

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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**DPS: 04-055**

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District School Superintendents

**FROM:** Jim Warford

**DATE:** December 29, 2003

**SUBJECT:** **Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities**

Consistent with the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the vast majority of students with disabilities in Florida are expected to demonstrate mastery of the Sunshine State Standards, participate in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and graduate with a standard diploma. In order to achieve this expectation, students with disabilities must be provided access to the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible with appropriately designed instruction and accommodations.

Analysis of the 2003 Florida Alternate Assessment Report data indicated that of the 261,553 Florida students with disabilities in grades three through ten, 30,036 students or 11.5% of the state's total population of students with disabilities in grades three through ten were assessed using an alternate assessment. The enclosed chart displays the proportions of students with disabilities taking alternate assessment by primary exceptionality.

**JIM WARFORD**  
*K – 12 Chancellor*

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When the determination is made at an early age not to teach and assess a student with disabilities on the Sunshine State Standards, this decision may limit the student's access to general education. In order to be excluded from the FCAT, a student must meet the following requirements according to Rule 6A-1.0943, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

- The student's demonstrated cognitive ability prevents the student from completing required coursework and achieving the Sunshine State Standards, even with appropriate and allowable course modifications
- The student requires extensive direct instruction to accomplish the application and transfer of skills and competencies needed for domestic, community living, leisure and vocational activities.

Low cognitive ability is defined as significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior. If a student meets all of the requirements above, an individual educational plan (IEP) team may determine that appropriate standards and assessment are the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma and alternate assessment.

The data collected on students with disabilities assessed using an alternate assessment indicate there were too many students who took an alternate assessment instead of the FCAT in 2003. If a student's curriculum is the regular Sunshine State Standards then the student should be assessed using the FCAT, not an alternate assessment. Students' rate of participation in the FCAT is a key data indicator for the focused monitoring site visits conducted by the Exceptional Student Education Program Monitoring staff of the Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services.

School districts have been given additional funding to develop and implement alternate assessment procedures for the past eight years. Since districts have alternate assessment procedures well established by now, the Assessment and Accountability for Students with Disabilities Project will not provide funding directly to the districts this year. However, the project will continue to provide training and materials to districts on appropriate assessments for students with disabilities whose participation in the FCAT is inappropriate and who are working toward a special diploma.

Additional information on the Accountability and Assessment for Students with Disabilities Project, including an announcement for an upcoming meeting for Alternate Assessment Coordinators, has been sent to Exceptional Student Education Directors under separate cover. We appreciate your support and continued efforts in providing services to students with disabilities. If you have additional questions, please contact Melissa Adams, Manager, Alternate Assessment Project, by telephone at 877/873-7232 or by electronic mail at [adamsm@paec.org](mailto:adamsm@paec.org).

JW/lcr

Enclosure

cc: Exceptional Student Education Directors  
ESE Alternate Assessment Coordinators  
District Assessment Coordinators