

Participation Decision for Indiana's Alternate Assessment (ISTAR) Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Who decides that a student should participate in the Indiana Alternate Assessment?*

The Case Conference Committee (CCC) makes the determination of how a student will participate in statewide assessments. The CCC must follow the Indiana Participation Guidelines if they are to assign a student to participate in the Indiana Alternate Assessment. No one member of the CCC makes this decision. Parents, teachers, and administrators make the decision based on evidence and adherence to the *Indiana Criteria for Determining Participation in the Alternate Assessment in Lieu of the General Education Assessment*.

2. *How do we know that a student has a “significant cognitive disability”?*

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 “significant cognitive disability.” Students demonstrating academic deficits or difficulties due to learning disabilities, speech-language impairments, and emotional-behavioral disabilities do not qualify for participation in the Indiana Alternate Assessment. Performing 3-4 grade levels below peers without disabilities is not, by itself, evidence of a significant cognitive disability. Academic deficits or difficulties alone do not indicate that a student has a significant cognitive disability. Further, a 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 the Indiana 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 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 significant cognitive disability. Determinations for student participation in statewide assessments must be evidence-centered and made individually for each student by the CCC.

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 Indiana Alternate Assessment.

3. *How do I know if the Indiana Alternate Assessment is appropriate for an ELL with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) whose language proficiency makes it difficult to assess content knowledge and skills?*

An ELL should be considered for the alternate assessment if (a) his/her intellectual functioning indicates a significant cognitive disability using assessments in his/her home language as appropriate, and (b) he/she meets the other participation guidelines for the Indiana 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 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.

4. *Why is it important to indicate that a student, participating in the Indiana Alternate Assessment, is receiving instruction on content linked to the Indiana Academic Standards (Content Connectors) and that his/her performance is measured against alternate achievement standards?*

The decision to align a student's academic program to the Content Connectors that are linked to the Indiana Academic Standards and participation in the Indiana Alternate Assessment limits a student's direct contact with the breadth of the Indiana Academic Standards for the grade level in which he/she is enrolled. This limited or modified exposure to the grade level standards may have significant impact on academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities.

5. *What if it is not possible to assess a student because the student does not appear to have a mode of communication?*

All attempts should be made to find a route of communication with the student as soon as he or she is enrolled. If various approaches and technologies do not appear to demonstrate a route of communication, then consider that all behavior 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 competency as the base for student access to the Indiana Academic 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 Indiana Alternate Assessment.

6. *If a student has been tested in the past on an alternate assessment, but the current CCC determines that the student does not meet the Indiana Participation Guidelines, can the student be assigned to the general assessment?*

Yes. The CCC must ensure that the student receives appropriate instruction on the Indiana Academic Standards and participates in the required general assessments for the student's current grade level with or without accommodations.

7. *Is it possible that a decision to participate in an AA-AAS could change as a student gets older?*

Participating in the Indiana 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. The CCC should be especially cautious about assigning students with 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 Indiana Academic Standards and the general assessment increases, the committee may determine that participation in the Indiana Alternate Assessment is appropriate.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to continue to need supports to live as independently as possible after high school and throughout their adult lives. 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 significant cognitive disability and would not be appropriately placed in the Indiana Alternate Assessment.

Available Website Resources:

Indiana Department of Education, Office of Student Assessment: www.doe.in.gov/assessment

ISTAR Alternate Assessment: www.doe.in.gov/assessment/alternate-assessments

Indiana Department of Education, Office of Special Education: www.doe.in.gov/specialed

Project SUCCESS: www.projectsuccessindiana.com

PATINS: www.patinsproject.com