



STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**ALTERNATE  
ASSESSMENT  
ELIGIBILITY  
DETERMINATION  
ROADMAP**

# ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

## Roadmap To Determine Eligibility

### Understanding the Eligibility Criteria for Alternate Assessment

Review **Part A** through **Part C** of the Participation Criteria Form for each subject for the student's current grade level.

2

### Documenting the Decision

If the IEP team determines that the student is eligible, they must document their decisions using the *Participation Criteria* form and include it in the IEP.

4

### When to Make Eligibility Decisions

1

IEP teams should complete the formal eligibility process at some point in grade 2 and then each year after that at the annual IEP meeting.

### Gathering Evidence

3

Use multiple pieces of evidence to inform the decision of eligibility in an alternate assessment.

### Review of Eligibility Determinations

5

To ensure that students are appropriately identified for the alternate assessments the eligibility determination must be reviewed annually.

# Section 1 When to Make Eligibility Decisions

## Grade 2

Since state assessments begin in grade 3, IEP teams should aim to complete the eligibility process during grade 2. Avoid postponing eligibility decisions until grade 3, as this can limit the student's instructional time aligned with the alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements). Ensuring early alignment provides students with the necessary preparation for the DLM alternate assessments.

## Grade 3-8, and 11

Although there is no specific deadline for making eligibility determinations, it is crucial to do so as early in the school year as possible. Students determined eligible after the school year begins should still take the DLM assessments for their designated grade level.

Timely decision-making by IEP teams is essential. Delays in eligibility decisions may prevent teachers from completing the required steps to administer the DLM alternate assessments. Additionally, students may miss valuable instructional time aligned with the alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements).



# Section 2 Understanding the Eligibility Requirements

## Part A: Determining Initial Eligibility

Determining eligibility for the alternate assessment is a detailed process led by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. Part A begins with confirming the student has an IEP, followed by a review of the eligibility category under which the student is eligible for special education and related services.

### 1 Confirm that the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

This first step is essential in determining a student's initial eligibility for the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessment. Begin by confirming whether the student has a current Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- If the student **does not** have an IEP, they are not eligible for the DLM, and the IEP team should stop here.
- If the student **does** have a current IEP, the IEP team can proceed to the next statement/Step in Part A to continue the eligibility determination process.

### 2 Review the student's eligibility category

The IEP team will review the student's eligibility category according to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5(c).

- If the student is classified under the categories Auditorily Impaired, Emotional Regulation Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Specific Learning Disabilities, or Speech or Language Impairment (only), they are **not** eligible for the DLM. **Stop here.**
- If the student is eligible under the categories Communication Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Social Maladjustment, or Visual Impairment, they are rarely considered to have a most significant intellectual disability. **Proceed to Part B with caution.**

For students classified under Autism, Deaf/Blindness, Intellectual Disability, Multiple

- Disabilities, or Traumatic Brain Injury, there is a possibility of a significant intellectual disability. However, fewer than half of these students may qualify for the DLM. **Proceed to Part B.**

# Part B: Determining if the Student has a Significant Intellectual Disability

In Part B of the Eligibility Criteria form, the IEP team will assess whether the student's disability significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior across the areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science. The term "significant intellectual disability" is not a category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the state assessment program.

**Question: The student has a disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.**

The phrase "The student has a disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior" describes profound impairments in cognitive abilities and everyday skills. These challenges affect learning, reasoning, problem-solving, communication, social interaction, and self-care, limiting independent participation in standard academics and daily activities. Records indicate the student's disabilities necessitate extensive support now and into adulthood.

Evidence must clearly demonstrate that a student's disability significantly impacts both cognitive functioning and daily living skills (adaptive behavior), regardless of their disability category. If the student meets these criteria, document the decision with compelling, specific evidence from assessments and observations. If the student does not meet these criteria, the student is not eligible to participate in the alternate assessment. The IEP team must develop an IEP that includes the accommodations that will allow the student to participate in the general statewide assessment.

This process requires careful consideration and a collaborative approach to ensure that only students who truly meet the criteria are identified, ensuring appropriate educational placement and assessment decisions.

## Completing the Eligibility Form

Determine if the student's disability impacts their ability to participate in the general assessment for each subject area and select YES or NO.



If the answer is NO, the student is not eligible to take the DLM in that subject area.



If the answer is YES, proceed to Part C.

Note: If the student is not in a Science testing grade level (Grades 5, 8, or 11), mark 'N/A' for Science.



# Part C: Applying the Eligibility Criteria for the Alternate Assessment

Part C is essential for determining a student's eligibility for the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessment. This decision relies on a comprehensive evaluation of the student's instructional needs, cognitive abilities, and the impact of their disability across the subject areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science. IEP teams must systematically review four key criteria in sequence to make this determination. Below is a detailed explanation of each criterion.

## 1 The student is taught using the Alternative Achievement Standards (Essential Elements).

IEP teams should carefully review the student's present levels of performance, short-term goals and objectives, and performance targets to ensure alignment with the alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements). Specifically, the IEP should demonstrate that the student's instruction is aligned with the first three linkage levels—Initial Precursor, Distal Precursor, and Proximal Precursor—of the alternate achievement standards. The short-term goals and objectives should directly correspond to the skills and concepts outlined in these linkage levels, while the annual academic goals should be closely aligned with the alternate achievement standards for the student's current grade level. This alignment ensures that the student's progress is mapped toward achieving grade-level performance targets.



### Completing the Eligibility Form

For each subject area in Part C - Statement 1, indicate whether the student's disability impacts their ability to access grade level curriculum standards.



If the answer is NO, the student is not eligible to take the DLM in that subject area.



If the answer is YES, proceed to Statement 2

# 2

## The student requires extensive, repeated individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature.

To meet this criterion, the student must require substantial, ongoing individualized support essential to their education. If their needs are extensive and require consistent, long-term intervention rather than temporary or sporadic assistance, the criterion is met. The IEP team should evaluate this by considering the following:

### Nature of Instruction and Support:

- *Extensive and Repeated:* Evaluate whether the student needs ongoing, substantial instruction and support beyond what is typically provided in a standard classroom setting. This means that the student requires frequent, intensive help to make progress and achieve their learning goals.
  - Note: In this context, "repeated" does not refer to rote learning or repetitive drills, such as those used in discrete trial teaching (DTT). Instead, it highlights the need for consistent, individualized support that evolves with the student's needs over time. This term pertains to the necessity of ongoing, substantial assistance, not specific teaching methodologies.

### Not Temporary or Transient:

- The student's need for support must be consistent and long-term, not temporary or situational. This support should be an integral and continuous part of their educational plan, embedded in their daily learning routine rather than provided occasionally or in response to specific issues.
  - *Long-Term Support:* The required support must address ongoing needs and be a regular part of the student's educational experience, not a short-term solution.
  - *Daily Integration:* Support should be necessary on a daily or regular basis, such as assistance with adaptive behavior or learning strategies, rather than applied intermittently.
  - *Embedded in the IEP:* The support should be deeply integrated into the student's IEP and overall educational strategy, reflecting a fundamental need that shapes how instruction is delivered and progress is measured.

### Completing the Eligibility Form

For each subject area in Part C - Statement 2, indicate whether the student's disability impacts their ability to access grade level curriculum standards.



If the answer is NO, the student is not eligible to take the DLM in that subject area.



If the answer is YES, proceed to Statement 3

# 3

## The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing Alternate Achievement Standards.

The student requires significant modifications to educational materials and teaching methods due to challenges with intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. These adaptations are essential for the student to engage with the curriculum, achieve their IEP goals, and participate meaningfully in their education. While the student follows reduced achievement standards, the need for extensive adaptations underscores the severity of their intellectual disability and their ongoing requirement for individualized support to succeed.

- **Substantially Adapted Materials:** Educational materials are significantly modified to meet the student’s specific needs. This could involve simplifying content, using visual aids, or changing the format to make it accessible based on the student’s cognitive level.
- **Individualized Methods:** Teaching methods and strategies are tailored to the student’s unique learning style and needs. This could include specialized instructional techniques, assistive technologies, or personalized support. These materials should be documented in the student’s IEP.
- **Intellectual Abilities:** The use of substantially adapted materials and individualized methods reflects the student’s intellectual limitations. Traditional instructional materials and methods may be too complex for the student due to their intellectual functioning, necessitating significant modifications to enable understanding and progress.
- **Support for Learning Goals:** Even with reduced achievement standards, these adaptations are essential for the student to access and engage with the curriculum effectively. They help bridge the gap between the student’s cognitive abilities and the educational expectations.



Adapted Reading Resources

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Adapted Writing Resources

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Completing the Eligibility Form

For each subject area in Part C - Statement 3 , indicate whether the student's disability impacts their ability to access grade level curriculum standards.



If the answer is NO, the student is not eligible to take the DLM in that subject area.



If the answer is YES, proceed to Statement 4



# 4

The student's significant intellectual disability will impact post-school outcomes\* (e.g., supported housing and/or supported employment).

Statement 4 evaluates whether the student's intellectual disability significantly impacts their ability to achieve successful post-school outcomes, such as living independently, maintaining employment, or accessing community supports. It underscores the severity of the student's disability, which often necessitates alternate assessments to accurately measure progress due to substantial learning needs that standard assessments cannot address.

Examples of necessary supports may include supported housing (e.g., group homes with assistance) and supported employment (e.g., job coaching or workplace modifications) to address challenges in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. These challenges are typically evident from birth unless a major event, such as a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), significantly alters the student's intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior later in life.

**\*This must be documented in the student's IEP transition plan\***

## My student is not in high school, how does this apply to them now?

Even though the student is not in high school, the statement helps to determine whether the severity of their intellectual disability will impact their future ability to live independently, work, or access community supports. This early assessment is important for planning and setting realistic, long-term goals.

By evaluating the impact on post-school outcomes, the IEP team can anticipate the kinds of supports the student may need as they transition out of school and into adulthood. For example, if the student's needs suggest that they might require supported housing or employment in the future, the IEP team should begin planning now to ensure appropriate supports are in place.



### Completing the Eligibility Form

For each subject area in Part C - Statement 4, indicate whether the student's disability will impact their post-school outcomes.








If the answer is NO, the student is not eligible to take the DLM in that subject area.



If the answer is YES, proceed to the next section.

# Eligibility Criteria Summary

Eligibility Statements	IEP Team Decision
The student has a disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior <b>AND;</b>	 <b>YES</b>
The student is taught using the Alternate Achievement Standards (Essential Elements) <b>AND;</b>	 <b>YES</b>
The student requires extensive, repeated individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature <b>AND;</b>	 <b>YES</b>
The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information, <b>AND;</b>	 <b>YES</b>
The student's significant intellectual disability will impact post-school outcomes (e.g., supported housing and/or supported employment).	 <b>YES</b>



**The answer to ALL the questions must be YES for a student to be eligible to take the DLM**



# Section 3

# Gathering Evidence

Using multiple pieces of evidence to inform the decision is important for two reasons:

1. It prevents decision-making that relies on one type, or an inappropriate type of evidence (e.g., IQ score or disability category), and
2. It provides a complete picture of the student both academically and in social settings.

Below is a list of possible evidence that IEP teams should gather before the decision if the student meets the participation criteria. It is important to remember that no one piece of evidence should be used to make this decision and no one person should be making the decision; it must be a decision reached and agreed to by all members of the IEP.



## Curriculum, Instructional, and Classroom Evidence

- Example instructional objectives and materials.
- Work samples and data on progress from both school- and community-based instruction.
- Classroom work samples and data.
- Teacher observations.



## Assessment Data and Evidence

- Past state assessments to compare with classroom work.
- District-wide alternate assessments.
- Reading assessments.
- Any other academic achievement tests.
- Results of initial or most recent evaluations of the student.



## IEP Information

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and short-term objectives or post-school outcomes from the IEP.
- Considerations for students with specific communication needs or modes.



## Evaluations

- Adaptive behavior assessments.
- Informal assessments.
- Psychological assessments and evaluations, including information associated with IQ tests\*
- Speech and communication assessments.

**\* It is important to not use the IQ score as a qualifying measure but to use the descriptive information in the evaluation.**

# ***Factors that CANNOT be Considered When Determining Eligibility (1 of 2)***

The following factors shall not be used in decision-making because they do not add to the IEP Team's understanding of what the student knows and can do. While some of the factors listed below make it difficult for a student come to school ready to engage and learn they cannot be considered when determining eligibility for the alternate assessment.

**✗ NO**

## **Multilingual Learner Status**

It is important to understand that a student's ability to learn and their knowledge of English is not connected. How well a student understands and speaks English has an impact on his/her ability to learn; however, it does not indicate a disability.

**✗ NO**

## **Anticipated Disruptive Behavior During Testing**

Behavior challenges can make learning difficult for some students and should be treated appropriately and professionally. Behavior challenges should not be considered when deciding if a student meets the criteria for an alternate assessment as they are not indicators of cognitive ability.

**✗ NO**

## **Poor Attendance or Extended Absences**

Some students have medical conditions that prevent them from attending school regularly enough to receive instruction. While this is recognized as a factor that inhibits a child's exposure to educational experiences, it is not evidence of a child's ability or their potential to learn and must be addressed through the appropriate school resources.

**✗ NO**

## **Impact of the Student's Score on the Accountability System**

How well or poorly a student may perform on any state assessment may not be used as a deciding factor in determining which assessment is appropriate for a student.

# Factors that **CANNOT** be Considered When Determining Eligibility (2 of 2)

The following factors shall not be used in decision-making because they do not add to the IEP Team's understanding of what the student knows and can do. While some of the factors listed below make it difficult for a student come to school ready to engage and learn they cannot be considered when determining eligibility for the alternate assessment.

**✗ NO**

## Need for Accommodations to Participate in the General Statewide Assessment

Students with disabilities are entitled to receive the accommodations and accessibility features they need to access the general statewide assessment. For information on accommodations and supports available for general statewide assessments, consult the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment: Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual or contact the Office of Assessment at [assessment@doe.nj.gov](mailto:assessment@doe.nj.gov).

**✗ NO**

## Administrative Decision

Under no circumstances may a school, district, or program administrator unilaterally determine a student's eligibility. Such decisions must be made collaboratively by the IEP team, with parents or guardians serving as equal and integral participants, and in full compliance with all established procedures governing educational decision-making.





# ***Factors that Cannot be the SOLE CRITERIA used to Determine Eligibility***

The following factors must not be used as the sole criteria for determining a student's eligibility. While a student with a significant intellectual disability may require extensive services or spend a high percentage of time in special education settings, this is also true for many students without a significant intellectual disability. The IEP team should consider these factors within the broader context of the student's intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.

## **? Discuss**

### **Percent of Day in Special Education**

Students receive special education services in a variety of ways and in varying degrees of intensity. It is more meaningful to consider the type and intensity of the structures and supports the student requires in order to participate academically and socially in their school than it is to consider the number of hours or days a student receives special education and related services.

## **? Discuss**

### **Academic and Related Services the Student Receives**

Many students receive a variety of related services that address their physical, behavioral, or other challenges beyond their cognitive ability. The type of services a student receives does not indicate a significant intellectual disability.

## **? Discuss**

### **Instructional Setting**

The setting in which a student receives his/her education is not a factor in determining cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. Districts routinely utilize staff with expertise in the challenges of a specific disability, behavior, or mental health issue, either within the school, district, or in another setting. Regardless of where a student accesses specialized care or services, meaningful academic instruction should always be given to the student. Because of this requirement, the educational placement of a student is not to be used as factor for eligibility.

# Section 4

## Documenting the Decision



### **YES, the student is eligible.**

If the IEP team determines that the student is eligible, they must document their decision using the Participation Criteria form and maintain it in the student record. An IEP team LEA representative must sign the completed form, and a copy must be placed in the student's file. The eligibility form must be completed annually.

This must be done regardless of grade level. For example, grade 9 students do not take an alternate assessment, but the Participation Criteria form should be completed and kept with the student's IEP, noting they are eligible for the alternate assessment.



### **NO, the student is not eligible.**

If the IEP team determines that the student is not eligible, three (3) things must happen:

1. The student must participate in the state assessments for their current grade level with appropriate accommodations and accessibility features as determined by the IEP team.
2. The student's instruction must be aligned with New Jersey Student Learning Standards via the general education curriculum. Without access to the general education curriculum, students will not be able to learn the academic skills and knowledge for their grade level which will be assessed through state assessments.
3. Record of the decision must be recorded on the Participation Criteria form, and maintained in the student record.

## Section 5

# NJDOE Accountability and Oversight

To ensure students are appropriately identified for the alternate assessment and that guidance to LEAs and IEP teams is clear and effective, the NJDOE Office of Special Education will conduct targeted monitoring and review data on eligibility determinations for LEAs exceeding the 1% participation cap. NJDOE will analyze participation rates in alternate assessments to identify schools and districts requiring additional support and guidance in applying eligibility criteria to make valid and appropriate determinations.



# Resources and Contacts



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