

2008 ADE AIMS Policy Changes: Impact on 2008 AIMS Passing Rates

In July of 2008, the ADE announced two changes to how AIMS results will be published. These changes in publication criteria, along with an earlier change in AIMS testing protocol will impact passing rates on the AIMS test for 2008.

Here are the three changes that will impact 2008 AIMS test results:

1) Alternate accommodations were eliminated from the AIMS test for Special Education students.

What does this mean and why the change?

In previous years, when a student's IEP specified a classroom accommodation like access to a calculator or multiplication chart while completing math assignments, the student was given the same accommodation on the AIMS test. Because alternate accommodations provide an advantage to the student that was not considered in the test design, scores resulting from alternate accommodations are considered invalid and have not been included in school and district summary reports. Several years ago, the United States Department of Education (USDE) notified the ADE that the use of alternate accommodations violated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing regulations. After several years of fighting with the USDE over the issue the ADE finally decided to eliminate the accommodations this year.

What is the impact?

Elimination of alternate accommodations impacts on AIMS results in two ways. First, students who previously benefited from an accommodation are no longer receiving the benefit, which will likely lower their individual test scores. Second, because these students did not receive accommodations, their scores are considered valid and are now included in the school and district totals. Inclusion of these lower test scores will likely reduce school and district passing rates in comparison to prior years.

2) Alternate AIMS (AIMS-A) scores will be included in the AIMS totals reported to the press.

What does this mean and why the change?

The Alternate AIMS, or AIMS-A (not to be confused with alternate accommodations on the regular AIMS), is an alternative standards-based assessment that meets the testing requirements of NCLB for students with

significant learning disabilities. While the scores from the AIMS-A have always been used in NCLB calculations, they have never been published in summary form. The ADE is merging the AIMS-A results into the summary AIMS reports this year as part of their effort to unify all of their reporting under the NCLB reporting standards.

What is the impact?

While the number of students completing an AIMS-A instead of the regular AIMS is relatively small (514 for 2008), inclusion of their scores this year will likely reduce school and district passing rates in comparison to prior years.

3) AIMS results will not be broken out by Category 1 and 2.

What does this mean and why the change?

Under Arizona law, all students are tested in English regardless of their English fluency. Students who have been identified as “English Language Learners” (ELLs) for fewer than four years are thought to be at a disadvantage on the AIMS because of their lack of English fluency. In prior years, AIMS scores were reported separately for fluent English speakers (Category 1) and for non-fluent English speakers (Category 2). It is important to note that these two groups are not mutually exclusive (see definitions below). English Language Learners who are still not fluent after four years of instructions are included in both groups. While the Category 1 summary has traditionally been considered to be the “official” result for schools and districts, and is published by the local newspapers, all students, regardless of English fluency are included in NCLB calculations. The ADE is eliminating the Category 1 and 2 distinctions this year as part of their effort to unify all of their reporting under the NCLB reporting standards.

Category 1 – this group includes native English speakers, ELLs whose have proven to be fluent by means of the AZELLA test and ELLs who have received four or more years of English instruction.

Category 2 – this group includes all non-fluent ELLs regardless of how long they have been instructed in English.

What is the impact?

English Language Learners who have not established fluency in English tend to perform poorly on the AIMS test. By eliminating the Category 1 and 2 distinctions, the ADE is effectively merging a group of low performing students into the “official” AIMS results. Inclusion of these lower test scores will likely reduce school and district passing rates in comparison to prior years.