

4.1 Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About the WAAS-Portfolio

Q: Why assess students with disabilities on the alternate assessment?

A: It's the law. Both IDEA and No Child Left Behind require that all students including those with disabilities participate in the state's assessment system, with or without accommodations, or that they take an alternate assessment if they cannot take the tests due to the severity of their disabilities. The WAAS-Portfolio is our state's alternate assessment and assesses students with significant cognitive disabilities in their performance of skills and knowledge of content found in the state's GLEs. By participating in alternate assessments, students become more "visible" in their schools and have a greater chance of being considered when decisions are made to allocate staff and resources.

There is more to the alternate assessment than "passing." The alternate assessment gives feedback that can be used to identify challenging goals and instruction for each student. The evidence submitted in a portfolio ensures that students with the most intensive disabilities have an opportunity to "show what they know" and to receive instruction at a level that is challenging and attainable.

Q: Why not use a different set of standards for these students?

A: One reason to include students with significant disabilities in standards-based instruction is to explore their capabilities. Although "life skills" are critical for these students to function as independently as possible, academic skills are also important. *Learning standards* are defined as "valued outcomes for all students." Why, then, should separate standards be identified for some students and not for others? And who, if anyone, should decide which students should receive standards-based instruction and which should not?

Some students with disabilities have never been taught academic skills and concepts, even at very basic levels. Yet, all students are capable of learning at a level that engages and challenges them. Teachers who have incorporated learning standards into their instruction cite unanticipated gains in students' performance and understanding.

An additional advantage is that some social, communication, motor, self-help, and other daily living skills can be addressed during activities in which learning standards are taught.

Q: Does teaching the general curriculum violate the IEP?

A: IDEA states that the IEP must include goals that:

- (aa)meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and
- (bb)meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability...." Sec.614. (d) (1) (A) (i) (I)

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Q: If students with significant cognitive delays could work on the general education curriculum, wouldn't they be in general education?

A: Special education is designed to "...enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum..." Sec.614. (d) (1) (A) (i) (I) (aa)

Q: How do we know portfolios truly reflect what students have learned?

A: If teachers follow instructions outlined in the *2009-2010 Teachers' Guide for the WAAS-Portfolio*, they can be assured that the portfolio will be scored based on the student evidence submitted. Basic instructional modeling is inherent in the WAAS-Portfolio data collection process. Teachers instruct a new skill by beginning with the introduction the skill and taking a baseline check of their students' present levels of performance. Teachers constantly adjust their teaching to meet the identified needs of their students as well as model the skill, guide their students' skill practice, and take another check or more of the skill acquisition (the midline data point). The teaching continues with potentially another adjustment to teaching, more modeling, guided and independent practice and finally the celebration of the students' accomplishment at acquiring the skill. Assessing the student's progress throughout the instructional process is intuitive to teachers. For the WAAS-Portfolio, teachers document that progress at three intervals (data points). Because compiling the WAAS-Portfolio is built upon good instructional practice, the student evidence truly reflects what they have learned.

Q: Portfolios require some effort. How can teachers manage the portfolio process efficiently?

A: OSPI is making the effort to communicate to all school administrators the need to coordinate this process at the building level and to meet regularly with teachers who conduct alternate assessments to identify teacher resources. All adults who work with a student are encouraged to be involved in developing his or her portfolio.

Teachers should begin collecting student work early in the school year and to complete all required forms and cover sheets according to the established data collection windows and in advance of the end of the data collection windows. Teachers have incorporated collecting the data for the WAAS-Portfolios as an integral part of their daily instruction and have begun to use the that student evidence to plan instruction, identify educational goals for students, write progress reports, and share information with parents.

Finally, teachers are encouraged to request assistance from the OSPI Alternate Assessment Staff, if they need it.

Q: Are teachers required to use the electronic forms?

A. The electronic forms and extensions in ProFile™ were developed to assist teachers but are not required. The forms and extensions in ProFile™ will eliminate administrative errors and save teacher time; however teachers can still download the forms after completing them in Word and can also handwrite the WAAS-Portfolio forms.

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Q: Are academic skills functional for students with significant cognitive delays?

A: Literacy and numeracy are the 2 most functional skills in our society.

Q: How do teachers teach both academic and functional curriculums?

A: Most functional skills, including but not limited to social, motor, behavioral and communication, can be taught within the context of general education activities.

Q: If the reading, writing, science and high school mathematics extensions have changed little from 2008-2009 to 2009-2010, can we use last year's extensions and/or forms for the 2009-2010 WAAS-Portfolio?

A: No, we have refined the 2009-2010 extensions and forms to reflect teachers' requests that we extend extensions lower and simplify the forms. Therefore, using last year's extensions and forms could lead to a non aligned portfolio which means the portfolio will not be scored for performance and context.

Q: How are WAAS-Portfolio scores calculated and reported?

A: The scores are calculated by summing Parts C and D, Performance and Context, for the two targeted skills in each content area. For example, the top performance score is a 4 and the top context score is a 2. If Reading Skill 1 receives 4 for performance and a 2 for context and reading skill 2 receives a 4 for performance and a 2 for context, the sum would be 12. At the high school level, High school WAAS-Portfolios are scored by two separate scorers whose scores are summed, so a perfect score for a high school portfolio then becomes 24.

Q. Why can't we waive the students in the Awareness Level on the Continuum for Cognitive Development from the assessments before 11th grade?

A. The No Child Left Behind requirements do not allow any state to waive the assessment of any student taking the state's accountability assessments, including the alternate assessment, the WAAS-Portfolio. Washington State's Federal accountability includes assessing all students in grades 3-8 and 10. At grade 11, Washington State can consider waiving students from the graduation assessment requirements; therefore the state has established a policy that students in the awareness category on the Continuum for Cognitive Development, the 1% of the 1% of the state's student population, can be waived from graduation assessment requirements. This waiver allows the students to graduate, but they do not receive a Certificate of Individual Achievement.