

What Alternate Assessments and Diplomas *Really* Mean for Students with Significant Disabilities



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Reauthorization of ESEA in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) included two policy initiatives for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities:

- Limits on participation in the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS)
- The possibility of a state-defined alternate diploma for these students

OVERVIEW

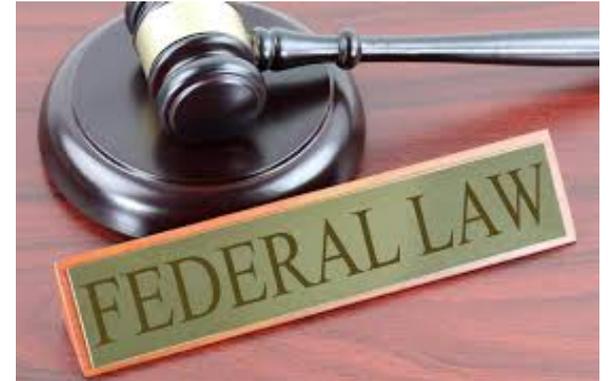
It is now nearly five years since these policies were enacted. This session will:

- Examine the current status of these policies, how they are being implemented, and their effects
- Present findings of analyses of the implementation of these policies
- Discuss benefits and challenges

FEDERAL INFORMATION (ESSA)



Every Student Succeeds Act



Prior to ESSA, states were allowed to count 1% of students as proficient using alternate assessments (AA-AAAS); after ESSA, states were allowed to have no more than 1.0% of students participate in AA-AAAS.



ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS(AA-AAAS)



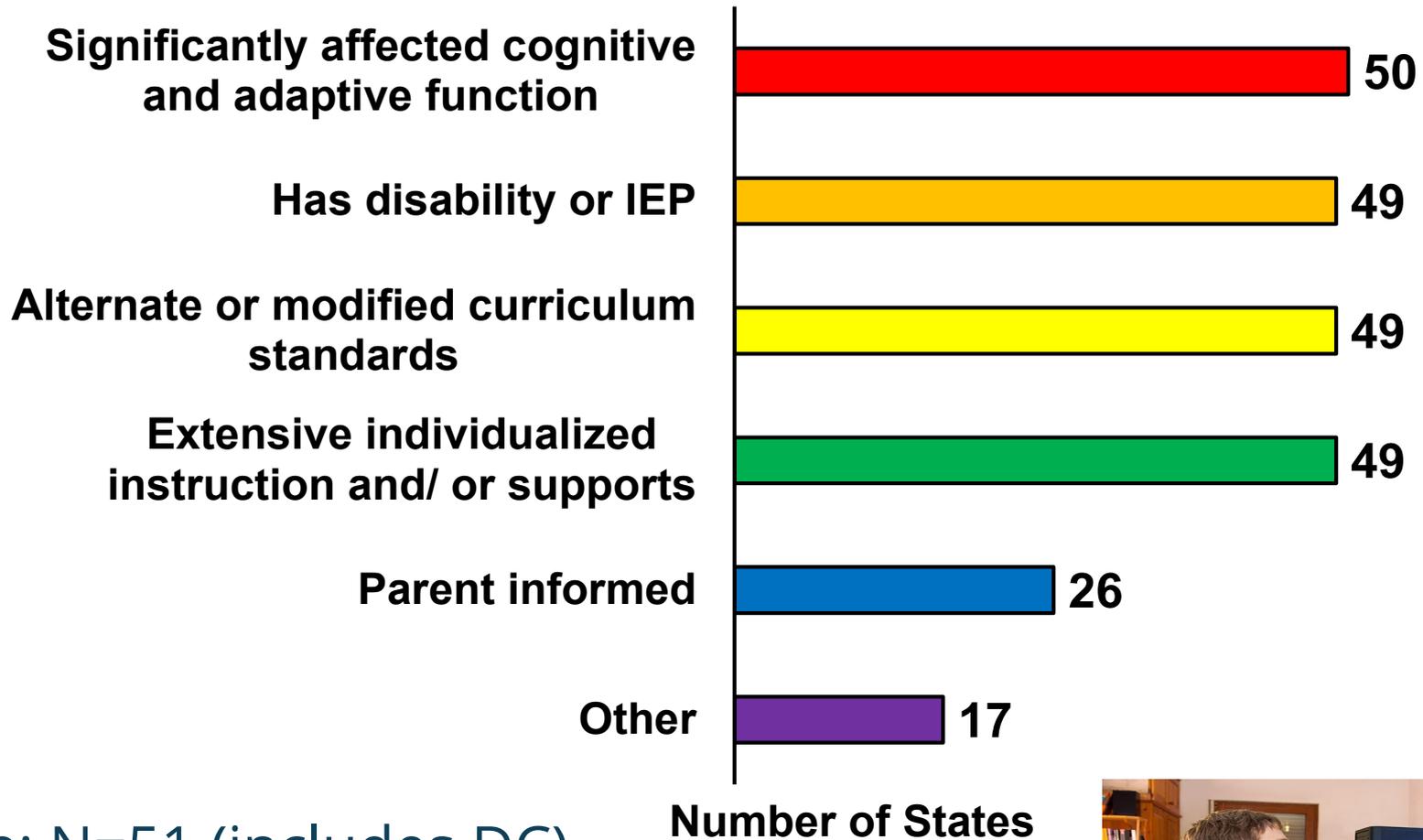
POLICY ANALYSIS

(AA-AAAS)

- **Purpose of study:** To provide an update on state participation criteria and guidelines for AA-AAAS.
- **Method:** In January and February 2019, NCEO staff searched the websites of state education agencies to collect AA-AAAS policy information.



Participation Criteria (top 5 + other)

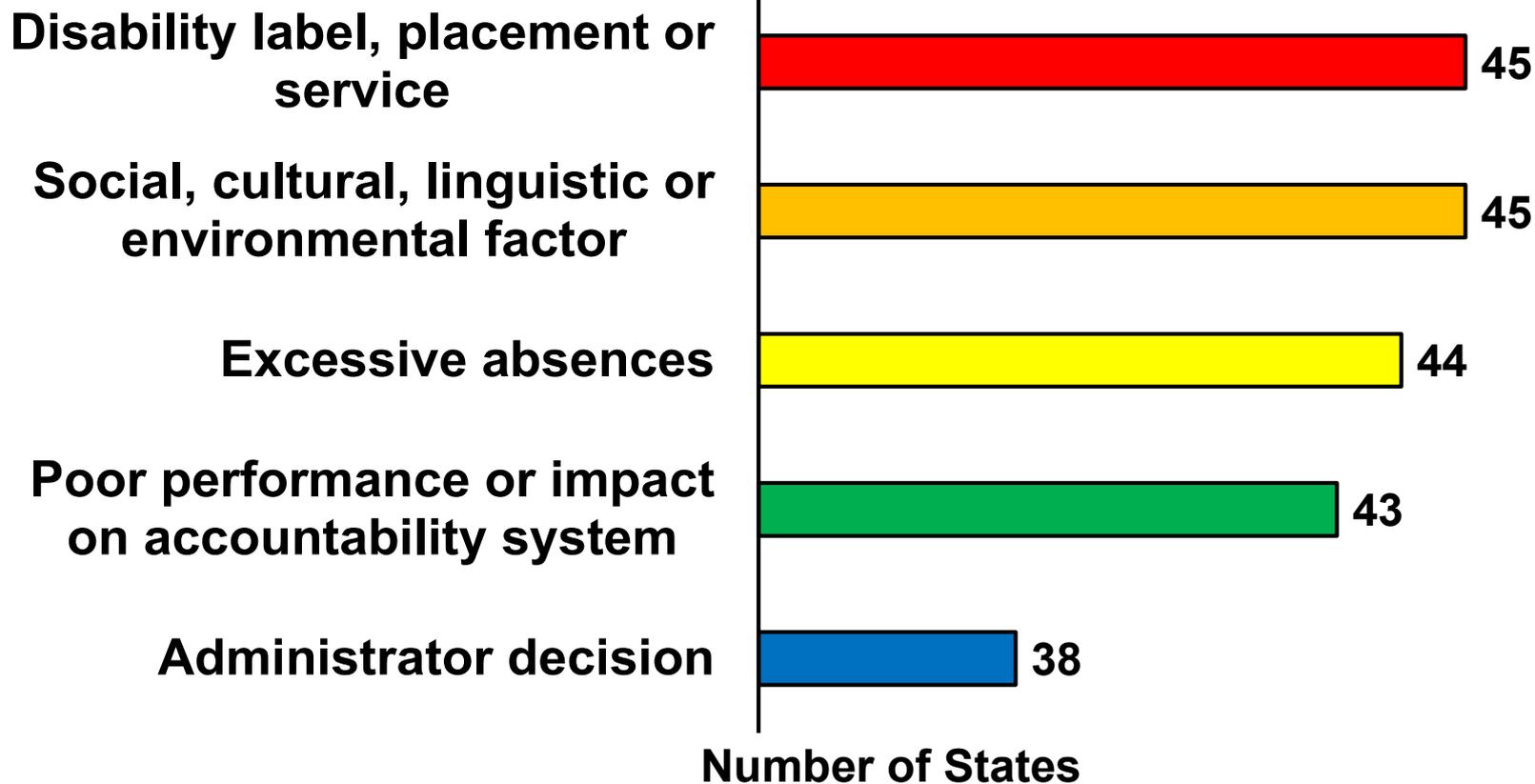


Note: N=51 (includes DC)

Number of States



Factors Not to be Used for Participation Decisions (top 5)

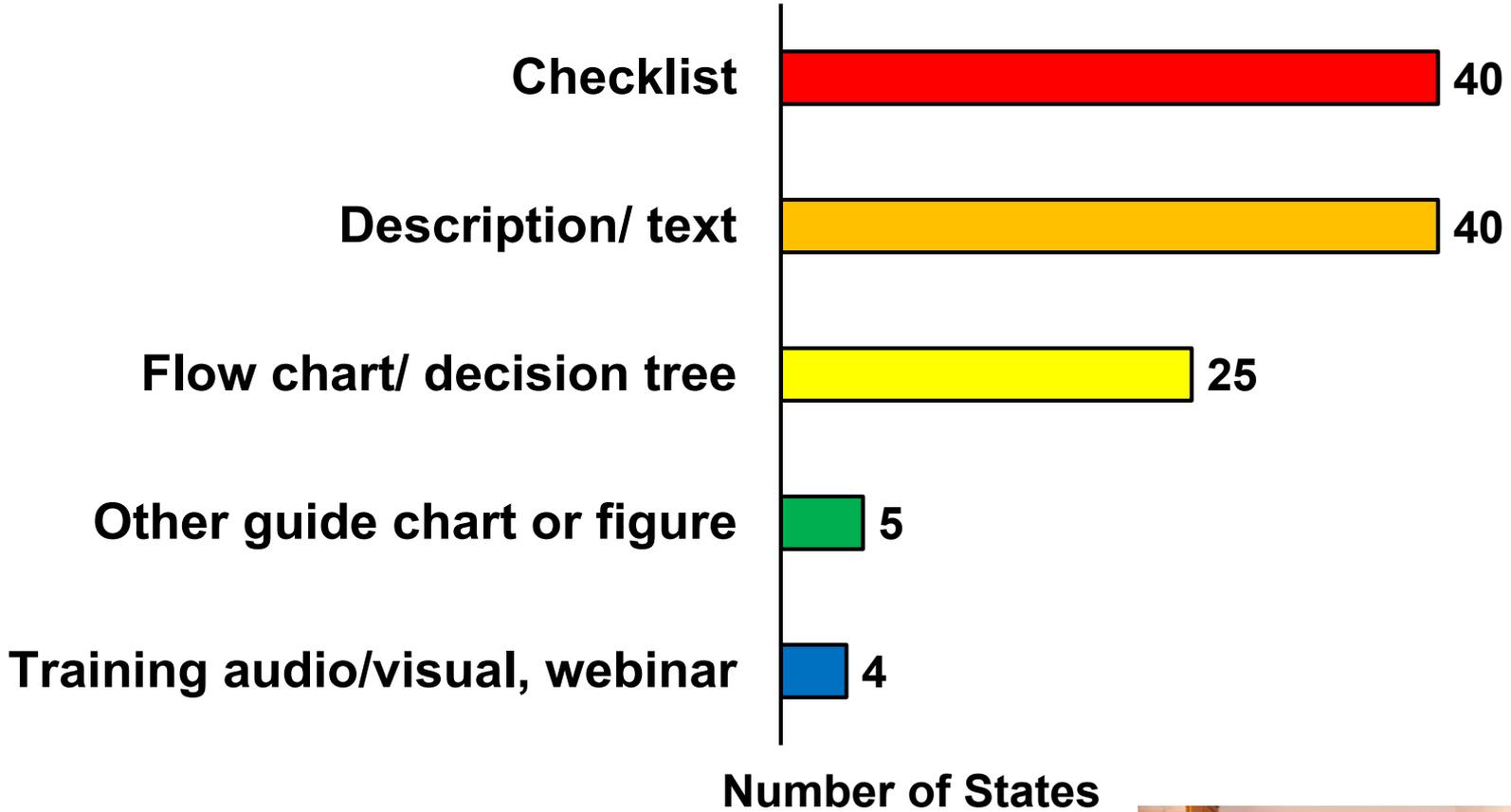


Note: N=46





Format of Criteria for Participation (top 5)



Note: N=51 (includes DC)

Source: Thurlow, Lazarus, et al. (2019)



DEFINITION EXAMPLE: OREGON



Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are typically characterized by significantly below average general cognitive functioning. This commonly includes a student with intelligence test scores two or more standard deviations below the mean on a standardized individually administered intelligence test, occurring with commensurate deficits in adaptive behavior that are frequently also evident in early childhood. Further, the cognitive disability must significantly impact the child's educational performance and ability to generalize learning from one setting to another. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in general, require highly specialized education and/or social, psychological, and medical services to access an educational program. These students may also rely on adults for personal care and have medical conditions that require physical/verbal supports, and assistive technology devices.

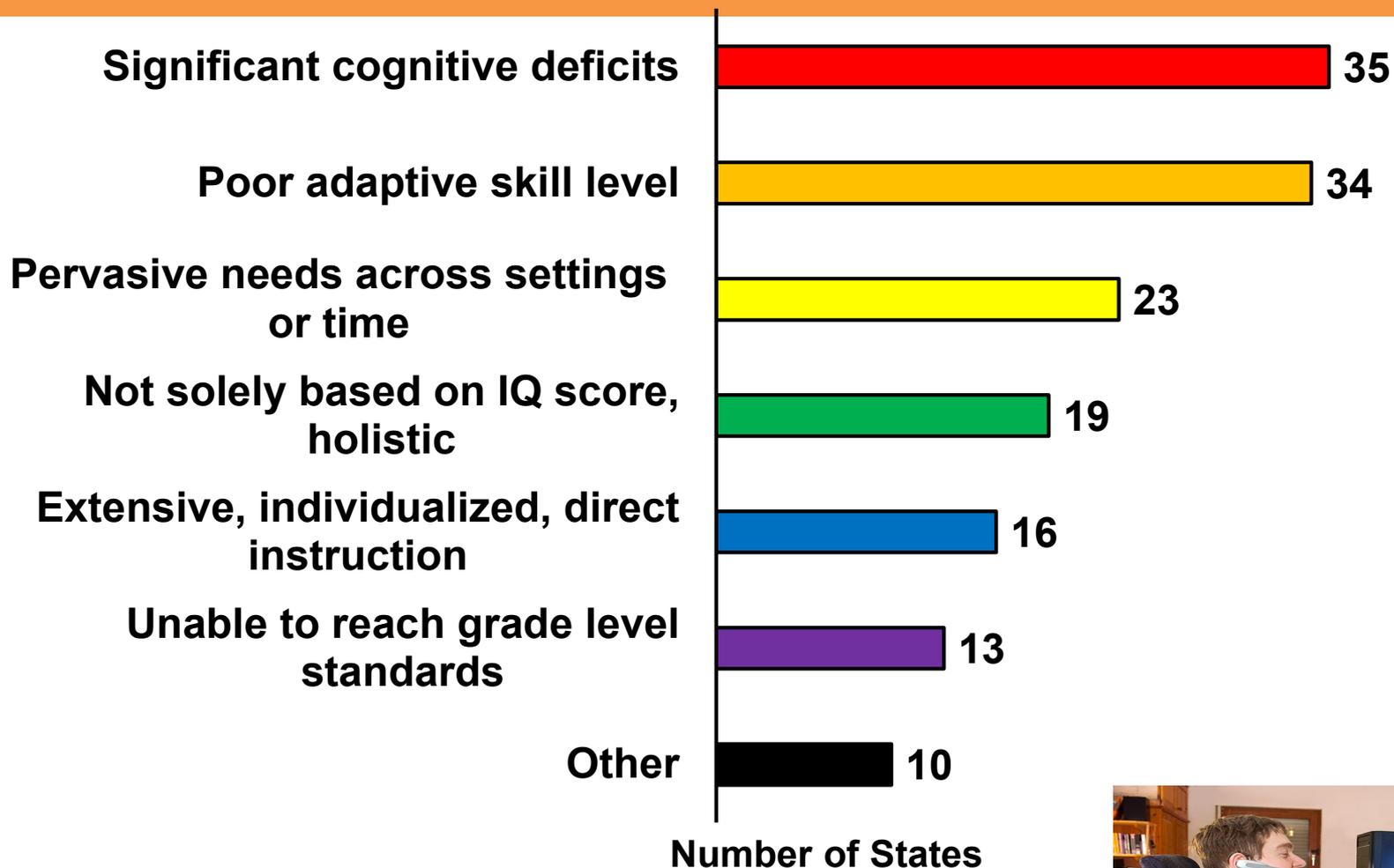
These intensive and on-going supports and services are typically provided directly by educators and are delivered across all educational settings.

DEFINITION EXAMPLE: ARIZONA

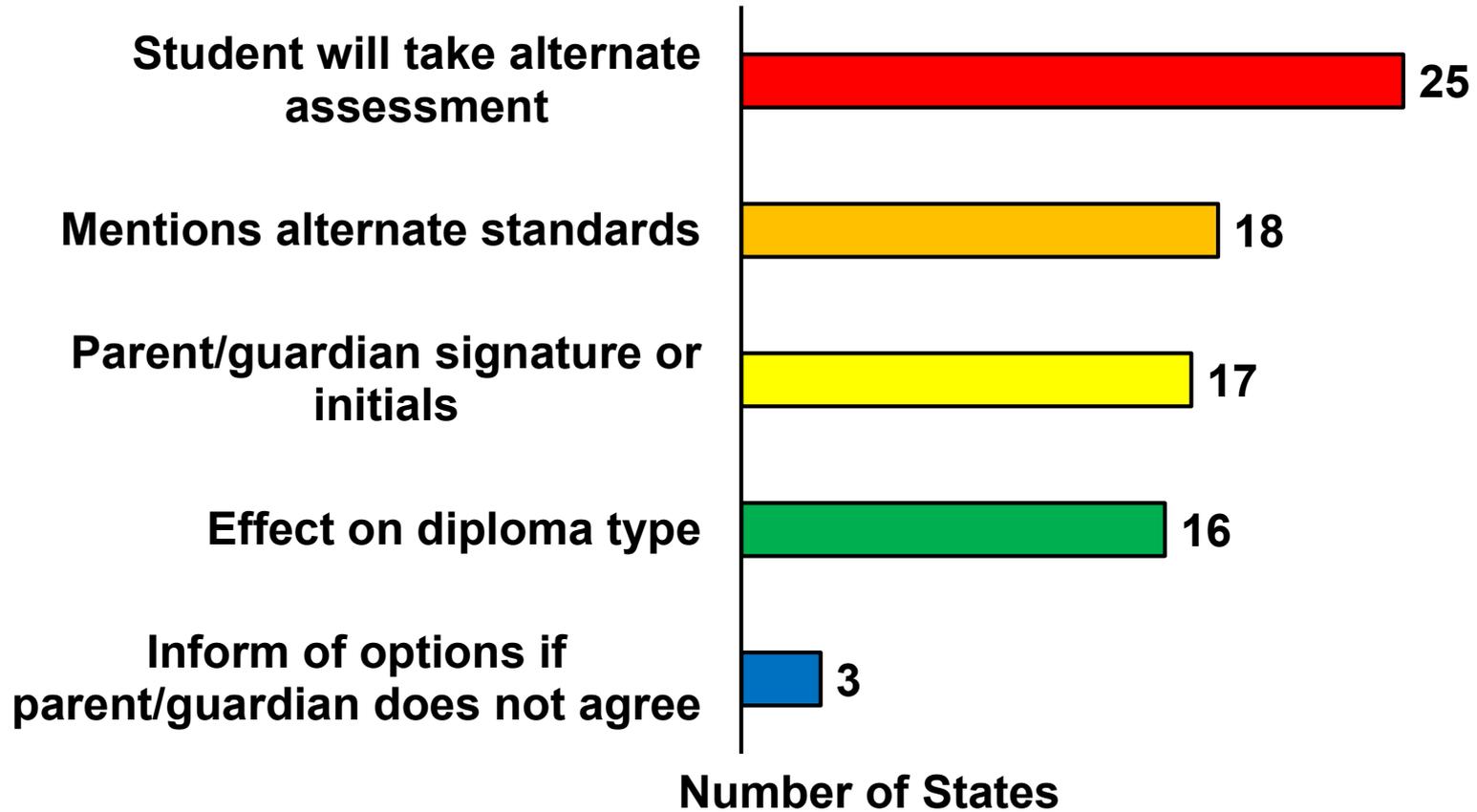
A student with a significant cognitive disability is one who has records that indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is defined as actions essential for an individual to live independently and to function safely in daily life. Having a significant cognitive disability is not determined by an IQ test score, but rather a holistic understanding of a student.



Components of State Definitions of Significant Cognitive Disabilities (top 6 + other)



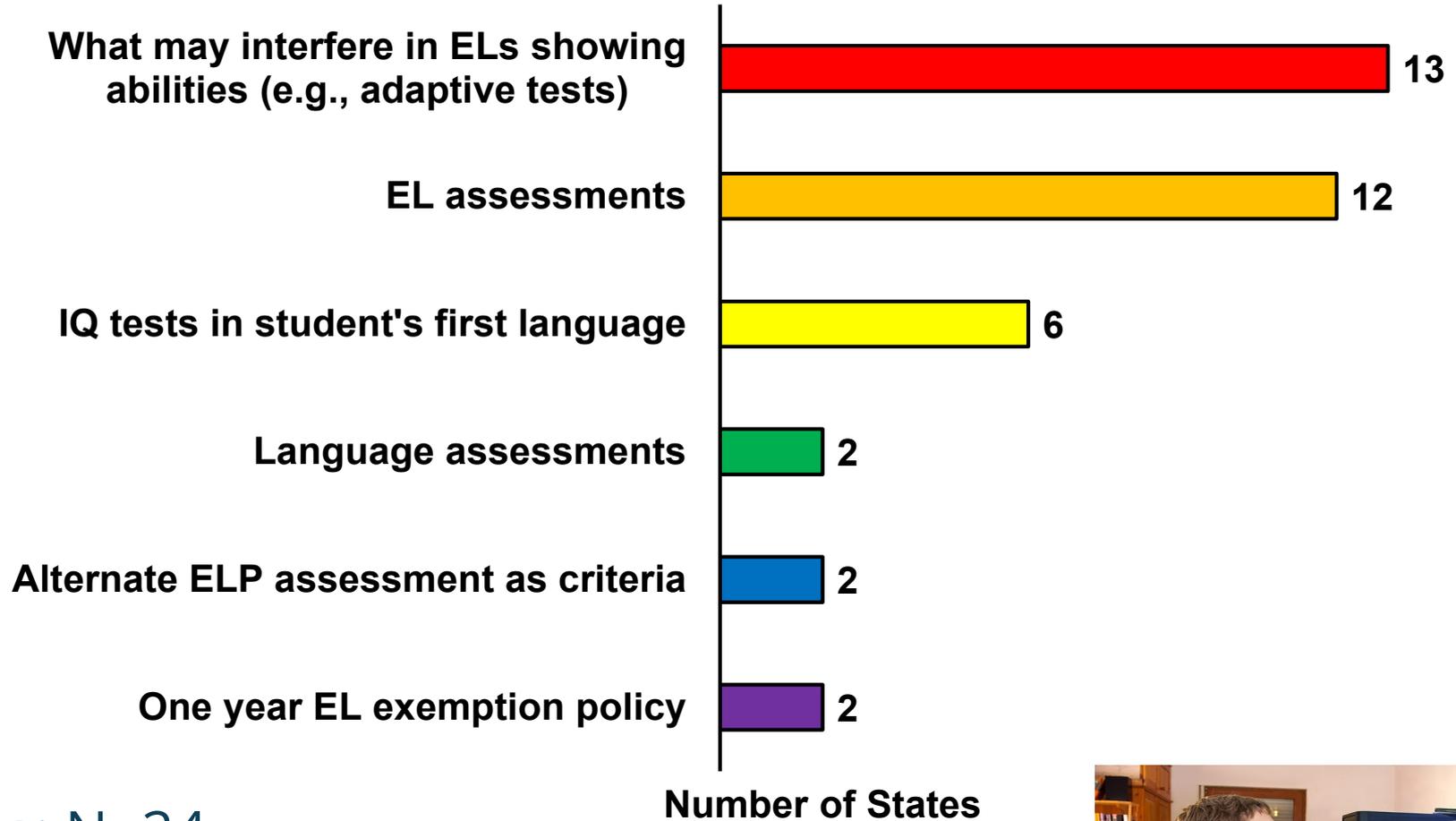
Parent Information (top 5)



Note: N=26



Mentions of English Learner or Language in AA- AAAS Criteria (top 6)



Note: N=24



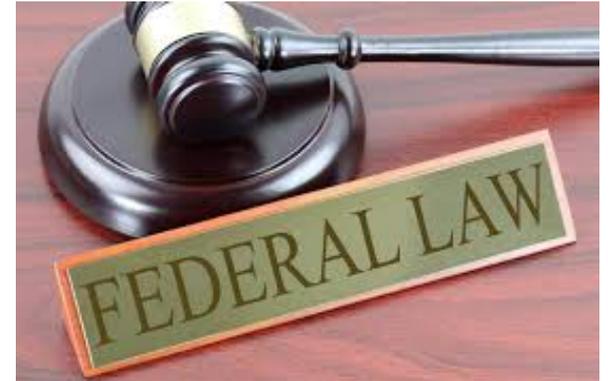
STATE-DEFINED ALTERNATE DIPLOMA



FEDERAL INFORMATION (ESSA)



Every Student Succeeds Act



Definition of “state-defined alternate diploma” included in Sec. 8101. Definitions

Specifically designated for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards



Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

- The state-defined alternate diploma counts in the ACGR.

STATE-DEFINED ALTERNATE DIPLOMA

Federal Requirements:

- ✓ **Standards based**
- ✓ **Aligned** with state requirements for the regular high school diploma
- ✓ Obtained within the **time period** for which the state ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education (FAPE)

✚ it must meet the implied condition of being **state defined!**

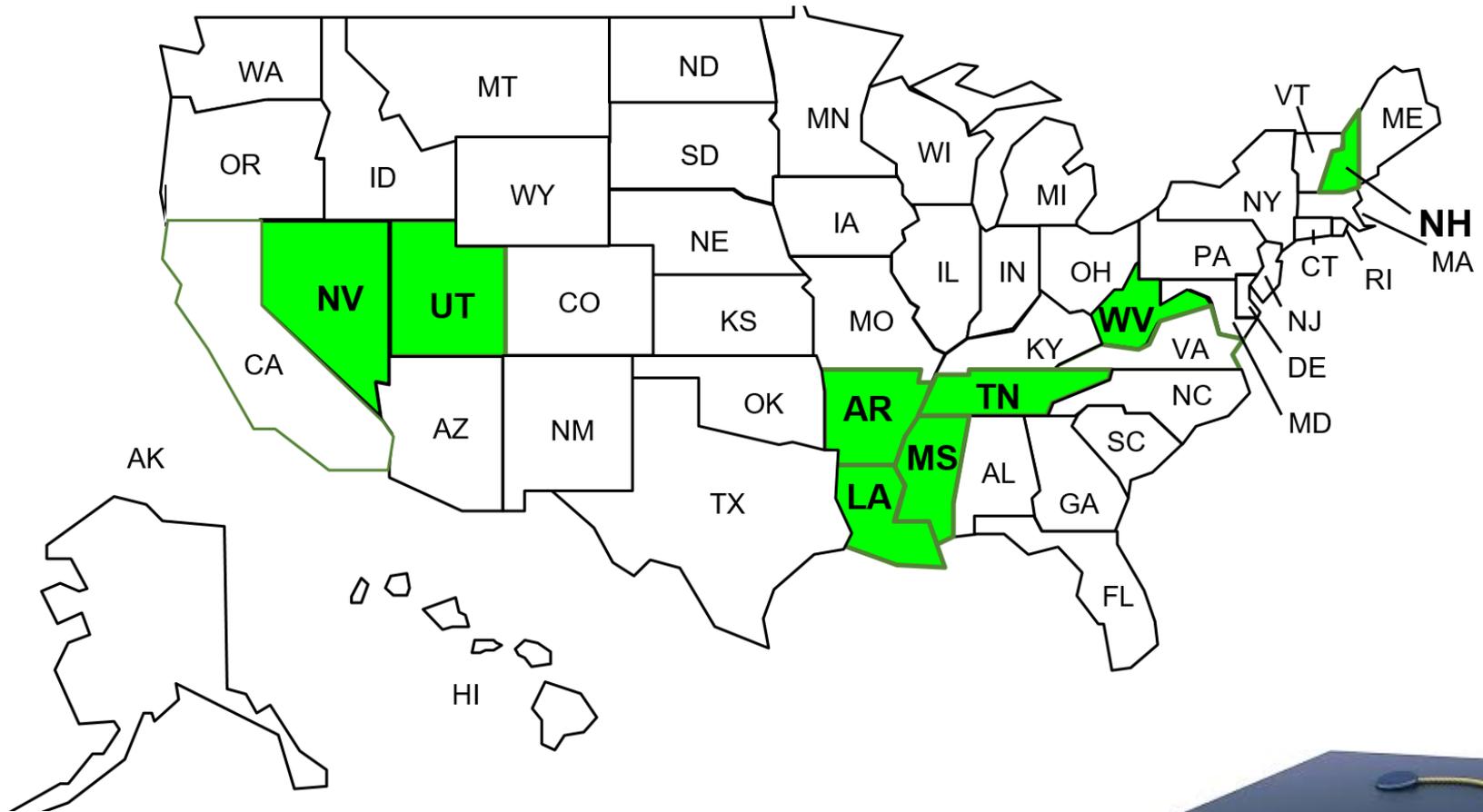


STATE-DEFINED ALTERNATE DIPLOMA ANALYSIS

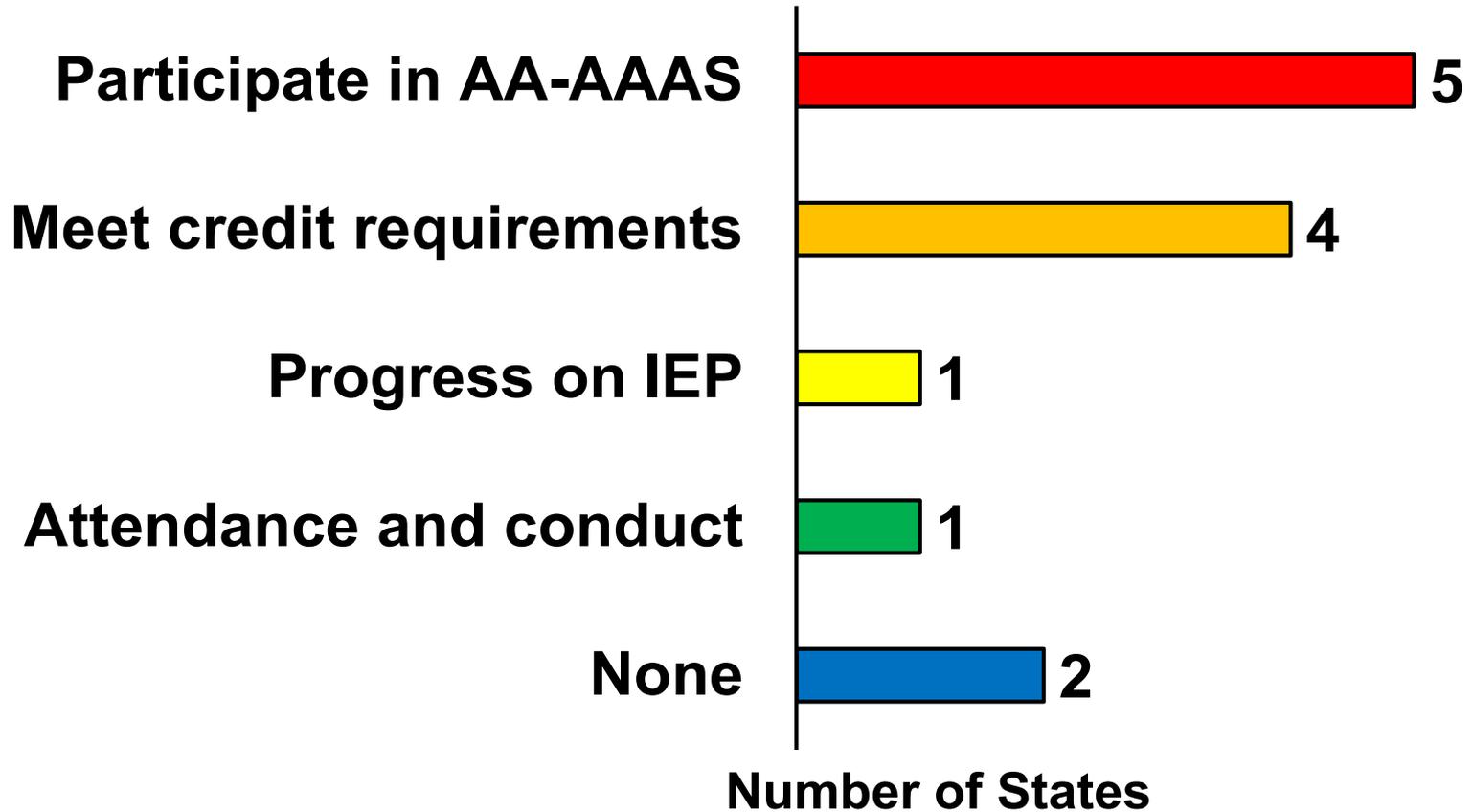
- **Purpose of study:** To summarize the status of state-defined alternate diplomas three years after ESSA indicated that states could develop these diplomas and use them in accountability calculations.
- **Method:** From mid-January to mid-February 2019, NCEO staff searched the websites of state education agencies to collect relevant policy information.



STATES



ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS



TOTAL CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

STATES	ALTERNATE	STANDARD
Arkansas	22.0	22.0
Louisiana	21.0-25.0	23.0 or 24.0 (a)
Mississippi	24.0	24.0
Nevada	23.0	23.0
Tennessee	22.0	22.0
Utah	24.0	24.0
West Virginia	16.0 (b)	24.0

a: Louisiana had 2 standard diploma options

b: West Virginia's information was missing credit counts for some content areas.



CONTENT AREA CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

STATES	ENGLISH	MATH	SCIENCE
Arkansas	same	same	same
Louisiana	same	same	unique (a)
Mississippi	same	same	different
Nevada	same	different	different
Tennessee	same	same	same
Utah	same	same	same
West Virginia	same	different	same

a: In Louisiana, the number of credits in science is less than for the university diploma, but the same as for the career diploma.



TYPE OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE

STATES	ADM.	TEACHERS	PARENTS	STUDENTS
AR	Req	Req	Req	Req
LA	Req	Req	Req	Req
MS	Req	Req, Imp	Req	Req
NV	Req	Req, Imp	Req	Req
NH	Req	Req	Req	Req
TN	Req	Req	Req	Req
UT	Req	Req	Req	Req
WV	Req	Req, Imp	Req	Req

Requirement resources and **Implementation** resources.



REFERENCES

- [2018-19 participation guidelines and definitions for alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards \(NCEO Report 415\)](#) (2019, October)
- [Status of state-defined alternate diplomas in 2018-19 \(NCEO Report 416\)](#) (2019, September)
- [2016-2017 APR snapshot #21: AA-AAS participation and performance](#) (2019, July)

REFERENCES (continued)

- [2015-2016 APR Snapshot #18: AA-AAS Participation and Performance](#) (2018, July)
- [Alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities: Participation guidelines and definitions \(NCEO Report 406\)](#) (2017, December)
- [Considerations for developing state-defined alternate diplomas for students with significant cognitive disabilities](#) (2016, November; updated 2017, March)

Discussion

- What are the benefits and challenges . . .
 - 1% threshold on participation in the AA-AAAS
- What are the benefits and challenges . . .
 - State-defined alternate diplomas

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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