NCEO Tool 10

IEP Team Resource: Making Decisions about Participation in the Alternate Assessment

1% Toolkit

NCEO
National Center on
Educational Outcomes

IEP Team Resource:
Making Decisions about Participation in the Alternate Assessment

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In collaboration with

NCEO's 2019 1.0% Peer Learning Group (PLG 3)

Acknowledgments

IEP Team Resource:
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The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), includes a 1.0% cap on state-level participation rates in the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). No limit was placed on district or school rates, but districts must provide justifications if they expect their rate to be above the 1.0% threshold. In addition, states are to provide oversight to districts.

These requirements mean that states, districts, schools, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams need to think carefully about which students should be included in the AA-AAAS. Because the ultimate decision about an individual student's participation in the alternate assessment is made by the IEP team, it is critical that this team be provided the best information and tools to support its decisions.

Purpose of this IEP Team Resource

This IEP team resource is designed to support IEP team members, including teachers, school psychologists, English language development specialists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, paraprofessionals, parents, administrators, and others who may participate in the IEP team meeting. It provides supports for the decision about whether a student with a disability should participate in a general assessment or an AA-AAAS. It does not address the development of a complete IEP. There are a number of resources that focus on IEP development in general; these rarely provide support specifically about making the decision about in which state assessment a student should participate. The tool and other resources provided here are designed to encourage rich discussion about the assessment participation decision. States can modify the tool as needed to reflect any differences in their IEPs or to link to their own guidelines for participation in the AA-AAAS (see https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/IEPTeamResource.docx to download the Microsoft Word version of this resource).

This guide is one of three developed by states and technical assistance centers working together in NCEO's 2019 1.0% Peer Learning Group 3. The two other documents that were developed can support the information presented here. They may be found at https://nceo.info/Resources/tools, and include:

- *Who Should Participate in Your State's Alternate Assessment? A Slide Presentation Tool for Administrators.* This tool is a set of slides that states can adapt for their own purposes to provide information to district and school administrators about the purpose of the state's AA-AAAS, implications of the assessment for districts and students, talking with parents about participation, and supporting decisions about which students should participate in the state AA-AAAS. District and school administrators also might use the slides to provide information to their staff.
- *Start with the End in Mind: An Infographic to Guide Decisions about Student Participation in the Alternate Assessment.* This infographic highlights information for

parents and guardians about what participation in an AA-AAAS may mean for the future of their child.

By the time this resource was being completed, schooling was interrupted for many students by the COVID-19 pandemic. IEP teams were no longer being asked only to make a judgment about which assessment a student should take, but also whether it should be taken remotely. Because of this added decision that many IEP teams were asked to make, Appendix A was added to this resource to provide some guidelines for IEP teams determining whether a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities taking the AA-AAAS should do so remotely.

Federal Law

Alternate assessments were first developed in response to the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which required that all states and districts develop, by the year 2000, alternate assessments for those students with disabilities unable to participate in regular assessments even with accommodations. IDEA did not define who the students were who could participate in an alternate assessment, nor did it use the term "significant cognitive disability." In 2003, regulations added to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) allowed states to count as proficient those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participated in the alternate assessment and met rigorous alternate achievement standards set by the state.

In 2015 ESSA reaffirmed that an AA-AAAS is the appropriate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. ESSA placed a 1.0% cap on the state participation rate for each subject, based on the total number of all students in the state assessed in the subject (34 CFR 200.6(c)(2)). ESSA specified that states cannot place a cap on the participation rates of local education agencies (LEAs) in any subject (34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)(i)). This means that LEAs can exceed the 1.0% participation threshold on an AA-AAAS in a given subject, but the state as a whole cannot exceed the 1.0% threshold in any subject.

Federal law reaffirms that the decision about participation in the AA-AAAS is to be made by the IEP team. The team is to adhere to the state's participation guidelines and the state's definition of a "student with the most significant cognitive disabilities." To be able to provide an assurance to the U.S. Department of Education that IEP teams in the state are doing so, states are providing support to districts. This tool is meant to help states provide that support to district IEP teams.

IEP Team Resource Overview

The IEP team decision about whether a student participates in the AA-AAAS is often one of the more difficult decisions that the team makes. It requires the consideration of many factors. To help IEP teams in this decision, several tools have been developed. These are based on a synthesis of the many tools that states may be using as they strive to provide relevant information to IEP teams so that the decisions that are made are best for the individual student.

This resource presents a collection of tools. They were identified and developed by NCEO 2019 PLG 3 and NCEO to help states meet the **assurances** they must provide to the U.S. Department of Education:

- IEP teams in the state are adhering to the state's AA-AAAS participation guidelines and the state's definition of a "student with the most significant cognitive disabilities."
- IEP teams (and their LEAs) in the state inform parents of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities of the implications of participation in the AA-AAAS.

The tools are organized into four sections that should be addressed by IEP teams as they make decisions about student participation in the alternate assessment:

- Section 1–Informing all IEP Team Members About the State's AA-AAAS
- Section 2–Preparing for the Decision About Whether the Student Should Participate in the State's AA-AAAS
- Section 3–Discussing Information Relevant to the Assessment Decision During the IEP Meeting
- Section 4–Monitoring Decisions About Instruction and Assessment.

The tools provided in each section can be adapted by states to be appropriate for their individual assessment systems.

Section 1: Informing All IEP Team Members about the State's AA-AAAS

- **Tool A:** List of Materials that May Be Used to Provide Assessment Information to IEP Team Members
- **Tool B:** Checklist to Document Assessment Information Provided to IEP Team Members
- **Tool C:** Sign-off Sheet on Understanding of Assessment Purposes and Participation Guidelines

Section 2: Preparing for the Decision about Whether the Student Should Participate in the State's AA-AAAS

- **Tool D:** Documentation of Information on Intellectual Functioning
- **Tool E:** Documentation of Information on Adaptive Functioning
- **Tool F:** Documentation of Instruction and Supports
- **Tool G:** Documentation of Data on Previous Test Participation and Performance
- **Tool H:** Documentation of Communication Skills
- **Tool I:** Documentation of Other Relevant Information

Section 3: Discussing Information Relevant to the Assessment Decision During the IEP Meeting

- **Tool J:** Discussion of Expectations for the Student's Future
- **Tool K:** Discussion of Implications of Participation in General and Alternate Assessment
- **Tool L:** Summary of Discussions of Intellectual Functioning, Adaptive Functioning, and Previous Participation and Performance

Section 4: Reviewing Decisions about Instruction and Assessment

- **Tool M:** Aggregation of Assessment Decisions by School and District
- **Tool N:** Review of Aggregate Decisions by School and District

In addition to the four sections of Tools A-N, this resource includes **Appendix A: Guidelines for Decisions about Remote AA-AAAS Testing** and **Appendix B: Additional Sample Resources from States on Ways to Prepare for the IEP Team Meeting Decision on Assessment Participation.**

Section 1: Informing All IEP Team Members about the State's AA-AAAS

The basis for making appropriate decisions about which assessment is most appropriate for an individual student is having a solid foundation of knowledge about the state's assessment system, including the purpose of the general assessment and the AA-AAAS. This knowledge should be demonstrated by all IEP team members, which may include parents or guardians, teachers, school psychologists, English language development specialists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, paraprofessionals, administrators, and others who may participate in the IEP team meeting. The tools provided here should be used and adapted, as needed, by states to ensure that all potential IEP team members are informed about the state's AA-AAAS.

The tools provided in this section are:

- **Tool A:** List of Materials that May Be Used to Provide Assessment Information to IEP Team Members
- **Tool B:** Checklist to Document Assessment Information Provided to IEP Team Members
- **Tool C:** Sign-off Sheet on Understanding of Assessment Purposes and Participation Guidelines

Tool A

List of Materials that May Be Used to Provide
Assessment Information to IEP Team Members

States and national organization have developed a wealth of information to assist IEP team members make decisions about which assessment is most appropriate for a student to take. Unfortunately, local IEP teams may not know about this information unless it is provided to them. This tool includes nationally available information. The state should add to it information specific to its assessments, both general and alternate. Resources in this tool are from both the NCEO and state resources submitted by PLG 3 participants.

Information for Administrators and Teachers

Information from NCEO

- *IEP Teams: Student Identification and Standards-based IEPs*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/Presentations/OnePercentConvening/4aThurlowIdentification StandardsIntro.pdf

- *Start with the End in Mind Talking Points*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool7Infographic.pdf

- *Who Should Participate in Your State's Alternate Assessment? A Slide Presentation Tool for Administrators*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool6DistrAdmPPT.pdf

Information from States

- *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Alternate Assessment IEP Team Guidance*
  https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/caaiepteamrev.asp

- *California Alternate Assessment Decision Confirmation Worksheet*
  https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/altassessmentdecision.pdf

- *Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Participation Guidance for Planning and Placement Teams* (Copy and paste link)
  https://ct.portal.cambiumast.com/core/fileparse.php/51/urlt/CT-Alternate-Assessment-System-Participation-Flowchart.pdf

- *Florida Assessment Planning Resource Guide for Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Team* (Copy and paste link)
  https://fsaa-training.onlinehelp.cognia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/docs/FlaAlt_ResourceGuideIEP.pdf

- *Florida Presentation: The Decision for Alternate Assessment*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/Presentations/OnePercentConvening/4bLaRussoAccess1percent.pdf

- *Illinois Dynamic Learning Maps Participation Guidelines*
  https://www.isbe.net/Documents/DLM_Participation_Guidelines.pdf

- *Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines Documentation Form*
  https://education.ky.gov/specialed/excep/forms/Documents/KY_Alternate_Assessment_Participation_Guidelines_Documentation_Form.pdf

- *Louisiana Alternate Assessment Eligibility: Frequently Asked Questions for IEP Teams*
  https://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/assessment/alternate-assessment-eligibility-faq-for-iep-teams.pdf?sfvrsn=2c19901f_12

- *Rhode Island State Assessment Program 2018 IEP Team Guidance on Eligibility for Alternate Assessments*
  https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Assessment/2020-21-Guidance-for-IEP-Teams.pdf?ver=2020-06-15-105435-547

- Wyoming Alternate Participation Guidelines (Copy and paste link)
  https://wyoassessment.org/core/fileparse.php/2417/urlt/2020-WY-ALT-Participation-Guidance.pdf

- Wyoming Alternate Participation Checklist (Copy and paste link)
  https://wyoassessment.org/core/fileparse.php/2417/urlt/2020-WY-ALT-Participation-Checklist-FILLABLE.pdf

Information for School Psychologists

Information from NCEO

- *IEP Teams: Student Identification and Standards-based IEPs*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/Presentations/OnePercentConvening/4aThurlowIdentificationStandardsIntro.pdf

- *Start with the End in Mind Talking Points*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool7Infographic.pdf

- *Who Should Participate in Your State's Alternate Assessment? A Slide Presentation Tool for Administrators*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool6DistrAdmPPT.pdf

Information for English Language Development Specialists

Information from NCEO

- *Learning Modules on English Learners (ELs) with Disabilities*
  https://nceo.info/Resources/training_modules#Learning-Modules-on-English-Learners-ELswith-Disabilities

- *State Assessment Decision-making Processes for ELLs with Disabilities*
  https://nceo.info/Resources/publications/OnlinePubs/briefs/brief09/brief09.html

Information for Related Services Personnel

Information from NCEO

- *IEP Teams: Student Identification and Standards-based IEPs*
  (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/Presentations/OnePercentConvening/4aThurlowIdentificationStandardsIntro.pdf)

- *Who Should Participate in Your State's Alternate Assessment? A Slide Presentation Tool for Administrators*
  (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool6DistrAdmPPT.pdf)

Information for Parents

Information from NCEO

- *Start with the End in Mind Talking Points*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool7Infographic.pdf

- *Who Should Participate in Your State's Alternate Assessment? A Slide Presentation Tool for Administrators*
  https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool6DistrAdmPPT.pdf

Information from States

- *A Parent's Quick Guide to the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA)*
  http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nysaa/2019-20/5-parentguidew-19.pdf

- *Parent Guide to Louisiana LEAP Connect*
  https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/assessment/parent-guide-to-leap-connect.pdf?sfvrsn=5fad921f_22

- *Parent Guide: Kentucky Alternate Assessment*
  https://education.ky.gov/specialed/excep/instresources/Documents/Parent_Guide_to_Alternate_K-Prep.pdf

- *West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment: An Informational Guide for Parents/Guardians*
  https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Guide-to-the-West-Virginia-Alternate-Summative-Assessment-2019.pdf

Tool B

Checklist to Document Assessment Information Provided to IEP Team Members

To make appropriate decisions about participation in the state's assessment (either the general assessment or the AA-AAAS), it is critical that all team members understand the purpose of each assessment and the state's guidelines about participation in the AA-AAAS. This tool is designed to document that information about the purpose of the state's assessments, including the AA-AAAS, was provided to potential IEP team members. The IEP team should document the evidence that supports each checkmark in this checklist, including the mechanisms used to ensure that team members received the information. ***States should adapt this checklist for their own circumstances.*** Also, because many students with disabilities should participate in the IEP team meeting, depending on the grade level of the student, information appropriate for students should be added.

_____ Information on the purpose of each general assessment in the state (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.)

How did the state ensure that this information reached IEP team members? (e.g., required webinar training, fact sheet distributed to schools, parent brief, etc.)

_____ Information on the purpose of each AA-AAAS in the state (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.)

How did the state ensure that this information reached IEP team members? (e.g., required webinar training, fact sheet distributed to schools, parent brief, etc.)

_____ Information on the format of each general assessment in the state (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.), including examples of items for each grade level

How did the state ensure that this information reached IEP team members? (e.g., web location of where to find sample items, fact sheet distributed to schools, parent brief, etc.)

_____ Information on the format of each AA-AAAS in the state (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.), including examples of items for each grade level

How did the state ensure that this information reached IEP team members? (e.g., web location of where to find sample items, fact sheet distributed to schools, parent brief, etc.)

Tool C

**Sign-off Sheet on Understanding of Assessment
Purposes and Participation Guidelines**

States are required to document that IEP teams have adhered to the state's guidelines for participation in the AA-AAAS. One way to provide this documentation is to have IEP team members sign off that they understand the purposes of the state's general and alternate assessments. This can be done before the IEP team meeting, or during the meeting following a brief discussion of the purposes of the assessments. If a student participates in the IEP team meeting (recommended, depending on the grade level), an adapted signature form might be used.

My signature indicates that I understand the purpose of the state's general assessments and the purpose of the state's alternate assessments, and that I have been provided the opportunity to review sample items for the grade of the student to be discussed at the IEP team meeting.

Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date
Signature	Role	Date

Section 2: Preparing for the Decision about Whether the Student Should Participate in the State's AA-AAAS

The decision about which assessment is most appropriate for an individual student can best be supported by preparing information directly relevant to the assessment participation decision before the meeting. This information should reflect considerations that are included in the state's guidelines for participation in the AA-AAAS. Sample resources from states on ways to prepare for the IEP team meeting decision on assessment participation are listed in Appendix B.

According to ESSA regulations, states' guidelines and definition must address "factors related to cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior" (Sec 200.6(d)(1)). The regulations also clarified that a specific disability category or being an English learner does not determine whether a student has a significant cognitive disability (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(i)), nor does a student's "previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general State or districtwide assessments" (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(ii)). The regulations state:

> A student is identified as having the most significant cognitive disabilities because the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the challenging State academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(iii))

The tools provided in this section are:

- **Tool D:** Documentation of Information on Intellectual Functioning
- **Tool E:** Documentation of Information on Adaptive Functioning
- **Tool F:** Documentation of Instruction and Supports
- **Tool G:** Documentation of Data on Previous Test Participation and Performance
- **Tool H:** Documentation of Communication Skills
- **Tool I:** Documentation of Other Relevant Information

Tool D

Documentation of Information on Intellectual Functioning

Measuring intelligence and intellectual functioning is a common approach to trying to quantify cognitive functioning. Cognitive functioning is a general term that is broad in scope. It generally includes a number of mental abilities, including "learning, thinking, reasoning, remembering, problem solving, decision making, and attention" (Fisher, Chacon, & Chaffee, 2019).[1] A measure of intelligence should not be a determinant of cognitive functioning and the potential for grade-level academic performance (see McGrew & Evans, 2004). Nevertheless, documentation of information on intellectual functioning is one element of determining that a student may appropriately participate in an AA-AAAS.

Rather than trying to reach a yes or no response about intellectual functioning, it may be more helpful for the IEP team to consider a continuum of intellectual functioning. The following factors and rubric frameworks may be used to reflect a continuum. ***States should insert descriptions of each level.*** These can form a basis for IEP team discussions about intellectual functioning.[2] Remember, though, that no one characteristic should solely determine whether intellectual functioning is at a level that suggests the AA-AAAS is the appropriate assessment.

Learning Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

Thinking and Reasoning Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

Memory Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

Problem Solving Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

Decision-making Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

Attention Characteristics

Most limited	**Mildly limited**	**Minimally limited**	**Not limited**

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[1] Reference: Fisher, G. G., Chacon, M., & Chaffee, D. S. (2019). Theories of cognitive aging and work. In B. B. Baltes, C. W. Rudolph, & H. Zacher (Eds.), *Work across the lifespan* (pp. 17-45)*.* Elsevier

[2] The ideas in in the presented rubric areas and levels are based on the Ohio Department of Education's *Ohio's Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool* http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/AASCDDecisionmakingTool_Final_Accessible-pdf-aspx.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

Tool E

Documentation of Information on Adaptive Functioning

Adaptive functioning, sometimes referred to as adaptive behavior, is defined as "coping with everyday environmental demands and includes daily living skills that people perform to care for themselves and to interact with others" (Mitchell, 2018.)[3] Although there are measures of adaptive behavior, it is recommended that information be collected from people who regularly interact with the student.

Rather than trying to reach a yes or no response about adaptive functioning, it may be more helpful for the IEP team to consider a continuum of adaptive functioning. The following factors and rubric frameworks may be used to reflect a continuum. ***States should insert descriptions of each level***. These can form a basis for IEP team discussions about adaptive functioning.[4] Remember, though, that no one characteristic should solely determine whether adaptive functioning is at a level that suggests the AA-AAAS is the appropriate assessment.

Dressing

Most limited	Mildly limited	Minimally limited	Not limited

Eating

Most limited	Mildly limited	Minimally limited	Not limited

Restroom Use

Most limited	Mildly limited	Minimally limited	Not limited

Personal Grooming

Most limited	Mildly limited	Minimally limited	Not limited

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[3] Reference: Mitchell, E. S. Adaptive functioning. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), (2018). *The SAGE encyclopedia of lifespan human development* (pp.32-34). Los Angeles: SAGE.

[4] The ideas in the presented rubric areas and levels are based the Ohio Department of Education's. *Ohio's Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool* http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/AASCDDecisionmakingTool_Final_Accessible-pdf-aspx.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

Tool F

Documentation of Instruction and Supports

The intensiveness of instruction and supports provided to a student is one aspect of determining whether a student is considered to have a most significant cognitive disability and should participate in the state AA-AAAS. This tool provides a set of questions about the nature of instruction and supports to generate a discussion of whether the student's instruction should be considered as "intense."

Reading/language arts:

- Are text materials always simplified for the student (e.g., reduced vocabulary and amount of text)?
- Does the student respond to assignments in a different way from other students (e.g., by pointing to pictures or selecting the correct option from several options)?
- Are different grading criteria used for the student (e.g., based on different requirements)?

Mathematics:

- Are problems always simplified for the student (e.g., word problems with simplified text; 2 digit multiplication problems rather than 4 digit problems)?
- Does the student respond to assignments in a different way from other students (e.g., by using cut-outs to solve fractions; solving computation problems via calculator)?
- Are different grading criteria used for the student (based on different requirements)?

Other academic subject areas (e.g., science, social studies):

- Are text materials always simplified?
- Does the student respond to assignments in a different way from other students?
- Are different grading criteria used for the student (based on different requirements)?

Functional skills:

- Is instruction on functional skills included in content instruction (e.g., keyboarding or other assistive technology device skills included in writing instruction; calculating a total of days in school as a part of mathematics instruction, etc.)?

Tool G

Documentation of Data on Previous Test Participation and Performance

Whether a student participated in the AA-AAAS in the past should not be a definitive indication that a student should again participate in the AA-AAAS. Similarly, participation in the general assessment does not necessarily mean that the student should again take the general assessment. With extreme caution, then, IEP team members should look at data on test participation and performance.

It is recommended that for every year in which the student was in a tested grade, the IEP team document and review which test the student took (by subject area if participation can vary by grade) and how the student performed on the test (proficient or not, or more ideally a score indicating how close to proficiency the student was each year). A simple chart like the following could be used (with additional columns if other subject area tests are administered, and additional grades if state tests are administered in other grades):

Student Name: _____

Assessment Participation

(Insert a check to indicate the test in which the student participated)

Grade	Reading/Language Arts		Mathematics		Science	
	AA-AAAS	General	AA-AAAS	General	AA-AAAS	General
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
High School						

Assessment Performance

(Enter the student's proficiency level or score, or both, on the assessment the student took)

Grade	Reading/Language Arts		Mathematics		Science	
	AA-AAAS	General	AA-AAAS	General	AA-AAAS	General
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
High School						

Tool H

Documentation of Communication Skills

Communication skills can sometimes make it difficult to identify other characteristics of a student with disabilities. The IEP team should consider using this tool to confirm that the student has a communication system. **If a communication system does not exist or is not used effectively to communicate with different individuals, the IEP should prioritize developing the student's communication skills.**

Student Name: _____

Mark the student's mode (or modes) of communication, then describe the student's communication skills using that mode of communication (select a response, then elaborate with specifics):

Mode of Communication

_____ Communicates orally

_____ Communicates via Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

_____ Communicates via signing

_____ Communicates via gestures and body language

Description of Communication. Indicate when the student communicates and with whom. Describe whether the communication is directed at a range of individuals (e.g., teacher, other educators, peers, etc.) and whether it covers a variety of message types (e.g., functional needs, peer interactions, academic engagement, etc.).

Tool I

Documentation of Other Relevant Data

If the IEP team believes there is other data relevant to the IEP team decision about assessment participation, that information should be documented and brought to the IEP team meeting for discussion.

Student Name: _____

Data Source 1: _____

Summary of data:

Data Source 2: _____

Summary of data:

Section 3: Discussing Information Relevant to the Assessment Decision During the IEP Meeting

While reviewing the information relevant to the AA-AAA participation decision during the IEP team meeting, it is important to discuss the information in an objective manner. The topic can be emotional for parents and educators alike. Because of this possibility, it may be helpful to use discussion guides.

The discussion guide tools provided in this section are:

- **Tool J:** Discussion of Expectations for the Student's Future
- **Tool K:** Discussion of Implications of Participation in General and Alternate Assessment
- **Tool L:** Summary of Discussions of Intellectual Functioning, Adaptive Functioning, and Previous Participation and Performance

Tool J

Discussion of Expectations for the Student's Future

Participation in the AA-AAAS has implications for the future educational and employment prospects of a child. It is critical that everyone agrees on expectations, and that those expectations are as high as possible. This is especially important given research findings that the achievement of a student with intellectual disabilities cannot be predicted by the student's measured intelligence (McGrew & Evans, 2004). Also, it is important to recognize that expectations may change as the student progresses through the grades. In other words, expectations for a child with significant cognitive disabilities in the early grades to be using the same curriculum materials, with needed accommodations, to participate in the regular assessment, and to be on track for a regular diploma may be reasonable. This may change over time as the curriculum becomes more complex.

The following is a discussion guide to facilitate the conversation with parents or guardians about expectations for the student.

1. What are your hopes for [child's name] this year? Do you expect that [child's name] will learn the same things as peers, with or without modifications?

2. What do you expect your child to be learning at the end of [elementary school, middle school, or high school]? What kinds of adjustments do you think are needed to ensure that [child's name] is successful?

3. Think about [child's name] as an adult. Describe what you hope [child's name] will be doing. How is this similar to or different from what you expect that [child's name's] peers without disabilities will be doing?

4. What do these expectations suggest for the decision about AA-AAAS participation?

Tool K

Discussion of Implications of Participation in General and Alternate Assessment

The short-term and long-term implications of participation in the AA-AAAS or the general assessment should be informed by the discussion of expectations for the child. The importance of this discussion is evident in ESSA, which states that participation in the AA-AAAS:

> does not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma. (Sec 1111(b)(2)(D)(VII))

ESSA also emphasizes the importance of making implications of participation in the AA-AAAS clear to parents, as stated here:

> (II) ensures that the parents of such students are clearly informed, as part of the process for developing the individualized education program (as defined in section 614(d)(1)(A) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C.1414(d)(1)(A)))— (aa) that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on such alternate standards; and (bb) how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma;

The IEP team may want to consider requirements of the regular high school diploma and how the student can work toward those requirements. This may take careful consideration of grade-by-grade requirements. It may be that a student will be able to stay on the pathway toward the regular high school with careful planning.

The following implications of participation in the AA-AAAS should be discussed during the IEP team meeting:

- It is possible the student will be included in different academic classes from those taken by peers.
- It is possible the student may not learn all the information needed to earn a regular high school diploma.
- If end-of-course tests are required, it is possible the student may not pass the test even with allowed accommodations.
- If a graduation test is required, it is possible the student may not pass the test even with allowed accommodations.

The IEP team should make sure parents or guardians understand these implications before they sign the IEP.

Tool L

Summary of Discussions of Intellectual Functioning, Adaptive Functioning, and Previous Participation and Performance

It is helpful to develop a summary of discussions that have been held about intellectual functioning, adaptive functioning, and previous participation and performance. This way, the summary is available from year to year for review and for consideration as to whether anything has changed that might indicate the need for a different decision about participation in the general assessment or the alternate assessment.

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Brief Summary of IEP Team Discussions:

Section 4: Reviewing Decisions about Instruction and Assessment

Decisions of IEP teams should be well documented and reviewed annually if possible. Ideally, this review of all IEP team decisions would be made at the district or possibly school level. If that is not possible, IEP teams can take on the responsibility for summarizing all decisions to determine whether there are unintended patterns of decisions, such as all students with significant cognitive disabilities receiving exactly the same instructional goals or all taking the alternate assessment regardless of grade-level.

The discussion guide tools provided in this section are:

- **Tool M:** Aggregation of Assessment Decisions by School and District
- **Tool N:** Review of Aggregate Decisions by School and District

Tool M

Aggregation of Assessment Decisions by School and District

The tables below may be used to compile information about IEP team assessment participation decisions. The purpose of these tables is to look for overall patterns in IEP team decisions. Ideally, information would be summarized by school and by year to provide a better picture of decisions. *(If your state allows for alternate assessment decisions to be made by content area, duplicate the table for each content area.)*

Assessment Participation Decisions

School	Number of IEPs with an Assessment Decision		Number of IEPs with Alternate Assessment Participation Decision		Summary of Percentages			
					AA-AAAS		General	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Additional tables may be created to examine other variables than gender (e.g., grade level, race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage status).

Tool N

Review of Aggregate Decisions by School and District

After information on IEP team assessment participation decisions have been summarized, district and school leaders might discuss topics such as the following:

What do AA-AAAS participation rates look like disaggregated by age, grade level, or school level?
- Consider whether participation rates on the AA-AAAS are higher in some grades than others. Do rates jump when students enter middle school or high school? Consider why this may happen.
- Have some students with disabilities previously participated in the general assessment in elementary schools, but then participate in the AA-AAAS when they transition to secondary school? Consider why this may or may not be appropriate.

What do AA-AAAS participation rates look like disaggregated by content areas?

- Consider whether participation rates are different in reading, mathematics, and science.
- Consider whether having science assessments only at one grade in each school level (elementary, middle, high) affects science AA-AAAS participation rates?
- If AA-AAAS participation varies by content area, is this consistent with state guidelines?

What do AA-AAAS participation rates look like disaggregated by student demographics?

- Consider whether participation rates are different for certain subgroups (e.g., black, Hispanic, Asian, White, English learners, economically disadvantaged) compared to the district rate as a whole and compared to other subgroups. Are some subgroups disproportionately participating in the AA-AAAS?
- Do schools with high rates of English learners, minority students, or economically disadvantaged students have access to additional resources and additional enrichment activities? Consider whether students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have access to these resources and activities.

What do AA-AAAS participation rates look like disaggregated by disability category?

- Are many students with disabilities other than intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities (such as specific learning disabilities, speech language impairment, emotional disturbance, or other health impairments) participating in the AA-AAAS?

What do AA-AAAS participation rates look like disaggregated by placement?

- Consider whether students in restrictive settings are more likely to participate in the AA-AAAS.

Note: These questions are from a larger set of questions in NCEO Tool #4, *District Dialogue Guide: Addressing the Percentage of Students Participating in the Alternate Assessment* https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool4DialogueGuide.pdf

Appendix A

Guidelines for Decisions about Remote AA-AAAS Testing

Remote testing is one approach that has been recommended for students who are receiving instruction through distance learning arrangements. Numerous challenges are associated with conducting remote testing in general, but more so for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in the state AA-AAAS.

It is not appropriate for parents or guardians to administer the AA-AAAS to their child. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2021)[5] has recommended that the AA-AAAS not be administered remotely. Specifically, it provided the following recommendation:

> **Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities generally cannot be assessed remotely.** It might be possible to have an educator familiar with the student who is certified in test administration to visit the family home to administer the alternate assessment. It also might be possible to bring the student into a safe and secure setting to allow for administration of the alternate assessment. Because of the nature of alternate assessments, which allow for significant breaks (including across days) during testing, there are many challenges in attempting these approaches.

Despite these challenges, some IEP teams may be asked to make a decision about whether a particular student who participates in the AA-AAAS can do so remotely. The following questions may help the IEP team determine whether remote AA-AAAS testing, if available, is possible for an individual student with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Does the student require assistance from a school-employed test administrator to participate in the AA-AAAS?
- Is a test administrator required to log into the computer?
- Does the test administrator enter student responses into the computer?
- Does the test administrator provide assessment materials (e.g., manipulatives) and accommodations to the student?
- Is a test administrator required to pause or terminate the assessment session?

Can a school-employed test administrator enter the student's living quarters to administer the AA-AAAS?

- Can all health safety precautions be ensured in the student's living quarters?
- Is the test administrator available to repeatedly enter the living quarters to administer sections of the AA-AAAS?
- Are the student's parents or guardians open to visitations from a test administrator for the purpose of administering the AA-AAAS?

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[5] CCSSO. (2021). *Meeting the assessment needs of students with disabilities during times of interrupted schooling.* Council of Chief State School Officers.

Appendix B

Sample Resources from States on Ways to Prepare for the IEP Team Meeting Decision on Assessment Participation

Arkansas

Guidance for IEP Teams
http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Student%20Assessment/DLM/Guidance_for_IEP_Teams_on_Alternate_Assessment_2018-2019.pdf

Participation Guidelines
http://adecm.arkansas.gov/Attachments/LS-16-084--ArkansasAlternateAssessmentParticipationDecisionGuidelines.pdf

Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Tool (Copy and paste link)
https://arksped.k12.ar.us/documents/curriculumAssessment/assessment/Arkansas-Alternate-Assessment-Participation-Checklist-2020-21.pdf

Kentucky

Guidance for ARC (IEP) Team Alternate Assessment Participation
https://education.ky.gov/specialed/excep/instresources/Documents/Guidance_for_ARCs_on_Participation_Decisions_for_the_Kentucky_Alternate_Assessment.pdf

Michigan

Assessment Selection Guidelines Training
https://mdoe.state.mi.us/mdedocuments/AssessmentSelectionGuidelinesTraining/index.html

Flow Chart, *Should My Student Take the Alternate Assessment?*
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Should_My_Student_Take_the_Alternate_Assessment_556705_7.pdf

Interactive Decision-Making Tool
https://mdoe.state.mi.us/MDEDocuments/InteractiveDecision-MakingTool/index.html

Nebraska

Alternate Assessment Criteria
https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Alternate-Assessment-Criteria-2019.pdf

Definition of "Most Significant Cognitive Disability"
https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Most-Significant-Cognitive-Disability-Definition.pdf

IEP Team Decision-Making Flow Chart
https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/IEP-Team-Decision-Making-Flow-Chart-Alternate-Assessment-11-21.pdf

New York

Eligibility Criteria for Participation in the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA)
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/documents/2019-nysaa-policy-brief.pdf

New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) Participation Decision-Making Checklist
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/nysaa-decision-making-checklist.docx

New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) Participation Decision-Making Flowchart
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/documents/nysaa-participation-decision-making-flow-chart.pdf

Ohio

Ohio Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool
http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/AASCDDecisionmakingTool_Final_Accessible-pdf-aspx.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

Ohio Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool FAQ
http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/DecisionMakingToolFAQ_Accessible.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Participation Criteria for Alternate Assessments Form (2020-21)
https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Assessment/2020-21-IEP_Team_Form.pdf?ver=2020-06-15-105527-907

Rhode Island 2020-21 IEP Team Guidance on Eligibility for Alternate Assessments
https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Assessment/2020-21-Guidance-for-IEP-Teams.pdf?ver=2020-06-15-105435-547

Rhode Island *Documentation of Evidence Form for Alternate Assessment Eligibility*
https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Assessment/2019-20_DocumentationofEvidenceForm.docx?ver=2019-10-18-143139-440

Wisconsin

Wisconsin *Participation Guidelines for Alternate Assessment*
https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/doc/form-i-7-a.doc

Wisconsin *Guide to Determining Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disability*
https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/pdf/mscd-guide-to-determining-students-with-mscd.pdf

Wisconsin Webpage: *Students with a Most Significant Cognitive Disability*
https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/program/students-most-significant-cognitive-disabilities

Wyoming

Wyoming Alternate Assessment (WY–ALT) Participation Guidance (Copy and paste link)
https://wyoassessment.org/core/fileparse.php/2417/urlt/2020-WY-ALT-Participation-Guidance.pdf

Wyoming Alternate Participation Checklist (Copy and paste link)
https://wyoassessment.org/core/fileparse.php/2417/urlt/2020-WY-ALT-Participation-Checklist-FILLABLE.pdf