



Successfully Transitioning Away from the 2% Assessment: Frequently Asked Questions

Produced by the CSAI and NCEO

States that administer an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (AA-MAS) and have also received a flexibility waiver from some of the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are required to phase out their use of these assessments by the 2014–15 school year. On August 23, 2013, the U.S. Department of Education published a proposed rollback of the regulation that allowed the AA-MAS.

In February 2014, a meeting was held for states to develop plans to transition away from the AA-MAS. During the February meeting, states had the opportunity to ask questions of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), as well as of other experts, about the use of data, accommodations, standards-based IEPs, and universal design. The following **Frequently Asked Questions** are representative of commonly asked questions raised during the in-person meeting.

- 1 **Why** is the AA-MAS being phased out?
- 2 **How** can states tell whether the instructional and assessment needs of low-performing students who participated in the AA-MAS are being met after the assessment is phased out?
- 3 **What** will happen to standards-based IEPs when the AA-MAS is no longer available?
- 4 **Should** students currently participating in the AA-MAS be transitioned to the general assessment or to an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS)?
- 5 **What** can states do with the test items developed for the AA-MAS?
- 6 **What** resources are available to help states transition away from the AA-MAS?

1

Why is the AA-MAS being phased out?

With the introduction of new high-quality assessments designed to comprehensively measure individual student achievement, the AA-MAS is no longer needed to accommodate some populations of students, including students with disabilities. As of the 2014–15 school year, those students who formerly participated in the AA-MAS will instead be able to demonstrate their achievement on a new generation of general assessments aligned with college and career readiness standards that were developed by Race to the Top assessment consortia or by individual states.

2

How can states tell whether the instructional and assessment needs of low-performing students who participated in the AA-MAS are being met after the assessment is phased out?

Drilling down into the existing demographic data to learn more about the characteristics of students who are currently participating in the AA-MAS can increase understanding of their characteristics. There is a risk that once the AA-MAS is phased out, this group of students will become less visible as their test scores and demographic data are rolled into the general test-taking population. It is important to continue to analyze data in order to better understand what is happening with low-performing students. This will help ensure that these students' instructional and assessment needs are met.

3

What will happen to standards-based IEPs when the AA-MAS is no longer available?

Standards-based Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were mandated by federal law for all students participating in an AA-MAS. However, they were used to guide classroom instructional practice and determine student supports prior to any federal legislation, and should continue to be used to support students.

Standards-based IEPs are appropriate for all students with disabilities. They identify the services, supports, and specialized instruction that individual students need in order to access the general curriculum, based on state grade-level standards, and to make progress in that curriculum. Standards-based IEPs can stimulate conversation among IEP team members using the same language, regardless of the team members' roles.

States recognize the importance of standards-based IEPs and are concerned that without the federal requirement for them, IEPs may disappear. When done well, standards-based IEPs represent best practice for creating IEPs.

4 Should students currently participating in the AA-MAS be transitioned to the general assessment or to an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS)?

Almost all students currently participating in the AA-MAS should be transitioned to the general assessment. The AA-AAS is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, so very few students who previously participated in the AA-MAS should be included in the AA-AAS. This means that as new assessments are developed, participation guidelines will need to include appropriate criteria that bring the students who participated in the AA-MAS into the general assessment. Educators should be trained on the participation guidelines so that they are able to confidently make appropriate participation decisions.



5 What can states do with the test items developed for the AA-MAS?

Test items developed for the AA-MAS were developed using grade-level content standards, but are also based on modified achievement standards. Although most items developed for the AA-MAS exemplify the use of universal design principles, they are not appropriate for the general assessment unless the modified achievement standards on which they are based can be adjusted to be appropriate for grade-level achievement standards. In addition, it is likely that AA-MAS items will need to be evaluated for their relevance to college and career readiness.

However, there may be other uses for AA-MAS items. States may find it useful to include them in formative assessment measures. States may also be able to use items from the AA-MAS, with appropriate adjustments, in their practice tests.

6

What resources are available to help states transition away from the AA-MAS?

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has developed a web page with resources specifically targeted to this issue. The information on this web page includes materials and videos of presentations from a meeting cohosted by NCEO and the Regional Resource Center Program, as well as state-developed information. The web page is <http://www.nceo.info/AAMAStransition/default.html>.

NCEO has also written a Policy Directions report, *Successfully Transitioning from the AA-MAS to the General Assessment*, that provides suggestions for states on how to successfully transition from the AA-MAS:

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/policy22/PolicyDirections22.pdf>.

A companion document provides similar information for the Race to the Top assessment consortia. This NCEO Brief, *Considerations for Consortia as States Transition Away from AA-MAS*, includes a number of considerations for the consortia. It is available at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/briefs/brief07/NCEOBrief7.pdf>.

Another useful resource for states transitioning away from the AA-MAS is the NCEO publication *Lessons Learned in Federally Funded Projects that Can Improve the Instruction and Assessment of Low Performing Students with Disabilities*. This publication includes chapters from federally funded projects that were developed to support students taking an AA-MAS, and shares lessons learned from those projects. It is available online at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/LessonsLearned.pdf>.

In a synthesis report, NCEO has also summarized what states wrote in their ESEA flexibility waiver applications about their plans for phasing out the AA-MAS. States may find it helpful to see other states' plans. This report, *States' Flexibility Plans for Phasing Out the Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards (AA-MAS) by 2014-15*, is available online at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis89/SynthesisReport89.pdf>.

An additional resource that states may find helpful is the report from the ASES/NCEO Forum on *Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-performing Students: Implications for Assessment and Instruction*. This report is available online at <http://www.nceo.info/OnlinePubs/LowPerfStudentsForumReport.pdf>

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