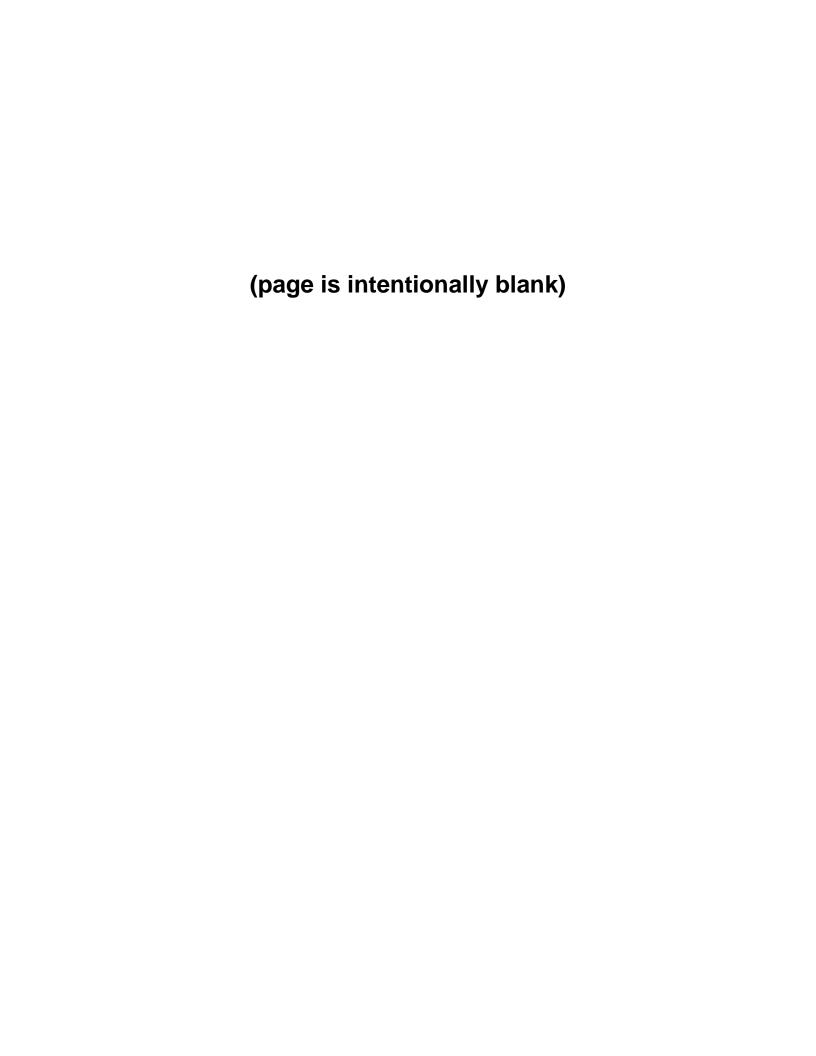# NCSC GSEG Policy Paper

Alternate Assessments Based on Common Core State Standards:

How Do They Relate to College and Career Readiness?

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NCSC GSEG Policy Paper: Alternate Assessments Based on Common Core State Standards: How Do They Relate to College and Career Readiness?

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NCSC

National Center and State Collaborative

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is applying the lessons learned from the past decade of research on alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) to develop a multi-state comprehensive assessment system for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

NCSC is a collaborative of 26 states (15 core and 11 Tier II states) and five organizations. The NCSC core partner states include: Arizona, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, Pacific Assessment Consortium (PAC-6)[1], Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming. As of May 2013, the NCSC Tier II affiliated states include Arkansas, California, Delaware, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and U.S. Virgin Islands. Tier II states will provide usability and sustainability tests to refine NCSC products before they are released for broad dissemination in 2015, thus ensuring that other states are able to implement them without intensive support from project staff.

The five NCSC partner organizations include: National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (Center for Assessment), University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of Kentucky, and edCount, LLC.

This document is available in alternative formats upon request.

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[1] The Pacific Assessment Consortium (including the entities of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of Palau, and Republic of the Marshall Islands) partner with NCSC as one state, led by the University of Guam Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (CEDDERS).

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Introduction

All students, including students with the most significant disabilities, have the right to participate and progress in the general curriculum (IDEA 1997, 2004). Moreover, all students must be assessed annually on grade-level content standards in math and reading in grades 3 through 8, and once in high school, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Under NCLB, all student scores are included in school, district, and state accountability systems. For students in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (i.e., students with the most significant cognitive disabilities), that assessment can be based on alternate performance standards that are reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity from grade-level performance standards, but those alternate performance standards must still clearly link to the content standards for the student's current grade. In other words, alternate assessment scores must be a direct measure of learning in relation to the grade-level content identified for all students.

Common Core State Standards

In 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association (NGA) released a set of academic content standards in reading and mathematics referred to as the Common Core State Standards (http://www.corestandards.org/). As of March 2013, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) had been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. Based on the skills students will need to compete in a global economy, the CCSS are meant to prepare students for success in college and work. College and career readiness was thus a foundational element in their development (see http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CorePublicFeedback.pdf).

As states work to develop their own definitions and guidance about what "college and career ready" means for *all* students, it becomes important that we describe what college and career readiness means for students with significant cognitive disabilities. In the National Alternate Assessment Center paper "What Does 'College and Career Ready' Mean for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities," Kearns, Kleinert, Harrison, Sheppard-Jones, Hall, and Jones (2011) described the essential elements of college and career readiness for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. They made the following recommendations for enhancing college and career readiness for these students:

1. Communicative competence should be addressed as a foundational priority, and as the basis of everything else.

2. Fluency in reading, writing, and math are necessary for lifelong learning, community involvement, and success in the workplace.

3. Age-appropriate social skills and the ability to work effectively with others are essential for future educational and career pursuits.

4. Independent work behaviors, as well as the ability to recognize the need for and request assistance as needed, are critical for lifelong learning and on-the-job success.

5. Skills in accessing support systems are essential for long-term success, in that individuals with the most significant cognitive disabilities will continue to need coordinated supports to achieve their highest potential. (pp. 24-25)

Finally, Kearns et al. noted that the above recommendations "require a careful sense of balance both in the curricular focus for this population of students as a whole, and within the personalized learning priorities identified for each student" (p. 26).

The purpose of the present paper is to build on the conceptual framework of the 2011 paper. Specifically, we explicate the relationship between that which alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) are intended to measure (i.e., grade-level content knowledge in math and language arts) and the concept of college and career readiness. We discuss: (a) how a well-designed AA-AAS based on the CCSS addresses important dimensions of college and career readiness for students with the most significant disabilities; and (b) how practitioners can identify those essential elements of college and career readiness that are not within the scope of even the best designed AA-AAS. We will base our discussion on the approach of the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), which is developing a common AA-AAS to be implemented across NCSC states in 2014-2015, and which is building that assessment as one integral part of a well-aligned, evidence-based system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

A Comprehensive System of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The NCSC approach is based on several principles (Quenemoen, 2012). First, the approach is not to design alternate assessments "in isolation," but rather to build these assessments as integral parts within the broader framework of rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction. Assessing students without first ensuring opportunities for learning in a rigorous, grade-level curriculum can hardly be expected to result in meaningful changes in student outcomes. Given the heterogeneity of the population of students who take an AA-AAS (Kearns, Towles-Reeves, Kleinert, Kleinert, & Thomas, 2011) this also means "beginning at the beginning"–so that no student is excluded.

Thus, the comprehensive NCSC system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is built on a foundation of *communicative competence*, so that all students have a reliable means to receive information from others and communicate and show others what they know.

A second fundamental principle is that the NCSC assessment focuses on the close alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and the essential knowledge and skills that allow students to build competence in academic domains most likely to lead to enhanced college, career, and community outcomes. We elaborate more fully on this alignment in our description of the model below.

Third, college and career readiness in the NCSC model also encompasses *community readiness*. Life beyond high school is more than just going to work or college. We learn to become responsible citizens, to vote, to participate in volunteer projects and recreational activities in our communities; we develop a network of friends, learn to access the complex world of health care, to make necessary purchases and to manage our money, and to take care of our household and personal needs. Exhibit 1 articulates the relationships of each of those elements, including the importance of preparation for a full life in the community. We discuss each of the elements in the model shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. The Foundational Principles of the NCSC Alternate Assessment

In the NCSC model for *Communicative Competence*, students must be able to communicate personal needs, and share information, ideas, questions, and comments about the daily events in their lives and the world in which they live. Research has clearly indicated the pervasive communication needs of students who are eligible for the alternate assessment (Kearns, Towles-Reeves, et al., 2011). For students who have not yet developed communicative competence, this must be an over-arching objective for them *now*; communicative competence is foundational for learning and essential for active community participation. It is the prerequisite for everything else. Moreover, with recent technology advances, a broad array of approaches is available to develop *dynamic* communication systems, allowing students to participate in instruction and interaction throughout the day.

The other components of the model in Exhibit 1, *Curriculum, Instruction*, and *Assessment*, are integrally linked in the process of learning. Under the core element of Instruction are access to grade-level content or lessons, the provision of needed accommodations to ensure that access, and the provision of systematic, evidenced-based instruction to maximize learning opportunities. First, it is important that students with significant cognitive disabilities engage in the use of instructional materials and in the performance of activities that are chronologically age-appropriate and that allow them to progress with their peers. Shared learning experiences provide "value-added" opportunities to develop necessary social skills and to practice vital communication skills. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provide an overall context for making that content accessible (Ryndak, Jackson, & White, 2013), as well as insuring that individualized adaptations are part of that overall access. Systematic, evidence-based instruction is a matter of ensuring that our instruction matches how students best learn, that we embed frequent opportunities for active student responses, and that we provide students with immediate feedback on the accuracy of their responses, with ongoing checks for student understanding. It also means that we engage in data-based decision making (Heward, 2013), that is, we make instructional changes based on a careful and continuous review of the student's performance.

Part of the challenge of ensuring access to the general curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities is determining how to make progress through the curriculum meaningful for students who need reduced breadth, depth, or complexity compared to typical peers. The second element in our learning triangle thus addresses the framework for building that curriculum. We have described the CCSS earlier in this paper; our model is based on a *prioritized* subset of the CCSS that support access to the general curriculum for each grade and foster meaningful participation in grade-level instruction with peers without disabilities at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity.

Building on the foundation of the prioritized subset of the CCSS, we have created two additional tools to assist in curricular planning: the *Learning Progression Framework* and the *Core Content Connectors (CCCs)*. The Learning Progression Framework provides a map (Hess, 2011) to Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams for what should come next as students continue to progress through grades. The Core Content Connectors (CCCs) identify the prioritized academic content designed to frame the

instruction and assessment of students with significant cognitive disabilities in kindergarten through high school, while retaining the grade-level content focus of the CCSS and the learning targets of the Learning Progression Frameworks. The CCCs are specifically intended to promote success as students advance with their peers without disabilities to the next grade.

The final vertex of our learning triangle is the assessment itself, which consists of both formative and summative assessments. Thus a "system of assessments," including formative tools administered throughout the year and embedded in the instructional materials, provide regular feedback about student progress. The annual summative assessment (for our purposes, the NCSC Alternate Assessment) provides schools and districts with the information they need to provide additional instructional and curriculum resources to teachers. In addition, the results of the summative assessment should be useful to student teams in identifying appropriate instructional goals and objectives, as well as ongoing supports, and as we argue later in this paper, constitutes one measure of college and career readiness.

The Role of Professional Development

An underlying assumption of the NCSC model is that without materials and resources that assist special and general education teachers in interpreting the content standards and curriculum progression, the implementation of curriculum and instruction will not have the necessary impact for these students and/or students may simply not have access to standards-based instruction. A system of professional development that includes materials and training resources assists teachers to understand the content on which to build the curriculum. In addition, sample units and lessons provide teachers with examples for how to develop and implement lessons based on the content. Next, a set of evidence-based instructional practices give teachers the tools they need to provide high quality, research-based instruction. Finally, providing modules for how teachers can develop their own lessons and student supports closes the curriculum and instruction professional development loop. This comprehensive set of professional development resources ensures that students have not only been prepared to participate in the assessment, but that the results of the assessment are both valid and useful to teams in determining individualized learning goals and the identification of on-going supports.

The Relationship of the NCSC Assessment to College and Career Readiness

Because NCSC's summative assessment is given during a 1-2 month window of time each year, there are limits to what can be said about college and career readiness for students with significant cognitive disabilities based on that assessment alone. Indeed, these limitations are true for *all* students—important life outcomes can never fully be predicted by a single test result; success in one's career and life is more than just having a strong mastery of academic content.

Individual teaching items at each grade within the NCSC curriculum-instruction-assessment model are designed to measure generalization of concepts and skills to new problems, and whenever possible are linked to real-life applications (so that students can see the relevance of what they are learning to problems that they are likely to encounter both in life and at work). These aspects support a focus on college and career readiness. For example, a high school instruction or assessment task asking a student to compute the surface area of a figure can have direct relevance to career and life applications such as estimating the amount of paint needed to paint a room, or the amount of seed to sow a lawn with grass. (Browder, 2012). Similarly, an algebraic equation can have direct relevance when a student is asked to develop an equation for the money he would make, after paying for both transportation and lunch for that day, if he earned $10 an hour for six hours. The point is that the test items are based on instructional and curricular materials that actually *do* have relevance to college and career readiness. This is why a seamless model of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is so important in describing the relationship of college and career readiness to academic achievement for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Similarly, a high school instructional or assessment item in reading may ask the student to identify the author's point of view or purpose in writing a passage, how the author has used details or evidence to support his or her purpose, and to evaluate information presented across formats (text, graphs, timelines) included in that passage. Being able to analyze information presented in multiple formats is essential for how we receive and understand information in today's world, and requires the ability to integrate and evaluate that information (e.g., does that information support or not support the author's point of view). Other reading passages at the high school level may ask the student to consider a story of how one student thought about and discussed career goals with family members and teachers, and why obtaining information from a variety of sources is important for key life decisions. In writing at the high school level, a student may be asked to formulate an argument or a position, and to develop the claims and the evidence that supports that position. This type of persuasive writing (either written directly by the student or dictated through a scribe or speech-to-text technology) lies at the heart of self-advocacy and critical thinking, both essential elements of self-determination, an evidence-based predictor of college and career readiness (see Antosh et al., 2013).

NCSC partners have designed the curricular materials that NCSC participating states are encouraging their schools to use. These materials have been created to teach the content that will be assessed in the NCSC assessment.

Next we describe the evidence-based predictors of post-school success that alternate assessments are *not* designed to measure. Our purpose in doing so is to assist teachers, administrators, families, and students, in ensuring that the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Transition Plan incorporates these additional skills to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities truly are college and career ready. As we describe below, these other

indicators, when included with rigorous and relevant academic content linked to grade-level content standards, will prepare the student for a successful and fulfilling life.

Developing the Additional Elements of College and Career Readiness: What Tests Cannot Measure but Students Still Need

Among the factors directly related to post-school success for students with significant cognitive disabilities that alternate assessments are not directly designed to measure are:

1. Self-determination;

2. Student involvement in the IEP planning process;

3. Community-based vocational training and paid employment while in school;

4. Community-based instruction;

5. Inclusion in general education;

6. Social interaction skills and opportunities with peers;

7. Knowledge of one's own support needs;

8. Interagency transition collaboration; and

9. Role of the student's Transition/IEP team in creating needed supports and linkages.

Each of these factors is described below.

Self-Determination

Students' ability to direct their own lives and to make important decisions related to their education and career goals (Holub, Lamb, & Bang, 1998) have been strongly related to positive post-school outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, in press; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Moreover, this is a skill that can be taught through carefully designed instruction (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013), though opportunities to teach youth with significant disabilities self-determination skills are often missed (Carter, Owens, Trainor, Sun, & Swedeen, 2009).

IEP teams need to insure that students are systematically taught the skills of self-determination, including goal setting, developing plans to achieve those goals, and self-monitoring and self-evaluation skills to track their progress toward their academic, personal, and life-course goals. Yet, there is an important caveat here. Although NCSC's alternate assessment is not a direct measure of student self-determination, at

the middle and upper grades, performance on the NCSC assessment requires increasingly self-directed learning (constructing one's own arguments, organizing and comparing the evidence in more than one text), problem solving (using algebra and geometry principles to answer 'real-world' problems), and evaluation (evaluating the supporting evidence for an author's point of view). Self-directed learning, problem solving, and evaluation are all important dimensions within the broad rubric of self-determination.

Student Involvement in the IEP Planning Process

Student involvement in the IEP process is both an indicator of student self-determination *and* an opportunity to enhance self-determination in a critical moment in planning one's future (Test, Mason, Hughes, Konrad, Neal, & Wood, 2004; Thoma & Wehman, 2010), as well as in improving academic performance (Test et al.). Students clearly need the opportunity to participate in setting their education and career goals, and to develop the self-advocacy skills they will need in their future.

Community-Based Vocational Training and Paid Employment While in School

Community-based vocational evaluation (centered on identifying the interests of the student through the discovery process), job training (including internship opportunities available to students without disabilities), and especially *paid employment* opportunities while still in high school have all been documented in enhancing positive post-school outcomes for youth with significant disabilities (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Test, 2012). Inge and Moon (2011) noted a number of promising practices including: student-centered planning, interagency collaboration, high school curricula that include access to *both* life skill instruction and the general curriculum, access to paid employment while in high school, and family involvement. In another study, Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2011) found that factors associated with early paid work experience for adolescents with significant disabilities also include student communication and self-help skills, as well career assessments and internships.

Opportunities for transition-age youth to engage in paid work experiences engaged in by youth without disabilities (summer and after school jobs) provide additional opportunities for youth with limited employment history to expand their resumes (Carter, Ditchman, Sun, Trainor, Swedeen, & Owens, 2010). Carter et al. also noted the need for such summer opportunities as student internships and volunteer activities for students with significant disabilities who typically have had little opportunity to engage in these. Each of these factors is important for IEP teams to consider in preparing youth with significant cognitive disabilities to be college and career ready.

Community-Based Instruction

As Kleinert, Browder, and Towles-Reeves (2009) noted, students with significant cognitive disabilities often experience considerable difficulties in generalizing what they have learned in the classroom and applying that knowledge and those skills to real-life settings. That is why community-based instruction (actual instruction in the settings in

which the student will need to apply math, reading, or other academic skills) is acknowledged as an evidenced-based practice for youth with significant disabilities (Test, 2012). Community-based instruction (CBI) includes such activities as banking, grocery shopping, using health clubs, mobility training, and using public transportation. CBI involves very carefully planned, individualized instruction, and is designed to insure that students can truly apply the academic skills they have learned in the classroom to the 'real-world' settings in which they will be expected to use those skills in adult life. Effective CBI: (1) supports academic instruction, but does not supplant it, (2) often includes peers without disabilities as a part of their own learning experiences; (3) is data-based and clearly tied to important student goals; (4) provides frequent opportunities for active student learning (embedding learning trials throughout that instruction); and (5) does not remove students from regularly scheduled general education classes.

Inclusion in General Education

Test (2012) noted that participation in general education is an evidenced-based practice directly related to positive employment, postsecondary education, and independent living outcomes for students with disabilities. Moreover, in a classic study, Fisher and Meyer (2002) found that students with severe disabilities educated in inclusive settings performed significantly better on both social and adaptive measures than similar, matched students served in self-contained settings.

Yet, we know that students with significant cognitive disabilities are served primarily outside of general education settings. In a 15-state survey of teachers, Kleinert et al. (2013) identified the educational placements of 39,837 students with significant cognitive disabilities participating in their respective state alternate assessments. These researchers found that 92% of students were served primarily in self-contained classrooms or separate schools, while only 7% were served in regular education or resource room placements. The great majority of students with significant cognitive disabilities across those 15 states were served in separate classrooms, either with inclusion limited to special activities (70.7%), or with "some" academic inclusion (8.9%). Instruction in rigorous academic content certainly is important, but it is questionable whether students with significant cognitive disabilities are receiving high quality academic instruction on grade-level content if they do not have access to trained subject matter teachers and the opportunity to learn with students without disabilities.

The NCSC model of tightly aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment is designed to enable access to grade-level instruction. The NCSC prioritized set of academic standards represents precisely those standards that represent the skills and knowledge that support access to the general curriculum for that grade, and foster meaningful participation in grade-level instruction with students without disabilities.

Working Collaboratively With Peers and Social Interaction Skills

Erik Carter and his colleagues identified and researched promising peer support strategies for supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities in general

education classes (Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2009). Test (2012) identified the presence of social skills and student supports (including peer supports) as evidenced-based predictors for both employment and post-secondary education outcomes; and Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2012) noted that young adults with severe disabilities who had higher levels of social skills were more likely to be competitively employed after high school. A key element in preparation for college and career readiness for students with significant cognitive disabilities is the presence of opportunities to interact and develop friendships with peers without disabilities. IEP teams need to insure that students have these opportunities through participation in general education classes, extra-curricular and other school activities, and direct instruction as necessary to develop the social skills to take advantage of these opportunities.

Student's Knowledge of Own Support Needs and How to Access Those Supports

Conley (2007) posited that students who are 'college ready' must be able to identify their own needs and access systems of supports. Kearns, Kleinert, et al. (2011) suggested that this principle applies to all students, including those students with disabilities participating in alternate assessments. The ability to access systems of support whether negotiating college applications, applying for a job, or thinking through affordable living arrangements represents a fundamental set of knowledge and skills. Understanding that supports are both needed and available is the first step (for example, recognizing that transportation may be required to travel to a job). Accessing those supports and negotiating the service system require not only knowledge and skills, but social interaction and communication skills as well. Innovative and creative problem solving is essential if students are to be prepared for the next step in their lives.

Interagency Transition Collaboration

The importance of interagency collaboration, such as the involvement of the State Vocational Rehabilitation agency, is well documented in achieving positive post-school outcomes for youth with significant disabilities (Test, 2012; Winsor, Butterworth, & Boone, 2011). Further, it is a federally mandated part of a student's Individualized Transition Planning. An outstanding resource in inter-agency collaboration is the Association of University Centers on Disabilities' "A Collaborative Interagency, Interdisciplinary Approach to Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood (Antosh et al., 2013). This resource, within a core focus on self-determination, considers employment, post-secondary education, health care, community living, housing, and transportation needs at the point of transition (available online at: http://www.aucd.org/docs/publications/transition2013_full_sm.pdf).

The Extent to Which the Student's Transition/IEP Team is Creating Ongoing Supports and Developing Interagency Linkages to Achieve Transition Goals

In this section, we briefly describe federal transition requirements, and how these

requirements are an essential, though not sufficient, part of college and career readiness. Note that for students with significant cognitive disabilities, this will in all likelihood mean *ongoing* supports into adulthood.

Individual student transition planning requirements under IDEA (1997, 2004) include:

1. Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16:

    a. Appropriate, measurable post-secondary goals

    b. Transition services (including course of study) needed to reach those goals.

2. These measurable post-secondary goals should be based on "age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills." (IDEA, 20 USC 1401, Sec 614 [D][1][a][8])

3. It is expected that outside agencies (e.g., State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, state and local Developmental Disability agencies, etc.) may play a vital role in student transition planning. Under the US Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Transition Indicator (Indicator 13), IEP teams must invite representatives of outside agencies, as appropriate, with parent and/or student permission (US Office of Special Education Programs).

For students with significant cognitive disabilities, who often require carefully coordinated and life-long supports to achieve their career, post-secondary education, community, and independent living goals, federal transition requirements represent an important *(though minimum)* framework for building toward college and career readiness. Indeed, the focus on transition for students with significant disabilities typically needs to begin at an *earlier* age than the IDEA requirements currently state (Antosh et al., 2013)

Wagoner (2012) suggested that in our digital age, creativity and innovation will be necessary of all students to find their way in a world where jobs are scarce. Finding a job may indeed be creating a job that meets a student's interests, skill set, and available opportunities. This type of innovation may be particularly useful for students who have significant cognitive disabilities. Identifying and supporting a student's interests while promoting his or her independence may indeed lead to important life opportunities that may not otherwise exist. Person-centered planning approaches (Amado & McBride, 2001) help students and their families identify strengths, gifts, and abilities, as well as develop life opportunities crafted through creative and innovative thinking. Person-centered planning is the context for creating a vision for the student's future—a vision that has the student at its center.

College and Career Readiness, High Academic Expectations, and the Role of Alternate Assessments: How Are They All Related?

It is certainly essential to have high expectations for what students with significant cognitive disabilities can achieve academically, and to ensure that what they are taught is as rigorous as possible. Moreover, because the field, to date, really has not had a coherent curricular framework based on grade-level content for students with significant disabilities, we do not yet know what even *is* possible (Browder, 2012). The danger is that we may limit students by our own preconceptions, and by what we have taught and expected in the past.

As Hunt, McDonnell, and Crockett (2012) noted, academic content can directly contribute to a student's quality of life. In addition to preparing a student for college or a career, rigorous academic content can increase a student's knowledge of the world and can promote lifelong learning. This is especially true (as Hunt et al. note), for academic content that is applied and practiced in a variety of natural settings and situations; enables the student to have a deeper understanding of his or her world, culture, and community (thus promoting community and civic engagement); or is something simply of great interest to a student (promoting a sense of wonder, and perhaps shared hobbies and leisure activities with others). Well-designed alternate assessments, in tandem with high quality curriculum and instruction aligned to the CCSS, are intended to capture a portion of that academic learning. We have attempted to describe the foundational elements of such an alternate assessment in the first part of this paper.

Yet, for students with significant cognitive disabilities, as for all students, college and career readiness is more than a measure on a single test. In the second part of this paper, we have attempted to describe those other essential elements that go beyond the limits of any test. These elements include evidence-based predictors of post-school success for students with significant disabilities, including: directly teaching self-determination skills; providing opportunities for integrated, paid employment; interagency collaboration and planning around individual student needs; community-based vocational instruction; participation in general education classes; and the presence of social skills and student supports. Student IEP teams must ensure that those practices are incorporated in the student's program, while simultaneously balancing that instruction with high academic expectations. It is precisely this balance that will improve the life outcomes of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

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