

## SCHOOL LEADER SERIES

# Understanding the Consequences of Assessment Participation Decisions for Students with Disabilities

School leaders recognize that assessment participation decisions have short- and long-term consequences for students with disabilities. Most students with disabilities take the general assessment with or without accommodations. A few students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet the state's participation criteria take the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS).



Assessment participation decisions should not be made lightly. For example, if a student is assigned to the general assessment without provision of needed accessibility features and accommodations, the student may struggle to interact with the test, and the results will not show what the student knows and can do. Likewise, if a student is inappropriately assigned to the AA-AAAS, which has different expectations for performance, the student may not receive appropriately rigorous instruction. It is imperative that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet the state's definition for participation in an AA-AAAS take that assessment. It is equally important that students who do not meet the state's definition take the general assessment, with the provision of accessibility features and accommodations as appropriate.

It is important to recognize both short-term and long-term consequences when making assessment participation decisions. **Short-term consequences** include those that are fairly immediate for the student, including the nature of instruction and possibly decisions about classroom placement. **Long-term consequences** include those that are in the future, including whether the student has gained the knowledge and skills for high school graduation and for some post-secondary training and employment opportunities.

## What can school leaders do to ensure IEP teams understand the short-term and long-term consequences of participation decisions for students with disabilities?

School leaders can provide professional development opportunities for IEP team members and encourage discussions about possible short-term and long-term consequences. They also can:

- adapt or develop materials for IEP teams that highlight the consequences of assignment to either the general assessment or an AA-AAAS;
- ensure that parents and guardians understand the short-term and long-term consequences of assessment participation decisions, providing interpreters as needed to bridge potential cultural and linguistic barriers; and

CCSSO's Assessment, Standards, and Education for Students with Disabilities (ASES) and School Leadership Development and Supports (SLDS) state collaboratives made important contributions to this document.

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- encourage IEP team members to “start with the end in mind.” IEP teams need to understand that the short-term consequences of assessment participation decisions made in the earliest grades can lead to long-term consequences in the later grades.

## What can school leaders do to ensure appropriate assessment participation decisions are made and implemented, thereby reducing negative short- or long-term consequences?

Ensure that IEP teams have access to state participation guidelines and any decision-making tools provided by the state.

Provide professional development opportunities to help IEP teams understand how to use state participation guidelines and tools and equip them to confidently make participation decisions.

Request parent or guardian sign-off on a statement that they understand the short-term and long-term consequences of a decision about their child’s assessment participation.

Provide professional development training to all staff on how to provide accessibility features and accommodations for both instruction and assessment, so that students with disabilities are able to show what they know and can do.

Ensure that all educators, including both general education and special education teachers, receive professional development training on how to use grade-level content standards to instruct all students.

Monitor assessment participation and placement decisions and revisit those decisions when needed.

## Talking Points for School Leaders

- Our school has high expectations for all students and believes that all students are to be instructed on the same grade-level content.
- IEP teams at our school understand how to use state participation guidelines to make assessment participation decisions.
- The AA-AAAS is designed specifically for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. It is based on alternate achievement standards, which means the performance expected is different.
- Our school believes that the general education classroom is the best placement for all students, including those who participate in the AA-AAAS.
- There are short- and long-term consequences for students with disabilities when they participate in the AA-AAAS, including significantly different academic expectations and changes in instruction, and the possible inability of the student to earn a regular diploma or reach desired, post-school outcomes.
- IEP teams at our school understand that decisions about assessment participation in the early grades have implications for post-secondary outcomes for students.

School leaders should customize these talking points to meet their specific school contexts.

The information in this resource reflects the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015* (Standards #2, 3, 8) and *Promoting Principal Leadership for the Success of Students with Disabilities*.

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