

# State-Defined Alternate Diplomas



# OBJECTIVES

1. To clarify what ESSA says about the state-defined alternate diploma
2. To generate discussion about the pros and cons of developing a state-defined alternate diploma
3. To identify next steps the state will take (if any)

# AGENDA

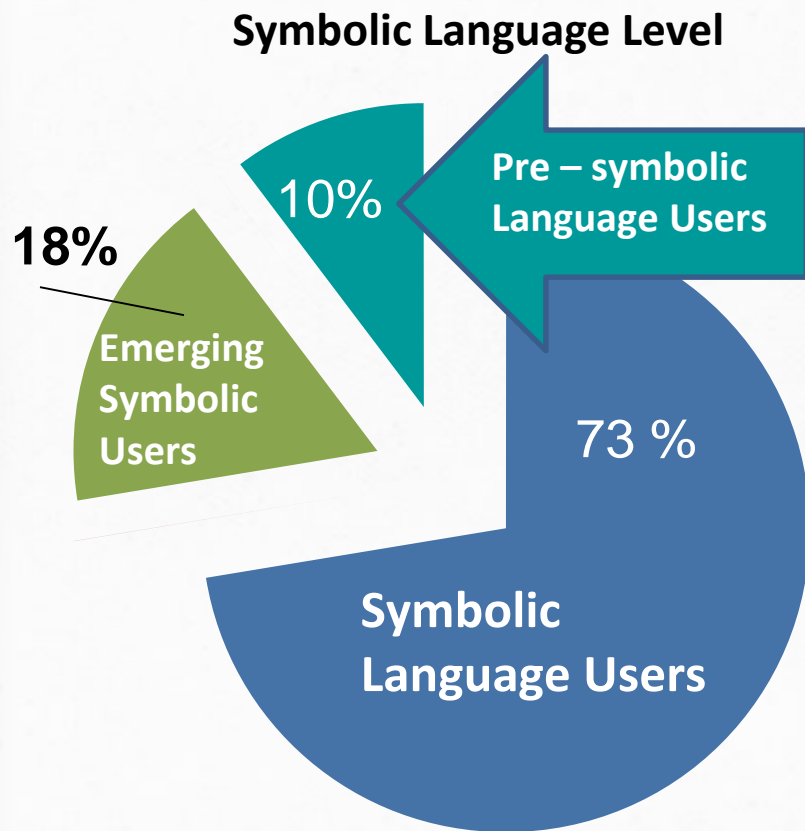
- Introductions
- Who Are We Talking About?
- Current Status in Your State
- ESSA Language on State-Defined Alternate Diplomas
- Considerations for Deciding Whether to Offer a State-Defined Alternate Diploma
- Steps for Creating a State-Defined Alternate Diploma
- Questions?

# Who Are We Talking About?

# History of Education for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

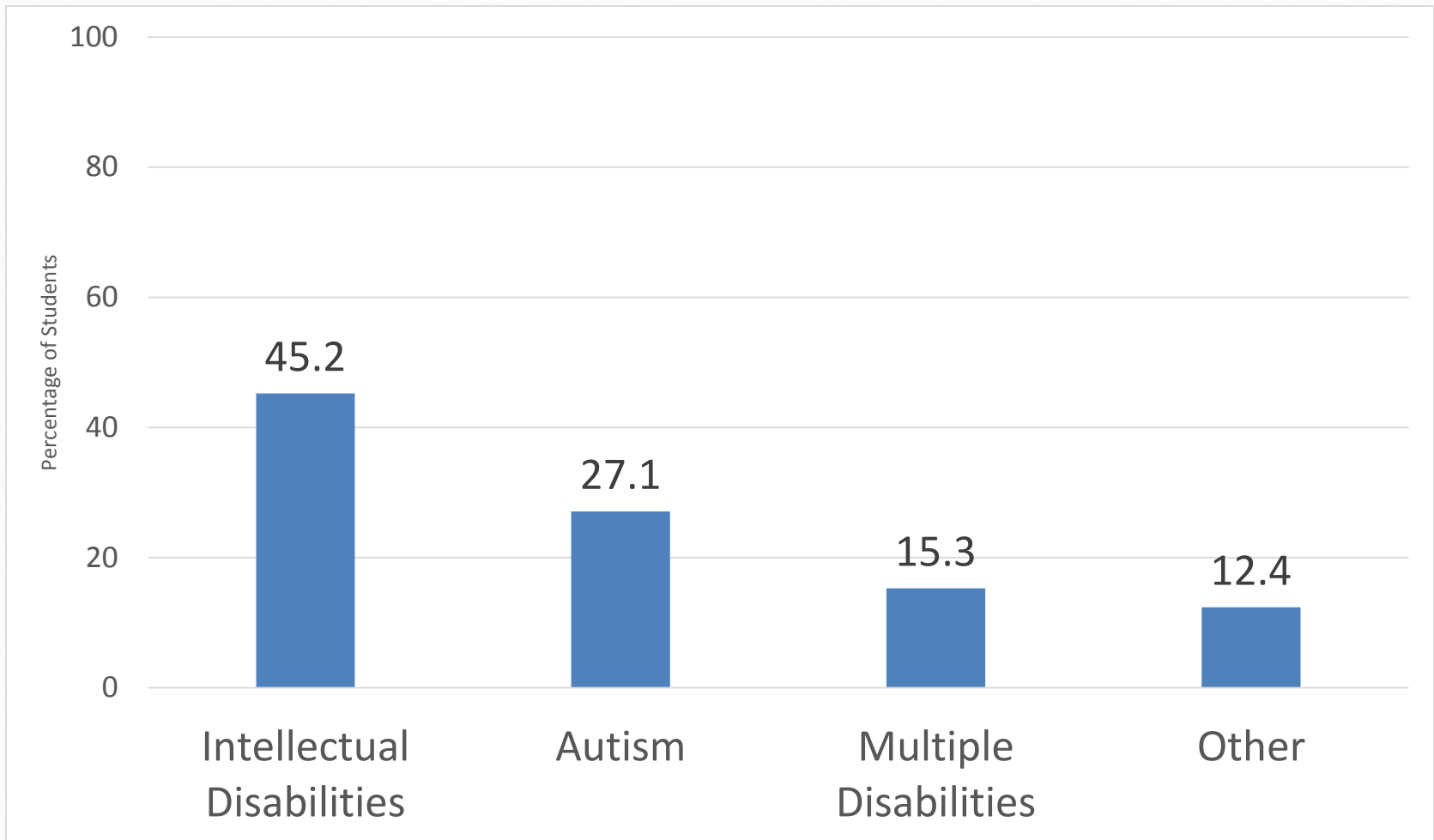
- **IDEA 1997 required the development of alternate assessments by 2000 for students unable to participate in regular assessments**
- **Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities were first “named” in 2003, when ESEA allowed for up to 1% to be included in an alternate assessment based on alternative achievement standards**
- **Accountability attention has resulted in greatly increased attention to academic instruction for these students**

# Who Are the Students? Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities



Most students with significant cognitive disabilities have either emerging symbolic or symbolic communication skills.

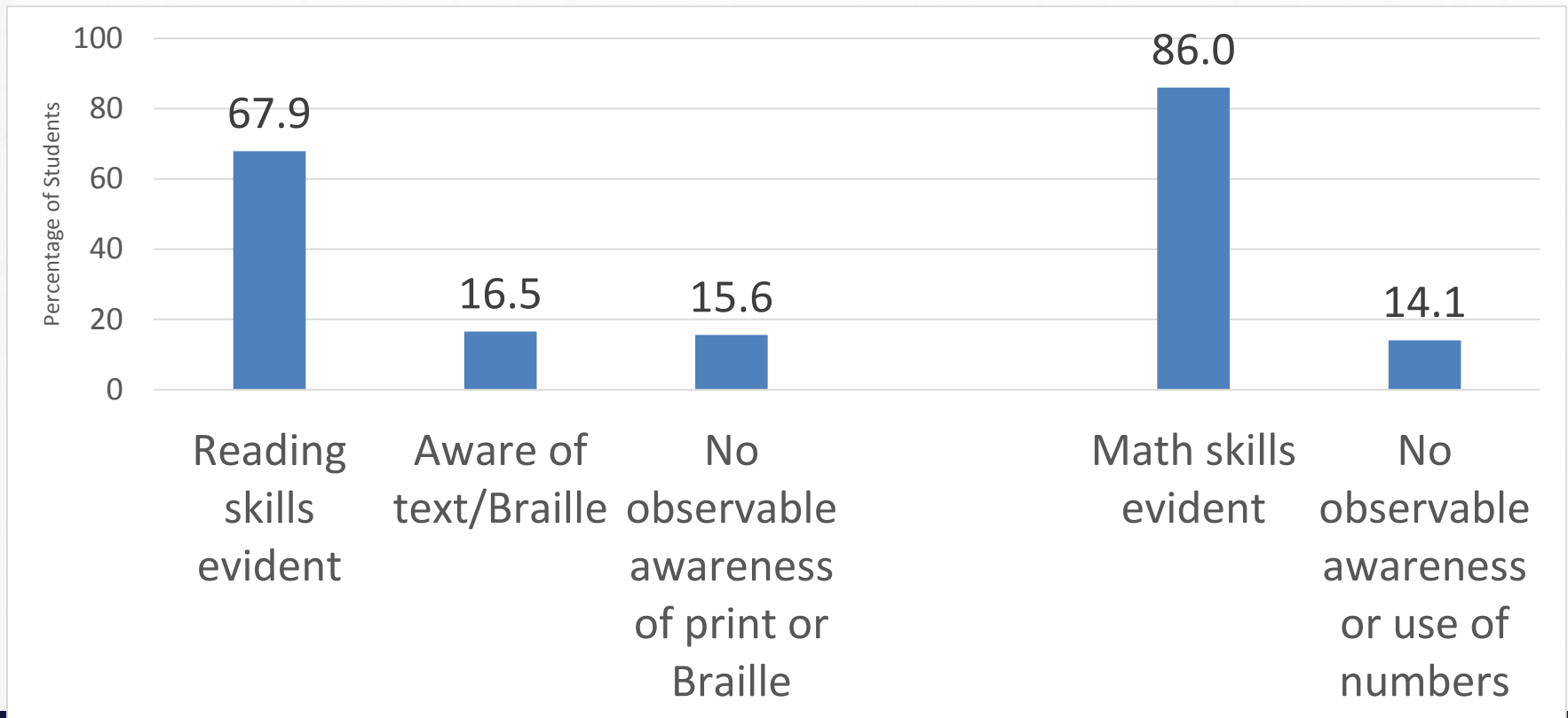
# Who Are the Students? Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities





# Who Are the Students? Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities – cont.

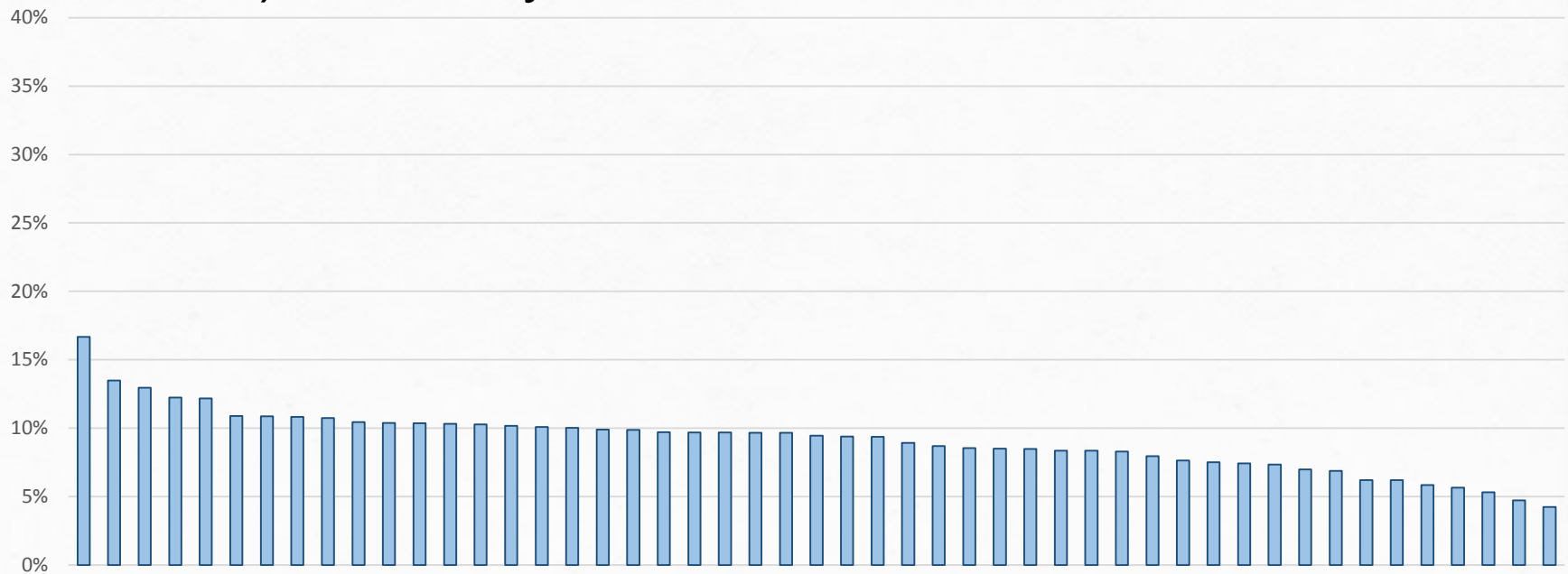
## Reading and Math Skills





# Who Are the Students? Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities – cont.

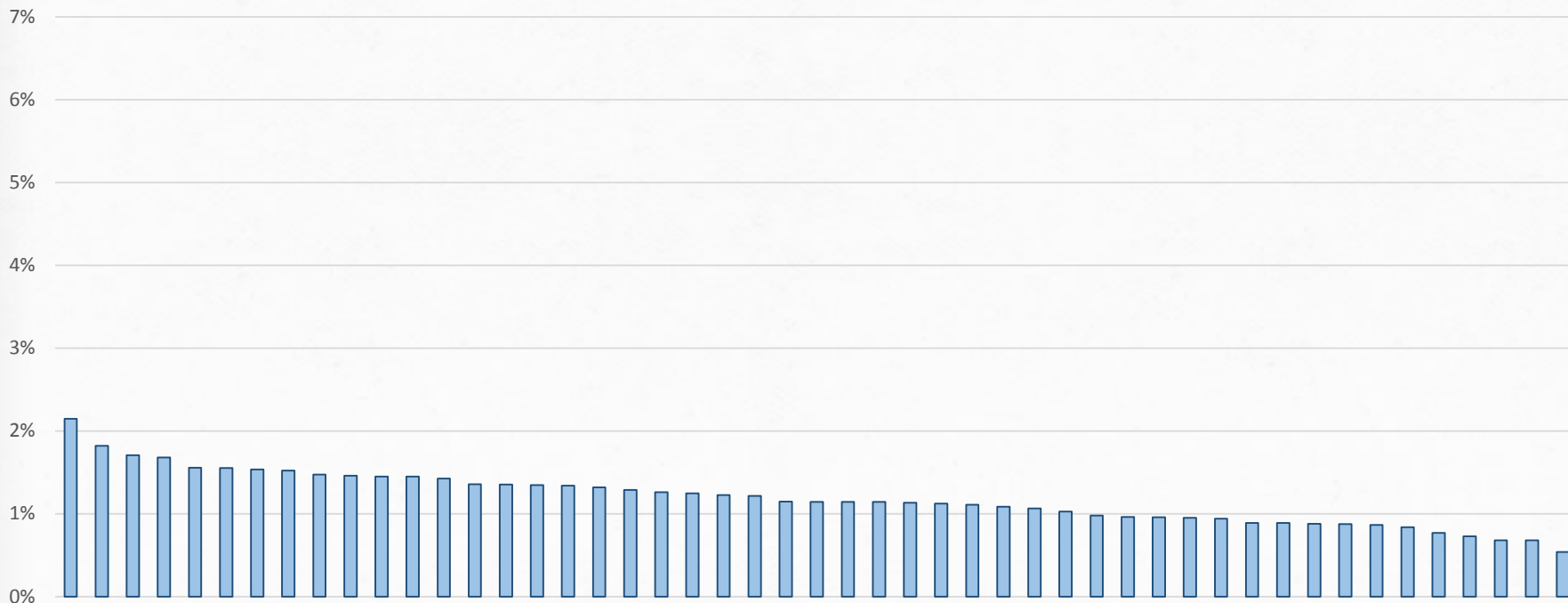
Percentage of Grade 8 Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (Based on Only Students with Disabilities) Varies by State\*



\*Based on 2013-14 Participation in the Alternate Reading Assessment

# Who Are the Students? Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities – cont.

## Percentage of Grade 8 Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (Based on all Grade 8 Students) Varies by State\*



# ESSA Language on State-Defined Alternate Diplomas

# ESSA Language

- **Definition of “state-defined alternate diploma” included in Sec. 8101. Definitions (see Brief)**
- **Specifically designated for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards**

# ESSA Language – cont.

- **The state-defined alternate diploma must meet three requirements:**
  - ✓ **Standards-based**
  - ✓ **Aligned with the State requirements for the regular high school diploma**
  - ✓ **Obtained within the same period for which the State ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education under section 612(a)(1) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1))**

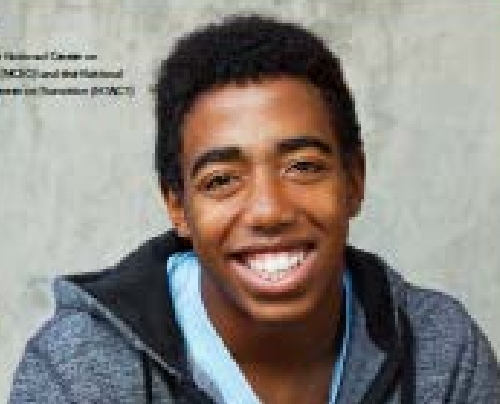
# ESSA Language – cont.

- **PLUS, the state-defined alternate diploma must meet the implied condition of being state defined!**

**[This may be a challenge for states that currently allow districts to set graduation requirements]**



# ESSA Language – Questions?

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**Considerations for Developing State-Defined Alternate Diplomas for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities**

Title of the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), allows for the inclusion in graduation accountability of a diploma option for students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAC) per Title II. The inclusion of state-defined alternate diplomas in the Title II adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) accountability formula.



**See Brief, *Considerations for Developing State-Defined Alternate Diplomas for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities* for considerations about each of the four requirements (3 directly stated plus 1 inferred) for the state-defined alternate diploma**



# Considerations for Deciding Whether to Offer a State- Defined Alternate Diploma

# Considerations

- **Do current diploma options in your state adequately meet the needs of all students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities?**
  - **Viable pathway to meaningful access to college, careers, and community?**
  - **Reflect an opportunity to earn a diploma that shows completion of a rigorous standards-based program of study?**

# Considerations – cont.

- **Do stakeholders want a diploma for students with significant cognitive disabilities?**
  - **Has a discussion occurred with educators and parents of students with significant cognitive disabilities?**
  - **If educators and parents are positive, what do businesses, industry councils, and educational institutions think?**

# Considerations – cont.

- **Do students with significant cognitive disabilities have the opportunity to learn rigorous standards-based content?**
  - **Is it possible that an state-defined alternate diploma would increase opportunity to learn?**
  - **Can educators be prepared for this shift toward “student stakes” for students with significant cognitive disabilities?**

# Steps for Creating a State-Defined Alternate Diploma

# Steps for Creating...

- 1. Define the meaning of “state-defined alternate diploma”**
  - **What would be the purpose for having a state-defined alternate diploma?**
  - **What would it mean if a student earned a state-defined alternate diploma?**

# Steps for Creating...

- 2. Examine policy adjustments that need to be made to incorporate the State-defined alternate diploma into current educational policies**
  - **Would the student who receives it be on track to pursue postsecondary education or employment (consistent with WIOA)?**



# Steps for Creating... – cont.

- 3. Determine the course and exit exam requirements that will align with those requirements for the regular diploma**
  - **Similar course content requirements?**
  - **If there is a state exit-exam, is there also an exit exam for students with significant cognitive disabilities?**

# Steps for Creating... – cont.

- 4. Revise assessment participation requirements to ensure that only those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in alternate exit exams to earn a State-defined alternate diploma**
  - **Check participation rates at high school level**
  - **Check proficiency rates at high school level**

# Steps for Creating... – cont.

- 5. Provide professional development to promote access to the general curriculum and opportunity to learn for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities**
  - **Check available resources from the two alternate assessment consortia**
    - ✓ **NCSC: <https://wiki.ncscpartners.org>**
    - ✓ **DLM: <http://dimpd.com>**

# RESOURCES

- Thurlow, M., Albus, D., Lazarus, S., & Vang, M. (2014). *Graduation policies for students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in states' AA-AAS (Synthesis Report 97)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Thurlow, M., Test, D., Lazarus, S., Klare, M., & Fowler, C. (2016). *Considerations for Developing State-Defined Alternate Diplomas for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Thurlow, M. L., Wu, Y., Quenemoen, R. F., & Towles, E. (2016, January). *Characteristics of students with significant cognitive disabilities (NCSC Brief #8)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center and State Collaborative.

# Group Discussion

1. What are the pros and cons of developing a state-defined alternate diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?
2. What is happening in your state for graduating students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?

# NEXT STEPS

## 1. What's Next?

- Start a Community of Practice (CoP) around Alternative Diplomas OR get email information from us, OR...?

## 2. If CoP, what timeline for meetings? Monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly...other?

## 3. If CoP, what happens at next meeting?

- Start an action plan for your state and share with the group? OR...Other ideas?

# THANK YOU



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