



## Considerations for Consortia as States Transition Away from AA-MAS

States with an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (AA-MAS) that received a flexibility waiver from some of the requirements of No Child Left Behind are required to phase out their use of this assessment. And, on August 23, 2013, the U.S. Department of Education published a proposed rollback of regulation that allowed the AA-MAS.

Not all states developed an AA-MAS. Sixteen states offered this optional assessment between 2011 and 2013. Many, but not all of these states, also belonged to one of the two Race to the Top Assessment (RTTA) consortia that are developing new general assessments—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced). Table 1 shows the regular assessment consortium memberships of states that have had an AA-MAS.

As states make the transition from the AA-MAS, key considerations for the consortia are:

- Include low-performing students who currently participate in an AA-MAS in the RTTA consortia assessments
- Inform assessments by lessons learned in states
- Include low-performing students in field tests
- Develop accessibility and accommodations policies that address the needs of low-performing students
- Customize non-summative assessments for low-performing students
- Collect and examine data on low-performing students

### About this Brief

This Brief addresses the need for consortia to assist their member states in moving away from the AA-MAS. It focuses on key considerations for consortia as they address the inclusion of low-performing students in all member states, informed by the lessons learned from the AA-MAS. Topics highlighted in this brief are: including low-performing students in field test designs, customizing non-summative assessments to include low-performing students, and collecting and examining data on this group of students.

This and other Briefs in this series address the opportunities, resources, and challenges that cross-state assessment collaboratives 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.

**Table 1. Membership of States with AA-MAS in the RTTA Consortia\***

| State          | Regular Assessment (RTTA) Consortia |                  |      |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|------|
|                | PARCC                               | Smarter Balanced | None |
| California+    |                                     | X                |      |
| Connecticut    |                                     | X                |      |
| Georgia        |                                     |                  | X    |
| Indiana        | X                                   |                  |      |
| Kansas         |                                     |                  | X    |
| Louisiana      | X                                   |                  |      |
| Maryland       | X                                   |                  |      |
| Michigan       |                                     | X                |      |
| Minnesota      |                                     |                  | X    |
| North Carolina |                                     | X                |      |
| North Dakota+  |                                     | X                |      |
| Oklahoma       |                                     |                  | X    |
| Pennsylvania   | X                                   | X                |      |
| Tennessee      | X                                   |                  |      |
| Texas          |                                     |                  | X    |
| Virginia       |                                     |                  | X    |
| Total          | 5                                   | 6                | 6    |

\* The states identified as belonging to PARCC and Smarter Balanced are those that were reported on the consortia websites on January 16, 2014.

+State is not currently operating under an ESEA flexibility agreement.

All consortium states, not just those with an AA-MAS, have low-performing students. Although states that implemented an AA-MAS have immediate challenges to address in phasing out this assessment, all states must address the instructional and assessment needs of low-performing students. Low-performing students CAN learn grade-level content when educators are committed to providing high-quality instruction that meets the students' learning needs, along with appropriate supports and accommodations. States working together in consortia have an opportunity to share resources and expertise to raise expectations and outcomes of low-performing students.

## Considerations

**Include low-performing students who currently participate in an AA-MAS in the RTTA consortia assessments.** Students who were eligible for an AA-MAS should be expected to participate in the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments. The next generation of assessments under development by PARCC and Smarter Balanced is designed to be innovative and more inclusive, with increased capacity to assess a broad population of students. Both of these consortia and their member states need to communicate to Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams and parents about the importance of these students participating in the general assessment.

**Inform assessments by lessons learned in states.** The states that developed an AA-MAS learned many lessons about assessment design that can inform the development of accessible assessments. States that developed an AA-MAS increased their understanding of universally designed assessments and good testing practices. In addition, many of these states experimented with various assessment design adjustments, including increased white space, fewer answer choices, and chunking reading passages. Consortia should look to the lessons learned about assessment design as the next generation of assessments is being built.

**Include low-performing students in field tests.** Consortia should ensure inclusion of low-performing students in their field tests. It is important to include low-performing students in field tests so that test developers can gather information about how items function for these students. Although the AA-MAS was developed only for students with IEPs, low-performing students include those who are English language learners, English language learners with disabilities, students on 504 plans, and other students who have neither a special education nor English language learner designation.

**Develop accessibility and accommodations policies that address the needs of low-performing students.** Consortia should be sure that their accommodations policies address the inclusion needs of students who may have participated in the AA-MAS. Accommodations and other accessibility features help students show what they know and can do in relation to grade-level content standards. In determining accommodations policies for an assessment, it is important to remember that accommodations do not change the construct being measured. An example of an appropriate accommodation would be allowing a student to use a calculator on a math assessment that does not measure the student's ability to calculate.

**Customize non-summative assessments for low-performing students.** Consortia should be sure that their non-summative assessments

account for the differences in the learning paths of this group of students. Interim and other non-summative assessments may be used to monitor progress of low-performing students. It is essential that these assessments be developed using the principles of universally designed assessments, as well as incorporate the other lessons learned from the AA-MAS. In addition, students who need accommodations for instruction and assessment should have them available on non-summative assessments as well as for the summative assessments. Finally, educators should use caution in making judgments about the results of non-summative assessments because low-performing students may have different learning progressions from those of other students.

**Collect and examine data on low-performing students.** As the next generation assessments are implemented, consortia should be sure to collect and examine data across member states to track the performance of low-performing students. Working together in consortia, states have an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about the characteristics of low-performing students as well as their performance on grade-level content assessments. By using data well, consortia can help states and districts improve expectations and outcomes for the students who may have previously been assessed on an AA-MAS.

## Conclusion

As states transition away from the AA-MAS, several considerations emerge that have implications for the assessment policies and practices of the RTTA consortia. The consortia must account for all students, including low-performing students with disabilities. Low-performing students will benefit from a well-informed and structured transition process.

## Resources

The following resources can be found on the NCEO website ([nceo.info](http://nceo.info)):

***Don't Forget Accommodations! Five Questions to Ask When Moving to Technology-based Assessments*** (NCEO Brief #1). (2011, March). NCEO. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

***Forum on Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-performing Students: Implications for Instruction and Assessment.*** (2013). Warren, S., Christensen, L., Shyyan, V., & Thurlow, M. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

***Including Students with Disabilities in Common Non-summative Assessments*** (NCEO Brief #6). (2012, July). NCEO. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

***Lessons Learned in Federally Funded Projects that Can Improve the Instruction and Assessment of Low Performing Students with Disabilities.*** (2013). Thurlow, M. L., Lazarus, S. S., & Bechard, S. (Eds.) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

***NCEO Brief: The Characteristics of Low Performing Students on Large-scale Assessments.*** (2010). Lazarus, S., Wu, Y.-C., Altman, J., & Thurlow, M. L. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

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