

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
April 12, 2011

SUBJECT: Growth Measure for Students with Complex Support Needs

TO: School District Superintendents  
School District Special Education Directors  
School District Assessment Coordinators  
Charter School Chief Executive Officers  
Charter School Special Education Directors  
Intermediate Unit Executive Directors  
Intermediate Unit Special Education Directors  
Approved Private School Administrators

FROM: John J. Tommasini  
Director  
Bureau of Special Education

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has announced the public reporting site for Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) district and school results. PVAAS results reflect the performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). PVAAS growth analyses does not include results from the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) or the PSSA-Modified; however, the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) is committed to researching how students with complex support needs demonstrate meaningful and measurable growth.

Assessment, special education and psychometrics have founds it challenging to include the results of students who take the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) within growth model calculations. Ensuring that an AA-AAS discriminates sufficiently to project a student to proficiency is just one difficulty. Out of 15 states that have growth models approved for annual yearly progress (AYP) purposes, only two have developed a means to include these students in their growth model but there are differences in the way the data are handled. The other 13 states partially include AA-AAS students in their AYP growth calculations or are considering ways to do that in the future. (*Growth Models and Students with Disabilities: Report of State Interviews Project Forum at NASDSE 2009 December*).

Pennsylvania is examining the growth of students participating in AA-AAS in two ways. First, the University of Pittsburgh will study 15,000 video tapes of 5,000 students participating in the PASA over a three year period. Second, the PDE is a partner in the federal National Center and State Collaborative Grant developing a comprehensive assessment system for students with complex support needs. A component of this grant is to describe growth qualitatively and then develop methods to accurately measure growth quantitatively.

For additional information on growth models and students with disabilities, please go to the Bureau of Special Education website and click on "students with complex support needs" or paste the following link into your web browser:  
[http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/special\\_education/7465/students\\_with\\_complex\\_support\\_needs/93312](http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/special_education/7465/students_with_complex_support_needs/93312).

For questions related to this Penn\*Link, contact Lynda A. Lupp, Special Education Adviser at (717) 783-6885 or [lylupp@state.pa.us](mailto:lylupp@state.pa.us).

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