



## IDEA National Survey Project

<http://www.ideasurvey.org>

### **LIMITS ON SUNSHINE: WHAT PARENTS ARE TOLD ABOUT ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS UNDER ESEA**

The IDEA National Survey Project (<http://www.ideasurvey.org>) is a collaboration of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Autism National Committee, National Down Syndrome Society, and The Advocacy Institute. Over 3,900 parents of students with disabilities shared perceptions about their children's education and whether their rights are protected.

The survey included three questions about the assessments required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). At present, federal regulations permit states to administer two alternate assessments. The Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS) may be given to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Federal Regulations have also allowed states to administer the Alternate Assessment based on Modified Achievement Standards (AA-MAS) to certain other students with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> This amounts to 20% of students with disabilities. Problems and concerns with both alternate assessments have been documented elsewhere.

Assessments often are related to whether students receive a high school diploma. By December 2010, 28 states (covering 74% of public school students) required students to pass an exit examination to receive a high school diploma.<sup>3</sup> While nearly 256,000 students with disabilities graduated with a high school diploma in 2009-10, nearly 60,000 received only a certificate of completion, attendance, or achievement.<sup>4</sup> A diploma is a gateway to many jobs, certain college education programs, scholarship programs, and other opportunities. Unemployment rates are highest among Americans without high school diplomas.<sup>5</sup>

### **SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES REGARDING ESEA**

The survey is not a scientific survey or an academic project, but it is a useful barometer of what parents of children with disabilities think about the education their children receive. Of the parents responding to the survey, 821 reported that their children took either the AA-AAS (538 parents) or the AA-MAS (287 parents). This fact sheet reports the responses from those parents. Approximately 40% of these parents said the IEP team did not tell them how the assessments differed or the eligibility requirements for each. A substantial majority (65%) were not told how the assessment would affect whether their child would earn a regular diploma.

These responses are striking because federal regulations in place since 2007 have required that the IEP team receive a "clear explanation" of the differences between the assessments. This must include a statement of the impact of an alternate assessment on the student's education, including the ability to receive a regular diploma. 34 C.F.R. § 300.160(d).

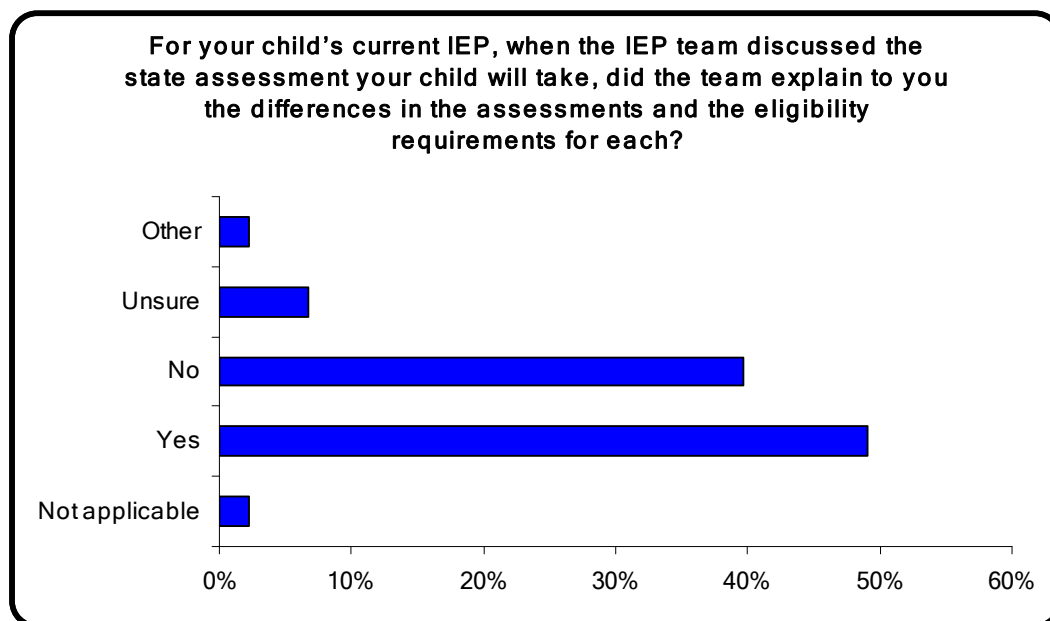
Asked who selected the assessment the child would take, 49% replied that school staff alone made that decision. This appears to differ from IDEA requirements. The current regulation specifies that the alternate assessment selected must be included in the IEP, 34 C.F.R.

§300.160(a). Parents are equal members of the IEP team, 20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(B), and the IEP team must determine whether the child will take an alternate assessment, 20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(VI)(bb). (For readers who are blind or have visual impairments, the information contained in the charts below is also repeated in the text.)

### ANALYSIS OF ESEA SURVEY RESPONSES

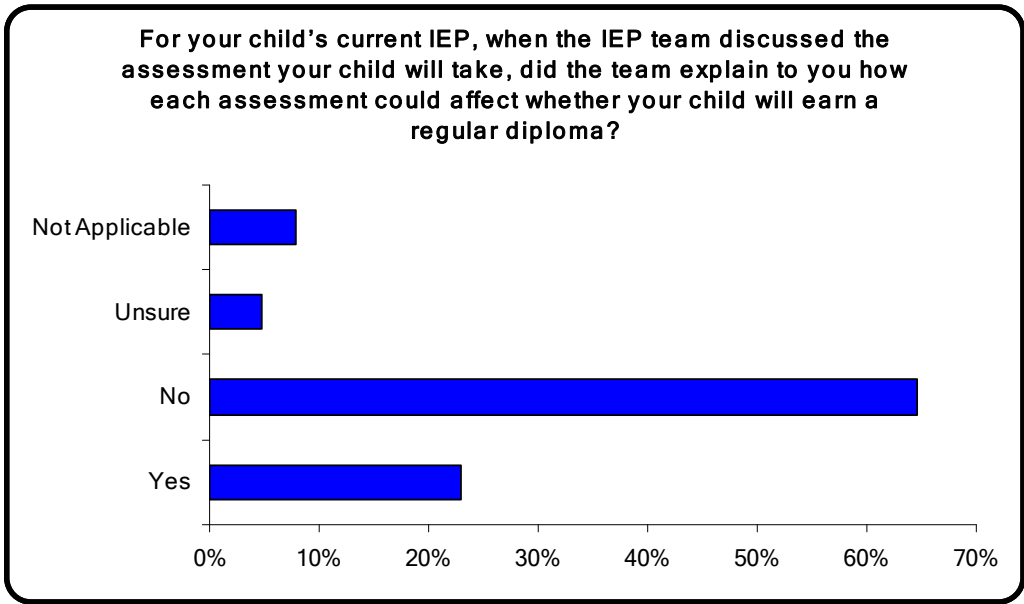
#### EXPLANATION OF ASSESSMENT DIFFERENCES/ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Survey participants were asked “For your child’s current IEP, when the IEP team discussed the state assessment your child will take, did the team explain to you the differences in the assessments and the eligibility requirements for each?” Of the parents who identified their child as taking an alternate assessment, 49% (399) said they were told. But 40% (322) said they were not told of the differences or eligibility requirements for each. Of the remainder, 7% (54) were unsure; 2% (19) selected not applicable; and 2% (18) selected other.



#### ASSESSMENT IMPACT ON REGULAR DIPLOMA

Survey participants were asked, “For your child’s current IEP, when the IEP team discussed the assessment your child will take, did the team explain to you how each assessment could affect whether your child will earn a regular diploma?” Of the respondents who identified their child as taking one of the alternate assessments, 65% (522) were not told how the assessment could affect whether the child earned a regular diploma; 23% (185) were told; 5% (38) were unsure, and 8% (63) responded not applicable.

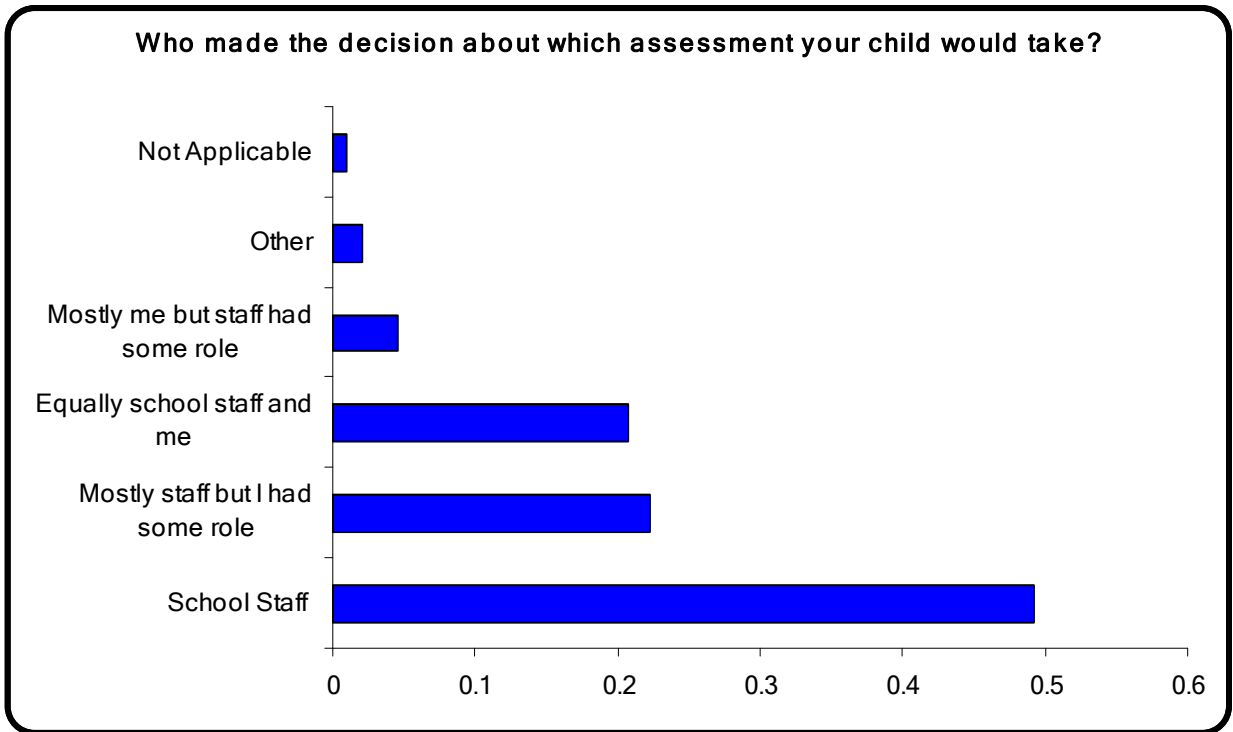


Some of the parents shared comments on the issue: They included:

- "OMG [Oh My God] where can I get this info!"
- "I would like more info on this."
- "I brought it up, they had never told me, but I had found out prior when advocating for another child. They said that when he goes to Middle School if he is still in an ESE self contained class, he will not earn credits which will make it impossible for him to get a standard diploma. Also, he has never taken the state exam, which hurts him. We are actually going to keep him in 5th grade one more year to give him more time to try to catch up."
- "Found out a few months back that because my child testing they will not receive a diploma."
- "They do not want him to take real reading and math classes[;] so he cannot ever earn a diploma."
- "They only did when I asked about it...didn't volunteer the info"

**ASSESSMENT DECISION-MAKER**

Finally, survey participants were asked “Who made the decision about which assessment your child would take?” Of the respondents, 49% (404) said school staff made the decision; 22% (183) said it was made mostly by school staff and partly by the parent; 21% (171) said the decision was made equally by school staff and the parent; 5% (38) said it was made by the parent but school staff had some role; 2% (17) responded other; and 1% (8) said the question was not applicable).



**THE IDEA NATIONAL SURVEY PROJECT**

You can read more about the IDEA National Survey Project on the project website, <http://www.ideasurvey.org>. The remainder of the survey focuses on issues related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The survey results will be published this Fall. For more information about the project, contact Jessica Butler, Coordinator, IDEA National Survey at [jessica@jnba.net](mailto:jessica@jnba.net). More information about each participating organization may be found on each organization’s website, [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#); [Advocacy Institute](#); [National Down Syndrome Society](#); and the [Autism National Committee](#).

<sup>1</sup> 34 CFR §§ 200.1(d), 200.6, 200.13 (promulgated Dec. 9, 2003). A state may include the proficient and advanced scores of students taking it in calculating adequate yearly progress (AYP), so long as the number does not exceed 1% of all students in the grades tested (approximately 10% of children with disabilities). *Id.*

<sup>2</sup> 34 CFR §§ 200.1(e), 200.6, 200.13 (promulgated Apr. 9, 2007). States that do so may count the proficient or advanced scores of students taking that assessment in calculating AYP, as long as the number does not exceed 2% of all students in the grades tested. *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Center on Education Policy, STATE HIGH SCHOOL TESTS: EXIT EXAMS AND OTHER ASSESSMENTS (Dec. 2010).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT DATA, Table 4-1 (2009-10) ([www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org))

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, ECONOMIC NEWS RELEASE, TABLE A-4 (Oct. 7, 2011)

