

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



COMPANION GUIDE for the DeSSA-Alternate I

A guide to assist IEP Teams in the decision-making process when determining student eligibility for participation in the alternate assessment

Companion Guide Committee 2021-2022

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 - Additional clarifications provided
- Decision Tree updated
 - Alignment of decision-making tools, edits

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Companion Guide for the DeSSA-Alternate Assessment

This Companion Guide is meant to assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams during the decision-making process when determining the appropriateness of student participation in the **Delaware System of Student Assessment Alternate Assessment (DeSSA-Alt)**.

WHAT IS AN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT?

In December 2015, the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) was reauthorized with the adoption of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, which replaced the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*. As with NCLB, ESSA regulations allow the use of alternate assessments, based on alternate achievement standards, for students with ***the most significant cognitive disabilities***.

The majority of students with disabilities are able to participate in the general education curriculum, and will take the general DeSSA assessments with accommodations and other supports. However, a small number of students with ***the most significant cognitive disabilities*** cannot participate in the general education assessment, even with accommodations. For these students, a different kind of assessment is appropriate. This DeSSA-Alt, based on alternate standards, was developed to be part of a balanced educational system of grade-level Delaware Content Standards instruction and assessment to ensure all students are able to participate and show what they know and can do.

IEP teams must consider an individual student's needs and characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations, or in the alternate assessment.

DELAWARE'S DEFINITION OF A STUDENT WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are those whose school records indicate their disabilities pervasively impact their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior across settings. Significant deficits in intellectual functioning result in the students requiring extensive individualized direct instruction and substantial supports in order to make measurable educational gains. Significant deficits in adaptive behavior often result in the student being unable to develop the skills needed to live independently or to function safely in their daily life at home, in school and in the community. The student can not show learning on the general assessment. As a result, the student is learning academic content that is reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity.

The decision to include the student in the DESSA-Alt is NOT based on the following:

1. existence of an IEP;
2. specific categorical label;
3. educational placement or setting*;
4. English language learner status;
5. socio-economic or cultural differences ;
6. excessive or extended absences;
7. disruptive behavior;
8. student's reading level; or

9. the expectation that the student will not perform well on DeSSA Gen. Ed assessments

Note: Intelligence quotient (IQ) scores are not a reliable measure to determining eligibility, as many of the assessment tools used to determine IQ are not fully accessible for learners with significant motor, communication and sensory complexities. IQ scores should never be used in isolation to determine eligibility (from Delaware’s Companion Guide, adapted from Kansas State Dept. of Education @ www.ksde.org).

*It is important to remember that participation in the Delaware Alternate Assessment does not determine the setting/placement in which the student receives instruction.

DETERMINING PARTICIPATION IN THE DESSA-ALT ASSESSMENT

The DeSSA-Alternate Decision-Making Tool is used to help IEP teams determine whether or not a student meets the state’s definition and specific criteria in order to participate in the alternate assessment.

IEP teams “shall determine when a child with a most significant cognitive disability shall participate in an alternate assessment aligned with the alternate academic achievement standards.” (Title 1, Part A, Subpart 1, Sec. 1111(b)(2)(D)(ii)(I)—Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

The IEP team makes the determination of how a student will participate in statewide assessments. The IEP team must follow the Delaware Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines if they are to assign a student to participate in the DeSSA-Alternate. No one member of the IEP team makes this decision. Parents, teachers, and administrators make the decision based on evidence and adherence to the DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool.

This document outlines steps that an IEP team should take in determining eligibility and whether the alternate assessment is appropriate for a student. These steps include: (a) reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community) and (b) determining whether the student fits all of the Participation Guidelines criteria for participating in the alternate assessment as outlined.

For your reference, the [DeSSA-Alternate Decision-Making Tool](#) and the [Decision Tree for Assessing Students with Disabilities](#) are located in our Accessibility Manual as Appendix B-3 and is posted to our Alternate Assessment webpage.

UNDERSTANDING THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE DESSA-ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

A STUDENT MUST SCORE A TOTAL OF **15 POINTS** ON THE DECISION-MAKING TOOL IN ORDER TO BE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DESSA-ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT.

SECTION A: DETERMINING INITIAL ELIGIBILITY

A student must have an IEP in order to participate in the DeSSA-Alt. Assessment. If the IEP team determines that a student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment, the student must be eligible to participate in ALL the content areas of the alternate assessment.

A student who does not meet ALL the criteria for ALL content areas must participate in the DeSSA/SAT general education assessments with/without accommodations.

SECTION B: DETERMINING IF A STUDENT HAS A MOST SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY

The student has a disability or multiple disabilities that pervasively impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. (*Adaptive behavior- essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life- DLM definition*).

Does student have a disability, or disabilities, that significantly impacts cognitive function and adaptive behavior? Review of student records and other evidence indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that prevent the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the standards at their enrolled grade level. Additionally, the student's disability causes dependence on others for many, and sometimes all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive ongoing support in adulthood.

- **Conceptual Domain:** The student's cognitive disability interferes with learning grade level skills which may mean that the student is several grade levels behind in all academic areas and requires modified materials to work on grade level skills and concepts. Student is unable to participate in the general assessment even with accessibility supports. This means that the student needs Level 3 supports in order to participate in the alternate assessment.
- **Social Domain:** The student may be nonverbal, communicate without intention, etc. Adult assistance is almost always necessary for the student to communicate with others. For example, the student may need partner-assisted scanning to communicate with peers and adults. The student generally has limited expressive and receptive skills.
- **Practical Domain:** The student may have difficulty with independently taking care of themselves in the areas of self-care, travel, health needs, and etc. Adult assistance, in these areas, may be needed across all settings.

SECTION C: DETERMINING IF THE STUDENT REQUIRES EXTENSIVE DIRECT INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

The student requires specialized direct individualized instruction and/or a wide range of supports to acquire and transfer skills to school, home, work and community environments.

The student's demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior across these settings is significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations. Substantial supports are supports from the classroom teacher and others as well as various supports within the student's environment to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

The student's disability impacts academic, life, and job skills at home, school, and community. This covers the three aspects of learning:

- ***What the student needs in order to learn.*** Specially designed individualized instruction is needed. For example, systematic instruction is necessary for the student to access the curriculum. Instruction is typically given in small groups or 1:1 ratio.
- ***The types of materials required for the student to learn.*** Materials are significantly modified, customized, and adapted in order to facilitate understanding. Classroom and other materials that peers without disabilities use for instruction or assessments, may be changed in appearance and content form for the student to access these materials. Presentation of information is typically different from the traditional presentation.
- ***How the student demonstrates their learning.*** Their need for substantial supports to achieve gains in the grade-and-age-appropriate curriculum requires substantially adapted materials and customized methods of accessing information in alternate ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

SECTION D: CURRICULAR OUTCOMES

The student requires extensively modified instruction with less complexity and depth of skills and *uses the Delaware Alternate Achievement Standards to access the Delaware Content Standards.

Goals and instruction for this student are adapted to reflect the enrolled grade-level Delaware Content Standards while addressing knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student. Life and job skills are also embedded and included as part of the student's instruction and may provide the context for access to the standards.

The decision to align a student's academic program to the * that are linked to the Delaware Alternate Achievement Standards in ELA, Math, and Science and participation in the alternate assessment limits a student's direct contact with the breadth of the Delaware Content Standards for the grade level in which they are enrolled. This limited or modified exposure to the grade level standards may have significant impact on academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities.

Note the words ***uses** in this criterion. This means that the student who takes the Alternate Assessment is instructed in the Alternate Achievement Standards which are the Dynamic learning Maps Essential Elements.

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The decision to include the student in the DESSA-Alt is NOT based on the following:

1. existence of an IEP;
2. specific categorical label;
3. educational placement or setting*;
4. English language learner status;
5. socio-economic or cultural differences ;
6. excessive or extended absences;
7. disruptive behavior;
8. student's reading level; or
9. the expectation that the student will not perform well on DeSSA Gen Ed assessments

*It is important to remember that participation in the Delaware Alternate Assessment does not determine the setting/placement in which the student receives instruction.

RUBRIC FOR DETERMINING STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR THE DELAWARE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH MOST SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

This rubric is provided as a companion document to the DeSSA-Alternate Decision-Making Tool to assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams in making appropriate decisions regarding student participation in Delaware's Alternate Assessment for Students with most significant cognitive disabilities. IEP Teams must use various data sets in review of a student's eligibility to take the Alternate Assessment which could include but is not limited to:

- Evaluation Team Reports
- Benchmark assessment data
- Diagnostic assessments
- Assistive Technology evaluation
- Speech and Language assessments that determine expressive/receptive language communication status.
- IEP goal/objectives progress data
- Both formative academic and transition assessment data
- Adaptive skills checklists/inventories
- Progress on functional, daily living and life skill standards
- Sensory and/or motor assessments describing access modes of communication, fine/gross motor tasks.
- Learner Characteristics Inventory (LC)

Reference: Adapted from Kansas State Dept. of Education (www.ksde.org)

Evidence for the decision to participate in the Alternate Assessment is NOT BASED on:

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social, cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic and other services student receives
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education services
8. English Learner (EL) status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of student scores on the accountability system
12. Administration decision
13. Anticipated emotional duress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/ Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to participate in the assessment process

Note: Intelligence quotient (IQ) scores are not a reliable measure to determining eligibility, as many of the assessment tools used to determine IQ are not fully accessible for learners with significant motor, communication and sensory complexities. IQ scores should never be used in isolation to determine eligibility.

Directions: Review a student’s IEP and related documents to answer each question. Mark the column that best answers the question. Responses do not all need to be in the far-right column, but all or most should be in the 3rd and 4th columns to the right. Only a small number of learners, approximately 1.0 percent across the entire state, should qualify as meeting the criteria for the Delaware Alternate Assessment which is designed for Students with a most significant cognitive disabilities.

PARTICIPATION AND ELIGIBILITY DECISIONS

Directions: Review a student’s IEP and related documents to answer each question. Mark the column that best answers the question.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Does the student have a current IEP? | | | |
| NO. Stop here. The student is not eligible for alternate assessment. | | YES. Continue evaluation. | |
| 2. Review the student’s IDEA category definition. | | | |
| ___ IDEA category description does <u>not</u> include intellectual or cognitive impairment as a characteristic. | | ___ IDEA category description <u>does</u> include intellectual or cognitive impairment as a characteristic. | |
| 3. Does the data review provide evidence of most significant cognitive disability (a person’s ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience)? | | | |
| ___ Presence of disability documented no evidence that a cognitive disability interferes with learning; goals and objectives that are designed to support learners in learning grade-level skills and concepts in the standards. | ___ Documentation shows the learner may have benchmark and diagnostic data that show a wide skill gap in reading. Prescriptive, direct and systematic instruction is present in the IEP. (Note: Complex reading difficulties do not qualify the learner as having a most significant cognitive disability.) | ___ Evidence that a cognitive disability interferes with learning grade-level skills and concepts. Goals and objectives address grade level academic skills and concepts through extended standards and learning progressions. | ___ Evidence that a cognitive disability significantly interferes with learning grade-level skills and concepts. Presence of goals and objectives to support acquisition of expressive and receptive language and communication skills and/or sensory/motor access for active participation and engagement aligned with grade-level concepts. |

4. Does the learner data document a significant deficit across all domains of adaptive behavior? Does the student require systematic, direct instruction of adaptive behavior skills to be embedded within instruction?

Adaptive behavior refers to an individual's ability to apply conceptual, social and practical skills in everyday life.

- Conceptual skills: receptive and expressive language, reading and writing, money concepts, self-direction.
- Social skills: interpersonal, responsibility, self-esteem, follows rules, obeys laws, is not gullible, avoids victimization.
- Practical skills: personal activities of daily living such as eating, dressing, mobility and toileting; instrumental activities of daily living such as preparing meals, taking medication, using the telephone, managing money, using transportation and doing housekeeping activities; occupational skills; maintaining a safe environment.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>___ NO instruction needed in any of the adaptive skills</p> | <p>___ General instruction needed in one or more domains of adaptive skills, which are covered in district Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) and core instruction initiatives</p> | <p>___ Systematic, direct instruction needed within two or more domains of adaptive skills</p> | <p>___ Prescriptive, systematic, direct instruction needed across many or all adaptive skills within each domain</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

Action Step: Questions 2-4 correspond to Section B on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 8 or below, the student will not participate in the DeSSA-Alt. Assessment.

Action Step: Questions 2-4 correspond to Section B on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 9, proceed to Section C.

5. Does the learner require specialized direct instruction and/or a wide range of supports to acquire and transfer skills to school, home, work and community environments?

___ Student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is temporary or transient in nature
Or
Student does not use substantially adapted material and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings

___ Student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not temporary or transient in nature
Or
Student uses substantially adapted material and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings

Action Step: Question 5 corresponds to Section C on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 5 or below, the student will not participate in the DeSSA-Alt. Assessment.

Action Step: Question 5 corresponds to Section C on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 6, proceed to Section D.

6. Does the learner participate in grade-level academic instruction with learning targets aligned to the Delaware’s Alternate Achievement Standards with integrated supports and services as outlined in the IEP?

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>___ Present levels of performance on the IEP indicates that the learner’s skills are closely aligned with grade-level standard concepts and skills.</p> | <p>___ Student IEP goals and objectives link goals and learning targets to grade-level standard concepts and skills in prescriptive area(s) of data determined need.</p> | <p>___ Student IEP goal(s) are aligned to grade-level targets through most complex extended standards and objectives. These include extended standard skills and concepts or learning progression steps that lead to grade-aligned performance target(s).</p> | <p>___ Student IEP includes present level of performance statements that link learner data with grade-level peers through extended standards. Goals and objectives are based on data-determined needs within standards-based learning progressions. Goals and objectives are linked to grade-level standards through extended standard (modified) concept and skill targets on the least complex side of the range.</p> |
|--|--|---|---|

7. Does the learner require individualized accommodations, access features and materials beyond those provided through Universal Tools, Designated Supports and Accommodations as outlined in Delaware’s Accessibility Manual?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>___ Student’s IEP does not define the specific accommodations, supports, scaffolds, services, materials required for access.</p> | <p>___ Student’s IEP outlines some accommodations, supports and scaffolds that are presently presented in the Accessibility Manual under Universal Tools, Designated Supports and Accommodations. (Note: Complex reading, writing or math difficulties alone do not qualify the learner as having a most significant cognitive disability nor does it mean that they should take the alternate assessment).</p> | <p>___ In addition to the accommodations, supports and scaffolds that are presently presented in the Accessibility Manual, the student requires additional individualized accommodations not allowed on Delaware’s State Tests. For example, test administered over more than one-day, verbal delivery mode supported by concrete objects, picture symbols, all text on the test read aloud, etc. to both access and respond to the test.</p> | <p>___ Student’s IEP outlines individualized accommodations, access features and materials beyond those provided through universal tools, designated supports and accommodations as outlined in Delaware’s Accessibility Manual to meet the communication, motor and/or sensory needs of the learner and provide them with the opportunity to show what they know.</p> |
|---|---|---|--|

Action Step: Questions 6-7 correspond to Section D on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 2 or below, the student will not participate in the DeSSA-Alt Assessment.

Action Step: Question 6-7 correspond to Section D on DeSSA-Alt Decision-Making Tool. Review data and if student scores 3, proceed to Section E.

8. Does the student require the use of assistive technologies to actively engage and participate meaningfully and productively in daily instructional activities in school, home, community and work environments?

Note: The assistive technology box on the IEP should be a quick reference before taking a deeper look into the supports, services and testing accommodations section of the IEP. There are more than 10 domains of assistive technology IEP teams should consider.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>____ Student requires no assistive technology as indicated in the check box on the IEP.</p> | <p>____ Student requires assistive technology supports and services as indicated in the check box on the IEP but assistive technology is not evident within the IEP</p> <p>OR</p> <p>the AT described within the IEP (accommodations, supports, services and scaffolds) are outlined in the Accessibility Manual under Universal Tools, Designated Supports and Accommodations.</p> | <p>____ Student requires assistive technology supports and services as indicated in the check box on the IEP.</p> <p>The learner had been feature-matched with individualized assistive technology to support instruction, communication, sensory or motor access needs and is currently learning to use or is independently using assistive technology as a scaffold to access learning and his or her environment.</p> | <p>____ Student requires multiple assistive technology supports and services as indicated in the check box on the IEP.</p> <p>The learner is in process of an assistive technology evaluation for needs in instructional learning and instructional communication, sensory or motor access and is currently being supported with person- dependent scaffolds to access learning and their environment.</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

Question 8 corresponds to the assistive technology needs in Section D. The student’s needs are reviewed, but this section it is not scored in the Decision-Making Tool.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: ACCOMMODATIONS VS. MODIFICATIONS

The difference between accommodations and modifications

Accommodations alter how a student learns. They do not change what the student is expected to learn. Accommodations describe an alteration of the environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to pursue a regular course of study and/or complete assigned tasks. Within a classroom, accommodations take the form of physical or environmental changes, such as changing the timing, setting, formatting, response, or presentation of material. For example, the teacher may seat a student easily overwhelmed or distracted from noisy parts of a classroom; or a student having difficulty reading may listen to an audio recording of the text. Other classroom accommodations may include:

- Providing a student with extra time to complete assignments.
- Having breaks during instruction.
- Using large print books and worksheets.
- Having sign language interpreters.
- Using specialized keyboards.

Formal or standardized testing situations may also include accommodations, depending upon the needs of the student. Ideally, a student's testing accommodations are similar to the accommodations provided in the classroom. Accommodations do not allow altering the scoring of a standardized test or content of the information presented.

Modifications describe very fundamental changes in the curriculum. They may include altering the standard expectations for a course or assessment, as the student may be unable to learn all of the material, or particular portions of the material presented. Within the classroom, modifications can include shortening assignments or providing texts that are easier to read. For an elementary student with cognitive impairments in a general education class, assignments might be reduced in number or modified significantly. When applied to standardized testing, modifications do impact the interpretation of the test results. Additionally, modifications may take the form of an "alternate assessment," in which a test may not cover the same material as the standard exams.

It is important for parents, teachers, and administrators to be aware of the differences between accommodations and modifications when creating educational programs for students. With appropriate accommodations and modifications in place, IEP teams can help set students up for success.

Reference: [Accommodations vs. Modifications: What's The Difference?](#)

SELECTING ACCOMMODATIONS

Determining necessary accommodations should be part of the development of each IEP or 504 Plan. These questions should be considered in the selection process:

- What are the student's learning strengths and needs?
- How do the student's learning needs affect the achievement of the grade level content standards?
- What specialized instruction does the student need to achieve the grade level content standards?

Next, discuss and review the accommodations the student has already been using. Ask these questions:

- What accommodations is the student regularly using in the classroom and on tests?
- What is the student's perception of how well an accommodation has worked?
- Has the student been willing to use the accommodation?

- What are the perceptions of the parents, teachers and others about how the accommodations appear to have worked?
- Have there been difficulties administering the selected accommodations?

EVALUATING ACCOMMODATIONS

Evaluating how effective the accommodations are should be an ongoing process — only by closely reviewing the impact of an accommodation can improvements happen. IEP or 504 teams should not assume that accommodation selection carries over from year to year. Each year the team should review:

- Each accommodation and the results of tests when the accommodation was used
- Student's perception of how well each accommodation is working
- Effective combinations of accommodations
- Perceptions of teachers, paraprofessionals and other specialists about how the accommodations appear to be working

Be sure that accommodations don't lead to inappropriate testing practices such as:

- Coaching students during testing
- Editing student work
- Allowing a student to answer fewer questions
- Giving clues to test answers in any way
- Reducing the number of responses required
- Changing the content by paraphrasing or offering additional information

Cortiella, C. (2005) No Child Left Behind: Determining Appropriate Assessment Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. National Center for Learning Disabilities

[No Child Left Behind: Determining Appropriate Assessment Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

APPENDIX B: STRATEGIES FOR ACCOMMODATIONS BEFORE THE DESSA-ALTERNATE

School personnel are responsible for providing high-quality instruction to all students through Universal Design for Learning. [The Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) have increased the expectation that students will participate in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible. Despite these heightened expectations, however, students with disabilities often face challenges or barriers within the curriculum that inhibit or restrict their ability to access and demonstrate learning.

These barriers to learning can be related to:

- How information is presented (e.g., as text, in a lecture)
- The manner in which students are asked to respond (e.g., in writing, through speech)
- The timing and scheduling of instruction (e.g., the time of day, the length of a given assignment)
- The characteristics of the environment/setting (e.g., the levels of noise and lighting)

Accommodations can be implemented to eliminate those barriers through:

- **Presentation accommodations** allow students to access information in ways that do not require them to visually read standard print. These alternate modes of access are auditory, multi-sensory, tactile and visual.
- **Response accommodations** allow students to complete activities, assignments and tests in different ways to solve or organize problems using some type of assistive device or organizer.
- **Timing/scheduling accommodations** increase the allowable length of time to complete a test or assignment and may also change the way the time is organized.
- **Environmental/Setting Accommodations** change the conditions of an instructional setting. These provide students with accessible locations that may include specific room conditions and reduces distractions that would allow a student to do individual work in different locations.

GUIDE TO CHOOSING ACCOMMODATIONS

| | Barrier | Questions to ask | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Presentation accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Requires reading of printed text ■ Requires decoding of text ■ Complex Directions | <p>Can the student read and understand directions?</p> <p>Does the student need directions repeated frequently?</p> <p>Has the student been identified as having a reading disability?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Large Print ■ Magnification Devices ■ Human Reader ■ Audio Tapes ■ Screen Reader ■ Talking Materials (calculators; clocks, timers) |
| Response accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Requires written response ■ Requires pre-planning of response | <p>Can the student use a pencil or other writing instrument?</p> <p>Does the student have a disability that affects his ability to spell?</p> <p>Does the student have trouble with tracking from one page to another and maintaining place in reading?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Scribe ■ Note-takers ■ Tape Recorder ■ Respond on Test Booklet ■ ·Spelling and Grammar devices ■ ·Graphic Organizers |
| Timing & scheduling accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Requires focus for extended periods of time | <p>Can student work continuously during the entire time allocated for test administration?</p> <p>Does student tire easily because of health impairments?</p> <p>Does student need shorter working periods and frequent breaks?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Extended time ■ Frequent Breaks ■ Multiple testing sessions |
| Environmental/ Setting accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Setting not conducive to needs of student ■ Environmental factors may be a disruption | <p>Do others easily distract the student?</p> <p>Does student have trouble staying on task?</p> <p>Does student exhibit behaviors that would disrupt other students?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Change of room or location in room ■ Earphone or headphones ■ Study carrel ■ Lower level lighting ■ Flexible/Preferential Seating |

References: [No Child Left Behind: Determining Appropriate Assessment Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

[What should Teachers Know About Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

APPENDIX C: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that a student has a “most significant cognitive disability”?

DDOE does not define a “most significant cognitive disability” in terms of a “cut off” IQ score. Most students with significant cognitive disabilities have intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, or autism, but not all do. And, not all students with these disabilities are considered to have a “most significant cognitive disability”. Students demonstrating academic deficits or difficulties due to learning disabilities, speech-language impairments, and emotional-behavior disabilities do not qualify for participation in alternate assessment. Performing three to four grade levels below peers without disabilities is not, by itself, evidence of a most significant cognitive disability. Academic deficits or difficulties alone do not indicate that a student has a most significant cognitive disability. Further, a most significant cognitive disability will be pervasive, affecting student learning across content areas and in social and community settings.

Students with autism or intellectual disabilities should be carefully considered for alternate assessment, but they should not automatically be assigned to the alternate assessment based on their identified disability category. Not all students with autism or intellectual disabilities have a most significant cognitive disability. Many students eligible to receive special education and related services under these categorical labels are able to participate in general assessments, with accommodations.

Students receiving special education services who are identified as having orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, or traumatic brain injuries, do not necessarily have a most significant cognitive disability. Determinations for student participation in statewide assessments must be evidence centered and made individually for each student by the IEP team.

Students demonstrating mild to moderate cognitive disabilities may be more appropriately placed in the general assessment system with accommodations. Anticipated or past low achievement on the general assessment does not mean the student should be taking the DeSSA-Alt.

2. How do I know if the alternate assessment is appropriate for an MLL with an IEP whose language proficiency makes it difficult to assess content knowledge and skills?

An ELL should be considered for the alternate assessment if (a) their intellectual functioning indicates a most significant cognitive disability using assessments in their home language as appropriate, and (b) they meet the other participation guidelines for the alternate assessment. Assessments of adaptive behavior and communication should take into account linguistic and sociocultural factors for valid interpretation of these assessments, alongside the information on goals and instruction in the student’s IEP used to determine what may or may not be a most significant cognitive disability. If an ELL with an IEP does not meet the criteria for the alternate assessment, he/she should take the general assessment with accommodations as appropriate.

3. What if it is impossible to assess a student because the student does not appear to communicate?

All attempts should be made to find a method of communication with the student as soon as they are enrolled. If various approaches and technologies do not appear to demonstrate a method of communication, then consider that all behavior that the student exhibits is a form of communication, and use this as the starting point. A critical element in assessing all students is a focus on communicative competence as the base for student access to the Delaware Content Standards. Best practice would indicate that students should enter Kindergarten with a communication system that allows them to demonstrate an understanding of academic concepts prior to entering the third grade. However, with or without a communication system, students must still participate in the DeSSA-Alt.

4. If a student has been tested in the past on an alternate assessment, but the current IEP team determines that the student does not meet the Delaware Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines, can the student be assigned to the general assessment?

Yes. The IEP team must ensure that the student receives appropriate instruction on the Delaware Content Standards and participates in the required general assessments for their current grade level with or without accommodations.

5. Is it possible that a decision to participate in an alternate assessment could change as a student gets older?

Participating in the alternate assessment requires that the student has a significant cognitive impairment and interacts with content that has been significantly modified from that which is provided to the student's typically developing peers. Even though students with significant cognitive disabilities often are identified early, prior to starting school, they may be able to participate in the general assessment during their elementary grades. IEP teams should be especially cautious about assigning students with significant cognitive disabilities to an alternate assessment in their early school years. When the level of support needed for the student to participate in the breadth of the Delaware Content Standards and the general assessment increases, the team may determine that participation in the alternate assessment is appropriate.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to continue to need supports to live as independently as possible throughout their adult lives after high school. Students who did not need early intervention services, or who are unlikely to need substantial daily supports in their adult lives, probably do not have a most significant cognitive disability and would not be appropriately placed in the alternate assessment.

6. Do students on the alternate assessment earn a diploma of alternate achievement?

DE Code does not link attainment of a diploma of alternate achievement to the alternate assessment.

An IEP team determines the type of assessment a student will take. For students who are on the DeSSA-Alt, the standards assessed are not the same as in the DeSSA general assessments. The standards assessed in the DeSSA-Alt are less complex than the Delaware Content Standards assessed in the DeSSA general assessments, therefore students taking the DeSSA-Alt will not be eligible to earn credits towards a regular State of Delaware Diploma. Thus, if a student is on the DeSSA-Alt the only diploma option available to the student will be State of Delaware Diploma of Alternate Achievement Standards.

7. What additional information is available for families?

The Office of Assessment has provided the following resources for families:

- [Parent Guide for the Alternate Assessment](#)
- [What Parents Need to Know about the Accessibility Supports on Statewide Assessments](#)
- [DeSSA-Alt Fact Sheet](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)
- DE High School Diploma vs Diploma of Alternate Achievement Standards ([English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Haitian Creole](#))
- [DLM Parent Brochure](#)
- A Future Opportunity Family Flying ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))
- [DDOE Guidance and Procedures for Implementing the Decision-Making Tool](#)

These resources can be found on DDOE's [Alternate Assessment webpage](#)

| Term | Clarification |
|--|--|
| Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) | Includes all forms of communication (other than speech) that are used to express thought, needs, wants and ideas. (The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017); |
| Access modes for communication | Can include, but are not limited to, sign-language, bilingualism, cued speech, verbal therapy, Braille, assistive technology devices and written language. (Ohio Department of Education) |
| Accessibility | Features of the test that eliminate barriers and allow the test-taker to show what he or she can do in each of the tested content areas. |
| Accessibility Guidelines (AG) | Contain guidelines regarding the accessibility features, accommodations, policies and procedures for all Delaware state assessments, along with guidance regarding participation in state assessments and selection of test supports and accommodations. |
| Accommodations | Alters how a student learns, not what the student is expected to learn. |
| Adaptations | Adaptations are accommodations and/or modifications that allow access to the general education curriculum for all students. |
| Adaptive behavior: | The collection of conceptual, social and practical skills that all people learn to function in their daily lives. (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017). |
| Adaptive skills | Practical, everyday skills needed to function and meet the demands of one’s environment, including the skills necessary to effectively and independently take care of oneself and to interact with other people. Adaptive skills are measured in three domains: • Conceptual skills: literacy; self-direction; and concepts of number, money and time; • Social skills: interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, following rules, obeying laws and avoiding being victimized; • Practical skills: activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, use of money, safety, health care, travel/transportation, schedules/routines and use of the telephone (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017) |
| Assistive technology (AT) | Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of that device. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). |
| DeSSA Universal Tools | <p>Universal tools are access features available to all students based on student preference and selection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available to ALL students |
| Term | Clarification |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| DeSSA Designated Supports | Designated supports are available for students whose individual needs and preferences require additional features. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available to students who have an IEP, are students identified as EL or students identified as EL with an IEP or 504, or “general ed students receiving supports” |
| DeSSA Accommodations | Adjustments to the testing conditions, test format or test administration procedures, which provide equitable access during assessments for students with disabilities. The use of accommodations, when needed, generate valid test results. Accommodations should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide equitable access during instruction and assessment Mitigate effects of student’s disability, leveling the playing field Not change content Not reduce learning or performance expectations Not change the construct being assessed Not compromise the integrity or validity of the assessment Accommodations are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available to students with IEP or 504 plan, need |

| | |
|---|--|
| DeSSA-Alt Accessibility Features | Accessibility features are entered into the Kite portal. Many of the supports a student may need are already built into the assessment design. Three categories of support Category 1: Supports within the student portal Category 2: Supports or materials required in addition to those within the student portal Category 3: Supports requiring TA to provide outside of the student portal |
| Diagnostic assessment | Measures students' understanding of a subject area or skills base. |
| Multilingual Language Learner | Multilingual Language Learners are students (MLLs) whose primary or home language is other than English who need special language assistance to effectively participate in school instructional programs. (Ohio Department of Education) |
| General Education Students Receiving Supports | Students who are struggling and at-risk. Students who are receiving supports through RTI program or have been referred to the school’s problem-solving team may benefit from universal or designated supports. |
| Embedded | Supports available within the test delivery system |
| Intellectual disability: | Significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. |
| Modifications | A change in what a student is being taught or expected to learn. Fundamental changes to the curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alters content knowledge and conceptual complexity Teaching to a different set of expectations |
| Non-Embedded | Supports provided outside of the digital-delivery system. |
| Most significant cognitive disability | A disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior |

PROCESS LOG

Companion Guide Committee 2018-2019

Representatives from the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) Office of Assessment and the Exceptional Children Resources group, the Center for Disabilities Studies, and Delaware local education agencies collaborated in the development of this Companion Guide.

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- Cheri Woodall, Colonial School District Student Services Coordinator
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- Michelle Jackson, DDOE Office of Assessment (OoA)
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Revisions from AGECE, 10/23/2019

- Delaware’s Definition of “Student with Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities” approved.
 - Reviewed, “pervasive” term added
 - Added to Delaware’s Participation Guidelines
- FAQ
 - Removal of Content Area Eligibility Delineation
 - Revision of Alternate Diploma Question

Review/Revisions 4/24/23

- Document review, alignment of decision-making tools, edits
- Delaware’s Definition of “Student with Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities” updated
 - Additional clarifications provided
- Decision Tree updated
 - Alignment of decision-making tools, edits