

NCEO Brief

Trends in the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities

November 2008

This *Brief* is based on the report, *Trends in the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities* (Technical Report 50), published by the National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2008.

□ Background

States have been required to publicly report participation and performance information for students with disabilities in large-scale assessments since 1994, when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized. The importance of public reporting and specific requirements for reporting have increased since then through the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, the reauthorization of ESEA in 2001, and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004. The reporting requirements of ESEA 2001 included provisions that starting no later than 2005-06, states had to have in place and report on assessments in reading and math for high school and each of grades 3-8. States also had to have an assessment of science in place for three different grade levels by 2007-08; public reporting of science results also was required for that school year.

There have been dramatic changes in testing and reporting since the National Center on Educational

Outcomes (NCEO) began documenting public reporting of state participation and performance information for students with disabilities. A 1998 NCEO report revealed that most states did not publicly report information on either participation or performance for students with disabilities and that in those states that did report, many students with disabilities were exempted from testing altogether. The NCEO reports covering the time span from 1998-2002 showed that states slowly made improvements in their reporting practices for students with disabilities, specifically in terms of increased frequency in disaggregation of the participation and performance results of these students on state assessments.

□ 2008 Study of Trends

This brief describes the results of an analysis of trends in the public reporting of state assessment results for students with disabilities. The analysis was conducted on a compilation of publicly reported assessment data gathered from state Web sites and personnel during the data collection for four previous analyses completed by NCEO (see Resources). These data were supplemented with data obtained from current state education Web sites. This trend analysis covered the years 2001-02 to 2004-05, and examined both participation and performance. The goal of the analysis was to determine:

1. Whether progress has been made by states in publicly reporting the participation and performance of students with disabilities on state assessments.
2. The nature of trends in the four years of participation and performance data for students with disabilities.



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Findings

Greater numbers of states reported assessment data for students with disabilities disaggregated for each grade and each content area across the years of data analyzed. Still, the number of states for which data were available across all four years was relatively small. For the *regular assessments*, slightly more than half of the states had performance data across the four years, and fewer than 10 states had participation data for all four years. For *alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards* taken by students with significant cognitive disabilities, only a few states had data across the four years. No states reported participation data in a consistent manner across four years. Eight states reported performance data for the alternate assessment across three of the four years from 2001-02 to 2004-05.

Regular Assessment Participation

Participation rates for *regular assessments* were relatively stable across years, and the median rates for all school levels were above 95 percent by the 2004-05 school year for the nine states included in this analysis. The 95 percent value is notable because it corresponds to the NCLB accountability criterion that requires student participation of at least this level for all subgroups before a school or district can meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) objectives. The mean participation rate increased for students with disabilities in both content areas at all school levels. An example of this trend is shown in Figure 1 for elementary reading assessments.

Regular Assessment Performance

Trends in performance on the *regular assessment* were a little easier to gauge than were trends in participation because many more states publicly reported these data in comparable ways for all four years. Data were available for between 24 and 28 states depending on the level (elementary, middle, high school) and content area (reading, math). When looking across time, it is possible for states' standards, assessments, policies, and practices to change. We have not specifically noted these changes here. Nevertheless, the average percentage of students with disabilities proficient on the regular assessment showed moderate increases across the four years for both reading and math in elementary and middle schools. For example, for elementary reading assessments, as shown in Figure 2, performance showed increased proficiency for students with disabilities. Data for high schools did not show the same gains.

Alternate Assessment Participation

Trends in participation on *alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards* could not be analyzed because the nature of state reporting practices for this assessment lag behind the others.

Figure 1. Participation Rates for Students with Disabilities on Elementary Reading Assessments

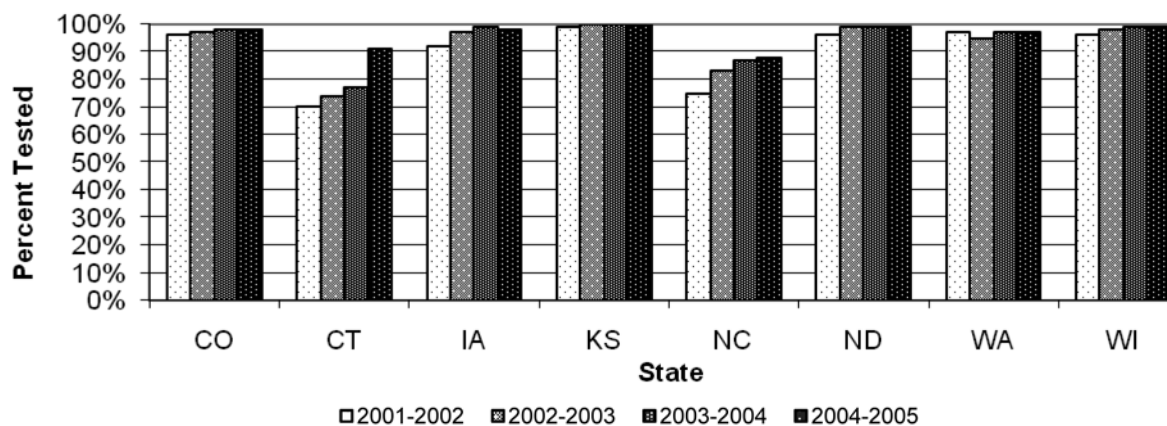
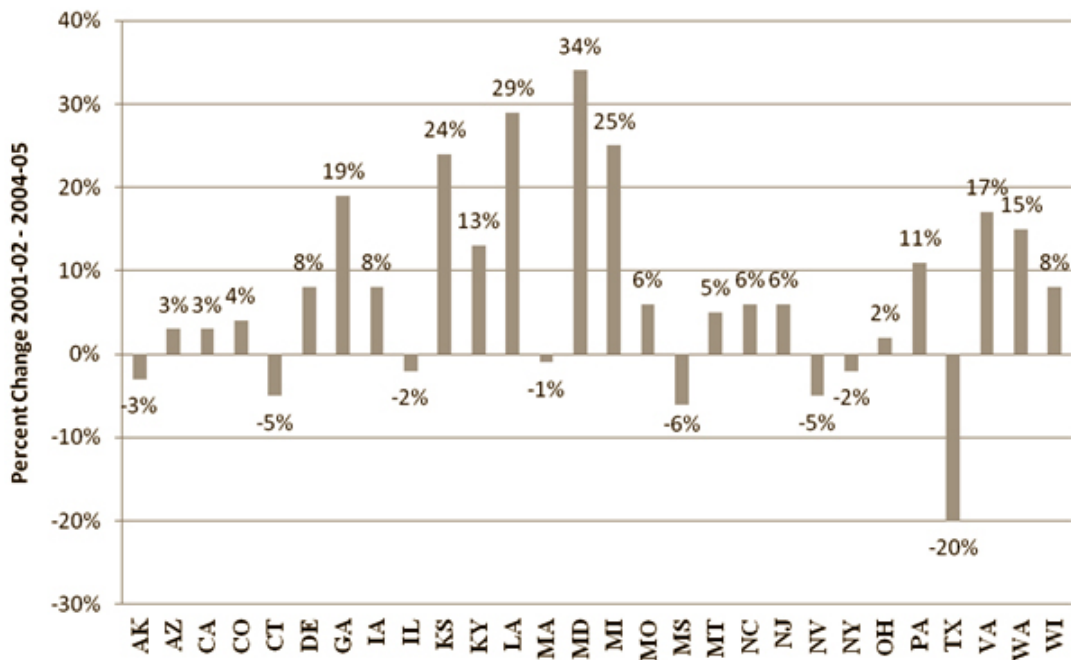


Figure 2. Performance Trends for Students with Disabilities on Elementary Reading Assessments

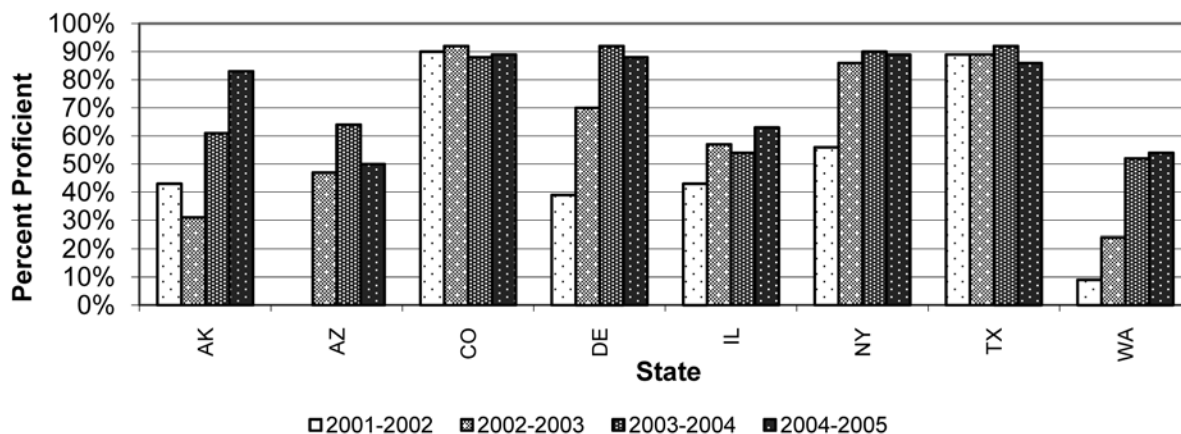


□ Alternate Assessment Performance

Performance trends for the alternate assessment must also be viewed with caution. By relaxing our criteria used for regular assessments to include states that reported for three of the four years, we were able to include eight states at the elementary and middle school levels, and six states at the high school level. Additional caution is warranted when considering alternate assessment performance results due to possible changing standards, policies, and practices across time. The percentage of students who scored proficient or above tended to increase fairly

significantly across the four years studied, far more than seen for the regular assessments. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the mean percentage of students who were proficient and above increased for students with disabilities on elementary alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards in reading. The discrepancy between regular assessment proficiency percentages and alternate assessment proficiency percentages, for example, 29% versus 70% for middle school reading, raises the question of whether states have adopted less challenging criteria for achieving proficiency on alternate achievement standards.

Figure 3. Performance Trends for Students with Disabilities on Elementary Reading Alternate Assessments



❑ Conclusions

Despite requirements to publicly report data, relatively few states had data on participation and performance in assessments across four years. Performance data were available more often than participation data. This finding raises concerns. To really understand performance results, it is necessary to have a good understanding of participation rates.

Changes in state participation guidelines can lead to changes in the testing population, and potentially also to changes in assessment performance. This is especially true for small subgroups such as students with disabilities. Although the analysis of trends identified some areas of increased reporting and better achievement data, the analysis also highlighted the relative lack of transparently reported assessment data. The public reporting requirements of ESEA and IDEA are meant to ensure that educators, parents, and others have good data on which to hold schools accountable and improve outcomes over time. Improving the transparency of reported data is essential to achieving those outcomes.

❑ Resources

- Klein, J. A., Wiley, H. I., & Thurlow, M. L. (2006). *Uneven transparency: NCLB tests take precedence in public assessment reporting for students with disabilities* (Technical Report 43). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Available at www.nceo.info/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Technical43.html.
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- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (1997). Public Law 105-117. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (2004). Public Law 108-446. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- No Child Left Behind Act. (2001). Public Law 107-110. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- Thurlow, M., Quenemoen, R., Altman, J., & Cuthbert, M. (2008). *Trends in the participation and performance of students with disabilities* (Technical Report 50). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Thurlow, M. L., & Wiley, H. I. (2004). *Almost there in public reporting of assessment results for students with disabilities* (Technical Report 39). Minneapolis,

MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Available at www.nceo.info/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Technical39.htm.

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Wiley, H. I., Thurlow, M. L., & Klein, J. A. (2005). *Steady progress: State public reporting practices for students with disabilities after the first year of NCLB (2002-2003)* (Technical Report 40). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Available at www.nceo.info/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Technical40.htm.

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National Center on Educational Outcomes
University of Minnesota • 207 Pattee Hall
150 Pillsbury Dr. SE • Minneapolis, MN 55455
Phone 612/626-1530 • Fax 612/624-0879

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