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/ California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System

Alternate Assessment IEP Team Guidance

Guidelines for individualized education program (IEP) teams regarding participation in the California Alternate Assessments and the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California.

This document is intended for IEP teams to help guide them in determining whether the California Alternate Assessments (CAAs) and the proposed Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (Alternate ELPAC) would be the most appropriate assessments for an individual student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The participation criteria presented in this document are adapted from the 2013 Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for the National Center and State Collaborative Alternate Assessment. In order to participate in the CAAs and Alternate ELPAC, students must meet all three of the criteria outlined in the “Participation” section of this document.

- The CAAs for English language arts/literacy (ELA), mathematics, and science were developed by the California Department of Education (CDE) to ensure that all students are able to participate in assessments that are a measure of what they know and can do in relation to the grade-level California Common Core State Standards (CA CCSS) and the California Next Generation Science Standards (CA NGSS). In addition, the CAAs are aligned with grade-level content and are part of a curriculum and assessment cycle, which is accomplished through a linkage between the CA CCSS and the CA NGSS and their respective Core Content Connectors.
- The Initial Alternate ELPAC will become the statewide initial assessment of English language proficiency for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities beginning 2022–23. Until then, a locally determined alternate assessment should be administered to eligible students. IEP teams must use the same eligibility criteria for the locally determined assessment that will be used to determine eligibility for the Alternate ELPAC Operational Field Test.

The learning characteristics of students with significant cognitive disabilities represent a broad range, and assignment to alternate assessments is based on the cognitive disability, not the category of a student’s disability. Therefore, information considered by the IEP team to make a determination as to whether the student has a significant cognitive disability is the first consideration before selecting an alternate assessment that provides student access to state assessments, promotes participation, and elicits the student’s best performance. With respect to students identified with a specific learning disability, the IEP team determination that the student has been identified with a specific learning disability rules out the consideration of the student being identified

as cognitively impaired.

IEP teams must consider a student's individual characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in general statewide assessments, with or without accessibility resources, or participate in the alternate assessments. In addition, as part of the IEP process, parents must be clearly informed that their child's achievement is being measured against alternate achievement standards and of "how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma" (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, [34 CFR] Section 300.160 [d][1]). While many of the students taking alternate assessments are not on a "diploma track," this "does not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an alternate assessment from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma" (34 CFR Section 300.160 [d][2]).

Description of the CAAs and Alternate ELPAC

CAAs for ELA and mathematics. These assessments are delivered via computer, with allowances for flexibility in administration (e.g., a student may respond to administrator-presented item stimuli rather than to the item stimuli on the computer). A trained test examiner familiar with the student (e.g., the student's teacher) facilitates the administration in a one-on-one setting, presenting items via computer, paper, or manipulatives, as appropriate for the student. Items are administered to the student over the course of one or more testing sessions, as needed for the student to complete a content-area assessment. The CAAs for ELA and mathematics use a staged approach, meaning that each student receives items that have been determined to be at an appropriate level of challenge. Embedded-routing tests help determine the items a student encounters.

CAA for Science. Test examiners administer the online CAA for Science to students in a one-on-one setting. Eligible students will be administered four performance tasks. Three performance tasks will be operational, and one performance task will be field tested for future use on the assessment. Each performance task will assess two Science Connectors and consists of ten items—five items per Science Connector. Each performance task will assess one of the three science domains (i.e., Life Sciences, Earth and Space Sciences, and Physical Sciences). The performance tasks can be administered soon after the student has received instruction in the content areas. All items on a performance task may be individualized on the basis of the student's IEP. As with other standardized assessments, the CAA for Science should be administered to each student in a consistent manner, according to the directions provided, with variations only as specified in each student's IEP. However, to maximize engagement for all students, the CAA for Science offers some additional options for individualization in specific orienting activities and test questions. Through individualization, test examiners can use materials that the student is most comfortable using to access the science concept. Individualization does not change the standard being assessed.

Alternate ELPAC. This assessment is proposed to be delivered online in a one-on-one setting. The student will interact with a trained test examiner who will collect and record responses. The Alternate ELPAC is untimed; test items will be administered to the student over the course of one or more testing sessions, as needed, for the student to complete proficiency assessment in all domains

(Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening). The proposed design of the Alternate ELPAC is linear (i.e., not adaptive). The Alternate ELPAC will assess a student's proficiency in English while allowing for a range of receptive and expressive communication modes, including assistive devices, gestures, and so forth. The Alternate ELPAC will adopt a multitiered accessibility resources model so that the assessment will measure language proficiency, not technology ability.

Participation

Once a student is identified for alternate assessment, they will then take the alternate assessment for all standardized State assessments, including the CAA ELA, Math, and Science assessments, and the Alternate ELPAC.

IEP teams should use the Alternate Assessment Decision Confirmation Worksheet to determine whether a student is eligible to participate in the CAAs or Alternate ELPAC.

To participate in the CAAs or Alternate ELPAC, a student must meet all three of the following criteria:

- 1. The student has a significant cognitive disability.** Review of the student's school records indicates a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior essential for a person to live independently and to function safely in daily life. Having a significant cognitive disability is not determined by an IQ test score; rather, a holistic understanding of the student is required. Students identified with a specific learning disability cannot also be identified as cognitively impaired, as the determination of a specific learning disability rules out cognitive impairment. IEP teams should be careful to consider the following:
 - Conceptual skills—language and literacy; money, time, and number concepts; and self-direction
 - Social skills—interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, and the ability to follow rules/obey laws and to avoid being victimized
 - Practical skills—activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, health care, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, use of the telephone. As part of the IEP team decision, the team also should consider the following:

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- Community environment typical of the student's peers and culture
- Linguistic diversity
- Cultural differences in the way people communicate, move, and behave

- 2. The student is learning content derived from the CA CCSS or the CA NGSS or is acquiring proficiency as identified in the 2012 ELD Standards.** Goals and instruction listed

in the IEP for the student are linked to the grade-level CA CCSS, CA NGSS, or 2012 ELD Standards and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and set high expectations for this student.

The student's disability or multiple disabilities affect how instruction is presented and how the student accesses curriculum derived from the CA CCSS, CA NGSS, and/or 2012 ELD Standards. The content the student is learning is derived from the CA CCSS, CA NGSS, or 2012 CA ELD Standards, and appropriately breaks the standards into smaller achievable steps. The National Center and State Collaborative has derived these smaller steps from the CCSS to guide instruction, and they are called Core Content Connectors. Science Connectors also were derived from the CA NGSS standards. A Connector is a representation of the essential "core" content of a given state instructional standard. Each Connector was identified by examining learning progressions aligned with the CA CCSS or CA NGSS to determine the critical content for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

3. The student needs extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-level and age-appropriate curriculum, including the following:

- Instruction and support that are not of a temporary or transient nature
- Substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings

The IEP team also should consider the following information to determine whether the CAAs are appropriate for an individual student:

- Description of the student's curriculum and instruction, including data on progress and classroom work samples
- Examples of performance on assessment tasks to compare with classroom work
- Results of districtwide assessments
- Results of individualized reading assessments

IEP information, including:

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and short-term objectives
- Circumstances of a student with individualized and substantial communication needs or modes (from multiple data sources)

- Circumstances of a student who may be learning English as a second or other language (i.e., an EL), which may interfere with an accurate assessment of the student's academic, social, or adaptive abilities

Examples of inappropriate criteria: Some issues may affect a student's learning experience and ability to learn but are not appropriate to consider during the decision-making process for the CAAs and the Alternate ELPAC. Do not use the following as criteria for participation/eligibility for alternate assessment decisions:

- A disability category or label
- Poor attendance or extended absences
- Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
- Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
- Academic and other services the student receives
- Educational environment or instructional setting
- Percent of time the student receives special education
- Student identification as an EL; as with the percent of time a student receives special education, this is a consideration of how the student's English fluency may affect the student's performance—as opposed to their disability
- Low reading level/achievement level
- Disruptive behavior
- Impact of test scores on the accountability system
- Administrator decision
- Anticipated emotional distress
- Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in assessment

For information about the CAAs or the Alternate ELPAC, contact the California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance Office by phone at 916-445-8765 or by email at: caaspp@cde.ca.gov or the English Language Proficiency and Spanish Assessments Office by phone at 916-319-0784 or by email at: elpac@cde.ca.gov.

Questions: California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance Office | caaspp@cde.ca.gov | 916-445-8765

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