

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team Decision Making Guidelines Regarding Student Participation in Statewide Assessments

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team makes many important decisions regarding the program and services available for students eligible for special education and related services. One of those important decisions involves a determination of how a student will participate in (1) the general student assessment system in grades 3-8 plus once in high school, with or without allowable accommodations, or (2) if the student will participate in the Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS). *Essential to an appropriate decision by the IEP team regarding a student's participation at any level of the statewide assessment system is a fundamental belief in the integrity of the overall IEP process.*

IEP teams should begin this decision-making process with the proposition that all students, including all students eligible for special education, can learn grade level content and should participate in the general assessment system to the maximum extent possible. However, there are times in which the IEP team can decide that the alternate assessment is necessary and appropriate for a relatively small segment (approximately 1%) of the *total tested population*, or roughly 10% of the total number of special education eligible students being tested.

For example, if the total tested population in a school district is 4,000, then 40 students would represent 1% of the total tested population. Similarly, if 400 students eligible for special education were tested in the same school district, then 40 would represent 10% of the students eligible for special education that were tested.

General Criteria

The decision about how an eligible student participates in the statewide assessment is an IEP team decision, and *not an administrative decision*. The IEP team should use the following criteria for determining the extent to which a student can participate in the general assessment, with or without accommodations, or if the student should participate in the alternate assessment system (WAC 392-172A-03090 through 03110).

- 1) The student must be eligible for special education and must have an individualized education program (IEP) in effect at the time of the decision.
- 2) IEP team decisions regarding a student's participation in the statewide assessment must be based on both current and historical evaluation and instructional data relevant to the student.
- 3) IEP team decisions should be based on the student's present levels of educational performance, need for specially designed instruction, annual goals, learner characteristics and access to the general education curriculum.
- 4) IEP Team decisions regarding a student's participation in statewide assessments must be made at a scheduled IEP team meeting that precedes administration of the statewide assessment.

Alternate Assessment

The alternate assessment is a statewide testing option in lieu of the regular assessment. It is an option only for students with significant cognitive challenges. The term “significantly cognitively challenged” does not represent a new or separate category of disability. It is a designation applied to a small number of students (generally 10% or less) eligible for special education and related services participating in the statewide testing program.

For purposes students who are significantly cognitively challenged means those students who require intensive or extensive levels of direct support that is not of a temporary or transient nature. Students with significant cognitive challenges also require specially designed instruction to acquire, maintain or generalize skills in multiple settings in order to successfully transfer skills to natural settings including the home, school, workplace, and community. In addition, these students score at least two (2) standard deviations below the mean on standardized, norm-referenced assessments for adaptive behavior and intellectual functioning.

For a student to be considered as having a significant cognitive challenge and therefore, appropriate for consideration as a candidate for the alternate assessment, **ALL** of the following statements should be carefully considered by the student’s IEP team:

- The student’s demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in school, work, home and community environments are significantly below chronological age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations and accommodations.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction and/or extensive supports in multiple settings to acquire, maintain and generalize academic and functional skills necessary for application in school, work, home and community environments.
- The student demonstrates complex cognitive disabilities and poor adaptive skill levels determined to be significantly (at least two standard deviations) below chronological age expectations by the student’s most recent individualized eligibility determination which prevents the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the appropriate grade level expectations.

The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum at grade level is **not** primarily the result of: (a) poor attendance, excessive or extended absences, (b) lack of access to quality instruction, (c) social, cultural, linguistic, or economic differences, (d) below average reading or achievement levels, (e) expectations of poor performance, (f) the anticipated impact of the student’s performance on the school/district performance scores, and (g) the student’s disability category, educational placement, type of instruction, and/or amount of time receiving special education services.

When an IEP team determines that the student should take an alternate assessment, the team must document why the student cannot participate in the regular assessment, and why the alternate assessment is appropriate for the student. Please note that an IEP team could document and justify that the alternate assessment could be an appropriate statewide assessment for an individual not necessarily meeting all of parameters of the state definition of significantly cognitively challenged on a case by case basis.

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT: GUIDANCE TO IEP TEAMS

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 and 2004, as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), require that all students with disabilities, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, participate in state and district assessment programs.

The IEP committee may decide that a student's knowledge and skills can best be assessed with the alternate assessment if the student meets **all** of the following participation criteria:

CRITERIA

DESCRIPTORS

The student has an IEP in effect at the time of the assessment participation decision. Review of student records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.

The student must have a documented cognitive disability that affects intellectual potential. For the purposes of state assessment the term "significantly cognitively challenged" is a designation used to refer to the population eligible to participate in the alternate assessment; it is not a new or separate category of disability.

The student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measureable gains in the grade and age-appropriate curriculum.

(a)The student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature.
(b)The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings, including school, workplace, community and home.

The student demonstrates complex cognitive disabilities and poor adaptive skill levels determined to be significantly (at least two standard deviations) below chronological age expectations by the student's most recent individualized eligibility determination.

The student scores **at least** two (2) standard deviations below the mean on standardized, norm-referenced assessments for adaptive behavior and intellectual functioning.

The determination for how a student participates in accountability and graduation assessments is **NOT** based on: (a) poor attendance, excessive or extended absences, (b) lack of access to quality instruction, (c) social, cultural, linguistic, or economic differences, (d) below average reading or achievement levels, (e) expectations of poor performance, (f) the anticipated impact of the student's performance on the school/district performance scores, and (g) the student's disability category, educational placement, type of instruction, and/or amount of time receiving special education services.