

## *Fast Facts: Alternate Assessments for Students with Significant Disabilities*

*The increased focus on content standards and academic learning for Students with Significant Disabilities is clearly reflected in Vermont's Alternate Assessment (VTAAP). Common questions and clarifying information on this topic are provided below.*

### **“Why do Students with Significant Disabilities need to be included in state-wide tests?”**

**Fact:** State-wide assessments for all students are indicated in both NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) as one tool for gathering information needed to measure and document the results of education. For students with significant disabilities, these laws direct states to: provide adaptations and accommodations for learning and testing; provide an alternate testing format; address the same grade-level academic content standards; use rigorous achievement standards; and report students' performance scores towards AYP. The VTAAP meets these expectations by: documenting the use of Assistive Technology; using a collection of student work (a portfolio) as a measure of academic learning; using the GEs (content standards) as the assessment targets; setting performance targets that reflect high expectations, and establishing consistent administration guidelines across all students so that their scores can be appropriately combined as a representation of their academic learning within the AYP calculations.

### **“Why does the assessment change every year?”**

**Fact:** The Alternate Assessment first appeared in the federal law (IASA) in 1994, but it wasn't until 2004 that the USDOE released a peer review process articulating the specific expectations associated with the development and implementation of this assessment. This document is now used to evaluate alternate assessments and to determine if they will be approved as part of states' overall assessment system. Since the release of this document, nearly all states have had to recreate or revise their assessments to conform with these requirements. By 2008-09 Vermont's alternate assessment had evolved to include many of the elements that were outlined in the federal guidance documents. The current VTAAP is an assessment that follows the federal guidelines, complies with both IDEA and ESEA, and represents current best practice in the field of special education.

### **“Is the assessment going to change again?”**

**Fact:** Previous changes to Vermont's Alternate Assessment were consistent with efforts to conform to federal and state mandates. The federal peer review process of the VTAAP began in Spring 2011, as an evaluation of its compliance with the USDOE guidelines. The state's efforts to bring this assessment into alignment should ensure that Vermont's entire assessment system will be approved as being a valid and reliable measure of students' learning in the general education curriculum. The VTAAP is expected not only to fulfill federal requirements, but also was designed to emphasize practices and procedures that are part of proven teaching methods and to reflect Vermont's educational initiatives to improve learning and outcomes for all children.

### **“How are the results of this test used? Shouldn't the IEP progress reports be enough?”**

**Fact:** State-wide testing is one part of a comprehensive assessment of student performance. Best practice clearly demonstrates the benefits and necessity for ongoing, formative assessment in addition to the collective statements of performance over time. Schools should use assessment results to direct instructional attention and resources, leading to improved student learning. The information collected will also help each Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to assess and instruct students appropriately.