



All Kids Count

by

Julia K. Landau, J.D.

Janet R. Vohs, B.A.

and

Carolyn A. Romano, J.D.

Book Design by

Janet Malone

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About the Federation and the PEER Project

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities. We further believe that listening to and learning from families and from people with disabilities about their experiences, knowledge, hopes, and dreams are fundamental to shaping a society in which everyone's contributions count.

Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER) is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts.

Through publications, teleconferences, workshops, and institutes, the PEER Project provides opportunities for parents, parent organizations, and professionals to learn about school reform efforts occurring in states and local communities. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in early literacy. Information briefs, facts sheets, and a resource manual on school reform are currently being developed.

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PEER Core Staff

Carolyn A. Romano, Project Director
Janet R. Vohs, Assistant Project Director
Martha H. Ziegler, Senior Resource Specialist
Richard J. Robison, Technical Monitor
Kristen "Nummi" Nummerdor, Graphic Designer
Piyanuch "Oui" Sirithanachai, Project Assistant
John Sullivan, Technology Specialist

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Introduction

"Measure what you treasure." This popular saying is particularly relevant when considering the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment systems. Statewide assessments have become a key component of school reform initiatives because they are seen as a way to hold schools accountable for the educational results of all students. Assessments also help states and school districts gather information about student performance and progress, leading to improved education for all students.

Yet, a look at the recent history of assessment practices across the country reveals that students with disabilities have been excluded from assessments at alarmingly high levels: approximately fifty percent of students with disabilities have been excluded from various large-scale assessments, with rates of exclusion varying widely from state to state. Exclusion from large-scale assessment systems gives an unfortunate message that the learning achievements and progress of some students don't count. If, as a nation, we really do believe that all students count, then we must count all students, including students with disabilities, in statewide assessments. Counting all students does not mean that all students take the same tests. It does mean that every student deserves full and equal opportunity to demonstrate what he or she knows and is able to do. It also means that every student's learning and educational progress is accounted for and considered when critical policy and program decisions based on assessment scores are made.

All Kids Count is intended as a basic primer on the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment systems. Its purpose is to give parents, parent leaders, professionals, and other interested parties basic guidelines and points of reference for participating in discussions around policies and practices related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment programs.

Right now educators, school administrators, parents, policymakers, test designers, and other stakeholders are intensely engaged in developing new strategies to include students with disabilities in large-scale assessments. One important impetus for this increased attention to assessment occurred on June 4, 1997, the day President Clinton signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997. IDEA now requires that students with disabilities have access to the same high standards and general education curriculum as their non-disabled peers. IDEA also requires that all students with disabilities be included in state and district assessments, with accommodations where appropriate. Participation of children with disabilities is similarly required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Benefits to Students

Statewide assessments have enormous ramifications for students with disabilities.

Benefits to students include:

A Key to Higher Expectations. The overall goal for our nation's many education reform initiatives is to raise the level of learning for all students, including students with disabilities. This goal is grounded in the belief that all students are capable of meeting much higher standards than have been expected of them in the past. Historically, expectations for students with disabilities have been appallingly low, as these students have been discouraged from participating in general curriculum studies. Students with disabilities must participate in assessments to ensure meaningful access to the same high curriculum and standards that drive education for all other students.

School Accountability for All. Participation in assessments sends the message that schools are accountable for all students reaching higher levels of learning. The higher expectations placed on schools can result in increased use of accommodations or adaptations and other strategies to help students with disabilities reach higher standards.

A Role in Shaping Policies and Programs. To help students meet higher standards, state and local education agencies are developing new instructional methods and technologies. Data from assessments can be used to gather information about promising practices and to improve programs. If students with disabilities are included in assessments, their needs will be considered in shaping education policies, programs, and practices.

High Stakes for Individual Students. For individual students, the importance of assessment may be even more direct and critical. Increasingly, assessments are used as the basis for awarding diplomas or for gaining access to post-secondary opportunities. Students with disabilities must have equal opportunities to demonstrate their competencies in order to have full and equal access to future life opportunities.

States are now reviewing and revising their policies in order to comply fully with IDEA. Educators must now consider the achievement of all students with disabilities when evaluating the performance of a school, district, or state. These changes to IDEA provide great promise. When properly implemented, they will ensure that students with disabilities receive the full benefits of education reform. As with all other aspects of special education law, however, making the promise a reality is contingent on the active participation of parents of students with disabilities working in partnership with educators.

In America, we treasure education and view it as essential to creating the educated citizenry necessary for a democracy to flourish. We treasure our children as the best hope for our future and the future of our country. With active participation of parents, committed professionals, and ordinary citizens, we can create an educational system that

demonstrates its commitment to each child by counting and being accountable for each child's learning.

Overview of Contents

All Kids Count contains the following components:

Executive Summary: Analysis of Statewide Assessment Survey Results -- This Summary provides a national picture of statewide assessment policies and practices, including those related to the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs. The analysis is based on findings from the PEER Project's state-by-state survey of statewide assessment programs.

State Profiles: Statewide Assessment Survey Results -- The State Profiles are based on the PEER Project's survey of individual state policies and practices related to statewide assessment. In addition to general information about each state's assessment program, there are brief answers to specific questions related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in assessments, the use of accommodations, and the reporting of scores.

In conducting this survey, the PEER Project analyzed state policy documents and directly contacted state education officials to update, verify, and expand upon the Council of Chief State School Officers' Annual Survey of State Student Assessment Programs (Fall 1996, data on 1995-96 programs). The PEER Project's survey was conducted from Summer 1997 through February 1998. The PEER Project recognizes that states are continuously engaged in addressing school reform and assessment issues, and, therefore, some of the reported information may already have changed.

Policy Issues, Questions, and Strategies -- This section highlights key policy and implementation issues for students with disabilities and suggests strategies for improving state policy and program development related to assessment.

Examples of Accommodations from State Assessment Policies -- The PEER Project compiled this list of accommodations while reviewing state assessment policies. They are offered as examples of possible accommodations that may be useful in developing an individual student's IEP or 504 plan, or in designing state policies.

Assessment: A Key Component of Education Reform -- Prepared by Martha L. Thurlow, Ph.D., Associate Director, National Center for Educational Outcomes, this PEER Information Brief provides an overview of the role of assessment in education reform and highlights issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments.

Executive Summary: Analysis of Statewide Assessment Survey Results

Over the past months, from the Summer of 1997 through February 1998, the PEER Project conducted a survey of statewide assessment programs. The purpose of the survey was to provide parents, parent leaders, professionals, advocates, and others with a snapshot of their state's policies and current practices in assessment. With the recent passage of the IDEA Amendments of 1997, many statewide assessment programs are in flux; nearly all will have to make major changes in assessment policies and practices to fully implement IDEA. The survey findings and individual state profiles will assist those efforts in a number of ways. First, since students with disabilities have been largely excluded from large-scale assessment in the past, parents and others concerned with the education of students with disabilities are unfamiliar with the language and practices of assessment. The state profiles provide a handy reference for understanding the status of statewide assessment in one's own state and for identifying areas where more information may be needed. The survey will also serve a useful purpose by providing a point of reference to gauge future progress toward achieving full compliance with IDEA.

The following report summarizes our key findings as of February 1998.

General Overview

Forty-seven states currently have some form of statewide assessment program in place. Statewide large-scale assessments are usually standardized "paper and pencil" assessments that are different from the individualized evaluations required by IDEA. Statewide assessment programs have different goals than special education assessments. Usually, the purpose of a statewide assessment is twofold: (1) to provide information about individual student achievement, and (2) to gauge the success of schools and school systems, i.e., to hold educators accountable for student attainment of educational outcomes.

In many states, test results have high stakes for individual students. For example, more than a third (43%) of the states require students to "pass" an assessment in order to receive a high school diploma. These high stakes underscore the importance of participation. If students with disabilities are exempt from the assessment, they will not even be considered when schools are determining which students are eligible to receive diplomas.

The type of assessments utilized by states throughout the country are quite varied. There is a wide range in the choice of specific assessment instruments, the grades in which students are assessed, the subjects tested, and the types of questions used. Regardless of the specific nature of a state's assessment system, full implementation of IDEA requires a focus on state policies for including and accommodating students with disabilities in the assessment program.

Findings Related to Students with Disabilities

The following is a summary of the PEER Project's survey findings (corresponding to questions 6, 7, and 8 of the state profiles) which pertain to students with disabilities.

1. Participation of All Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessment

The state must have "...in effect policies and procedures to ensure that...[c]hildren with disabilities are included in general State and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations, where necessary" [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(17)].

All children with disabilities must participate in statewide assessment. Yet, very few states currently have policies which provide for full participation of students with disabilities. The vast majority (89%) of states currently allow exemption of some students with disabilities. The exemption criteria for many states are quite broad, leading to concern that existing policies contribute to exclusion of large numbers of students from participation in the assessment. More than one quarter (28%) of the states do not provide any specific criteria for IEP teams to utilize when determining exemptions. In addition, there are still some states (17%) that continue to exempt students based on the restrictiveness of their placement or the category of their disability, policies that are clearly inconsistent with the IDEA Amendments of 1997. In a few states, the IEP team is not used to determine a student's participation in assessments. These policies and practices will need to be changed to comply with IDEA.

One third of the states allow exemptions for students whose instructional programs do not reflect the learning standards on which the test is based or for students who are not seeking a diploma. These exemption criteria are particularly troubling. IDEA was amended to require access to the general education curriculum. This change was made in recognition of the fact that many students are currently denied the opportunity to learn the same curriculum provided to students without disabilities. Thus, exemption criteria linked to a student's lack of participation in the general curriculum will simply solidify these exclusionary practices.

IDEA now mandates that a state must conduct alternate assessments for children who cannot participate in the general statewide assessment, even with accommodations [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(17)(A)(ii)]. "Only a small percentage" of students should participate in the state assessment program with alternate tests [Note to Proposed Rules 34 C.F.R. 300.138]. Alternate assessments must be available no later than July 1, 2000. Yet, a Summer 1997 phone survey conducted by the PEER Project found that 62% of the 26 states responding did not have alternate assessments available. This finding is consistent with the survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers* which indicated that 90% of the states did not have alternate assessments available. This is of grave concern, because the unavailability of these tests means that students requiring alternate assessments to demonstrate what they know will be denied that opportunity. It will take time to develop the alternate assessments necessary to provide students with equal opportunities to demonstrate their competencies. Therefore, state agencies must act quickly in order to comply with IDEA and be ready to conduct alternate assessments by July 1, 2000.

State officials frequently indicated that they were in the process of revising state exemption policies in view of the new IDEA requirements. Significantly, all the states have adopted policies regarding participation of students with disabilities, a change that signifies notable progress over recent years. In addition, the vast majority of states utilize the IEP team for making assessment decisions. It is now crucial that parents, educators, and state and federal officials ensure that any new policies address the needs of all students with disabilities.

* Annual Survey of State Student Assessment Programs: Data on 1995-96 Statewide Student Assessment Programs. (Fall 1996). Council of Chief State School Officers. Washington, DC.

2. Provision of Appropriate Accommodations in order for Children with Disabilities to Participate in Statewide Assessments

The IEP must include "...a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of State or districtwide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in such assessment" [20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A)(v)(I)].

The IEP team is authorized and required to specify any accommodations and modifications necessary for the child to participate in the statewide assessments. In the vast majority of states, the IEP teams do determine individual accommodations. Few states, however, comply fully with IDEA requirements.

Almost three quarters of the states (72%) provide a list of "approved accommodations." The majority of these states, however, preclude IEP teams from recommending an accommodation that is not on the approved list. Such a restriction is inconsistent with IDEA because it limits the ability of the IEP team to choose accommodations or modifications based on the student's individual needs. Only five states appear to permit IEP teams to choose the accommodations or modifications a student needs even if the accommodations are not on the state's approved list. Twelve states allow the IEP team to request state approval for an accommodation that is not listed. However, this approval process still removes the IEP decision about accommodations from the team most knowledgeable about the child, a practice inconsistent with IDEA.

State policies which allow IEP teams to consider the full range of accommodations, including those utilized in classroom instruction, will best protect against discrimination in assessment practices. Approximately one quarter of the states appear to have such policies, allowing IEP teams to consider accommodations based solely on the child's individual needs. At the same time, it is important to note that additional research will be needed to address technical issues around test measurement and use of the full range of accommodations.

3. Reporting Scores of Students with Disabilities with the Scores of All Other Students ("Aggregated") and Separately from the Scores of Students without Disabilities ("Disaggregated")

Reports to the public under...[this section]...must include aggregated data that include the

performance of children with disabilities together with all other children and disaggregated data on the performance of children with disabilities [Proposed Rules 34 C.F.R. 300.139 (b)].

IDEA requires states to report the scores of students with disabilities in two ways. First, school, district, and statewide summaries must report the scores of students with disabilities with the scores of all other students ("aggregated" scores). This provision is important because if the scores of students with disabilities are only reported separately, the achievement of students with disabilities is likely to be considered as less important when evaluating school performance. As stated in the comment section of the proposed rules regarding aggregation of data: "The Secretary believes that the IDEA Amendments of 1997 were designed to foster consideration of children with disabilities as a part of the student population as a whole." In addition, school, district, and statewide summaries must also report the performance of children with disabilities separately from the scores of students without disabilities ("disaggregated" scores) to allow analysis of student performance and identification of specific trends.

Approximately one fifth (23%) of the states currently report both aggregated and disaggregated scores. Approximately one half of the states report only disaggregated scores, reporting the performance of students with disabilities separately from students without disabilities. The remaining states only provide aggregated reports, incorporating the scores of students with disabilities in local and state reports. As states move forward to implement the new provisions of IDEA, they must ensure that all reports are comprised of scores of students with disabilities in the aggregated and disaggregated forms. Reporting aggregated and disaggregated scores will ensure that the performance of students with disabilities is fully considered when evaluating the overall performance of our public schools.

Again, the PEER Project emphasizes that these findings are intended as a snapshot of the status of statewide assessment programs at a particular moment in time. The U.S. Department of Education, states, school districts, educators, parents, professionals, students, and other interested citizens will continue to be actively engaged in developing meaningful ways to measure progress and evaluate educational practices of students and schools. It is critical that issues for students with disabilities be considered as these systems are designed and developed. Implementing IDEA will present many rewards and challenges as we strive to extend the benefits of school reform to all students.

Statewide Assessment: Policy Issues, Questions and Strategies

This policy paper provides a list of questions that parents and parent organizations can address in an effort to ensure that statewide assessment systems fully and fairly include students with disabilities. In the past, students with disabilities have too often been excluded from large-scale assessments. However, students with disabilities now must be included in state assessment programs with appropriate accommodations, as required by

the recent amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Statewide assessments have enormous ramifications for students with disabilities. Assessments frequently serve as the cornerstone of efforts to improve education. If students with disabilities are excluded from the development and administration of statewide assessments, it is less likely that they will benefit from overall school reform improvements. Also, statewide assessments can be a way to hold schools accountable for improving educational outcomes for all students. If students with disabilities are excluded, they may not be considered when important educational policy decisions are made.

Statewide assessments are different from the three-year individualized evaluations required by IDEA for students receiving special education services. For students in special education, a variety of tests and assessments are used to determine whether the student continues to need special education and to identify the student's specific educational needs. In contrast, statewide large-scale assessments are usually standardized, "paper and pencil" assessments. The goals of statewide assessment programs also differ from those of special education assessments. Usually, the purpose of a large-scale assessment is two-fold: 1) to provide information about individual student achievement, and 2) to gauge the success of schools and school systems -- to hold educators accountable for student attainment of educational outcomes.

Almost all states now have some type of statewide assessment program as a result of education reform initiatives. Many states will now need to revise their assessment policies in order to comply with new IDEA amendments and ensure participation of all students with disabilities. Parents who are knowledgeable about diverse learners (including students with IEPs) need to become active participants in the development of assessment policies. The following questions are intended as a guide to effective participation during this period of reform and change.

What type of assessment will the state use?

It is important to know what kind of assessment your state administers. Typically, a state's assessment includes one or more of the following types of assessments: 1) multiple-choice questions; 2) performance-based assessments, in which students demonstrate their knowledge through short-answer, open-ended, and essay questions; and 3) portfolio assessment, in which examples of students' work (essays, models, or reports) are assembled to document student progress.

Find out which type of assessment your state will administer, and the subject areas covered, then analyze what you think will best meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Which assessment or which contractor will the state use?

Find out if your state will use assessments that have already been developed ("off-the-

shelf" assessments) or if the state will develop its own assessment, aligned with the state's standards. Ensure that the company selected to administer or develop the test has sufficient expertise and experience in assessing students with disabilities.

What is the process for developing the assessment?

It is important to design the assessments so that they do not discriminate against students with disabilities. Often when developing a new assessment, a bias committee is established. The bias committee, which traditionally addresses race discrimination, should also address discrimination on the basis of disability. Individuals with disabilities and individuals with expertise in disability bias should be included on the committee.

Such a committee is important because some test questions rely on information unavailable to a child because of his or her disability. In addition, students with all types and severities of disabilities should fully participate in all samples, trials, and field tests.

What are the "stakes" or consequences of the statewide assessment?

It is important for parents to know how test results will be used. Find out whether students are required to "pass" the assessment in order to receive a high school diploma. Many states link assessment results to graduation. Additionally, some states use assessment results as a basis for student promotion, student awards, or recognition of exemplary performance.

Furthermore, some states use assessment results as a direct accountability tool for educators and school systems, for example, linking test scores with bonuses, school funding, or accreditation.

Will all students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment?

Among the most critical issues to explore are your state's policy and practices for allowing students with disabilities to participate in the statewide assessment. Recent amendments to IDEA specifically require states to include all children with disabilities in assessment programs. The ADA and Section 504 similarly require participation of students with disabilities.

Despite these requirements, currently some states exempt certain groups of students with disabilities from the state assessment, based on disability categories, the child's reading level, or the restrictiveness of the child's placement. Other states already include all students in the assessment system, providing accommodations or alternate assessments that enable students with disabilities to participate fully.

It is crucial to ensure that all students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment, as required by law. If students with disabilities are excluded from testing, there is no mechanism to determine whether these students receive the benefits of education reform. Further, if certain groups of disabled students are exempt, then the achievement of the excluded students will not be considered when evaluating a school or school district's performance. Schools will have less incentive to improve education for students whose scores do not count. For those states where test results have significant

consequences for the individual students, such as receipt of a diploma, participation becomes even more critical.

Who determines if a student with disabilities needs accommodations in order to participate in the assessment?

IDEA now requires that a child's IEP specify the need for modifications in the administration of a state (or district-wide) assessment. Through the IEP process, individualized decisions must be made regarding whether a student with a disability can participate in the statewide assessment "as is" (without accommodations) or whether the student requires accommodations in order to participate. In some cases the IEP team may determine that a student requires an alternate assessment in order to receive an equal opportunity to demonstrate his or her proficiency and achievement.

Most states currently rely on the IEP team to determine how students with disabilities will participate in the statewide assessment. The individual decisions regarding assessment are subject to due process procedures required by IDEA.

What type of accommodations are available to students with disabilities?

States currently have wide-ranging policies regarding the type of accommodations available for assessments. There are generally four types of accommodations that should be considered by the IEP team:

- Timing of test: e.g., extended time, breaks, extending over days, time of day
- Setting of test: e.g., small group, alone, front of room, carrel
- Presentation of questions: e.g., large print, braille, readers, sign language, assistive technology
- Methods of response: e.g., dictate to scribe, point to response, sign language, computer, tape recorder

Some states allow students to use the same accommodations for assessment that are included in students' IEPs and used in classroom instruction. Other states have a limited list of "approved accommodations" that IEP teams must choose from. In this case, IEP teams should still be allowed to specify unlisted accommodations if necessary to ensure equal opportunity to participate in the assessment.

Accommodations necessary to remove barriers to participation must be provided. It is important to acknowledge that use of some types of accommodations can be controversial. These issues become most apparent when the accommodation is closely related to the skill being assessed (i.e., reading a reading test). State policy which allows IEP teams to consider the full range of accommodations, including those utilized in classroom instruction, such as a reader for all subjects, will best protect against discrimination in test administration. Such a policy is critical, especially for high-stakes tests.

IDEA recognizes that some students may require "alternate" assessments in order to participate in the state assessment system. The recent amendments to IDEA require states to develop and begin conducting alternate assessments no later than July 1, 2000.

How will the test results be used?

The way test results will be used at the classroom and school level is very important. This issue is especially critical for students who perform poorly on the assessment. Test results should be used to ensure that these students receive the instructional support and opportunities they need to improve their performance, and to further ensure that any remedial educational opportunities are provided in the mainstream. Test results should not be used as a basis for holding students back, tracking, or pull-out instruction, and the test results alone should not be used as basis for referral to special education.

How will the test scores of students with disabilities be reported?

States usually report school-wide and district-wide test scores, as well as individual student scores. Exclusion of students with disabilities from assessment has led to exclusion of many students from these reports. Recent amendments to IDEA require that school systems disaggregate as well as aggregate test scores of students with disabilities. Therefore, consistent with IDEA, states should report the scores of students with and without disabilities together (aggregating the scores), in addition to providing the test scores of students with disabilities separately (disaggregating the scores).

When the scores of students with disabilities and students without disabilities are reported together ("aggregated"), it is clear that the progress of all students will be given equal weight when evaluating the effectiveness of public school systems. At the same time, it is also important to provide mechanisms to separate the scores of students with disabilities in order to hold schools accountable for their achievement. Many states will need to change their reporting practices to comply with new IDEA reporting requirements.

Obtain copies of your state's education reform and assessment legislation, regulations, and policy documents.

Call your state Department of Education to request these documents. You can also request them from your local legislator. (See State Departments of Education Contact Information, page 85.)

Review state documents to determine current policy regarding inclusion of students with disabilities and provision of accommodations.

Decide whether a change in law or policy is necessary to ensure inclusion of all students with disabilities in statewide assessment with necessary accommodations. You can contact your state's Parent Center, Protection and Advocacy organization, disability and children's advocacy organizations, or the American Civil Liberties Union to request assistance in reviewing your state's law and policy. (See Parent Centers on Disability Contact Information, page 95.)

Propose changes to your state law and policy that will address concerns about inclusion of students with disabilities.

Work with key stakeholders (other parent and disability organizations, P&A, children's advocacy organizations, state special education advisory committee, etc.) to secure the changes necessary to fully and fairly include all students with disabilities in assessment.

Identify who will be making policy decisions about participation of students with disabilities.

The state Department of Education or your local legislator can help you to determine whether the legislature, state board of education, or department of education will be the leader in this area.

Get involved in the decision-making process.

If your state or district has an assessment advisory group, join the group or ensure that parents of children with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and special education and inclusion experts are appointed to the group. The state Department of Education or your superintendent can inform you whether an advisory group exists.

Set up meetings with the decisionmakers, and provide materials and information to support your positions about the policy questions listed above. Provide proposed language for necessary policy changes, and provide examples of students with disabilities who may be excluded from the assessment.

Consider a variety of advocacy strategies to effect changes in your state policy and practice.

Any of the following strategies may prove to be useful or necessary: dissemination of position papers, proposals, and reports; providing information and training to parents of children with disabilities statewide; meeting with staff at the Department of Education; testifying before legislative hearings, the State Advisory Council (SAC), and state Board of Education; providing information to media; filing complaints with the Office for Civil Rights or OSEP; and legal action.

Identify other organizations or constituencies with similar concerns and positions.

Bilingual parent groups, Title I parent groups, PTAs, teacher unions, and educators' professional organizations may prove to be useful allies.

Ensure that the organization administering your state's assessment is qualified to assess students with disabilities.

[Contact the PEER Project](#) or the Parent Center in your state to get information about contractors and assessments being considered for selection or already chosen by your

state. Ascertain the experience and expertise of testers in including students with disabilities in assessments, and the appropriateness of proposed tests. You can also call The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FAIR Test), at (617) 864-4810 for information.

Develop questions to ask all contractors to ascertain their history and expertise in including students with disabilities. For instance, ask them for the percentage of students with disabilities who have participated in other assessments they have developed. Request policies regarding participation and accommodations for other assessments they administer. Request resumes of the staff who will be involved in the project. Request specific details about the organization's experience including students with severe disabilities.

Ensure that participation in assessments is fully addressed at IEP meetings.

Work with your local school district or state Department of Education to ensure that IEPs specifically address participation in statewide (or district-wide) assessments. IEP members must specify whether the student with a disability can participate in the assessment: (1) under routine conditions; (2) with accommodations, or (3) with an alternate assessment. The IEP should state the specific types of accommodations or alternate assessment required.

Consider whether changes to the IEP form developed by the state Department of Education or local district would help IEP teams fully and fairly address these issues.

Examples of Accommodations from State Assessment Policies

Education reforms designed to improve educational results for all students have been initiated at federal and state levels throughout the 1990s. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, national school reform legislation signed into law by President Clinton on March 31, 1994, specifies important goals and principles applicable to all students. This legislation specifically includes students with disabilities in its call for much higher standards of learning for all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA) further reinforce the requirement to include students with disabilities in regular education reform initiatives. IDEA raised the standards for students with disabilities by requiring that they have access to the general education curriculum, and by requiring that they be included in state assessment programs with appropriate accommodations.

These higher expectations for students with disabilities have increased attention to providing the accommodations students need to have full and equal access to educational opportunities in instruction and testing. To ensure that their participation in testing is adequately considered, IDEA now requires IEP teams to include a statement of individual

modifications and accommodations students with disabilities need to participate in state and district-wide assessments.

In an effort to assist educators, parents, and policymakers as they move toward full participation of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessment programs, the PEER Project compiled the following examples of accommodations. The list was drawn from a review of state policy documents developed by the 47 states currently administering state assessments. Although states have wide-ranging policies regarding the type of accommodations available for assessments and their usage, it is important to note that test modifications must be based on individual student needs. Since it is impossible to itemize all the possible situations that may accompany a particular disabling condition in relation to a particular test or test item, a comprehensive listing of every possible testing accommodation that may be appropriate is not possible. However, the following brief description of the kinds of accommodations used across the country may be useful as IEP teams consider the full range of accommodations that may be needed to provide students with disabilities full and equal opportunity to participate in assessment programs.

It is important to acknowledge that use of some types of accommodations can be controversial. These issues become most apparent when the accommodation is closely related to the skill being assessed (i.e., reading a reading test). State policy which allows IEP teams to consider the full range of accommodations, including those utilized in classroom instruction, such as a reader for all subjects, will best protect against discrimination in test administration. Such a policy is critical, especially for high-stakes tests. Additional research will be needed to address technical issues around test measurement and use of the full range of accommodations.

The examples of accommodations listed here are organized into four categories that should be considered by the IEP team: Timing/Scheduling Accommodations, Setting Accommodations; Presentation Accommodations; Response Accommodations. The examples are summarized or, in some instances, excerpted from the original policy documents.

A. Timing/Scheduling Accommodations

At time of day or week most beneficial to student

Multiple testing sessions

In periods of ___ minutes followed by rest breaks of ___ minutes

Extended time to complete tests

Untimed testing sessions

...until, in the administrator's judgment, the students can no longer sustain the activity due to physical disability or limited attention span. (Allow test administrator to determine length of sessions and need for breaks based on observation of student's ability to successfully sustain the activity. Additional sessions would be scheduled as needed to complete testing.)

B. Setting Accommodations

In a small group, in a separate location

Individually, in a separate location

In a carrel

In the special education classroom

With student seated in front of classroom

With teacher facing student

Near student's special education teacher or aide

At the student's home

At the hospital

With special lighting

With special acoustics

Individual testing stations for students responding verbally

With adaptive or special furniture

In location with minimal distractions

Students with visual impairments may be separated from other examinees if their method of response is distracting to other students.

Students should not be required to take exams in corridors or other uncomfortable locations.

C. Presentation Accommodations

Large print editions of tests

Braille editions of tests

Directions read aloud by test administrator

Test items read aloud by test administrator

Test given by person familiar to child

Standard directions read several times at start of exam

Directions reread for each new page of test items

Directions given in simplified language

Key words in directions (such as verbs) underlined or highlighted

Directions provided for each new set of skills in the exam

Directions repeated as needed

Student asked to demonstrate understanding of directions

Directions given in any format necessary to accommodate student (signing, auditory amplification, repeating, etc.)

Directions provided on verbatim audiotape (for students who have difficulty with printed words or numbers and/or who acquire knowledge primarily through the auditory channel)

Student given a written copy of examiner's instructions (from examiner's manual) at time of tests

Additional examples provided

Practice tests or examples provided before test is administered

Student [physically] assisted to track the test items by pointing or placing the student's finger on the items

Spacing increased between test items

Size, shape, or location of the space for answers altered as needed

Fewer items placed on each page

Size of answer bubbles enlarged

Cues (e.g., arrows and stop signs) provided on answer form

Student cued to remain on task

Physical assistance provided

Paper placed in different positions

Student's test taking position altered

Opportunity for movement increased or decreased

Stimuli reduced (e.g., number of items on desk limited)

Test administered by special education teacher or aide

Directions and test signed by interpreter

Appropriate adjustment of any medication ensured to prevent interference with the student's functioning

Use of glasses, if needed

Proper functioning of hearing aids ensured

Students who use braille edition of test use braille rulers

Sign language interpreter, amplification, or visual display for test directions/examiner-led activities

Videocassette with taped interpreter signing test instructions and test items

Cued speech interpreters, and/or oral interpreters

Magnifying equipment (closed circuit television, optical low-vision aid, etc.)

Assistive technology (adaptive keyboard, word processor, voice-activated word processor, voice synthesizer, etc.)

Amplification equipment (e.g., hearing aid, auditory trainer)

Noise buffers worn by student

Augmentative communication systems or strategies, including letter boards, picture communication systems and voice output systems

Loose-leaf test booklet (allow student to remove pages and insert them in a device such as printer or typewriter for doing math scratchwork)

Placemaker, special paper, graph paper, or writing template to allow student to maintain position better or focus attention

Acetate color shields on pages to reduce glare and increase contrast

Masks or markers to maintain place

Visual stickers

FM or other type of assistive listening device

Closed-caption or video materials

Tape or magnets to secure papers to work area

Mounting systems, including slantboards and easel

Device to screen out extraneous sounds

Each test site must have two adults when using an interpreter to sign the test: 1) a test administrator who reads the information aloud (e.g., directions, test questions) and 2) a qualified interpreter who signs to the students. It is recommended that the school use an interpreter who has previously signed for the students.

The interpreter must be proficient in sign language or the student's individual communication modality. The interpreter should not fingerspell words that have a commonly used sign. Test administrator and interpreter must attend all training sessions.

Because the interpreter must be familiar with the concepts of writing/open-ended and multiple-choice test questions, he or she is allowed to review writing/open-ended test items for up to 15 minutes and multiple choice items for up to 2 hours per subject on the day of testing under secure conditions. The interpreters must not disclose the content or specific items of the test. Test security must be maintained.

Place keepers, trackers and pointers; allow students to use a device [for] place keeping or the assistance of a proctor to nonverbally assist in the manual tracking of item to item or item to answer sheet. Proctor must have training in performing the service without giving verbal or nonverbal clues to student.

On some tests, students with disabilities may be unable to complete a test item due to item format. Whenever possible, the format of the item should be changed to allow student to complete the test. However, this is not always possible, i.e., some test items can't be reproduced in braille. Questions presented auditorally can't always be signed

without changing purpose of the item. In such case, questions should be omitted and the credit for the question prorated. (Only use when inability to complete due to item format, not due to lack of competence in skills or knowledge being measured.)

...audiocassettes used in conjunction with a printed test to provide multi-sensory stimulation.

Assist the student to track the test items by pointing or placing the student's finger on the items.

Directions are nonsecure documents and may be reviewed prior to test administration.

Reading assessments may be read to student when the intent of reading is to measure comprehension, only if this is the normal mode as documented in IEP/504 plan.

D. Response Accommodations

Student marks answers in test booklets

Student marks answers by machine

Student writes answers on large-spaced paper

Student dictates answers to proctor or assistant who records it

Student dictates answers to scribe or tape recorder to be later transcribed; students are to include specific instruction about punctuation on the Writing Assessment

Student signs or points as alternative responses

Student audiotapes responses

Periodic checks provided to ensure student is marking in correct spaces

Spelling, punctuation and paragraphing requirements waived

Use of Response Aids, such as:

- abacus

- arithmetic table

- chubby, thin, or long well-sharpened pencils

- Misspeller's Dictionary, if student identified as having a disability which interferes with ability to learn how to spell (not special accommodation - electronic dictionaries are special accommodations)
- calculator, if documented disability interferes with mental or physical ability to perform math processes without calculator
- word processor or typewriter
- calculator/ talking calculator
- communication devices such as language board, speech synthesizer, computer, or typewriter
- other assistive communication device
- additional answer pages for students who require more space for writing due to size of their handwriting
- pencil adapted in size or grip diameter
- slate and stylus, braille writers, and modified abacus or speech output calculators (re: braille only)
- spell-check device (either separate device or as word processing function)
- grammar-check device

Scribe — The students should know the identity of the scribe, who should have previous experience working with the students.

Answers to questions designed to measure writing ability in English or in a second language may be recorded in an alternative manner (e.g., dictation). Spell check and grammar check devices are permitted. Students with severe spelling disabilities may be excused from spelling requirements.

In general, the student who uses an aid to record responses must provide all information, including spelling of difficult words, punctuation, paragraphing, grammar, etc. Only those students whose disability affects their ability to spell and punctuate should be excused from providing such information. Modifications can't include both a spell check device and deletion of spelling requirements (either/or).

Only those students whose disability affects their ability to either memorize or compute basic math facts should be allowed to use computational aids.

Regardless of the response option used, all student responses must be recorded in a regular spring test booklet before materials are sent in for scoring. If student's answers are marked in large print or separate sheet, test administrator must transfer the responses to a regular print test booklet.

If a student has no means of written communication sufficient to complete the writing assessment due to severe physical disability, that student can be exempted from the writing portion only of the basic skills test or high school graduation test. An exemption for this reason does not affect that student's eligibility for a regular high school diploma. Any decision to exempt a student from writing assessment should be clearly documented with justification in IEP.

Assessment: A Key Component of Education Reform

by Martha L. Thurlow, Ph.D., Associate Director, National Center on Educational Outcomes

Introduction

Assessment is a key component of special education and education reform. Children are assessed individually to determine their eligibility for special education services and to ascertain learning needs. Education reform initiatives usually rely on large-scale standards-based assessments — student progress is measured relative to a set of state, district, or national standards. Thus, what students know and are able to do is compared to standards of knowledge and skills, rather than to the performance of other students.

Assessments used for education reform often are referred to as statewide or district-wide assessments because they are designed to measure the status of the education system for all students. They may also be called large-scale assessments because large groups of students are tested in a relatively short period of time and under uniform conditions so that results can be compared across groups of students. You may recall taking these kinds of tests when you were in school.

In the past, large-scale assessments were not always considered important for students with disabilities — it was assumed that special education assessments provided sufficient data on how well students were doing in school. Typically, however, special education assessments have not provided information on what students know and can do relative to local and state standards.

Today's tests probably are different from the ones that you took. In addition to typical multiple-choice tests, alternative assessments are being used. Many of these alternative forms of assessment require students to provide written responses, and often the responses are expected to be several paragraphs long. The assessments may also be performance-based assessments — assessments that take a variety of forms including:

essays, problem-solving items, science experiments, production of art work, and portfolios of student work and computer simulations.

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require the participation of students with disabilities in statewide and district-wide assessments, regardless of the format of the assessments. This addition to the law means that the education system must be accountable for the results of education for all students.

What is Results-Based Accountability?

Standards-based assessments often are part of a larger accountability system — a system that holds an individual or group responsible for student learning. Results-based accountability is different from the compliance-based accountability of special education. Both approaches to accountability can be used at the same time. Results-based accountability looks at the important question, "Is the student learning?" Compliance-based accountability asks the question, "Is the student receiving the services written on his or her IEP?"

Accountability is a more encompassing term than assessment. It can include more than the collection of data from tests, record reviews, and other performance assessments. A system is accountable for all students when it makes sure that all students count (or participate) in the evaluation program of the education system. Counting all students does not mean that all students take the same test. Rather, it means that all students' learning and progress are accounted for and included when reporting on the education system.

Have Students with Disabilities Been Included in Assessment and Accountability Systems?

Studies show that students with disabilities have been excluded to an unreasonable extent from large-scale assessment programs and from results-based accountability systems. About 50% of students with disabilities have been excluded from various assessments at the national, state, and local levels. But the exclusion rates vary from 0% to 100%. And, these are only estimates. Most states and districts have a difficult time saying exactly how many students with disabilities participated in their large-scale assessments.

With the passage of the 1997 amendments to IDEA, exclusion of students with disabilities from state and district-wide assessments is no longer acceptable. IDEA now requires that students with disabilities be included in assessment programs. Specifically, students with disabilities are expected to participate in state and district-wide assessments, using accommodations where appropriate, and their scores are to be reported in the same ways that the scores of other students are reported. To ensure that all students with disabilities are included, alternate assessments are to be developed for the small percentage of students unable to participate in regular state and district-wide assessments. There should be no exclusion of students with disabilities from state and district-wide assessment programs.

Why be concerned about the exclusion of students with disabilities from assessments and accountability systems?

Out of sight is out of mind — individuals excluded from assessments are not likely to be considered in policy decisions that affect all students. Students with disabilities must be considered and included in the assessment of what students know and can do. To understand whether education is working for students with disabilities, inclusion in assessments and accountability systems is critical. Major changes in policies and practices are needed to ensure that all students with disabilities are included in state and district-wide assessments. Implementing the new IDEA requirements appropriately will require significant effort on the part of parents, educators, students, test-designers, policy makers, and others. In the mid 1990s, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) identified three points in the assessment process where exclusion of students often occurs. In each of these three phases of the assessment process, substantial changes are required:

1. development of the assessment,
2. administration of the assessment, and
3. reporting results of the assessment.

1. At the time of development

Students with disabilities often are not considered when items are developed, and they are not included when assessments are field-tested. As a result, assessments may not have appropriate items for students with disabilities. Frequently, there are insufficient test items to accommodate the diversity and range of skills of students with disabilities.

2. During administration

A second point of exclusion occurs during the administration of the assessment. This is the kind of exclusion most people know about. Low expectations, totally separate curricula, and lack of needed accommodations have led schools to exempt students. To protect students with disabilities from having to "suffer" through a test they may fail, parents have been encouraged to keep students home, or students have been pulled out of the classroom to watch a movie, or go on a field trip when the state or district-wide assessment is given.

There are many reasons for exclusion that occurs at the point of administration. Among the most common are:

- Written guidelines that are exclusionary or vague
- Restrictions on accommodations
- Altruistic, yet misguided, concerns about possible negative effects of tests on students with disabilities
- Incentives created by the assumption that students with disabilities will perform poorly and the desire to have a school or state look good in comparison to other schools or states

3. When reporting results

A third point of exclusion occurs when the reports of results are prepared. Often, the scores of students with disabilities are omitted. Scores are omitted in some cases, due to a

concern that the performance of students with disabilities will negatively impact the overall results of the assessment. On the other hand, states and districts sometimes are unable to separate the scores of students with disabilities from those of other students. When this is the case, it is difficult to hold schools accountable for the achievement of students with disabilities.

What Are Assessment Accommodations?

Assessment accommodations are changes in how the assessment is presented, where it is presented, the timing or scheduling of the assessment, and how the student can respond. States and districts use a number of terms to refer to the concept of accommodation. Frequently used terms include: adaptation, modification, and alteration. It is important to find out how these terms are used in a particular location. The use of accommodations during assessments is probably the most controversial aspect of the participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments. There are a number of technical and implementation issues related to the use of accommodations and their effect on test scores. These issues require additional research and negotiation to help create a fully inclusive assessment system. However, by law, students with disabilities must now be included in assessments with appropriate accommodations.

An Action Plan for Assessment: What Needs to Happen?

In less than a decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of attention that our nation pays to assessments given both in and outside of the classroom. Assessment and accountability have moved to the forefront of reform efforts and now IDEA requires that students with disabilities be included fully in these efforts. Building a system that is accountable for all students should be the goal of our education system. If we begin our planning and development of assessments with this end in mind, then we can proactively address the issues of accountability for the learning of all students.

General Actions Steps

Be in the know. Find out what your state or district is doing in the assessment arena. Does your state have a statewide assessment? Is there a district assessment? Secure copies of participation, accommodation, and reporting guidelines. If your state does not have a statewide or district assessment, find out what is currently being developed to account for student learning. In either case, check to see how students with disabilities are considered in the guidelines or the development of the assessment and policies. Use the following checklist to guide your efforts:

Instrument Development

Find out whether individuals knowledgeable about disabilities are involved in the development of test items or new assessments, and whether students with disabilities are included when assessments are field tested. Field testing helps identify problems and the need for more varied items. Test items can be dropped, modified, or added during this phase to allow more students to participate.

Instrument Administration

Check to determine whether students with disabilities are participating in the assessment.

When sampling procedures are used for a new assessment, the sample must be representative of all students.

Partial Participation

Even though a student may not be able to take all parts of an assessment, the student should be included in those parts in which participation is possible.

Alternate Assessment

For a small percentage of students with disabilities, it may be necessary to have an alternate assessment. These assessments are for students with severe disabilities who need a totally different test to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. Check to see whether an alternate assessment is available or being developed in addition to the regular assessment. The 1997 amendments to IDEA require states with state and district assessment programs to conduct alternate assessments beginning July 1, 2000, for students who need them.

A Monitoring System

It is important for assessment systems to monitor adherence to the assessment guidelines. Find out whether your state and district-wide assessment systems include mechanisms to:

- Check that students receive the appropriate assessment (regular or alternate).
- Verify that appropriate accommodations are provided during the assessment.

Remove incentives for exclusion from the regular assessment. Some states have achieved this by assigning the lowest possible proficiency level score to all excluded students when determining school, district, and statewide scores.

Reporting of Results

The IDEA Amendments of 1997 require students' scores to be reported separately ("disaggregated"), and the proposed rules stress the importance of combining ("aggregating") data in reports. In addition, the number of students with disabilities taking regular state or district assessments must be reported, along with the results of those students taking alternate assessments. If a student is excluded from regular testing for any reason, find out what the procedure is for including their alternate test results in testing reports. For example, Kentucky assigns the scores of all students to their neighborhood schools, regardless of the school they actually attend.

Individual IEP Action Steps

With the IDEA Amendments of 1997, IEPs must now address a student's participation in state and district-wide assessment. During the IEP process, attention needs to be given to

- (a) the goals of instruction, which must be linked to the general education curriculum,
- (b) the kinds of instructional accommodations used in the classroom, and
- (c) the accommodations needed to enable participation in assessments.

The following issues and questions should be addressed during the IEP development process:

Identify the goals of the student's instruction. With the IDEA Amendments of 1997, the IEP must address the student's participation in the general curriculum.

What kinds of instructional supports, services, and accommodations are indicated on the IEP? Are these accommodations appropriate given the student's strengths, weaknesses, and educational goals?

What kind of accommodations, if any, are necessary for the student to participate in state or district assessments? Are the accommodations used during classroom instruction the same as those provided during tests? If not, why not? Accommodations usually should not be introduced for the first time during an assessment. They should be part of the student's ongoing instruction.

If a student is being considered for an alternate assessment, consider whether further accommodations or adaptations would increase the likelihood of participation in the regular assessment.

Some Final Words

Increasingly, states are expected to implement systems of education that emphasize higher standards and accountability for all students. State assessments are being revised in response to changes in the law, public challenges, and national initiatives. Assessment results help policymakers make decisions to improve education programs. It is imperative, therefore, that all students, including students with disabilities, participate in these assessment and accountability systems. Participation will help ensure that American schools address the learning needs of the diverse student population.

Resources

Alternate Assessments for Students with Disabilities. NCEO Policy Directions Number 5 by M. Thurlow, K. Olsen, J. Elliott, J. Ysseldyke, R. Erickson, & E. Ahearn (1996) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Assessment Guidelines that Maximize the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments: Characteristics and Considerations. A report authored by J. Elliott, M. Thurlow, and J. Ysseldyke (1996, Synthesis Report 25) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Increasing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments. NCEO Policy Directions Number 6 by M. Thurlow, J. Ysseldyke, R. Erickson, and J. Elliott (1997) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Making Decisions About the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments. A report authored by J. Ysseldyke, M. Thurlow, K. McGrew, and M. Vanderwood (1994, Synthesis Report 13) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Outcomes Assessment for Students with Disabilities: Will it be Accountability or Continued Failure? An article authored by M. McLaughlin and S. Hopfengardner-Warren appearing in Preventing School Failure (1992, vol 36, issue 4, pp. 29-33).

Providing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments. An NCEO Policy Directions Number 7 by J. Elliott, J. Ysseldyke, M. Thurlow, and R. Erickson (1997) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Recommendations for Making Decisions About the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessment Programs. A report authored by J. Ysseldyke, M. Thurlow, K. McGrew, and J. Shriner (1994, Synthesis Report 15) at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Reporting the Results of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments. NCEO Policy Directions Number 8 by R. Erickson, J. Ysseldyke, M. Thurlow, and J. Elliott at the National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. A report authored by W. King, J. Baker, and J. Jarrow (no date) at the Association on Higher Education and Disability, University of Ohio.

Testing Students with Disabilities: Practical Strategies for Complying with District and State Requirements. A book by M. Thurlow, J. Elliott, and J. Ysseldyke (1998), published by Corwin Press, Inc. (Thousand Oaks, CA).

For more information, please contact:

National Center on Educational Outcomes
University of Minnesota
350 Elliott Hall
75 East River Road
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612 / 624-8561
Fax 612 / 624-0878
<http://www.coled.umn.edu/nceo>

Federal Departments

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education Programs
550 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20202

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>

Contact: Melody Musgrove, Director, Office of Special Education Programs
Melody.Musgrove@ed.gov

Contact: Ruth Ryder, Deputy Director, Office of Special Education Programs
Ruth.Ryder@ed.gov

Note: There are individual contacts for each state.

Division Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior Office of Indian
Education Programs

Bureau of Exceptional Education

Mail Stop #3512/MIB OIE-23

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, DC 20240

202-208-4976

202-208-5037 Special Education Team Chief

202-208-6675 Special Education Team

202-273-0030 Fax

www.shaman.unm.edu/oiep

Contact: Ken Whitehorn, Acting Bureau Chief
Regional coordinators address assessment issues.

For more information, contact Cheri McMahon.

202-208-6675

Note: Includes listings for tribes and schools nationwide.

Department of Defense

Education Activity, Special Education Branch

4800 Mark Center Drive

Alexandria, VA 22350-1400

<http://www.dodea.edu/Curriculum/specialEduc/index.cfm>

Contact: DODEA Headquarters Special Education Coordinator

Email: special_ed@hq.dodea.edu

Parent Centers on Disability in US Territories

American Samoa

American Samoa PAVE

P.O. Box 3432

Pago Pago, AS 96799

011-684-633-2407
011-684-633-2408 Fax
Contact: Fa' Anati Penitusi

Virgin Islands
V.I. FIND
#2 Nye Gade
St. Thomas, US VI 00802
340-775-3962
340-774-1662
340-775-3962 Fax
Contact: Catherine Rehema Glenn

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Boston, Massachusetts