



***Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards***  
**Transitioning to CCSS-aligned Curriculum and Assessments**  
**for Students with Disabilities**

By voluntarily adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), states sought to establish consistent, clear, and rigorous academic standards in English language arts (ELA) and math. As of September 2013, the CCSS had been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia in both ELA and math and by one state in ELA only. Adopting states now face the challenges of preparing all students—including students with disabilities—to learn the content embodied in the Common Core and take assessments aligned to the new standards.

At this stage of implementation, state and district leaders, principals, and teachers should be working to support students with disabilities in transitioning from previous state standards to the CCSS. In some states, certain students with disabilities are currently assessed using alternate assessments based on either alternate or modified achievement standards. As explained in the Background section of this report, alternate assessments based on alternate standards are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (the so-called “1% rule”), while those based on modified standards are aimed at students with disabilities who are working on grade-level content but may need more time to master it (the “2% rule”). States, districts, and schools will have to help students who are currently tested with alternate assessments prepare to take assessments aligned to CCSS.

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at The George Washington University describes the activities being undertaken by states to help districts, schools, and teachers prepare students with disabilities for the transition to CCSS-aligned curricula and assessments.

The information in this report is based on the responses of state officials to specific questions about students with disabilities embedded in a broader CEP survey on Common Core implementation. The survey was administered to state deputy superintendents of education or their designees from February through May of 2013. Of the 46 states (including the District of Columbia) that have adopted the CCSS in one or both subjects, 40 responded to the survey. The responses of specific states have been kept confidential to encourage frank answers.

The 2013 survey marks the third time since 2010 that CEP has surveyed states about their progress in implementing the Common Core but the first time we have included questions specific to preparing students with disabilities. Reports about other aspects of CCSS implementation based on these surveys are available at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

## Key Findings

- ***A majority of states (33) are providing or plan to provide training and materials to help ensure that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities are aligned to the Common Core.*** Twenty-four states reported that they began providing training and materials in school year 2012-13 or earlier to help teachers align instruction for students with disabilities to the CCSS, while 9 states intend to do so in school year 2013-14 or later.
- ***In 37 states, officials report facing challenges with providing professional development to help teachers align instruction for students with disabilities to the Common Core.*** No state official said that providing this type of professional development was *not* a challenge.
- ***Most survey states that currently administer alternate assessments based on modified standards to some students with disabilities have begun implementing plans to transition these students to new CCSS-aligned exams.*** In particular, 7 of the 11 survey

states that assess students based on modified standards under the 2% rule have already begun implementing plans for this transition, while 3 states intend to start implementing their plans in school year 2013-14 or later.

- ***Survey states are taking various actions to help districts, schools, and teachers prepare students with disabilities for the transition from assessments based on modified standards to new CCSS-aligned assessments.*** Nine of the 11 survey states that assess students based on modified standards report taking one or more of the following actions to help with this transition: revising or creating guidelines to help IEP teams determine assessment options and accommodations for students with disabilities, revising or creating professional development and other supports for teachers, and analyzing the characteristics of students who currently sit for alternate assessments based on modified standards.

## **Background**

In 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the CCSS. These voluntary, state-developed standards are designed to provide students nationwide with access to a high-quality education through clear and robust standards in both math and ELA (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-a). The Common Core standards are intended to be accessible to all students, including those with varying levels of academic ability and diverse backgrounds. For example, the math CCSS explicitly state, “The Standards should be read as allowing for the widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset, along with appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-b).

Although states decide whether to adopt the CCSS, the accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) influence how they implement these standards and assess student mastery. Under NCLB, at least 95% of all students in grades 3 through 8 and one

high school grade, including students with disabilities, must be tested in math and ELA to determine their progress in meeting state academic standards. The results of these tests are used to determine whether schools and particular subgroups of their students—including students with disabilities—have made “adequate yearly progress” toward NCLB’s ultimate goal of 100% of students scoring proficient by school year 2013-14, or required levels of progress toward another state-determined goal in the case of the large majority of states granted federal waivers of certain NCLB accountability requirements. Therefore, states that adopt the CCSS must use the Common Core standards and aligned assessments to comply with NCLB requirements.

Given that traditional assessments may not be appropriate to measure the performance of all students with disabilities, the U. S. Department of Education (ED) issued regulations and guidance outlining how students with disabilities could be assessed to comply with NCLB requirements. The majority of students with disabilities will take the same assessments as the general population with accommodations based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Accommodations are designed to permit students with disabilities to participate in an assessment. For example, a student with an accommodation might be given extra time to take the test or be allowed to use a calculator. While accommodations are effective for most students with disabilities, some students with disabilities’ IEP team may determine that an alternative assessment is more appropriate.

For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, states have the option of assessing their achievement using alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) (Title I Final Rule, 2003). While the AA-AAS are based on grade-level content, the content is assessed with less depth, breadth, and complexity, and the state-established definitions of proficiency differ from those used on regular state assessments (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2013). For purposes of NCLB accountability, ED guidance caps the percentage of students in a state or district whose scores from AA-AAS can be counted as proficient at 1% of all students, or about 10% of all students with disabilities, in the tested grades. Although more

students can take the AA-AAS, the cap is meant to discourage districts from inappropriately holding too many students to lower achievement expectations as a way to boost the percentage scoring proficient. In 2012-13, all 50 states and the District of Columbia had an AA-AAS policy.

ED regulations also allow states to administer alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS) to students whose disabilities make it unlikely they will be able to reach grade-level proficiency, even after receiving appropriate instruction based on their IEP (Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Final Rule, 2007). ED regulations cap the percentage of students in a state or district whose scores from AA-MAS can be reported as proficient for accountability purposes at 2% of all students in the tested grades, or about 20% of students with disabilities. In 2012-13, 15 states had an operational AA-MAS (Lazarus, 2013). On August 23, 2013, ED proposed a regulation that would eliminate the use of modified academic standards and AA-MAS in all states for purposes of meeting NCLB accountability requirements (Title I Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 2013).

Accountability policies, including those affecting students with disabilities, have also been shaped by the NCLB waivers that ED has granted to 42 states and the District of Columbia and to a select group of California districts. States that receive waivers are freed from many NCLB accountability requirements but must develop their own systems to hold schools accountable for student performance in math and ELA. The waiver conditions require states to discontinue the use of the AA-MAS after school year 2013-14; from that point on, students with disabilities who were formerly assessed based on modified achievement standards must participate in the regular assessment.

States with waivers that have adopted the Common Core and that belong to one of two state testing consortia—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia—will be able to use the consortia exams to assess many students with disabilities. The consortia-developed assessments will be

ready for states to implement in school year 2014-15.<sup>1</sup> These assessments will be administered by computer and can provide many of the testing accommodations that students with disabilities need. For example, PARCC is using the principles of universal design for learning, which are intended to give all students equal opportunities to learn, to design the presentation methods, response options, timing and scheduling of its assessments and to establish accommodations that are aligned to a student's IEP (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2013). Smarter Balanced is using a computer adaptive test that offers a range of visual and tactile presentation options to help accommodate students with disabilities (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, n.d.) States that have adopted the Common Core but have not joined a consortium will be responsible for creating and administering their own CCSS-aligned assessments for all students, including those with disabilities.

To help CCSS-adopting states in assessing students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, ED awarded grants in 2010 to two additional state consortia—\$22 million to Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and \$45 million to the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). These consortia are developing CCSS-aligned assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and will also provide member states with curriculum development materials and guides to enhance instructional practices. As of July 2013, the DLM had 16 member states and the NCSC had 26.

## **State CCSS Activities Related to Students with Disabilities**

Many survey states are taking steps to provide training and materials to help districts, schools, and teachers align instruction for students with disabilities to the CCSS. As shown in **figure 1**, 24 states reported that they provided these types of training and materials in school year 2012-13 or earlier, while 9 states plan to do so in school year 2013-14 or later. Two states said that this activity was not a focus of their state education agency (SEA) efforts to implement the

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<sup>1</sup> The “non-summative” components of the PARCC assessments, which include tests for diagnostic purposes, are not expected to be ready until 2015-16.

Common Core, while two other states said it was not within their authority. Two state respondents did not know if training and materials will be provided.

**Figure 1. Number of states providing training and materials to ensure that IEPs for students with disabilities are aligned to the CCSS**

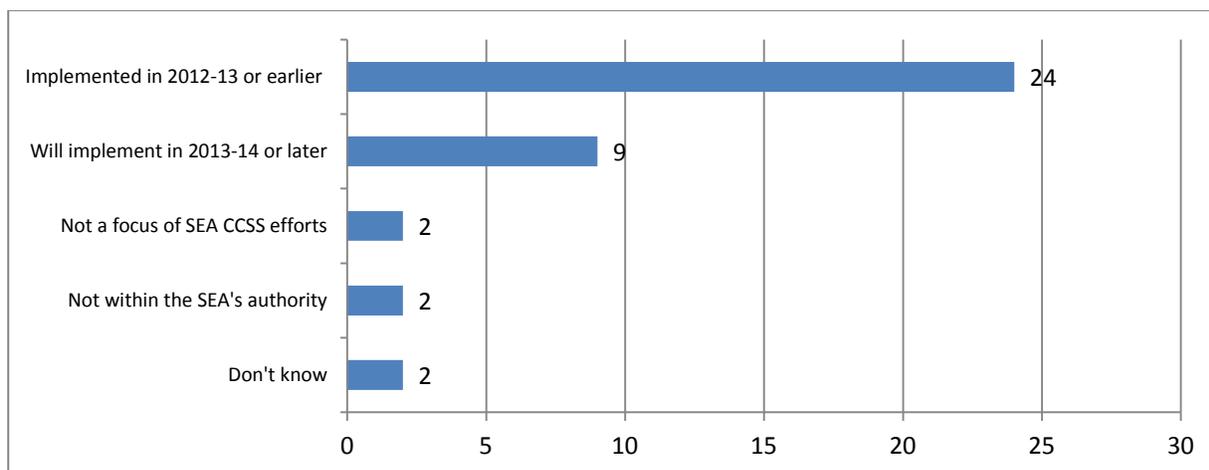


Figure reads: Twenty-four states report that they have already provided training and materials to ensure that IEPs for students with disabilities are aligned to the CCSS.

Note: Table sums to 39 because one state was removed due to response error.

At the same time, nearly all of the responding states (37 of 40) reported experiencing some level of challenge in providing professional development to help districts, schools, and teachers align instruction for students with disabilities to the Common Core. As displayed in **figure 2**, 22 states reported facing major challenges in carrying out this professional development, and 15 states reported facing minor challenges. Two states said it was too soon to tell if providing such professional development was a challenge, and one state respondent did not know. No state respondents said this effort did *not* present a challenge.

**Figure 2. Number of states facing challenges in providing professional development to ensure that instruction for students with disabilities is aligned to the CCSS**

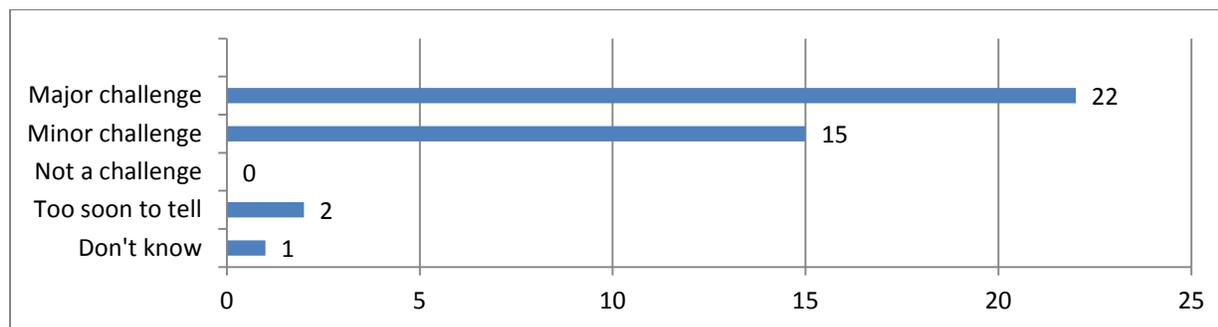


Figure reads: Twenty-two states reported experiencing major challenges in providing professional development to ensure that instruction for students with disabilities is aligned to the CCSS.

### Curriculum and Assessment Support for Students with Disabilities

Eleven the 15 states that administer alternate assessments based on modified standards participated in our survey. As noted above, states with waivers that currently use AA-MAS will have to stop using these assessments and begin administering regular tests to participating students, and if proposed ED regulations take effect, all states will have to do so.

Ten of these 11 states have begun to implement or are preparing to implement plans to transition students tested with AA-MAS to the new CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC, Smarter Balanced, or the state (one state had not joined either testing consortia). As shown in **figure 3**, seven states began implementing plans for this transition in school year 2012-13 or earlier, while three states intend to start implementing their plans in school year 2013-14 or later. One state respondent reported that this activity was not a focus of the SEA's Common Core efforts.

**Figure 3. Status of state plans to transition students from alternate assessments based on modified standards to new CCSS-aligned assessments**

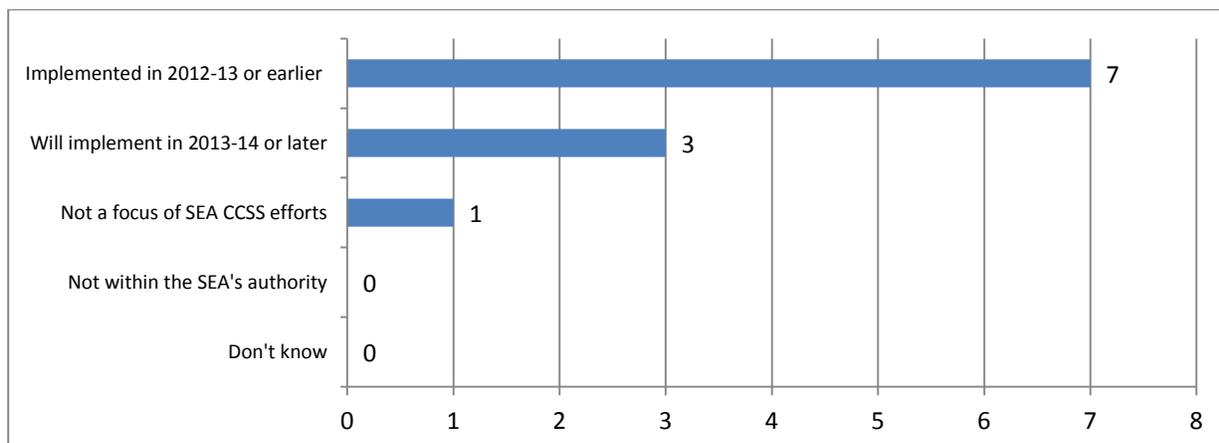


Figure reads: Seven of the 11 survey states that assess some students with disabilities with AA-MAS began implementing a plan in 2012-13 or earlier to transition these students to new CCSS-aligned assessments.

Nine of the 11 survey states that administer AA-MAS reported taking at least one of the actions listed in **table 1** to help districts, schools, and teachers transition students with disabilities to regular CCSS-aligned assessments. For example, eight states report revising or creating guidelines to help IEP teams determine assessment options and accommodations. Six states are revising or creating professional development and other support materials for teachers to help with the transition to the new assessments for this group of students with disabilities. Four states are conducting an analysis to determine the characteristics of students who currently sit for the alternate assessments, and one respondent did not know what steps the state is taking. One state official chose the “other” response to this question and explained that the state was actively working with the National Center and State Collaborative.

**Table 1. State actions to help districts, schools, and teachers transition students participating in AA-MAS to new CCSS-aligned assessments**

State actions	Number of states
Revise or create guidelines to help IEP teams determine assessment options and accommodations	8
Revise or create professional development and other support materials for teachers to help with the transition to the new assessments for students with disabilities	6
Conduct an analysis of the characteristics of students currently taking an alternate assessment based on modified standards	4
Don't know	1
Other	1

Table reads: Eight states are revising or creating guidelines to help IEP teams determine assessment options and accommodations for students currently taking alternate assessments based on modified standards.

We also analyzed how many states were taking *more than one* of the actions listed in table 1 to help districts, schools, and teachers transition students from AA-MAS to new CCSS-aligned assessments. Altogether, seven survey states reported taking more than one such action:

- Two states are taking all three actions shown in table 1.
- Four states they are revising or creating assessment guidelines for IEP teams *and* revising or creating professional development and support materials for teachers.
- One state is revising or creating assessment guidelines for IEP teams *and* analyzing the characteristics of students currently taking AA-MAS.

While most students with disabilities in CCSS-adopting states will participate in the general assessments developed by PARCC or Smarter Balanced, IEP teams will still have the option of determining that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should instead be assessed on alternate assessments aligned to the CCSS, such as those being developed by DLM and NCSC. As displayed in **table 2**, a majority (30) of survey states report that they have joined either DLM or NCSC, while 3 states intend to use an assessment developed by another entity. Two states selected the “other” response, including one that said the topic was “under discussion” and another that indicated it will likely join one of the consortia. Four survey

respondents did not know if their state was a member of either consortium and no respondents replied that assessments were going to be developed by their state, higher education institutions, or school districts.

**Table 2. Assessments that CCSS-adopting states plan to use for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities**

CCSS-aligned assessment option	Number of states
DLM or NCSC member	30
Assessment developed by an entity other than DLM or NCSC	3
Other	2
Don't know	4
Assessment developed by institution(s) of higher education	0
Assessment developed by school districts	0
Assessment developed by state	0

Table reads: Thirty states report having joined either DLM or NCSC and will be able to use CCSS-aligned assessments developed by these consortia for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Note: Table sums to 39 because one state was removed due to response error.

## Conclusion

State responses to our survey suggest that students with disabilities are being not overlooked as states implement the more rigorous academic standards in the Common Core. The vast majority of SEAs surveyed report that they are providing training and materials to help ensure that IEPs for students with disabilities are aligned to the Common Core. And SEAs that are currently giving alternate assessments based on modified standards to certain students with disabilities are working to prepare these students to take new CCSS-aligned assessments, such as those being developed by PARCC and Smarter Balanced. In addition, a majority of survey states have joined one of two other state consortia that are developing CCSS-aligned assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. However, nearly all of the SEAs responding to our survey report facing challenges in providing professional development to help schools and districts align instruction for students with disabilities to the CCSS. This last finding is consistent with broader findings from the same survey, which indicate

that states are generally finding it challenging to provide CCSS-related professional development in sufficient quantity and quality.

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