



## School Leaders Supporting Educators of Students Who Moved from the Alternate to the General Assessment: Integrating Multiple Assessments for Instructional Decision Making

It is essential that school leaders implement the use of multiple assessment measures to inform instructional decisions, particularly for students who moved from the alternate to general assessment (Ghere et al., 2024). As an instructional leader, your role is pivotal in guiding educators to recognize the value of using a balanced assessment system (Wylie & Landl, 2024). A balanced assessment system includes a range of assessment types:

- Formative assessments (ongoing measures informing daily instruction),
- Benchmark assessments (periodic measures tracking progress toward grade-level standards), and
- Summative assessments (end-of-unit or end-of-year measures evaluating achievement).

A balanced instructional system informs instructional decisions and provides meaningful data about all students, while it also allows for a more nuanced understanding of each student's strengths and areas for growth. Relying solely on one type of assessment may not capture the full scope of the student's capability.

Educators also use information gathered from various stakeholders, including the IEP team, family or guardian, general education teachers, and specialists, to make instructional and assessment decisions about how best to support student learning. When using multiple measures to instruct students who moved from the alternate to the general assessment, educators need to understand the importance of multiple measures to learn more about the characteristics of the student. Here are key strategies school leaders need to consider:

- **Collaborative Preparation and Support:** Plan with stakeholders, including the student, parents or guardians, and the instructional team of general education and special education teachers and specialists for a student's step-by-step move with realistic pacing to the general education classroom that often requires increased preparation (see The MIDAS Project's [Goldilocks Tool](#)).
- **Individualized Approach:** All students have unique learning needs, some more complex than others. Educational programs for students with disabilities consist of grade-level academic content standards expectations and special education IEP goals. Integrating students' progress data from both ensures that the student's individual learning profile is addressed. Data from the alternate assessment can also be used as one source of baseline information to inform the move to the general assessment.
- **Collaborative Decision Making and Support:** Leaders ensure that students receive targeted instruction and support (e.g., scaffolding, assistive technology, counseling) to develop the skills required to participate in the general classroom content and assessments. Ongoing monitoring of progress and data sharing among stakeholders are essential to make instructional and support adjustments as a student progresses to meet grade-level expectations in the class and assessments. School leaders should use this data to determine what resources and training educators still need to optimize student learning.
- **Accessibility:** Individual accessibility needs, including the need for accommodations, must be considered at all points. School leaders should help ensure that the supports needed to access grade-level content, participate in assessments, and move to the general education classroom are provided appropriately.
- **Universal Design:** Building on the need for accessibility, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL; CAST, 2024) and Universal Design for Assessment (UDA; NCEO, 2016) frameworks encourage educators to offer multiple ways of presenting information, engaging students, and assessing their learning. Rather than retrofitting instruction, activities, and assessments to meet the needs of individual students, teachers who implement UDL and UDA principles create learning and assessment opportunities that are accessible to all learners from the start, maintaining academic rigor while offering different modes of expression (e.g., visual representations, oral explanations, hands-on projects, or traditional written responses). This approach allows students to display knowledge through their strengths without constructing irrelevant barriers.

**Data-Driven Integration for Data-Informed Decisions: The Instruction and Assessment Cycle** (The MIDAS Project, 2025): Leaders need to ensure that data from multiple assessments (formative, benchmark/interim, summative, observational, etc.) are integrated into a comprehensive understanding of a student's progress. The Instruction and Assessment Cycle (see Figure 1) helps teachers refine their teaching through a continuous cycle of setting goals, gathering evidence from multiple measures of assessments, and adjusting instruction. The data are used to guide instructional decisions, adapt support, and determine the need for additional or different supports. The process is cyclical, with teachers regularly reassessing to monitor student progress and improve their approach as needed.

**Figure 1. Instruction and Assessment Cycle**



Source: Brookhart (2020). Used with permission.

This framework helps teachers continuously refine their instruction based on student data:

1. **Where Am I Going? – Setting Clear Learning Goals**
  - Identify essential grade-level standards
  - Develop specific, measurable objectives
  - Communicate goals clearly to students
2. **Where Am I Now? – Gathering Evidence**
  - Select appropriate assessment methods
  - Collect data on current understanding
  - Analyze results to identify patterns
3. **Where to Next? – Adjusting Instruction**
  - Adjust teaching based on assessment results
  - Provide targeted support where needed
  - Monitor the progress of students to their next learning goal
  - Reassess to track progress

## Conclusion

School leaders set a school-wide tone that all students can achieve grade-level standards with the appropriate support. Leaders explicitly advocate for the use of multiple assessment measures to create a balanced, comprehensive, and supportive learning environment. This approach promotes flexible, collaborative decision-making practices to better support students who moved from the alternate to the general assessment. This requires leaders to prioritize scheduled time for stakeholders to meet regularly and respond to professional development needs. The move can create anxiety and stress for students with changes in teachers, classrooms, peers, assessments, rigor of instruction and expectations, and routine activities. Collaborative data sharing that is paired with strong and targeted supportive strategies (e.g., scaffolds, feedback, differentiated instruction, tutoring, accommodations, UDL) is crucial for helping students make progress and for counteracting burnout and frustration among both students and educators. Educators can ensure alignment with grade-level academic content standards with implementation of these strategies so that students are engaged and capable of meeting grade-level expectations.

## Reflection Questions for School Leaders

1. How balanced is our current assessment system? Do we rely too heavily on one type of assessment?
2. How well do our assessments provide meaningful, actionable data for students who moved from the alternate assessment to the general assessment?
3. What professional development do educators need to effectively interpret and use multiple assessment data?
4. How effectively are we using assessment data to inform instructional decisions that support students in meeting grade-level academic content standard expectations?

## Additional Resources

- Boyer, M., & Landl, E. (2021, April). *Interim assessment practices for students with disabilities* (NCEO Brief #22). National Center on Educational Outcomes and National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment.
- Thurlow, M. L., Lazarus, S. S., Christensen, L. L., & Shyyan, V. (2016). *Principles and characteristics of inclusive assessment systems in a changing assessment landscape* (NCEO Report 400). National Center on Educational Outcomes.

## References

CAST (2024). *Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 3.0*. Retrieved from <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Ghere, G. S., Quanbeck, M., Sommerness, J. E., & Lazarus, S. S. (2024). *Using multiple measures of academic achievement to inform instruction for students with disabilities who moved from the alternate assessment to the general state assessment* (MIDAS Report 101). Making Improved Decisions for Students on the Cusp of Alternate Assessment Participation Using Multiple Measures of Academic Achievement from Multiple Sources (MIDAS).

National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). (2016). *Universal design of assessments*. Retrieved from [https://nceo.info/Assessments/universal\\_design](https://nceo.info/Assessments/universal_design)

The MIDAS Project (2025). *Teacher Modules on Students Who Moved From the Alternate to General Assessment: Instruction and Assessment Cycle*, <https://nceo.info/About/projects/midas/teacher-modules/module-1? draft=463428ea-7516-436e-a641-87ef71c7fc83>

Wylie, E. C., & Landl, E. (2024). *A common language for discussing the goals, characteristics and components of balanced assessment systems*. Council of Chief State School Officers. <https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/CCSSOBASCommonLanguage/>

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The MIDAS Project. (2024). *Questions to ask if your child switches from the alternate to the general assessment*.

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