

Iowa's Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines and Considerations

The criteria for participation in Iowa's Alternate Assessments reflects the needs of a student with the most significant disability. IEP teams must select the alternate assessment as the only option for all subject content areas assessed. Students, whose IEP teams determine participation in Iowa's Alternate Assessments, will be assessed using the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM, starting in 3rd grade), the Early Literacy Alternate Assessment (EL AA, starting Kindergarten), the Early Math Alternate Screener (EMAS) and the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment (Alt ELPA21) based on assessment requirements.

The following are not allowable (or acceptable) considerations for determining participation in Iowa's Alternate Assessments.

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic and other services student receives
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education
8. English Learner (EL) status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated student's disruptive behavior
11. Impact of student scores on accountability system
12. Administrator decision
13. Anticipated emotional duress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/AAC) to participate in the assessment processes

The student is eligible to participate in Iowa's Alternate Assessments if all responses below are marked Yes.

Participation Criterion	Participation Criterion Descriptors	Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No) Provide Documentation for each
1. The student has a significant cognitive disability.	<p>Review of student records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.</p> <p><i>*Adaptive behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.</i></p>	Yes / No

Participation Criterion	Participation Criterion Descriptors	Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No) Provide Documentation for each
2. Instruction alignment. For students who are not currently on alternate assessment: The student receives instruction on the Iowa Academic Standards with modified expectations. For students currently on alternate assessment: The student receives instruction on the Iowa Academic Essential Elements and continues to require significant program modifications.	For students who are not currently on Alternate Assessment: Goals and specially designed instruction listed in the IEP for this student are linked to the Iowa Academic Standards but address knowledge and skills that have been significantly modified. Goals and specially designed instruction listed in the IEP for this student are linked to the enrolled grade level Iowa Academic Essential Elements and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.	Yes / No
3. The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-and-age- appropriate curriculum.	The student a. requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and b. uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings.	Yes / No

IEP team conversations around the documented considerations will be used to guide the team in determining Alternate Assessment participation. Teams should use the below considerations when discussing the criterion within Iowa's Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines. Each of the considerations align to the criterion.

Participation Criterion #1 - Considerations 1 and 4

Participation Criterion #2 - Considerations 1, 2 and 3

Participation Criterion #3 - Considerations 1, 2 and 3

If the IEP team is unsure whether the alternate assessment is appropriate for a learner, the recommendation is to continue with Iowa Academic Standards and standard assessment(s) until more data makes it clear that it is required for a FAPE. While participation in statewide assessments must be reviewed at least annually, the IEP team may revisit the need for Iowa Essential Elements and alternate assessment(s) at any time.

Additional Participation Considerations:

- Progress Towards Iowa Academic Standards.** Are there data to show that the student is not responding to instruction? (This might include classroom performance/progress data, literacy and mathematics screening data, federally mandated assessments, IEP progress monitoring data, a team review of documented allowable accommodations used, and any other additional information to make an individualized determination.)
- Accommodations.** Have considerable, highly individualized accommodations been provided and documented for access to core instruction? Does the student consistently use the accommodations in instruction and assessments? Is there documentation that the student has been successfully taught how to use these accommodations? Has the IEP team considered an increase in SDI time?

3. **Modifications to Curriculum and Content.** Has the IEP team considered if the student requires modifications to have access to content? Have considerable, highly individualized modifications been provided and documented for access to core instruction? Does the student consistently use the modifications in instruction and assessments? Is there documentation that the student has been successful (making progress) with the use of these modifications?
4. **Adaptive Behavior.** What are the documented adaptive behavior needs and concerns? What are the documented communication needs and concerns? How do they impact access to and progress towards the general education curriculum? Use of assistive technologies needed for the student to actively engage and participate meaningfully and productively in daily activities in school, home, community, and work environments have been **identified and implemented**.
- a. Conceptual
 - b. Social
 - c. Practical

Implications for Participation

Participation in the Alternate Assessment constitutes completion of a modified curriculum that may impact current and future course planning, activities, and other areas of participation. Because this decision does have a life-long impact on the student, teams should carefully consider all available data and make participation decisions based on individual student needs.

Early Childhood

- a. PK-K Transition: When thinking about which data to consider in discussions during the transition meeting, it is recommended the team consider GOLD, any screening or additional assessment information the district may have (ex. IGDIs or ASQ), Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) and IEP goal progress monitoring data. The decision to place a student on alternate assessment is high stakes, therefore, if the data do not clearly support one conclusion over another, it is recommended to wait to place a student on alternate assessment until the need is clearly supported by data. Access to the general education curriculum and standards should always be the starting point before moving to more restrictive placements (including the alternate assessment).
- b. Early Elementary: For students in the early elementary grades, the IEP team must consider how the student could have access to the district's universal screeners. Should the student take a different universal screener due to their disability that is not the alternate assessment (a student that is Deaf Hard of Hearing completes Avenue PM)? Does the student show deficiencies in adaptive behavior? Is the student making progress on IEP goals aligned to general education standards? If the information/data is not clear, the standard assessment should be the default assessment.

Secondary Transition Planning

- a. A student participating in Alternate Assessments may graduate with a regular high school diploma as allowed by the district's board policy. Districts may choose to establish policies and procedures that permit students participating in Alternate Assessments to complete state graduation requirements in unique, individualized manners. Review the [Department's guidance regarding special education graduation](#).
- b. Participating in a modified curriculum may have impacts on the student's ability to meet the admission requirements for particular institutions of higher education or particular degree pathways. The IEP team should consider consultation with the district's school counselor to learn more about any potential admission requirements and pathway options related to the student's postsecondary education goals in order to develop a program that appropriately and reasonably addresses their goals.

- c. Although the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education currently require the Secondary Transition planning begin no later than the student's 14th birthday, the IEP team also has the authority to determine that it is necessary to begin this process sooner. The team may consider doing so when the identified skill deficits can be reasonably anticipated to require on-going, intensive, and individualized instruction in order to address their unique needs and enable the student to reasonably achieve their postsecondary expectations. Throughout this process, the team must ensure the use of individualized and reliable transition assessment practices in order to ensure appropriate identification of needs, planning, and services. Data-driven decision making must always be used to inform participation in courses and activities that support post-school plans.

Glossary

Accommodation: Changes made to how a student accesses or demonstrates understanding of learning content, communication, environments, materials or assessments. Testing accommodations are adjustments to the testing conditions, test format or test administration that provide equitable access during assessments for students with disabilities and students who are English learners. Testing accommodations cannot change what is being measured.

Adaptive skills: Practical, everyday skills needed to function and meet the demands of one's environment, including the skills necessary to effectively and independently take care of oneself and interact with other people (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017).

- a. Conceptual: The Conceptual Domain covers skills that are needed to communicate, apply academic skills, and manage and accomplish tasks.
- b. Social: The Social Domain covers behaviors needed to engage in interpersonal interactions, act with social responsibility and use leisure time. This includes social competence, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (wariness), social problem-solving, following rules/obeying laws and avoiding being victimized.
- c. Practical: The Practical Domain covers behaviors needed to address personal and health needs; take care of home, classroom, or work settings; and function in a school or community setting.

Assistive technology: An assistive technology device is any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of that device (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

English Learner (EL): English learners are students whose primary or home language is other than English who need language assistance to effectively participate in school instructional programs.

Educational Evaluation Report (EER): The Educational Evaluation Report is the summary of testing for the initial evaluation and/or reevaluation. The Educational Evaluation Report drives the services in a student's IEP.

Modification: Changes what a student is taught or expected to learn. Modifications to grade-level learning change the expectation to learn the full breadth and/or depth of content. Modifications during testing are changes in the standards being measured on the test or in the conditions in which a student takes the test that result in changes in what the assessment is designed to measure by reducing or changing the expectations for the student. Modifications are not permitted during state testing. The alternate assessment is a different assessment, both in content and expectation.

Significant cognitive disability: Significant cognitive disability is not a disability category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Iowa does not identify students for special education by disability category.

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI): Specially Designed Instruction is "...adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction (i) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children" (34 CFR Sec. 300.39(b)(3)).

Universal tools: Features or preferences that are either built into the assessment system or provided externally by test administrators that can be used by all students.