

Guidance for IEP Team Decisions Regarding Appropriate Determination for Participation in Alabama's Alternate Assessment (AAA)

The Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to ensure that the total number of students assessed in each subject using the alternate assessment (for a student with a significant cognitive disability) does not exceed one percent (1%) of the total number of students in the state assessed with Alabama statewide assessments. **In Alabama, the definition of a student with a significant cognitive disability is a student with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of three standard deviations below the mean which is an IQ of 55 or below. AAC 290-4-2-.03.**

IEP Team members need to understand the purpose of the alternate assessment and the characteristics of students who most appropriately participate in the assessment. For a student with a significant cognitive disability, his or her learning characteristics may include factors related to cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. Data confirms that most students with significant cognitive disabilities are in the disability areas of intellectual disability, autism, and multiple disability. Additional characteristics of students with a significant cognitive disability who are likely to participate in the alternate assessment include students with diverse receptive and expressive communication skills.* It is important to make appropriate instruction and assessment decisions for all students, especially those who may be candidates for the alternate assessment.

All IEP Teams must conduct a review using the following guidance for IEP Team decisions regarding appropriate determination for participation Alabama's alternate assessment:

The student demonstrates cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in the home, school and community which is significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations:

1. Review the student's measure of cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior

The student's current academic achievement level prevents the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum and achievement of the appropriate grade level expectations:

2. Review the student's challenging needs affecting academic, behavioral and functioning areas

3. Review the student's need for intensive and/or technically specialized approach of supports and services across settings

LEA's must maintain documentation of the required review outlined above.

Most importantly, it is important to determine that that the student's inability to participate in the regular assessment is primarily the result of a significant cognitive disability and **NOT** excessive absences, visual or auditory disabilities, social, cultural, language or economic differences, poor performance, administrator's decision, behavior, impact of scores on accountability system, and need for accommodations.

The IEP Team decision regarding a student with a significant cognitive disability participating in the alternate assessment may be based on the review of the student's evaluation results, progress monitoring data, work samples, etc. ESSA also requires LEAs to ensure that as part of the IEP the parent of students who will participate in an alternate assessment are clearly informed that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on instruction from alternate standards and that participation in alternate assessments prepares students for supported/competitive employment.

Stay tuned for more updates. For more information, contact Susan Goldthwaite at sgoldthwaite@alsde.edu or 334-242-8114.

*For more information see: National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), *Strategies for Meeting the 1% State-level Cap on Participation in the Alternate Assessment*, Brief #12, April 2017: <https://nceo.info/Resources/publications/OnlinePubs/briefs/brief12/brief12.html>

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