

Participation Guidelines: Alternate Academic Achievement Standards for Instruction and Alternate Assessment

This clarifying document has been prepared as a companion for the Participation Guidelines Worksheet.

Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility for Special Education

When a child is referred for special education services, the school district will use "...a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information, including information provided by the parent..." to build the body of evidence to define a student's characteristics as a learner. The IEP Team will review the evaluation data and follow the Determination of Eligibility Checklists to document the student's eligibility to receive special education services under IDEA and to develop an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). During the IEP Team considerations, the academic achievement standard for instruction will be specified and how the student will participate in assessment will be documented. (20 U.S.C. 1414(b)(2)(A)).

Cognitive Disability

As part of the multi-disciplinary process, the unique needs of the child will be identified and evaluated. If cognitive and adaptive delay is a suspected area, a school psychologist or other trained licensed personnel will select and administer valid and reliable instruments based upon the student's needs. Results of testing and observational instruments shall be reported and documented as part of an empirical body of evidence. No one procedure can be the sole determiner of whether a child has a disability or to determine a specific educational plan. Multiple sources of information must be considered to define the pervasive level of support required by the student and to identify areas of strength as well as areas of need. A comprehensive review would be expected to address the following areas: academics; communication; self-care; daily living; social skills; access to the community; self-direction; health and safety; leisure; and work. Adaptive skills should be commensurate with the scores from the cognitive evaluation.

Significant Cognitive Disability

While the Alternate Achievement Standards for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities Non-regulatory Guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education in August 2005 states that alternate achievement standards are intended for "...students with the most significant cognitive disabilities." (p.6) there is no federal definition or single method of determining the most "significant cognitive disability" In Colorado, ECEA Guidelines for Eligibility are outlined for the disability categories. The Intellectual Disability checklist outlines the criteria for significant cognitive disability. Guidelines for the Determination of Eligibility for a Child with an Intellectual Disability or Multiple Disabilities also provides guidance in determining significant cognitive disability.

Since the impact of having an intellectual or cognitive disability varies considerably, just as the range of abilities varies considerably among all people, **the designation of "the most significant cognitive disability" is left to the professional judgment of the school psychologist and other professionals contributing to the body of evidence gathered during the evaluation and considered by the IEP Team.** Generally, such students can be characterized as having intellectual functioning **well below average** (typically associated with cognitive measures indicating an IQ below 55, / 3.0 standard deviations or more below the mean) that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive functioning. This reference is

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only offered to help distinguish between students who meet eligibility criteria to receive special education services as a student with an Intellectual Disability and students with the most significant cognitive disability. The words “typically associated with IQ below 55” allow for some district/school flexibility; **it is not intended to be an absolute requirement.** For students with IQ measured in the 55-70 range, additional factors related to the severity and impact of the disability must be taken into account when considering the selection of alternate academic achievement standards and assessment.

IEP Team decisions must be based upon

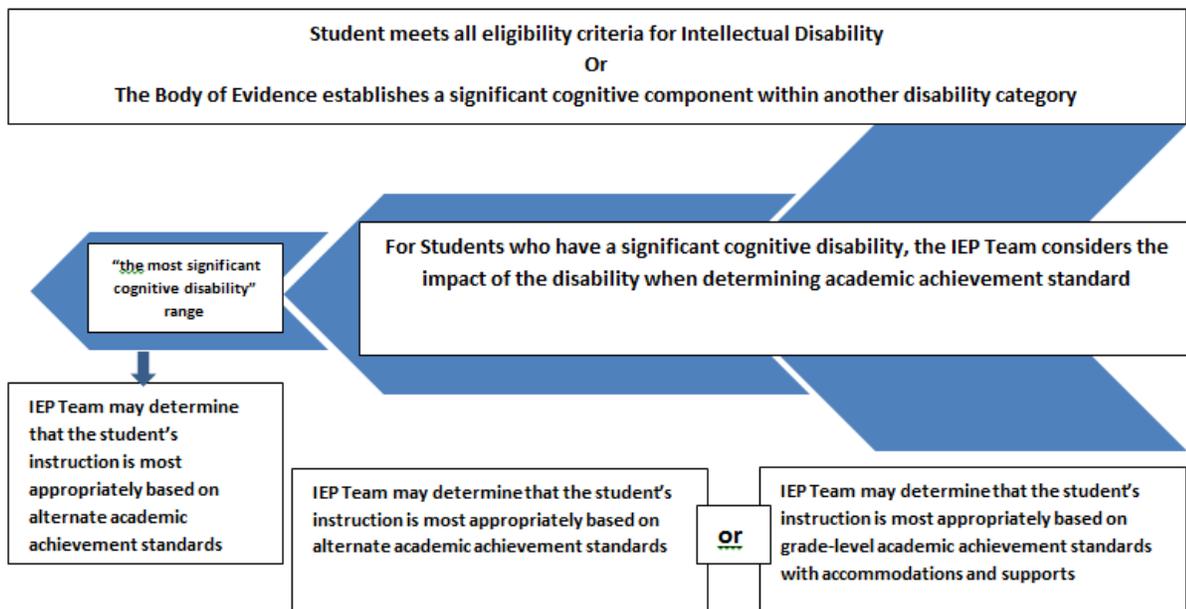
- unique abilities and needs of each individual student
- impact of the disability on educational performance
- professional judgment, supported with a collected body of evidence to support the existence of a cognitive disability that falls within the **significant cognitive disability** range, either as the primary condition, or a secondary component.

Neither the special education disability category nor a given standardized IQ score can be the sole factor considered when determining instructional standards and participation in assessment. In other words, the disability category of *Intellectual Disability* itself or an IQ score below 70 **does not automatically** qualify the student to receive instruction based on alternate standards or to take an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. Some disability categories have eligibility criteria that may inherently exclude significant cognitive disability, (Serious Emotional Disability, Specific Learning Disability, or Speech or Language Impairment for example.)

It is the existence of the significant cognitive disability, regardless of a certain disability category, that allows the IEP Team to consider the option of alternate standards and assessment.

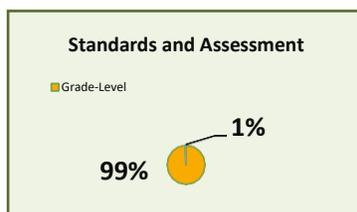
Consideration of Alternate Standards for Instruction and Assessment

(Reads right to left – beginning at 2 SD below the mean)



Participation Guidelines: Alternate Academic Achievement Standards for Instruction and Alternate Assessment

Naturally, it will be a relatively small number of students who have a significant cognitive disability that will meet the participation guidelines to receive instruction based on the EEOs and take alternate district/state assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards. **However, the number of students who meet the participation guidelines is not limited, nor can it be administratively determined.**



Instructional Standards

The **Colorado Academic Standards (CAS)** are expectations of what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade. They also stand as the values and content organizers of what Colorado sees as the future skills and essential knowledge for our next generation to be more successful. State standards are the basis of the annual state assessment.

On August 3, 2011, the State Board of Education adopted **Extended Evidence Outcomes (EEOs)** as alternate standards in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Reading, Writing and Communicating for students with a significant cognitive disability. These alternate expectations are directly aligned to the grade level expectations for all students.

Measurable Goals and Objectives

In the IEP, annual goals are based on enrolled grade-level standards and specify the specialized instruction and related services the IEP Team has identified for the student. If a student meets participation guidelines for alternate standards and assessment, the IEP must include measurable annual goals **and** objectives for the tested academic areas. Goals that are non-academic are used to teach skills students need in order access the general curriculum and benefit from specialized instruction.

Accommodations

The IEP Team is also responsible to document instructional accommodations and accommodations for district/state assessment in the IEP. (See the **Colorado Instructional Accommodations Manual** 2014-15 for more information.)

Participation in Assessment

The IEP Team determines how individual students participate in assessment programs, not whether they participate. Federal law clearly includes all students in assessment and accountability. Since instruction drives assessment, it is the instructional standard that determines assessment. If evidence of a significant cognitive disability is documented, then the IEP Team will consider the educational impact of the disability to determine the appropriate academic standard for instruction.

- The IEP Team may choose grade-level instructional standards with/without appropriate accommodations. In that case, the student will participate in grade-level classroom/district/state

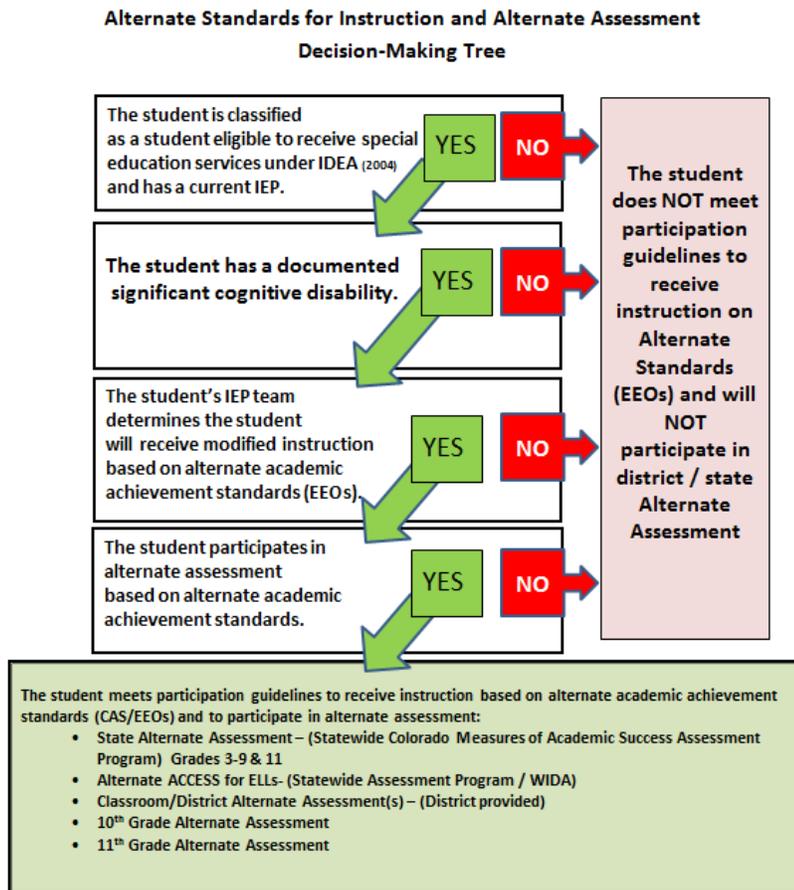
Participation Guidelines: Alternate Academic Achievement Standards for Instruction and Alternate Assessment

assessment with or without accommodations. However, if there are compelling indications that the student should receive instruction based on alternate standards and take alternate assessment, those factors must be documented in the IEP.

OR

- If the body of evidence supports the existence of a significant cognitive disability, the student may receive instruction based on alternate academic achievement standards and will participate in alternate classroom/district/state assessment.

Not all students who have a cognitive disability will require instruction based on alternate standards and take alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards.



(1) Accommodations within the general education curriculum were considered;
(2) The decision to provide instruction and assessment based on alternate standards is NOT primarily due to social, cultural, or economic factors;
(3) The student's achievement is more appropriately measured against alternate achievement standards (EEOs) rather than typical age or grade-level standards.

For questions regarding the Participation Guidelines, please contact:

Colorado Department of Education
Gina Herrera

Exceptional Student Services Unit

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herrera_g@cde.state.co.us