

Alternate Assessments

for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with the most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD), or alternate assessment, is the federally required state assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The alternate assessment is based on Ohio's Learning Standards—Extended (OLS-E). It allows a very small population of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on an appropriate assessment.



What Families Should Know About Alternate Assessments

Deciding whether a child should take the alternate assessment can be challenging. Some families worry their children may feel stress taking regular state tests. At the same time, families also worry others will not expect as much from children who take the alternate assessment. This document offers information to help families better understand the alternate assessment and how to make this decision with the IEP team.

How the IEP Team Decides a Child Qualifies for the Alternate Assessment

A student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team uses a wide range of sources to determine alternate assessment eligibility. These may include:

- Work samples;
- Results from formative assessments;
- Universal screeners and diagnostic assessments;
- Data from evidence-based interventions;
- Support needs assessments;
- Assistive technology assessment;
- The learner profile;
- Daily services and supports provided by an aide or paraprofessional; or
- Daily instructional supports provided by intervention specialists.

A student's IQ test score or specific disability alone cannot determine if the student has a significant cognitive disability. Significant cognitive disability is based on understanding the whole child. The alternate assessment is for a small portion of students whose disabilities profoundly impact both their intellectual abilities and most daily living skills.

Testing All Students

State and federal laws require that all students participate in state and district tests. These laws apply to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities too. Students take either the general tests or alternate assessments. When all students participate in testing, it provides important information to the state and schools about how students are learning.

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Regular Assessment or Alternate Assessment

Most students with IEPs and significant cognitive disabilities take the regular state assessments. Some of those students may take the regular assessments [with accommodations](#). A student who is blind using an electronic braille writer to complete an assessment is an example of an accommodation. Another example is a student with limited dexterity having more time to type responses. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who cannot take the regular state assessments, even with accommodations, should take the AASCD.

The population of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who will need to take the alternate assessment is very small. In addition to learning functional life skills, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities must have access to the general curriculum. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities receive this content through instruction based on Ohio's Learning Standards Extended.

Characteristics of Students who are Eligible for the Alternate Assessment

A student who qualifies for the alternate assessment most likely:

- May be in the process of developing a functional and consistent mode of communication for example, currently nonverbal or uses very limited non-symbolic communication;
- May be inconsistent when expressing their wants and needs. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate for understanding;
- Requires significantly modified curriculum and instruction using OLS-E and usually does not appear to apply or generalize skills outside the classroom setting;
- Requires layers of supports (accommodations, scaffolding and assistive technologies) to follow directions and daily routine activities; or
- Requires intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational and navigation skills, not because of physical ability but because of significant cognitive needs.

More Information

To support families and IEP teams, the Ohio Department of Education has developed the Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool. The tool was created with partners like parents, teachers and administrators. The tool is required to be used by the IEP team, including the parents, to determine if a student is qualified to take the alternate assessment.

Learn more about the alternate assessment and find the tool on the [Department's website](#).