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John H. Hager, assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education, is pleased to share with you an important message about newly released guidance covering alternate assessments for certain students with disabilities.

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Dear Colleague:

Next month, our office will be providing states with a "Tool Kit" of information and resources to help them improve instruction, curricula and assessments for students with disabilities. The Tool Kit will be updated on a dedicated Web site so that as new resources become available, they will be made available to those who need them. One of our goals in providing this information is to help schools, teachers and parents improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

An important guidance document has become available in advance of the release of the Tool Kit, and we wanted to provide this to you as quickly as possible. On August 9th, the Department of Education released new non-regulatory guidance on alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards for the 1 percent of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This guidance is now posted at [www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/saa.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/saa.html).

The regulation on alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities was first released on December 9, 2003 (and may be found at [www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2003-4/120903a.html](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2003-4/120903a.html)).

This guidance will be among the materials provided in the Tool Kit we will be disseminating to each state and territory in September. The Department is pleased to make this guidance available and we anticipate that it will be extremely useful as States develop, improve and implement assessments based on alternate achievement standards.

In addition, this spring the Secretary announced that the Department will issue a new regulation that will permit States to develop modified achievement standards. The Department will publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking later this year for comment and will issue a final rule as soon as possible. When the regulation on modified achievement standards is final, the Department will develop a separate guidance document to guide its implementation.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to direct them to us at

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