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Secondary Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA)

Attachments:
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SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE
GEORGIA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT (GAA)

by

MISTY SALTER

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty
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ABSTRACT

MISTY SALTER
SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE GEORGIA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT (GAA)
Under the direction of Dr. Sybil Keesbury

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine secondary special education teachers’ perceptions of the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) as an assessment measure for high school students with cognitive disabilities. The GAA was created in an effort to ensure accountability of teachers, schools, and states by assessing students with severe cognitive disabilities on grade level content and standards to ensure these students are being provided access to the same general curriculum as their same aged peers. Georgia’s special education teachers assess students using the portfolio approach, as mandated by the state. The participants in this study were six Georgia public high school teachers who have worked with the GAA for a number of years and have administered the GAA to high school students with cognitive disabilities. Consequently, these teachers were able to share their perceptions of the GAA’s ability to effectively measure student progress and growth.

Findings revealed that the secondary special education teachers in this study do not perceive the GAA to be an appropriate assessment for high school students with significant cognitive disabilities. All six of the research participants expressed their
dissatisfaction with the GAA's portrayal of their students' progress and individual growth. The participants unanimously agreed that the GAA was not a recommended approach for assessing their students.

While participants did not have a unified response about a specific assessment tool to replace the GAA, all participants agreed that for an assessment of this population of students to be appropriate, the assessment would need to focus on individual student goals that are more functional in nature. Participants unanimously agreed that assessment for high school students with significant cognitive disabilities should include functional skills, focus on IEP goals, and be individualized for each student.
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