

Educational Accountability for Students with Disabilities

The President's signing in 2002 of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB), increased the emphasis on educational accountability that had been growing throughout the 1990s. NCLB requires states to describe how they will close achievement gaps and make sure all students achieve academic proficiency. For students with disabilities, NCLB solidified the Federal government's commitment to the inclusion of these students in state accountability systems. Although novel in establishing consequences for performance, NCLB expanded mandates established by the 1997 Amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The 1997 IDEA amendments required states to demonstrate that students with disabilities are participating in state and district assessments, or in alternate assessments when students with disabilities cannot take part in regular assessments even with accommodations. The law also required states to report on the number of students with disabilities taking regular and alternate assessments, and on the performance of students on these assessments. Below we report our findings from the 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 school years on the participation of students with disabilities in assessments; unless otherwise noted, no significant changes were found from the 2002-2003 school year period.

By the 2002-2003 school year, participation rates of students with disabilities in statewide reading assessments were high and have remained high. Districts and schools employed a wide variety of accommodations in order for students with disabilities to participate in assessments. The participation of students with disabilities in alternate assessments increased from the 2002-2003 school year.

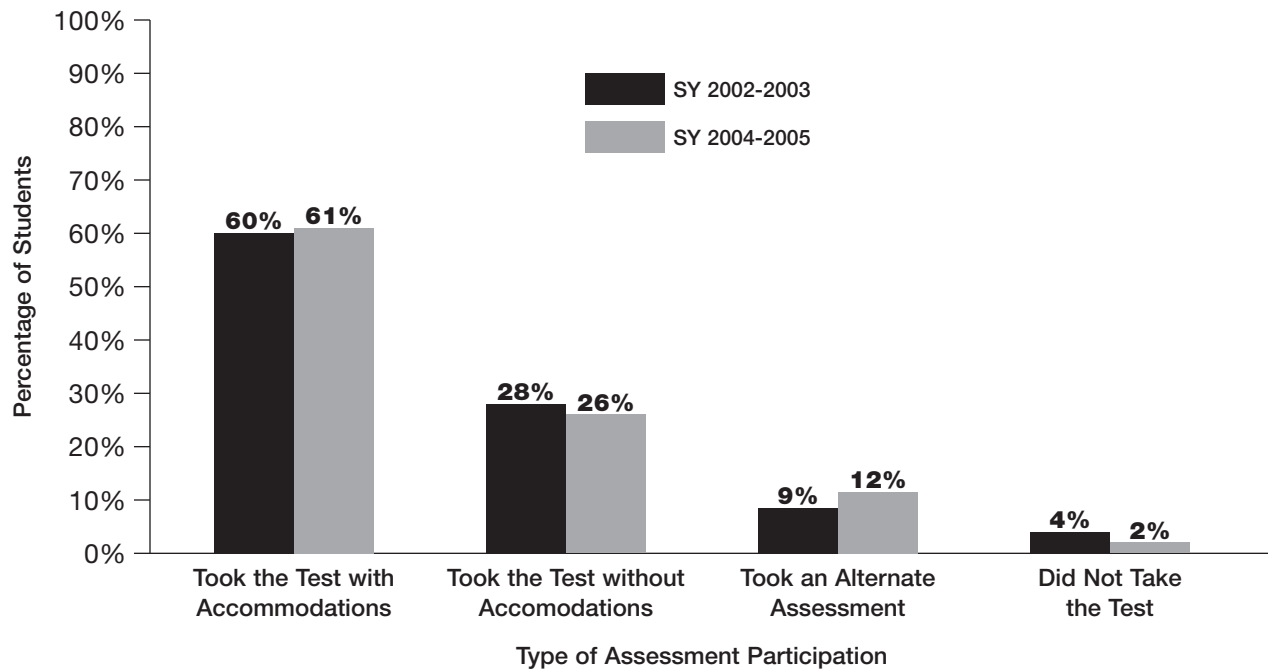
(See Figure 1)

For instance, our study found that:

- By 2002-2003, almost all students with disabilities (96 percent) participated in statewide reading assessments, and the participation rate increased to 98 percent in the 2004-2005 school year.
- More than half of students with IEPs (61 percent) took the state reading assessment with accommodations in the 2004-2005 school year, and about one-fourth of students with IEPs (26 percent) took the test without accommodations.
- The use of alternate assessments by students with disabilities has increased over time. Twelve percent of students with disabilities took an alternate assessment in the 2004-2005 school year, compared with only 9 percent in the 2002-2003 school year.

Figure 1

How Students with IEPs Participated in Statewide Reading Assessments



Note: The estimated participation rates apply to those students with IEPs who were in schools that administered the statewide reading assessment and in grades that were tested. The school survey asked about the participation of students with disabilities in statewide reading assessments for the prior school year.

The results summarized in this fact sheet are based on the six year *Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of IDEA (SLIIDEA)* supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, as part of Contract ED-00-C0-0026, conducted by Abt Associates Inc. Any points of view expressed in this fact sheet are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education.

Surveys were mailed to key personnel responsible for or familiar with special education issues in all 50 states and the District of Columbia - a total of 959 districts and 4,434 schools. For state, district, and school surveys, response rates were 100 percent, 89 percent, and 80 percent, respectively in the 2004-2005 school year. Similar response rates were obtained for the 2002-2003 school year.

From Abt Associates Inc (2006 April). *Marking the Progress of IDEA Implementation and Volume I: The SLIIDEA Sourcebook Report (1999-2000, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 School Years)*. Study reports, data tables and technical documentation are available at <http://abt.sliidea.org>.