

## **INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) TEAM DECISION-MAKING GUIDELINES REGARDING STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team makes many important decisions regarding the program and services available for students eligible for special education and related services. One of those important decisions involves a determination of how a student will participate in (1) the general student assessment system in grades 3-8 plus once in high school, with or without allowable accommodations, or (2) if the student will participate in the Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS). *Essential to an appropriate decision by the IEP team regarding a student's participation at any level of the statewide assessment system is a fundamental belief in the integrity of the overall IEP process.*

IEP teams should begin this decision-making process with the proposition that all students, including all students eligible for special education, can learn grade level content and should participate in the general assessment system to the maximum extent possible. However, there are times in which the IEP team can decide that the alternate assessment is necessary and appropriate for a relatively small segment (approximately 1%) of the *total tested population*, or roughly 10% of the total number of special education eligible students being tested. For example, if the total tested population in a school district is 4,000, then 40 students would represent 1% of the total tested population. Similarly, if 400 students eligible for special education were tested in the same school district, then 40 would represent 10% of the students eligible for special education that were tested.

### **GENERAL CRITERIA**

The decision about how an eligible student participates in the statewide assessment is an IEP team decision, and *not an administrative decision*. The IEP team should use the following criteria for determining the extent to which a student can participate in the general assessment, with or without accommodations, or if the student should participate in the alternate assessment system (WAC 392-172A-03090 through 03110).

1. The student must be eligible for special education and must have an individualized education program (IEP) in effect at the time of the decision.
2. IEP team decisions regarding a student's participation in the statewide assessment must be based on both current and historical evaluation and instructional data relevant to the student.
3. IEP team decisions should be based on the student's present levels of educational performance, need for specially designed instruction, annual goals, learner characteristics and access to the general education curriculum.
4. IEP Team decisions regarding a student's participation in statewide assessments must be made at a scheduled IEP team meeting that precedes administration of the statewide assessment.

## GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The IEP team should consider the following factors when determining whether or not the student can participate in the general statewide assessment, with or without accommodations.

1. Has the student received instruction in the areas to be tested?
2. Can the student work with other students present in the testing environment?
3. Can the student work for a reasonable period of time consistent with the timed elements of the test, if any?
4. Can the student follow test protocol directions?
5. Can the student use a pencil and paper and/or computer based format to answer open ended questions?
6. Can the student respond to multiple-choice questions?
7. Can the student use a "bubble sheet" format?
8. Can the student work independently or with assistance from someone such as a scribe?
9. Has the student been taught to read or use books on tape?
10. Does the student's IEP include accommodations/modifications that are allowable for use on the statewide test?

If the IEP team answers "no" to any of the above 10 questions, the team must then carefully consider what if any, other generally acceptable accommodations/modifications would be necessary to allow the student to participate in the general assessment without invalidating the test results.

## ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

The alternate assessment is a statewide testing option in lieu of the regular assessment. It is an option only for students with significant cognitive challenges. The term "significantly cognitively challenged" does not represent a new or separate category of disability. It is a designation applied to a small number of students (generally 10% or less) eligible for special education and related services participating in the statewide testing program.

*For purposes of the Washington Alternative Assessment System (WAAS), students who are significantly cognitively challenged means those students who require intensive or extensive levels of direct support that is not of a temporary or transient nature. Students with significant cognitive challenges also require specially designed instruction to acquire, maintain or generalize skills in multiple settings in order to successfully transfer skills to natural settings including the home, school, workplace, and community. In addition, these students score **at least two (2) standard deviations below the mean** on standardized, norm-referenced assessments for adaptive behavior and intellectual functioning.*

For a student to be considered as having a significant cognitive challenge and therefore, appropriate for consideration as a candidate for the alternate assessment, ALL of the following statements should be carefully considered by the student's IEP team:

- The student's demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in school, work, home and community environments are significantly below chronological age expectations, 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 complex cognitive disabilities and poor adaptive skill levels determined to be significantly (at least two standard deviations) below chronological age expectations by the student's most recent individualized eligibility determination which prevents the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the appropriate grade level expectations.
- The student's disability causes dependence upon others for many, if not all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive on-going support in adulthood.
- The student's inability to complete the standard academic curriculum at grade level is not primarily the result of: (a) poor attendance, excessive or extended absences, (b) lack of access to quality instruction, (c) social, cultural, linguistic, or economic differences, (d) below average reading or achievement levels, (e) expectations of poor performance, (f) the anticipated impact of the student's performance on the school/district performance scores, and (g) the student's disability category, educational placement, type of instruction, and/or amount of time receiving special education services.

When an IEP team determines that the student should take an alternate assessment, the team must document why the student cannot participate in the regular assessment, and why the alternate assessment is appropriate for the student. Please note that an IEP team could document and justify that the alternate assessment could be an appropriate statewide assessment for an individual not necessarily meeting all of parameters of the state definition of significantly cognitively challenged on a case by case basis.

## **SUMMARY**

All students should participate in the statewide assessment system. Like all IEP team decisions, the decision about whether the general assessment, the general assessment with allowable accommodations, or the alternate assessment is appropriate for a given student must be carefully considered. Data and practice suggest that an alternate assessment is necessary and appropriate for approximately 10% of the special education population or 1% of the total student population being tested in the required grades. While the IEP team is ultimately responsible for determining the most appropriate assessment option for a student, these guidelines present some of the questions and considerations IEP team members must contemplate in their statewide assessment decision making process. Utilizing these guidelines will help to ensure that the required measures of student progress are relevant, meaningful, and accurately depict the student's accomplishments and needs for continued

growth and development. These guidelines may also be used for IEP team decisions regarding any district wide assessments.

## Washington Alternate Assessment System

### Descriptors for Participation Requirements in the WAAS Portfolio

According to federal regulations all students must be assessed on grade-level curriculum. The Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS) is a statewide testing option in lieu of the regular assessment. It is an option only for students with significant cognitive challenges. The term “significantly cognitively challenged” is a designation applied to a small number of students eligible for special education and related services (generally 10% or less) for purposes of their participation in the statewide and/or district-wide student assessment system for all students. . Significant cognitive disability is determined by the IEP committee and is not linked to a specific disability. The student must have a documented cognitive disability that affects intellectual potential.

The IEP committee may decide that a student’s knowledge and skills can best be assessed with WAAS Portfolio if the student meets **all** of the following participation criteria. The way a student is routinely assessed (multiple choice or performance-based) should be considered when the IEP Committee is determining a student’s WAAS eligibility.

#### The Student:

Demonstrates cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in school, work, home and community environments that are significantly below chronological age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations and accommodations.

#### Descriptors:

The student accesses and participates in Washington’s grade level Learning Standards through activities that focus on prerequisite skills. Even when provided access to a differentiated general education curriculum, the student is unable to derive reasonable educational benefit without significant individualized modifications to content and performance expectations. The student requires access to the general education curriculum through goals and objectives in the IEP that focus on prerequisite skills that are functionally linked to the grade-level curriculum and requires supports to access the general curriculum that may include assistance involving communication, response style, physical access, or daily living skills.

Participates in a course of study is primarily functional and life skills oriented

The student demonstrates performance objectives that may include real life applications of the grade-level Learning Standards as appropriate to the student’s abilities and needs. The goals and objectives listed in the student’s IEP focus on progress within functional achievement indicators and extensions to the Washington Learning Standards. The student strives to achieve the most basic self-help and communication skills and is seeking opportunities throughout the day to accomplish very individual goals. The student may demonstrate academic skills by applying them in environments where the needed skill may naturally occur such as the use of reading, math and science skills during a cooking activity in a kitchen.

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 needs specialized instruction and techniques over a period of time to ensure that he or she can learn, retain information, and transfer skills to other settings. However, even with extensive, intensive, pervasive, frequent, and individualized instruction in all settings, the student may be unable to acquire, maintain, generalize, and apply academic skills across environments.

The student demonstrates complex cognitive disabilities and poor adaptive skill levels determined to be significantly (at least two standard deviations) below chronological age expectations by the student's most recent individualized eligibility determination which prevents the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the appropriate grade level expectations.



There is empirical evidence of a severe disability that precludes the acquisition of Washington Learning Standards. The student demonstrates knowledge and skills routinely in class by methods other than paper and pencil tasks. The student may be able to perform some paper-and-pencil tasks (tracing words, copying spelling words, completing simple worksheets, even writing simple phrases or sentences). However, the student is typically evaluated by methods other than paper and pencil such as by observing student performance while the student manipulates items, verbalizes responses, eye gazes or activates an augmentative communication device.

The student's disability causes dependence upon others for many, if not all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive on-going support in adulthood.



The student may need specialized academic help as well as help throughout the day in areas such as expressing his/her needs, getting from place to place, eating lunch, negotiating social situations and/or taking care of personal needs.

The student's inability to complete the standard academic curriculum at grade level is not primarily the result of: (a) poor attendance, excessive or extended absences, or lack of instruction, (b) social, cultural, linguistic, or economic differences, (c) below average reading or achievement levels, (d) expectations of poor performance, (e) the anticipated impact of the student's performance on the school/district performance scores, and (f) the student's disability category, educational placement, type of instruction, and/or amount of time receiving special education services.



The student's cognitive and adaptive skill performance are not the result of external factors such as absences, lack of instruction, etc., and require intensive or extensive levels of direct support that is not of a temporary or transient nature.

When an IEP team determines that the student should take an alternate assessment, the team must document in the IEP why the student cannot participate in the regular assessment, and why the alternate assessment is appropriate for the student. Please note that an IEP team could document and justify that the alternate assessment could be an appropriate statewide assessment for an individual not meeting all of parameters of the state definition of significantly cognitively challenged on a case by case basis.