

**Guidance for IEP Teams
on
Participation Decisions
for the
ACAP Alternate
Assessment and Alternate
Achievement Standards**



**Alabama State Department of Education
Student Assessment and Special Education Services
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Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for the ACAP Alternate Assessment and Alternate Achievement Standards

Introduction

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Team makes many important decisions regarding programs and services available to students eligible for special education and related services. One important decision involves a determination of how a student will participate in the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP); either in (1) the general education assessment with or without allowable accommodations, or (2) an alternate assessment for students unable to participate in the general assessment, even with allowable accommodations, due to significant cognitive disabilities.

The IEP Team should begin this decision-making process with the understanding that **all** students, including all students eligible for special education, can learn grade-level content and should participate in the general education assessment to the maximum extent possible. However, there are times in which the IEP Team can determine that an alternate assessment is necessary and appropriate for a relatively small group (approximately 1%) of the *total tested* population. 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.

This document is intended to help guide IEP Teams to determine whether the ACAP Alternate, an alternate assessment program based on alternate achievement standards, is the appropriate assessment for a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The ACAP Alternate was developed to ensure that all students can participate in an assessment that is a measure of what students know and can do in relation to the grade-level state content standards.

General Criteria

The decision about how an eligible student participates in the *ACAP* is an IEP Team decision, **not an administrative decision**. The IEP Team should use the following criteria for determining the extent to which a student can participate in the *ACAP Summative*, with or without allowable accommodations, or whether the student should participate in the *ACAP Alternate*:

1. The student must be eligible for special education and must have an IEP in effect at the time of the decision.
2. The IEP Team decisions regarding a student's participation in the *ACAP Alternate* must be based on both current available data and consideration of historical evaluations and instructional data relevant to the student.
3. The IEP Team's decision should be based on the student's present levels of educational performance, need for specially designed instruction, current annual goals, learner characteristics and access to the general education curriculum.
4. The IEP Team's decision regarding a student's participation in statewide assessments must be made at a scheduled IEP Team meeting that **precedes** administration of the statewide assessment.
5. All decisions must be timely and current; switching assessments at the last minute, right before testing, is disruptive to the student and the administration of the assessment.

Avoid the Following as Criteria for Participation Decisions

Other issues may affect a student's learning experience and his or her ability to learn that are **NOT** appropriate to consider during the decision-making process for the *ACAP Alternate*. These are:

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 services
8. English Learner (EL) status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of test scores on the State's accountability system
12. Administrative decision
13. Anticipated emotional distress

ACAP Alternate

Federal law requires the use of an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities receiving special education services who cannot participate in the regular state assessment program. Each state is required to establish the state's definition of "significant cognitive disabilities." In Alabama, the definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disability *is a student with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of three standard deviations below the mean, which is an IQ score of 55 or below, that significantly impacts intellectual functioning and that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive functioning (defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life). As a rule, a student having a significant cognitive disability is not solely determined by an IQ test score, but rather by a holistic understanding of a student.* The IEP Team should use this definition as part of the determination for a student to participate in the alternate assessment program. As determined by the student's IEP, a student receiving instruction on the alternate achievement standards, an extension of the grade-level state content standards, meets one part of the eligibility to participate in the alternate assessment program.

Additional criteria for a student with a significant cognitive disability references students who require intensive or extensive levels of direct support that is not of a temporary or transient nature. A student with a significant cognitive disability may 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.

For students with an IQ measured in the 55-70 range, additional factors related to the severity and impact of the disability must be taken into account. Neither the special education disability category nor a given standardized IQ score can be the sole factor considered when determining instructional standards and participation in an assessment.

For a student to be considered as having a significant cognitive disability and therefore eligible for the ACAP Alternate assessment, the student's IEP Team should carefully consider **ALL** the following statements:

- 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 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 concurrent with deficits in adaptive behavior that are below chronological age expectations, which prevents the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the appropriate grade level expectations.

ACAP Alternate Participation Decision-Making Tool





ACAP Alternate Participation Decision-Making Tool

STUDENT _____ **GRADE:** _____ **DATE:** _____

PURPOSE

In Alabama, the definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disability is a student with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of 55 or below, which significantly impacts intellectual functioning and that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive functioning. For students with an IQ measured in the 55-70 range, additional factors related to the severity and impact of the disability must be taken into account.

The definition of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities references students who require intensive or extensive levels of direct support that is not of a temporary or transient nature. The purpose of this decision-making tool is to guide and support individualized education program (IEP) Teams in determining whether a student is most appropriately assessed with an alternate assessment. The ACAP Alternate Participation Decision-Making Tool will assist IEP Teams to determine if a student meets the criteria for a student with the most significant cognitive disability.

INSTRUCTIONS

IEP Teams should begin this decision-making process with the understanding that all students, including all students eligible for special education, can learn grade-level content and should participate in the general education assessment to the maximum extent possible. However, there are times in which the IEP Team can determine that an alternate assessment is necessary and appropriate for a relatively small group (approximately 1%) of the total tested population.

This tool is divided into four parts, A through D. IEP Teams must work through the document, starting with Part A. At the end of each part, the team should review if the student meets the criteria. If, after reviewing the information, a student does not meet the eligibility criteria in all parts, the student may not participate in the ACAP Alternate. All members of the IEP Team must sign the decision-making tool. Throughout the tool, IEP Teams must review multiple sources of information, including the student's IEP, and other data, such as results from formative assessments, evidence-based interventions, assistive technology assessment and the student's cumulative folder documenting evaluations used for eligibility or continued eligibility.

PART A- DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

1. Review the student's IDEA disability category.

Student meets state eligibility criteria under the following disability category designation:

Specific Learning Disability
Speech or Language
Impairment (only)

Student meets state eligibility criteria under the following disability category designation:

Hearing Impairment
Emotional Disturbance
Orthopedic Impairment
Other Health Impairment
Visual Impairment

A student in one of these categories very rarely will be a student with the most significant cognitive disability and therefore rarely, if ever, will qualify for the alternate assessment.



Proceed to Part B.

Student meets state eligibility criteria under the following disability category designation:

Autism
Deaf-Blindness
Developmental Delay
Intellectual Disability
Multiple Disabilities
Traumatic Brain Injury

A student with any of these disabilities may have a cognitive disability. However, fewer than half the students in these categories may have a most significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for the alternate assessment.



Proceed to Part B.

PART B- DETERMINING IF STUDENT HAS SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY

Directions: Select the column in each of the three adaptive skills domains (Conceptual, Social and Practical) that best describes the student’s daily functioning. After reviewing all available data, if the team still is struggling to decide, presume competence and select the column to the left (for example, if the team is trying to decide between Column 2 or Column 3, select Column 2).

Conceptual Domain:

Ability to communicate, apply academic tasks, manage and accomplish tasks.

The student is on grade level academically in all content areas,

AND

the student has age appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills, including conversation skills (verbally, via sign language, or a communication device),

AND

the student expresses and makes independent choices, exhibits self-control, and takes responsibility for choices at an age-appropriate level.

1

The student has difficulty learning academic content aligned to grade level standards but is making progress with appropriate supports and interventions as specified in the IEP,

AND

after learning new content, the student may need additional practices with direct instruction to generalize the new skills into daily living activities,

AND

the student has some age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills (verbally, via sign language, or a communication device), uses and understands simple, nonverbal communication and can follow simple, age-appropriate directions and routines with prompting,

AND

the student may have been referred for an initial evaluation during elementary school due to academic difficulties.

2

The student has difficulty learning academic content aligned to grade level standards across all subject areas and may require multiple tiers of intervention, accommodations or modifications,

AND

the student may need instruction aligned to the Alternate Achievement Standards to build base skills to get back to grade level,

AND

the student may struggle to generalize skills outside the classroom even with assistance and practice,

AND

the student has difficulty communicating wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas but receptively understands messages,

AND

the student struggles to follow directions and routines without significant assistance,

AND

the student may have been referred for an initial evaluation in preschool or kindergarten due to developmental differences.

3

The student has significant difficulty with learning academic content requires instruction that is aligned to the Alternate Achievement Standards with intensive accommodations,

AND

the student requires significantly modified curriculum and instruction using the Alternate Achievement Standards and likely is unable to independently apply or generalize skills consistently outside the classroom setting,

AND

the student may be unable to clearly express wants and needs and may not seem to understand the messages conveyed by others. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate,

AND

the student requires layers of supports to follow directions and daily routine activities,

AND

the student was most likely identified with developmental delays as an infant or toddler and received early intervention services.

4

Social Domain:

Ability to engage in interpersonal interactions, act with social responsibility, and use leisure time. This includes social competence, self-esteem, gullibility, wariness, social problem-solving, following rules/obeying laws and avoiding being victimized.

The student displays age-appropriate social, communication and leisure skills,

AND

the student can initiate and maintain friendships, express and recognize emotions with peers who are the same age,

AND

the student engages in play and recreational activities without additional support.

1

The student may have difficulty with social interactions (for example, may misinterpret peers' social cues or others may consider the student's actions as immature),

AND

the student's communication, language and conversation skills are more concrete or immature than peers who are the same age,

AND

the student may have challenges in regulating emotion and behavior in an age-appropriate manner, and these challenges may be noticed by peers and adults.

2

The student has social, behavior and communication skills markedly different from peers who are the same age,

AND

the student is able to be understood but uses a mode for communication that is much less complex than peers who are the same age,

AND

the student may struggle to generalize skills outside the classroom even with assistance and practice,

AND

the student may use behaviors to communicate,

AND

the student may not perceive or interpret social cues accurately,

AND

the student often needs significant support to engage in social situations and/or use communication skills,

AND

the student may be easily persuaded to do things that go against the rules or safe boundaries when coaxed to do so.

3

The student often uses behaviors to communicate,

AND

the student's communication skills are very limited in terms of vocabulary and grammar,

AND

the student may be in the process of developing a mode of communication, may be described as nonverbal or uses very limited non-symbolic communication,

AND

the student requires significant adult assistance to communicate with peers or adults and may require layers of support (simple speech, visuals, gestures, etc.) to communicate,

AND

the student may not yet show understanding of symbolic communication with speech or gesture.

4

Practical Domain:

Behaviors needed to address personal and health needs; take care of home, classroom or work settings; and function in a school or community.

The student is able to follow safety rules and functions in the community and classroom setting similarly to peers who are the same age,

AND

the student independently performs self-care activities such as eating, dressing and taking care of personal hygiene.

1

The student often functions age-appropriately in personal care daily living activities and using community resources,

AND

the student displays recreational skills typically on the same level as peers, although some additional support may be needed,

AND

the student may need support in navigating the school and community and may need reminders about being mindful of safety hazards.

2

The student may need support to care for personal needs (for example, eating, dressing, toileting needs), may have needed an extended period of explicit teaching in these areas and may require prompting or cues,

AND

the student often requires additional support and learning opportunities for recreational skills,

AND

the student requires intensive support to safely navigate the school and community.

3

The student requires significant support and direct instruction across all activities of daily living (meals, dressing, bathing, toileting needs) or may be dependent on others for all aspects of physical care, health and safety,

AND

The student requires intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational and navigation skills, not because of physical ability but because of significant cognitive needs. The student requires supervision at all times.

4

Determining Most Significant Disability:

Students with the most significant cognitive disability will have significant deficits in ALL adaptive skills domains.

- The student's daily functioning skills **do not** align with the majority of the components in columns 3 and 4 of **ALL** 3 three adaptive skills domains above.



Stop here. The student is not eligible for participation in the alternate assessment.

- The student's daily functioning skills align with the majority of the components in columns 3 and 4 for **ALL** 3 three adaptive skills domains above.



Proceed to Part C.

PART C- DETERMINING THE STUDENT'S NEED FOR ALTERNATE ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS AND SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORTS

Directions: Select the column that best describes the student's curriculum, instruction, supports, accommodations, modifications and assistive technology needs. After reviewing all available data, if the team still is struggling to decide between two columns, presume competence and select the column to the left (for example, if the team is trying to decide between Column 2 or Column 3, select Column 2).

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment:

Student's daily learning needs as outlined in the IEP.

The student's present levels of performance on the IEP indicates that skills are closely aligned with grade-level standards, concepts and skills with present-level data showing skill gaps represented within Alabama's Courses of Study.

1

The student's IEP includes annual goals and objectives aligned to Alabama's Courses of Study and may be modified in prescriptive area(s) of data-determined need,

AND

instruction and assessment are aligned to grade-level targets that build in complexity,

AND

the student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that is standards-based and includes intensive explicit instruction in all content areas on grade-level standards.

2

The student's IEP includes goals and objectives that target modified grade-level standards within the Alternate Achievement Standards,

AND

instruction and assessments are aligned to modified grade-level targets within the Alternate Achievement Standards,

AND

the student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that is standards-based and includes below grade-level learning. The student requires both accommodations and modifications.

3

The student's IEP includes present level of performance statements that align learner data to well below grade-level Alternate Achievement Standards, building base skills and engagement skills,

AND

instruction and assessments are based on student data, likely showing significant skill gaps,

AND

the student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that is standards-based and also includes below grade-level learning. The student requires extensive accommodations and modifications.

4

Accommodations/Modifications:

This section describes the accommodations and modifications needed for the student to participate meaningfully in daily instructional and assessment activities.

The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features that are necessary and are provided during instruction and assessment to support access.

1

The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features and accommodations that are provided during instruction and assessment to support access.

2

The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features and accommodations that are provided during instruction and assessment to support access,

AND

the student requires additional individualized accommodations, modifications and/or scaffolds not allowed on state assessments. These are also provided during instruction and classroom assessments to support access.

3

The student's IEP outlines individualized supports, accommodations and modifications, and materials beyond accessibility features to meet the cognitive and physical task demands of instruction and assessment. These additional supports address the communication, motor and/or sensory needs of the learner and provide the learner opportunities to show what he or she knows and can do.

4

Assistive Technology:

This section describes the assistive technology needed for the student to participate meaningfully in daily instructional and assessment activities.

The student's IEP Team has determined the student does not need any assistive technology,

OR

the student had an assistive technology evaluation completed and it was determined that no assistive technology is required.

1

The student requires assistive technology supports and services. The IEP Team is in the process of learning about assistive technology and determining specific supports for the student.

OR

the student's IEP indicates the need for assistive technology in the Measurable Annual Goals, Specially Designed Instruction, and/or Statewide and District Testing areas.

2

The student's IEP outlines required assistive technology supports and services,

AND

an assistive technology assessment was used or is in the process of being used to match individualized, assistive technology to support academic instruction, communication, daily living, seating/positioning, mobility, sensory and/or motor needs, etc.

OR

the student currently is learning to use or is independently using assistive technology as a scaffold to access learning in his or her environment.

3

The student's IEP describes complex physical, sensory or medical needs that require multiple assistive technology supports and services across most of the assistive technology domains. It may be challenging to determine access for the use of assistive technologies,

AND

The student currently requires person-dependent supports or scaffolds that may be replaced with assistive technology once feature matching can be determined.

4

7

Determining whether the student requires extensive individualized instruction and substantial supports: Characteristics of students who qualify for the ACAP Alternate will only fall into columns 3 or 4.

The student's characteristics in the columns above in Part C do not align with the majority of the components in columns 3 or 4.



Stop here. The student is not eligible for participation in the alternate assessment.

The student's characteristics in the columns above in Part C align with the majority of the components in Columns 3 or 4. The student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction with learning targets aligned to the Alternate Achievement Standards.



Proceed to Part D.

PART D - ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The decision to participate in the alternate assessment is made after reviewing the entire decision-making tool and the collection of evidence used in parts A, B and C. The decision to participate in the alternate assessment is NOT made based solely on any of the following considerations.

- Disability category or label.
- Poor attendance or extended absences.
- Native language/social/cultural or economic difference.
- Expected poor performance on the general education assessment.
- Academic and other services students receive.
- Educational environment or instructional setting.
- Percentage of time receiving special education services.
- English Learner (EL) status.
- Low reading level/achievement level.
- Anticipated disruptive behavior.
- Impact of test scores on accountability system.
- An administrative decision.
- Anticipated emotional distress.
- Need for accommodations (i.e. assistive technology, communication device) to participate in the assessment.

The IEP Team has determined, based on a review of the student's educational information, that the ACAP Alternate, based on the Alternate Achievement Standards, will be used to provide an evaluation of the student's current academic achievement.

Yes

No (the student will participate in the general education assessment)



Information from the Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for the Alabama Alternate Assessment Program guide was discussed at the IEP Team meeting. The decision-making information in the guide was followed to determine the student's participation in the ACAP Alternate Program. The parent has been informed of the difference between assessments based on grade level standards and those based on alternate achievement standards and how participation in the alternate assessment may delay or otherwise affect the student's completion of the requirements for a regular high school diploma*. Additionally, the parent has been provided access to the guide and given an opportunity to ask questions.

*A regular high school diploma means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the State that is fully aligned with State standards, or a higher diploma, except that a regular high school diploma shall not be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E).

Date provided to the parent: _____

This form must be signed by the parent(s) after the IEP Team has determined that the general education assessment, even with accommodations, would not be an accurate measurement of academic achievement, and, therefore, the student will participate in the ACAP Alternate. This document will become part of the student's IEP and filed with the current IEP record.

I understand that my child's achievement will be measured by participation in the ACAP Alternate, which is based on the Alternate Achievement Standards. I understand that my child's participation in an alternate assessment may delay or otherwise affect my child's completion of the requirements for a regular high school diploma.

I understand that decisions regarding participation in statewide assessments must be discussed at the student's annual IEP Team meeting and documented in the IEP.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

LEA Representative Signature

Date

Special Education Teacher Signature

Date

General Education Teacher Signature

Date

Student Signature (where appropriate)

Date