

## Plenary Session

### Welcome, Introductions, and Setting the Context for the Conference

*Adam Schott, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), U.S. Department of Education (ED)*

*[Plenary Session slides 1–5]*

Patrick Rooney, Director of School Support and Accountability (SSA) at ED, welcomed participants and thanked the ED team that organized the conference. He noted ED's excitement about the event and reviewed the three focus areas for the conference:

- Focus Area 1: Assessment Peer Review in the Context of Supporting Multiple Approaches to Student Assessment
- Focus Area 2: Best Practices for Reducing and Maintaining Appropriate Participation Rates in Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAAS)
- Focus Area 3: The Past, Present, and Future of the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA)

Mr. Rooney added that all conference materials are posted online so the field can benefit from all of the information from the concurrent sessions. In conclusion, he thanked the ED staff members and subject matter experts involved in organizing the meeting and stated that ED looks forward to learning from participants, as well as providing them with guidance. He introduced Adam Schott

Mr. Schott welcomed participants on behalf of U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and senior leadership. He thanked participants for their important work, which has helped generate a road map for assessment and for states' effective communication of assessment results to diverse audiences over the past few years. There has been greater attention on student achievement since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the entire field is working to ensure that all states' results return to pre-pandemic levels. The work requires a balanced approach, and ED is holding firm to its high standards with flexibility to improve the quality of assessment systems and the resulting information.

Statewide assessment design requires a great deal of planning, and sessions were designed to assist states with that process—particularly preparing for assessment peer review. For states interested in IADA, one avenue for innovation is to begin a pilot program with a subset of school districts and then expand as appropriate. Not many states have started programs under IADA, and ED is examining the multiple underlying reasons—including policy and implementation barriers. ED acknowledges that it might have been more inviting regarding IADA, and Secretary Cardona would like to improve uptake. ED released a request for information (RFI) to obtain more views on IADA, and more than 8,000 comments were submitted and reviewed. Grants were awarded to some states to help them develop innovative assessments and test items. The

next round of grant opportunities will be announced soon. Additionally, ED will continue assessment initiatives and discussions throughout the fall. ED's research division, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), has written a report on the early implementation of IADA (discussed in a separate plenary session). The report's findings led ED to lift the seven-state cap on IADA. Therefore, ED is open to hearing from all states with novel ideas on assessment and will offer as much technical assistance as possible to support these efforts. In conclusion, Mr. Schott thanked participants for their work, which makes changes to large-scale assessments occur over time.

Clayton Hollingshead, an Education Research Analyst at ED, noted that the most recent State Assessment Conference was in 2018 and expressed his excitement to cover the three focus areas, as the field has many questions about those topics. He thanked Dr. Kathy Banks, an Educational Research Analyst at ED, for planning the conference and introduced Nathan Dadey.

Overview of Focus Area 1 (Assessment Peer Review in the Context of Supporting Multiple Approaches to Student Assessment)

*Clayton Hollingshead, Educational Research Specialist, OESE*

*Nathan Dadey, Senior Associate, Center for Assessment*

*[Plenary Session slides 6–26]*

Dr. Dadey reviewed the program sessions in greater detail and listed the subject matter experts, including himself, for each focus area: Phoebe Winter (independent consultant), Meagan Karvonen (Accessible Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Systems [ATLAS], University of Kansas), Zach Warner (New York State Education Department), Christine Rozunick (Texas Education Agency), and Brooke Nash (ATLAS, University of Kansas). Mr. Hollingshead served as the ED staff member supporting Focus Area 1.

The Focus Area 1 (Assessment Peer Review in the Context of Supporting Multiple Approaches to Student Assessment) sessions were designed for new SEA assessment staff members and to meet the increased interest in innovating large-scale student assessments. Dr. Dadey explained that under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a wide variety of approaches to assessment are possible. Indeed, some approaches are explicitly encouraged through flexibility. There is a growing interest in these kinds of approaches because of multiple factors (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, pushes from teachers and leaders, and state legislative requirements). Although there is interest in new approaches to assessment, a key issue is whether they will pass peer review. Given this context, the seven sessions of Focus Area 1 demonstrate how states can address the critical elements (CEs) of peer review through these multiple approaches—that is, “how to get to ‘yes.’”

Dr. Dadey noted that each session touches on many CEs but has specific focuses:

- Session 1A: Test Design and Development—CEs 2.1, 2.2, and 3.1
- Session 1B: Alignment—CEs 2.1 and 3.1
- Session 1C: Fairness and Comparability—CEs 4.2, 4.5., and 4.6

- Session 1D: Overall Validity—CE 3.1
- Session 1E: Test Administration—CEs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 5.3
- Session 1F: Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs) and Score Reporting—CEs 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.1
- Session 1G: Preparing for Peer Review—A Question-and-Answer Period

In the context of state assessment, “multiple approaches” is a blanket term used to summarize designs that are not commonly or widely employed but are allowable under ESSA. There are many possible approaches—and aspects of each can be used together—but Focus Area 1 sessions concentrate on (1) through-year assessment; (2) portfolio, project-based, or performance assessment; and (3) assessments that use matrix sampling of content. The multiple approaches considered in Focus Area 1 involve substantial shifts from the typical domain sampled, end-of-year assessments. However, they must meet the requirements of peer review and, in doing so, will need to (1) be based on state academic content standards; (2) produce annual determinations of academic achievement; and (3) provide for fair, reliable, and valid interpretations of each student’s proficiency. The multiple approaches under consideration involve variation in the knowledge and skills students are assessed on, the timing and frequency of assessment, and how they are assessed. All of these variations affect the inferences assessments are designed to support.

Delving further into the multiple approaches, Dr. Dadey outlined that a through-year assessment program is administered in multiple sessions during a school year. These assessments are intended to support (1) the production and use of a summative determination and (2) one or more additional aims (e.g., to guide instruction). Examples include the Texas Through-year Assessment Pilot (assessments in the fall, at midyear, and in the spring); a “modular” design, in which each assessment covers a small group of standards; and Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), which are instructionally embedded assessments.

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965’s (ESEA) Section 1111(b)(2)(B)(vi), state assessments “may be partially delivered in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.” These types of assessments involve the application of knowledge, skills, and abilities to problems. They require the student to produce something (e.g., a report, experiment, or performance) and are scored against specific criteria. Portfolio, project-based, or performance assessments may take place over varying time periods (e.g., hours, days, or weeks), depending on the range and complexity of skills being assessed. Dr. Dadey reviewed some possible performance assessment designs—including performance assessment paired with a shortened summative assessment, periodic performance tasks administered flexibly throughout the year, and portfolio assessment with evidence collected throughout the year and a culminating performance task. Examples include New York state’s performance-based assessment of some components of its science curriculum, which is administered in the fall and spring.

The field has some interest in content matrix sampling, which is also possible under ESSA. In this approach, each student receives a subset of the item content and associated standards within

the same assessment administration window. Content matrix sampling is based on statistical sampling of items (within constraints) across students within the same year. In terms of reporting results, students receive overall achievement scores that are based on a representative sample of the content. This approach reduces testing time and the amount of information provided at the student level but maintains school-level data.

Dr. Dadey emphasized that although a robust set of best practices that meet peer review requirements exist for the typical state assessment program, the field continues to develop the multiple approaches considered in Focus Area 1. Thus, knowledge about the multiple approaches is burgeoning and dynamic. To date, only one program based on these multiple approaches has been peer reviewed. However, this is about to change, as some programs that included multiple approaches were implemented operationally in 2022–23. ED expects that more programs with multiple approaches will be submitted for peer review. Although the multiple approaches are under development, boundaries are needed. Many of these multiple approaches involve expanding the role of state assessment to purposes and uses beyond the production of summative annual determinations (e.g., scale scores and achievement levels). They also involve additional assessments that support these additional purposes and uses. Dr. Dadey stressed that peer review is only concerned with assessments that produce summative annual determinations.

Overview of Focus Area 2 (Best Practices for Reducing and Maintaining Appropriate Participation Rates in Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards [AA-AAAS])  
*Donald Peasley, Supervisory Educational Research Analyst, OESE*  
*Sheryl Lazarus, Director, National Center on Educational Outcomes*

*[Plenary Session slides 28–37]*

In the overview of Focus Area 2 (Best Practices for Reducing and Maintaining Appropriate AA-AAAS Participation Rates), Dr. Peasley commented that many states have been challenged by the requirement to have an AA-AAAS participation rate at or below 1.0 percent. Participation rates in AA-AAAS are trending downward and have been lower since the 2015 passage of ESSA. In the year before the implementation of the 1.0 percent cap (2016–17), 42 states exceeded this limit of the percentage of students taking an AA-AAAS in mathematics compared with 30 states in school year (SY) 2021–22. In that SY, more than half of states still exceeded the 1.0 percent cap. Compared with SY 2016–17, AA-AAAS participation rates had decreased in 33 states in SY 2021–22 and had increased and remained above 1.0 percent in 11 other states.

Dr. Peasley identified the subject matter experts for Focus Area 2: Sheryl Lazarus (National Center on Educational Outcomes), Andrew Hinkle (National Center on Educational Outcomes), Kathy Strunk (National Center on Educational Outcomes), Robin Stripling (Arkansas Department of Education), Cary Rogers (Kansas State Department of Education), and Wendy Stoica (Ohio Department of Education). During the Focus Area 2 sessions, experts shared resources from the National Center on Educational Outcomes—which partners with almost all states and works systematically to implement practices to reduce AA-AAAS participation rates. The panel of

subject matter experts included representatives from states that have decreased their participation rates. Dr. Peasley served as the ED staff member supporting Focus Area 2.

Dr. Lazarus commented that as someone who works in special education, she understands the challenges involved in meeting the 1.0 percent cap. She remarked that it is positive to see a focus on students with disabilities and emphasized the need to ensure that the appropriate students participate in alternate assessments. Dr. Lazarus thanked everyone involved in developing content for the Focus Area 2 sessions.

Session 2A (1.0 Percent Boot Camp) was provided in two parts and was designed for staff members who were new in their positions or who wanted to learn the basics about reducing and maintaining appropriate participation rates for AA-AAAS. These workshop-style sessions covered topics such as legal requirements, “dear colleagues” letters, and 1.0 percent initiative work timelines, as well as the high-interest matters of developing and improving participation guidelines, 1.0 percent cap waivers, providing oversight to local education agencies (LEAs), and addressing disproportionality. Sessions also included discussion of state examples and an activity that helped participants generate draft plans to implement 1.0 percent initiatives in their states.

Session 2B (Eligibility for Participation in the AA-AAAS) included guidance on defining or refining the phrase “student with the most significant cognitive disability.” During the session, subject matter experts also discussed the concepts of disposition, high expectation, least dangerous assumption, and starting with the end in mind. Representatives from states shared their successes and challenges.

Session 2C (Root Cause Analysis and Continuous Improvement) was conducted in two parts. In this workshop-style session, participants worked through a root cause analysis on how to meet the 1.0 percent cap, using a continuous improvement approach. Subject matter experts reviewed activities and approaches that lead to a state’s continued progress in ensuring that students are participating in the appropriate assessment. The session also covered the development of high-quality 1.0 percent cap waiver requests and provided state examples.

Session 2D (Monitoring AA-AAAS Participation Rates) covered the “who, what, where, when why, and how” of monitoring school districts regarding participation in AA-AAAS. Subject matter experts discussed reviewing data and individualized education programs (IEPs), tiered systems of support, and district action plans. The session also covered addressing disproportionality in AA-AAAS participation and the justification/assurances process for districts to explain why they have exceeded or will exceed the 1.0 percent cap. State examples were provided.

Session 2E (Addressing the 95 Percent Assessment Participation Requirement) covered strategies and resources that can assist states in meeting the 95 percent participation requirement. Subject matter experts provided guidance on talking to parents about the

importance of involving their children in statewide assessments. In this workshop-style session, participants worked on an action plan that will help increase student assessment participation.

Overview of Focus Area 3 (The Past, Present, and Future of IADA)

*Kathleen Banks, Educational Research Specialist, OESE*

*Carla Evans, Senior Associate, Center for Assessment*

*[Plenary Session slides 38–45]*

Dr. Banks explained that Focus Area 3 was designed to address the field's increased interest in innovating large-scale student assessments, as well as the desire to provide more actionable information from them. Additionally, these sessions addressed interest in encouraging use of the flexibilities afforded by the IADA from the policy perspective. She identified the subject matter experts for Focus Area 3: Scott Marion (Center for Assessment), Carla Evans (Center for Assessment), Phoebe Winter (independent consultant), Meagan Karvonen (ATLAS, University of Kansas), Sheryl Lazarus (National Center on Educational Outcomes), Thomas Lambert (Louisiana Department of Education), Kinge Mbella (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction), and Allison Timberlake (Georgia Department of Education). Dr. Banks served as the ED staff member supporting Focus Area 3.

Dr. Evans summarized the purpose of Focus Area 3. These sessions focused on key features of the IADA requirements and explored the opportunities and challenges associated with participating in the IADA. In addition to addressing key technical, inclusion-related, and practical issues, participants had the opportunity to learn from individuals who have implemented the authority in their states. Subject matter experts discussed their approaches for meeting the comparability requirements in IADA and considerations for the inclusion of students with disabilities and English learners. They also covered how to make an orderly transition from a legacy statewide assessment to a new IADA assessment.

Session 3A (Basics of IADA) provided an overview of the IADA—including key requirements, flexibilities afforded, and common misconceptions.

Session 3B (Lessons Learned About the Implementation of IADA) provided a brief overview of the recent IES evaluation report about the work of the first four states (LA, NH, GA and NC) granted the IADA. The session concentrated on hearing about the experiences of those states, their lessons learned, and next steps. Presenters included three state representatives, including one from a state (Georgia) that no longer participates in the IADA.

Session 3C (Planning and Implementation in IADA) provided information on key issues concerning the planning and implementation of the IADA. These issues included gathering stakeholder feedback, creating the conditions necessary to support successful implementation, considering the needs of all student groups in the initial planning and design phases, scaling up considerations, and planning orderly transitions from legacy assessment programs. This session

also covered strategies for states to plan for implementation without a formal planning period in the IADA.

Session 3D (Addressing Comparability in IADA) provided an overview of the challenges associated with the IADA comparability requirements. The information drew on some of the RFI responses and previous recommendations. Subject matter experts also discussed options for meeting the IADA comparability requirements. This session was repeated in the 3G slot to maximize access to the information.

Session 3E (Including All Students in the IADA) provided considerations and guidance for including all students in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation components of the IADA. Subject matter experts particularly focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities and English learners. Additionally, panelists shared examples of what they have done proactively to design assessments for all students in both the general and the IADA programs. They also described challenges and opportunities related to inclusion with respect to the IADA.

Session 3F (Meeting the Requirements of Peer Review in the IADA) provided an overview of the tensions and challenges between the assessment peer review requirements and the IADA program. Subject matter experts also covered goals and strategies for producing and explaining compelling assessment peer review evidence.

Dr. Banks noted that all slide decks and other supporting documentation were posted on the [conference website](#). The meeting proceedings will be posted by early November. Participants had the opportunity to evaluate the conference.