



New Jersey's Alternate Assessment Overview for Families



This overview provides information to families on the alternate assessment statewide assessments in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Resources are provided to support families and teachers in their combined work.

Alternate Assessment

Alternate assessments measure the knowledge and skills of students with significant intellectual disabilities, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and later amended in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This assessment system is based on the same state standards established for all New Jersey public school students. Alternate assessments support student independence to the greatest extent possible by making academic content accessible and the expected achievement levels appropriate. It allows a very small population of students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on appropriate assessment.

New Jersey's Alternate Assessment

The New Jersey Alternate Assessment (NJAA) is the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and it is an assessment of English Language Arts, mathematics, and science skills aligned to the New Jersey Standards for eligible students with significant intellectual disabilities in grades 3-8, and 11. It is a secure test presented to individual students via computer by teachers trained by the New Jersey Department of Education and the Alternate Assessment partner, DLM.

What Families Should Know About the Alternate Assessment

Deciding whether a child should take the alternate assessment can be challenging. Some families worry their children may feel stressed taking the general statewide assessment, even with appropriate accommodations and accessibility features. 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 Student 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 support provided by an aide or paraprofessional; or
- Daily instructional support provided by intervention specialists.

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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 regulations apply to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities too. Students take either the general assessments or alternate assessments. When all students participate in testing, it provides important information to the state and schools about how students are learning.

General Assessment or Alternate Assessment

Most students with IEPs and significant cognitive disabilities take the general state assessments. Some of those students may take the general 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 general state assessments, even with accommodations, should take the alternate assessments.

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

A student who qualifies for the alternate assessment most likely is:

- In the process of developing a functional and consistent mode of communication, for example, currently nonspeaking or uses very limited non-symbolic communication;
- Demonstrating inconsistencies when expressing their wants and needs. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate for understanding;
- Requires significantly modified curriculum and instruction using the Essential Elements 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; and
- 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 New Jersey Department of Education has developed the [Alternate Assessment Participation Criteria](#) form. The form should 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 other resources on the Department's [website](#) and NJ DLM [website](#).