



# ASSESSMENT 2024-25



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## ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT FAQ

### Who Should Participate in Alternate Assessments?

Alternate assessments are for students with the **most significant cognitive disabilities** who are unable to participate in regular assessments even with extensive accommodations. Any student designated as an alternate assessment participant must have **documentation** within their IEP.

### Why Must Students with Disabilities Participate in State Assessments?

According to federal and state law, all students must be included in educational accountability systems. "All students" includes students with disabilities. The following statutes reference the need to have students with disabilities participate in state assessment programs:

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 1111(b)(2)(B)
- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)
- 612(a)(16)(A) New Mexico Statutes Annotated (NMSA) 1978 22-2C-4 E

### Why Is It Important to Include Students with Disabilities in the General Accountability System?

Legal requirements aside, it is important for the students themselves: by raising expectations that all students will learn at high levels and then testing their accomplishments, successful outcomes will be raised as well. If all students are to benefit from educational reforms, all students must be included.

### Who Are the Students with the *Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities*?

A student who:

- Requires substantial modifications, adaptations, or supports to meaningfully access the grade-level content;
- Requires intensive individualized instruction in order to acquire and generalize knowledge;
- Is unable to demonstrate achievement of academic content standards on the general education achievement test, even with accommodations.

Additionally, Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) has produced the **DLM Participation Guidelines** to assist IEP teams in determining if the assessment is appropriate for specific students.

## What is the Definition of a Student with a *Most Significant Cognitive Disability*?

For a local education agency to classify a student as having a *most significant cognitive disability*, all of the following must be true:

1. Student is already determined eligible for special education and has an IEP;
2. Student demonstrates cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior which are significantly below age expectations even with program modifications and accommodations (typically characterized as having *IQ or adaptive behavior scores 2.5 or more standard deviations below the mean*);
3. Student requires intensive, repeated, and direct individualized instruction and substantial supports in order to learn and generalize academic, functional, and adaptive behavior skills across multiple settings;
4. Student requires modifications to access the general education curriculum; and
5. Student has a disability that results in dependence on others for meeting their daily living needs and they are expected to require considerable ongoing support into adulthood.

## Which of the New Mexico State Assessments Are Considered Alternate Assessments?

Assessment	Subject Areas	Students	Notes
<b>Dynamic Learning Maps - Instructionally Embedded</b>	ELA, Math, Science	Grades 3–12	<i>Optional</i> progress monitoring tool
<b>Dynamic Learning Maps</b>	ELA, Math, Science	ELA and Math: Grades 3–8, 11  Science: Grades 5, 8, 11	<b>Required</b> ESSA summative assessment for students with the <i>most significant cognitive disabilities</i>
<b>WIDA Alternate ACCESS for ELLs</b>	English language proficiency	K–12 identified as ELLs	<b>Required</b> ESSA assessment for ELs with the <i>most significant cognitive disabilities</i>

## Does a Student Need to Take Alternate Assessment in All Content Areas?

A student takes either the general or the alternate assessment in any given content area. The IEP team should determine what best meets the student’s assessment needs. It is permissible for the IEP team to determine that alternate assessment is appropriate in one content area and not another.

## What Criteria Should the IEP Team Consider?

The student should take the general assessment if instructional goals are consistent with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). If instructional goals are more aligned with alternate academic achievement standards, the IEP team may consider assigning the alternate assessment. The DLM is aligned with content-specific **Essential Elements**.

## What Criteria Should the IEP Team Not Consider?

IEP teams should not consider the category of a student's disability, the setting in which the student receives instruction, the percentage of time in a particular classroom, chronic or extended absences, and the expectation that a student will not perform well or will be disruptive taking the general assessment.

## What Documentation Is Required?

Decisions about a student's participation in the general or alternate assessments must be documented in the IEP. The student's record in Nova should also indicate that he or she is expected to participate in alternate assessment.

## What Accommodation Options Are Available on an Alternate Assessment?

Any accommodations outlined in a student's IEP and that the student uses daily in instruction should be utilized on the alternate assessment. For a comprehensive list of accommodations available for individual assessments, please see the accommodations and accessibility manuals for each assessment. DLM will use the answers provided by instructors on the Personal Needs Profile (PNP) and First Contact Survey (FCS) to tailor the assessment to fit individual student needs.

## Is There a Limit on the Number of Students Who Take the Alternate Assessment?

The total number of students who take the alternate assessment in a state may not exceed 1% of the total number of all students who are assessed in that subject (i.e., if 100 students are administered a math assessment, only one should be administered the alternate assessment). The PED is required by law to monitor the percentage of students who take the alternate assessment. (ESSA1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I))

## What Happens if an LEA Exceeds the 1% Limit?

The 1% participation cap is a state requirement. *LEAs do not have a formal limit* but are expected to monitor participation to ensure that the criteria for assigning alternate assessment is being strictly followed. An LEA that consistently has a disproportionate number of alternate assessment participants will be subject to monitoring and support activities. Nothing can prevent an IEP team from designating a student for alternate assessment. Even an LEA who anticipates exceeding the 1% limit should in no way interfere with the IEP team. The decision depends on individual student needs, not on whether the LEA exceeds the 1% limit.

## Where Can I Find More Information?

[Every Student Succeeds Act](#)  
[Office of Special Education Programs](#)  
[PED Special Education Laws, Rules, and Guidance](#)  
[WIDA Alternate Access for ELLs](#)  
[Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment](#)