



Policy on Assessment and Accountability

Position

To ensure that students with disabilities are appropriately assessed under educational assessment and accountability systems, it is the position of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) that:

- a.) All students with exceptional learning needs shall be included in all assessment and accountability systems, and shall have available the opportunity to participate in general assessments, assessments with accommodations including off-grade level testing or alternate assessments that reflect valid and reliable performance for them, rather than cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, disability, or other exceptionality.
- b.) All students with exceptional needs in all settings shall be included in the assessment and accountability systems. This includes students in traditional public school placements and students who change schools or placements, as well as all students receiving publicly-funded educational services in settings such as home schools, private schools, charter schools, state-operated programs and in the juvenile justice system.
- c.) Only assessment processes and instruments that have been developed and validated on student samples that included students who have exceptionalities and that validly demonstrate their performance shall be used. Test designers shall be required to develop universally designed assessments.
- d.) State and provincial determinations of adequate yearly progress must address the progress made on grade promotions and graduation rates for exceptional students, as well as addressing other appropriate achievement indicators for students with exceptionalities, and toward making well-grounded appraisals of the particular schools.
- e.) The IEP team will determine student participation in assessments as part of the review of the overall individualized education program and be based on individual student needs.
- f.) All students with exceptionalities shall be included when assessment scores are publicly reported, whether they participate with or without accommodations or

participate through an alternate assessment - subject to personal confidentiality protections. If standards-based reform is to succeed all students must be held to higher standards, and every student must therefore be counted. However, assessment data focused on school system accountability shall never be the sole basis for making individual student educational decisions.

g.) To ensure equal access and opportunity for all students and to ensure inclusive accountability in all local and state/provincial accountability indices, the performance on assessments of students with exceptionalities must have the same impact on the final accountability index as the performance of other students, whether or not these students participated with accommodations or in an alternate assessment.

h.) Policy makers and all other stakeholders must be committed to the continuing development of a unified system of assessment and accountability for all students.

i.) There must be a firm commitment to the continuing improvement of the assessment and accountability system in the challenging years ahead, through the processes of structured monitoring, intensive ongoing evaluation, and systemic professional training based on emerging research and best practice.

j.) The successful implementation of an appropriate assessment and accountability system, including its application to students with exceptional needs, requires the cooperative efforts of all teachers, related service personnel, paraprofessionals, administrators, parents, and students in its planning, application, and evaluation.

k.) The support of legislators, other policy makers, and state/provincial educational service personnel is essential to guarantee that each student is afforded the opportunity to be assessed with a measure for her/his abilities.

Background

The Council for Exceptional Children recognizes the important role that standardized and other student assessments play in documenting educational accountability, and in ensuring sound educational decisions are made toward achieving the highest possible academic standards for all students. Developments in national, state and provincial policy are moving to ever more rigorous assessment and accountability systems, most notably on a nationwide basis in the United States and Canada through required testing of all students in specific grades. CEC endorses the various governmental efforts to ensure students with exceptional needs, those with disabilities as well as those with gifts and talents are guaranteed the right to be included in these assessments, which conforms to the larger right to full inclusion in the overall educational enterprise. CEC is concerned, however, that students with disabilities must be assessed with high expectations using measures that appropriately provide for the use of accommodations as needed and alternate assessments for the small percentage of students with the most significant disabilities; and the individualized decisions are within the framework of general assessment, assessment with accommodations or alternate assessments.

School accountability systems have in some states and provinces led to the implementation of high stakes for students, such as having to pass an exam to move from one grade to the next, or to earn a standard high school diploma. There are many issues that surround this use of testing, including access to the curriculum, opportunity to learn, test adequacy, that are particularly of concern for students with exceptional learning needs.

Reference

Council for Exceptional Children 2004 Policy Manual; Section Three, Part 1, Chapter 3, Para.15.

Date Adopted

Approved by the Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors January 10, 2003.