

Supporting IEP Team Decisions

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- **Making decisions about whether students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, should participate in state general or alternate assessments is one of the most critical decisions an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team makes because the decision may have both short- and long-term consequences.**
- **For IEP teams to confidently make decisions for instructional and assessment accommodations, team members need to consider many things, including student characteristics, needs, and preferences, as well as relevant laws and guidelines.**
- **Special education leaders and school administrators can help IEP teams by providing information and resources that support decisions about assessment participation and accommodations.**
- **It is essential to document and monitor all assessment participation and accommodation decisions to help ensure that there are no unusual patterns in participation and accommodation decisions across IEP teams, schools, or districts that need to be addressed.**

• **Key words:** IEP, Assessment Participation, Accessibility, Accommodations.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the heart of providing special education services to students with disabilities. It is a complex document that is supposed to include several required components (e.g., present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable annual goals, etc.; see Thurlow, 2009). According to the court case *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), “The essential function of an IEP is to set out a plan for pursuing academic and functional advancement” (p. 992). One component of the IEP that was introduced with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 was the student’s participation in state and district-wide assessments, including the accommodations to be provided. Although decisions about assessments and assessment accommodations are just one component of creating or revising an IEP, these decisions have lifelong implications for students with disabilities.

IEP teams are required to be composed of certain individuals, including “a representative of the district who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education, and who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and the availability of resources of the district, and has the

authority to allocate resources” (McElhinny & Pellegrin, 2014, p. 2). This representative is an administrator who often is the special education director, a special education coordinator, or a school principal. Research has documented the need for administrators, including school principals, to have basic knowledge of special education programming and requirements so that they can use their position to support special education services and decisions (Carney, 2021; Pregot, 2021). This individual should also be knowledgeable about making assessment participation decisions and decisions about accommodations (Hinkle et al., 2021a, 2021b). For English learners with disabilities,

It is essential that the IEP team include participants who have knowledge of the student’s language needs. It is also important that the IEP team include professionals with training, and preferably expertise, in second language acquisition and how to differentiate between the student’s needs stemming from a disability or lack of [English language proficiency]. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 2)

Research has identified the characteristics of leaders who are effective in supporting students with

disabilities in schools. Characteristics frequently cited are the beliefs, attitudes, and values of leaders (Council for Exceptional Children, 2022), as well as a vision for the future and a commitment to change when needed (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lararowitz, 2010; Lashley, 2007). Still, as Thurlow, Quenemoen, and Lazarus (2019) stated, “Principled leadership requires ...high quality staff development, coaching, and resources, along with oversight and monitoring of implementation, so that all schools, all teachers, and all students are successful” (p. 11).

In this article, we address the knowledge needed by leaders and the approaches that leaders should take to support IEP teams in making assessment participation and accommodation decisions. Too often, the type of training and support IEP team members need to make these decisions are unavailable to them. Administrators can provide these so that all team members have the information they need to make appropriate decisions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, general education teachers and school principals report being underprepared to effectively serve students with disabilities. Research reported by the CEEDAR Center has indicated that just over 10% of principals state that they are prepared to serve students with disabilities (Connally & Kimmel, n.d.; Galiatsos, Kruse, & Whittaker, 2019; Stelitano, Johnston, & Young, 2020). In other research, only 12% of a nationally representative sample of school principals and only 17% of general education teachers reported feeling well prepared to serve and teach students with disabilities (Galiatsos et al., 2019; Stelitano et al., 2020). There are few available data on how prepared principals and general education teachers think they are to serve English learners with disabilities, but some experts have proposed competencies educators in teacher training programs should develop to serve this population (Jozwik, Cuenca-Carlino, & Gardiner-Walsh, 2020; Whitenack, Gollhoer, & Burciaga, 2019).

In this article, we provide basic information administrators need to know about student participation in state and district-required assessments and about ways to ensure that students have needed accessibility supports, including accommodations. We highlight specific things that administrators can do to support IEP teams, as well as identify the critical role that administrators play in documenting and monitoring IEP processes and outcomes for students with disabilities.

Participation Decisions

States administer a general statewide summative test on grade-level standards in the content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science each year; some states also have statewide tests in other content areas (e.g., social studies). Most students with disabilities (including English learners with disabilities) participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations. States also provide a statewide summative alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) in reading, math, and science (and possibly other content areas), to a very small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, including English learners with significant cognitive disabilities. Data from these assessments contribute to program planning decisions. In addition, for English learners with disabilities, states provide an English language proficiency (ELP) assessment, and often an alternate ELP assessment, for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Districts often add to the state-required assessments that students take. Students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, must be included in these assessments, as required by IDEA. In addition, if the district requires these assessments, the need for alternate assessments that serve the same purpose must be addressed (Browder, Lazarus, & Thurlow, 2021; Lazarus, Hinkle et al., 2021).

One of the most important and difficult decisions IEP teams make is whether a student should participate in the general assessment or the AA-AAAS, and, for English learners with disabilities, whether the student should participate in the alternate ELP assessment, if one is available. The participation decision is a critical one because it may have short- and long-term consequences for the student. This means that IEP teams should carefully consider many factors that are relevant to student assessment participation before making this decision.

Student participation in assessments also contributes to program planning decisions. Ensuring the participation of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, is critical to making certain that student programming needs are met. Ideas for communicating about annual state assessment

participation are provided in a communication toolkit developed by National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO; Kwon et al., 2021).

One of the most important and difficult decisions IEP teams make is whether a student should participate in the general assessment or the AA-AAAS, and, for English learners with disabilities, whether the student should participate in the alternate ELP assessment, if one is available.

To aid in these assessment participation decisions, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to develop their own definitions of students with the “most significant cognitive disabilities” and to provide participation guidelines for IEP teams to use when deciding whether a student should participate in the AA-AAAS. Definitions and criteria vary across states (Thurlow, Lazarus et al., 2019), but all must: (a) acknowledge that the student has a significant cognitive disability and deficits in adaptive behavior; (b) indicate that the student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in grade- and age-appropriate curriculum; and (c) provide evidence that the student is learning content derived from the state content standards (ESSA, Section 200.6(a)(7)(iii)(d)(1)). States may choose to also include terminology such as “the student’s materials must be significantly adapted and significantly supported” in their definition, or they may include a set of exclusionary factors that are not to be considered in determining that the student should participate in the alternate assessment (e.g., socioeconomic status, English learner status, educational placement, emotional disturbance, etc.).

ESSA also placed a limitation of 1% at the state level on the percentage of tested students who can participate in the AA-AAAS. States must request waivers if they exceed the 1% requirement. To apply for a waiver, states are required to meet several requirements including that 95% of all students and 95% of students with disabilities participated in the state assessment. All states, including those that have met the 1% requirement at the state level, must

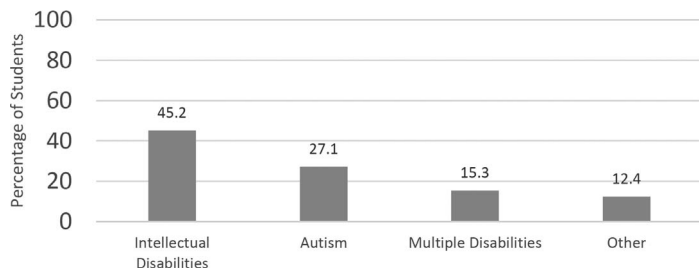
monitor and provide oversight to districts with AA-AAAS participation rates over 1%. Districts exceeding 1% participation are required to provide justifications to the state and may be required to participate in additional state monitoring and oversight activities (34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)(ii-iii)). These implications for district administrators emphasize the importance of being sure that decisions about which students participate in the AA-AAAS are appropriate and supported by evidence.

Decisions about whether an English learner with a disability should participate in the general ELP assessment or an alternate ELP assessment (if available) are also made by the IEP team, but the criteria for making these decisions are generally more complex. Liu et al. (2021) developed a framework for guiding these types of decisions, including a flowchart to help decision makers. Participation in the AA-AAAS is one criterion that is used for deciding English learner general or alternate assessment participation for students in Grades 3–8 and high school (and any other grades with state-required assessments), but that criterion cannot be applied in all grades in which ELP assessments are required (e.g., K–2 and nontested high school grades). Liu et al. (2021) provided possible criteria for those other grades.

Characteristics of Students Who Participate in the AA-AAAS and Alternate ELP Assessment

Research has identified numerous characteristics of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in states’ AA-AAAS (Almond et al., 2010; Kearns, Lewis, Hall, & Kleinert, 2007; Kearns, Towles-Reeves, Kleinert, Kleinert, & Thomas, 2011; Kleinert, Browder, & Towles-Reeves, 2009; Towles-Reeves, Kearns, Kleinert, & Kleinert, 2009). For example, we know that most students who participate in the AA-AAAS have intellectual disabilities, autism, or multiple disabilities. This finding is based on several studies that used the Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI; see Kearns, Kleinert, Kleinert, & Towles-Reeves, 2006), the First Contact Survey (Karvonen, 2019), or similar instruments completed by educators of the students. *Figure 1* presents LCI data collected from 15 states’ Spring 2015 AA-AAAS (Thurlow, Wu, Quenemoen, & Towles, 2016). It shows that the disability categories

Figure 1. Categorical labels of AA-AAAS participants. Note. Reprinted with permission from Thurlow et al. (2016).



of intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities accounted for 87.6% of students who participated in the 2015 operational assessment. Students with other primary categorical disabilities made up 12.4% of the students in the AA-AAAS. The “other disabilities” group included some categories of students not anticipated to typically participate in the AA-AAAS (e.g., specific learning disability, speech-language impairment, emotional disturbance), as well as others that may be appropriate if a cognitive disability also exists (e.g., deaf-blind).

Studies of the characteristics of students who participated in the AA-AAAS also examined communication, vision, hearing, and motor characteristics. For example, Thurlow et al. (2016) reported that most students participating in the AA-AAAS were perceived by their teachers to be using symbolic expressive language and most did not have significant vision or hearing impairments or motor functioning limitations. Instruction occurred primarily in segregated settings such as special education classrooms for 87% of participating students, with some academic inclusion and nonacademic inclusion. Most students demonstrated some basic reading skills (e.g., sight words, simple sentences, etc.) and math skills (e.g., counting by rote, counting to 10, etc.).

Some studies have specifically examined the characteristics of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (e.g., Christensen et al., 2018; Karvonen & Clark, 2019). These studies confirmed that the majority of these students who participated in an AA-AAAS were identified in the categories of intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities. These studies also noted the lack of English language development services for these students, decisions that IEP teams could influence if they were sure to include educators who oversee or

provide English language development services to English learners in general. Alternate ELP assessments are still in development so there are limited data to indicate which students participate in them.

Factors IEP Teams Should Consider When Making Assessment Participation Decisions

IEP teams should have a basic understanding of the legal requirements for participation in state and district-wide assessments. They should also understand the implications of their decisions. Participation decisions may result in both short- and long-term consequences.

The implications of participation decisions in the short-term are related to how students are instructed on reading, math, science, and other standards-based subjects. Students participating in the AA-AAAS or alternate ELP assessment are held to different performance standards than other students. These performance standards are called alternate academic achievement standards and are aligned with the same content or ELP standards used to teach students who participate in general assessments (Sabia et al., 2020), but they are taught with less depth, breadth, and complexity. This means students held to alternate achievement standards may not be instructed on the content or ELP standards in the same way or to the same depth, breadth, and complexity as their peers. This could potentially result in negative consequences (such as loss of opportunity to learn or not being held to high expectations) for students over time.

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IEP teams also determine where students should receive their special education services. There is a tendency for teams to decide that students who participate in alternate assessments should be educated in more restrictive placements. Although this is an inappropriate short-term consequence of the participation decision, it needs to be recognized and counteracted (Sabia & Thurlow, 2019).

For English learners, earning a proficient score on the state ELP assessment is one criterion for exit from English language development services. If an English learner is inappropriately assigned to a general ELP assessment, the student may never exit from English language development services even though that student has English language skills appropriate for a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. On the other hand, if an English learner is inappropriately assigned to the alternate ELP assessment, with its different proficiency requirements, that student might be exited from English language development services that would still benefit the student.

A long-term implication of student participation in the AA-AAAS rather than the general assessment might be that the student is not prepared to receive a high school diploma. There may also be other graduation requirements that the student may not be able to accomplish (e.g., taking courses required for graduation). IEP teams must know their state and district graduation, diploma, and other school exiting requirements as they make participation decisions. Another long-term implication of the participation decision emerges after students have completed their K–12 school careers. Participation in the AA-AAAS may impact students' postsecondary opportunities such as participation in postsecondary institutions (e.g., college, technical school), military service, and employment.

Parents Are Part of the IEP Team

Parents play a critical role in IEP decisions, including whether their child should participate in general or alternate assessments and what types of accessibility features and accommodations will provide optimal support to specific students. For example, parents will know whether their child reads in the family's home language and has enough language skills to benefit from a translated test, a native language dictionary, or a bilingual interpreter. Parents should be encouraged to provide input and express opinions during an IEP team meeting; however, IEP teams sometimes find it challenging to engage parents in this decision. Parents may not have the basic knowledge they need to participate meaningfully, the information may be overwhelming to them, or they may not feel comfortable in the school setting. This is an area administrators can address by modeling

respectful, positive communication with parents during an IEP team meeting and providing team members with comprehensible resources that can be used during the meeting and sent home with parents. Administrators can also ensure that appropriate translation and interpretation services are provided to those parents who need them (Liu, Lazarus, Thurlow, Funfe Tatah Mentan, & Jarmin, 2019).

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IEP teams must clearly communicate to parents the implications of decisions about which assessment their child will take, a requirement of both ESSA and IDEA. Some IEP teams start the discussion about implications for student assessment participation by asking parents about their goals for their child as an adult. An NCEO infographic, "Start with the End in Mind" (Nagle et al., 2020), could be used for this discussion; it is organized with concise, easy to understand information for parents. Materials may need to be translated or adapted for families of English learners.

Accommodations (and Other Accessibility) Decisions

Identifying accommodations needed for access to instruction has been part of IEP discussions since the initial authorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. With the requirement in IDEA 1997 that students with disabilities participate in state and district-wide assessments, the responsibilities of the IEP team expanded. IEP teams must not only consider the needs of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, for access to the general education curriculum, but also must consider their needs for access to state and district-wide assessments. English learners with disabilities may require accommodations to support both their disability-related needs and their English language

development. Legal requirements for providing accommodations to students with disabilities include not only IDEA, but also Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ESSA addresses accommodations for both students with disabilities and English learners in its requirements for funding. For English learners, it states that they:

shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided appropriate accommodations on assessments administered to such students under this paragraph, including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know and can do in academic content areas, until such students have achieved English language proficiency. (20 U.S. Code §6311(b)(2)(B)(vii)(III))

In general, when considering IEPs for assessments in K–12 schools, states have clarified which accommodations may change the meaning of assessment items, and therefore may not be used. These “nonallowed” accommodations often vary by test. For state summative assessments, state policies indicate which accessibility features and accommodations do not change what the test is intended to measure.

Initially, the terms “accommodations” and “modifications” were applied to both instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. The concept of universal design was applied to assessments in the early 2000s (Thompson et al., 2004). With the shift to digitally based assessments, the concepts of “access” and “accommodations” became dominant. Larson, Thurlow, Lazarus, and Liu (2020) described this as part of a paradigm shift, in which access considerations are applied to all students, including English learners, not just those students with disabilities. Terms that are used now, in addition to “universal design,” are “universal features,” “designated features,” “accessibility features,” and “accommodations.” The current approach to terminology was summarized by Thurlow, Warren, and Chia (2020):

Accessibility is the term now used to reflect the concept that an assessment is appropriate for all students. This term includes the concepts of accommodations and universal design, as well as other tiers of support that help to make an assessment appropriate for all students. It reflects a process that takes place

Table 1: Assessment accessibility terms

Term	Definition
Accessibility	General term used to convey the quality of an assessment for measuring a student's knowledge and skills or language proficiency without impediments created by unintended barriers.
Accommodation	A change in the format or procedures of an assessment that provides an individual student with documented needs greater access to an assessment to show knowledge and skills without changing what the assessment is intended to measure. The documented needs may be identified in an IEP, 504 plan, or English learner plan.
Designated feature	A change in the format or procedures of an assessment that provides an individual student greater access to an assessment to show knowledge and skills without changing what the assessment is intended to measure. An adult or team of adults identify the students and their needs; the student need not have an IEP, 504 plan, or English learner plan.
Universal design	An approach to the design and development of an assessment that makes it most accessible for the greatest number of students.
Universal features	Characteristics of the assessment that provide access and are available to all students (e.g., highlighter, line reader, note pad)
<i>Note.</i> These are general definitions. Terminology, definitions, and examples may vary in states and possibly for different assessments. IEP = Individualized Education Program.	

throughout the entire development and implementation process. (p. 20)

Terminology may differ by state and sometimes by the specific assessment under consideration. *Table 1* provides a brief definition of each of these. Administrators should know the terminology used for the assessments administered in their schools.

Beyond knowing the terms, administrators can build on the many lessons that have been learned about how IEP teams should determine which accessibility supports or accommodations an individual student may need:

- Know each student's characteristics that may influence their access needs during instruction and during assessments, as well as their preferences that might influence whether they will use

accessibility features and accommodations identified for them on assessments.

- If a student with a disability is also an English learner, ensure at least one member of the team has expertise in this area and consider the language characteristics of the student as well as the disability characteristics.
- Know what each assessment requires of the student (types of tasks, timing, etc.) when making decisions about what accessibility supports and accommodations a student might need.
- Be familiar with the accessibility supports and accommodations that are allowed for each assessment in which the student will participate. Have the state guidelines for accessibility supports and accommodations at hand to check that those selected for the assessment are allowed by the state.
- To the extent possible, require consistent use of accessibility features and accommodations across assessment and instruction. Students show what they know best when they are tested under conditions similar to those under which they learn. However, recognize that some accommodations used in instruction may not be appropriate for assessment because they change what the assessment is measuring.
- Separately consider each assessment, including state and district-wide assessments, alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and ELP assessments for English learners with disabilities.
- Ensure that students have experience with accessibility supports and accommodations that may be used for testing (especially those provided via the testing platform) before the day of the test.
- Obtain the valuable information that parents can contribute to considerations about accessibility supports and accommodations a student may need for instruction and assessment.
- Check whether accessibility supports and accommodations are working for a student through tryouts and through conversations with the student, parent, and other teachers, when possible.
- Teach students to advocate for the accommodations and accessibility supports they need (Prater, Redman, Anderson, & Gibb, 2014).
- Participate in training whenever it is available.

As is evident from this listing of what is involved in IEP teams' decisions about accessibility and accommodations for state and district-wide assessments, there is a lot that IEP teams need to know and do. Effective communication strategies are key to a successful IEP team (see Hinkle et al., this issue).

Providing Support to IEP Teams

School leaders can provide support to IEP teams and their members so that they make appropriate decisions about assessment participation and the identification of needed accessibility supports and accommodations for instruction and assessments. IEP teams must understand legal requirements for state and district-wide assessments, the purposes of the assessments, the relationship of instruction and assessments to grade-level academic content and English language proficiency standards, and how to use state and district-provided training and materials to guide their decisions about assessments for individual students. Administrators should make sure IEP teams, regardless of the student's grade level, know about state and district requirements for graduation, diploma, and other school exit requirements.

School leaders should ensure that all IEP teams include appropriate representatives to meet student needs. For example, if the student is an English learner or potential English learner, the IEP team must include an English language development educator. Necessary language supports (e.g., interpreters) must be provided to parents who may not be English speakers. All members of the IEP team, including related services providers (Lazarus, Goldstone, Thurlow, et al., 2021), need to have knowledge about the student as it relates to their unique role (e.g., school psychologist, English language development specialist, parent, etc.). For example, speech-language pathologists can contribute to discussions about communication systems that are foundational to access class content and assessments (Goldstone, Lazarus, Thurlow, & Hendrickson, 2021). Information should be collected prior to the IEP team meeting on the student's cognitive and adaptive functioning, instruction and supports, past participation and performance in assessments, communication characteristics, contextual information provided by parents, and

other relevant information (Thurlow, Strunk, Hall, & Hawes, 2021). All information and data about the student should be documented and included as evidence for use during decision making.

Administrators should make sure IEP teams, regardless of the student's grade level, know about state and district requirements for graduation, diploma, and other school exit requirements.

Administrators may be participants in IEP teams, but often they designate another individual to sit in for them. When this is done, it is their responsibility to ensure that the person who participates in the IEP meeting has the full breadth of knowledge and skills needed to make appropriate decisions about assessment participation and needed accessibility supports and accommodations.

In addition, administrators must ensure that school-based IEP team members can communicate clearly with parents about the importance of decisions about assessment participation. This necessarily involves communicating about the purposes of assessments and the implications of participation in alternate assessments. Administrators can ask IEP teams to prepare examples of a general grade-level achievement standard compared to an alternate achievement academic standard to share with parents. Starting with the state-provided performance level descriptors for the general and alternate assessments can be a good starting point for these examples. Supporting parents with information about how instruction, curriculum, and assessments are based on these standards is also important. A useful starting point may be to have a team discussion with the parents about their expectations for the child and areas of concern parents may have (Thurlow et al., 2021).

Although states generally provide numerous guidelines and training materials that can be used to support IEP teams as they make decisions about accessibility supports and accommodations for assessments, they may not be easy to use by IEP team members. Special education administrators and school leaders can support IEP teams by ensuring access to usable and understandable materials. Communication should clearly differentiate between accessibility supports and accommodations for

instruction and for assessments, with the recognition that some may be appropriate for instruction but not for assessment, depending on what the assessment is measuring, and that some of these might be available for the assessment that are not typically used in the classroom when the assessment is provided through technology. Still, with these small differences, there should be consistency between the accommodations used in the classroom and the assessment. For those supports available through the assessment platform, but not typically used in the classroom, educators should be sure that students participate in practice tests so that they have exposure to the accessibility supports and accommodations that will be available to them during the assessment.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the NCEO have developed valuable resources for school leaders to help ensure they support IEP teams and have the information needed to support those teams (Hinkle et al., 2021a, 2021b). *Table 2* provides a list of these and other resources that are especially relevant to special education administrators and school leaders.

Documenting and Monitoring Participation and Accommodation Decisions

Administrators should ensure that all IEP team decisions about assessment student participation and accommodations are clearly documented and updated on an ongoing basis. IEP teams (possibly in collaboration with English learner teams), schools, districts, and state departments should monitor these decisions in order to know whether students are participating in appropriate standards-based instruction and assessments and are receiving assessment access and accommodations that allow students to show what they know and can do. Evaluating summarized and aggregated decisions can also reveal whether there are unintended patterns, such as all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities receiving exactly the same instructional goals or all students in certain disability categories taking the AA-AAAS (Thurlow et al., 2021).

Administrators should support training that focuses on how to document, summarize, and aggregate decisions and compare the decisions to student progress and performance. This will allow

Table 2: Assessment accessibility and accommodations supports for administrators and school leaders

Resource	Link
1% Toolkit —A set of 11 tools developed collaboratively by NCEO, the 1% Community of Practice, ^a and the 2019 Peer Learning Groups ^b to address the 1% cap on participation in the alternate assessment requirements stipulated in ESSA 2015.	https://nceo.info/Resources?product_type=instrument&text=%221%25%20Toolkit%3A%22
Accommodations in Assessment for Students with Disabilities —This resource supports the participation of children with disabilities in large-scale testing. It provides basic information about accommodations and how they can support some students in accessing a test. The resource contends that it is the responsibility of the IEP team to decide how the student with a disability will participate, and then to document that decision in the child's IEP.	https://www.parentcenterhub.org/iep-assessments/#options
Accommodations Toolkit—The NCEO's Accommodations Toolkit provides easy-to-use summaries of the academic research literature on specific accommodations for students with disabilities as well as policy analyses.	https://publications.ici.umn.edu/nceo/accommodations-toolkit/introduction
Assessments for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities ESSA Fact Sheet —This fact sheet is designed to accompany the <i>Stakeholder Guide to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)</i> (see separate entry) and provides a basic overview of the alternate academic achievement standards and alternate assessment provisions contained in ESSA.	https://www.parentcenterhub.org/essa-fact-sheet-alt-assess/
IEP Tip Sheet: Participation in Assessment —This tip sheet provides information about assessment participation and accommodations for students with an IEP.	https://promotingprogress.org/resources/iep-tip-sheet-participation-assessment
IEPs: How Administrators Can Support the Development and Implementation of High-Quality IEPs —This online module provides information about the role of school administrators in overseeing and supporting the IEP process.	https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep02/cresource/#content
Participation Communication Toolkit —A customizable set of tools developed by NCEO to identify and describe reasons why all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities should take state tests. The purpose of the tool is to provide a concise resource that state education agency staff, and district and school administrators can use when communicating with educators, policymakers, families, and students.	https://nceo.info/Resources?text=%22NCEO+Participation+Communication+Toolkit%22
School Leaders Series —These briefs for school leaders focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities—including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities—in assessment, and the academic instruction that preceded it. School leaders play a key role in creating and sustaining schools that meet the needs of all learners.	https://nceo.info/Resources/series/school-leader
Stakeholder Guide to the ESSA Academic Assessments —This resource provides Parent Center staff and their advocacy partners information about key provisions in ESSA so that they may become meaningfully involved in how the law is now planned and implemented by the states.	https://www.parentcenterhub.org/essa-guide-assessments/
Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities —“This sixth chapter of an English Learner Toolkit, is intended to help state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) meet their obligations to English Learners. This tool kit should be read in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights' (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Dear Colleague Letter on “English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents” published in January 2015, which outlines SEAs' and LEAs' legal obligations to English learners under civil rights laws and other federal requirements.”	https://promotingprogress.org/resources/tools-and-resources-addressing-english-learners-disabilities
Webinar Alternate Assessment for Career and College Readiness —This webinar highlights three speakers providing an overview of the alternate assessment, the NCSC alternate assessment, and the DLM alternate assessment. PowerPoint slides and handouts are available.	https://www.parentcenterhub.org/webinar-alternate-assessment-career-college-readiness/
Webinar ESSA and the Assessment of Students with Disabilities —The webinar focuses on the assessment of students with disabilities, as required by the 2015 reauthorization of ESSA. Presenters from the NCEO and The Advocacy Center provide overviews of the key provisions in ESSA that relate to students with disabilities, highlighting in particular the importance of ESSA's state assessment provisions for improving outcomes for these students.	https://www.parentcenterhub.org/webinar-essa-and-assessment-of-students-with-disabilities/

Note. NCEO = National Center on Educational Outcomes; ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act; IEP = Individualized Education Program; NCSC = National Center and State Collaborative; DLM = Dynamic Learning Maps.

^aThe NCEO 1% Community of Practice was established in 2017 to support states with implementation of requirements related to the 1% cap on participation in the AA-AAAS.

^bThe NCEO 2019 Peer Learning Groups were established to provide technical assistance to states on three topics related to the 1% cap on participation in the AA-AAAS: (a) Developing and implementing a 1% data analysis and use plan; (b) guiding and evaluating district justifications for exceeding the 1% cap; and (c) Building capacity of IEP teams and parents in making decisions about assessment participation.

educators to identify cases of inappropriate decisions being made. Inappropriate decisions should be addressed by IEP teams so that students receive the instruction, curriculum, and assessments best suited to their needs.

Administrators should support training that focuses on how to document, summarize, and aggregate decisions and compare the decisions to student progress and performance.

Both IDEA and ESSA emphasize the need for documentation and monitoring of the decisions IEP teams make for students but allow states to determine how they will conduct these practices. IEP teams should know their state's rules and guidelines for assessment participation and the provision of accommodations. They should know how to document, review, evaluate, report, and act on monitoring findings (Christensen, Thurlow, & Wang, 2009). IEP teams should be prepared to provide state monitors with documentation about IEP team assessment participation decisions (Hinkle et al., 2021a) as well as their decisions about accessibility and accommodations.

A recent survey of states examined the policies, practices, and procedures used to monitor IEPs for alternate assessment participation decision making (Hinkle, Thurlow, Lazarus, & Strunk, 2022). The survey was sent to special education and assessment directors in the 50 regular states and the District of Columbia. The 34 states that responded to the survey's 14 questions provided answers indicating great variation in monitoring practices across the states. For example, not all states monitor AA-AAAS participation decision making. There is also variation in "when" states review IEPs. Some states conduct reviews on an ongoing basis; others review them at the beginning of the year, while still others review them either before or after the spring assessment.

Other notable findings of Hinkle et al. (2022) revealed that (a) monitoring by states is most often conducted by the regular monitoring team in the special education division (but is frequently joined by a special education specialist from the special education division or assessment division); (b) monitors most often focus on a sample of IEPs within a targeted group either throughout the year or during

a specific window of time; (c) most states use the state's participation guidelines to confirm that evidence exists supporting the student's participation in the alternate assessment; and (d) states often use a "constructive" approach to work with districts when evidence does not sufficiently support the decision that a student should participate in the alternate assessment.

CCSSO recommends that documentation and monitoring of assessment accommodations should involve collection of data from test administration observations, test administrator interviews, and discussions with students. Parents or guardians, teachers, and specialists should also be asked their perceptions of how well the support "worked" (Lazarus, Goldstone, Wheeler, et al., 2021).

Questions used to evaluate accommodations decisions should consider data from both the student level and the school or district level (Christensen et al., 2009). Examples of questions that may be used to evaluate accessibility supports and accommodations at the student level include asking about student performance on classroom assignments and assessments when the student was provided accessibility supports and accommodations versus when they are not used; asking what combinations of accessibility supports and accommodations seem to be effective; and asking what difficulties were encountered when using them.

Examples of questions that may be used to evaluate accessibility supports and accommodations at the district or school level include asking whether procedures are in place to ensure test administration procedures are not compromised when the accommodations are provided; asking about the types of accommodations that are provided and whether some are used more than others; and asking whether accommodations are appropriately documented in IEPs, 504 plans, and English learner plans.

Conclusions

Decision making for student assessment participation and student accommodations requires that IEP teams consider many factors. In some cases, they may need to collaborate with English learner teams to make decisions for English learners with disabilities. Administrators can provide knowledge and resources that address these factors. They should ensure that IEP teams feel confident to make decisions that meet

each student's needs, and that parents are meaningfully involved in making the decision. Careful documentation and ongoing monitoring of decisions that have been made for students will allow districts and schools to track student progress and expose unintended patterns that can be addressed.

Special education leaders who stress the importance of appropriate IEP team decision making, particularly in the areas of assessment participation and student accommodation provision, are contributing to successful learning experiences and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities.

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