Teaching Students Who Moved from the Alternate to the General Assessment: What to Look For

A School Leader's Observation Guide

Introduction

This observation guide is designed to support school leaders in evaluating classroom practices that facilitate successful transitions for students moving from state alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) to state general assessments. The guide focuses on identifying evidence-based instructional strategies and inclusive practices that promote academic growth and meaningful participation for all students in the general education environment.

The primary purpose is to help educators and instructional leaders identify whether classrooms are implementing inclusive practices that enable all students, including students who have moved from the alternate to the general assessment, to access grade-level academic content and demonstrate their knowledge and abilities.

Goal: To promote a mindset of presumed competence and active engagement in grade-level instruction for all students, including those moving from alternate to general assessments.

Directions for Use

The guide consists of various indicators that would suggest that educators are implementing inclusive practices and evidence-based instructional strategies. When you are observing a classroom, use this guide and check off each indicator that you witness in the classroom. Do not expect that you will see evidence of every indicator in a single observation session.

Evidence of Presumed Competence

- All students are working toward the same grade-level academic content standards, including students who moved from the alternate assessment to the general assessment.
- Learning objectives for the lesson are communicated through multiple means.
- Success criteria are communicated through multiple means.
- Learning objectives and success criteria are understood by all students.

Collaboration

- Evidence shows that general education and special education teachers consistently collaborate to plan lessons.
- The special educator is familiar with the curriculum, and the general educator is familiar with individual student accommodations and supports.
- Individual student instructional and assessment accommodations or supports are evident throughout the lessons, as needed.
- Evidence suggests the use of student benchmark, formative, and classroom summative assessments data to inform instruction.

- **If co-teaching**:
  - There is parity to the teachers' roles in all instructional practices.
  - Teachers use two to three co-teaching models (e.g., station teaching; parallel teaching; team teaching; small group instruction; one teach-one observes) during the lesson ([What is Co-Teaching? An Introduction to Co-Teaching and Inclusion](#)).
  - Both teachers engage with and show ownership for the learning of all students.

Instructional Approaches

- Teachers use the [Universal Design for Learning (UDL)](#) and [Universal Design for Assessment (UDA)](#) frameworks to support the variety of learners.
- Questioning strategies engage all students in higher-order thinking.
- Questioning strategies encourage student self-reflection to take ownership of their learning.
- Wait time is provided for all students to process and respond.
- Scaffolding supports grade-level achievement rather than off-grade activities.
- There is a mix of both whole-group and small-group instruction to meet learning goals.
- Small group composition is not ability-based but varies between homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, depending on the purpose of the group.
- Evidence of successful implementation of High-Leverage Practices ([High-Leverage Practices | TeachingWorks](#)).

Student Engagement

- Collaborative peer engagement strategies (e.g., turn and talk; think, pair, share; four corners) are embedded at various times in a lesson ([The Power of Peers: Introduction to the Peer Engagement Implementation Guides](#)).
- All students have meaningful roles in the classroom activities.
- Classmates are supported in how to communicate with students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices.

Student Feedback Practices

- Teachers discuss both student strengths and areas for further growth.
- Student benchmark, formative, and classroom summative assessment data are used to inform feedback.
- Teacher feedback is provided in multiple ways to ensure that all students understand.
- Teacher feedback focuses on specific strategies for improvement.
- Students receive clear, individualized feedback on the next steps to achieve grade-level standards.
- Students are encouraged to revise their work to meet grade-level standards.

Conclusion

This observation guide gives school leaders a practical tool for checking whether classrooms are using the inclusive practices and proven strategies needed to support students who have moved from alternate to general assessments. By focusing on key areas, such as presumed competence, collaboration, instructional approaches, student engagement, and feedback practices, the guide helps

leaders see whether all students, including those who recently moved from alternate assessments, have real access to grade-level content and opportunities to show their learning. Leaders should not expect to see every indicator in a single classroom visit. Instead, this tool supports ongoing observation and conversation about creating truly inclusive learning environments.

Using this guide well can help school leaders recognize and promote the conditions that help students with disabilities succeed after they transition. By looking for evidence of teachers planning together, Universal Design for Learning principles, varied instructional groupings, peer engagement strategies, and individualized feedback, leaders can support teachers in moving away from simplified or below-grade activities toward challenging, grade-level instruction with the right supports. This tool ultimately helps schools maintain a belief that all students are capable learners and ensures that transitions from alternate to general assessments come with the high-quality, inclusive instruction that all students deserve.

This document is available in alternative formats upon request.

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