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Reporting on State Assessment Data for Students with Disabilities: Synthesis of the 2007 NCEO Report

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The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has conducted nine analyses of the public reporting of state assessment results for students with disabilities including four since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This document synthesizes findings reported in NCEO's most recent analysis, *Nearing the Target in Disaggregated Subgroup Reporting to the Public on 2004-2005 Assessment Results*, by VanGetson and Thurlow (2007)¹. This synthesis was completed as part of the cooperative agreement between Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has marked a shift toward holding all students to high standards and holding all schools and school districts accountable for students' progress toward those standards (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). Perhaps most significantly, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), any school accepting federal dollars must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the number of students meeting proficiency standards in the areas of reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and once between grades 10 and 12 (Petersen & Young, 2004) and the ultimate goal is to have all students achieve proficiency by 2013-2014 (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). These results must be disaggregated by student group (i.e., gender, disability, limited English proficient [LEP], ethnicity, economic status, migrant status)², included in the state's accountability system, and publicly reported in a clear, timely and useful manner (Petersen & Young, 2004). Not surprisingly, since the passage of NCLB, there has been an increase in the number of states that publicly report participation and performance data for all of their assessments. The number of states that report these data for all of their alternate assessments has also shown considerable improvement.

¹ NCEO's document is available at <http://www.nceo.info/OnlinePubs/Tech46/>.

² Subgroups of migrant and gender are required subgroups for reporting purposes, but are not among the required subgroups for AYP determinations.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the 2004-2005 academic year were collected by reviewing every state's department of education website. At the time of initial review, a little over half of the states had already posted their 2004-2005 assessment data online in a way that made the data easy to locate and understand. This information was then verified and/or supplemented by contacting state directors of assessment and state directors of special education. Comparison data were used from the 2003-2004 NCEO analysis, as well as from earlier NCEO analyses.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

All 50 states reported some disaggregated general assessment results for students with disabilities for the 2004-2005 school year. Thirty-six states reported participation and performance data for all their general assessments; 12 reported participation and performance data for some of their general assessments; and two reported only performance data for all tests. When considering only assessments that were part of states' NCLB accountability systems, more states reported all assessment data publicly: forty-four states reported participation and performance data for all these assessments; four reported participation and performance data for some of these assessments; and two reported only performance data for all of these assessments. The results reported in the following sections of this document pertain to *all* general assessments, not just those assessments that are part of states' NCLB accountability systems.

Characteristics of State Assessment Systems

NCEO identified 97 different state-mandated general assessments for the 2004-2005 academic year. Criterion-referenced tests (CRT) comprised 63% of all assessments that states administered; norm-referenced tests (NRT) comprised 17% of the assessments; exit exams comprised 13%; and combined CRT/NRT comprised the remaining 7%.

Disaggregation of Regular Assessment Data for Students with Disabilities

Seventy-two percent of states reported disaggregated participation and performance data for students with disabilities for all their assessments; 4% reported performance data, but not participation data, for all assessments; and 24% reported participation and performance data for some, but not all, of their assessments.

Disaggregation of Alternate Assessment Data for Students with Disabilities

Forty-seven states reported some data for students with disabilities' participation or performance on an alternate assessment. There were a total of 59 different alternate assessments administered in 2004-2005, with six states administering more than one. Eighty percent of states reported both participation and performance data for their alternate assessment (an increase from 66% in 2003-2004).

ASSESSMENT PARTICIPATION IN 2004-2005

General Assessment Disaggregated Participation Results for Students with Disabilities

Among the states identified as providing participation data for students with disabilities, the way in which information was reported varied. Thirty-seven states reported either the percent of students tested or the percent not tested for at least one of their assessments (a slight increase from 34 states in 2003-2004). Forty-three states reported the number of students tested; 16 provided the number of students not tested; seven states provided the percent of students exempted or excluded from assessments; and 12 states provided the number or percent of students absent. NCEO noted that it is important that states report the percentage of students tested, in addition to a count, because this presents a more accurate picture of the participation rate.

Alternate Assessment Disaggregated Participation Results for Students with Disabilities

Forty-six states provided participation information for some or all of their alternate assessments (an increase from 35 in 2003-2004). Forty-one states provided information on the number of students tested; 38 states provided either a percentage of students tested, not tested or both; five states provided the number or percent of students exempted or excluded; and seven states provided either the number or percent of students absent. Not all states reported data clearly for each grade and content area, either aggregating across grade or content area, or presenting the percent of all students tested who took the alternate assessment.

ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE IN 2004-2005

Performance of Students with Disabilities on Regular Assessments

As with participation data, the way in which states provided performance data for students with disabilities varied. All 50 states reported a rate of proficiency, such as percent of students with disabilities who are proficient; 40 states reported percent of students with disabilities in each achievement level; 20 states reported the number proficient; and 18 states reported the number not proficient. Because state assessments differ considerably in terms of content standards and likely differ in level of difficulty, NCEO noted that it is not appropriate to compare performance across states. It is possible, however, to examine the differences in percent of students with and without disabilities achieving proficiency within each state, although it should be noted that this gap is also affected by differences between the participation rates of the two groups.

The following subsections provide information on performance results for reading and math assessment, since these content domains are the ones assessed by most states and are the first content areas required by NCLB to be assessed, reported and included in accountability. Although most states reported the performance of general education students and then the performance of subgroups, such as students with disabilities, some states did not report the performance of general education students as a specific group. When these data were not

available, the performance of all students was given. This distinction is important when considering gaps between these groups and students with disabilities because the performance of all students includes students with disabilities and might be slightly lower than the performance of general education students.

Reading Performance

The performance of students with disabilities in reading is generally much lower than the performance of general education students. At the elementary level, the difference in percent proficient within a given state ranged from 11 to 49 percentage points; at the middle school level from 23 to 58 percentage points; and at the high school level from 20 to 59 percentage points. One evident pattern is that the gaps between students with and without disabilities increase with grade level. Another is that there are observably lower proficiency rates in reading at the middle school level than at the elementary level for students both with and without disabilities.

Mathematics Performance

In general, the gaps in proficiency rates between students with disabilities and general education students on math assessments were quite similar to those found in reading assessments. At the elementary level, the difference in percent proficient within a given state ranged from 10 to 45 percentage points; at the middle school level from 12 to 51 percentage points; and at the high school level from 17 to 60 percentage points. Again, the percent proficient of students both with and without disabilities is observably lower at the middle school level than the elementary level.

Performance of Students with Disabilities on Alternate Assessments

Forty-two states reported a rate of proficiency, such as percent of students with disabilities who are proficient and 27 states reported percent of students with disabilities in each achievement level. The number proficient and number not proficient were much less widely used reporting methods. On average, students with disabilities achieved higher rates of proficiency on the alternate assessment than on the general assessment. On the alternate assessment, there were no observable differences in rates of proficiency across grade levels.

ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE: TRENDS

For the current period ending 2004-2005, 11 states have seven years of publicly reported information on their state assessments. Information on trends within these states related to the performance of students with disabilities is provided in the following sections on reading and math tests.

Reading Test Performance of Students with Disabilities

In general, the rate of proficiency in reading for participating elementary school students with disabilities continues to increase. Eighty percent of states included in this analysis for 2004-2005 have shown such an increase compared to the 2003-2004 school year and most of the states show an overall trend across the seven years toward greater rates of proficiency for participating students. At the middle school level, all of the states reported a higher percentage of participating students achieving proficiency in 2004-2005 than in 2003-2004 and several states show a trend across the seven years toward greater rates of proficiency among participating students. At the high school level, data also indicate a trend toward higher levels of proficiency among those participating.

Math Test Performance of Students with Disabilities

The math trends are similar to those noted in reading performance. In general, it appears that rates of proficiency for participating elementary school students with disabilities continue to increase in math. Ninety percent of states included in this analysis report higher rates of proficiency in 2004-2005 than in 2003-2004 and most of the states show a trend across the seven years toward higher rates of proficiency among participating students. At the middle school level, 70% of the states had a higher percentage of participating students achieving proficiency in 2004-2005 than in 2003-2004 and most states show an overall trend across the seven years toward greater rates of proficiency among participating students. At the high school level, data also indicate an overall trend toward increasing rates of proficiency.

OTHER INFORMATION COLLECTED

Accommodations

Sixteen states provided state-level information about the use of accommodations by students who took the general assessment. In some cases, states reported on standard accommodations (those considered appropriate and not ones that change the constructs measured by the assessment). In other cases, states reported on nonstandard accommodations (which generally were considered to change the constructs measured—and might be referred to as “non-allowed” accommodations or “modifications”—although individualized education program [IEP] teams could select them). Last, some states reported on both or did not specify the type of accommodation given. Five states reported student participation and performance by specific accommodation (e.g., directions read orally, Braille, extended time) and three states indicated that this information was available in their state performance plans (SPPs).

Assessment Data Disaggregated by Student Group

In addition to the six required reporting categories under NCLB, some states provided assessment data for other disaggregated student groups. All 50 states reported on four of the NCLB categories: ethnicity, LEP, poverty and special education. One state did not report by

gender and six states did not report by migrant status, both required categories under NCLB. Other disaggregated student groups for whom assessment results were provided included accommodations (16 states), Title I (13 states) and gifted and talented (12 states).

Web-based Reporting

While analyzing participation and performance reporting on states' department of education websites, it became clear that some states' data were easier to find than others'. It took an average of 3.4 mouse "clicks" (with a range of two to six) to navigate from the states' department of education homepages to actual data on students with disabilities' participation and performance on state assessments

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING

With the push to provide assessment results in a clear, accessible and timely manner, web-based reporting has become the primary vehicle for sharing data with the public. Based on its analysis of publicly reported assessment data, especially disaggregated results for students with disabilities, NCEO generated the following recommendations:

- Report results clearly for each test, subject area and grade level – not only combined under the student group "students with disabilities."
- Report the percentage of students tested in each student group rather than the number of students tested.
- Clearly report proficiency levels (e.g., "proficient," "not proficient").
- Report the number and percent of students with disabilities using accommodations.
- Clearly label state assessment results on the state's department of education homepage to ensure easily accessible data.
- Report on all state-wide assessments, whether or not the assessment is part of the accountability system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

All 50 states reported some disaggregated general assessment results for students with disabilities for 2004-2005 (an increase from 48 states in 2003-2004). Furthermore, in examining seven years of data from the 11 states that had publicly reported information using the same assessment, there was a general trend in both reading and math toward higher rates of proficiency among participating students with disabilities. These data indicate that states are continuing to move toward meeting both the reporting and proficiency requirements of NCLB. NCEO notes, however, that assessment data for students both with and without disabilities is not always easy to find on state department of education websites. As mentioned in the recommendations section of this document, it is critical that states ensure that assessment information be clear, concise and easily accessible.

PRIMARY REFERENCE

VanGetson, G.R., & Thurlow, M. (2007). *Nearing the Target in Disaggregated Subgroup Reporting to the Public on 2004-2005 Assessment Results*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

SECONDARY REFERENCES

Goertz, M., & Duffy, M. (2003). Mapping the landscape of high-stakes testing and accountability programs. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(1), 4-11.

Petersen, G. J., & Young, M.D. (2004). The No Child Left Behind Act and its influence on current and future district leaders. *Journal of Law and Education*, 33(3), 343-363.