

TAO Addresses the Unique Assessment Needs of Students with Cognitive Disabilities



National Center and State Collaborative

BACKGROUND

NCSC Develops Alternate Assessments

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is a multi-state consortium that began the development of a comprehensive assessment system for students with significant cognitive disabilities. The further expansion and management of this system was later transferred to the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) Partner States.

The long-term goal of the MSAA remains the same as that established by the NCSC, which is to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for post-secondary options. To this end, the MSAA will continue to grow a comprehensive support system, supplementing the NCSC's rigorous resources for curriculum, instruction, and student accommodation (Classroom Solutions).

CHALLENGE

Developing Alternate Assessments and Finding a Technology Platform That Would Meet the Requirements

The NCSC's specific requirements, beyond a plethora of fundamental technical data architecture details, included:

- Low cost of implementation and ownership
- Easy adaptability and ability to integrate with existing systems
- Capability to accept items developed externally, outside of the platform
- Scalability to effectively support the MSAA Partner States and beyond for students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- Security solutions for issues such as confidentiality and integrity

SOLUTION

Why TAO

Based on these needs, the NCSC issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in 2013.

“Open Source was not the only factor in the RFP process,” says Chris Domaleski, Senior Associate at the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. “The degree of customization of the proposed solution with TAO was viewed as very beneficial to our project. In addition, it has a demonstrated history of success in other large-scale implementations. Those factors contributed to our selection of the proposal that featured TAO.”

RESULTS

Implementing the TAO Open Source Solution

The MSAA Partner States are working with their contractor to regularly identify, evaluate and execute requirements, enhancements, and other ancillary services to implement the solution. The first major deployment was a pilot test in the spring of 2014, in which over 9,000 students from 17 different states participated. Delivery of the assessment went smoothly. Further refinements were made to the user management component, ensuring students were appropriately assigned to tests and that teachers had appropriate access. A second deployment in the fall of 2014 followed suit.

In the spring of 2015, the test was operationally administered to all eligible students from the participating states. A total of approximately 70,000 tests were administered to 35,000 students in 15 states. Subsequently, in the fall of 2015 pilot, approximately 6,000 students participated from 19 states.

“We were looking for a solution that could meet the needs of this unique student population,” says Chris Domaleski. “Flexibility that would allow easy customization was critical, because creating assessments accessible to the population we serve requires careful design work and easy adaptability. With TAO, we can customize at a deeper level, such as presenting reading passages in a manageable format and allowing students to navigate through content simply and flexibly. TAO also allows users to print out items if necessary. This degree of customization and flexibility allows us to anticipate the success of students with significant cognitive disabilities. We are pleased to have found a solution that met these challenges.”