

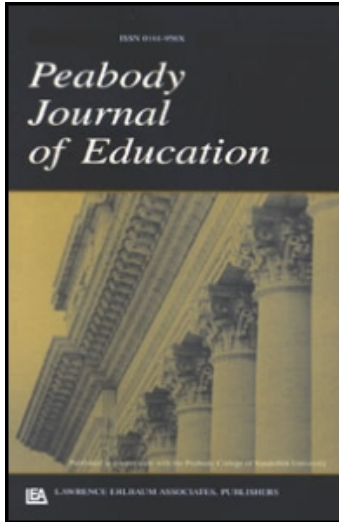
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The Changing Landscape of Alternate Assessments Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards: An Analysis of Early Adopters of AA-MASs

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Several states had an assessment that they considered to be an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS) in place, or in development, when the April 2007 federal regulations on modified achievement standards were finalized. This article uses publicly available information collected by the National Center on Educational Outcomes to analyze changes in states' AA-MAS between 2007 and 2008. The article compares across the 2 years the number of states that had an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS, states' participation guidelines, and the characteristics of these assessments. We also provide information about the number of students who participated in this assessment option during the 2006–07 school year. In 2007, six states (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma) either had or were in the process of developing an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS. In 2008, California, Connecticut, and Texas also offered this assessment option. Six of the nine states that have been early implementers of the AA-MAS were states that had offered an out-of-level testing option until federal policies required that option to be phased out. Most states had fewer items on their AA-MAS than on their regular assessment. States that had participation guidelines for the AA-MAS in 2007 developed them prior to finalization of the federal regulations, and some changes between 2007 and 2008 in states' participation guidelines appear to have been made to better align the guidelines with the regulations. The characteristics of the assessments states consider to be AA-MASs are changing rapidly and will probably continue to change rapidly over the next few years as more is learned about the advantages and limitations of this assessment.

Federal legislation requires that all students, including students with disabilities, be included in state accountability systems. Most students with disabilities participate in the regular assessment with or without accommodations, and a few with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards. A couple states also have an optional assessment called an alternate assessment based on grade-level achievement

standards for those students with disabilities who need alternate ways to show what they know.¹

In April 2007 No Child Left Behind regulations gave states the flexibility to offer another assessment option, an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS), for students with disabilities. The AA-MAS is an assessment option for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) whose progress to date, in response to appropriate instruction, is such that the student is unlikely to achieve grade-level proficiency within the school year covered by his or her IEP. The AA-MAS is sometimes referred to as the “2% option” because states may count up to 2% of all students as proficient based on the percentage of students who receive special education services and who meet proficiency standards with this option (Lazarus, Thurlow, Christensen, & Cormier, 2007).

Large-scale assessments developed specifically for students with disabilities are a part of states’ assessment and accountability systems. This means that they must conform to the same criteria that guide the development and administration of other assessments (e.g., American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to examine the evolution of AA-MAS. Specifically, it was designed to examine changes that have occurred in states’ approaches to, and student participation in, the option since the finalization of the regulations in 2007. Specifically, our research questions were as follows:

1. Did the number of states that offered an AA-MAS change between 2007 and 2008?
2. Have states’ eligibility criteria for the AA-MAS changed substantially since 2007?
3. Has the percentage of students participating in the AA-MAS changed across time?
4. Has the test design of states’ AA-MAS changed substantially since 2007?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2006–07, all states had both general assessments and alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards; in addition, a couple states (e.g., Massachusetts, North Carolina) had alternate assessments based on grade-level achievement standards (Albus, Thurlow, & Bremer, 2009). A few states (e.g., Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma) also had an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS (Lazarus et al., 2007), having gone ahead and developed an assessment in response to the 2005 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking about the AA-MAS (*Notice of Proposed Rule Making: Title I*, 2005). At least one additional state (Maryland) had an AA-MAS under development prior to the April 2007 release of the regulations (Lazarus et al., 2007). As of November 2008, none of the states that believed they had an AA-MAS had successfully completed the federal peer review process used by the U.S. Department of Education

¹For a detailed comparison of alternate assessment options (e.g., AA-AAS, AA-GLAS, and AA-MAS), refer to the table in Appendix A, “Modified Academic Achievement Standards: Nonregulatory Guidance” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, pp. 52–53).

to determine whether the assessment satisfies the requirements for the state to receive federal funds.²

According to Koretz (2008), the fundamental dilemma, which was highlighted by the regulations, is “the difficulty of deciding how best to test low-achieving students” (p. 309). Almond, Quenemoen, Olsen, and Thurlow (2000) explored issues surrounding students who did not neatly fit into the assessment options that were available at the time their study was conducted. They concluded that these issues reflected “gray areas of assessment” and that the challenge of students who do not fit into existing assessment systems is not really due to “gray area students,” but rather to issues with the assessment system itself (i.e., “gray areas of assessment systems”). It was suggested at that time that the gray areas were not the same everywhere and that the specific issues that existed were related to the context in which they emerged. States developing an AA-MAS are doing so within the context of their existing assessment systems.

Participation

Prior to the development of the regulations that permitted the AA-MAS option, some educators, advocates, and policymakers asserted that there may be some students with disabilities whose knowledge and skills were not well assessed with assessment options available at that time. However, the data suggest that only a small proportion of the population of students with disabilities, overall, has not participated in state assessments. The combined rates of participation of students with disabilities across the assessment options were quite high (Thurlow, Altman, & Cormier, 2009), ranging from 95.3% of students with disabilities on both high school reading assessments and high school mathematics assessments to 98.8% of students with disabilities on both elementary reading assessments and elementary mathematics assessments. Most states reached these levels of participation without the AA-MAS. There is still some variation across states, but in general participation of students with disabilities is comparable with other student subgroups. For example, Thurlow, Bremer, and Albus (2008), in an analysis of publicly reported participation data on the eighth-grade general math assessment, found that in 10 of the 14 states 97–99% of students with disabilities participated in the assessment.

Every state has guidelines for participation for their various assessments, and they formulate each set of guidelines to be consistent with the purpose and objectives of their large-scale assessments. Analyses of the 2007 participation guidelines of all 50 states (Christensen, Lazarus, Crone, & Thurlow, 2008) showed that states most often recommended that the following criteria be used to determine the way in which students participate in their assessments: IEP determination (50 states), instructional relevance/ instructional goals (44 states), current performance/level of functioning (36 states), and level of independence (36 states). States also indicated criteria that should *not* be considered: presence or category of disability (25 states); cultural, social, linguistic, or environmental factors (23 states); and excessive absences (22 states). The participation guidelines of states that offer an AA-MAS also include criteria for participation in that option.

²As of a date (July 2009) near the time of publication one state (Texas) had received approval.

Performance

Although participation rates in the existing assessments were quite high, the same was not true, in general, of the performance of students participating in the assessments. In 2006–07, an average of 38.9% of students with disabilities showed proficient or above performance on the general reading assessment at the elementary school level, and an average of 40.6% of students with disabilities showed proficient or above performance on the general mathematics assessment at the elementary school level (Thurlow et al., 2009). This compares with 62.4% of all students showing proficiency on the elementary reading assessment and 67.7% on the elementary mathematics assessment.³ It is expected that the proficiency rates of students with disabilities will conform to the trends of increasing performance shown by students with disabilities across time (Thurlow, Quenemoen, Altman, & Cuthbert, 2008).

Context of Current Study

It is important to examine any new assessment that is introduced into an existing assessment system. Just as we are interested in whether states are determining that they need another option (specifically, the AA-MAS), and whether the need for this assessment has changed across time, we are also interested in who any new assessment is for and what the test does differently from what other assessments do. In a particularly active period for assessments, where there is increased attention to the effects of the performance of subgroups on accountability results (Koretz, 2008; Meier & Wood, 2004), it is essential that we watch and document the evolution of assessments.

METHOD

To obtain the information for the current analysis, data were gathered from state Web sites and other publicly available sources. Data collected included (a) states' participation guidelines for the AA-MAS, (b) participation data for states with an AA-MAS, and (c) information about selected test design changes for states' AA-MAS. The participation guidelines and information about the assessment design characteristics were downloaded from states' Web sites during summer 2007 and summer 2008. The states included in this study had an assessment the state considered to be an AA-MAS in place in summer 2007 or summer 2008—or had information about an AA-MAS in development on the state's Web site.

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has tracked characteristics of states' AA-MAS since 2007 (Albus, Lazarus, Thurlow, & Cormier, 2009; Lazarus, Rogers, Cormier,

³The percentage of all students who show proficiency on the elementary reading and mathematics assessments was estimated using data in *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Research and Development Report* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). For fourth-grade reading and mathematics, the average state proficiency rate was calculated by summing the "estimate of proportion meeting the state proficiency standard" for all states included in the report, and then dividing by the number of states. It was assumed that the proportion proficient in fourth grade was similar to the proportion proficient in other tested elementary grades.

& Thurlow, 2008; Lazarus et al., 2007). Participation data also were collected from states' Web sites, starting with those states that had an AA-MAS in 2008.

States were given the opportunity to verify that the participation criteria and test design information that we gathered was correct. If a state requested a change, NCEO required written documentation as to the source of the requested change before making the change. Data for states' participation guidelines and selected characteristics of the states' AA-MAS were collected, organized, and reported by NCEO in 2007 and 2008. See Albus et al. (2009), Lazarus et al. (2008), and Lazarus et al. (2007) for a complete list of documents used, and for additional details and specifications. If the NCEO reports did not contain detailed information about a specific characteristic or criterion, relevant documents from the states were reviewed to gather additional data. For the participation criteria and the test design changes, we compared changes between 2007 and 2008 in the number and percentage of states that included specific criteria or characteristics. For the participation data, we examined those numbers or rates provided for students with disabilities in the AA-MAS.

RESULTS

The Results section contains five subsections. First we report on which states had an AA-MAS in 2008 and then compare this with the states that offered this option in 2007. The second section contains a detailed comparison of states' participation guidelines for the AA-MAS in 2007 and 2008. Next we report the participation rates in states with an AA-MAS. Following this are the results of our analysis of the AA-MAS assessment and question characteristics for states that offered this option in 2007 and 2008. The final subsection analyzes how states' AA-MAS differed from their regular assessment in 2007 and 2008. As described in the Methods section of this article, the reported results for 2007 and 2008 included both the states that had an assessment the state considered to be an AA-MAS and the states that had information about an AA-MAS in development on their Web sites.

States With an AA-MAS

The number of states that believed they had an AA-MAS increased from six states (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma) in 2007 to nine in 2008 (California, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas). As previously noted, as of November 2008,⁴ no states had successfully completed the U.S. Department of Education's peer review process for the AA-MAS. Table 1 shows the names of the AA-MAS in these states, along with the content areas and grades for which the assessments were developed. All nine states had an AA-MAS for mathematics and reading/English language arts. California, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Texas also had an AA-MAS for science. Kansas, Louisiana, and Texas had a social studies AA-MAS. Some states offered the AA-MAS at more grade levels than others.

⁴See footnote 2.

TABLE 1
 Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards Name, Content Areas, and Grade by State, 2008

State	Assessment Name	Content Areas/Grades
California	California Modified Assessment	ELA (3–8); Math (3–7); Science (5,8)
Connecticut	CMT/CAPT Modified Achievement Standards	ELA and Math (3–8,10–11)
Kansas	Kansas Assessment of Multiple Measures	Reading and Math (3–8; once in HS), Writing (5,8, once in HS); History/Government (6,8, once in HS); Science (4,7, once in HS)
Louisiana	LEAP Alternate Assessment, Level 2	English and Math (Grades 4–10); Science and Social Studies (4, 8, 11)
Maryland ^a	Modified Maryland School Assessment and Modified High School Assessment	Reading/ELA and Math (3–8, HS)
North Carolina	NCEXTEND2	Reading and Math (3–8); Science (4,8,11)
North Dakota	North Dakota Alternate Assessment Aligned to North Dakota Content Standards for Students with Persistent Cognitive Disabilities	Reading and Math (3–8); Science (4,8,11)
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Modified Alternate Assessment Program	ELA/Reading and Math (3–8, HS); Science (5,8)
Texas	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, Modified	English and Math (3–11); Science (5,8,10–11); Writing (4,7,10); Social Studies (8,10–11) (field tests included)

Note. Source: Albus et al. (2009). ELA = English Language Arts; HS = high school;

^a Still under development. Maryland plans to implement its alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards in 2008–09 at the earliest.

Participation Guidelines

During both 2007 and 2008 the participation guidelines for all states included in this study indicated that a student must have an IEP to qualify for an AA-MAS (see Table 2). In other words, all states required that the student must already be identified as a student with a disability and be receiving special education services to participate in this assessment option.

In 2007 only two states' guidelines (Maryland, Oklahoma) indicated that a student's previous performance on multiple measures must be considered, but 1 year later seven states (California, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas) included this criterion. Examples of the types of multiple measures that states allowed included statewide assessments, district assessments, formal and informal classroom assessments, progress monitoring, and formative assessments.

As shown in Table 2, in 2007 two of the six states with an AA-MAS had participation guidelines that specifically indicated that the student must be learning grade-level content, whereas 1 year later, the guidelines of seven of the nine states with an AA-MAS required that the student be learning grade-level content. In both 2007 and 2008, two thirds of the states with an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS (e.g., four of the six states in 2007 and six of the nine states in 2008) indicated that participation decisions should not be based on a student's disability category label.

TABLE 2
 Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards Participation Criteria

Criterion	Year	State									No. of States ^b
		CA ^a	CT ^a	KS	LA	MD	NC	ND	OK	TX ^a	
Has IEP	2007			X	X	X	X	X	X		6
	2008	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Previous performance on multiple measures	2007					X			X		2
	2008	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	7
Learning grade level content	2007					X	X				2
	2008	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	7
Not based on disability category label	2007			X	X		X		X		4
	2008	X	X	X	X				X	X	6
Not progressing at rate expected to reach grade level proficiency within school year covered by IEP	2007					X					1
	2008	X	X			X	X	X		X	6
Cannot demonstrate knowledge on regular assessment even with provision of accommodations	2007			X		X	X		X		4
	2008	X	X	X		X		X		X	6
Receives specialized/ individualized instruction	2007			X		X	X		X		4
	2008	X	X	X		X		X			5
Not due to excessive absences, social, cultural, language, economic, or environmental factors	2007			X			X		X		3
	2008	X	X	X					X		4
Not receiving instruction based on extended or alternate standards or not eligible to take AA-AAS	2007			X							1
	2008		X	X		X	X				4
Previous performance on state assessment	2007				X	X					2
	2008	X			X	X			X		4
Receives accommodations during classroom instruction	2007				X						1
	2008		X		X				X	X	4
IEP includes goals based on grade-level content standards	2007										0
	2008	X	X			X	X	X			5
Not based on placement setting	2007				X		X				2
	2008				X				X	X	3
Not due to being identified as having a significant cognitive disability	2007					X	X	X			3
	2008		X			X	X				3
Performance multiple years behind grade level expectations	2007			X	X	X	X				4
	2008			X	X						2

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; AA-AAS = alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards.

^aState did not have an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards in 2007. ^b2007, $N = 6$; 2008, $N = 9$.

In 2007 only one state (Maryland) of the six states with an AA-MAS indicated that for a student to participate in this assessment option, the student must not be progressing at a rate expected to reach grade-level proficiency within the school year covered by the IEP—however, 1 year later the guidelines of six of the nine states offering this option included this criterion (California, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas). Likewise, there were large increases between 2007 and 2008 in the number of states that included a criterion which indicated that a student's IEP must include goals based on grade-level content standards. No states'

guidelines contained this criterion in 2007, but five states (California, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota) included it in 2008.

Two participation criteria were mentioned much less frequently in 2008 than in 2007. In 2007, four of the six states that had an AA-MAS (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina) included the “performance multiple years behind grade-level expectations” criterion. In 2008 only two of the nine states (Kansas, Louisiana) included this criterion. Three of the six states with an AA-MAS in 2007 (Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota) indicated that the decision was not due to the student being identified as having a significant cognitive disability, whereas in 2008 the participation guidelines of only three of the nine states with an AA-MAS (Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina) included this criterion.

Participation Data

We found participation data for the AA-MAS for five states (California, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Oklahoma), but only one state had data across years. Thus, we decided to present data for the 2006–07 testing year, which is the year for which most states had data. The available data were found to vary widely in terms of the level of detail.

Table 3 shows AA-MAS participation rates calculated for those states with data available. The numbers presented do not show the many ways in which states presented participation information.

TABLE 3
Average Participation Rates in States' Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards in Grades 4 and 8, 2006–07

State	Reading/English Language Arts				Mathematics			
	Grade 4		Grade 8		Grade 4		Grade 8	
California ^a	12,703	2.7%			10,702	2.3%		
Connecticut ^b								
Kansas ^c	816	2.5%	1,115	3.2%	816	2.5%	1,115	3.2%
Louisiana ^d	653	1.3%	921	1.9%	653	1.3%	921	1.9%
North Carolina ^e	3,263	3.1%	2,436	2.3%	2,838	2.7%	2,531	2.3%
North Dakota ^b								
Oklahoma ^f	2,062	4.8%	2,365	5.6%	1,950	4.6%	2,358	5.6%
Texas ^b								

^aCalifornia provided both “Students Tested” and “Students with Scores.” The former number was used as the numerator to calculate the participation rate. This rate might be higher than it would be had denominator been the total student population. Data were not available for Grade 8. ^bData were not available. ^cKansas provided the number of students participating in the alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS) at each grade, Grades 3–8 plus high school. ^dLouisiana provided the number of students in the AA-MAS and a participation rate based on the population of students with disabilities. We used the total student population to calculate rates. ^eNorth Carolina provided the number of students at or above Achievement Level III and the number of valid scores. We used the latter for the numerator. Student enrollment data were used as the denominator to calculate the participation rate. ^fOklahoma provided students tested on the Oklahoma Modified Alternate Assessment Program with and without accommodations, as well as the number of all students. We used the latter numbers to calculate the participation rates.

California provided basic information on the number and percentage of students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who were assessed with the California Modified Assessment between 2006–07 and 2007–08. Kansas provided data on the number and percentage of students assessed on the Kansas Assessment of Multiple Measures, which is its AA-MAS. It did this both for all grades combined and by individual grades, as well as disaggregated by content area (math and reading). Louisiana provided data on proficiency rates by content area (English Language Arts and Mathematics) for each grade, producing a total number assessed in the LAA2, its AA-MAS. North Carolina provided performance data for the EXTEND2, for each grade (3–8, plus 10), disaggregated by gender-ethnicity, economic disadvantage, limited English proficiency, migrant status, disability status, disability category, and parents' education status. These data were provided at each grade for both mathematics and reading. Oklahoma provided data on its Oklahoma Modified Alternate Assessment disaggregated by whether the students used accommodations during the assessment. These data were provided along with the data for other assessments, for both reading and math, for Grades 3 to 8.

Most states did not provide the total student population number in the same location as the AA-MAS data were presented. To provide comparable data across states, we located the total student population numbers and used them as denominators to calculate AA-MAS participation rates. As is evident in Table 3, which shows only Grades 4 and 8, states varied considerably in the calculated participation rates. California, Kansas, North Carolina, and Oklahoma had participation percentages that exceeded 2% of the total population. Participation rates ranged from 1.3% for Grade 4 reading/English language arts in Louisiana to 4.8% for reading/English language arts in Oklahoma. North Carolina, the only state with 2 years of data, had participation numbers in 2006–07 that were higher than they had been in 2005–06. Specifically, the participation rates during the two school years (2006–07 vs. 2005–06) were Grade 4 Reading, 3.1% versus 2.2%; Grade 4 Math, 2.7% versus 2.6%; Grade 8 Reading, 2.3% versus 2.1%; Grade 8 Math, 2.3% versus 2.0%.

Assessment and Question Characteristics

The AA-MAS in most states included multiple-choice questions in both 2007 and 2008 (five of the six states offering this option in 2007 and all nine states with this option in 2008; see Table 4). The AA-MAS in one state (e.g., Louisiana) included constructed responses in 2007; in 2008 two states' (Connecticut, Louisiana) assessments had constructed responses. The AA-MAS in four states (Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma) included a writing prompt in 2007. In addition to these four states, Texas (which did not offer an AA-MAS in 2007) had a writing prompt in 2008. One state's assessment (North Dakota) required performance task responses. The format of North Dakota's assessment was performance based in both 2007 and 2008—and a portfolio was required in 2007, but not required the following year.

Test Design Changes

The tests that states considered to be an AA-MAS differed in several ways from those states' general assessments. Some states incorporated features that might be considered accommodations

TABLE 4
Selected Assessment and Question Characteristics, 2007 and 2008

Characteristic	Year	State									No. of States ^c
		CA ^a	CT ^a	KS	LA	MD ^b	NC	ND	OK	TX ^a	
Multiple choice	2007			X	X	X	X		X		5
	2008	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Constructed response	2007				X						1
	2008		X		X						2
Portfolio	2007							X			1
	2008										0
Performance task	2007							X			1
	2008							X			1
Writing prompt	2007			X	X		X		X		4
	2008			X	X		X		X	X	5

^aState did not have an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS) in 2007.

^bThe Maryland AA-MAS was under development in both years; however, publicly available information about the characteristics of the assessment was available. ^c2007, *N* = 6; 2008, *N* = 9.

on the general assessment into the design of their AA-MAS. As shown in Table 5, in 2007 two states (Kansas, North Carolina) with an AA-MAS incorporated the calculator into the AA-MAS assessment design; only one state (North Dakota) incorporated the calculator into the assessment design in 2008.

In 2007 a distractor was removed in four of the six states offering the AA-MAS (Kansas, Maryland, North Carolina, and Oklahoma); in 2008 six of the nine states with this assessment option (California, Kansas, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas) removed a distractor. For example, if a state’s general assessment had four answer choices for each multiple choice question, then on the AA-MAS there would be three choices. Four states (Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma) had fewer items on the AA-MAS than on the general assessment in 2007; by 2008 eight states had fewer items (California, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas). For North Dakota, the number of items on the regular assessment was not compared with the number of items on the AA-MAS due to the performance task format of that state’s AA-MAS.

In 2007, three states (Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina) had fewer reading passages on their AA-MAS than on the regular assessment; by 2008, five states (California, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas) had fewer reading passages. Three of the states with an AA-MAS had shorter reading passages in 2007 (Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina). In 2008, in addition to these states, the assessments of two states (California and Texas) that offered an AA-MAS for the first time in that year contained this test design change. In 2007, four of the six states with an AA-MAS incorporated simplified language into the test design of the AA-MAS (Kansas, Maryland, North Carolina, and Oklahoma), and in 2008 six of the nine states with an AA-MAS incorporated simplified language (Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas).

In 2007, no states indicated that test questions were to be read aloud to all students who participated in the assessment; however, by 2008 one state (Texas) had incorporated this change

TABLE 5
Selected Design Changes in States' Alternate Assessment Based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards, 2007 and 2008

Selected Design Changes	Year	State									No. of States ^c
		CA ^a	CT ^a	KS	LA	MD ^b	NC	ND	OK	TX ^a	
Breaks as needed	2007			X							1
	2008			X							1
Calculator	2007			X			X				2
	2008							X			1
Distractor removed	2007			X		X	X		X		4
	2008	X		X		X	X		X	X	6
Fewer items per page	2007				X		X		X		3
	2008	X			X		X		X	X	5
Fewer items on test	2007			X	X		X		X		4
	2008	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	8
Fewer passages	2007			X	X		X				3
	2008	X		X	X		X			X	5
Key text bolded/underlined	2007			X					X		2
	2008			X					X	X	3
Larger font size	2007				X		X		X		3
	2008	X			X		X		X	X	5
Segmentation of passages	2007								X		1
	2008		X						X	X	3
Shorter passages	2007			X	X		X				3
	2008	X		X	X		X			X	5
Simplified language	2007			X		X	X		X		4
	2008		X	X	X		X		X	X	6
Test questions read aloud	2007										0
	2008								X		1

^aState did not have an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS) in 2007.

^bThe Maryland AA-MAS was under development in both years; however, publicly available information about the characteristics of the assessment was available. ^c2007, $N = 6$; 2008, $N = 9$.

into its AA-MAS design. Texas differentiated between oral administration of the test (which was allowed as an accommodation for the math and science assessments but not allowed on the reading test) and reading of the questions and answers (which was required as a routine administration procedure). For example, the test administrators' manual for third grade for the reading test said, "Questions and answer choices will be read aloud to students by the test administrator" (Texas Education Agency, 2008, p. 47). Test administrators were also directed to preread aloud certain sections of the test that were identified by a "speaker icon."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Three more states had an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS in 2008 than in the previous year. In 2008 all nine states that had developed an assessment they believed to be an

AA-MAS had tests that included multiple-choice questions. For states that had an AA-MAS in both 2007 and 2008, there were many changes in the states' AA-MAS participation guidelines across the 2 years. The criteria that we reviewed in 2007 had been developed prior to the release of the final regulations, and many of the changes appeared to have been made as an attempt to better align the criteria with the regulations. For example, according to the regulations:

The student's progress to date in response to appropriate instruction, including special education and related services designed to address the student's individual needs, is such that, even if significant growth occurs, the IEP team is reasonably certain that the student will not achieve grade-level proficiency within the year covered by the student's IEP. (*Final Rule 34 CFR Parts 200 and 300, Section 200.1(e) (2) (ii) (A), 2007*)

In 2007, the participation guidelines of only one of the six states (Maryland) that had an assessment they believed to be an AA-MAS included the criterion that the student must not be progressing at the rate expected to reach grade-level proficiency within the school year covered by their IEP. However by 2008, six of the nine states with an AA-MAS (California, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas) included this criterion.

Other examples of changes in the eligibility criteria that appeared to be a response to the regulations was the sharp increase in the number of states that required the determination of student progress be based on multiple measures, that the IEP include goals based on grade-level content standards, and that the student receive accommodations during classroom instruction. Also, probably in response to the regulations, there were several criteria that states were much less likely to include in 2008 than in 2007. In 2007, four of the six states (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina) with an assessment they considered to be an AA-MAS indicated that for a student to participate in an AA-MAS, his or her performance should be multiple years behind grade-level expectations; by 2008 this had decreased to only two of the nine states with an AA-MAS (Kansas, Louisiana). Similarly, four of the six states with an AA-MAS in 2007 (Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota) had a criterion that participation in an AA-MAS should not be due to a student being identified as having a significant cognitive disability; in 2008 only three of the nine states with an AA-MAS (Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina) had this criterion.

Changes in participation rates between 2007 and 2008 were less clear, primarily because these data were not available. In fact, only five states publicly reported any data about their AA-MAS. Just one of these states had data across 2 years (North Carolina). It was only by seeking other data that we were able to produce comparable rates across states. The reporting on the AA-MAS appeared to be missing the intent of the April 2007 regulation, which required that states and districts report on the participation and performance of students with disabilities on the alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards, just as they do for other assessments used for accountability purposes. Both IDEA and NCLB require this public reporting (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2007).

There were also a number of test design changes between 2007 and 2008—though in many instances the percentage of states making a selected change varied little across years. States may be finding that some potential test design changes do not meet the needs of the group of students that qualify to participate.

DISCUSSION

Six of the nine states (California, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas) that have been early implementers of the AA-MAS were states that had offered an out-of-level (OOL) testing option (VanGetson, Minnema, & Thurlow, 2004) until federal policies required assessing grade-level content standards. In some of these states that had offered OOL tests, policymakers and department of education staffers may have thought that there was a need to offer a new less difficult assessment as the OOL option was phased out. Extra care needs to be taken by states that may perceive the AA-MAS as a replacement for an out-of-level test to ensure that the AA-MAS maintains high-expectations for students who participate in this option. Most states that had never provided an out-of-level option have not developed an AA-MAS.

States are not required to offer the AA-MAS assessment option, and there may be a number of factors related to instruction and assessment of the group of students who qualify for this option that could potentially affect the decision. This investigation clearly indicated that the landscape surrounding the AA-MAS is rapidly changing. Even in states that do not offer an AA-MAS, most students participate in an assessment used for accountability purposes. Rather than needing another assessment option, some states may instead have instructional issues (Filbin, 2008; Fincher, Ban, & Rogers, 2007). The 2007 regulations stated that “students who are assessed based on modified academic achievement standards [must] have access to the curriculum, including instruction, for the grade in which the students are enrolled” (*Final Rule 34 CFR Parts 200 and 300*, Section 200.1(f) (2) (iii), 2007). However, some students who may qualify for this assessment option may not currently have access to grade-level content. For example, the Georgia Department of Education conducted a curriculum implementation survey to examine whether students who were persistently low performing had access to grade-level, standards-based content. Preliminary results from the study suggested that some students did not have the opportunity to learn grade-level content; the author concluded that “any assessment solution must be coupled with instructional support” (Fincher, 2008).

States need to ensure that students who participate in an AA-MAS have access to grade-level content, and they must carefully consider how an AA-MAS may fit into their assessment system—including any intended and unintended consequences. Filbin (2008), in an analysis of the initial March 2008 federal peer review of states’ AA-MAS, noted that

a coherent assessment system is necessary to ensure that every student receives instruction linked to the grade-level standards based on their unique learning characteristics, that student achievement is adequately measured, and that all students are included in accountability systems. It is crucial for States to consider how learning differs across students and how the various assessments within the current system tap both content knowledge and process skills with respect to the grade-level standards to effectively assign students to the most appropriate assessments. (p. 6)

States developing an AA-MAS are doing so within the context of their existing assessment systems. The “gray areas of assessment” (Almond et al., 2000) may still exist, and there needs to be more recognition of issues with the assessment system itself. The landscape surrounding the AA-MAS will probably continue to change for several years as more is learned about the advantages and limitations of this assessment option. Future analyses are needed to provide more

detailed investigations into the characteristics of AA-MAS. This study provides a descriptive baseline for such future studies.

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