

THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT CONSORTIA: National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC)

- **MEMBERSHIP:** 19 states** (Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Pacific Assessment Consortium (PAC-6*), Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Wyoming) serving approximately 90,000 students who participate in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards
 - **GOVERNANCE:** A Project Management Team oversees development of the system and consists of one to two state representatives from each of four NCSC Work Groups, Project Principal Investigators from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), and six individuals from four partner organizations: the University of Kentucky (UKY); the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA); the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC); and edCount, LLC
 - **PROJECT MANAGEMENT PARTNER:** NCEO at the University of Minnesota is the host fiscal agent and leads the Project Management Team. Four additional organizations also provide leadership: UKY on professional development; NCIEA on assessment design; UNCC on curriculum and instruction; and edCount, LLC, on evaluation
 - **AWARD:** \$45 million from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education
- * PAC-6 consists of six entities: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands
- ** In this context, “states” refer to any U.S. state or jurisdiction authorized to participate in NCSC as a state education agency.

This information is accurate as of January 6, 2012.

The following summary of the NCSC assessment system has been approved by the NCSC Consortium.

The NCSC is developing a comprehensive system that addresses the curriculum, instruction, and assessment needs of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities by:

- 1) producing technically defensible summative assessments;
- 2) incorporating evidence-based instruction and curriculum models; and
- 3) developing comprehensive approaches to professional development delivered through state-level Communities of Practice.

These resources will support educators and Individualized Education Program (IEP)¹ teams as they design and implement appropriate instruction that addresses content and skill expectations aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as help prepare students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for postsecondary life. When complete, the assessment system and accompanying resources

will be made available to all states, regardless of their participation in the original grant.

SYSTEM COMPONENTS

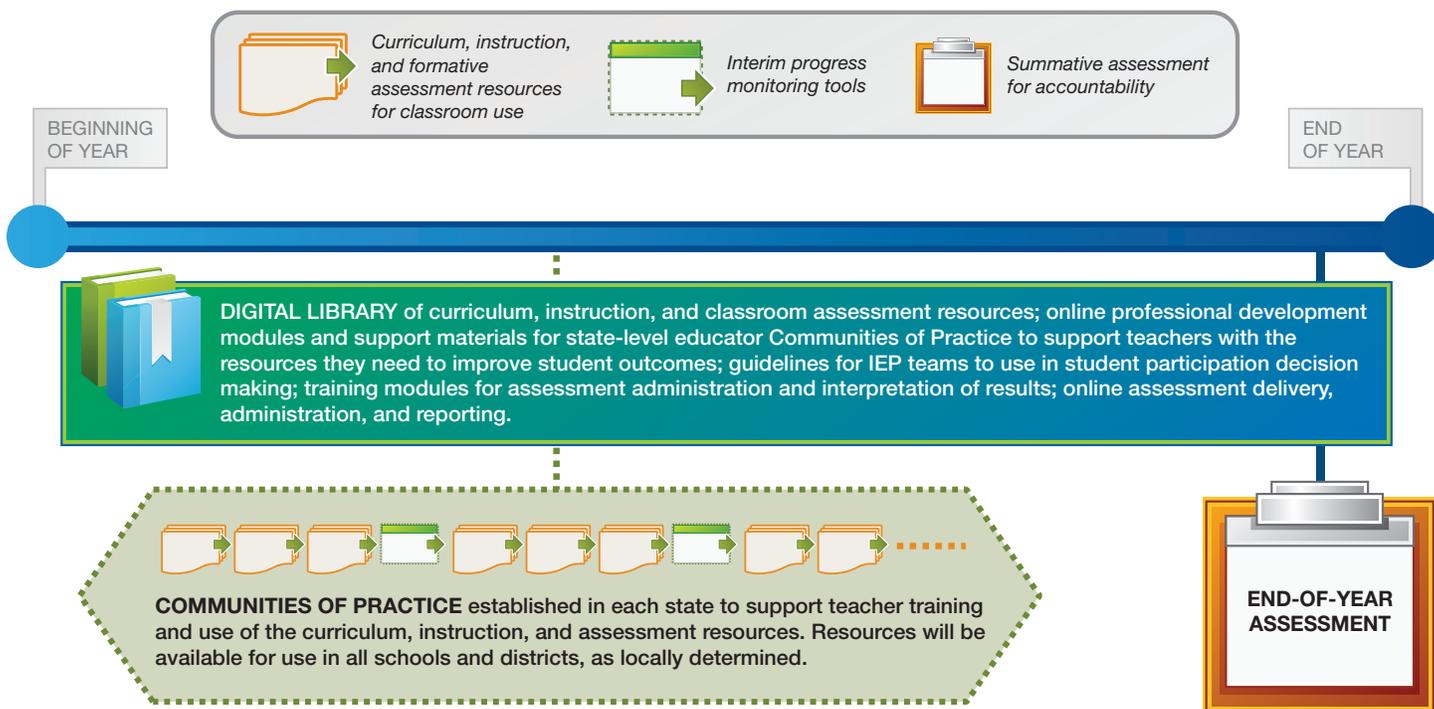
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

NCSC will use a summative assessment design that coordinates with the general assessment used by each member state and produces scores that can be used for accountability purposes. NCSC will develop a technology-based management system to facilitate assessment administration, documentation, and reporting.

Curricular Sequencing and Grade-Level Content

Targets: NCSC began its development work in 2011 by convening partners from member states and project research staff to create a vision of College and Career Readiness (CCR) for students with the most significant

¹ IEP, mandated by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, is a written plan for a student with disabilities that describes how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning, and the services, supports, and special instruction that the student requires to learn more effectively.



Alternate assessment systems are those developed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and are based on alternate achievement standards.

cognitive disabilities. This CCR definition then informed the use of research-based learning progression frameworks (LPFs) that describe a curricular sequence for how typical students develop and demonstrate more sophisticated understanding in each content area over time. From these LPFs for mathematics and English language arts (ELA), NCSC is developing grade-level assessment content targets and alternate achievement standards, linked to the CCSS for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The system of assessments, curricular materials, and professional development materials will address these grade-level learning targets in the context of the broader curriculum for all students.

Assessment Delivery: Teachers will use an online NCSC assessment delivery system to administer an annual assessment for each student in ELA and mathematics.

To balance the need for test standardization with the need to provide full access for each student, NCSC will develop a mechanism to determine the appropriate parameters for each student's assessment participation and teachers will then be given flexibility to select appropriate items within those parameters. NCSC will

create online accommodations and administration manuals, and teachers will certify their training prior to test administration.

Types of Items and Tasks: A variety of item types will be developed, such as multiple choice, short-constructed response, and performance tasks. For each standard to be measured, an evidence-centered design approach will be used to determine the appropriate item type. Multiple items will then be developed for each standard at differing levels of complexity, along with accommodations. These pre-established variations will ensure multiple ways for students to access and respond to the assessment based on their communication, sensory, and motor needs.

Presentation of Items and Tasks: Because the population of students with significant cognitive disabilities has varying communication modes and a wide range of skill levels, teachers have generally adapted assessment tasks to meet each student's needs at the time of testing.

This flexibility is a strength in terms of accessibility, but poses a challenge for score interpretation because some adaptations may inadvertently change the

knowledge and skills being measured. Through the use of cognitive laboratories and other methodologies, NCSC will research test formats that balance the need for flexibility with the need for standardization. This process will involve teachers who work with students eligible to take an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards, assessment design experts, and content experts.

Scoring: Students who are able to interact with the computer will enter their own responses directly into the online system. For other students, teachers will enter data into the online system based on their interactions with the students as part of the assessment administration process. Many items will be automatically scored by the system. NCSC will investigate the accuracy, efficiency, and costs associated with scoring processes that may be used for complex or performance-based responses, including human scoring and automated scoring options.

Measuring Growth: NCSC assessments will be designed to support valid inferences about student achievement on the assessed domains. NCSC will develop methods to evaluate student growth based on studies involving students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Accountability: The system will be designed to produce aggregate scores that can be used to meet all of the uses and requirements of Race to the Top and pending Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization.

Reporting: The reporting system will allow scores and interpretive information to be disseminated electronically and will include both teacher and parent guides to help them interpret reports and determine next steps. Accompanying curriculum and professional development resources will help educators use the data to improve student learning. In addition, NCSC will create a comprehensive system of resources to support educators in delivering high-quality, academic instruction for all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

RESOURCES, TOOLS, AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Formative and Interim Assessment Tools: In addition to developing the system of summative assessments, NCSC will develop formative and interim tools as part of

comprehensive curriculum, instruction, and assessment resources that can be used by teachers throughout the school year to monitor student progress. NCSC will offer a wide range of professional development resources through individual state Communities of Practice. These resources will be available online to the public.

Curriculum and Instruction Tools: To help teachers translate the CCSS into effective instruction, NCSC is developing curriculum resource guides for the concepts in math and ELA that are considered to be “big ideas” within the academic content. These guides will provide information on instruction within the general education setting (e.g., how the area can be taught to typically developing students); teaching and applying skills in meaningful contexts; linking skills to other content areas; differentiation of instruction through Universal Design for Learning; considerations for providing instruction of more basic skills to some students as embedded within instruction of grade level content; and tools for tiered interventions.

State Transition Planning: NCSC is providing assistance to member states in the development of state-specific transition plans that address state needs.

Professional Development Resources and Activities:

- **Implementation of the Common Core State Standards:** NCSC will develop online professional development modules to help special educators gain an understanding of the prioritized academic content within the learning progressions. Using a train-the-trainers model, NCSC also will support the formation of Communities of Practice within each member state by training 10–40 teachers from each state (based on state size). These teams will lead the implementation of the NCSC-developed curriculum and assessment materials.
- **Assessment Administration and Use of Assessment Accommodations:** NCSC will develop online training modules to ensure readily accessible and consistent training in the proper administration of the assessments and use of accommodations. Teachers will be required to complete an accompanying certifying exam before administering the assessments.
- **Assessment Results Interpretation:** NCSC will work closely with state teams in the development of training modules designed to help teachers use

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both formative and summative assessment results to improve instruction and instructional programs.

- Communication Triage:** Most students who participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards are able to use some form of symbolic communication, such as spoken words, printed text, sign language, or pictures. For students who do not use any form of symbolic language, research suggests that most can still communicate through the use of augmentative communication strategies. NCSC will develop materials to build capacity in each state for teachers to effectively use augmentative communication strategies with these students. The goal is to ensure that each student is given the opportunity to develop communicative competence to allow for access to instruction and assessments.
- Teacher and Principal Evaluation Tools:** NCSC will develop, field test, and validate tools for evaluating teacher and principal effectiveness that rely on multiple measures. Professional development modules will be created to support appropriate use of the tools.

TECHNOLOGY

NSCS will use technology to deliver, score, and report on the assessments; to deliver curriculum and instruction tools; and to deliver online and on-demand professional development. The assessment delivery system will support numerous assistive technologies and communication modalities.

TIMELINE

<p>October 2010– June 2012</p>	<p>Develop common definition of College and Career Readiness for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities</p> <p>Develop content frameworks based on the hypothesized curricular framework in the CCSS</p> <p>Develop draft assessment blueprint through evidence-centered design approach and conduct cognitive labs on model items</p> <p>Implement Communities of Practice in each state and conduct initial training and orientation</p>
<p>July–December 2012</p>	<p>Produce classroom curriculum, instruction, assessment (C-I-A), as well as progress monitoring tools</p> <p>Produce content support for special education teachers and begin training</p> <p>Begin sample field test of model items</p>
<p>January–June 2013</p>	<p>Complete sample field test of model items and revise assessment components based on results</p> <p>Integrate C-I-A resource training into each state rollout of CCSS</p> <p>Produce participation and accommodations training manual</p>
<p>July–December 2013</p>	<p>Develop final test blueprint, items, and reporting system</p>
<p>January– September 2014</p>	<p>Field test all alternate assessment students</p> <p>Set cut scores</p> <p>Complete validation studies and technical report</p>
<p>2014–15 school year</p>	<p>The NCSC Alternate Assessment System is operational</p>

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