



# Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines

## Decision Making Tools for IEP Teams

Revised Aug. 27, 2018 to include updated information on page 4 table

## Introduction

This document is provided to assist individualized education program (IEP) teams in making decisions regarding participation in the Alternate Assessment on Alternate Achievement Standards (alternate assessment) for an individual student.

The IEP team, which includes parents as equal partners, is responsible for determining if a student with a disability should participate in the general assessment with accommodations or in the alternate assessment. To document that a student is eligible and an alternate assessment is the most appropriate assessment option, the IEP team should review all important information about the student over multiple school years and multiple instructional settings (e.g., school, home, community) and determine that the student has met all eligibility requirements.

The alternate assessment is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in a school curriculum that includes substantially modified academic instruction. The content, learning objectives, and expected outcomes for the academic instruction are aligned to standards but are modified due to the impact of the significant cognitive disability. The student is an active learner and participates in instruction linked to grade-level standards and addresses knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student. IEP goals and short-term objectives are designed to teach the skills required for the student to increase access, participation, and independence in all environments, including grade-level instruction. Access to standards-based instruction should be provided to all students, regardless of the least restrictive environment (LRE) determined by the IEP team.

## Eligibility

The alternate assessment is administered to students who meet the criteria listed below and who are the ages commensurate with typical students in the grades that are tested in the general assessment programs.

To participate in an Alternate assessment, a student must demonstrate a **significant** cognitive disability which results in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications. The student must also possess current adaptive skills requiring extensive direct instruction and practice in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of skills necessary for application in school, work, home, and community environments. The IEP team must rule out that the inability to achieve the state grade-level

achievement expectations is not the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, or economic differences.

A student with a significant cognitive disability requires substantial modifications, adaptations, or supports to meaningfully access the subject area content and requires intensive individualized instruction in order to acquire and generalize knowledge. The student's instruction should be based on the Alternate Assessment Standards, which provide access to the general education curriculum.

Students who meet the eligibility criteria for alternate assessment may be classified in any of the disability categories listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as long as there is documentation that the student has a significant cognitive disability or severe intellectual disability and significant adaptive skills deficits.

The IEP team must make an annual decision regarding how students will participate in state and district-wide testing. If an IEP team uses the decision making tools in this guide and posted on the department's alternate assessment web page ([here](#)), it is recommended that a copy be maintained with the notes from the meeting as documentation required by IDEA Section 614 (d)(1)(A)(VI)(bb) to provide for state monitoring of student files (34 C.F.R. §§ 300.149 and 300.600 through 604.)

The decision for participation in the alternate assessments should be based on a holistic analysis. Possible sources of data the IEP team may consider reviewing include: psychological evaluation reports, results of individual cognitive ability tests, adaptive behavior skills data, results of individual or group-administered achievement assessments, district-wide alternate assessments, individual reading assessments, findings of communication or language proficiency assessments, teacher-collected data from classroom observations, progress monitoring data, and IEPs.

Instructional material and additional guidance documents are posted on the department's alternate assessment web page ([here](#)).

## Implications for Alternate Assessment Participation

**The IEP team should be aware that participation in the alternate assessment means that the student is participating in a curriculum that does not lead to a high school diploma.** The achievement expectations for the alternate assessment are not the same as the expectations for the general assessment. Parents must be informed during the IEP team meeting to discuss assessment participation that participation in the alternate assessment does not align to the state's general high school diploma criteria. Students must earn units in the core content as a requirement for a high

school diploma, and participation in the alternate assessment precludes a student from doing so. IEP teams should also be aware that if a student **without** a significant cognitive disability participates in the alternate assessment, the results will not reflect what the student knows and can do. The assessment results may not be valid, and the student may be considered as not participating in assessment for state and federal accountability purposes.

## Description of Alternate Assessment in Tennessee

### *Tennessee's Alternate Assessment on Alternate Achievement Standards*

Students who participate in the alternate assessment system will do so according to the grade enrollment of the student.

Grade	None	MSAA ELA/Math	TCAP/Alternate Science**	TCAP/Alternate Social Studies
K, 1	X			
2		2nd Grade Alternate		
3-4		X		
5-8		X	X	X (Grades 6-8 Only)
9	X			
10			X	
11		X		
12	X*			

\*Unless student has not previously completed the ELA, math, science alternate assessment

\*\*Field Test Spring 2019

## ***The Multi-State Alternate Assessment***

The Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) consists of 11 state or territory partners. All MSAA partners are actively involved in continuing the development and enhancements of the MSAA Comprehensive System, including evidence-based instructional practices, professional development modules to support educators, and a summative alternate assessment with built-in supports for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

### ***Assessment Design***

The MSAA is an assessment of English language arts (i.e., reading and writing) and mathematics in grades 3–8 and 11. It is an on-demand assessment of approximately 30 test items that assess approximately 10 prioritized content targets per grade level. These content targets were identified for each grade based on learning progressions and alignment to the grade-level state standards. The assessment includes multiple choice items and constructed response items. Each content target is assessed by items that have been carefully and intentionally designed to assess a range of ability and performance. Instructional resources for MSAA can be accessed online ([here](#)).

### ***Assessment Administration***

The assessment is delivered via computer, with allowances for flexibility in administration (e.g., a student may respond to administrator-presented item stimuli rather than to the item stimuli on the computer). A trained testing administrator familiar to the student (e.g., the student's teacher) facilitates the administration, presenting items via paper or manipulatives as appropriate for the student. Items are administered to the student over the course of one or more testing sessions as needed for a student to complete a content area assessment. Testing sessions are scheduled within a testing window of approximately six weeks.

The assessment uses an adaptive approach, meaning that each student receives items that have been determined to be an appropriate level of challenge. Embedded locator tests and classroom data help determine the items a student encounters. The administration script provides flexibility in the ways in which a student may interact with items, so that what is being measured is not changed.

## ***Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Alternate Assessments for Science and Social Studies***

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Alternate assessments (TCAP-Alt) for science and social studies are aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards for instruction through the Alternate Assessment Targets and Underlying Concepts. The Alternate Assessment Targets were developed by a group of Tennessee educators to guide development of assessment items aligned to standards and accessible to students on the alternate assessment. The process mirrored the process and principles used in developing the common core connectors (CCCs) for the MSAA. Alternate Assessment Targets

break down state standards into smaller, more manageable skills and concepts for students. The Underlying Concepts were developed from the Alternate Assessment Targets for students who are most significantly impacted and/or just beginning to emerge in understanding or communication. The TCAP-Alt is designed to allow many of the supports, accommodations, and modifications. Additional information, including instructional support, can be accessed on the department's alternate assessment web page ([here](#)).

### ***Assessment Design***

The TCAP-Alt summative assessment in social studies and science is required for students who qualify for the alternate assessment in grades 3–8, and biology is required for students in grade 10. The assessment is in a paper and pencil format with the teacher reading the items to the students and indicating the students' answer choice on a scannable form. The questions will have two to three possible answer choices. The assessment has built-in supports to ensure students can respond as independently as possible. The test must be administered by a Tennessee certified and licensed educator employed by the district.

### ***Assessment Administration***

The test may be administered over a two-month window determined by the department. Each content assessment assigned to the grade level will include 20–30 multiple choice questions.

The test may be stopped and started as often as is appropriate and may be administered over multiple days. The test administrator will determine the length of each session based on individual student need.

### ***Optional Second Grade Assessment***

The optional second grade assessment was designed using a similar process as MSAA and TCAP-Alt:

- developing Alternate Assessment Targets from the grade-level standards,
- developing underlying concepts from the Alternate Assessment Targets, and
- developing item families consisting of four tiers of levels from the Alternate Assessment Targets and Underlying Concepts.

### ***Assessment Administration***

This will be a paper and pencil test delivered in three pieces: test items book, student response cards, and answer sheet to record answers.

- ELA and math only
- 30–40 multiple choice questions for each content area
- Answer cards are on perforated paper
- The teacher will complete the answer sheet, the front will be pre-filled demographics, the back will be answer bubbles

- Assessment can be delivered over multiple days and multiple times as needed for the student

If the district chooses to administer the second grade assessment, students who have been determined eligible for the alternate assessment *must* be assessed as well.

### ***Alternate ACCESS for ELs***

The Alternate Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Learners (Alternate ACCESS for ELs) is an assessment of English language proficiency for students in grades 1–12 who are classified as ELs and have significant cognitive disabilities that prevent their meaningful participation in the ACCESS for ELs assessment.

The ACCESS for ELs is a large-scale test of English language proficiency based on the WIDA English Language Development standards. The ACCESS for ELs is designed to assess all ELs in grades K–12. The ACCESS for ELs is designed to assess students' English language proficiency in five areas: social and instructional language, language of ELA, language of mathematics, language of science and language of social studies. The test is divided into four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing). The IEP team should consider whether the student can take this assessment with accommodations or the Alternate ACCESS for ELs.

The Alternate ACCESS for ELLs consists of items that are less complex than the ACCESS for ELs assessment. The Alternate ACCESS for ELs assesses four English language proficiency areas: social and instructional language, language of ELA, language of mathematics, and language of science. Like the ACCESS for ELs, the Alternate ACCESS for ELs is divided into four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

The Alternate ACCESS for LLs is based on alternate model performance indicators. The model performance indicators provide the expectations for what the student should be able to do and produce at the English language proficiency level. Therefore, the expectations of performance on the Alternate ACCESS for ELs are different from the ACCESS for ELs.

All kindergarten EL students, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, should be assessed using the kindergarten ACCESS for ELLs. A person with expertise in second language acquisition should be involved in the IEP decision-making process for students with disabilities who are ELs.

# Determination of Eligibility for Alternate Assessment Participation

## Review of Eligibility for alternate assessment Participation Checklist

The student must meet all eligibility criteria descriptors in order to meet the criteria for alternate assessment.

<b>Name of Student:</b>			
<b>Date of Birth:</b>			
<b>Area of Disability:</b>			
<b>Grade on September 1:</b>		<b>Date of Review:</b>	

### What assessment did the student participate in last year?

- General Assessment
- alternate assessment
- New to state (assessment in previous state) Specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A (Student is entering school for the first time)

Eligibility Criteria	Eligibility Criteria Descriptors	Sources of Evidence
<p>The student demonstrates a significant cognitive disability and adaptive skills that result in performance that is substantially below grade- level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>Yes</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>No</b></p>	<p>The student has significant limitations in intellectual functioning as evidenced by cognitive ability test scores AND</p> <p>The student has significant deficits in adaptive behavior as evidenced by adaptive behavior scale scores. AND</p> <p>The student has academic skills that are on the emerging, readiness (prerequisite), foundational level and/or functional (real life) application of the general curriculum.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of Individual Cognitive Ability Test</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of individual and group administered achievement tests</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of informal assessments</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of individual reading assessments</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of district-wide alternate assessments</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Results of language assessments including English language learners (EL) language assessments, if applicable</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Review of exclusionary factors</li> </ul>
<p>The student accesses the state approved academic standards at</p>	<p>The student's curriculum is based on extended academic standards in ELA,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Examples of curricula, instructional objectives, and materials including work samples</li> </ul>

Eligibility Criteria	Eligibility Criteria Descriptors	Sources of Evidence
<p>less complex levels and with extensively modified instruction.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>Yes</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>No</b></p>	<p>mathematics, science, and social studies.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The student’s IEP has short-term objectives that focus on the extended content standards and/or pre-requisite skills. Short term objectives are required for IEPs of students who participate in the TCAP-Alt.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Curriculum activities differ significantly from those of students who participate in the general education curriculum with accommodations. (e.g., different objectives, materials, and learning activities).</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The content, learning objectives, and expected outcomes for the student are extended to focus on the emerging, readiness (prerequisite), foundational and/or functional (real life) application of the general curriculum.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Present levels of academic and functional performance, goals and objectives from the IEP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Progress data from scientific research-based interventions</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Progress monitoring data</p>
<p>The student has current adaptive skills requiring extensive direct instruction and practice in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of skills necessary for application in school, work, home, and community environments.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>Yes</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> <b>No</b></p>	<p>The student requires explicit and ongoing instruction in functional and daily living skills.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The student has substantial deficits in adaptive behavior, such that the student has difficulty demonstrating independence in everyday living skills, including interpersonal and social interactions across multiple settings.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Results of Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Teacher-collected data and checklists</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Present levels of academic and functional performance, goals, and objectives, and post-school outcomes from the IEP and the Transition Plan for students age 12 and older</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Examples of curricula, instructional objectives, and materials including work samples from both school and community based instruction</p>

- If the response is **no** for any of the eligibility criteria or considerations, the IEP team should consider the student for participation in the general state assessment with appropriate accommodations, if necessary.
- If the response is **yes** to all criteria and considerations, the IEP team should consider the student for participation in the alternate assessment.

Additional Considerations	Check each statement if agree
The decision for this student to participate in the alternate assessment is <b>NOT</b> based on a specific categorical label or educational placement.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student's inability to achieve state grade-level achievement expectations is <b>NOT</b> the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, or economic differences.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The decision for this student to participate in the Alternate assessment is <b>NOT</b> due to the fact that the student has English as a second language.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The decision for this student to participate in the Alternate assessment is an IEP team decision and is <b>NOT</b> being made for administrative purposes and/or in anticipation of impact on school or district accountability results.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The decision for this student to participate in the alternate assessment is <b>NOT</b> based solely on the fact that the student's instructional reading level is below the grade level of the general assessment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The decision for this student to participate in the alternate assessment is <b>NOT</b> based on the fact that the student is expected to perform poorly on the general assessment.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that participation in alternate assessment means that my child is participating in a curriculum that will **NOT** lead to a high school diploma.

Parent(s)/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

# Department Contact Information

## **For information about the administration of Tennessee alternate assessment:**

Megan Sellers, Project Manager for Assessment Design

(615) 906-1548

[Megan.Sellers@tn.gov](mailto:Megan.Sellers@tn.gov)

## **For assistance with instruction for students who participate in the alternate assessment:**

Alison Gauld, Behavior and Low Incidence Disabilities Coordinator

(615) 770-6814

[Alison.Gauld@tn.gov](mailto:Alison.Gauld@tn.gov)

## **For assistance with eligibility criteria for students who participate in the alternate assessment:**

Joanna Bivins, Director of School Psychology Services

(615) 741-9231

[Joanna.Bivins@tn.gov](mailto:Joanna.Bivins@tn.gov)