

2010–2011 *NCEXTENDI* Audit Report



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The guiding mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is that every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st century.

WILLIAM C. HARRISON
Chairman :: Fayetteville

REGINALD KENAN
Rose Hill

JOHN A. TATE III
Charlotte

WAYNE MCDEVITT
Vice Chair :: Asheville

KEVIN D. HOWELL
Raleigh

ROBERT "TOM" SPEED
Boone

WALTER DALTON
Lieutenant Governor :: Rutherfordton

SHIRLEY E. HARRIS
Troy

MELISSA E. BARTLETT
Roxboro

JANET COWELL
State Treasurer :: Raleigh

CHRISTINE J. GREENE
High Point

PATRICIA N. WILLOUGHBY
Raleigh

JEAN W. WOOLARD
Plymouth

NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., State Superintendent
301 N. Wilmington Street :: Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2825

In compliance with federal law, NC Public Schools administers all state-operated educational programs, employment activities and admissions without discrimination because of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, color, age, military service, disability, or gender, except where exemption is appropriate and allowed by law.

Inquiries or complaints regarding discrimination issues should be directed to:

Dr. Rebecca Garland, Chief Academic Officer :: Academic Services and Instructional Support
6368 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-6368 :: Telephone: (919) 807-3200 :: Fax: (919) 807-4065

Visit us on the Web :: www.ncpublicschools.org

M0910

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Methodology	3
Sample.....	3
The Auditors and Training.....	4
Audit Process and Procedures	5
Results and Findings	6
Assessors’ Demographics.....	6
Finding 1: Adherence to Test Administration and Scoring Procedures	7
Adherence to Directions and Scripts	7
Required Action	8
Resources for Required Action	8
Plan for Required Action	9
Independence of Scoring	9
Required Action	10
Finding 2: Review of Accommodations.....	10
Required Action	11
Finding 3: Compliance with <i>NCEXTEND1</i> Eligibility Criteria.....	11
Instruction on the North Carolina <i>Extended Content Standards</i>	12
Alternate Assessment Justification Statements.....	13
Review of Students’ Test Records.....	13
Special Concerns Regarding Adherence to <i>NCEXTEND1</i> Eligibility Criteria	14
Required Action	14
Conclusions	15

Introduction

The *NCEXTENDI* is North Carolina's Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAS). The intent of the AA-AAS is to assess academic skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities and provide access to the general education curriculum using the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards*. As part of the ongoing process for evaluating and improving the quality of the *NCEXTENDI* alternate assessment, an annual audit of the appropriate use and administration of the assessment was conducted in eleven schools throughout the state. These audits were conducted April 11, 2011 to May 17, 2011 to coincide with the *NCEXTENDI* test administration window. The audits focused on three specific areas, (1) the level of adherence to test administration and scoring procedures, (2) the use of accommodations, and (3) the level of compliance with the *NCEXTENDI* eligibility criteria.

This report documents the entire audit process. A discussion of the findings includes recommendations for changes to the *NCEXTENDI* that will facilitate improved and continued training for test administrators and school personnel.

All participating Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have received letters summarizing audit results for their school. These letters provided specific documentation of the audit findings and guidelines/recommendations for corrective action.

The findings of the audit have provided useful information for improving the administration of the *NCEXTENDI*.

Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used to prepare for and conduct the 2010–2011 *NCEXTENDI* audits.

Sample

A random, statewide sampling of LEAs, charter schools, and alternative special education schools was conducted in September 2010. Ten schools were selected to ensure maximum comparability between the sample and state demographics. Approximately 6,000 students were assessed using the *NCEXTENDI* across grades 3–8 and 10. The selection process was designed to guarantee equal representation from all ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic subgroups across all regions of the state. This population and its demographics were used to draw the sample of schools included in the 2010–2011 audits. One additional school was also included in the 2010–2011 audit sample for reevaluation as a result of findings from the 2009–2010 audit. A listing of the LEAs, grade levels, regions, and number of audits conducted is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: 2010–2011 Audit Sample

LEA	Grade Level/Type	Region	Number (n) of <i>NCEXTENDI</i> Students
Cumberland	Elementary	Southeast	10
Gaston (2)*	High K–12 Special Education	Southwest	11
Guilford	Middle	Central	10
Johnston	High	Central	4
McDowell	Middle	Western	5
Northampton	Elementary	Northeast	6
Onslow	Middle	Southeast	5
Scotland	Elementary	Southwest	9
Watauga	Elementary	Northwest	2
Winston Salem-Forsyth	6–8 Special Education	Northwest	8

*Two schools from Gaston County were included in the 2010–2011 school sample, one high school and one K–12 special education school.

A total of 70 students was selected for observation. A listing of the number of students per grade level is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: 2010–2011 Audit Sample—Number of Students by Grade Level

Grade	Number of Students
3	5
4	9
5	15
6	8
7	14
8	12
10	7

Schools were notified of their selection early in the academic year and were provided a description of what their participation entailed during a series of conference calls with LEA- and school-level testing personnel.

The Auditors and Training

Audit team members, representing NCDPI Test Development, Testing Policy and Operations, Exceptional Children, Curriculum and Instruction, and the NC State University Technical Outreach for Public Schools (NCSU-TOPS) were trained on the audit process and all data collection procedures. Auditors were also trained on characteristics/behaviors of the student population, use of accommodations, and possible student response modes (e.g. eye gaze, finger pointing, and use of switches). These training and informational processes helped to ensure the integrity and standardization of the assessment were maintained and valid inferences could be made from data collected during the audit. A complete listing of all auditors is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: 2010–11 Auditors

Auditor	Area of Responsibility
Barbara Scriven	NCDPI–Exceptional Children
Bobbie Grammer	NCDPI–Exceptional Children
Brian Swiger	NCDPI–Testing Policy and Operations
Carrie Perkis	NCDPI–Testing Policy and Operations
Charles Lanier	NCDPI–Test Development
Christopher Warren	NCSU–TOPS
Dan Auman	NCSU–TOPS
Debby Hagemann	NCSU–TOPS
Donna Kenestruck	NCDPI–Curriculum and Instruction
Eileen Davison	NCDPI–Exceptional Children
Faye Atkinson	NCDPI–Accountability Services
Garron Gianopulos	NCDPI–Test Development
Hope Lung	NCDPI–Testing Policy and Operations
Jami Inman	NCDPI–Curriculum and Instruction
Jerrie Brown	NCSU–TOPS
Johnny Wilson	NCDPI–Test Development
Kelly Hinkle	NCSU–TOPS
Rhonda Jernigan	NCSU–TOPS
Michael Gallagher	NCDPI–Test Development
Nadine McBride	NCDPI–Test Development
Nancy Carolan	NCDPI–Testing Policy and Operations
Phyllis Blue	NCDPI–Curriculum and Instruction
Robin Barbour	NCDPI–Curriculum and Instruction
Sarah Reives	NCDPI–Test Development
Shirley Gaskins	NCSU–TOPS
Tom Field	NCDPI–Accountability Services

Audit Process and Procedures

Upon arrival for each audit observation, auditors reported to the school's administrative office where they were greeted by the school's testing coordinator. After presenting proper identification and signing the school's visitor log, the testing coordinator then directed the auditors to the test administration location. Some administrations were conducted in the student's classroom while others were conducted in conference rooms or unused classrooms. For each test administration, the auditors consulted with the student's teacher, usually Assessor 1, to determine how best to introduce themselves to the student, the testing environment, and where the auditors should sit in relationship to the student. This information was needed to ensure the auditor's presence in the classroom would not have any effect on the student's performance.

During the test administration, the auditors read the test booklets and reading selections following along as the assessor read to the student and recorded whether the assessors were appropriately following the script. The auditors also recorded both the correctness (indicated as "Yes" or "No") of student responses and the student's answer choice (A, B, C) for each item. Auditors were provided with a copy of the student's test record and Individualized Education Program (IEP) found in the student's cumulative folder. The use of accommodations and/or modifications observed during the testing administration was also recorded and compared to the information found in the student's IEP. Copies of the student's test record and IEP were submitted to the NCDPI along with the other data collection sheets for further analysis.

Before leaving each school, the auditors were required to sign the student's confidential folder to document their review of the student's IEP and other confidential information. After the auditors had completed all forms and gathered all required documentation, they were directed back to the school's administrative office where they signed out and left.

Results and Findings

The *NCEXTENDI* assessments were administered from April 11, 2011 to June 22, 2011. A total of 68 students and 88 test administrations were observed. Two students from the sample student population were not observed due to extensive medical issues and absences on their respective scheduled testing dates. However, IEP documentation and test records for these two students were provided to the NCDPI for review and inclusion in the audit data. A listing of all observed test administrations by grade and content area is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: 2010–11 Audit Sample—Observed Test Administrations by Grade and Subject

Grade/Subject	Number of Tests Observed
Grade 3 Reading	3
Grade 3 Mathematics	2
Grade 4 Reading	5
Grade 4 Mathematics	7
Grade 5 Reading	6
Grade 5 Mathematics	7
Grade 5 Science	6
Grade 6 Reading	6
Grade 6 Mathematics	3
Grade 7 Reading	9
Grade 7 Mathematics	8
Grade 8 Reading	3
Grade 8 Mathematics	4
Grade 8 Science	7
Grade 10 Reading	4
Grade 10 Mathematics	4
Grade 10 Science	4

The NCDPI requires only one content area test administration observation for each selected student. However multiple content areas were observed for some students due to consecutive scheduling of test administrations.

Assessors' Demographics

The *NCEXTENDI Test Administrator's Manual* (TAM) stipulates that assessors must have professional training in education and the testing program. More specifically, the person identified as Assessor 1 must have routine contact with the student during classroom instruction and must be the student's primary teacher for the assigned content area.

Forty-one assessors, assigned as either Assessor 1 or Assessor 2, were observed during the 88 test administrations. The assessor population consisted primarily of Exceptional Children (EC) teachers. Only one school counselor and one central office staff person served as Assessor 2. Review of the data collected regarding the assessors showed that 21 assessors have bachelor's degrees and 20 assessors have master's degrees. In addition, 78% of the assessors (32 assessors)

have at least five years of teaching experience. A detailed listing of the assessors' years of experience is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: 2010–2011 Audit—Assessors' Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Teachers
0 – 4	9
5 – 10	18
11 – 15	4
16 – 20	5
21 – 25	2
26 or more	3

Following each test administration, assessors were asked to provide the auditors with feedback regarding test administration procedures and potential training needs. This information was collected and will be included in ongoing training processes and future development of *NCEXTENDI* assessments.

Finding 1: Adherence to Test Administration and Scoring Procedures

All tests that are part of the North Carolina Testing Program require a standardized process of administration. For the test results to be valid, all procedures outlined in the *NCEXTENDI Test Administrator's Manual* (TAM) must be followed. Assessors are responsible for following all directions in the TAM and all assessment booklets. As indicated in the TAM, paraphrasing, omitting, revising, or rewriting the scripts or the directions contained within the Student Assessment Booklet is considered a testing irregularity. Additionally, assessors are not allowed to confer regarding student responses to test items. Failure to comply with any of these directions is a direct violation of the North Carolina Testing Code of Ethics.

Adherence to Directions and Scripts

Review of collected audit data across all schools showed that assessors followed most test administration directions and scripts. Auditors across the entire audit sample commonly noted careful attention paid to item presentation, maintenance of student engagement throughout the assessment, and evidence of appropriate rapport between assessors and students.

Deeper analysis of audit data showed assessors followed all scripts and directions in 60.2% of the observed test administrations. Testing irregularities associated with test administration were noted in the remaining 39.8% of tests. Of these irregularities, auditors noted one instance where an assessor's cell phone rang during an administration and another instance where an assessor deviated from the script by paraphrasing and omitting part of the item scripts in the Student Assessment Booklet.

Systematic issues regarding test administration procedures were noted in four different schools. In one school, Assessor 1 and 2 drank coffee and sodas while administering the assessments to their students. This behavior was observed in each of the five test administrations across several

days of observations. As indicated in the TAM, food and drink are not permitted during the administration of secure tests. Auditors also noted that some students may have benefitted from the use of breaks during the test administration and multiple presentations of reading selections during the reading tests. Both the TAM and the Student Assessment Booklets for reading provide detailed information for how and when reading selections may be re-presented to the students and how breaks can be used during all test administrations.

In two schools, irregularities were noted in each test administration observed because Assessor 1 read the item scripts and directions and Assessor 2 presented the stimulus and manipulative cards to the students. The *NCEXTENDI* is designed to be a one-on-one assessment with Assessor 2 serving only as a second rater of student responses. The first page of the Student Assessment Booklet stipulates that Assessor 1 must present the reading selections, if applicable, and the test items to the student as indicated in the script for each selection and/or item. As stated in the TAM, any deviation from the script is considered a revision of the directions contained within the Student Assessment Booklet. In addition, one of these two schools also failed to provide the manipulatives for a mathematics assessment that the LEA is required to make available to the student. In the middle of the assessment, the auditors noted that the assessors divided a piece of paper into small squares to represent the numeric counters that the assessors should have given to the student at the beginning of the administration.

In the fourth school, Assessor 1 deviated from the scripts in the Student Assessment Booklet by not providing the required testing materials (i.e. calculator, pencil, and paper) to the student during the mathematics assessments. In addition, Assessor 1 did not have the appropriate LEA-provided manipulatives or counters for a mathematics item. During this assessment, the assessor stopped the test and retrieved some plastic coins from a container in the testing location. Neither of the assessors at this school or the one previously mentioned used the break scripts provided in the TAM before stopping the test to look for/create the counters or before restarting the test after the counters were found. LEA testing personnel for each school were notified of these occurrences during their respective Audit Exit Conference Calls.

Required Action

School-level Audit Reports were sent to each of these four LEAs indicating that assessors must follow all assessment administration instructions and procedures as described in the TAM including maintenance of one-one-one test administration processes and ensuring availability of all required testing materials.

Resources for Required Action

Each report encouraged assessors to use the *NCEXTENDI* sample assessment items to prepare for the assessment administration. This will also assist assessors in practicing how to present test items and follow the scripted directions exactly as printed. These sample items are located at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/policies/tswd/ncextend1>.

Plan for Required Action

Each of these four schools was also required to submit a written plan for the required action for this finding by September 1, 2011. This plan must include (1) specific activities to be implemented in response to the required action, (2) a timeline for the implementation of the required action activities, and (3) personnel responsible for the implementation of required action activities.

Independence of Scoring

In the majority of test administrations observed, assessors sat on opposite sides of the student and/or table and kept their answer sheets covered while students were administered the test items. Assessors limited all dialogue, if any, to the presentation and exchange of manipulative and stimulus cards for test administration purposes. Analysis of inter-rater reliability indicated that agreement between assessors and auditors was generally high. Table 6 shows the agreement rate between assessors for all students tested in reading, mathematics, and science. The percentage of perfect agreement documented below represents a compilation of all reading, mathematics, and science tests across grade levels.

Table 6: 2010–2011 Audit—Assessor Agreement across Grade Levels

Content Area	Agreement	Number of Students	Number of Items Evaluated
Reading	99.10%	7,022	105,330
Mathematics	98.92%	7,022	105,330
Science	99.46%	2,785	33,420

The agreement rates between auditors were slightly lower in comparison to the agreement rates between assessors. This finding was to be expected given the difference in the number of students observed versus tested and the difference in the number of test items that were evaluated. Table 7 shows the agreement rate among auditors for students who were observed during the *NCEXTENDI* audit. In addition to scoring the test items as correct or incorrect, the auditors were also tasked with recording the response card (A, B, C) each student selected for each item. The agreement rate presented below represents the percentage of agreement between the two auditors based on the response card options that were selected for each item across all grade levels. Test administrations where only one auditor was present were automatically labeled as a disagreement as there was not a second auditor to which student responses could be compared. Additionally, the decrease in agreement rates for the reading tests was a direct result of test administrations where auditors noted limitations in their ability to see what responses the students were selecting.

Table 7: 2010–2011 Audit—Auditor Agreement across Grade Levels

Content Area	Agreement	Number of Students	Number of Items Evaluated
Reading	91.51%	36	436
Mathematics	97.62%	34	421
Science	90.90%	17	143

Table 8 shows the agreement rates between the assessors and the auditors. More specifically, the agreement rates presented here reflect the proportion of observations where both assessors and auditors gave the same score (correct or incorrect). Disagreements were identified in instances where either one auditor or one assessor recorded a different response.

Table 8: 2010–2011 Audit—Assessor and Auditor Agreement across Grade Levels

Content Area	Agreement	Number of Students	Number of Items Evaluated
Reading	91.67%	36	436
Mathematics	95.88%	34	421
Science	93.14%	17	143

Out of the 88 test administrations observed, there was only one instance of assessors conferring. During this test administration, auditors noted that Assessor 1 asked Assessor 2 what the student selected but realized the error immediately. Assessor 1 continued by restating the item scripts to the student. This single event was not documented as an irregularity because the assessor stopped herself and corrected the potential error by re-presenting the item to the student as indicated in the TAM.

Required Action

No required actions were identified for any of the schools regarding independence of scoring.

Finding 2: Review of Accommodations

Following the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), all items for the *NCEXTENDI* assessments were created to ensure maximum accessibility for all students. However, on a case-by-case basis, accommodations may be made for individual students for both presenting and/or responding if the accommodation is routinely used during instruction and other classroom assessments. A listing of approved accommodations for the *NCEXTENDI* tests of Reading, Mathematics, and Science can be found in the TAM. Data and information regarding the use of testing accommodations was collected for each student observed. In particular, the auditors looked for a direct linkage between the testing accommodations used during the actual test administration and those documented in each student's IEP.

Given the design of the *NCEXTENDI* test administration, certain testing accommodations are required by the *NCEXTENDI* test administration procedures and were observed in all test administrations. These accommodations included separate setting, test administrator reads test aloud in English, extended time, and dictation to scribe. Also embedded in the test design are the

break scripts found on page 2 of the Student Assessment Booklet that allow students to take as many breaks as needed during the test administration in order to maintain engagement and ensure optimal student performance.

Adjustments were made to the collected audit data to exclude those accommodations required by the test administration procedures. Further review of students' IEPs documented the provision of unique, student-specific testing accommodations for 47.1% (32 students) of the observed student population; however, these unique accommodations were observed for only four (4) of the 68 students. These administrations included one student who used multiple testing sessions and three (3) other students who used augmentative communication devices to respond to test items. Table 9 provides a detailed listing of testing accommodations documented in student IEPs and those actually observed during the audit.

Table 9: 2010–2011 Audit—Documented vs. Observed Testing Accommodations

Testing Accommodation	Number (N) Documented	Number (N) Observed
Assistive Technology	7	3
Signing/Cueing	2	0
Adaptations to the NCDPI-provided manipulative cards	3	0
Multiple Testing Sessions	19	1
Mark in Book	1	0

According to the TAM, mark in book is not listed as one of the approved testing accommodations for the *NCEXTENDI* tests. Additionally, given that all student responses to test items are recorded and rated by the assessors, this accommodation, while potentially appropriate for instruction and classroom assessment, is not needed. Review of audit data showed that the most frequently documented accommodation, “multiple testing sessions” was only used in one (1) student’s test administration even though nineteen (19) separate student IEPs documented the provision. This finding suggests the need for more training and information regarding the use of breaks embedded in the test design and the administration procedures outlined on page 2 of each Student Assessment Booklet during the *NCEXTENDI* test administration.

Required Action

No required actions were identified for any of the schools regarding the use of accommodations; however, continued training and information is needed for LEA testing personnel and administrators regarding the effective use and implementation of testing accommodations.

Finding 3: Compliance with *NCEXTENDI* Eligibility Criteria

The *NCEXTENDI* eligibility criteria requires that students have an IEP and have a significant cognitive disability (i.e., exhibit severe and pervasive delays in **ALL** areas of conceptual, linguistic and academic development and also in adaptive behavior areas, such as

communication, daily living skills and self-care). Students participating in the *NCEXTENDI* assessment must also be instructed on the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards* for their assigned grade level. Any instruction of general education content, even at a lower grade level, is *NOT* appropriate for students participating in this assessment. Each student’s IEP was reviewed to 1) determine their area of disability, 2) document evidence of appropriate academic instruction as indicated by IEP goals, and 3) review alternate assessment justification statements.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2001 (IDEA) currently recognizes 13 different areas of disability for students in public education. The students selected to participate in the audit included students across all disability/eligibility areas. Some eligibility areas such as deaf-blindness, serious emotional disability, hearing impairment, and visual impairment were not represented in the *NCEXTENDI* sample because these were not the primary eligibility areas of the selected students. Some students assessed using the *NCEXTENDI* assessment may have secondary areas of eligibility, which may include these disability/eligibility areas. Table 10 provides a listing of the primary areas of disability for the entire student population.

Table 10: 2010–2011 Audit—Sample Student Population by Areas of Disability

Disability Code	Disability Description	Number of Students
AU	Autistic	11
ID-MI	Intellectually Disabled—Mild	12
ID-MO	Intellectually Disabled—Moderate	26
ID-SE	Intellectually Disabled—Severe	7
MU	Multiple Disabilities	10
OHI	Other Health Impairment	3
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury	1

Instruction on the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards*

The *NCEXTENDI* is designed to assess student understanding of reading, mathematics, and science content outlined in the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards* for each assessed grade level. Therefore, each student’s IEP must also reflect at least one academic goal for reading and mathematics. Review of student IEP documentation for the selected student population showed 84.3% of students (59 students) are receiving instruction on the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards* at their assigned grade level. For the remaining 15.7% of students, four students appear to be receiving instruction on the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study* general education curriculum and seven students’ IEPs showed no evidence of any academic instruction and only documented instruction on functional behaviors/skills.

Further review of audit data highlighted a distinct correlation between students being taught general education curriculum material and students identified as autistic. For these four students, both test performance and IEP documentation suggest academic abilities beyond the intent of the

North Carolina *Extended Content Standards*. Information regarding the instruction of general education curriculum in the self-contained classroom and use of additional testing accommodations was shared with the LEA. In addition, information regarding the required instruction of academic content for all students, even students with significantly low cognitive ability, was shared in each school's individual audit report.

Alternate Assessment Justification Statements

The alternate assessment justification statement in the student's IEP requires IEP teams to provide a rationale for why the regular testing program, with accommodations, is not appropriate and why the alternate assessment, with or without accommodations, is appropriate. Therefore, the justification statement for a student identified as Intellectually Disabled—Mild (IMDI) should not be the same as a student who is identified as Intellectually Disabled—Severe (IDSE), as their skills and abilities are extremely different from each other. Review of students' IEPs showed that 94.3% of students' IEPs provided an alternate assessment justification statement, while the remaining 5.7% did not. Most of the students' justification statements noted significant deficits in academic ability and the presence of significantly low cognitive abilities and were written to reflect the learning needs of individual students.

Concerns regarding alternate assessment justification statements were noted at three different schools. Two schools provided identical statements for all students, despite varying levels of ability and different disability classifications. Justification statements at the third school highlighted concerns regarding testing anxiety and the need for students to get the answers correct. Information regarding the individuality and student-specificity needed in the alternate assessment justification statement was shared with the LEAs in their respective LEA reports. Data and findings regarding these statements were also provided to the NCDPI—Exceptional Children Division for review.

Review of Students' Test Records

Each student's test record was reviewed in order to ensure the student was appropriately categorized to be in the *NCEXTEND1* population. Several student test records indicated participation on the general assessment and/or the *NCEXTEND2* modified assessment at previous grade levels. Both of these assessments are intended to assess student understanding of the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study* general education curriculum. Typically, students scores indicated proficiency on the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study* at the end of one year but not proficient the next year, whether the student was administered the general assessment or the *NCEXTEND2*. Special concerns are noted in the audit data when individual students are identified as requiring the *NCEXTEND1* and have demonstrated academic growth or even proficiency on the general education curriculum and corresponding assessments. These concerns were discussed with each LEA to ensure they are monitoring the appropriate use of the assessments with the focus being on administering the assessment that is aligned to the student's instruction and academic ability. Each LEA was reminded that neither the student's educational setting nor the area of disability dictated placement on the *NCEXTEND1* alternate assessment.

Special Concerns Regarding Adherence to *NCEXTENDI* Eligibility Criteria

Further review of IEP documentation, student test records, and student performance highlighted some significant concerns regarding assessment eligibility for four students at two different schools. Review of academic IEP goals for all four students showed evidence of skills much higher than the intent of the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards*. These students' goals more closely mirrored the general North Carolina *Standard Course of Study*. Review of these students' test records also raised concerns.

One 8th grade student was placed on the *NCEXTENDI* assessment even after showing progress on the *NCEXTEND2* at a previous grade level. Another 7th grade student was never assessed on the *NCEXTEND2*; only the general assessment. Additionally, review of these two student's alternate assessment justification statements indicated that these students were participating in the *NCEXTENDI* assessment because of issues regarding self esteem and testing anxiety. Neither statement provided any indication for how their respective cognitive abilities prevented access to the regular testing program even with accommodations. Lastly, both of these students' IEPs noted potential entrance into the Occupational Course of Study program for high school, a diploma-track course of study. As stated in the TAM, students in pursuit of a high school diploma, including students enrolled in the Occupational Course of Study, are not appropriate for the *NCEXTENDI* alternate assessment.

Similar concerns were noted at the another school. Review of IEP documentation showed that one 3rd grade student was placed on the *NCEXTENDI* due to persistent behavioral disruptions in the regular education classroom. Further review of this student's confidential information showed placement in special education services after a history of chronic absences and multiple retentions at previous grade levels. A 5th grade student at this same school also placed on the *NCEXTENDI* following periods of prolonged absences from school due to extensive medical issues and repeated hospitalizations. However, review of this student's test record and IEP goals showed academic skills far beyond the intent of the *NCEXTENDI* and the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards*. For both students, no documented evidence for how their respective cognitive abilities prevented access to the general education curriculum or assessment was noted. Audit data and findings for both of these schools were submitted to the NCDPI Exceptional Children's division for further review.

Required Action

Additional documentation was requested for each school regarding instruction on the North Carolina *Extended Content Standards* where special concerns regarding adherence to the *NCEXTENDI* eligibility criteria were noted. This additional documentation in combination with the audit findings were submitted to the NCDPI—Exceptional Children Division for further review.

Conclusions

After reviewing all information from the audit, the NCDPI recognizes more training and information regarding the *NCEXTENDI*, must be shared with other NCDPI staff, LEA testing personnel, school administrators, and teacher, including eligibility for and administration of these assessments,. To ensure this additional training occurs, the NCDPI proposes to:

- continue auditing administrations of the *NCEXTENDI* assessments annually,
- provide participating LEAs with an official report of the findings as well as sharing general findings with all of the LEAs,
- provide additional training regarding the *NCEXTENDI* TAM,
- provide web-based training modules for off-site training,
- update information on the *NCEXTENDI* NCDPI web page, and
- continue communicating between NCDPI Test Development, Exceptional Children, and General Education staff regarding the *NCEXTENDI*.

Implementation of additional training measures will increase understanding of the processes for *NCEXTENDI* test administration, as well as increase awareness of the importance of making appropriate assessment choices for students that reflect their instruction and academic abilities. To ensure the continued awareness and effective practice of uniform and valid test processes for schools and IEP teams, the NCDPI will share all audit results and findings with the NCDPI Exceptional Children's Division and all other audit participants. This collaboration between the NCDPI Division of Accountability Services, Division of Exceptional Children, and Division of Curriculum and Instruction will continue to be an essential component of future auditing of the *NCEXTENDI* assessment.