

Identifying Maine Students Appropriate for Alternate Assessment

As you listen to this presentation, you may want to refer to pages 9 – 11 of the 2008-2009 PAAP Manual

In order to inform teaching and learning, provide accountability, and measure student progress towards achievement of Maine's *Learning Results*, Federal and State laws require that **all** students be included in State components of Maine's assessment system.

Maine students participate in designated state accountability assessments annually in grades 3-8, and again in their third year of high school. Students in grades 10 and 11 participate in the PSAT to inform teaching and learning.

For all of these assessments, three avenues of participation are provided:

- Standard administration, for those who can take the test as it is traditionally presented.
- Administration with accommodations, for students who need approved changes in the way the test is presented, or the means by which their responses are communicated, to be on an equal footing with their peers who use standard administration. Such accommodations do not change what is being measured.
- And alternate assessment, for those students who have significant or profound disabilities that prevent them from showing what they know or can do through the general assessment formats.

Maine's alternate assessment, the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio, or PAAP, measures progress towards the standards of the Maine *Learning Results* by allowing students to produce evidence over the course of a school year.

The PAAP is a **modified** assessment; as such, it **does** change what is being measured. The student work included in a PAAP is based on standards that are developmentally backed-down to a point that allows access to academic instruction and assessment for all students.

If it appears that a student's successful participation may require either accommodations or the PAAP, a team must be convened to determine the avenue that is appropriate for the student. In the case of students with an identified disability, the decision-making panel must be the same group responsible for determining the student's Individual Education Program – the IEP Team. IEP Team members should include:

- at least one of the student's teachers
- the building principal
- the parent(s)/guardians(s)
- related services personnel
- the student (whenever possible)

A variety of materials are available to aid the IEP Team when it convenes to decide a student's assessment avenue. It is strongly advised that these materials be on hand as your discussions proceed:

- The PAAP Flowchart: *Process for Determining the Appropriate Avenue for Participation in the MEA/PSAT/MHSA*
- The Student Profile
- The approved State Assessment accommodations lists for the MEA/PSAT/MHSA
- PAAP Content Area Achievement Level Descriptors (specific to the student's grade span)
- The PAAP Rubrics
- Samples of the student's work, and
- Grade specific MEA released items from previous test administrations with sample student responses or PSAT/ SAT practice items.

Members of the decision-making team should keep in mind that there will be very few students appropriate for participation through the avenue of alternate assessment, the PAAP.

Federal **guidelines** suggest that eight to nine percent of all Special Education students in the grades tested within a school, taken as a whole – may be appropriate for inclusion in the alternate assessment.

Federal reporting **rules** allow only one percent of the total of all students tested in those grades, students in both the general curriculum and those with identified disabilities, to be reported as 'proficient by alternate standards'.

The Decision-Making Team Meeting Process

Use the steps outlined in the *PAAP Flowchart* as your guide.

An initial review of sample items from the relevant test would help team members develop an understanding of what will be expected of students who participate, either through standard administration or through accommodations. This will greatly enhance the team's decision making ability.

As the meeting begins, there should be an evaluation of the student's current achievement level on daily work: is it identical to work done by his or her peers in the classroom? or is it closely related to that work?

Examples of the student's work should be reviewed to determine how they compare to the level of knowledge and skills measured through the released assessment items. The student work should also be compared to sample responses that accompany the released items. If the student's work seems to be equivalent to the samples for any of the four levels of achievement, it is likely that standard administration or administration with accommodations is appropriate.

The team must next determine whether the student usually completes daily classroom work independently or with accommodations. The avenue of assessment should mirror, to the extent possible, classroom practices. If the student works independently, standard administration is appropriate; if accommodations are part of the student's instructional program, they will, most likely, be needed for assessment. The list of approved accommodations for the appropriate assessment must be reviewed to see if those the student uses in the classroom are available for use on the assessment. The team must identify the accommodations that will be most helpful to the student, and document the choices in the student's cumulative folder.

If the student's daily work is **significantly** below the grade level on which his or her peers are working, the question for the team will be to determine whether the use of accommodations or alternate assessment is more appropriate. If a review of the approved accommodations does not include the types of supports needed by the student, further discussion of participation through alternate assessment makes sense. A student who has an identified significant cognitive disability that requires personalized instruction and assessment in all content areas, is likely to be a candidate for participation through alternate assessment (PAAP).

At this point, the team will need to review the Alternate Achievement Level Descriptors for each content area to be tested, along with the PAAP Rubrics to ensure that alternate assessment is, indeed, appropriate. If the student is performing above the levels described in those documents, accommodations rather than alternate assessment must be used.

If you would like more information about this topic, you may contact Kimberly Schroeter at the Maine Department of Education. Her phone number is 207-624-6774, and she can be reached by e-mail at kimberly.schroeter@maine.gov.