



National Center and State Collaborative

# NCSC Assessment Policies

## NCSC Alternate Assessment

The NCSC Alternate Assessment of Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS) is designed to ensure that all students with significant cognitive disabilities are able to participate in an assessment that measures what they know and can do in relation to the grade-level Common Core State Standards (CCSS). NCSC's AA-AAS is part of a system of curriculum, instruction, and professional development that allows students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to be taught grade-level content connected to the CCSS.

The assessment contains many built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. These are some of the built-in supports found in the NCSC AA-AAS:

- Reduced passage length for the English Language Arts (ELA) reading passages;
- Pictures and other graphics to help students understand what they read (or what is read to them);
- Models for students to use during the ELA and mathematics tests;
- Common geometric shapes and smaller numbers on the mathematics tests; and
- The option to have the entire test read aloud.

In order to support communication independence to the greatest extent possible, the NCSC AA-AAS is designed to work with different communication modes and systems.

NCSC's long-term goal is to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and graduate from high school with post-secondary options. A well-designed summative (once a year) assessment alone is not enough to achieve NCSC's goal. That is why NCSC has developed curriculum and instructional resources, as well as professional development modules for educators.

The NCSC AA-AAS meets the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These laws require that all students participate in assessments that measure grade-level content standards.

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## Assessment Policies

There are a number of NCSC assessment policies regarding the steps that need to be taken before and during the assessment. Parents, as members of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, should be informed about these policies for the assessment discussion at the IEP meeting. If you have any questions about the information in this document, please talk to your child's teacher(s).

In addition to the policies discussed in this document, there is a detailed NCSC communication policy for students who do not have an observable response to test questions. This policy is explained in a separate document called Student Communication and the NCSC Alternate Assessment. It is posted at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/resources> under Resources for Parents.

Students who take the NCSC AA-AAS must be provided with an appropriate testing environment during every testing session. The policies regarding an appropriate testing environment support students so they can accurately demonstrate their knowledge. An appropriate testing environment is created by providing:

- Optimal testing conditions for every student;
- Assessment features that are appropriate for individual students; and
- Accommodations in the student's IEP that are consistent with NCSC accommodations policies.

## Optimal Testing Conditions for Every Student

These are some of the steps that Test Administrators take *before* the assessment to create optimal testing conditions:

- Review the features that are built into the assessment or available on the computer and prepare them for use, as appropriate for individual students;
- Identify the student's IEP accommodations that are consistent with NCSC accommodations policies;
- Check the computer and any Alternate and Augmentative Communication (AAC) and assistive technology device(s) a student may use during the test to make sure they are compatible with the NCSC Assessment System, are in working order, and are available for testing;
- Review sample questions in the NCSC Assessment System with the student and practice the appropriate assessment features and accommodations in the student's IEP that are consistent with NCSC accommodations policies;
- Make arrangements for the student to take the test in a familiar setting that is free of noise and distractions; and
- Develop a schedule for the test to be taken during the best time of day for the student and consider the time needed for breaks.

These are some of the steps that Test Administrators take *during* the assessment to create optimal testing conditions:

- Pause the test and start it at a later time or another day based on the student’s needs;
- Provide appropriate student positioning, appropriate assessment features, and the accommodations in the student’s IEP that are consistent with NCSC accommodations policies; and
- Provide encouragement to support student engagement and focus (e.g. “I like the way you are listening and following directions” or “Only two questions left”). The phrases must not indicate either the correct or incorrect response.

## NCSC Assessment Features

Assessment features are either built into the NCSC Assessment System or are commonly available on a computer. A few of the assessment features may be provided by the Test Administrator. Exhibit 1 displays the NCSC assessment features. They are available to any student who takes the assessment. Most of these features are self-explanatory. For those who are not familiar with the feature called “Answer Masking,” it allows answer choices to be covered as needed. A “Line Reader Tool” helps the student keep his/her place when reading and not skip sentences.

### Exhibit 1. NCSC Assessment Features

Answer Masking
Audio Player
Alternate Color Themes
Increase Size of Text and Graphics
Increase Volume
Line Reader Tool
Read Aloud and Reread Item Directions, Response Options, Passage

## NCSC Accommodations

Accommodations are changes in the materials or procedures of the assessment that do not change the specific knowledge and skills that the assessment measures. It is important to understand that the use of any physical prompting, including hand over hand, is not permitted. It is an inappropriate test practice, not an accommodation, because it gets in the way of measuring the *student’s* knowledge. The following accommodations are consistent with the NCSC accommodations policy. They can be used as long as they are on the student’s IEP.

**Assistive Technology-** The student may use assistive technology (AT) devices for viewing, responding to, or interacting with the test questions in other ways. The student and Test Administrator should use the AT device with the sample questions before the

assessment to make sure that it works properly with the NCSC Assessment System. The NCSC Assessment System works with many AT devices, such as alternate keyboard, switches and hubs, head mouse, etc.

**Paper Versions of Items-** The Test Administrator may print a copy of a question or questions. Large print forms are not available at this time. However, the online assessment feature that increases the size of text and graphics, is available to every student, if needed.

**Scribe-** A scribe is someone who has met NCSC’s qualification requirements to write or type exactly what the student communicates. Students may use an AAC system or device to provide answers to questions. The NCSC AA-AAS is taken online unless the student cannot use the computer to show what he/she knows. In those situations, the Test Administrator can type the student’s responses into the computer program, if he/she has a scribe accommodation.

**Sign Language-**The Test Administrator may provide sign language interpretation to the student.

## **Procedures for Assessing Students Who are Blind, Deaf, or Deaf/Blind**

Students who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind are assigned to a test form that reduces barriers for vision and hearing. A student is assigned to this form if the students has one or more of the following conditions:

- Low vision (uses some vision for daily living);
- No functional use of vision for daily living or the functional use of vision cannot be determined;
- Hearing loss that is still significant, even when aided;
- Profound hearing loss, even with aids and/or undetermined functional use of hearing; and/or
- Uses braille (braille test items are available for students who are eligible for braille and are in grade 3 or 4 – after grade 4 the “read aloud” test feature can be used).