



Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

Accessing the General Curriculum: Including Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform

presented by:

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MS. MACK: This is Mary Mack from the University of Minnesota. I am going to introduce the call and deal with some housekeeping details. Then I am going to turn it over to Ann Clapper, who is an Associate Director for the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition here at the University of Minnesota. And Ann will introduce the speakers and we will get going.

It sounds like we have a lot of people on the line and I am really excited about that. The title of today's teleconference is *Accessing the General Curriculum: Including Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform*.

I am just going to turn the call over to Ann. The process is the speakers will do a presentation and then there will be an opportunity for questions from the audience.

MS. CLAPPER: Hi. This is Ann Clapper from the University of Minnesota. Our presenters for today's teleconference are Dr. Margaret McLaughlin from the University of Maryland, and Dr. Victor Nolet from Western Washington University. Drs. McLaughlin and Nolet co-authored the book by the same title as our presentation today, *Accessing the General Curriculum: Including Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform*.

Dr. McLaughlin is in the lead-off position today and so she will start the presentation. And then Dr. Nolet will follow her. Dr. McLaughlin?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Yes. Okay. Thank you. This is the first time I have ever done one of these so I have to say that it is a bit odd, but I am going to try to do my best. And I have a couple of graphics that I am going to try to describe verbally, which will be quite a challenge but I am up to it.

I am going to start off with a little background information. When we talked about this, the presentation and the amount of time, Victor and I discussed the need to put this into the context, not just the IDEA requirement that we now consider individual children's education and individualized educational planning in terms of how they are going to access the curriculum, but even broader. Kind of the — what we are hoping to achieve with that, what the intent of that is, and really how dramatic. I don't know that we even recognize at this time how significant this requirement is going to ultimately be in the whole thinking about special education.

But as you know in the 1997 IDEA amendments, we have a variety of new provisions related to how students with disabilities are going to be part of a larger, standards-driven reform. Specifically, to access the general education curriculum, those — that language appears under the IEP provisions and — I am paraphrasing here — but it does indicate that the IEP must include a statement of the student's present levels of educational performance, including how the child's

disability affects their involvement and progress in the general curriculum. The goals and objectives of that child's IEP must enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. And the statement of special education related services supplementary aids and services, including modifications or supports for personnel that are necessary for the child to advance toward annual goals and be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

Now, the additional and accompanying provisions in the legislation (e.g., participation in assessments and reporting) require that children with disabilities be included in the state and local district assessments. These are the large-scale assessment programs, with accommodations as needed. I know that people recognize they are linked. But the significance of this link is, I think, becoming more and more evident and it certainly will under the new "leave no child behind" legislation (e.g., Title I of ESEA), which is imminent, since apparently that bill is going to come out of conference soon. That bill will require even more assessment and accountability.

And I am not going to spend time—this isn't a discussion of assessments and accommodations — but together those two provisions, and with the increasing use of those assessment results in high stakes accountability, whether they are used at the state, district, and school level for school accountability, as well as high stakes for kids, which would include promotion decisions, promotion retention, and also, of course increasingly, graduation are going to have huge impacts on special ed.

Now, having said all of that, we tend sometimes to think of assessment and access to the general curriculum in terms of separate requirements and an enormous amount of decisions that have to be made about this. But it's important to understand that access to the curriculum and the assessment requirements in IDEA are aligned with the other major federal and state reform initiatives that are out there. And probably the most significant one and the one that has the most influence really in terms of what the states have done recently in their

reforms is Title I. And it will probably, in all likelihood, remain the most significant driver of these practices, particularly in this new version, new re-authorization, of Title I of ESEA, the Elementary Secondary Education Act.

And basically the key features that we really need to think about as we think about access is that this whole standards driven reform model requires and is built on a notion of alignment, that there would be a set of common standards, content and performance standards, that would define the challenging and enduring knowledge and skills that all students should have, should be able to demonstrate when they leave school. And that there should be new and much more rigorous accountability on the part of public education for ensuring that every child does attain certain levels of this important knowledge, this enduring knowledge and skills. And as I said before, even more important is the concept of assessing how students are progressing on that knowledge. Assessments now are the common topic. Everybody is talking about assessments and there is going to be more of them, not less of them. And accountability, increasing accountability.

And with all of that, the policy is supposed to be aligned. In other words, you are not supposed to have a set of standards over here and then a set of assessments that don't somehow link to those standards and then the accountability. Within that alignment is the very critical link between the standards and the curriculum and the assessment. And the way that people need to think about this access to the curriculum is that it is an integral part of the entire standards model. It is — to use an old, over used phrase — it is where the rubber hits the road for all students. If you are truly going to implement higher standards, challenging standards, and you are going to be able to have a system of fair assessments and meaningful assessments and likewise for accountability, then you have to have a curriculum that is aligned with those standards.

Now we know that in the larger scheme of things, much broader than special education, there is not perfect alignment out there. But increasingly

there is. And there is this notion that the curriculum should be more closely defined or aligned or refer to exactly these standards and obviously what is going to be assessed. Now with IDEA '97 we are bringing, from a policy perspective, the IEP and the whole concept of individualized and individualization into this model of reform. And believe me, this is not just a paperwork requirement, it is a change of a policy framework and this is, if nothing else, the message that I want to convey. This is a very — I don't want to say radical — but it certainly is on the road to a real shift in thinking about special education. Because through the concept of the IEP, that was our embodiment, that was our be all and end all of what FAPE was — FAPE in so many words is really the interpretation of what is in that IEP. But now with some of these provisions that I have talked about we are beginning to say, well, we still have both a legal mandate and philosophically in terms of our values and everything else we really have the foundation of this notion of individualization. But we now have these new requirements that are starting to shift us.

Now, a lot of teachers — and I do spend time in schools, probably not as much as Victor has, but clearly we have been looking at a lot of issues around access and standards and interpretation of those — and as I said before, we know that the alignment is certainly imperfect and it's certainly far less than perfect within our thinking of special education. But we also know that teachers and people in the schools, the IEP teams even, tend to think about access in one of several ways. And if I had to kind of group them together I would say there is a cluster of thinking about this and practices that say, well, if the student is really going to access the classroom, the general ed curriculum, they have to be in the regular classroom where the regular curriculum is being taught. And that doesn't necessarily mean, you know, full inclusion or quarter inclusion. It does mean, however, that they are going to access the parts of the curriculum that they can achieve through that regular education training. And a lot of teachers, particularly for kids in the more mild-

moderate disability categories where we have kids we might refer to as learning disabled or behavior disordered — we tend to think of the special education teachers as somehow supporting some of those general curriculum lessons and activities. But “being there” in the regular classroom is a very important part, to some teachers or to many teachers, of access.

The other part is — and this is I would say more typically for kids with more moderate to more significant cognitive delays — that they tend to think of access in terms of — I don't want to make light of this but it's a semantic thing — well, if this child — we know the child needs reading. We do believe that learning to read — at least certain basic, rudimentary, functional reading skills are very critical to the student, and we will deliver those during a time when there is reading going on. I don't really believe it's an access to the curriculum as much as it is to the broad subject matter domain.

And then we have kind of the ad hoc nature of access, which is maybe a combination of the other two clusters but it kind of says, well, you know, our job here is to give the child access and so what I do is I look at what is being taught over here in general education and I try to fit in the child on an individual basis into a specific unit of instruction. Maybe it's into a lesson or a series of lessons, or even just individual activity by activity.

I do think that this latter interpretation of access has led to what I call the “treadmill effect” and that is you go into classes and you see — whether it's a special education or a general education class — you see special educators really trying, very stressed out I would add, trying to keep pace with and keep up with an ever-increasing pace of instruction and a greater amount of content as they try to “fit” an individual student or small group of students into that curriculum.

Now, I think that if we continue to operate in that way we run enormous risk of doing a couple of things to kids. One, we are going to end up giving them a bunch of splintered skills, a bunch of fragmented knowledge, and not a cohesive —

really a scope and sequence, to borrow a word, that is going to be meaningful and ensures that they learn the foundation — the critical and necessary knowledge at third grade or fourth grade or fifth grade — that can help them move forward in the next years or the next phases, if you will, of that curriculum. And I know Victor is going to talk more about that.

The other thing that we run a huge risk of doing — and in this era of high stakes accountability we cannot ignore this — and that is we have to be very, very cognizant that what gets tested at eleventh grade in an assessment or at eighth grade or whatever is not simply what got taught that year or in the last couple of years or it's not a handful of skills. Or at least increasingly it is not and it should not be. Rather, assessment is designed to be cumulative. It is designed to be reflective of almost the entire career, if you will, of however many years the child has been in school. So, as we hear about proposals to push down further and further, into the Head Start programs and preschool programs, early literacy, we have to begin to think more in terms of this whole curriculum continuum; of understanding that it is no longer okay for us to think of just what goes on pre-K or primary or whatever but that what we really need to be thinking about — and when I say we, I am talking about special educators — we really need to think that there is a curriculum continuum that really is on two dimensions. One, of course, is age or grade or developmental or whatever term you want to use that says we have to start very young thinking about what kind of critical and essential skills and knowledge and concepts are necessary to get in these early stages that you are going to build on as you move forward. The other thing we need to think about is how special education and related services become part of and support this continuum.

And the way I would like to think of this curriculum is that you really have at the very — if you think about a group of students and we'll leave out the students who are gifted and talented, not that they are not important, but in this graphic, if I can try to describe it, you have what we refer to as

general education but in fact is very diverse and includes quite an array of students and curricula or at least opportunities, particularly as you move up to middle and high school. If you think about the fact that there is a whole group of kids who do not experience significant learning disabilities but who need some related services support, whether it is speech and language types of support at the early ages or whether it's OT or PT or whatever. These students need no accommodations or modifications in either the curriculum content that they are going to receive, the performance expectations, sequence, timelines, or even instruction. In other words, these are kids for whom the curriculum is fine. That's one group of kids.

Then we move to probably the largest group of kids, at least it should be by far the largest group of kids in special ed. And these are the ones who do require accommodations. But the accommodations — and this is an important distinction — means that there has been no change, to the content or the performance expectation. So, at the one level if you are teaching Algebra I, this child is getting Algebra I, English I, social studies, science, whatever the particular content is. Not only that but the performance expectations are the same.

And this is where educators really trip up. They begin to say, well, we are going to make some accommodations here but in fact the accommodation starts to really modify what you are expecting the child to perform. One example would be — the classic example that comes out every time we talk about accommodations is reading, orally reading material to a child whether it's on a tape or a video or whatever or whether it's an individual reading. Is that an accommodation or does that really modify the performance expectations? In order to know that, you really have to know your curriculum. You really have to understand the key constructs, what it is you are trying to teach and whether you have started to change the performance expectations by reading the material.

Another type of an accommodation that is not a modification however, would be that you could change the sequence in which certain key knowledge or skills are offered. The timelines, giving more time, and certainly all of the instructional approaches would be accommodation.

Then as you move toward modifications (on the graphic) to the curriculum, you really are starting to change some or all of either the content. As you begin to think about students who are transition age and above, you may begin to move into areas that are more vocational, career, technical, that don't represent "the general curriculum" and that unfortunately is becoming the case in some places where we are moving more and more to pre-collegiate academic curriculum. However, a bigger and more likely type of curricular modification is in the performance expectation. Yes, you are going to do something that's literature based in English, but while the other kids read a certain kind of books, you are going to be using very simple books or having the child read a much lower level of book in terms of both vocabulary, syntax, et cetera.

Sometimes changing a sequence or radically altering the timelines so that the child really does move off the curriculum could be a modification. And instruction, changing some or all of the instruction, could in some cases reflect a modification. Possibly if it meant that the child instead of doing 15 of something did five, if in fact the reduction did not reflect the critical five problems that illustrate the key concept of binomials or whatever it is that we are talking about. I don't know why I always go back to Algebra when I know the least about it probably.

And then of course, special ed will be at the very, very far end (of the graphic), truly special and individualized for some small percent of students who both will have either individualized goals and/or participate in alternate expanded curricula that links to the alternate assessment.

And if you think about this curriculum continuum that way, you can see that the thinking about the student, thinking about the current continuum of curriculum, directly links to or lays on top of your decisions then about assessment;

that students who truly are accommodated students, both in terms of an assessment accommodation but instructional accommodations as well, are those students who may require very extensive instructional support but you have in essence not changed the content or the performance standards or expectations for that student, versus a student who does have some or significant modifications. And it is making a clear distinction between the two, which we know both in the assessment arena as well as the curriculum arena, is really still very ambiguous both in policy as well as practice. And also making very sure that once you move over or move on that continuum toward modification you've made some significant decisions that could impact that student's performance on later assessments and certainly later curricular opportunities.

So, I am going to stop at this point and turn it over to Victor, who is by far the more knowledgeable about — he knows a lot more about algebra, too — curriculum issues. And then I will come back at the end and talk about the IEP.

DR. NOLET: Well, Maggie and I don't have shares in either Tylenol or Bayer or any of the companies that produce pain relievers but we probably should, because I think that, as Maggie said, this really is a different way of thinking about the business that we are in and it could cause you to have a headache.

I want to really emphasize and pick up from a point that Maggie made, that access and inclusion are not the same thing. Those of us who have spent our lives in special ed and have talked about inclusion a lot for the last few years, this is not another way of talking about inclusion. When we talk about access to the general curriculum we are really talking about opportunities for the student to make meaningful progress in the general curriculum.

So, a point that Maggie made and I just want to take off from that point because I want to talk more specifically about the characteristics of curriculum and the structure of what it is that we are talking about access to, but we are not talking about the person simply being in the social studies class or

the algebra class or whatever it is that's going on. We are really talking about students with disabilities actually acquiring learning, key information in the curriculum, and then demonstrating performance progress with that key information.

So that really requires us to think quite specifically and quite deeply about what is curriculum. And it turns out that a lot of folks have been thinking about curriculum for a long time and we just need in the special ed world to use some of the thinking that folks have been using.

There really are three dimensions of curriculum that are particularly important for us here. One is that curriculum has a purpose, that is, there is some reason that information has been organized in a way and presented in a way and that that purpose we have now come to think of as the outcome. So in listening to the — I have the advantage, Maggie, that I was able to hear where folks were from and some of the backgrounds that folks have — but listening to the states that you folks are from that I heard, most of you are involved in some kind of standards reform process. Those standards really become the purpose, or that really is how we state the outcome of the curriculum. So as we think about curriculum we really link it directly to those standards. Some things like — they might be defined broadly like “preparing effective citizens,” or more specifically things like “teach children in the third grade to write in cursive or write using a writing process.” So one of the things you have to think of is that curriculum involves a process. It's not, and again, a term that Maggie used, curriculum itself is not an ad hoc process.

Curriculum also, a second component, involves an identifiable body of information, a domain. Knowing what's in the curriculum and is not in the curriculum is really how we define curriculum. Now, in the eighties and into the nineties all of the learned societies established some standards, which is what a lot of our states are basing standards on. So we rely on the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and English teachers and all of the learned societies to tell us what is in those domains. Now, I have been a special ed

teacher and I prepare special ed teachers and have all my life worked in special ed, and I know that the preparation that a lot of us have in special ed is often not domain specific, that we consider ourselves generalists where our real specialization is in pedagogy. So this really requires us to think differently about our job and to work closely with those folks, who know what the domain of algebra or social studies or literature, English, all of those content domains. So, a second dimension then of curriculum is this notion of domain — what is it that is in there and then why is it organized in a way. So, another term that we can think of is domain expertise. We look for those people who have expertise in a domain.

But the part that really actually we can come home to, both as special educators and as folks who work in general ed, is that the third dimension of curriculum is that it involves time. And really we have two ways of thinking about this: Time allocated to topic and activities and then the sequence in which time — in which information is presented and learned. So, that notion of time is one of the ways that we can think about the continuum that Maggie was referring to or a continuum that moves from no accommodations or modifications all the way over to a specialized quite different curriculum.

But this third dimension of curriculum, this notion of curriculum involving time, is really both where we — as Maggie points out — where we can often get tripped up because we think, well, we are going to maybe teach less in the same amount of time or we are going to teach less content or we are going to adjust time somehow. Where we have to be careful — and I think what really causes us pause as we think about access to the general curriculum — is often in special ed in particular but in general we get into a notion that basic skills precede more higher order or complex use of information. And what we get tripped up with in special ed is we think, well, my student, this particular student, has not mastered some basic skill so therefore they are not ready for more complex problem solving and information. That kind of thinking years ago — and this might be a

term that sounds familiar to some of you — leads us to this idea that ready means never. That if we wait for students in special ed or students with disabilities to be ready by virtue of learning some of those basic skills then they will never get to what is really the core of the curriculum, the information that is really the focus of the standards. So we have to be careful of a ready means never way of thinking and not allow ourselves to think, well, that those standards don't really apply to my students.

Which gets to another point that I just want to touch on. All of the language or most of the language that you are seeing and certainly the "leave no child behind" language includes the word "all." And it's really useful to remember that the word all really does have a specific meaning and it means "all" and the trouble is, or the trick is, how do we get to all.

Well, that leads us to thinking about these other dimensions of curriculum. We talked about domain and purpose and time. There is another way of thinking about curriculum — and again, this will sound familiar to many of you — we talk about curriculum as existing simultaneously at three levels or in three places. One is that there is an intended curriculum and that's the body of information that students are expected to learn as a result of their school experiences. The standards that states set are the intended curriculum. Certainly the policy makers, the state legislators, the folks who decide these things, have intended that students acquire information in an intended curriculum. So as we talk about alignment we have to think about what are we aligning with and we are aligning with that intended curriculum, so that's curriculum framework standards and so on.

There is also the taught curriculum or the operationalized curriculum, and that's the minute-to-minute, day-to-day, and week-to-week events that actually occur in the classroom. Now, the taught curriculum is where most of us spend our time. You ask a teacher what do they do and they say, well, I teach ninth grade algebra or I teach English to tenth grade students, or so on. But what we have to be aware of is that the actual teaching,

the work that folks do in the classroom, is the operationalization of a curriculum. And when we talk about alignment what we have to think about is what's going on in the classroom aligned with that intended curriculum. When that alignment is not there, then we are — then students aren't going — we can talk about opportunities to learn or we can just — we can talk about just the likelihood that students are going to get — out there in those things.

And of course, the third part — the third way of thinking about a curriculum is the learned curriculum and that is what actually the students acquire or learn as a result of being in classrooms and being exposed to instruction.

Now, within there I have got one more way of thinking about curriculum to confuse you with and to contribute to your headaches today. Within there we can think of: Then what is the actual structure of the information? What is it that is actually in those standards and what is it that a teacher is actually teaching in the classroom? It's not just all bits of unconnected information. So what over the last number of years we have come to understand is that information comes packaged in different ways. And you know, we for a while there were talking about information as being packaged as declarative or procedural knowledge or facts, concepts, rule relationships, strategies. Again, those are familiar terms for anyone who has been in the profession for any amount of time.

But what we sometimes forget is that teaching facts really looks and acts different. We teach and learn facts differently than we teach and learn concepts and differently than we teach and learn rule relationships and procedures and so on. And that again gets us back to that issue of ready means never. What we really are talking about here is an orchestration and alignment of what goes on in the classroom, that taught curriculum, that involves a skillful blending of teaching of all of the kinds of information in a way that allows a student to ultimately have access or increases the likelihood that a student could perform on those standards, on the outcomes, down the road.

So I want to just put out there then, these multiple ways of thinking about curriculum. What is it that we are talking about when we say access? Access means meaningful access to the actual content of the information — the actual facts, concepts, rule relationships. Access means meaningful progress in the intended curriculum. And access means that we really do attend to the purpose, the domain, and both the time allocated and the sequencing associated with curriculum.

I think what I will do then since I am looking at our clock and I want to make sure we have some time is that I will turn it back to you, Maggie, to talk a little bit about the decision making. And then maybe we can open it up after that.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Okay. Thank you, Victor. I am going to go very quickly through this because I think we do want to have time for questions. Where all of these things that Victor described come together is in the IEP planning. And it is a dilemma because in the case of curriculum and the general education curriculum, in some respects that whole plan is kind of at the mercy, if you will, of general education. And it would be wonderful if the intended curriculum was the same always, universally, the taught curriculum, and that it was operationalized in day-to-day lesson plans and units of instruction, et cetera, et cetera, that really were all cohesive and met the standards of a good curriculum. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

So what happens in the IEP process? There are really three major phases that one needs to think about. But I wanted to say that the most important phase is really phase one, which is identifying the critical enduring knowledge. And in this case, the IEP team in the best of all worlds, can look to the districts' standards and the curriculum basically and recognize that this is a truly aligned curriculum, aligned with the standards, and of course, then will lead the child toward learning that important knowledge. The learned curriculum will be what is assessed, what they are supposed to be assessed on and what is important.

If that is not the case then you really do have some very key decision points in identifying what might be taught in a particular course of study. All

of which may not be the intended curriculum. And so it becomes very, very important for special educators to understand the key core constructs, concepts, and knowledge in that curriculum so that they can pick that out and say these are the things that this child needs to access. The teacher may teach this "whole thing," whatever "this" is, over the course of a semester or a year's course of study. But out of that, we must identify just those critical constructs that we know are the things that are intended by the standards and important concepts that will be assessed and that need to be learned.

And so sometimes the taught curriculum can't be the curriculum that we look at in phase one, which is to identify that critical enduring knowledge. And we really do need to have a much deeper understanding of standards of curriculum. And where I have seen that happen, I've seen it happen two ways. I've seen it happen in a more formal way — if you want to say in some of the accommodations, some of the curriculum frameworks that have been developed in some districts. And I have also seen it work very well when teachers, general and special ed teachers — particularly general ed teachers who understand their curriculum well — come together in a collaborative way and really discuss those three things: The intended curriculum, what is expected to be learned, the learned curriculum, and what they are going to teach. And everyone recognizes that frequently what gets taught can be a lot more than either intended or learned.

Regardless, after you've accomplished phase one, you need to then analyze for that individual student the key knowledge and skills that that student is going to need to learn. And some of those — and this is the hierarchical notion that Victor was referring to when he said ready means never — we can't just say, well, these are the things, these are the five or six elements of fourth grade math, or whatever, that this kid is going to need to learn; and so, we are going to either just teach them in some global way or we are going to do some sort of task analysis that says oh, well, if he doesn't have these basic things here he can't learn the more complex set of operations. And,

again, this requires an understanding of that structure of the knowledge to know that some of that procedural knowledge is going to be very important but so is some of the other knowledge that is above that. And you can't wait for the child to master all of the lower skills and some of them are not going to be as critical.

So, again, that analysis of key knowledge and skills that a competent individual or student uses to perform the tasks of that important, enduring knowledge that we have identified in the first phase is very important. Then you can finally get to phrase three, which is to analyze that individual child's use of those knowledge and processes and strategies. And more than likely this analysis is going to involve curriculum embedded assessments, it's going to involve very, very in-depth assessment. You are really going to have to drill deeply into how that child thinks about certain problem solving and engages in it. It's kind of the cognitive labs that people talk about when they actually ask kids to, you know, if they go through certain problems and whatever to talk them through. And then on the basis of those you can then begin to say here is a child — you can fit the child, if you will, into that curriculum continuum. You can identify those students who really should be able to move through that curriculum with no accommodations.

Then there are going to be some who are going to need accommodations, which might be in the instructional arena and they might be intensive instruction. And that instruction may occur outside of general education for some part of the time. Keep in mind that we are not talking here about an LRE decision because that is a separate decision. Once one has identified these appropriate skills then they must identify those environments. If accommodation is not sufficient, the modified standard begins to be discussed. The team says, you know, we really do need to expand the time and we are going to teach these five concepts, or 10 or whatever, but we are going to do it over a two-year period. And I have seen some structured curricula that have actually formalized that. And then in some areas, or many areas, you may have

children who have a very differentiated or expanded curricular goal, either in more functional areas — in career-vocational areas — or perhaps social-behavioral, you know, other kinds of domains that are outside of, quote, that general curriculum.

So, together, that framework does require a deep knowledge of the curriculum. It does require this collaborative process. Certainly before the IEP event, people need to have a good understanding of all of these pieces of information. And it also is a very important distinction to know and to think about the IEP planning in terms of this curriculum continuum.

DR. NOLET: I have just two real quick points there. There are a number of transition people on. And what we are talking about is part of that transition planning process. So remember at age 14 you want to have these kinds of conversations. And then part of what the expectation is what happens after the person leaves school. So, this is grist for the mill in that transition discussion. And then I was noticing, clearly there we talk about alignment. It also involves alignment within, up, and down all of the components of our education enterprise. And what we are seeing more and more is that alignment has to involve alignment of teacher education, teacher preparation, certification, and licensure with the expectations of standards-based reform because obviously there is a whole lot of teacher skill we are talking about here. I will stop there and open up for questions.

MS. MACK: Thank you both, Dr. McLaughlin and Dr. Nolet. That was very informative. Are there questions from those of you on line that you might have for either Dr. McLaughlin or Dr. Nolet?

MS. PATTERSON: I have a question. This is Debbie. Could you explain a little more about when you are talking about very extensive instructional supports, could you give me some concrete examples of those?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: One of the things that Victor referred to is understanding that in teaching the curriculum you have essentially key skills, you have the knowledge of skills, the concepts — rules, concepts, and constructs. And then within

each of those kinds of areas, you have different types of skills and knowledge there. And those require different consideration of different instructional strategies.

MS. PATTERSON: Such as?

DR. NOLET: As we are talking about accommodations — understand that this is a continuum. So there is not a solid black line that says just stop making accommodations and now we are making modifications. It's really contextualized. An accommodation for one student might be a modification for another.

But under accommodations we can have all kinds of things but they fall generally into three kinds of categories. Alternative acquisition modes; in other words, how is the student going to acquire information. We could talk about content enhancement. And by the way acquisition modes could include audio/video tape, computer readers — that sort of thing. Alternative, or content enhancements; in this case we are talking about how can you supplement or augment the actual content. You might have things like visual displays, pneumonics, peer mediated instruction, computer assisted, advanced organizers, all of the things that we know enhance student acquisition or the content understanding.

And then alternative response modes; oral responding on timed computers, scribes, all of those sorts of things. Those would all likely be in the category of accommodations, whereas with modifications we are really talking about different content, using the information differently, using it or learning it on a different schedule or being taught differently. So it's not a clear line. Was that the gist of your question?

MS. PATTERSON: Yes. I just wanted some specifics on what you meant by very extensive instructional supports. I wrote that down and put it in quotes. If this was an important part of the process, I just wanted to know specifically what you meant by extensive instructional supports.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Well, let's say that the one thing that I was thinking of, is basically very intensive and explicit instruction, you are working with facts, with concepts, with rules, with

strategies, basically the teacher needs to give more opportunity to learn. Now, some of this is good teaching but some of this is going to be over and above even what you would do for say that lower quartile in a class that's having difficulty — teachers (for the special ed child) would have to be very explicit instruction related to the relationship among certain rules; where students are going to have to learn how to discern and it has to be explicit. In other words, for some kids you can teach the concept, you can teach it, you can show some examples, you can basically even state the rule, and with some practice the typical learner can begin to build that particular concept or rule. And of course, the more of those they have the easier the next ones are to learn. So the more competent learner does it much faster and more fluently.

DR. NOLET: Think about something like the water cycle.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Okay. I was going to say you could give her an exact example. But what we are really talking about with almost all levels of cognitive-based disabilities is this explicitness in the way in which you are going to have to teach these things. And that takes more intensive instruction. It's either going to have to be focused on that child and it's going to have to give more time to it. It doesn't necessarily have to be outside of a general education classroom but it is going to take more explicitness, more repetition, and those types of things. And that's how I was using the word intensive.

MS. PATTERSON: Okay.

MS. MACK: Debbie, if I might ask, what state are you from so?

MS. PATTERSON: Oh, I am from the great state of Missouri. And we are in the process of developing a new statewide achievement testing process and I have some real reservations and questions about it. I've had some experience with giving the test. The experiences have not been positive. I was teaching in a cross-categorical classroom of students in kindergarten through grade six. Some of these kids were absolutely able to take the test with no accommodations, no

modifications and did very, very well. Some of the students in my opinion really were not well served by the time spent taking the test. It took me six weeks to administer all of the tests at the end of last year. It was a very frustrating experience. I got the test results back. Many of them were not at all indicative of what I was seeing in the classroom. I don't know what went wrong. I suppose that my accommodations and modifications were not appropriate but it — I just have some real questions as to whether or not these tests are appropriate for all students.

You know, in my state at one time all of the special education students were exempt from achievement tests. That's obviously wrong. Now, all of the students are going to take these tests. I think that's probably just as wrong. I am just having a problem with all of the students taking these tests because I do not think it is beneficial for all of these students to be expected to take the test. That has just not been my experience.

Has anyone else had that experience or does anyone else have that concern or am I just being a naysayer?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Well, I know this is not about the assessment issue itself, but, what you are basically saying has been — and I certainly have heard it and it's being said from all levels — and there are a lot of issues around it. I think part of what is a really key issue both from an instructional as well as a legal and a policy arena is to understand that the object of the assessment, whether this is true or not we can debate, and that can differ state by state, but the way it's being viewed is that it is a benefit. And it is a benefit on several levels, one being universal — hopefully universal accountability for the kids. But also, beginning to actually drive instructional planning, the whole thinking about what kids learn, in a different way. Now, that is not a belief but a policy goal. I am not here to say that this is a universally accepted truth. I just would say to you that I wouldn't beat myself up a whole lot about whether your accommodations and modifications were wrong. I want to go back to something I said at the very beginning: All assessments, and Victor, I

think we could probably say this even about nationally norm-referenced ones, you can't just teach that knowledge, teach that content, including test taking skills, within even a one-year period of time. So what you are saying when kids begin to move into these things, is that the performance really reflects of either a fragmented education, or just lack of opportunity to learn all of this. I think ultimately we are learning much more about the performance of students with disabilities and the impact and accommodations then we knew even a handful of years ago.

MS. PATTERSON: Well, my concerns are that we are moving away from individualized and more towards a more generalized view of education. And I am sure that an argument can be made for that. However, we also need to realize that test taking is a big business. It takes a lot of money to develop and market and implement and score tests, we are seeing that here in the state of Missouri. And I am just not convinced that this is the proper method of assessment for all children who have special learning needs. I am not convinced.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: And I think your concerns and whatever they are — I'm hearing on a number of different elements, they are — we are going to have testing every year it looks like as part of that "leave no child behind" legislation. It's a very big part of this administration's push. And we are even going to have the National Assessment of Educational Progress now that will be used as a benchmark to even determine if a state's tests are rigorous.

MS. PATTERSON: Well, I think it's very, very important that if you are going to take time to assess students that the assessment be meaningful. And by that I mean the tests will help the teacher know where to go, where is the student weak, where is the student is strong. You know, what areas do we need to hit. And, again, I am just — I am not seeing that.

DR. NOLET: And I agree with everything that Maggie said, that this is an issue that comes up lots. And from the perspective of what we are talking about today, again it's an alignment issue. As more components of the whole enterprise

become aligned so that you've got pre-K to 12 alignment; and as more of the components of the actual standards-based reform system become aligned, then some of the frustration — not all of it, some of it — will go away. Some of it is going to be here to stay.

MS. PATTERSON: Do you have any suggestions for us?

DR. NOLET: That's the dilemma we are all in, is that we are in the middle of it right now. And I think the more that there is collaboration and communication; the more that we are talking across grade levels and across disciplines, then we can mitigate some of these things. When you are the lone ranger out there and there isn't a lot of conversation with folks in the general ed programs and across grade levels, then that kind of frustration is going to be there and it isn't going to go away. Again, it's not only about the specifics of teaching students to take the test and how we use our time, it's also about how the whole enterprise works, how the whole system works. And ability.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Debbie, for identifying that important issue for us. Are there other people on line today? I think we have time for maybe a couple more questions.

MS. CRUTHER: This is Stella from Kentucky. And I had a question about decision making in the IEP process that was mentioned. The first step was to identify the core content. And that, in Kentucky, is identified, the core content for assessment at each grade level. So at the second step, can the ARC say for this child we are only going to cover part of this curriculum?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Well, you know, if you look at what both the IEP says and the interpretation that has been provided by OSEP and now its been provided around the issue of test accommodations but it essentially reaffirms that the IEP team can make decisions about that individual student that may or — for example, they can — and this is a current interpretation — they can say that these would be the accommodations that this child is going to need to take an assessment. I know in Kentucky it's not such a big issue but in other states it is. The IEP team can do

that. But the IEP team has no control over the consequences of those decisions. So if you were to say, well, these are the standards — and, again, I am speaking now at a broad federal level. You may have state regulation that may make some changes here. But you say, well, these are the domains that are covered in the valued expected the KCCT, does it still have the same name for the standards?

MS. CRUTHER: In Kentucky?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Yeah.

MS. CRUTHER: Academic expectations.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Academic expectations, right. So you may have those academic expectations — and actually in Kentucky they have done a really nice job I thought of kind of identifying those critical elements. But you may decide that for a given child you are going to focus on, you know, on that subset which really relates to the alternate assessment and that's fine. But the issue is that has implications down the road.

MS. CRUTHER: Right. I am thinking of children who are anticipating receiving a high school diploma rather than an alternate.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Right. So if you make that decision, if you want to, you can make that decision. But there has to be a very clear understanding that there are consequences to that and that there is no obligation of the state to change the requirement just because the IEP team has decided to teach less or whatever.

MS. CRUTHER: Okay. That was my question. They can't change the graduation?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: The IEP team, absolutely not, no. In fact, there is a new court decision — I just heard about it yesterday at a meeting about test accommodations, which I have not — some of you may and I don't know if there is anyone on the line from Ohio, I think this was a case out of Ohio, the Reed case. I don't know what circuit that is, the federal appeals court there. It was a June or July decision I think just this past year, that essentially is the first federal court case on this issue of accommodations that has essentially said that there is no obligation for the state to honor — and this had to do with accommodations and assessment I am pretty sure. But essentially, yes,

the IEP team has the right to, you know, make these decisions but these do not have to be honored. At least in this one federal court.

DR. NOLET: And that is a role for that transition team starting at age 14, to discuss what are the implications of the decisions we are making. And I think the message we probably haven't said it enough, maybe, but the message is modify with caution. There are costs associated with modification.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: And particularly at the young age because what I kind of say is don't ever pull that child off that time line or out of that curriculum unless you are absolutely certain. I mean, to think that you are going to start in first grade or second or even third grade making these big modifications, sometimes the transition — the point of transition planning —

DR. NOLET: It's too late.

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: — it's too late. And I am seeing that more and more in working with some middle schools around here where they are saying by the time we really have taken a look at this kid at middle school this child has missed so much.

DR. NOLET: It really does require the, or it implies that the transition process and the transition team take very seriously, the age 14. Maggie is right; age 14 is a bit late for it. So, again, those of you that are in transition, sometimes transition doesn't kick in until a little while before graduation. And it really is this vertical kind of alignment that we are thinking of, too.

MS. MACK: Excellent points. Are there other callers who would like to ask a question?

MS. CANTRELL: Linda. Facilitator for special school district, St. Louis County, St. Louis, MO. And we are kind of concerned about how does the community-based instruction relate to the general ed alignment, especially when it takes time out of the general ed classroom and how it relates to the issue of diploma as it is being affected with removing them from the alignment from the general ed curriculum?

DR. MCLAUGHLIN: Oh, that's a great question and a common dilemma. As we said all along, the whole notion of inclusive programming

— whether it means inclusion in education or inclusion in a community — is a separate decision. And in this case, as well as with the case of kids who move into job sites in the community, those decisions are made with the implication that the student is not likely to receive the common diploma by meeting the same requirements as other students. Now, it's possible to teach these core concepts, at least some of them perhaps, in community-based settings perhaps. But my assumption is that most of the kids who would be out in the community would be students who would have more significant cognitive and developmental delays and would probably be students on our continuum that we think of as having a very "expanded or differentiated" curriculum. I really want to be careful of the words because I don't want to make it sound different — but these are students who are likely to be in an alternate assessment. And the issue of how that relates to a diploma is a state-by-state decision. Increasingly we are seeing assessments, high school assessments in 20 or 21 states, either in place, or in the works. In our own state we have had one. It's been a minimum competency assessment. We are moving to really much more ratchet up our high school assessments, end of course assessments in the next five or six years. So, we have got that movement. It's just a mix of states.

Now, if your state permits an IEP diploma or a diploma for, you know, the alternate assessment, then it's not going to impact that. If you are in a state that says no, the only way you are going to get any kind of a regular diploma is with passing this test or this test and this set of courses, then obviously students who are in community-based or other programs that aren't aligned with that core curriculum are not going to be able to pass those tests and are not going to get the diploma. And there are states like that. There have been states like that for some time. So again, I would just have to say that it's going to be dependent on where your state is moving in that direction.

MS. MACK: I want to thank everyone for participating in today's teleconference call. I think

it was extremely informational. I want to thank our speakers for doing such a wonderful job.

(Conclusion of teleconference)

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