Chapter 2: Identifying Students and Considering Why and Whether to Assess Them with an AA-MAS

Rachel Quenemoen, NCEO

The contents of this publication were developed under cooperative agreement S283B050019 with the U. S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.
Overarching Themes

- Clear link between assessment, instruction, and student cognition,
  - Several of the chapters focus on the importance of bringing lessons learned in studying the students and designing the assessments into the classroom.
  - Similar to accommodations, certain alterations will only be successful to the degree they are incorporated into a student’s daily instruction.

- Important to develop a validity argument for this assessment early in the process and test the various assumptions throughout.
  - Testing the assumption that a new assessment is needed is one of the first important recommendations.
  - Many chapters address ongoing collection and evaluation of validity evidence to ensure that the development is in line with the expected goals.

- Consider how to incorporate the recommendations into an existing assessment and accountability system
  - Including how to work with current state content standards and grade-level achievement standards.
Questions from Appendix C: Tool for State Policymakers

- See questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16, 20, 22, 28

- Chapter 2 is a starting point to your process in answering these questions, but the answers will evolve as you work - many of the chapters support this work.

- The answers will vary – based on your own state’s context.
Frame for articulating your state philosophy and guiding assumptions

- States have a great deal of flexibility in decisions about whether and how to implement AA-MAS.
- State leaders have a responsibility to articulate the philosophy and beliefs that these decisions reflect, and how the decisions may affect the students who may participate in an AA-MAS.
- Identifying who the students are will involve analyses of current achievement data, understanding of the instructional and curricular contexts experienced by these students, and stakeholder insights.
What do you know about these students?

- In states that have identified which students are achieving at the lowest levels on the general assessment, students who are the lowest performing are not all students with disabilities.

- Key question: Do opportunities to learn (OTL) for low performing students differ for those with and without disabilities?

- Key question: Do these students vary on how they respond to various assessment design choices?
Articulate expected consequences, monitor actual consequences

- If different, potentially less challenging, assessment options are provided for students who are achieving at low levels, then careful monitoring of consequences of the options is essential. This will ensure the intended positive consequences of improved outcomes are occurring and unintended negative consequences such as lowered expectations and outcomes are not.
RtI, Progress Monitoring – possible role in ensuring OTL and achievement

- Consider data from multiple sources (e.g., Response to Intervention (RtI), progress monitoring, interim assessments, etc.) to document a decision about a student’s participation in AA-MAS each year
- Consider documentation of the evidence-based practices that have been implemented for the student based on these data.
Building a system – and ensuring that there are no dead-ends

- Regardless of the underlying philosophy, states will have to define how the AA-MAS contributes to an overall system of assessments for accountability purposes. That is, there should be a coherent educational logic or relationship between the AA-MAS assessment and other alternate assessments based on either AA-AAS or AA-GLAS, as well as with the general assessment, with or without use of accommodations.
How effective are other parts of the system in allowing students to show what they know?

- Universal design, accommodations policies, decision-making guidelines, training, and monitoring should support the validity of the system of accountability assessments so that all students are included in ways that support use of assessment results in a standards-based accountability system.
Commonly articulated philosophies – examples for state discussion

- See Discussion Tool file for across Department discussions following this call