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Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This guide provides information on Iowa's AYP Alternate Assessments. A question-and-answer format is used to summarize information. Contact Jennifer Denne, Alternate Assessment Consultant at jennifer.denne@iowa.gov or 515-326-5332 for additional information regarding Iowa's Alternate Assessment.

Background

Question	Answer
What is an Alternate Assessment?	An alternate assessment is an academic assessment aligned to the Iowa Academic Essential Elements designed for a small number of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular grade level Iowa Assessments even with appropriate accommodations.
What is the purpose of the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment?	<p>The purpose of the DLM Alternate Assessment is to assess the educational performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● English Language Arts ● Mathematics ● Science <p>The alternate assessment ensures students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.</p>
Why does Iowa test use the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment?	<i>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)</i> requires that all students, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, have access to the general education curriculum. For accountability purposes, all students in grades 3-11 must be assessed on performance against grade level state content standards. The <i>Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)</i> also requires students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and participate in the statewide assessment system. Alternate assessment allows students who cannot participate in the general assessment, to be assessed more equitably given their current performance.
What is ESSA?	ESSA stands for Every Student Succeeds Act and is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and is the successor to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.
What is IDEA?	The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is federal government legislation that requires students with disabilities to participate in the statewide assessments.

Question	Answer
Who should participate in the DLM Alternate Assessment?	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team, which includes parents, uses state participation guidelines (found on the Department Iowa's Alternate Assessments Website and programmed into the IEP) to determine eligibility for alternate assessment base on State of Iowa's Participation Guidelines . Students in grades 3-11 participate in the DLM English Language Arts and Mathematics. Students in grades 5, 8, and 10 participate in the DLM Science Alternate Assessment.
How should students in off AYP years (Grades K, 1, 2, or 12) be assessed?	Students in these grades need to be assessed if the district gives a reading, mathematics, and/or science to all students. Assessment in these grades count for Chapter 72 reporting. Results of these assessments do not need to be sent to the Iowa Department of Education for purposes of accountability.
What is the outcome of participating in the DLM Alternate Assessments?	The outcome of participating in alternate assessment, beyond access to and participation in the Iowa Academic Standards, is that some students who historically have received a parallel or a different "functional" curriculum now have their school day devoted to instruction aligned to grade level content that all students in their school receive. All students with disabilities in Iowa graduate with a regular diploma, and alternate assessment participation will not impact the type of diploma your child will receive when your child completes the course of study outlined in their IEP.
How does instruction change for students as a result of participating in the DLM Alternate Assessment?	Students participating in the alternate assessment receive instruction on grade level Iowa Academic Standards Essential Elements. IEP teams review participation annually, and it is expected that as students become more proficient on more skills, that students would be considered for exit from the alternate assessment into the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress and the Iowa Academic Standards. Students must participate in the alternate assessment because participation ensures that the general curriculum is taught to students with significant intellectual disabilities.
Is it possible to learn both academic and functional skills at the same time?	Currently many children with the most significant cognitive disabilities have IEP goals that focus on learning life skills. NCLB and IDEA recognize that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can learn both functional and academic skills at the same time. That is, we should not wait to teach a child to read until they have mastered functional skills. Many students with significant cognitive disabilities thrive by learning academic content while they are learning life skills, just as their typical peers do. Teachers can and should address access to life goals during academic instruction.

Question	Answer
<p>When are the DLM Alternate Assessments administered?</p>	<p>The DLM ELA and Math alternate assessments are instructionally embedded assessments and occur from the start to the end of the school year.</p> <p>The DLM Science alternate assessment is a year-end assessment.</p> <p>Refer to Iowa's Alternate Assessments webpage for specific start and end dates.</p>
<p>ESSA</p>	<p>The IEP team decides a student's participation. ESSA limits the percent of students able to take the alternate assessment at 1% statewide. It also requires an LEA to submit to the state a justification for the LEA exceeding 1% participation in the alternate assessment (in all grades combined).</p>
<p>What content areas and grades does the DLM Alternate Assessment assess?</p>	<p>English Language Arts is assessed at grades 3-11.</p> <p>Math is assessed at grades 3-11.</p> <p>Science is assessed at grades 5, 8, and 10.</p>
<p>Why is the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards?</p>	<p>Alternate Assessments are meant to assess the grade-level content with <i>less depth, breadth, and complexity</i> than the standard assessment, and with a <i>different</i> definition of how well and how much students know and do in the content to be considered proficient. The achievement of students who participate in alternate assessment on grade-level content is very different from their general education classroom peers. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are able to learn academic content with reduced complexity, breadth, and depth clearly linked to the same grade-level content as their peers.</p>
<p>Can a student participate in the DLM Alternate Assessment in one content area and participate in the general assessment in another content area?</p>	<p>No. IEP teams must select the alternate assessment as the only option for all subject content areas assessed. Students who participate in the DLM Alternate Assessment will not participate in Iowa's standard assessment.</p>
<p>Can the IEP be used as the alternate assessment?</p>	<p>ESSA Regulatory Guidance to states is quite clear, the IEP cannot be used as an alternate assessment.</p>
<p>Is parental permission required for students with disabilities to participate in the DLM Alternate Assessment?</p>	<p>Not directly. Parents are members of the IEP team and will be involved in IEP team decisions on how an individual student will participate in accountability assessment programs.</p>

Question	Answer
Can parents refuse to have their child included in the alternate assessment?	No. All students must be assessed under federal regulations. Students with IEPs are assessed through either standard or alternate assessments as determined by the IEP team.
What does grade mean?	It means the grade the student is currently enrolled in.
We do not use grades but group students according to their ages. What do we use for the student's grade?	You must identify a grade for each student based on the ages of non-disabled students in particular grades.
Should we assess a student who comes to school only 2-3 hours per day?	Yes. Each student should have access to the Iowa Academic Standards on a daily basis. If your student attends only 2-3 hours per day contact Jennifer Denne , IDE prior to assessment administration to determine assessment requirements.
Should an alternate assessment be given to a student who spends all day in a hospital?	Yes. If appropriate, this student should be receiving hospital/homebound instruction. In this case, it would be appropriate for this student to take the alternate assessment. Contact Jennifer Denne , IDE prior to assessment administration to determine assessment requirements.

Alternate Assessment Process and Administrative Support

Question	Answer
How do you document student participation in the Individual Education Program (IEP)?	<p>The Services + page in the IEP allows for a complete description of how the student is being assessed. This will assist parents to understand how their child will participate in district-wide assessments. IEP teams must use the Criteria for IEP Teams in Determining Student Eligibility for the Iowa Alternate Assessment 1% document in determination for participation in the IAA located on the Iowa's Alternate Assessments webpage.</p> <p>Accessibility features of the DLM Alternate Assessment that are required for the student to access the assessment must be documented as accommodations on the student's IEP.</p>
What are the assessment participation requirements of the DLM Alternate Assessment?	For a student to be counted as a participant in the DLM Alternate Assessment they must meet the participation criteria for both the Fall and Spring Assessment Windows.
What if a student moves into the district or qualifies for Alternate Assessments during a DLM Window?	Please contact Jennifer Denne for participation requirements if a student starts participating in the DLM Alternate Assessment after September 30.

Question	Answer
<p>How does instruction change for students because of participating in Iowa’s Alternate Assessments?</p>	<p>Students participating in the alternate assessment receive instruction on grade level Iowa Academic Standards Essential Elements. IEP teams review participation annually, and it is expected that as students become more proficient on more skills, that students would be considered for exit from the alternate assessment against alternate achievement standards, into the Iowa Assessments and the Iowa Academic Standards. Students must participate in the alternate assessment because participation ensures that the general curriculum is taught to students with significant intellectual disabilities.</p>

Accountability

Question	Answer
<p>What is the 1% Threshold?</p>	<p>ESSA does not limit the percent of students able to take the alternate assessment. The IEP team decides a student’s participation. States are limited to 1% of their students participating in alternate assessments. A District exceeding the 1% threshold shall submit information to the state justifying the need to exceed the threshold.</p> <p>Any student taking the alternate assessment is counted in the participation rate. The total number of students participating in the DLM Alternate Assessment may not exceed 1% of the total student population that is assessed in each academic area (ELA, math, and science based on grade level).</p>
<p>What does a district do if they are over the 1% limit?</p>	<p>A District exceeding the 1% threshold shall submit information to the state justifying the need to exceed such threshold.</p>
<p>Can a student be exempted from the DLM Alternate Assessment?</p>	<p>Every student is to be tested, even those who receive homebound services or attend a shortened school day. District Assessment Coordinators should contact Jennifer Denne, IDE Alternate Assessment Consultant for guidance on assessment requirements for students who are receiving homebound services or attend shortened school day. Not testing certain students will affect a local school district’s participation rate. The only decision an IEP team can make is which type of assessment the student will participate-either the standard assessment or the alternate assessment. The DLM ELA and Math alternate assessment is a yearlong instructionally embedded assessment, while DLM science is a year-end assessment, so to say, “we need to exclude this student from the testing window” means the student is being excluded from participation in the Iowa Academic Standards, which is documented as non-compliance and illegal.</p>

Question	Answer
<p>For accountability purposes, how are home- schooled students, foster care students, out of state placements, residential placements and homebound students treated in the DLM Alternate Assessment?</p>	<p><i>Home School</i> students fall under their own rules and regulations associated with competent private instruction. They are not counted as full time equivalency (FTE) by the local school district and would not be a part of the district’s local accountability system.</p> <p><i>Foster Placement</i> students have been placed by the court system and if they do not attend a public school, their scores would roll up to the state level.</p> <p><i>Out-of-State Placements</i> are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. If the district was a part of the decision to send a student out of state then that sending district must make sure the student is tested in the state where instruction occurs and the scores sent back to the district. If districts have border agreements to send students across state lines, those students would count in the receiving district in the other state. Conversely, a student from another state attending an Iowa district would count in the Iowa district.</p> <p><i>In-State Private Residential Placements:</i> if a local district was involved in this decision and a 28E agreement was executed, then the score(s) for that student in the residential facility should come back to the sending district. If a parent made a unilateral decision or open enrolled to this facility then the district educating that student would keep the score in that district.</p> <p><i>Homebound</i> students (usually for medical reasons) who are receiving educational services from a district are required to be tested for ESSA. Homebound students take the same assessments as if they were in the building.</p> <p><i>Students Who Attend Less Than a Full Week of School:</i> students attending school less than a full week are required to be tested for ESSA.</p>