



Alt-OELPA Participation Guidelines

Collaborative for the Alternate Assessment of
English Language Proficiency

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Background

Ohio's Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment (Alt-OELPA) is a standards-based English language proficiency (ELP) assessment for eligible English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities in Kindergarten through Grade 12. The purpose of this assessment is to measure students' progress toward the attainment of English language proficiency in the four recognized language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It includes the academic English language students need to access and achieve grade-appropriate content taught in English. "English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities" is a term used in federal law. In this document, both that term and the term "English learners with significant cognitive disabilities" are used to mean "English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities."

The following definition serves as the basis for the Alt-OELPA participation guidelines.

English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities are students

- who are not proficient in the English language and have been identified as needing English language development services;
- who meet the federal definition of an English learner (ESEA §8101(20));
- who meet the state definition for having a most significant cognitive disability; and
- whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams have determined an alternate assessment is appropriate for the student.

This definition is consistent with federal regulations that outline the scope of state definitions

of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.^{1, 2}

The IEP team makes assessment eligibility decisions for students who receive special education services. This includes the Alt-OELPA participation decision for those students with a most significant cognitive disability who are also identified as English learners.³ No single individual should make the decision to have a student participate in the Alt-OELPA.

It is assumed here that the student has been identified as an English learner using the state's identification process and meets the federal definition of an English learner (ESEA 8101(20)). It also is assumed that the screening process results are included as just one piece of

¹ Federal regulations state that alternate assessment participation guidelines must:

include a state definition of "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" that addresses factors related to cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior, such that—

- (i) The identification of a student as having a particular disability as defined in the IDEA or as an English learner does not determine whether a student is a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities;
- (ii) A student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is not identified solely on the basis of the student's previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general State or districtwide assessments; and
- (iii) 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))

² This definition is based on: *The ELP Standards for English Learners with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities* (CCSSO, 2019); Christensen, Gholson & Shyyan (2018); Shyyan & Christensen (2018); and Thurlow, Liu, Goldstone, Albus & Rogers (2018).

³ For any student with a disability, the IEP team must consist of "(1) The parents of the child; (2) Not less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment); (3) Not less than one special education teacher of the child, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of the child; (4) A representative of the public agency who— (i) Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities; (ii) Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and (iii) Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency. (5) An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in paragraphs (a)(2) through (a)(6) of this section; (6) At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and (7) Whenever appropriate, the child with a disability." (IDEA §300.321) For English learners with disabilities, the IEP team should include a member with expertise in second language acquisition. "When an EL student is determined to be a child with a disability—as defined in IDEA, or an individual with a disability under the broader definition of disability in Section 504—the student's EL and disability-related educational needs must be met. For EL students, in addition to the required IEP team participants under IDEA, it is essential that the IEP team include participants who have knowledge of the student's language needs. It is also important that the IEP team include professionals with training, and preferably expertise, in second language acquisition and how to differentiate between the student's needs stemming from a disability or lack of ELP." (U.S. Department of Education, English Learner Toolkit, Chpt. 6, p. 2)

evidence in the Alt-OELPA participation criteria. Further, it is essential that parents or guardians, as members of the IEP team, are provided information in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner that they can understand in order to participate in decision-making for their child.

It is expected that the vast majority of English learners with disabilities will participate in Ohio's English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA) rather than the Alt-OELPA. All English learners are to be held to high expectations for their English language development regardless of the assessment in which they participate.

Participation Criteria

Making a decision about participation in the Alt-OELPA will differ for grades with an alternate content assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) and grades without an AA-AAAS.⁴ In Ohio, the AA-AAAS is Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD). Nevertheless, the intent is that the criteria are consistent across all grade levels, resulting in the same students being identified for participation in the Alt-OELPA regardless of grade. The IEP team must determine at least annually whether the student will participate in the state's alternate assessments, including the Alt-OELPA.

Student in a Grade with an AASCD

For English learners in grades 3-8, the IEP team should use the following criteria for participation in the Alt-OELPA:

⁴ The Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that all states assess reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8 and once in high school, and science once in the grade bands of 3–5, 6–8, and high school. States may assess these content areas in additional grades not required by federal law.

1. Student participates in (or is eligible to participate in) the AASCD according to the [Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Tool](#).
2. Student could not participate in the OELPA even with accommodations.
3. Potential unintended consequences of Alt-OELPA participation have been considered.

Student Not in a Grade with an AASCD

For English learners in grades K–2 and recent arrivals, the IEP team should use the following criteria for participation in the Alt-OELPA:

1. Student meets the state’s definition of having a most significant cognitive disability and has significant delays in adaptive behavior.

The determination that a student has a most significant cognitive disability and significant delays in adaptive behavior should be based on an IEP team review of student records. This review should include any medical records that the school has. These records should indicate that a disability or multiple disabilities significantly affect both the student’s cognitive functioning and the student’s adaptive behavior compared to that of the student’s same-grade level peers. The student’s delayed cognitive functioning and limited adaptive behavior are evident in home and community environments, not just in school.

A student’s **cognitive functioning** reflects the student’s reasoning, language, memory, and attention skills that may delay the student’s ability to meaningfully attain information and knowledge. Records of cognitive functioning may include the results of an individual cognitive ability test or other formal or informal assessments.

A student's **adaptive behavior** reflects the student's conceptual skills, literacy, numeracy, and self-direction skills that are required for people to function in their daily lives. Adaptive behavior is essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life. Records of adaptive behavior may include the results of standardized measures, interviews (e.g., with parents, students), or observations.

2. Student requires intensive and extensive individualized instruction and substantial supports to access the general education curriculum.

Student needs intensive, extensive, and repeated individualized instruction and supports to successfully and meaningfully access the curriculum. These services and supports are needed on a continuous basis throughout the student's school years. Supports might also include assistive technology, personal care attendants, or medical services.

Adaptations and modifications in the general education curriculum and instruction are needed to provide alternate ways for the student to acquire, maintain, demonstrate, and generalize English language skills across multiple settings and topics. Evidence of adaptations and modifications may include teacher-collected data (e.g., samples of student work or observations of the student). For English learners with significant cognitive disabilities, English language development is guided by English language proficiency standards that are aligned to but may be somewhat different in depth, breadth, and complexity from those held for English learners without significant cognitive disabilities.

3. Student could not participate in the OELPA even with accessibility supports and accommodations.

Appropriate accessibility supports and accommodations should be provided to English learners with significant cognitive disabilities during instruction and assessments. It is essential to determine which accessibility supports and accommodations provide these students with access to instruction. The goal of using accessibility supports and accommodations is to ensure that students are able to demonstrate their English language skills without barriers that are irrelevant to those skills. There must be clear evidence that if needed accessibility supports and accommodations were provided, the English learner still would not be able to participate in the OELPA.

4. Potential unintended consequences of Alt-OELPA participation have been considered by the IEP team.

There are potential consequences associated with participation in any assessment. Some that might be important to consider for participation in the Alt-OELPA include:

- Assignment to Alt-OELPA in early grades (e.g., K–2) may determine participation in a future AASCD
- A change in the student’s placement, which may not be reflective of their least restrictive environment
- Differential access to instructional content, perhaps at a reduced level of depth, breadth, and complexity compared to their English learner peers without significant cognitive disabilities

- Possible limitations in the provision of English language development services
- Differential exit criteria from English language development services compared to English learner peers without significant cognitive disabilities

Factors that Should NOT Determine Participation in the Alt-OELPA

The need to participate in Alt-OELPA instead of the OELPA (with or without accommodations) is not primarily the result of the following:

- Time of arrival in U.S. schools
- Language and cultural differences
- History of limited or interrupted formal schooling
- Low English language proficiency or literacy level without the presence of significant cognitive disability
- Student's ability to exit from English learner services
- Excessive absenteeism
- Poor performance or impact on accountability system
- Disability category label
- Special education placement or services
- A single person (e.g., principal, teacher) making the decision