



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES
National Center for Special Education Research

Dear [State Director of Accountability and Assessment]:

I am writing to inform you of a congressionally mandated study for which we need your 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).

Specifically, this legislation requires “a national study or studies to examine (1) the criteria that States use to determine eligibility for alternate assessments; and the number and type of children who take those assessments and are held accountable to alternative achievement standards; (2) the validity and reliability of alternate assessment instruments and procedures; (3) the alignment of alternate assessments and alternative achievement standards to State academic content standards in reading, mathematics, and science; and (4) the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments in appropriately measuring student progress and outcomes specific to individualized instructional need.”

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

The NSAA researchers have addressed the first three congressionally mandated topics by analyzing state documents and conducting a national telephone interview survey with state alternate assessment personnel to produce state and national profiles of state alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards.

The fourth topic regarding the use and effectiveness of the alternate assessments for appropriately measuring student progress and outcomes will be addressed by conducting surveys of randomly selected samples of teachers from states with alternate assessments that meet certain research criteria. Your state’s alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards has been identified as meeting these criteria. NSAA researchers will be contacting you to discuss the feasibility of conducting the final phase of the study in your state with a representative sample of teachers.

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

Sincerely,

Lynn Okagaki
Acting Commissioner, National Center for Special Education Research

Notification letter from the NSAA to states regarding state survey

[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]:

Thank you for your state's valuable contributions to the National Study on Alternate Assessment (NSAA) funded by the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE) in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). The first task of the NSAA has been to develop state and national profiles on alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) for students with significant cognitive disabilities using information from an extensive analysis of documents related to AA-AAS in your state and interviews with key state personnel. In order to provide Congress with information about the implementation of AA-AAS, the USDE has directed SRI International and its partners, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota and Policy Studies Associates, to administer state survey in several states with established AA-AAS and approved state assessment systems under the NCLB Peer Review process.

[Name] is the researcher who is knowledgeable about your state's AA-AAS. He/she will be contacting you to discuss the feasibility of conducting the state survey in your state. You may contact [Name] toll-free at [Phone Number] or by e-mail [e-mail Address].

We would like to randomly select a sample of teachers to complete a survey (hard-copy or online options are available). We know teachers are busy and want to show our appreciation for their help with the survey; each survey will have \$5 attached as an incentive to consider completing the screening questionnaire and full survey, and a \$35 check will be sent to each eligible teacher who meets the screening criteria and completes the survey. We plan to complete sampling in fall 2009, mail surveys to teachers in January 2010, and continue follow-up through April 2010.

This study is required by Section 664(c) of the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and, under the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR Section 76.591), grantees are required by law to cooperate with federal evaluations of programs for which they receive funds. If you have any questions about the study or the data collection process, please contact Renée Cameto, Project Director for the NSAA, at 650-859-6451 or at renee.cameto@sri.com.

We know how busy you are and appreciate your time and support in making the results of this study a valid and useful source of information for Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other policymakers and educators.

Sincerely,

Jose Blackorby, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
650-859-4210
jose.blackorby@sri.com

Renée Cameto, Ph.D.
Project Director
650-859-6451
renee.cameto@sri.com

cc: Superintendent
Special Education Director

State Letterhead

Notification letter from states to teachers
[Teacher First Name] [Teacher Last Name]
[School Name]
[School Address]
[School City], [State] [School Zip]

Dear [Teacher Name],

The [State Name] State Department of Education has agreed to support the congressionally mandated National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA) being funded by the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The NSAA will investigate the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments in appropriately measuring student progress and outcomes specific to individualized instructional need.

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

The NSAA study team will be conducting surveys in a number of states with established alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities. [State Name] has been identified as having an alternate assessment that fits the study requirements. Teachers have been randomly selected to participate in the study.

I strongly encourage you to participate in this research by completing the enclosed screening questionnaire and, if appropriate, the survey. While I recognize that you are quite busy at this time of the year, this study is important for informing Congress; national, state, and local policymakers; and educators about the implementation of alternate assessments.

To thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration, \$5 is attached, and you will be paid \$35 if you are determined to be eligible for the full survey and return it completed to SRI. Both hard-copy and online options are available for your convenience.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact [insert state contact name and contact info; David Malouf at NCSER at david.malouf@ed.gov, or at 202-219-1309; or Renee Cameto, NSAA Director, at renee.cameto@sri.com or at 650-859-6451. I truly appreciate your time, consideration, and effort.

Sincerely,

Name
State Director of Accountability and Assessment



Cover letter for state survey

[NAME OF TEACHER]

School [USE SCHOOL NAME]

Street

City, state, zip code

Dear [Teacher Name]:

Enclosed you will find a copy of a teacher survey for the National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA) being funded by the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to provide information to Congress about the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) measuring student progress and outcomes specific to individual instructional needs.

The survey asks about the characteristics of students receiving AA-AAS and the influences of the AA-AAS on instruction. Your state has agreed to participate in this important study. There are two parts to the survey, a one-page screening questionnaire and the full survey. Five dollars (\$5) is attached to the survey as a “thank you” for considering our request that you participate in our study.

- Screening questionnaire. The screening questionnaire determines if you are eligible to complete the full survey, and will take no more than 10 minutes. Please fill it out and return in the envelope provided.
- Full survey. For teachers eligible to complete the survey, \$35 will be sent to you when NSAA receives your completed survey. The full survey will take about 1 hour to complete.

Use the return envelope to return the hard copy version of the screening and full survey or complete both online at [Link].

The information that is collected from this survey will be used only for statistical purposes, and no information that identifies individual teachers or districts will be provided to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law. Reports prepared by the NSAA study will summarize findings across the sample of teachers and will not associate responses with a specific district, school, or individual. The final report for the study will be available in 2010.

If you have any general questions about the study or the data collection process, please contact NSAA survey coordinator [Name of Coordinator], toll-free at [Phone Number] or at [E-mail Address]. Please return the screening questionnaire and survey by [Date].

We know how busy you are and appreciate your time and support in making the results of this study a valid and useful source of information for Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other policymakers and educators.

Sincerely,

Jose Blackorby, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
650-859-4210
jose.blackorby@sri.com

Renée Cameto, Ph.D.
Project Director
650-859-6451
renee.cameto@sri.com

Reminder postcard for teacher

Dear [Teacher Name]:

Thank you for participating in the National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA). Recently we sent you a screening questionnaire and survey that will provide important information to the U.S. Department of Education and Congress regarding the use and effectiveness of alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards in measuring student progress and outcomes specific to individualized instructional needs of students.

If you have not already done so, please complete the screening questionnaire and the survey (if the screening questionnaire qualifies you as a respondent). An online survey is available if you prefer at [Link], or if you would like a replacement survey, contact the person indicated below. We will send you a check for \$35 for completing the survey. Surveys must be returned (or submitted online) by [Date].

Your input is extremely valuable, and we look forward to receiving your screening questionnaire and survey. Contact [Coordinator Name, and Contact Information] toll free if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jose Blackorby, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
650-859-4210
jose.blackorby@sri.com

Renée Cameto, Ph.D.
Project Director
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