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What Parents Need to Know About Delaware's Alternate Assessment (DeSSA-Alt)

Delaware's Statewide Assessments

All states are required to provide statewide assessment for all students. Delaware has two state testing pathways. Both pathways test English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. One pathway is the general assessment pathway called the Delaware System of Student Assessment (DeSSA).

The other pathway is the alternate assessment called the Delaware System of Student Assessment Alternate (DeSSA-Alt).

The alternate assessment pathway is designed to test students who cannot appropriately be tested using the general assessment pathway, even with accessibility supports.

The information in this handout applies to students who will be participating in the alternate assessment.

To make well-informed decisions, it is important that parents know the following information:

What is an alternate assessment?

The alternate assessment (DeSSA-Alt) is for a small group of students with the "most significant cognitive disabilities." This term is used for assessment purposes for students who cannot appropriately participate in the general assessment because of the pervasive impact of their disability or disabilities. Alternate assessments test alternate achievement standards and students must be taught using the alternate achievement standards.

What is Delaware's Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool?

The Decision-Making Tool was developed to help the IEP team determine if a student meets the criteria to take the alternate assessments (DeSSA-Alt).

The tool is meant to solicit meaningful discussion each year on whether the alternate assessment is the most appropriate assessment for the student.

Parents are a crucial member of the IEP team and must have an active part in making this decision.

Not all students with disabilities need to participate in the alternate assessments. The IEP team uses evidence and the decision-making tool to decide which assessment pathway is best for each individual child.

What does the "most significant cognitive disability" mean?

Delaware's definition of a student with a most significant cognitive disability is one whose disability or disabilities pervasively impacts his/her intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.

How do I know if my child has a "most significant cognitive disability?"

A student with a "most significant cognitive disability" has a disability or disabilities that severely affects learning in all subjects and in other areas inside and outside of school. This disability also impacts activities at home and social environments. This student usually has complex communication needs, requires personal assistance with everyday tasks and may never develop independence. The decision-making tool is the best way for teams to identify if a student has a most significant cognitive disability.

Who is on the IEP team?

The IEP team is made up of parents, teachers, staff, specialists and administrators. An IEP team uses the Decision-Making tool and other information to determine how a student participates in the state assessments. The decision is a group decision.

How does the IEP team decide which assessment my child should take?

The IEP team looks at student records, input from everyone at the meeting, data and reviews the Decision Tree for Assessing Students with Disabilities. The decision tree summarizes the steps for determining the pathway under which a student will be assessed.

How does the IEP team decide if my child is eligible for the alternate assessment?

An IEP team, including parents, meets to determine if a student has a "most significant cognitive disability."

These are some of the steps used to decide:

- Reviewing student records for several years
- Reviewing student information and data from other settings (school, home, community)
- Determining if the student meets the eligibility criteria on the decision-making tool.

If the IEP team finds the student eligible, each team member must sign to indicate agreement. There is also a written statement documented in the IEP.



How can I help make sure my child's needs are being met on the state tests?

Talking with the teacher can help ensure your child's needs are being met. You may also want to

- Ask for help and support for your child
- Ask for an evaluation or IEP process
- Think about the accessibility supports that might help
- Look at other resources available

What kinds of supports can my child have during testing and in the classroom?

The IEP team selects accessibility supports for both instruction and assessment. These decisions are based on each individual child's needs. Supports used during testing should also be used during classroom instruction. The Accessibility Guidelines manual lists student supports and the IEP team should review these every year.

What is the alternate assessment (DeSSA-Alt) like?

Delaware uses the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) testlets for the alternate assessments in ELA, Mathematics, and Science. Each testlet is based on essential elements (standards) that the student has been learning in the classroom.

Students take the test one-on-one with the teacher using a computer. Materials can be adapted for each student, based on student needs.

What will I find out if my child takes the DeSSA-Alt?

The alternate assessments will provide information about student skills. Parents receive score reports for each content area tested. These reports will help show what a student knows and can do.

What are alternate achievement standards?

Essential Elements are grade-level-specific expectations about what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should know and be able to do. Essential Elements are related to Delaware content standards for students in the general population.

Is my child taught with different standards?

Your child will be taught with the standards used to create the alternate assessment. The alternate assessments (DeSSA-Alt) are based on alternate achievement standards or DLM essential elements.

What if my child speaks a language other than English?

An English Language Learner student should be considered for the alternate assessment (DeSSA-Alt) if evidence shows a "most significant cognitive disability." The student must also

meet the participation guidelines. Assessments in his/her home language should be used, as appropriate.

If the student does not meet the guidelines, he/she should take the general assessments (DeSSA) with or without accommodations, as needed.

How can my child take a test if he/she has a different way of communicating?

The alternate assessment was created for students with even the most severe communication needs. Your child will provide responses using his or her best mode of communication.

If my child took the alternate assessments (DeSSA-Alt) before, can he/she switch to the general assessment (DeSSA) for next year?

Decisions are made each year about state testing participation. If the child is moved from the alternate assessment to the general assessment, classroom instruction would also need to change to be based on the Delaware Content Standards.

Will my child earn a Diploma of Alternate Achievement?

A diploma of alternate achievement is not linked to the alternate assessment.

An IEP team determines what diploma a child receives based on his/her involvement in the alternate assessment.

Also, a student cannot earn a regular high school diploma unless they meet all requirements for a high school diploma (e.g., number of credits earned as required by the state and their LEA).

Additional information and resources for state assessments can be found at

<https://education.delaware.gov/digital-de/family-resources/assessment-resources-for-families/>