



Frequently Asked Questions and Answers About the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System

Regulations for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require states to make available to eligible students with the most significant cognitive disabilities an alternate assessment designed to measure their knowledge and skills (34 CFR §§ 200.1(d) and 300.160 (c)). Connecticut's alternate assessment system for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities is comprised of the following:

- Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA) for English language arts and mathematics for eligible students in Grades 3-8 and 11; and
- Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) Assessment for eligible students in Grades 5, 8, and 11.

This FAQ document is intended to provide local education agencies (LEAs), parents, advocacy organizations and other interested parties with information regarding the requirements for serving Connecticut's children with significant cognitive disabilities participating in alternate assessments. This document represents the current understanding of the CSDE on this topic. This guidance does not impose any additional requirements beyond those required under applicable law and regulations.

1. What does “significant cognitive disabilities” mean?

Answer: Students with significant cognitive disabilities are identified as individuals who:

- Have an intellectual impairment, as documented through an assessment of cognitive functioning, that places the individual significantly below age/grade-level expectations;
- Demonstrate adaptive behavior (i.e., those conceptual, social, and practical skills necessary to meet the common demands of everyday life) that is well below age/grade-level expectations; and
- Require intensive, repeated individualized instruction and uses substantially adapted materials, assistive technology, and individualized methods of accessing information to acquire, maintain, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

While a student may not be determined to have a significant cognitive disability based solely on an IDEA classification, individuals with an intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, autism, or traumatic brain injury are more likely to be determined so.

2. Why is it necessary to confirm that the student requires extensive, repeated instruction using adapted materials and individualized methods to access the age/grade-appropriate curricula?

Answer: The CTAA and the CTAS are designed for the student who:

- Requires extensive, repeated, instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature; and
- Uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information to acquire, maintain, demonstrate, and transfer skills.

Access to age/grade-appropriate curricula is generally provided in a systematic manner, across multiple settings and subject areas, allowing these students greater opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. Students who do not require extensive, repeated, and individualized instruction, nor use substantial supports to achieve measureable gains in the age/grade-appropriate curricula are expected to access Connecticut's standard assessments with requisite designated supports, accommodations, and assistive technology (if applicable) as indicated on Page 8 of their individualized education program (IEP).

3. Why does Connecticut need alternate assessments?

Answer: Alternate assessments are designed to measure the knowledge and skills of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities as required by the IDEA and Every Student Succeeds Acts (ESSA). Alternate assessments are designed to support student independence to the greatest extent possible by making academic content accessible and the expected achievement

levels appropriate. The CTAA is aligned to the same Connecticut Core Standards (CCS) used to instruct and assess all of Connecticut's public school students in English language arts and mathematics. The CTAS is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

4. What is the CTAA?

Answer: The CTAA is an alternate assessment of English language arts and mathematics aligned to the CCS for eligible students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 3-8 and 11. It is a secure test accessed via an online platform during the CSDE's testing window. Teachers administering any alternate assessment must be trained by the CSDE **each** year prior to administering the assessments to each student individually. Accessibility features and accommodations are available based on the needs of each student.

5. What is the CTAS?

Answer: The CTAS is an assessment of the Next Generation Science Standards for eligible students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 5, 8, and 11. This alternate assessment is non-secure and is administered to students by a CSDE trained teacher over the course of the school year. The teacher supports students throughout the school year in the completion of specific Performance Tasks aligned to the NGSS Science content and can provide embedded scaffolding for students who require additional supports when responding to the activities.

6. How is eligibility for Connecticut's Alternate Assessment System determined?

Answer: Effective August 2019, the [Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form](#) must be utilized to determine eligibility for participation in the alternate assessment system. A draft is completed by the CSDE trained teacher and is then discussed by the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) to determine if the student qualifies. The PPT must verify that the student has a significant cognitive disability by documenting the following evidence:

- a. The student has an intellectual impairment as evidenced by cognitive assessments or other evidence to substantiate an intellectual impairment; **and**
- b. The student's adaptive behavior is well below age-level expectations as evidenced by adaptive behavior assessments; **and**
- c. The student requires intensive instruction and significant supports.

Refer to the [Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Participation Guidance for Planning and Placement Teams Flowchart](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form](#) for more information.

7. Should the student's primary disability category influence the PPT when determining the most appropriate assessment?

Answer: Although, there is no federal restriction on the primary disability for participation in an alternate assessment, certain disabilities (i.e., intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, autism or traumatic brain injury) are more likely to meet eligibility criteria. Students with the primary disability of Specific Learning Disability (SLD), SLD/Dyslexia, and Emotional Disturbance may not meet the eligibility criteria because these students may not have evidence supporting a significant cognitive disability that is pervasive in nature. Sections 34 CFR 300.309 (3)(a)(1) and (2) and 300.8(c)(4)(i) of the IDEA require that intellectual factors/impairments be ruled out in order to qualify for special education services under the categories of a specific learning disability or emotional disturbance. Therefore, these students would most likely participate in the standard statewide assessments unless there is evidence in the IEP to meet the criteria defined by the eligibility form.

8. How is the most appropriate assessment selected?

Answer: Assessment decisions should be made by the PPT. In an effort to maintain high expectations for all students, teams should first explore the standard assessment, considering all available designated supports and accommodations, including assistive technology as needed.

If, after the standard assessment option with consideration of accommodations has been explored and the team has concerns related to the student's inability to access the standard assessment, the team should consider the alternate assessment option. Eligibility criteria is described in the Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form. The PPT must ensure that the IEP is designed to meet the student's current needs and supports the assessment recommendation. The appropriate assessment determination must be documented on Page 9 of the IEP document.

9. How are the individual needs of the student addressed through the alternate assessment system?

Answer: The test design of both the CTAA and the CTAS incorporates best practices for teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities to make the grade-level content accessible. For example, the entire CTAA test, including passages, items, and response options, are read to the student by the trained test administrator or the embedded text-to-speech accessibility feature. Additional built-in supports include but are not limited to, reduced passage length in reading, embedded pictures and graphics to help students understand test content, and common geometric shapes and smaller numbers on the mathematics test. The CTAS provides guidance for trained teachers to use meaningful content-aligned Performance Tasks using the preferred communication methods of the student, and embedded supports and scaffolding to rate how the student demonstrates what they know and can do related to science. The alternate assessments also provide opportunities for the use of assistive technology, expressive and receptive communication supports, and accommodations included in the student's IEP that are consistent with Connecticut assessment policies.

10. Where can I find more information about Connecticut's Alternate Assessment System?

Answer: The following links provide more specific information related to the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System:

Connecticut Comprehensive Assessment Program Portal [Alternate Assessments](#)

[CSDE Assessment webpage](#)

[CSDE Special Populations webpage](#)

[CSDE Alternate Assessment System webpage](#)

[CSDE Special Education webpage](#)