ASES DAATA Focus Group: Consequences of Alternate Assessments Judged Against Alternate Achievement Standards Perspectives (AA AAS) from State Members, Partners, and Associates

DATE: February 2, 2006 Thursda	TIMES:	9:00 to 9:15 Introduction and Group Assignment 9:15 to 9:30 Transition to Rooms 9:30 to 10:30 Conduct of Focus Groups
FOCUS: Identify (a) states'/associates' perceived positive and negative consequences of AA AAS to date, and (b) status of state administrative policies and practices, both current and anticipated/planned		

Purpose: The purpose of the focus group interviews is to ascertain (a) state members' and ASES partners' sense of positive and negative consequences of administering AA AAS in their states, (b) their opinions about progress in their states toward intended consequences such as student w/SCD access to the general education curriculum and improved student learning in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as (c) unintended positive or negative consequences that members have seen in their states.

Do want to know[1]:
1. Extent of student w/SCD access to the general education curriculum and to instruction in academic content
2. Extent to which student learning in reading, writing, and mathematics has improved following development and administration of the alternate assessments.
3. Extent to which special education teachers received professional development in academic content, decision making, and alternate assessment test administration.
4. Negative intended or unintended consequences from alternate assessment administration.
5. Status SEA guidelines for participation, scoring practices, test specifications for the AA AAS, have things changed much following passage of NCLB in 2001 and posting of the 1% regulations in 2003. Are there changes in process now? (For this do we want to ask them to bring certain documents?)

Do not want to know:
1. How well members/associates like or agree with including students with significant w/SCD in large-scale assessment systems.
2. Test accommodations allowed with the state's grade-level large-scale assessments.
3. Other

How will we use the information?
- Develop a sense of the status of intended outcomes for AA AAS related to the access to general curriculum, academic outcomes and changes in this area following NCLB and Dec. 9, 2003 regulations.
- To forecast anticipated consequences, both positive and negative, particularly related to the intent of NCLB and the learning of students w/SCD.

For the focus group to be successful, we need to:
- Identify key ideas related to AA AAS, students, teachers, academic content, and achievement.
- Identify key ideas related to AA AAS with policy makers and administrators.

---

[1] These components, i.e. purpose, do want to know, do not want to know, how will we use the information, and for the focus group to be successful, we need to, are categories that Vaughn, et. al, recommend researchers address as part of designing the focus group.

- Identify challenges and possible solutions that might increase chances of positive consequences and decrease the likelihood of negative consequences for students, teachers, and schools.

Context within Which the Focus Group Interviews Occur

The implied intent of federal legislation and standards based education reform in relationship to students with significant cognitive disabilities (SCD) has been to:
- ensure student access to the general education curriculum
- hold schools and districts accountable for the academic achievement of students
- to improve student learning in state content standards
- to assess student academic achievement with validated tests linked to grade level expectations

The table below provides a temporal view of where states find themselves today regarding alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities and the milieu of standards based education reform, accountability, and federal legislation. Although states have some history with their alternate assessments, most assessments are still works in progress.

Moderator's role:
The DAATA management team members each will serve as focus group moderator, note-taker, and data gatherer. Moderators should welcome participants as they gather and provide name badges for first names to facilitate communication in case there are any new members and to establish a comfortable environment. During the focus groups, moderators are to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to prevent anyone in the group from monopolizing the conversation. Moderators should be familiar with the moderator's guide and the guidelines below on the types of responses appropriate for guiding the conversation without influencing people's contributions and suggestions for prompting participants to explain their responses to the prepared questions in greater depth. Moderators will kept track of the amount of time being spent on each question to ensure that all questions are adequately sampled.

Tape recorders will be available for the discussion and moderators should ensure that the recorders are working and that they are turned on at the beginning of the focus group discussion.

Moderators Guide[2]

Outline	Moderator's Script
Introduction a. Welcome b. Statement of the purpose of the interview c. Guidelines to follow during the interview 3 minutes	*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. We divided ASES members into groups with the goal of having a mix of special education and assessment orientations in each group. The questions developed for our discussion are intended to get your impressions of aspects of your state's alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities.* *The purpose of these focus group interviews is to learn about your sense of the positive and negative consequences from administering your state's alternate assessment since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and the 1% regulations published on December 9, 2003.* *There are a few guidelines we ask you to follow during the focus group interview. First, you do not need to speak in any particular order. When you have something to say, please do so. Second, please do not speak while someone else is talking. Third, remember there a number of people in the group and it is important to obtain the point of view from each of you. Fourth, we are not looking for consensus; we want to get a comprehensive perspective. Finally, because we have limited time, I may redirect the discussion if we get off track. Do you have any questions?*
Warm Up a. Set the tone b. Set the participants at ease 5 minutes	*It seems that all states have some form of alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. There are certain to be similarities and differences in the formats for alternate assessments administered in your states. We would like to start by having each of you tell us __briefly__ about your state's alternate assessment by telling us four things about the assessment that is being administered this year (2005-2006)[3]:* *During the focus group introduction, we handed out cards with questions about your alternate assessment. We did this to give you an opportunity to have your answers ready.* *To start with let's go around the group and each member report the answers to the questions for your state.* It seems like it would be a good strategy to keep a tally on a chart pack so that everyone in the group could have a sense of what had been said. It may be challenging at this point to help group members move quickly through this piece. It is not the point of the discussion but just the warm-up to get everyone on the same page.

---

[2] Adapted from Vaughn, S., Shay Schumm, J., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc. (page 43).

[3] Front & back wording for the cards with the three questions printed on them appear at the end of this protocol. We should distribute these during the introduction to the focus group and have the participants mark their answers before breaking into groups. During the focus group discussion, facilitators should collect these cards.

Outline	**Moderator's Script**
Clarification of terms a. Establish the knowledge base of key terms through questions b. Provide definitions of key terms 2 minutes	*Students with significant cognitive disabilities.* *Alternate assessment judged against alternate achievement standards.* *Consequences.* *General assessment.* **MOVE THIS PIECE TO THE INTRODUCTION**
Questions a. Initial question, more general[4] b. More difficult questions 15 minutes per topic	*For the purposes of our discussion today, we ask you to focus your comments and discussion about the way things are in the present year, 2005-2006.* *1. Student Learning: One intent of recent federal legislation was to bring about improved student learning in academic content for students with significant cognitive disabilities, particularly reading, writing, and mathematics. In what ways do you think that development and administration of the alternate assessment has positively influenced student learning in academic content until now, the current year 2005-2006?* *2. AA in Relation to General Assessment: We would like to get a sense of what each of you think about the design of your state's alternate assessment and its relation to the general education assessment. One way of looking at an AA AAS is to think of it as an extension of the general education assessment. Another way to think of the alternate assessment is as a test that involves a balance between functional skills and academic content. How do you see your state's 2005-2006 alternate assessment?* *3. Challenges: Alternate assessments can still be considered works in progress, especially regarding increasing student access to the general education curriculum and improved academic outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities. What do you see as hurdles to achieving these outcomes that your state has overcome thus far 2005-2006? What do you see as the next snags to be overcome?*
Wrap-Up a. Identify and organize the major themes from the participant's responses b. Ensure that any conversational points not completed are mentioned 2 minutes	*Unfortunately, we are coming to the end of our conversation about alternate assessment. I am going to attempt to summarize the key ideas that I have heard. One key idea is . . . . . . Another idea that I heard was that . . . .It also seems that . . . . . .Finally, ...* *There were several topics that were mentioned that we were unable to finish discussing. A couple of ASES members referred to . . . . and the . . . . . . Another important topic that we could have spent more time on was . . . Is there anything else that could have been discussed more thoroughly?*

---

[4] *It seems to me that we could get right down to business. In general, this is a group that meets regularly, although there are some new faces each time. They will have been together for one full day by the time the focus group is conducted and will have been discussing related topics. It seems that more than anything, we need to narrow the topic to make sure that we get the information that we want.*

DAATA Focus Group Protocol Draft 2.

Outline	Moderator's Script
Member Check a. Determine how each member perceives selected issues 5 minutes	*There were several key discussion points that I would like to mention and find out how each of you feel by checking with each member. We are no looking for more discussion at this time, but rather a general idea about how man members feel a particular way. I am curious about how many of you . . . . . . I would also like to know how many of you feel/believe . . . . . .*
Closing Statements a. Request anonymity of information b. Answer any remaining questions c. Express thanks 3 minutes	*Before we adjourn our focus group, I want to remind each of you that when the notes of this meeting are transcribed for purposes of review and analysis, names and states will remain anonymous. We understand that it has been an ASES position that what is discussed during ASES meetings is considered confidential. For this reason, states will not be identified in any summaries from our discussion. We do plan to provide information back to the ASES membership about consequences both positive and negative that surfaced during the focus group interviews. Are there any questions I can answer?* *Thank you for your contributions and your candid responses. Your efforts are very much appreciated.*

- -

DAATA Focus Group Protocol Draft 2.

State: _____

Federal Legislation

	←2001	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	**This Year ➔** 2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
IDEA	∧∧∧				IDEIA			
IASA	∧∧∧	NCLB		AAS 1%	MAS 2%			Science
Alternate Assessment Gen. Ed. Curriculum	∧∧∧	All in AYP		Peer Review	Peer Review			

Focus Group Time Frame

	←2001	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Areas of Consequences	∧∧∧							
Student Access Gen Ed • Reading • Writing • Mathematics	∧∧∧							
Student Outcomes • Reading • Writing • Mathematics	∧∧∧							
Other Consequences 1	∧∧∧							
Other Consequences 2	∧∧∧							

Legend:

NCLB	Congress Passed No Child Left Behind Act	Peer Review	Peer reviewers evaluate state submissions
All in AYP	All students included in AYP Calculations	MAS 2 %	Modified Achievement Standards announced Apr 2005
AAS %	Alternate Achievement Standards announced Dec. 9	Science	Year states must assess science.

To be handed out during the introduction to the focus groups before the large group reassembles into the four breakout groups. The purpose of this grid is to give a general idea about when legislation and regulations were introduced in order to couch the discussion in the present.

- **Observation Instrument, Checklist, or Rating Scale**: a list of skills that an individual familiar with the student's performance rates according to a specific proficiency rating scale.
- **IEP Evaluation**: progress toward objectives on a student's IEP is included as part of my state's data collection for the alternate assessment.
- **Performance Task or Event**: items or tasks administered by a teacher or test administrator to a student. Typically, the items/tasks are the same for all students.
- **Portfolio or Collection of Evidence**: a collection of student work gathered to demonstrate student performance on specific skills and knowledge, generally linked to state content standards.

- **Observation Instrument, Checklist, or Rating Scale**: a list of skills that an individual familiar with the student's performance rates according to a specific proficiency rating scale.
- **IEP Evaluation**: progress toward objectives on a student's IEP is included as part of my state's data collection for the alternate assessment.
- **Performance Task or Event**: items or tasks administered by a teacher or test administrator to a student. Typically, the items/tasks are the same for all students.
- **Portfolio or Collection of Evidence**: a collection of student work gathered to demonstrate student performance on specific skills and knowledge, generally linked to state content standards.

- **Observation Instrument, Checklist, or Rating Scale**: a list of skills that an individual familiar with the student's performance rates according to a specific proficiency rating scale.
- **IEP Evaluation**: progress toward objectives on a student's IEP is included as part of my state's data collection for the alternate assessment.
- **Performance Task or Event**: items or tasks administered by a teacher or test administrator to a student. Typically, the items/tasks are the same for all students.
- **Portfolio or Collection of Evidence**: a collection of student work gathered to demonstrate student performance on specific skills and knowledge, generally linked to state content standards.

- **Observation Instrument, Checklist, or Rating Scale**: a list of skills that an individual familiar with the student's performance rates according to a specific proficiency rating scale.
- **IEP Evaluation**: progress toward objectives on a student's IEP is included as part of my state's data collection for the alternate assessment.
- **Performance Task or Event**: items or tasks administered by a teacher or test administrator to a student. Typically, the items/tasks are the same for all students.
- **Portfolio or Collection of Evidence**: a collection of student work gathered to demonstrate student performance on specific skills and knowledge, generally linked to state content standards.

State: _____

(a) State Alternate Assessment *(mark one or more)*?
- Portfolio or Collection of Evidence   *(over for descriptions)*
- Observation, Checklist, or Rating Scale
- Performance Task or Performance Event
- IEP progress
- Other _____

(b) If collection or portfolio, are there prescribed entries or will the teacher choose the content?
____Prescribed   ____Teacher chooses   ____Both

(c) Who will score the assessment?
____The student's teacher,   ____raters at a scoring site,
____Other: _____

(d) Is your state planning to use the same approach next year?
____ Yes   ____ No

State: _____

(a) State Alternate Assessment *(mark one or more)*?
1. Portfolio or Collection of Evidence   *(over for descriptions)*
2. Observation, Checklist, or Rating Scale
3. Performance Task or Performance Event
4. IEP progress
5. Other _____

(b) If collection or portfolio, are there prescribed entries or will the teacher choose the content?
____Prescribed   ____Teacher chooses   ____Both

(c) Who will score the assessment?
____The student's teacher,   ____raters at a scoring site,
____Other: _____

(d) Is your state planning to use the same approach next year?
____ Yes   ____ No

State: _____

(a) State Alternate Assessment *(mark one or more)*?
- Portfolio or Collection of Evidence   *(over for descriptions)*
- Observation, Checklist, or Rating Scale
- Performance Task or Performance Event
- IEP progress
- Other _____

(b) If collection or portfolio, are there prescribed entries or will the teacher choose the content?
____Prescribed   ____Teacher chooses   ____Both

(c) Who will score the assessment?
____The student's teacher,   ____raters at a scoring site,
____Other: _____

(d) Is your state planning to use the same approach next year?
____ Yes   ____ No

State: _____

(a) State Alternate Assessment *(mark one or more)*?
6. Portfolio or Collection of Evidence   *(over for descriptions)*
7. Observation, Checklist, or Rating Scale
8. Performance Task or Performance Event
9. IEP progress
10. Other _____

(b) If collection or portfolio, are there prescribed entries or will the teacher choose the content?
____Prescribed   ____Teacher chooses   ____Both

(c) Who will score the assessment?
____The student's teacher,   ____raters at a scoring site,
____Other: _____

(d) Is your state planning to use the same approach next year?
____ Yes   ____ No

These last two pages could conceptually be printed front and back and cut into for pieces. They too could be handed out during the introduction to give all participates the same entrée into the group discussion.

Roles and Responsibilities

Moderator:
- Make people feel welcome and needed.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak and that no one monopolizes conversation.
- State the question at the beginning of the discussion for documentation on the audiotape.
- Say names out aloud when you call on people to participate in the discussion so the transcription can keep track of who said what.
- Be accepting and non-judgmental.
- Avoid showing personal opinions and commentary on what people offer.
- Manage pacing and complete the list of questions.
- Probe to encourage depth of explanation.
- Ask for examples and illustrations.
- Be alert.
- Keep centered on the purpose and goals of focus groups throughout all phases of interviewing.
- Present the questions in the order they are provided.
- Memorize the questions in advance so that you appear well prepared and can move fluidly through the discussion.
- Take notes about what is said and observed…including locating important quotations from the discussion. It is also worthwhile to make notes of observations about your role as a moderator…how did your style and approach effect the interview?
- Make notes immediately following the focus group session. Gather the taping equipment and carefully label the tape and assemble the handouts collecting into an envelope with your name and the members of the group listed on the outside. Check the tape recording for quality.
- Later, when they are ready, the moderator should review transcription notes for clarity and elaborate where necessary.

- How to keep the group focused:
    - Use the "parking lot" strategy. Have chart paper visible to the group and during the discussion, if a topic is presented other than the one being focused on, the moderator can say that the idea is worth discussing at a future point in time (perhaps for those wishing to stay longer after the session) and then the topic is listed on the chart paper and the moderator refocuses the discussion back on track. The "parking lot" procedure should be mentioned at the beginning of the session during introductions and ground rules.
    - Clarify with paraphrasing or summarizing. If the interviewer reveals areas of ambiguity or of uncertainty, where you are not really sure what the person meant, the moderator should clarify, asking if that was what the respondent meant.
- How to keep equal participation:
    - Use round table approach: Ask the questions and then ask someone to provide their response. The conversation moves from one person to the next in sequential order. Each person's answer can be limited to a specific amount of time.
    - Call on people by name.
- How to follow-up on someone's answer:
    - Summarize and ask if this accurately reflects their comments.
    - Ask general follow-up questions such as "would you explain that further?" "could you restate your point in another way?" or "would you give me an example?"
    - Avoid short confirming responses ("ok," "yes," "uh huh," etc.), nodding during answer.
    - Maintain neutrality toward content of responses…we are here to collect information and not make judgments about that person.
- How to wrap-up the focus groups:
    - Thank the participants for coming.
    - Summarize what was said or if anything was missing (optional).
    - Provide contact information for follow-up.
- What to do if someone dominates the conversation or talks too much:
    - Limit each person's response time and stick with it. Offer a gentle reminder to limit the length of the response…or let everyone have a turn at responding.
    - Call on other people to respond.
    - Call on someone else to begin if someone continually takes the lead in answering the question.
- What to do if someone does not comment:
    - Make sure you touch bases with everyone before the focus group. This will help to make people feel more comfortable during the discussion.
- What to do if someone offends other members of the group:
    - Acknowledge the comment, but remind the participants of the ground rules and the need to be respectful. Refocus the discussion.