacing. When discussing the need to transition a student who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, a teacher said:

I don't know how to fix it whenever they're in the special ed classroom or self-contained classroom and we think he's ready to move on...but I think there should be some type of process that needs to be followed before a child moves from self-contained full-time to general ed full-time.

Another teacher discussed the issue of the timing of the placement change. The teacher had a student transition from a special education classroom to a general education classroom in the Spring. This abrupt timing impacted the teacher's ability to plan and prepare the student, and it also led to the student being very behind content wise because the class had covered a lot of material that they did not get. The educator said:

Well, I really feel like...had it have been decided at the very beginning of the school year now fitting in and being with peers, I don't feel like he has struggled, but just [with] the content he has struggled. I feel like if he had been there from the get-go at the very beginning of the year and had, from day one, I feel like it would've been much smoother. I feel like just coming in at the [end of the year], because he's missed a whole bunch [of content]. And I'm not so sure he was doing 6th grade work in her class. He

wasn't doing 6th grade work. So he's missed almost a whole year of sixth grade work. And then he's coming in my [general education] class and we're almost done with the curriculum. So then I'm having to backtrack and I have to explain like a whole lot to try to get him caught up.

## **Teacher Skills Gaps**

Teachers discussed several areas where they were uncertain about how to educate students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. The main areas in which teachers were uncertain were how to address student support needs, how to support positive behavior, and how to support student academic progress.

**Addressing Student Support Needs.** Teachers reported uncertainty regarding how to best address student support needs as they moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. The support needs that teachers were uncertain how to address included anxiety, emotional regulation, and fitting in with peers. One special education teacher was uncertain what it looked like to provide the intensive support that the student needed in a less restrictive setting. The teacher said:

I think a lot of it is, I mean, especially whenever you get to like 3rd, 4th, 5th grade, which is kind of where we're seeing these kids start to be pushed out. The teachers have like a class of 25 kids and it's just them. And it's like how, how do they provide that individualized instruction that I do in here?

Another special education teacher mentioned the difficulty faced in supporting the social skills of students with autism who moved to general education classrooms:

Specifically with the kids with autism, because socially, like they can hang with the academics a lot of times, but they cannot hang socially. And so the struggle we find is like they'll go down there and they'll make friends, and they get caught up in the bad crowd or they get picked on and then have a setback.

Several teachers also reported issues with students not wanting to be different than their peers, which was more pronounced when they used accommodations, such as text-to-speech technology, that stood out compared to their peers.

**Behavior.** In addition to student support needs, educators reported uncertainty about supporting student behavior needs as they transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. These behavior needs were reported by teachers as stubbornness, work refusal, off-task behavior, and lack of motivation—though it was noted that other students also had similar behavioral issues. One educator stated:

The only thing I have a problem with this lesson is we have several that don't have the will to do it. They just sit there, don't they, they have the skill, but they just don't. And that's both those kids who have an IEP and, <laugh> yes, kids who don't have an IEP <laugh>. It's not a matter what kind of label or anything. They, the will is just not there. And they're like, I don't need this. I'm not going to use this. So why am I learning, why am I here?

Teachers reported that these behavior needs led to further issues such as students not doing their homework or turning in class work on time.

*Academics.* Teachers reported difficulty in meeting the academic needs of students who transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. These barriers involved student skill deficits that educators were not sure how to address or accommodate. Most of these barriers involved supporting students to engage and sustain their engagement in more rigorous instruction. One educator reported:

I suspect that she'll be in regular ed by the middle of next year, most of the day. But I think the rigor for her is hard. So like when stuff gets harder and she has to think more, it's like she is fatigued. I don't know. She gets tired.

Another educator reported that student confidence may play a factor in how they engage in more rigorous instruction:

<Student's> biggest problem is that she works very slow paced. And so that's why the process has been a lot slower for her. So she knew how to write those sentences because she told me what they were. But then when she got ready to put it on paper, she was staring at me because she's so not confident in her ability to do it by herself.

Finally, another educator shared that when instruction got more abstract, their focus student struggled:

They are so good with, you know, a lot of the just like rote skills. And then whenever it comes to moving past that, that's where we really struggle. And a lot of that has to do with their adaptive skills not being as high or, you know, just not having quite the understanding of the world around them.

## Instructional Barriers by Classroom Type

Results indicated that teachers experienced a variety of barriers, many of which were consistent across classroom types.

## **General Education Classes**

General education classes offered less access to SDI and lower interactions with teachers compared to special education classrooms. General educators reported several consistent barriers in general education classes that included students who had moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, including student inexperience with general education classroom norms and behaviors, transitioning to general education classrooms late in the school year, and shifting roles for providing special education services.

## **Special Education Classes**

Observations in self-contained special education classrooms revealed that they provided students with no access to grade-level general education curriculum for students who had transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. In special education resource classes, there was some access to general education curriculum content, but much lower in comparison to general education classes. Interview data revealed that many special education teachers had limited knowledge of standards-based instruction, and a few of them were not sure of the value of teaching core content standards. Special education teachers seemed to place high value on students with disabilities accessing highly specialized instruction and interventions because of concerns about the extent of student skill deficits. Further, special education teachers indicated that, from their perspective, the highly specialized instruction or interventions could not be provided in general education settings, where the grade-level curriculum was taught.

## **Discussion**

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This study revealed major successes and significant barriers that various educators experienced in educating students with disabilities who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general state assessment. When considering the alignment of standards, instruction, and assessment, general and special education teachers demonstrated high levels of skills as well as areas for growth.

The findings of this convergent mixed methods study found that the transition from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment was more successful when:

- Teachers had high expectations for the students.
- Grade-level, standards-based instruction was made more accessible via the use of scaffolds, supports, and accommodations.
- Schools were structured in ways that supported belonging and the building of teacher capacity.

- Teachers had a sense of self-efficacy, and believed that they could successfully instruct students who transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment.
- Teachers were provided with supplemental instruction and professional development for areas of need (e.g., communication, organizational skills, etc.).

The study also found that there were barriers to the successful transition from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. These barriers included:

- Some teachers had low expectations for the students who transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, and predominately a focus on safety and caring for those students (e.g., ableism).
- School-related factors such as historic delivery models (e.g., segregated classrooms) and scheduling issues sometimes limited access to grade-level standards-based instruction for students who transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment.
- Some teachers had skill gaps that affected their ability to confidently meet the instructional needs of students who transitioned from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment.

### Implications for Research and Practice

This study offers several implications for research and practice. Additional research is needed that is focused on students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. Little research has been conducted that specifically focuses on this population. There is especially a need to better understand how IEP teams make assessment participation decisions for students with disabilities and how these decisions translate into least restrictive environment determinations, which potentially alter a student's access to grade-level general education curriculum.

The findings of this study suggests several implications for practice:

- **Develop systems that support access to grade-level standard-based instruction.** This report provides evidence that students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment sometimes did not get access to grade-level standards-based instruction. Historic structural issues (e.g., students with disabilities consistently placed in segregated classrooms), as well as scheduling issues can limit student access to rigorous content. Supporting student achievement requires a multifaceted approach. Educational organizations are complex, and change is not easy; however, to create sustainable, more inclusive learning environments that meet the needs of all students, including those who transition from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment, many things will need to be addressed. This ranges from developing policies and procedures that support access to grade-level standards-based content, to the

use of instructional practices that facilitate the learning of all students, and the provision of special education services.

- **Ensure that instruction and assessments are accessible.** Students who move from the AA-AAAS need to be able to access grade-level standards-based content. Currently instruction, as well as assessments (e.g., classroom assessments, district assessments) may not be accessible. Scaffolds, supports, and accommodations can provide access to instruction. Similarly accessibility features and accommodations can provide access to assessments.
- **Provide high-quality focused professional development.** This study found that many educators did not have the knowledge and skills needed to successfully instruct students who moved from the AA-AAAS to the general assessment. The literature on professional development shows that educators require high-quality focused professional development that involves active learning, collective participation, sustained duration, and coherence to improve student outcomes (Yoon et al., 2007). Training is needed on topics such as:
  - o Ensuring content and materials are accessible to students during instruction and assessments
  - o Addressing gaps in student learning while simultaneously providing access to grade-level standard-based instruction
  - o Using data from multiple sources for instructional decision making

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## Appendix A

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### Teacher Consent Form

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of Research Study: MIDAS Project: Successes and Barriers of Educating Students on the Cusp of Alternate Assessment Eligibility

Why is this research being done?

Researchers at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota would like to collect information about educators' instructional successes and barriers in instructing students who have switched from the alternate to the general state assessment.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?

We are asking teachers who provide instruction to at least one student who has switched from the alternate to the general state assessment to allow us to observe two lessons and participate in a 1-hour interview focused on the successes and barriers you've experienced in educating this particular student.

How will this work?

If you agree to participate, you will be allowing technical assistant providers from NCEO to collect observational data during one classroom lesson. You will also be interviewed following classroom observations from the technical assistance providers. Lastly, we will request your help with distributing and collecting parent consent forms to participate in the study for the student participant in your classroom.

How are the observations structured?

Once training occurs, one opportunity will be identified for focused observation and an interview in Spring 2023. NCEO staff will collect data with an observation tool and interview you shortly after.

Is there any reason not to do this?

There is a small chance that you will feel uncomfortable being observed by the technical assistance providers. If that happens, you may stop at any time and we won't use any information from you.

What are the reasons for me to do this?

By participating both the observations and ongoing coaching, you will

1. Give us important information about promoting student engagement that will allow us to provide professional development targeted at specific needs within the classroom and school
2. Help to improve future technical assistance to your state, and other schools and districts, both locally and nationally.

Do I have to do this?

Absolutely not. Helping us is your choice. You may choose later that you no longer want to participate at any time and there will be no record of your participation. If you participate in an observation and decide you do not want to do the interview, you do not have to continue. Your decision to participate or not will not be held against you in any way. If you decide at any time that you would no longer like to participate, please contact Jessica Bowman at [bowman@umn.edu](mailto:bowman@umn.edu) or Sheryl Lazarus at [laza010@umn.edu](mailto:laza010@umn.edu).

Who will see my observation and coaching data?

NCEO staff members will have access to observation and interview documentation, which include notes and transcripts. Your documents will be de-identified and will use a participant number to protect your identity. A record of which documents are tied to which participant numbers will be maintained by NCEO staff in a password-protected file and will be destroyed within one calendar year upon study completion, along with all remaining original data files.

Will I, my school, or my district be named in any way in the dissemination of results?

No. All disseminated data will be deidentified and reported in aggregate. Any unanticipated identifying information will be removed from study documents. All data collected will be stored on a protected and HIPAA-compliant server for one calendar year.

What if I have other questions or want to provide feedback?

If you have other questions about this research, please contact Jessica Bowman at [bowman@umn.edu](mailto:bowman@umn.edu) or Sheryl Lazarus at [laza010@umn.edu](mailto:laza010@umn.edu) .

This research is supported through a Cooperative Agreement (#H326G210002) with the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to [z.umn.edu/participants](http://z.umn.edu/participants). You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

By signing your name below, you are giving consent to take part in this research.

---

Signature of teacher Date

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Printed name of teacher

---

Printed name of person obtaining consent Date

---

Signature of person obtaining consent

## Appendix B

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### Parent/Guardian Consent Form

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of Research Study: MIDAS Project: Successes and Barriers of Educating Students on the Cusp of Alternate Assessment Eligibility

Why is this research being done?

Researchers at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota would like to collect information about educators' use of evidence-based instructional practices with students who have switched from the alternate to the general state assessment.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research study?

We are asking your child to take part in this research study to measure their engagement with the curriculum and with peers and teachers in the classroom.

How will this work?

If you agree to allow your child to participate, you will be allowing technical assistant providers from NCEO to collect observational data during 30 minutes of two classroom lessons. The observation of your child will focus on their engagement in the curriculum and with peers and teachers.

How are the observations structured?

NCEO technical assistance staff will identify an opportunity for a focused 1-hour observation with your child's teacher. NCEO will collect data with an observation tool, noting opportunities your child has to respond to the content, their engagement with peers and the teacher, and whether they are provided with specially designed instruction.

Is there any reason not to do this?

Although the technical assistance providers will not interact with your child, there is a small chance that your child will feel uncomfortable being observed. If that happens, your child or you can let us know at any time and we will discontinue data collection.

What are the reasons for me to do this?

By participating in the observations, your child will

1. Give us important information about promoting student engagement that will allow us to provide professional development targeted at specific needs within the classroom and school

2. Help to improve future technical assistance to other schools and districts, both locally and nationally

Do I have to do this?

Absolutely not. Helping us is your and your child's choice. You may choose later that you no longer want your child to participate, and their data will be destroyed. Your decision to allow your child to participate or not will not be held against you in any way. If you decide at any time that you would no longer like to participate, please contact Jessica Bowman at [bowman@umn.edu](mailto:bowman@umn.edu) or Sheryl Lazarus at [laza010@umn.edu](mailto:laza010@umn.edu) .

Who will see my observation and coaching data?

NCEO will have access to observation documentation, which includes notes. The documents will be de-identified and will use a participant number to protect your child's identity. A record of which documents are tied to which participant numbers will be maintained by NCEO staff in a password-protected file and will be destroyed within one calendar year upon study completion, along with all remaining original data files.

Will my child or their school be named in any way in the dissemination of results?

No. All dissemination efforts will be deidentified and reported in aggregate. Any unanticipated identifying information will be removed from study documents. All data collected will be stored on a protected and HIPAA-compliant server for one calendar year.

What if I have other questions or want to provide feedback?

If you have other questions about this research, please contact Jessica Bowman at [bowman@umn.edu](mailto:bowman@umn.edu) or Sheryl Lazarus at [laza010@umn.edu](mailto:laza010@umn.edu) .

This research is supported through a Cooperative Agreement (#H326G210002) with the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to [z.umn.edu/participants](http://z.umn.edu/participants). You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

By signing below, you are giving permission for your child to take part in this research.

---

Signature of parent/guardian

---

Date

---

Printed name of parent/guardian

---

Printed name of child

---

Printed name of person obtaining consent

---

Date

---

Signature of person obtaining consent

# Appendix C

## Classroom Observation Protocol

### MIDAS Evidence-Based Instructional Practices Snapshot

<b>Observer Name</b> <i>Type observer name in the space below</i>	<b>Date and Time Observed</b> <i>Type date and time in the space below</i>	<b>District/State</b> <i>Type district and state in the space below</i>
<b>Teacher Name</b> <i>Type teacher name in the space below</i>	<b>Student number</b> <i>Type number in the space below</i>	<b>Setting</b> <i>Type setting in the space below</i>

<b>Instructional EBP Observed</b>						
<i>Highlight the practices you observed in the space below:</i>						
Co-teaching	Explicit instruction	Flexible grouping	Technology	Positive/corrective feedback	Scaffolding	
Cooperative learning	Extended wait time	Prompt hierarchy	Graphic organizers	Manipulatives	Other:	
<b>Content is aligned with grade-level standards (e.g., work sample)</b>						
<i>Type notes and evidence of this practice in the space below:</i>						
<b>Materials and lesson are grade appropriate (example)</b>						
<i>Type notes and evidence of this practice in the space below:</i>						

Adapted from TIES Center, 2022  
Updated : 12/19/22

<b>Adapted content, methodology, and delivery help student reach a specific learning goal (Specially Designed Instruction)</b>		
<i>Highlight what was adapted and type notes and evidence in the space below:</i>		
Content	Methodology	Delivery

<b>Focus student grouped with grade-level classmates without disabilities</b>
<i>Type notes and evidence in the space below:</i>

<b>Evidence of co-planning, co-teaching, or co-assessing for this lesson</b>
<i>Type notes and evidence in the space below:</i>

Adapted from TIES Center, 2022  
Updated : 12/19/22

**Time Sampling:** Record observations for 15 seconds at the end of each 45 second interval for the focus student who has moved from the alternate to general assessment. Circle or highlight all that apply for each interval.

	Y if evident			N if not evident			NA if not applicable to focus student								
	1 min	2 min	3 min	4 min	5 min	6 min	7 min	8 min	9 min	10 min	11 min	12 min	13 min	14 min	15 min
<b>Communication supported</b>	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA	Y N NA
<b>Instructional EBP</b>	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N
<b>SDI</b>	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N
<b>Opportunity to respond</b>	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N
<b>Engaged in gen. ed. curriculum</b>	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO	ON OFF NO
<b>Engagement/Class routines</b>	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N	Y N
<b>Interactions with whom</b>	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA	T P IA

T= Teacher    P= Grade-level peer without disabilities    IA= Instructional Assistant

### Instructions for time sampling form

**Who to observe:** Target student (i.e., the student whose parent/guardian consented for them to participate in the study; the Target student.

**What to observe:** The observer will observe the target student’s access to communication and instructional supports/evidence-based practices, interactions, and engagement with the curriculum, peers, or with educators.

#### Evidence-Based Instructional Practice:

Yes - There is an educator interacting with the target student (either individually or as part of a group) and is providing access to evidence-based instructional practices such as co-teaching, explicit instruction, flexible grouping, technology, positive/corrective feedback, scaffolding, time delay, extended wait time, prompt hierarchy, graphic organizers etc.

No - There was no interaction or participation in evidence-based instructional practices.

#### Communication supported:

Yes – During instruction or social interactions, the focus student is supported to communicate. This could include communication partners using wait time, modeling or aided modeling of AAC, English learner supports, reading body language, or indicating for the focus student to use their AAC.

No – The student was not supported to communicate during instruction or social interactions.

N/A – No support was required for communication or there was no instruction or social interaction apparent.

#### Instructional EBP:

Yes - Educators used EBPs to provide instruction to the target student during the interval including, but not limited to: co-teaching, explicit instruction, flexible grouping, technology, positive/corrective feedback, scaffolding, time delay, extended wait time, task analysis, prompt hierarchy, and graphic organizers.

No – Educators did not use EBPs during the interval or no instruction was provided to the target student.

#### Specially Designed Instruction:

Yes - It is evident that the focus student has access to specially designed instruction, such as adapted content, methodology, or delivery of instruction. It may include additional, intensive instruction or opportunities for repeated practice that most other students do not receive.

No – The focus student does not have access to specially designed instruction. Content, methodology, and delivery of instruction are the same for all students.

Adapted from TIES Center, 2022  
Updated : 12/19/22

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**Engagement in the General Education Curriculum:**

Yes - There is evidence that the focus student is engaged in the general education curriculum (e.g., either actively through writing, counting, reading, answering questions or passively by watching or listening to a teacher or peer presentation). If yes, indicate whether the content was on or off grade level.

No – the student is not engaged in the general education curriculum. This could be because they are transitioning or managing materials, doing an alternate activity (such as doing a folder activity), because no instruction or expectations are provided related to the general education curriculum, or because the student is out of the room or on a break.

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**Engagement/Class Routines:**

Yes - There is evidence that the focus student is engaged in a similar activity or routine that the rest of the class is engaged in (e.g., making a lunch choice, class discussion, lining up)

No – The focus student is engaged in an alternate and unrelated activity or routine than the rest of the class (e.g., practicing writing their name while the rest of the class is engaged in a discussion).

---

**Interactions with whom:**

The student has had an active interaction with another person or people in the class, a teacher (T), peer (P), and/or instructional assistant (IA). No circled codes would indicate the student did not interact with anyone else during the interval.

**Source:**

TIES Center. (2021). *Evidence based inclusive practices snapshot: Adult overall behavior observation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, TIES Center.

**Adapted from:**

Toews, S. G., Kurth, J. A., Turner, E. L., & Lyon, K. J. (2020). Ecobehavioral analysis of inclusive classrooms and instruction that support students with extensive support needs. *Inclusion, 8*(4), 259-274. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-8.4.259>

Adapted from TIES Center, 2022  
Updated : 12/19/22

## Appendix D

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### Interview Protocol

#### Purpose

- Gather perceptions on instructional successes and barriers
- Develop PD materials that address their perceived needs
- Compare contextual and grade-level-specific similarities/differences across sites

#### Introduction Script

I'm a researcher with the National Center on Educational Outcomes and we are partnering with the \_\_\_\_\_ Department of Education. We are involved in the MIDAS project which is the Making Improved Decisions for Students on the Cusp of Alternate Assessment Participation Using Multiple Measures of Academic Achievement from Multiple Sources...

We are hoping to learn more about the successes and challenges to teaching students who have moved from the alternate to the general state assessment.

If you would like to take a break or to stop at any time, just let me know. Also, you may skip questions and/or terminate the interview at any time.

The interview will last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. I will record it, upload it into my computer and get it electronically transcribed. Once that is done, the recording will be deleted.

#### Interview Questions:

##### General questions about the observation

- What are your thoughts on the lesson and how it went? Did it go as you planned/expected?
- Tell me how you know if the lesson went well? What did you expect to see? (You can focus on the student that we are observing, but also share about the whole class)

[Show observation snapshot.] Let's walk through the notes that I have. I know I'm not seeing the whole picture and I want you to help give us more background.

We saw...Tell me more about... (interviewer chooses 2 successes and 1 challenge area)

- EBPs, alignment with standards, materials, SDI, co-planning, peers
  - Observed - I saw you implement \_\_\_\_, what made you decide to implement that practice?

- Not Observed - Are there instructional practices that you frequently use? Have you considered \_\_\_ practice? Tell me about...
- Communication supported, opportunity to respond, engagement, interactions
  - Observed - I saw the student communicating using \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me more about what this looks like on a daily basis.
  - Not observed - Tell me about \_\_\_\_\_ (how the student's communication/engagement, peer interactions) is supported in your class? Do they receive English Language/Speech/Special Education services?

#### Student-specific questions

How long has the student been in your class?

Where were they receiving instruction before?

Where do you see them receiving instruction in the next school year?

#### Successes and barriers

How is it going?

What are the successes you've had?

What data, if any, do you find most helpful to plan instruction?

Pain points?

Level of collaboration

Follow up on classroom demographics form, if needed

#### Closing

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this project. You will be hearing from me next when your interview is transcribed so that you have an opportunity to edit/revise if anything came across in a way that you didn't mean. Then, I will send you a summary of your interview related to our research questions and you have a chance again to clarify anything we may have misrepresented.

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