



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

National Center for Special Education Research

Dear [State Director of Accountability and Assessment]:

I write to inform you of a congressionally mandated study for which we need your keen assistance. The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education has funded a study entitled The National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA). This study is required by Section 664(c) of the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and addresses three broad research questions:

1. What is the current status of alternate assessment development, policy, and practice in the states?
2. How does the state policy and practice “play out on the ground” for individual students with disabilities and their families?
3. What differences do variations in policy and practice make in students’ experiences and selected educational outcomes?

SRI International, a research organization located in Menlo Park, California, is conducting this study, in close partnership with the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota and Policy Studies Associates of Washington DC.

To address the first research question, SRI is currently developing state and national profiles through document analysis and state telephone interviews. In an effort not to overburden states with study activities, SRI has completed the document analyses for each state by compiling the data on alternate assessment systems that states submitted for the peer review process required under the No Child Left Behind Act, and has also conducted searches of state World Wide Web sites.

We are now moving into a new phase of data collection, which will require SRI and its associates to contact state officials familiar with the alternate assessment system. Activities during the winter and spring of 2007 will include contacting state officials to verify information collected through the document analysis and to collect updated information on issues and changes in state alternate assessments. Because this is a congressionally mandated study, we are required to report on all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The study will employ telephone interviews to verify the information already collected in the document analysis. In addition, we hope to obtain each state’s perspectives on alternate assessments.

We will be contacting you shortly to determine the appropriate people to assist in gathering information on your state’s alternate assessment.

If you have any questions about the study or the data collection process, please contact Dr. David Malouf at the National Center for Special Education Research in the U.S. Department of Education. His e-mail address is David.Malouf@ed.gov and his phone number is 202-219-1309. You may also contact Renée Cameto at renee.cameto@sri.com or at 650-859-6451.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Kame'enui
Commissioner, National Center for Special Education Research

[DATE]

[NAME OF DIRECTOR]

State Director of Accountability and Assessment [USE APPROPRIATE TITLE]

State Office of Assessment [USE APPROPRIATE OFFICE NAME]

Street

City, state, zip code

Dear [NAME OF State Director of Accountability and Assessment]:

You should recently have received a letter from Dr. Edward Kame'enui, the Commissioner of the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE) at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), introducing you to the congressionally mandated National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA). The NSAA is being conducted by SRI International, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota, and Policy Studies Associates.

This 4-year study has reviewed all states' peer review submissions and state department of education websites over the last 6 months to learn about the development and implementation of state's alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

In order to provide Congress with information about the current status of development, policy, and practice in the states regarding alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards, we will produce a profile of each state and a national comparison of states on a full range of characteristics of states' approaches to alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. State profiles will become public information and be posted on the IES website. States will receive complimentary copies of the profiles when they have been completed.

The attached Data Summary document shows the data and information that our researchers found in their review. We are contacting you now to determine whether these data and information are accurate and complete and to obtain data and information we were unable to locate during our review. You have been selected as our state contact because of your responsibility for assessment and accountability in your state. We recognize that there may be other individuals in your state who are better able to answer some of the questions; however, each state's director of accountability and assessment is the primary state contact for this study.

The development of a complete Data Summary has two phases. In Phase I, state officials in each state are asked to review and verify the accuracy of the data and information we have collected on 2005-06 and to identify where changes have occurred or are to be implemented in the 2006-07 school year. In Phase II, telephone interviews will be conducted to (1) correct inaccurate or incomplete data and information for 2005-06 and (2) discuss any changes that are being implemented in 2006-07.

[Name] is the researcher who has conducted the document review for your state. [He/she] will also be conducting the interviews. [He/she] can be contacted at [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION]. [He/she] will be contacting you within 2 weeks to set up interviews. The document review must be completed and returned to SRI before the interview so that the interview for your state can be customized.

If you have any general questions about the study or the data collection process, please contact Renée Cameto, Project Director for NSAA, at 650-859-6451 or at renee.cameto@sri.com.

We know how busy you are and very much appreciate your time for this important study.

Sincerely,

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