



Eligibility and Participation of Students in the  
Ohio Alternate Assessment for Students  
with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD)

**Frequently Asked Questions for Families**

**1. Who takes the alternate assessment?**

Federal law requires that all students take yearly state assessments. Most students with individualized education programs (IEP) take the regular state assessment. Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD) is only appropriate for the very small population of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to take a regular assessment, even with allowable accommodations.

Students who qualify for the alternate assessment are most likely to be identified as having a multiple disability, an intellectual disability, a traumatic brain injury, are deaf and blind or identified as being on the autism spectrum. However, even though students identified in these disability categories are most likely to have a significant cognitive disability, less than half of these students will have a most significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for participation in the alternate assessment. Students with other types of disabilities will very rarely have a significant cognitive disability that will make them eligible for the alternate assessment. Students with a specific learning disability or a speech language impairment (only) do not have a cognitive disability and cannot qualify for participation.

**2. How does the individualized education program (IEP) team make the decision that my child qualifies for participation in the alternate assessment?**

A wide range of data sources should be evaluated when determining alternate assessment eligibility that may include:

- Work sample evidence;
- 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 supports provided by an aide or paraprofessional.
- Daily instructional supports provided by intervention specialists.

As a member of the IEP team, you must have access to and understand the participation criteria for the alternate assessment. The state of Ohio provides individualized education program teams with criteria for participation in the AASCD, which can be found on the [Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal](#) on the General Resources page.

It is important to understand that identifying a significant cognitive disability is not solely determined by an IQ test score, nor based on a specific disability category, but rather on a wholistic understanding of the complex needs of a student. Participation in the alternate assessment reflects the pervasive nature of a most significant cognitive disability that impacts both intellectual ability and adaptive functioning (daily living skills). These students will have intellectual functioning and adaptive skills well below average and other characteristics must also be considered beyond just standardized test scores.

### **3. When does the individualized education program team make the decision that my child qualifies for participation in the alternate assessment?**

Students begin taking academic assessments beginning in third grade, so the earliest the IEP team will determine alternate assessment participation is when they develop the IEP that will be in effect during the student's third-grade year. Decisions concerning a student's participation in statewide tests are made at least annually by each student's IEP team.

Typically, a student who will participate in the alternate assessment has had significant disabling issues since birth and except for extreme cases, such as a traumatic brain injury, older students who have been taking general assessments during their school careers could suddenly qualify for an alternate assessment when they did not qualify previously.

### **4. Should my child take the alternate assessment?**

Deciding whether your child should take the alternate assessment can be a challenging decision. There is often the fear that a child may be stressed out if taking the regular assessment or that expectations will be lowered if your child takes the alternate assessment. Fortunately, there are many resources available to help you and the IEP team make the decision that is right for your child.

To guide and support individualized education program teams in determining whether a student is most appropriately assessed with an alternate assessment, the Ohio Department of Education, in consultation with parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, has developed a new [Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool](#).

The online Ohio's State Tests have universal tools available to all students, including repeating instructions, taking notes on a digital notepad, making text bigger or smaller, highlight and shade text, and cross out answers on multiple choice questions. The tests also have built-in accommodations, including read aloud or text-to-speech, calculator, masking which lets students cover or hide text, color and contrast control. Additionally, the tests allow certain student specific accommodations for students with disabilities such as assistive technology and augmentative communication. Student practice test resources are available online and on paper at this [link](#).

The online Alternate Assessment has practice tests to give students the opportunity to navigate the online testing system, use the available tools and features and familiarize themselves with the testing experience. Student practice tests resources are available at this [link](#).

## **5. How will taking the alternate assessment affect my child/child's future?**

Planning for life after graduation begins the moment a student enters school. Early learning curriculum and assessments impacts what your child will learn and be able to demonstrate in high school and beyond. While [Ohio law](#) requires IEP transition planning begin formally in Ohio at age 14, or younger if determined appropriate, every grade-level experience can strengthen the foundation for future success. Students, teachers, administrators, parents and families and agency providers can work together to identify and deliver the services and supports that will help students with disabilities meet the rigorous requirements to earn an Ohio diploma and move toward meaningful post-graduation goals.

In Ohio, all students who graduate from high school receive a regular diploma. Ohio does not have an alternate diploma, certificate of attendance or some other “lesser” diploma option for students who do not meet regular [graduation requirements](#). However, parents must understand that while a student who takes the alternate assessment receives the same diploma as other students, the diploma does not reflect the same level of post high school readiness. This is because students who have taken an alternate assessment have learned academic content that is greatly reduced in breadth, depth and rigor and they are not prepared for the same post-graduation goals as students who earn their diploma by meeting regular requirements. When students take the alternate assessment, the expectations about what they can learn and be able to do are significantly reduced compared to their typical peers.

When students with disabilities receive their diplomas without earning them by meeting regular requirements, they are less likely to be able to successfully and independently participate in post-high school learning experiences, military service, earning and sustaining a living wage or engaging in a meaningful, self-sustaining vocation. After high school, students who take an alternate assessment will likely need ongoing support for daily living their entire lives.

## **6. Where can I learn more about participation in the Ohio Alternate Assessment?**

Families can visit the [Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal](#) to find more information, including other frequently asked questions documents and practice tests for the alternate assessment. Families also are encouraged to speak with their students’ teachers to learn more.