

**NH Alternate Assessment
2008
Frequently Asked Questions**



NH Alternate Assessment: Frequently Asked Questions Fall 2008

These frequently asked questions were compiled from the 2007–2008 NH Alternate Assessment training sessions and from questions received.

NH-Alt During 2008-09 for <u>Alternately</u> Assessed Students in Grade:	What content areas are assessed?			
	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
2	Yes	Yes	-	-
3	Yes	Yes	-	-
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	-	-
6	Yes	Yes		
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
8	-	-	-	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
11	-	-	-	Yes

✦ How do I get a copy of the NH Alternate Assessment Educators’ Manual and/or Portfolio Template?

In any of three ways:

1. All participants in September NH-Alt Training Workshops receive a printed copy.
2. Copies of the *New Hampshire Alternate Assessment Educators’ Manual* and/or the Portfolio Template may be immediately printed as a Word document from the following Web location: <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/assessment>. (Once there, choose: NH Alternate Assessment and look for *2008-2009 Materials and Information*.)
3. Copies of the Educators’ Manual (that are printed, tabbed, and spiral-bound) and copies of the Portfolio Template (that are printed, 3-hole punched and shrink-wrapped) can be ordered from Measured Progress and will be sent free of charge. To order, call: Amanda Breitmaier at Measured Progress (1-800-431-8901 x 2251).

✦ ***Who can I call to ask questions about NH Alternate Assessment?***

The NHDoe employs two full-time Alternate Assessment Coaches who specialize in training educators to conduct the NH Alternate Assessment.

Portfolio development questions may be directed to:

Marie Cote, Alternate Assessment Coach, at:
marie.cote@comcast.net, (603) 689-8777 and

Allyson Vignola, Alternate Assessment Coach, at:
allysonvignola@hotmail.com, (603) 848-4850

General inquiries may be directed to:

Susan Morgan, NHDoe, Program Specialist, at:
smorgan@ed.state.nh.us, (603) 271- 3719

Policy and other inquiries may be directed to:

Gaye Fedorchak, NHDoe,
Supervisor of NH Alternate Assessment and Access Support, at:
gfedorchak@ed.state.nh.us, (603) 271-7383

✦ ***Who participates in the NH Alternate Assessment?***

Only those students who have the ***most severe cognitive disabilities and are unable to demonstrate achievement of grade-level academic standards, even with the best instruction and with appropriate accommodations***, may participate in the Alternate Assessment, which is based on *alternate achievement standards*. In New Hampshire, alternately assessed students, with teacher assistance, produce portfolios that include samples of student work and data showing the progress the student has made on academic content skills in a given school year. Four criteria must be met for a student to qualify for participation. The student must:

1. Be currently enrolled in grades 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 or 11, *and-*
2. Have an active IEP, *and-*
3. There must be evidence that the student's demonstrated cognitive disability and adaptive behavior skills *prevent him or her* from demonstrating achievement of the grade-level proficiency standards described in the New Hampshire Curriculum Frameworks, *even with best instruction and with appropriate accommodations, and-*
4. There must be historical data (current and longitudinal across multiple settings) that confirm the student criteria listed above.

✦ What are characteristics of students appropriately served in the New Hampshire Alternate Assessment?

The following characteristics occur *in combination*—*not* in isolation:

- **Limited Communication:** The student may be considered nonverbal or may have very limited expressive vocabulary and language skills. The student may use simple language structures to communicate and seldom acquires new communication skills through incidental learning. Most NH-Alt students do talk and have some limited, *very basic* writing skills, but each of these students shows a *substantial delay* in the development of language skills relative to the skills of same-aged peers; *and*
- **Very Low Levels of Academic Achievement:** Performance in the subject matters of reading, writing, and mathematics is significantly below that of same-aged peers (e.g., *performance-level expectations must be modified to a reduced or simpler level of performance from the curriculum standards set for general education or “typical” New Hampshire students*). When typical general education peers are reading paragraphs and answering questions, the Alternate Assessment student might be matching objects, pictures, or symbols, and when typical peers are writing and solving equations, the Alternate Assessment student might be using objects, symbol systems, or pictures to show more basic connections; *and*
- **Highly Specialized Instruction:** The student generally requires systematic instruction with tasks broken into small steps. In addition, the student needs deliberate instruction to apply learned skills across multiple settings (e.g., school, home, work, and other settings); *and*
- **Ample Supports:** The student requires individualized instructional, technological, or interpersonal supports to make progress in learning. The student *requires accommodations* to demonstrate proficiency of even the *modified* performance expectation levels described above, such as modeling and repeated demonstration, physical hand-over-hand guidance, specially designed prompting procedures, and alternate or augmented communication systems.

✦ What is the 1% rule?

Under the federal law known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, no more than 1% of the scores from statewide assessment in a school district are allowed to *show proficiency* in an assessment based on alternate achievement standards. The remaining statewide assessment scores *in the proficient or above range*, must be earned by students who take a general assessment based on *grade-level* academic standards.

For example, if a district had a total of 500 students and *all 500 hundred students* participated in the NH Alternate Assessment, the state would be allowed to *credit* only 5 students from this district as earning scores of “proficient” through the NH Alternate Assessment. The remaining 495 students, no matter what their scores, would not be credited as “proficient” for purposes of district accountability for student results. Students and parents would receive individual scores as earned, but the school and district would not be credited with teaching students grade-level material. This is one of the fundamental requirements of the NCLB law. The reason for this rule is to ensure that the vast majority of students are supported by their schools to learn and to show *grade-level proficiency* of academic content skills. NH Alternate Assessment does not assess the achievement of grade-level content skills. Instead, NH Alternate Assessment assesses content

skills that are *linked to* grade-level academic activities but are modified to a lower level of depth, complexity, and breadth.

✦ **What happens when a student moves into the school district partway through the school year?** Under federal and state law, all students (with very rare exceptions) in all school districts *must participate* in statewide assessment. This includes new students who move into the district during the school year. As with any new student, the previous (or sending) school district should send any files and grade reports (both current and previous) to the new district. If the student is in the process of participating in the NH Alternate Assessment, the sending NH district should send any of the portfolio portions thus far completed in the current school year. On a student's chart or graph within the portfolio, the teacher may note the dates of the transition and from where the student arrived. Students moving in-state from one NH public school district to another must complete and submit a portfolio.

- *Note: Data on all alternate assessment students enrolled in your district at any time during the school year will be collected online during NH Alternate Assessment Registration between January and February. This same data will be updated at the time of statewide portfolio pick up in May. Students moving in and out may be documented in this way for accountability. More details will be made available from the NHDOE in late fall or early winter 2008-09.*

**Special Case –
Entry to a NH Public School District from Placements Not Accountable for Providing Instruction in NH Curriculum:**

Below is outlined the procedure for arrival in NH public schools of an alternately assessed student from these *three places*:

1. another state
2. a home-school program
3. a privately *funded* placement in a *private* school

NH-Alt eligible students from these 3 categories, who arrive, for any reason, in a NH District ***on or before Feb. 1st must complete a NH-Alt portfolio.*** These students will be exposed to NH curriculum and instruction for a sufficient time to conduct this assessment. However, students in the *3 categories listed above*, who ***arrive after Feb. 1st do NOT have to complete*** a NH Alternate Assessment during that school year. These students are treated, under NCLB/AYP accountability, as “NT/Approved” (Not Tested for Approved Reasons),

- *Note: Data on all alternate assessment students enrolled in your district at any time during the school year will be collected online during NH Alternate Assessment Registration between January and February. This same data will be updated at the time of statewide portfolio pick up in May. Students moving in and out may be documented in this way for accountability. More details will be made available from the NHDOE in late fall or early winter 2008-09.*

✦ ***Transitioning Students between NH Alternate and NECAP General Assessment:***

A chart to guide teams in identifying how to transition students from one assessment system into the other is available online at: www.ed.state.nh.us/assessment. On this page, choose: NECAP or NH-Alternate Assessment, and on this page, choose: Fall (current year) Materials and Information.

✦ ***Are there times at which a student must take BOTH the NECAP and the alternate portfolio assessment?***

Yes, but only one, as follows: *In the fall, when a NH public student is transitioning from NH general assessment(NECAP) into NH Alternate Assessment, but this was not decided until after Feb. 1 in the prior school year, then the student must do both fall NECAP and NH-Alt.*

*In the fall, if a NH publicly enrolled student was **NOT identified prior to Feb. 1 of the prior school year, as an alternately assessed student**, then the student is expected to participate in the NH general assessment (NECAP) in October, but this would not extend to the Science test given in May. If the student is transitioning into the NH-Alt, then the student will be assessed in Science through the year-long NH-Alt portfolio process. Also in the fall, the school would begin the NH Alternate Assessment as well for all content areas assessed in that grade in NH-Alt. This will achieve the assessment transition from general to alternate assessment for the student. The student will not have to take the general assessment again after that first transition year.*

✦ ***If a student completed a NH Alternate Assessment portfolio during the last school year but the team decides that the student can participate within the general assessment this year, what score will “stand” as the student’s score?***

- The NH Alternate Assessment score will stand as the student’s score. Once an alternate assessment score is generated for a student, then the NECAP assessment can only be taken as a practice experience. If NECAP is taken as a practice test in this way, then the school should complete all parts of the NECAP Student Response Booklet exactly the same way they do so for students who normally participate in NECAP assessment.. Measured Progress will identify students who have a prior NH-Alt score through a match of student identification numbers across systems. This will ensure that a NECAP score report is returned to provide feedback only for this student in addition to the official NH Alternate Assessment Reports (student and summary). In this way only the NH-Alt score will be counted for purposes of NCLB accountability, but you will get information from both experiences, through the NECAP student report, NECAP item analysis reports, and student level data files.

✦ ***How do students transition from NH Alternate Assessment to General Assessment?***

Students *may change* from NH Alternate Assessment to NH General (NECAP) Assessment by NOT doing a portfolio during the current school year. Instead, they would simply participate in the full grade-level instruction during the current school year. Then, in October of the *next* school year, they would participate in the NECAP assessment. (For more information, See online Transition Chart, described above.)

✦ ***How do I produce an assessment portfolio starting halfway through the school year for a new student? Won't it get a poor score?***

The NH Alternate Assessment is designed to allow collection of academic performance data during each of 3 data collection periods across the year. Portfolio scoring is designed to allow students to show *and receive credit* for academic skill growth even if it occurs late in the year. Well-chosen targeted skills with solid baseline data usually lead to successful student growth that can be demonstrated. Portfolios begun late in the year may not score at the highest possible levels, but they can and often do earn scores in the proficient range. In addition, the data gathered during the portfolio process help to inform instruction and planning for the upcoming year. This is one of the purposes that assessment, at its best, is meant to serve.

✦ ***How do I register a student for participation in NH Alternate Assessment?***

Special education directors/coordinators from *sending districts* can register students electronically from January through February. The NH Department of Education sends a letter during January to each public school district outlining the registration dates and process. Sending public school districts are responsible for ensuring the participation of all their students in statewide assessment and, therefore, are solely responsible for registering their out-of-district students. Registrations are not accepted from private school personnel.

✦ ***Can a student take the NECAP mathematical section and do the NH Alternate portfolio for the reading component?***

No. A student must either fully participate in the NECAP or fully participate in the alternate portfolio assessment. Generally, a student who shows such severe cognitive disability as to require Alternate Assessment in one content area will also need it in other content areas. If a student can successfully participate in the general assessment in one content they should also be able to participate, perhaps with accommodations, in general assessment in other content areas.

✦ ***What about students who are medically fragile or just miss several days of the year from school?***

Students who are medically fragile or miss several days of school and are participating in the alternate portfolio assessment should participate when present in school or, if home-based instruction is put in place, the teacher will want to continue to collect data in the home. Any extensive time out from school should be noted on the student's progress chart or graph. Any student who receives public instruction must participate in statewide assessment of academic progress.

✦ ***Can Writing Standard 2 be used as the Reading Choice Standard on a portfolio?***

No. For the Reading "Choice" Standard, you may only choose from ***Reading*** Achievement Standards.

✦ ***Does a targeted skill have to come from the student's IEP goals and objectives?***

No. IEP documents focus on the method of access to the school curriculum. They do not set curriculum itself. You may want to include the targeted skills in the student's IEP if they help to show the method of access that the student is using to acquire and demonstrate the targeted

academic skills. This may help team members to be aware of and working toward the targeted skills using a path of access that works best for the student.

✦ **What are the required standards for Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Science?**

- The required Reading Standard is Standard #1. This standard is required for grades 2-7 and 10 only.
- The required Writing Standard is Standard #2. This standard is required for grades 4, 7, and 10 only.
- The required Mathematics Standard is Standards #3–4. These standards are required for grades 2-7 and 10 only.
- The required Science Standard is Standard #1. This standard is required for grades 4, 8, and 11 only.

In addition to each “required” (state-selected) standard, the student is also required to complete one “choice” (team-selected) standard in each content area. *See the question below.*

✦ **What are the “choice” standards for Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Science?**

- The Reading Choice Standards are Standards 4, 5, 6, and 7. (Reading is required for students in grades 2-7 and 10 only.)
- The Writing Choice Standards are Standards 5, 6, and 7. (Writing is required for students in grades 4, 7, and 10 only.)
- The Math Choice Standards are Standards 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. (Mathematics is required for students in grades 2-7 and 10 only.)
- The Science Choice Standards are Standards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. (Science is required for students in grades 4, 8, & 11 only.)

✦ **If I choose Reading Standard 5 for my Reading Choice Standard, can I then choose Writing Standard 5 for my writing choice standard?**

Yes you can, if this is an appropriate targeted skill for your student. It is one of the allowed Writing Choice Standards listed above. Although it has a similar critical function to Reading Choice Standard 5, it is different in that it requires the student to *create some symbol form* consistent with the critical function of writing—not reading.

✦ **What happens if a student is found to be inappropriately placed in NH Alternate Assessment?**

Note: Students who participate in Alternate Assessment are not expected to meet the level of depth or complexity in their academic knowledge as students who participate in the General Assessment. The decision to have a student participate in the Alternate Assessment is a team process and must be documented in the student’s IEP. Parents never have to approve the IEP until they are satisfied with its contents. If you feel strongly about having your child participate in statewide general assessment based on grade-level achievement standards, please contact your child’s Case Manager or the Special Education Director in your district to work toward a solution.

Students who participate in NH Alternate Assessment *do* count toward all the school and district accountability numbers. These students count just like the students who take general assessment. The school is held accountable for their academic performance on the test and also held *accountable for their appropriate participation in statewide assessment*. Students who participate in statewide assessment and are placed in out-of-district private schools also count toward school and district accountability determinations.

Some students fall into a transition zone of academic skills. These students are functioning at higher levels relative to most Alternate Assessment students, but they are still struggling mightily when assessed on the general assessment. It is clear that some team decisions are not black or white, nor are they easily made. From the roughly 3500 portfolios we have seen over the last 3 years, we have been able to affirm that the vast majority of students who take the NH Alternate Assessment appear to be reasonably identified and appropriately assessed. We have been watching the federal guidance for information on how we should handle those few assessments that are judged to be inappropriate to the student. The federal directive is that if the state education agency (SEA) finds a student who was inappropriately assessed under the Alternate Assessment system that we are to count that student as *non-participating* for purposes of statewide assessment. This, in turn, would be reflected in the school's and district's participation accountability numbers.

In practice, here is what is starting to happen. Please know that we are in the very early stages of our response to this concern: First, we have built a check on this problem into our portfolio-scoring system. Each portfolio is scored by two independent scorers who are continuously monitored for score accuracy and reliability. Each of these scorers is asked to indicate whether the portfolio illustrates work showing skills that could be better assessed in the general assessment. If *both* first-round scorers agree, we have a senior scorer review it. Then, *if we obtain consensus across all three scorers*, the portfolio is referred to the office of the Statewide Coordinator of Alternate Assessment, and the school is contacted. The first time this occurs will be considered an advisory year and the team will be asked to review its decision. If the team decides to keep the student as a participant in NH-Alternate Assessment then again, the following year, the portfolio submitted for this student will be reviewed for appropriateness. If, in two consecutive years, scorers determine that the student appears to be inappropriately placed in NH Alternate Assessment, the IEP team will be notified that they must make a choice: The school and district may accept a minimum performance score on NH Alternate Assessment (0 performance credit), or the school may have the student participate in the following fall's NECAP general grade-level assessment for whatever score the student earns.

This process directly addresses the issue of inappropriate assignment. The intent of this process is to provide as fair and objective a method as possible to determine if and when students are inappropriately assessed against a standard lower than for which they should be reaching. Again, this is still an emerging process, and it will take time to see how well it works. The first level of appeal of such a determination would be addressed to the office of the Director of Statewide Assessment.

✦ **What is the talk I've heard about a modified assessment for another 2% of students? (Often called "The 2% Rule")**

Early in 2006, there was published a *proposed NCLB rule-making notice* about granting permission to states to develop an assessment based on "modified grade-level academic achievement standards" that could be used by an additional 2% of students identified as needing special education. Broad public input was sought as part of the required rule-making process. However, due to intense and conflicting public feedback from across the nation, the U.S. Department of Education decided to withdraw the proposed rule and go back to the drawing board on this proposal. This rule was proposed again in a new form during the spring of 2007. NH has entered a new partnership with Vermont, Rhode Island, and Maine and Measured Progress to conduct targeted research that will help NH determine the best way to respond to this legislation. At the present time the right path is not yet clear.

(For more information on the federal proposal for modified assessment, see the NCLB webpage on this topic: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/speced/toolkit/index.html>)