

Departmental Investments Supporting Teaching and Assessing Students With Disabilities

This document summarizes some of the Department of Education's investments designed to improve results for students with disabilities. These investments, supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), and the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), focus on improving teaching, learning, and assessing by increasing states' ability to provide rigorous assessment, instruction, and accountability for students with disabilities. These investments will help ensure that states, local school districts, and families have the information they need to improve and enhance educational opportunities for students with disabilities throughout the nation.

New Investments Supporting Teaching, Learning, and Assessing

New Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers

The Comprehensive Centers Program in the OESE, authorized by Title II of the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (TA Act), awarded discretionary grants to establish TA Centers to help states raise student achievement and reach the goals of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* in September 2005. Centers established under this program replace the former Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers, the Regional Technology in Education Consortia, the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education, and the Regional Mathematics and Science Education Consortia.

These Centers focus their TA on states and on helping states increase their capacities to provide sustained support to districts and schools so they meet their student achievement goals. The new Centers serve as field agents for the Department to help states understand the provisions and purposes of *NCLB* and related federal programs and adopt proven approaches to achieve *NCLB* school-improvement and student-performance goals. The Centers work closely with and leverage the resources of other

TA providers and research organizations, including the Regional Educational Laboratories, Special Education Technical Assistance Network, Parent Information and Resource Centers, Equity Assistance Centers, Reading First National Technical Assistance Centers, IES Research Centers, the What Works Clearinghouse, and other federal, regional, and state entities and postsecondary institutions.

The Department supported 21 awards under the Comprehensive Centers Program competition:

- Sixteen awards supported regional Comprehensive Centers. The Regional Centers serve as frontline providers of services to states within defined geographic boundaries to help states implement the provisions and meet the purposes of *NCLB* and other related K–12 federal education programs. Fifteen such awards were made on September 30, 2005. An award for the Great Lakes West region, to serve Illinois and Wisconsin, was made in early January 2006.
- Five Content Centers, national in scope, work closely with Regional Centers to provide focused expertise and assistance based on deep content knowledge to states on several key school improvement issues. The five Centers with specific topical expertise and focus are: the Center on Assessment and Accountability, the Center on Instruction, the Center on Teacher Quality, the Center on Innovation and Improvement, and the Center on High Schools. These Centers were awarded on September 30, 2005.

The funds from the Comprehensive Centers Program used to initiate the new Centers in FY 2005 totaled \$41,618,337. Of that amount, \$36,180,176 was used to fund Regional Centers and \$5,438,161 was used to fund the Content Centers. The Department's FY 2006 appropriations act provides a total of \$56.3 million for the Comprehensive Centers Program, of which about \$53.3 million will be used for grants to the Regional and Content Centers and \$3 million will be used for evaluation¹.

¹ These numbers do not include the \$3 million funds provided by OSERS to the three Content Centers, only the amounts provided through the Comprehensive Centers appropriations for FY 2005 and FY 2006.

Eighteen of the 21 Centers funded under this competition are supported entirely with funds from the Comprehensive Centers Program. Three of the Centers are also supported with funds appropriated for the Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination Program, which is authorized under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, as amended (*IDEA*). The total funding from the Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination Program is \$3 million in FY 2005 and FY 2006 to provide partial support for three of the Content Centers. These funds are in addition to the OESE funds. The co-funded Content Centers are the Center on Instruction, the Center on Teacher Quality, and the Center on High Schools.

For more information and a list of the funded Centers, visit

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/newccp/awards.html>.

General Supervision Enhancement Grant Program

Under the General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) Program, the OSERS will support planning grants in FY 2006 to assist states with the development, enhancement, or redesign of a comprehensive system of state assessments (including alternate assessments), standards, and instructional supports. The *IDEA* requires states to develop State Performance Plans (SPP) that include measurable and rigorous targets for 20 indicators, including the participation and performance of children with disabilities on the state assessments required under the *NCLB* Act. States are required to report on their SPP targets through the submission of an Annual Performance Report (APR). The APR includes data on student performance on assessments, using the same assessment data and targets required under the *NCLB* Act. Many states need support in developing, enhancing, or redesigning their assessment systems to ensure that they meet the requirements of *NCLB* with regard to the assessment of children with disabilities. OSERS plans to make up to five awards to states to develop planning grants for a total of approximately \$1.2 million. States were encouraged to submit applications as a consortium. The level of funding for a consortium will reflect the combined total that the applicants would have received if they had applied separately. As part of this planning activity, states must work with experts in large-scale assessment and special education. The Notice Inviting Applications was published in the Federal Register on August 4, 2005, and awards are expected to be made in January 2006.

For a copy of the application announcement that closed October 16, 2005, please visit <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/pdf/05-15460.pdf>.

National Technical Assistance Center on Assessment for Children with Disabilities

The OSEP funded a National Center in 2005 at the University of Minnesota to provide TA for improving results for students with disabilities by increasing their participation rates in high-quality assessment and accountability systems, improving the quality of assessments in which they participate, improving the capacity of states to meet data collection requirements, and strengthening accountability for results. The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) will accomplish this mission through a combination of activities in the following areas: (a) needs assessments and information gathering, (b) TA and dissemination to improve the participation of students with disabilities in assessments and accountability systems, (c) TA to improve the capacity of states to meet data collection requirements, (d) collaboration and leadership, and (e) other functions.

For more information, please visit <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO>.

Study on Alternate Assessments

The National Center for Special Education Research in the IES of the U.S. Department of Education has awarded a 4-year, \$4.4 million contract to SRI International to conduct a national study of alternate assessments used to permit some students with disabilities to participate in state and local testing programs. Required by the 2004 reauthorization of the *IDEA*, the study will examine the criteria states use to determine eligibility for alternate assessments and the number and type of children who take them; the validity and reliability of alternate assessment instruments and procedures; the alignment of alternate assessments and alternate achievement standards with state academic content standards in reading, mathematics, and science; and the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments in appropriately measuring student progress “specific to

individualized instructional need.” To paint a complete picture, the study also will examine alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards and those based on grade-level standards.

In carrying out the study, SRI will produce profiles for all 50 states and 9 “unique states,” plus a national summary profile. It will list characteristics of alternate assessments and examine how students are placed in these assessments and how data gathered in these assessments are used. The study also will look at factors that help or impede the implementation of alternate assessments, alternate achievement standards and modified academic achievement standards. A major objective of the project is to conduct a quantitative analysis of the relationships between variables in alternate assessment systems and student outcomes. To conduct the study, SRI and its partners will use a national telephone interview survey, an analysis of state documents, case studies, and quantitative analysis. SRI, a 59-year-old nonprofit research institute, has as its partners in the project the University of Maryland’s Educational Policy Reform Research Institute, the University of Minnesota’s NCEO, and Policy Studies Associates in Washington, DC.

Technology and Standards-Based Reform Projects

The OSEP funded two new projects in 2005 to develop, implement, and evaluate models for using technology to enhance the benefits of standards-based reform for children with disabilities. The project at CAST, Inc., will create and evaluate a universally designed curriculum-based measurement system to monitor students’ progress toward standards in reading through such means as development of adjustable text and graphics that support access to content for students with visual and sensory disabilities as well as learning disabilities. Project INFORM, at the University of Oregon, will assist state departments of education in organizing the measurement of state standards into a cohesive framework for decision-making that is responsive to the diversity of students with disabilities by developing (a) a computerized model of alignment that allows teachers to understand students’ specific skills relative to state standards, (b) a computerized curriculum-based measurement system to help teachers decide the optimal manner for students’ participation in state assessments, and (c) a computerized data entry and reporting system for monitoring student performance on state assessments.

Ongoing Investments Supporting Teaching, Learning, and Assessing

National Center on Educational Outcomes

NCEO provides national leadership in the participation of students with disabilities in national and state assessments, standard-setting efforts, and graduation requirements. Funded by OSEP, NCEO gathers and analyzes data on the participation and performance of students with disabilities in state and national assessments and in other education reform efforts and identifies policies and practices that ensure all students, including students with disabilities, benefit from state and local assessment and accountability efforts. Through publications, presentations, TA, and other networking activities, NCEO facilitates the use of research-based information by states, policy groups, researchers, and other agencies so that lessons learned from careful research can be translated into practice at all levels to improve student results.

NCEO's Web site is <http://www.education.umn.edu/nceo>.

Research on Assessment and Reading

Two projects on assessment and reading, initially funded by OSEP, now are being supported through IES. **Developing Accessible and Valid Reading Assessments: A Research-Based Solution** is a project that is designing and developing an accessible reading proficiency assessment that isolates the components of reading into different test sections to allow scores to be reported by component for improved student diagnosis, progress monitoring, and design of intervention. The project, conducted by Educational Testing Service, is developing a definition of reading proficiency that addresses the five components of reading, a research agenda, principles and guidelines for designing accessible reading tests, and an accessible, diagnostic, reading proficiency assessment.

More information is available on the National Accessible Reading Assessments Web site at <http://www.narap.info/about/dara.htm>.

The **Partnership for Accessible Reading Assessments (PARA)** is at the NCEO and represents a consortium that is working toward accessible reading assessments for all children with disabilities that affect reading. The Center is conducting a systematic program of research and development to make large-scale assessment of reading proficiency accessible to students with disabilities that affect reading.

For more information, visit PARA's Web site: <http://www.readingassessment.info>.

Projects on Reading and Students with Mental Retardation

Three projects on reading for students with mental retardation, originally funded by OSEP, now are being supported through IES. **RAISE: Reading Accommodations and Interventions for Students with Emergent Literacy** will evaluate reading interventions for students with moderate and severe mental retardation to advance both key reading skills and progress in literacy. Based at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte, the center will examine the implementation and impact of four different types of reading programs. The project, **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Reading Interventions for Students with Mild Mental Retardation**, located at Georgia State University, evaluates the effectiveness of theoretically motivated instructional reading programs for children with mild mental retardation. Programs are being evaluated for their impact on both early developing reading skills and the development of reading fluency and beginning reading comprehension skills, including other developmentally related language and cognitive skills. Findings will be disseminated to participating school district personnel and families as well as nationally via conference presentations and publications.

Maximizing Literacy Learning Among Children with Mild to Moderate Mental Retardation (Project Maximize) is a 4-year longitudinal study of 150 children who have mild or moderate mental retardation. The research is intended to determine if what we know about teaching reading to students with reading difficulties applies to children who have mild or moderate mental retardation. This project, at Southern Methodist University, will also explore what levels of reading competence can be achieved by these students. Findings will be disseminated through scholarly publications, publications designed for practitioners, and conference presentations.

National Collaborative Center on Standards and Assessment Development

The National Alternate Assessment Center at the University of Kentucky brings together and builds upon the current research base on alternate assessment and provides technical support to states in the development of guidelines and procedures for designing high-quality alternate assessments with an emphasis on technical quality, alignment with grade-level content, and design and administration issues. Funded by OSEP, the Center is developing an alternate assessment design and implementation model and will produce a prototype of a technical manual which will include the unique features of each type of alternate assessment and the technical quality criteria of each. TA and information will be provided to states by the Center and through coordinating with other TA and dissemination resources such as the Regional Resource Centers. The Center's Web site is: <http://www.naacpartners.org>

Enhanced Assessments Instruments Grant Program

The Enhanced Assessments Instruments Grant Program, funded by OESE, has been instrumental in developing innovative assessments and psychometric methods used in statewide assessment programs. The purpose of these competitive grants is to support state activities designed to improve the quality, validity, and reliability of state academic assessments beyond the requirements described in section 1111(b)(3) of the *NCLB* Act. *NCLB* suggests a wide variety of appropriate uses for these funds, but competitive priorities focus on assessments designed for measuring the achievement of students with disabilities and English language learners. Individual states or a consortium of states are eligible to apply for the enhanced assessment grants. Nine consortia were the recipients of the initial grants (awarded during FY 2003), and five additional awards were made in FY 2004.