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A New Series of Briefs for the Race to the Top (RTTT) Assessment Consortia

Including Students with Disabilities in Common Non-Summative Assessments

Inclusive large-scale assessments have become the norm in states across the U.S. Participation rates of students with disabilities in these assessments have increased dramatically since the mid-1990s. As consortia of states move toward the development and implementation of assessment systems that include both non-summative assessments and summative assessments, ensuring that all assessments in the system appropriately include all students is a priority. Non-summative assessments, as used in this Brief, include interim, benchmark, diagnostic, and formative assessments.

Both the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) are developing assessment systems with innovative features such as multiple point in time administrations, technology-delivered assessments, and optional non-summative assessments.[1] These innovations will allow the Consortia to assess student learning, growth, and achievement toward College and Career Readiness standards by supplementing a single annual administration of large-scale tests of student achievement with additional information from other assessments.

The Consortia will need to take care not to subtract from the progress that has been made in the inclusiveness of large-scale assessments as they develop and implement their non-summative assessments. Critical considerations as non-summative assessments are developed and implemented include:

[1] PARCC refers to *Optional Early and Mid-Year Assessments.* SBAC refers to *Optional Interim Assessments.*

About this Brief

This Brief addresses the need for the Consortia to develop an inclusive approach to their non-summative assessments, including their optional interim assessments. Consideration should be given to: (a) the implementation of universal design principles; (b) the development of clear participation criteria and guidelines; and (c) accommodation policies that account for good testing practices, embedded features of technology-based assessments, and additional accommodations. This Brief encourages the Consortia to build on what has been learned from inclusive large-scale assessments.

This and other Briefs in this series address the opportunities, resources, and challenges that cross-state collaborative assessment efforts face as they include students with disabilities and English language learners. Topics in this series (e.g., accommodations, participation) are intended to support a dialogue grounded in research-based evidence on building inclusive assessment systems. Each Brief provides an overview and discussion of issues, as well as insights into potential next steps and additional data needs for Race-to-the Top Assessment Consortia decision making.

- Application of universal design principles
- Development and implementation of participation guidelines
- Development and implementation of accommodation policies and practices

Universal Design Principles

Principles of universal design can be used to improve access to learning and assessment. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a guide for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for all students.[2] Classroom-based measures provide a means for teachers to improve instruction by enabling them to compare the effectiveness of different instructional strategies and identify where students are having difficulty.

Principles of Universal Design for Assessment (UDA) (see Table 1) now guide the development of most large-scale assessments. These principles are just as appropriate for assessments used for non-summative assessment purposes, provided that the construct is clearly defined so that the content is not changed nor is the standard of performance. Universal design principles can be used to maximize the accessibility of items without watering them down or making them easier for some groups of students.

Participation

It is important for the Consortia to ensure that even though their non-summative assessments are optional, they do not disproportionately exclude students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should be included in non-summative assessments to the same extent that other students are included in them. The Consortia should consider the principles of inclusive assessment systems (see Table 2) as they develop participation guidelines for their non-summative assessments.

Participation guidelines with clear criteria will support sound decision making about how students participate in non-summative assessments. As appropriate, it is also critical to develop mechanisms to document participation rates by groups of students at the classroom, school, district, and state levels to help ensure that students are not inappropriately excluded.

Accommodations

Consortia will also have to address accommodations for their non-summative assessments. Given the computerized delivery of the Consortia non-summative assessments, attention should be given to the ways in which innovative assessment design allows for embedded features that provide access

Table 1. Best Practices for Universally Designed Assessments*

Practice 1. Ensure the presence of universal design in RFPs.
Practice 2. Conceptualize and construct the test so that each item can be written with accessibility features; items must respect the diversity of the assessment population, and be sensitive to test taker characteristics and experiences (gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, region, disability, language).
Practice 3. Review teams use tools to flag items that represent issues of research-based areas of bias that specifically impact students with disabilities.
Practice 4. Use think aloud methods to analyze flagged and unflagged items.
Practice 5. Revisit items based on information from Steps 2 and 3.
Practice 6. Field test with an emphasis on including students with disabilities.

* Based on *Universal Design Online Manual,* 2006 (see Resources).

[2] Instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessment are the four components of UDL identified by the National Center on Universal Design for Learning.

Table 2. Principles of Inclusive Assessment Systems – Adapted for Non-Summative Assessments

Principle 1. All students are included in ways that allow educators to measure their students frequently for instructional purposes.
Principle 2. Assessments allow all students to show their knowledge and skills on the same challenging content.
Principle 3. High quality decision making determines how students participate.
Principle 4. Classroom or group reporting includes the assessment results of all students.
Principle 5. Instructional decisions are affected by all students.
Principle 6. Continuous improvement, monitoring, and training ensure the quality of the overall system.

* Adapted from *A Principled Approach to Accountability Assessments for Students with Disabilities,* 2008 (see Resources).

for students with disabilities as well as other students.

The Consortia also should anticipate the common accommodations that will be needed, and provide guidance to educators through clear policies and guidelines. Consideration should be given to whether the accommodations are selected ahead of time by the teacher or IEP team, or whether the student may be the one to decide when and which accommodations to use.

Glossary

Accommodations are changes in materials and procedures designed to give access to students who need them, and to produce test scores with greater validity for those students.

Embedded Features are interactive tools that are part of the test platform and used to customize the assessment for individual test takers.

Good Testing Practices are testing practices and procedures that should be available to all.

Source: Don't Forget Accommodations! Five Questions to Ask When Moving to Technology-Based Assessments, 2011 (see Resources).

Concluding Thoughts

Non-summative assessments, whether they be interim assessments or formative assessments, are an important part of the assessment systems that the Consortia are developing. Ensuring that these assessments carry through the inclusiveness of the summative assessments is critical. To do this, the Consortia must not forget the essential importance of maintaining the progress that has been made in appropriately including students with disabilities in assessments.

To ensure that the implementation of universal design principles, participation criteria, and accommodations are of high quality for non-summative assessments, PARCC and SBAC might also consider examining the composition of their committees, work groups, and stakeholder engagement opportunities. Ensuring that special education representatives are involved in the development process is important, as is providing avenues for teacher engagement in training and other activities related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the entire assessment system, including non-summative assessments.

Concerted efforts are needed to ensure that inclusiveness is reflected in non-summative assessments in terms of universal design, participation, and accommodations. Careful planning will help ensure that the consortia move forward in a way that builds on past knowledge and experiences to create more accessible and valid assessments throughout the entire assessment system.

Resources

A Principled Approach to Accountability Assessments for Students with Disabilities (Synthesis Report 70). Thurlow, M.L., Quenemoen, R.F., Lazarus, S.S., Moen, R.E., Johnstone, C.J., Liu, K., Christensen, L.L., Albus, D.A., & Altman, J. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. www.nceo.info/OnlinePubs/Synthesis70/index.htm

A State Guide to the Development of Universally Designed Assessments. (2006). Johnstone, C., Altman, J., & Thurlow, M. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. www.nceo.info/OnlinePubs/StateGuideUD/UDmanual.pdf

Don't Forget Accommodations! Five Questions to Ask When Moving to Technology-based Assessments (NCEO Brief #1). (2011). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. www.nceo.info/OnlinePubs/briefs/brief01/default.htm

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