Lessons Learned About **Assessment** from Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in College and Career Ready Assessments

The new large-scale assessments rolled out by consortia and states are designed to measure student achievement of rigorous college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. Recent surveys of teachers in several states indicate that students with disabilities adjusted well to the new assessments, and liked many of their features, but that there also are challenges. Some of these challenges are related to assessment issues that need to be addressed to improve accessibility and student outcomes.

Many students with disabilities use **accessibility features and accommodations**, to access these assessments. Most states and consortia use a tiered accessibility framework, with a three-

NCEO
National Center on
Educational Outcomes

ncsi
national center for systemic improvement

tiered framework being the most common:

Tier 1: The first tier includes accessibility features that any student may use.

Tier 2: The second tier is accessibility features that may be used by any student, but they must be designated in advance by an educator.

Tier 3: The third tier is accommodations that are limited to students with disabilities or English learners.

This Brief was prepared to provide information and suggestions for state education agencies (SEAs) and other technical assistance (TA) providers who work with local education agencies (LEAs). It highlights three main challenges **identified by the teachers**, and then addresses the implications for assessment and the implications for TA providers. A companion Brief on lessons learned about the implications for

instruction from the inclusion of students with disabilities in CCR assessments was recently published (Heritage & Lazarus, 2016).

Resource suggestions are provided, although these are not exhaustive. Undoubtedly, TA providers will have access to other useful and relevant resources.

Though this Brief is focused on the immediate needs of students with disabilities, many of the identified issues apply to all learners. The suggestions in this Brief apply to both consortia-developed assessments and state-developed assessments.

The Brief is organized to allow the suggestions to be easily shared with LEA staff and test vendors in a way that can support improved decision making, improved assessments, and ultimately improved assessment experiences for students with disabilities, as well as other students.

The three challenges pertain to:

Unfamiliarity with Item Types: Students struggled with some of the item types because they had never experienced them.

Accessibility Challenges: Some students found it difficult to meaningfully engage with the new assessments because they did not receive needed accessibility features and accommodations.

Technical Challenges: Problems with the testing system, as well as issues with how the testing system interacted with assistive technology (AT) devices, made it difficult for some students to access the test.

Challenges, Implications for Assessment, and Implications for TA Providers

Challenge #1: Unfamiliarity with Item Types

- Students (and their teachers) had never seen some of the item types that were on the assessment.

- Students were not provided with opportunities to practice responding to some item types.

- Students found the essay to be particularly challenging, and did not know how to allocate their time across the activities required to complete the essay (researching, outlining, drafting, etc.) and other performance tasks within the allowed time.

Implications for Assessment	Implications for TA Providers
Students need increased exposure to a wide range of item types (e.g., constructed response, essays, multi-part items, drag and drop, multiple responses, etc.) so they can better navigate and respond to all assessment items. Students need to practice responding to all item types so that they are prepared to respond when taking the assessment. Students need high-quality feedback on their responses to practice items.	• Post high-quality examples of all types of assessment items that may be included in the test. • Post recommendations on how to use practice tests effectively. • Provide professional development to educators on use of practice tests and related materials to help familiarize students with sample items, including how to provide high-quality feedback on practice test essays, constructed responses, and other performance tasks. • Provide examples of how to teach students to organize their time (research, outlining, drafting, etc.) when writing essays and other performance tasks.

Challenge #2: Accessibility Challenges

- Students have needs that make it difficult for them to meaningfully access the assessment without the use of accessibility features and accommodations.

- Teachers do not know how to confidently select and implement appropriate accessibility features and accommodations for their students.

- Sometimes things do not go smoothly on test day, and students do not receive their accessibility features and accommodations.

Implications for Assessment	Implications for TA Providers
Student needs must be identified so that barriers that interfere with their ability to demonstrate what they know can be removed. Educators need to know how to confidently make appropriate accessibility and accommodations decisions. Educators need to know how to use the online tools to appropriately select embedded accessibility features and accommodations. Students need to know how to use their embedded accessibility features and accommodations. The logistics for the provision of accessibility features and accommodations need to be mapped out prior to test administration.	• Provide professional development to educators on: — how to select, implement, and evaluate accessibility features and accommodations. — how the perspectives of students and their parents/guardians can provide valuable information that can be used for accessibility decision making. — how to complete the Personal Needs Profile (PNP), Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP), or other similar profile. — how to provide students with sufficient opportunities to practice using accessibility features and accommodations. • Develop easy-to-use tools that can be used to create and document sound logistical plans that will help ensure that accessibility features and accommodations are available on test day, and administered with fidelity.

Challenge #3: Technical Challenges

- Students struggle to demonstrate what they know on an assessment when some accessibility features and accommodations are not available or do not work as intended.

- Students have difficulty using embedded technology (e.g., keyboarding, scrolling) that differs from what they use in instruction.

Implications for Assessment	Implications for TA Providers
Students need to be able to take the test without getting waylaid by technical problems with the testing system. Students need to be familiar with assistive technology (AT) that they use on the assessment. Teachers and parents need to be comfortable with computer use and computer-based testing.	Provide professional development to educators on how to: • Make assistive technology (AT) decisions for individual students. • Make decisions regarding when a student needs a paper and pencil test accommodation. • Familiarize students during instruction and use practice tests with AT that will be used on assessment. • Check AT compatibility issues. • After the assessment, report any compatibility issues with AT devices. • Help teachers and parents develop a higher comfort level with computers and computer-based assessments, including the use of embedded accessibility features and tools. SEAs should work with consortia and test vendors to: • Address any lingering technical challenges that may cause issues for students using some accommodations (for example, lack of assistive technology support). • Ensure that all item types are accessible and do not create additional barriers. • Ensure that accessibility and accommodations policies are clear and appropriate. • Resolve issues related to differences between the AT used for instruction and the AT used on the assessment. • Figure out compatibility and security issues for various AT software and devices. • Ensure that practice tests have the same embedded accessibility features or accommodations as the actual assessment. • Ensure that students using AT have access to a practice test session that enables them (and their teachers) to see that the AT works as intended in the test environment. • Develop procedures and reporting tools that educators can use to report compatibility issues with AT devices as well as test irregularities (e.g., student did not get accommodation that was on IEP).

Conclusion

The lessons learned from the first administration of the new large-scale assessments developed by consortia and states can help improve future administrations. The perspectives of teachers on the difficulties that students with disabilities had with the new assessments provide valuable information about several assessment challenges that have implications for assessment and for TA providers. It is important to continue to collect and analyze data so that the assessments, and the experiences of the students who take them, can be continually improved. The suggestions in this Brief can be used to guide and help focus TA efforts on activities that will lead to improved assessment accessibility, more valid test scores, and ultimately to improved outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

Companion Brief

Lessons Learned about Instruction for Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in College and Career Ready Assessments. Heritage, M. & Lazarus, S. S. (2016). Minneapolis, MN and San Francisco, CA: NCEO and NCSI. http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/LessonsLearnedAboutInstruction.pdf

Suggested Resources

Challenge #1: Unfamiliarity with Item Types
Practice and Training Tests. Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced). (2015). Los Angeles, CA: Author. http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/

Practice Tests. Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). (2015). Washington, DC: Author. http://www.parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests

Also see practice tests on state department of education websites.

Challenge #2: Accessibility Challenges
Literature Review of Testing Accommodations and Accessibility Tools for Students with Disabilities. (2012). Laitusis, C., Buzick, H., Stone, E., Hansen, E., & Hakkinen, M. Princeton, NJ: Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium/Measured Progress/Educational Testing Service. http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Smarter-Balanced-Students-with-Disabilities-Literature-Review.pdf

Making Accessibility Decisions for ALL Students. NCEO (2015). Minneapolis, MN: Author. http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/briefs/brief11/NCEOBrief11.pdf

Online Training Modules to Improve Accommodations Decision Making. NCEO (2012). Minneapolis, MN: Author. http://www.nceo.info/Resources/training_modules#Accomm

Professional Development to Improve Accommodations Decisions—A Review of the Literature. (2011). Hodgson, J. R., Lazarus, S. S., & Thurlow, M. L. Minneapolis, MN: NCEO. http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis84/SynthesisReport84.pdf

Challenge #3: Technical Challenges

Assistive Technologies for Computer-based Assessments. Hakkinen, M. (2015). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RD_Connections_24.pdf

Audio Support Guidelines for Accessible Assessments: Insights from Cognitive Labs. Christensen, L. L., Shyyan, V., Rogers, C. & Kincaid, A. (2014). Minneapolis, MN: NCEO. http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/GAAP/GAAPAudioReport.pdf

Principles and Characteristics of Inclusive Assessment Systems in a Changing Assessment Landscape (Report 400). Thurlow, M. L., Lazarus, S. S., Christensen, L. L., & Shyyan, V. (2016). Minneapolis, MN: NCEO. http://www.nceo.info

Sign Support Guidelines for Accessible Assessments: Insights from Cognitive Labs. Shyyan, V., Christensen, L. L., Rogers, C. & Kincaid, A. (2014). Minneapolis, MN: NCEO. http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/GAAP/GAAPSignItemsReport.pdf