

# 1999 NATD Symposium: Issues and Trends in Inclusive Assessment Practices

Exemplary Practices in Including Special Education  
and ESL Students in Local Assessments

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## **Background**

The movement to include special education students to the maximum extent feasible in all district level assessments has presented considerable challenges to local school district personnel. Local districts, under the new IDEA provisions are to include disabled students in district assessments with "appropriate" accommodations to the extent feasible and to provide alternate assessments for those who cannot participate in standard assessments with accommodations. In all cases the IEP is to be the driver guiding participation of disabled students in district assessments. The requirement to provide alternative assessments does not become effective until the 1999-2000 school year, the other requirements are in effect now.

## **The Challenges**

Determining when it is and is not appropriate for disabled students to participate in district-wide assessments and with which accommodations is not a straightforward determination. IDEA identifies this determination as falling to the IEP team, which means that such teams need to have the technical expertise to make assessment accommodations. In many cases this knowledge is not in place. IEP team members need to understand the implications of making accommodations and the impact that they will have on inferences made using the resulting data. To meet the test of "appropriate" participation or use of accommodations, the data so obtained must be valid and meaningful. These determinations are not simple and the need for further training for staff is obvious.

The press for accountability and improved test scores is present in most school districts throughout the nation. There are natural incentives to exclude low performing students whenever possible and to provide accommodations which will improve student performance at every opportunity. District staff need to chart a course regarding participation of disabled students in assessments and reporting of results in the context of a growing high stakes environment. There is great potential for school personnel to overgeneralize the use of accommodation strategies applying them in situations where they are not appropriate.

In the case of local district use of norm-referenced tests districts are presently confronted with a dilemma in that IDEA calls for applications of these assessments that the current generation of tests were not designed for. All of the major testing companies have reported that they are hard at work on making future editions of their assessments IDEA friendly. The form below embodies a set of review criteria that local district test adoption committees might apply when considering tests for adoption.

## **NATD Networking Functions**

The National Association of Testing Directors (NATD), whose members include measurement professionals with responsibilities for implementing assessment programs primarily in the K-12 setting organized this symposium as a means of furthering the dialog concerning inclusive assessment practices. NATD provides an important networking function whereby its members share information about testing practices. As part of the symposium, we set about canvassing our members to identify district examples of work in the area of inclusive assessment. This was communicated to the membership through content posted to our [www.natd.org](http://www.natd.org) web site, through postings to our NATD Internet list serve, and the ERIC K-12 Assessment list serve. Sample documents which have been collected to date have been uploaded to our NATD web site and are available to the general public. We expect to add more as they become available. In addition these proceeding will be published in a monograph and available form NATD. The papers are currently available at the NATD web site and will be available in hard copy format within a few months.