

New Mexico's Expanded Grade Band Expectations 2006-2007

The Development Process: The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) convened several iterative panels of diverse expert university and district level educational stakeholders, in addition to soliciting the assistance of national advisors, to develop performance standards, called Expanded Grade Band Expectations (EGBEs) for students with significant cognitive disabilities in the spring and summer of 2006. Both general and special educators were involved throughout this process to ensure both the relevance of the EGBEs to the student population and the accuracy of the linkages to grade level content.

The EGBEs were developed in the content areas of mathematics and science in four grade bands and five grade bands in language arts: 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9 – 12 (9-10 & 11-12 in language arts). The EGBEs provide both assessment and instructional expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities that are consistent with the academic expectations established by the No Child Left Behind Act. EGBEs that form New Mexico's **Assessment Frameworks** are set apart in **bold** print. EGBEs that have clear instructional importance and relevance but are not part of our Assessment Frameworks are listed in italics. These EGBEs are for classroom assessment only. Only what is listed in bold print is assessed on the New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA). However, we must emphasize that both the bolded and italicized EGBEs must be taught.

The academic expectations increase from grade band to grade band and as the student's level of cognitive and communication functioning increases. Our new alternate assessment, the NMAPA, has been developed to align with the **bolded** EGBEs that are part of the Assessment Frameworks. Thus, students with significant cognitive disabilities will be assessed with regard to how well they have mastered this specific set of knowledge and skills.

The structure of the EGBEs: The EGBEs build up toward grade band expectations, just as a ladder is built rung by rung. They have been written at eight different levels of complexity, called Clusters. Groups of clusters are collapsed into four levels of functioning, which are listed in bold on the left side of the chart below.

- Performance at the **Engagement** level correlates to the "Beginning Step" level of proficiency.
- Performance at the **Pre-Symbolic** level correlates to the "Nearing Proficiency" level of proficiency.
- Performance at the **Symbolic** level correlates to the "Proficient" level of proficiency.
- Performance at the **Extended Symbolic** level correlates to the "Advanced" level of proficiency.

		ENGAGEMENT	1 Attention 2 Joint Attention		
		PRE-SYMBOLIC	3 Pre-symbolic 4 Early Symbolic		
		SYMBOLIC	5 Symbolic 6 Conventional Symbolic		
		EXTENDED SYMBOLIC	7 Extended Conventional Symbolic 8 Symbolic Skills for Transition		

Research that supports this model: These clusters were developed based on current research and best practices for students with severe disabilities (see for example Downing, 2005; Reichle, Beukelman, & Light, 2002; Wetherby, Warren, & Reichle, 1998). They are consistent with Diane Browder’s work, which has been instrumental in informing the development of links to grade level standards in New Mexico, and follow well-established understandings of the development of cognitive and communication skills. According to Browder, Flowers, Karvonen, & Wakeman (cited in Browder, Wakeman, & Jimenez, 2006), their research indicated “the symbolic (abstract), early symbolic (concrete), and two lower levels (pre-symbolic/awareness) formed clear differences as clusters.” The progression of clusters in the New Mexico EGBE’s, from engagement through emerging intentional behavior and communication, developing understanding and use of symbolic representation, and finally to the use and manipulation of formal symbol systems (including language and mathematical symbols), therefore provides a research-based framework for consistent academic expectations across content areas.

Description of cluster levels: Students functioning at the Attention level are able to attend to content oriented stimuli and materials. At the Joint Attention level, they are able to attend to stimuli and materials jointly, along with a peer or teacher. Students who are communicating at the Pre-Symbolic level can explore patterns that exist among objects and graphic representations, which are pictures and picture symbols. They do not yet understand that numerals and letters have significance at these three levels. A student functioning at the Early Symbolic level is beginning to realize that numerals and letters contain meaning and significance. They can use abstract symbols, numerals, and letters to a very limited degree for meaningful purposes. Students functioning at the Symbolic level or higher understand that symbols, numerals, and letters have meaning and are

communicating using symbols, numerals, and letters to a limited degree. Students functioning at the Conventional Symbolic level are using some language and social conventions in their communication patterns. Students functioning at the Extended Symbolic level are using language and social conventions more consistently and across contexts in their communication patterns. Students functioning at the Symbolic Skills for Transition level are demonstrating extended communication skills that are still below grade level expectations, but at a level of complexity that denotes that they should be assessed and instructed at a higher level.

The panels that developed these EGBEs used process verbs throughout each cluster as consistently as possible in order to ensure that the communication levels were also reflective of cognitive complexity. For instance, at the Pre-Symbolic level (Cluster 3), examples of process verbs are: *match*, *anticipate*, *respond*, *track*, and *identify*. These process verbs at the Pre-Symbolic level apply primarily to objects, but could include graphic representations, which are pictures of objects or picture-symbols. Examples of process verbs used at the cluster eight level are: *evaluate*, *predict*, *describe*, *explain*.

It is hoped that teachers will be able to use the cluster level as a specific guideline with regard to cognitive expectations. For instance, though the word complex may be used in an EGBE written at the Symbolic Skills for Transition level (Cluster 8), we would expect the interpretation of that word to be applied at this level, which would differ significantly from a grade level expectation of that term.

The EGBEs have been published in a format that we hope teachers find useful and relevant. At the top of each section, the grade band general content strand and standard is listed. Beneath these content standards, the benchmarks are listed. The EGBEs have been written such that they link to each benchmark. In other words, they are rungs on the instructional ladder that climb toward the benchmark. The expert panels have also established specific linkages with Grade Level Performance Standards (GLPSs). Specific GLPSs that each EGBE links to are listed by coded reference in a column to the right of the EGBE, within each benchmark. These GLPSs are listed by their respective codes, such as **3.4**. This means the EGBE links to a third grade GLPS, number four. Thus, teachers will continue to use the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks to establish specific grade level expectations. We have elaborated the map which leads the teacher to specific GLPSs.

These EGBEs are to be used exclusively for assessment and instructional purposes for students with significant cognitive disabilities. They can, and should, be used to develop IEP goals and objectives for this group of students.

Pre-Achievement Level Descriptors: The NMPED has also developed draft Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs) for each grade band and content area to provide teachers and parents with an initial understanding of the skill level that will be required to garner an “Advanced,” “Proficient,” “Nearing Proficiency,” or “Beginning Step” score on the NMAPA. These Pre-ALDs will be finalized at the official standards setting for the NMAPA, which is currently scheduled for July of 2007. The NMPED cannot publish

them in final draft form until the standard setting process is conducted, as the expert panels that will be convened at that time need to be able to review impact data and official test items. These components will not be available until that time.

If you have any questions about the design, use, or relevance of these EGBEs, please do not hesitate to contact Dan Farley, Education Consultant, at the New Mexico Public Education Department: 505-827-6577 or dan.farley@state.nm.us.

References

- Browder, D., Wakeman, S., & Jimenez, B. (2006). *Creating access to the general curriculum with links to grade level content for students with Significant cognitive disabilities*. Downloaded October 20, 2006 from www.osep-meeting.org/2006conf/Presentations/Monday/6_Breakouts/BO_AccessGenCurr/BO_BrowderWakemanJimenez.ppt
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