Commonly Voiced State Philosophies and Beliefs and Their Implications for Use of Alternate Assessments based on Modified Achievement Standards

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<th>Philosophy 1 (does not appear to match AA-MAS requirements)</th>
<th>Philosophy 2</th>
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<td>There is a group of students with disabilities who are being instructed in an easier curriculum linked to the grade-level content but different from their enrolled grade classmates, and thus the state needs to provide a modified assessment to match the curriculum. Given that many of these students will never catch up to same-grade peers, this practice will result in very different expectations for student outcomes.</td>
<td>Student achievement needs to be considered in the context of systematic opportunities to learn (services, supports, specialized instruction, etc.) the general curriculum based on grade-level content and achievement standards. For students who do not as yet have these opportunities, intervention on opportunities to learn is the first priority in order to accelerate their learning. Given that it will take some time for these students to regain the lost ground, short term AA-MAS options are an appropriate interim measure to hold schools accountable for their learning. These AA-MAS should cover substantially the same content as the general assessment, but may have more content coverage at the lower end of the grade-level content and achievement expectations. Still, the state policy is based on an assumption that eventually, with strong interventions and evidence-based practices in student services, supports, and specialized instruction, these students will achieve the same outcomes as typical peers.</td>
<td>Student characteristics related to disability, ethnicity, poverty, and other demographic categories have been associated with a history of low expectations and limited opportunities to learn. Until we intervene to change learning opportunities, we cannot use past performance to predict which students could achieve to proficiency. This is true for students with disabilities and for those without disabilities. Designing a new assessment option now jeopardizes an opportunity for reform to ensure all students are taught well. The state policy must ensure students are being taught first, then see who is left achieving at low levels once all are taught well before building any assessment options that may risk perpetuating lowered expectations and outcomes.</td>
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Implications of Philosophy 1: This philosophy does not appear to match the requirements under the 2%

Implications of Philosophy 2: This philosophy seems to match the language of the 2% regulation. Response-to-Intervention and standards-based progress

Implications of Philosophy 3: This approach assumes that the state will provide leadership and resources to intervene on historical lack of
regulation. This philosophy may match the needs of a very small group of student who may now participate in AA-AAS but for whom the current alternate achievement standards are not an appropriately high expectation.

In other words, these are students who currently may be topping out on the AA-AAS or who are performing at the very lowest levels of the general assessment. The 1% regulation permits states to set more than one alternate achievement standard.

Development of a second AA-AAS with higher performance expectations than on the existing AA-AAS may be warranted.

Careful guidelines, training, and monitoring would be required to avoid inappropriate decisions about which students could benefit from this more challenging AA-AAS.

monitoring tools should be in place to get better data to understand their needs and to plan improved services supports, and specialized instruction to ensure that they do, indeed, catch up over time.

A state working under this philosophy may consider requiring 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, and also require documentation of the evidence-based practices that have been implemented for the student based on these data.

They may also decide to implement an AA-MAS only at selected grades, and instead promote and support efforts like RtI and progress monitoring to prevent students from falling behind. Effective implementation of universal design will be a key component of this strategy.

opportunities to learn for all the students who are not currently achieving proficiency. Certainly systematic interventions like RtI and progress monitoring, universal design, new interim or formative assessment options, and continued efforts in states to implement programs like Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) contribute to this effort. These efforts are laudable and difficult to take to scale, but they are necessary.

They are not, however, sufficient to ensure that all students who historically have had limited opportunities to learn and continued low expectations for their performance achieve at higher levels.

States that voice this philosophy will look for ways to intervene on attitudes and beliefs of educators and the public who still find it appropriate to expect less of students simply because they have a disability label, or who are poor or of minority status.

Another philosophical stance, outside the parameters of the current accountability system: There is another philosophy underlying assessment choices in states that is not included above, since it does not assume that participation in these assessments should lead to systematic improvement in instruction and curriculum for low-performing students and ultimately to improved student achievement, as is assumed in the current accountability model. That set of beliefs is focused around the need to provide what is often described as “relief” to districts and schools from the consequences of system accountability for students with disabilities.