

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT: GUIDELINES FOR IEP TEAM DECISION-MAKING

PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR ASSESSMENTS

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team must determine if a student with disabilities receiving special education and related services will participate in assessments under standardized conditions, with or without allowable accommodations or if the student will participate in the Arkansas Alternate Portfolio Assessment System. Decision-makers start from the premise that ALL students, including ALL students with disabilities, are to participate, to the extent possible, in the regular assessment rather than in the Alternate Portfolio Assessment System. Decisions about how a student will participate must be made at the IEP meeting that precedes the next school year's administration of any statewide assessment.

The Arkansas Department of Education has provided the following guidelines for Local Education Agencies to use in determining students for whom the standard assessment is inappropriate.

The IEP Team's decision-making process should be guided by the following criteria:

- The student must have a current IEP.
- The decision concerning a student's participation in statewide and district-wide assessment is an IEP Team decision and not an administrative decision.
- IEP Team decisions concerning a student's participation in statewide or district-wide assessment must be based on both current and historical data.
- Decisions regarding participation are made annually and are based on the student's curriculum, present levels of educational performance, skill levels, and learning characteristics.
- Decisions must be made at the IEP meeting that precedes the next school year's administration of any statewide assessment.

The student's IEP Team should consider these factors:

1. Can the student work independently?
2. Can the student work effectively with 25-30 other students in the room?
3. Can the student work effectively for 30-60 minutes?
4. Can the student listen to and follow oral directions?
5. Can the student use a pencil and paper testing format to answer open-ended questions or to write at least a paragraph?
6. Can the student take multiple-choice tests?
7. Can the student use a "bubble sheet" answer format?
8. Can the student operate a calculator?
9. Has the student received instruction in areas to be tested?
10. Has the student been taught to read or to use taped books?

If the IEP Team answers “NO” to any question(s) 1-10, the student's IEP Team must consider which, if any, accommodations are needed by the student.

In making a decision about how the special education student will participate in testing, the IEP Team must have addressed the following considerations:

REGULAR ASSESSMENT

Does the student’s IEP contain specific accommodations for use during testing?

- If the student’s IEP does not contain accommodations, the student will participate in the standard assessment without accommodations.
- If the student’s IEP contains specific accommodations, the IEP Team must have done the following:
 1. Identified the accommodation(s), as stated in the student’s IEP, for use during testing. (Reminder: Only those accommodations listed in the student’s IEP may be considered for use during the standard testing.)
 2. Decided if there are portions of the standard test during which a specific accommodation should not be allowed and ensured that the test administrator knows when the accommodation is not permitted.
 3. Determined if the student’s IEP accommodation(s) is compatible with the allowable accommodations for the Arkansas Benchmark Examinations. If it is not listed as an allowable accommodation, the Arkansas Department of Education must be contacted to determine if an exception may be granted.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

Significant Cognitive Disability (SCD) Eligibility Criteria for Alternate Portfolio Assessment System

For some students with disabilities, their levels of cognitive ability and adaptive behavior skills may prevent attainment of the academic content and achievement standards that are designated at each grade level for all students. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, such students may meet the criteria established by the State to be considered as students with a “significant cognitive disability” and may be assessed with an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards.

All students with disabilities must participate, with or without accommodations, in the Augmented Criterion-Referenced Tests (Benchmark for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8; End-of-Course Algebra, Geometry, and Biology, if taking those courses; grade 9 Mathematics; grade 11 Literacy), or the Alternate Portfolio Assessment System for those students determined to have a significant cognitive disability.

The Alternate Portfolio Assessment System in Arkansas for the Augmented Benchmark Examinations in grades 3 through 8 (Mathematics and Literacy) and Grade 11 Literacy is designed for and administered to those students with disabilities who have been determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams to be students with a significant cognitive disability. The decision for a student’s participation in the Alternate Portfolio Assessment System is an IEP Team decision based on the defined needs and associated academic/behavioral performance deficiencies of the student. It is not a decision made by the school administration.

The term “significant cognitive disability” is not a new separate category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the statewide student assessment program. For a student to be classified as having a significant cognitive disability for purposes of participation in the Alternate Portfolio Assessment System, ALL of the following statements must be true as determined by the student’s IEP Team:

- The student’s demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in the home, school, and community environments are significantly below age expectation, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations.
- The student’s course of study is primarily functional and life-skills oriented.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction and/or extensive supports in multiple settings to acquire, maintain, and generalize academic and functional skills necessary for application in school, work, home, and community environments.
- The student demonstrates severe and complex disabilities and poor adaptive skills levels (determined to be significantly below age expectations by that student’s comprehensive assessment) that essentially prevent the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards established at grade level.
- The student’s disability causes dependence on others for many, if not all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive ongoing support in adulthood.
- The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum at grade level is not primarily the result of the following:
 - excessive or extended absences, poor attendance, or lack of instruction;
 - sensory (visual or auditory) or physical disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, or a specific learning disability;
 - social, cultural, linguistic, or economic differences;
 - below average reading level;
 - low achievement in general;
 - expectations of poor performance;
 - disruptive behavior;
 - the student’s IQ;
 - the anticipated impact of the student’s performance on the school/district performance scores; and
 - the student’s disability category, educational placement, type of instruction, and/or amount of time receiving special services.