



Students with Disabilities and Testing Requirements

1. How are students with disabilities included in state and district assessments under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

Under IDEA, the individualized education program (IEP) team develops an IEP, which spells out the educational goals for the student and the services he or she will receive. IDEA also requires that students with disabilities be included in state and district assessments.

2. What are the requirements for the participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)?

NCLB builds on IDEA's requirement that students with disabilities participate in state and district assessments. Under NCLB, all students, including students with disabilities, must be assessed annually using state assessments in reading and math in grades 3–8, and at least once in high school. Science must be assessed once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school. Results are reported for all students and for specific subgroups of students by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability and limited English proficiency. States and districts must be able to demonstrate that at least 95 percent of all students, and of the students in each subgroup, are included in assessment results in order to meet the accountability requirements.

3. How may students with disabilities participate in NCLB's assessment requirements?

Students with disabilities may participate in NCLB's assessment requirements in one of the following ways:

- Grade-level assessment,
- Grade-level assessment with accommodations,
- Alternate assessment based on grade-level academic achievement standards,
- Alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards, or
- Alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards.

4. Who makes the decision about how a student with disabilities participates in the state assessment system?

A student's individualized education program team determines how the student will participate in the state assessment system and what, if any, accommodations are needed for the student to take the general assessment. Students with disabilities who are not able to show what they know and can do on the general grade-level assessment, even with appropriate accommodations, must be assessed with an alternate assessment. Alternate assessments may be based on grade-level academic achievement standards, modified academic achievement standards, or alternate academic achievement standards.

5. How are students with disabilities included in adequate yearly progress (AYP) calculations?

The U.S. Department of Education has issued two exemptions to AYP calculations for students with disabilities. The first permits a student's proficient score on "alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards" to count the same as any other student's proficient score on a state assessment, subject to a 1 percent cap. This is intended to allow students with significant cognitive disabilities to participate in NCLB's assessment and accountability system.

The second allows a student's proficient scores on "alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards" to count as proficient in AYP calculations, subject to a 2 percent cap. This is intended to allow students with disabilities who are capable of achieving grade-level standards, but not within the same timeframe as all other students, to participate in NCLB's assessment and accountability systems.

6. How do modified academic achievement standards compare with alternate academic achievement standards?

The achievement expectations for modified academic achievement standards are less difficult than grade-level academic achievement standards, but more demanding than alternate academic achievement standards. Modified academic achievement standards, like grade-level academic achievement standards, are based on a state's approved grade-level academic content standards for the grade in which a student is enrolled. Modified academic achievement standards are not based on academic content standards that have been modified or restricted.

Alternate academic achievement standards, on the other hand, are based on a very limited sample of content that is linked to grade-level

content standards but may not fully represent grade-level content and may include substantially simplified content.

7. How do alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards differ from alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards?

An alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards differs from an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, in the following ways:

- (1) The nature of alignment with grade-level content standards. An alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards must be linked to grade-level content, but need not fully represent grade-level content. A state may develop "extended content standards" that substantially restrict or simplify grade-level content in order to make it accessible to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and may use these extended content standards as the basis for an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. In contrast, alignment with grade-level content standards is the foundation of an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. An alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards must cover the same grade-level content as the general assessment.
- (2) Proficiency. The type of student work that defines proficient performance on an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards is substantially different from the type of student work that defines proficient performance on grade-level academic achievement standards. Proficient performance on an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement

standards, in contrast, is expected to represent understanding of grade-level content based on a less rigorous assessment.

8. Are states required to develop modified academic achievement standards?

No. States have the option of developing modified academic achievement standards. If a State chooses not to develop modified academic achievement standards, it must still ensure that all students with disabilities are appropriately assessed and include the assessment scores of all students with disabilities in AYP determinations.

9. May a student take an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards in one subject and take the general assessment in another subject?

Yes. A student's IEP team decides how the student will be assessed for each applicable subject area. Thus, an IEP team could decide that a student should take the alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards in one subject (e.g., reading) and the general assessment in another subject (e.g., math).

10. May states or districts exceed the 1 percent and 2 percent caps?

The 2 percent cap may be exceeded only if the state or district is below the 1 percent cap for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards. For example, if the number of proficient scores on the alternate assessment based on academic achievement standards is 0.8 percent, the state or district could include 2.2 percent of proficient scores on alternate

assessments based on modified academic achievement standards in calculating AYP. Under no circumstance may the percentage of proficient scores on alternate assessments based on alternate and modified academic achievement standards exceed 3 percent at the state level.