

# District Alternate Assessment

## Which students are eligible for alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards?

Only students, who have a significant cognitive disability as determined by their Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, are eligible for an alternate state assessment, including the 11th Grade Alternate Assessment. These learners, approximately 1% of the student population, will access grade-level instruction through the Colorado Academic Standards/Extended Evidence Outcomes (alternate academic achievement standards).

### For Additional Information on assessment for students with a disability, please contact

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## What is required by law in terms of implementing a district alternate assessment?

With the passage of IDEA in 1997 and its reauthorization in 2004, it is required that both state and districts provide an alternate assessment for students who cannot participate in general state and district assessments, even with accommodations. Federal statute 20USC1411 provides the regulations for including children with disabilities in both state and district level assessments (including alternate assessments) with appropriate accommodations as indicated on their Individualized Education Program (IEPs).

### In relation to district assessments, IDEA states that districts must:

- Establish accommodation guidelines for their regular district assessments
- Establish participation guidelines for the district alternate assessment for those students who cannot participate in the regular district assessment even with accommodations
- Report results for students with disabilities (on both the district assessment and district alternate) with the same frequency and detail as students who do not have disabilities
- Include Universal Design principles in the development and administration of the alternate assessment

## What is a district assessment?

**A district assessment is an interim or summative assessment given to students at a point in time to measure student performance on district curriculum content.** Districts use the results to determine school improvement priority areas, to gain information on student learning relative to content standards, and to report student progress to the community.

Some district-wide assessments are embedded into the curriculum by grade levels, content areas, or courses. In some cases, teachers weave the assessment into everyday classroom instruction. These assessments are then graded using a district developed rubric, or submitted to a group of trained scorers. These embedded assessments can be district-developed or purchased commercially from a test publisher.

Another assessment design used at the district level is a large scale test. These may be computer-based or paper and pencil assessments which may be timed (60 minute sessions, for example) and administered across grades to several students at once. Typically these consist of multiple choice and/or constructed response to academic questions. Accommodations on these tests are typically very codified and structured. Examples include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Terra Nova, the California Achievement Test, and also some district-designed tests. Some additional examples that would require a district to have an alternate assessment available for those students who cannot participate in the



general district assessment even with accommodations would include district interim/benchmark assessments; end-of-unit / chapter tests; end of course tests or any other test that yields scores that are used for accountability of schools (UIP/AYP) and students (report card grades).

### **What is a district alternate assessment?**

**If a school district has a district-wide assessment, then that district must also have a district alternate assessment for those students who cannot participate in the regular assessment even with accommodations.**

The CDE recommends that districts use either a **Body of Evidence** or a **Performance Based Test** to measure the progress of students with disabilities who are eligible for alternate academic achievement standards and alternate assessment. These assessments should be used to measure student progress in the district's academic curriculum. **If the district assessment covers several different content areas (Reading, Writing, Math, Science, etc.) then the district alternate must also measure progress in those content areas and should be linked to grade level expectations through Extended Evidence Outcomes.** While the district is responsible for creating guidelines as to which assessments the student should take, the student's IEP will document the academic achievement standard and participation in assessment for each subject area. If the student meets participation requirements, all assessment will be taken in the alternate format.

#### **Body of Evidence:**

In terms of a district alternate assessment, a Body of Evidence is a collection of information about a student's progress in the general academic curriculum. A Body of Evidence incorporates data from multiple sources and assessment methods. Informational data may be gathered for the Body of Evidence on an ongoing basis. Examples of evidence types might include student work samples; worksheets; photographs with a written summary; or an audio or video tape with word-for-word script. Along with the piece of evidence, the complexity level and the level of assistance required during the completion of the task should be noted.

In general, the strength of the Body of Evidence assessment is that it allows a great deal of flexibility for teachers and students in finding evidence of academic skills, and thus may allow for a more valid assessment of what a student knows and can do. However, the Body of Evidence approach may have more threats to reliability, as it is difficult for the test to be administered and scored in the same way across several students.

Both the information collected and the scoring rubric for the Body of Evidence assessment should be closely aligned with the district's academic content and Colorado Academic Standards/Extended Evidence Outcomes. The Body of Evidence assessment should use a variety of clearly defined acceptable materials to document student knowledge and should be scored using a carefully designed rubric accompanied by extensive scoring training.

#### **Performance Based Test:**

A Performance Based Test (such as an end-of unit test or state assessment) is a point-in-time, direct measure of a student's knowledge and skills. This assessment typically measures how independently the student can perform an activity linked to grade-level curriculum content or an alternate academic standard.

A Performance Based Test mirrors components of a general assessment in many ways. For example, it uses a set of ordered questions for each student and yields quantitative data that can be analyzed in much the same way as the general assessment. In addition, since this is the form of test used for the state alternate assessment in Colorado (the CoAlt), teachers should be more familiar with resource materials available from the CDE, as well as, have experience in giving and scoring this type of assessment.



However, making Performance Based Tests valid for this population of students can be a challenge. Threats to validity result in part from the specific content of the test being more prescribed. That is, the test defines how a student can demonstrate understanding in Reading or Math, etc. in a more standardized way. Typically this would be an advantage in a testing system, but for this population of students, it may limit how they can demonstrate what they know. In addition, the demonstration of the academic knowledge/skill is at one point in time, instead of across a longer period.

To address threats to validity, the content of the test must be closely aligned with academic standards. Also, because of the variety of challenges this population of students presents in accessing and responding to assessments, significant accommodations and modifications are considered. For example, the test should allow for 3 August 2014 the extensive use of assistive technology devices, flexibility in testing session length and scheduling, and changes to the materials presented to the student so that they may better understand, manipulate, and respond to questions and activities. Reliability on the Performance Based Test is typically strong if those administering the test are trained to give the same questions to all students and there is clear guidance provided on scoring the levels of independence in performing each task.

### What questions should districts ask in developing a district alternate?

1. What is the purpose of your district's large-scale assessment?
2. To what extent has your district aligned assessment with standards (CAS/EEOs) and district curriculum?
3. What are the participation requirements for a student to take a district alternate?
4. What accessibility features/accommodations will be allowed on the district alternate?
5. Are those accommodations documented in the IEP, provided and routinely used during instruction?
6. To what extent does your district have a system to collect and analyze district-wide assessment data?
7. How will the results of the alternate be reported?
8. Will your alternate process measure what it is intended to measure? (Validity)
9. To what extent does the assessment provide the same results over repeated administrations? (Reliability)
10. Will your system be able to demonstrate growth?
11. Will your system provide meaningful information to parents and teachers?

2008 IDEA Amendments to regulations mandate districts to provide IEP Teams with a clear explanation of the differences between assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards and those based on modified or alternate academic achievement standards. (Note: Colorado does not have an adopted modified academic achievement standard and thus does not have a state assessment based on a modified academic achievement standard.) The IEP Team must also take into consideration any effect state or local policies may have on the student's education resulting from taking an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. (For example, what are district requirements for graduation / high school diploma?) The Amendments also mandate districts to ensure that parents are informed that their child's achievement will be measured based on alternate academic achievement standards.

*This CDE guidance document is meant for clarification, is not legally binding, and is not to be confused with legal advice. This guidance reflects CDE's recommendations, but Administrative Units (AUs) may have developed their own policies or procedures that differ from those described herein. Be sure to refer to your local AU's policies and procedures through the Director of Special Education. If you are seeking legal advice, please contact your legal counsel.*

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