

Guidance for Individualized Education Program Teams California Alternate Assessments for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science: Participation Decisions

This document is intended to help guide individualized education program (IEP) teams in determining whether the California Alternate Assessments (CAAs)—alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards—are the most appropriate assessments for an individual student. The CAAs were developed by the California Department of Education 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 (CCSS) and the California Next Generation Science Standards (CA NGSS). In addition, the CAAs were developed to be part of a system of curriculum, instructional, and assessment tools such that students with significant cognitive disabilities would be able to participate in content instruction and assessments that are aligned with the CA CCSS. This is accomplished by a linkage between the CA CCSS and Core Content Connectors (CCCs), which are in turn aligned with the CCC and CAA items.

IEP teams must consider a student’s individual characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in the general assessments, with or without accommodations, or in the alternate assessments. This document outlines steps that an IEP team is to take in determining whether the CAAs are appropriate for a student, including reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community) and determining whether the student fits all of the criteria for participating in the CAAs as outlined in this document. Additionally, 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.” While many of the students taking the CAAs 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.”

Description of the CAAs

English Language Arts and Mathematics

The CAAs are assessments for English language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics in grades three through eight and grade eleven. They are on-demand assessments of approximately 29 test items that assess approximately 10 to 12 prioritized content targets per grade level, depending on the grade level. These content targets were identified for each grade on the basis of learning progressions and alignment with the grade-level CCSS. These assessments include multiple-choice, constructed-response, and technology enhanced items. Each content target is assessed by items that have been carefully and intentionally designed to assess a range of ability and performance.

Science

The new CAA for Science test was first piloted in the 2016–17 school year, and is completing a second pilot year in 2017–18. All students enrolled in grades five and eight will be administered the pilot test. All grade twelve students are to take the pilot test; if the student is in grades ten or eleven has finished their last science class, and the LEA elects to administer the assessment at those grade levels, those students may also be assessed. Regardless of the grade level in

which the test is taken, students will only take the test once in high school. This new assessment is aligned with the CA NGSS. The Next Generation Science Standards were developed by the States in conjunction with the National Research Council (NRC), the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and other critical partners. The CAA for Science represents a new format of assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Included with the assessment is a science lesson, which the teacher can deliver when it best fits their instructional calendar. After the lesson is taught, the teacher then conducts the actual assessment, and collects data on individual student performance.

Assessment Administration

English Language Arts and Mathematics

The CAAs for English language arts and mathematics 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 testing examiner familiar with the student (e.g., the student's teacher) facilitates the administration in a 1:1 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 use a staged approach, meaning that each student receives items that have been determined to be an appropriate level of challenge. Embedded routing tests help determine the items a student encounters.

Science

The CAA for Science is also administered in a 1:1 setting, although the embedded lesson can be taught in a group setting. After the student has participated in instruction of the standard, the teacher then delivers the assessment and collects data on the student's performance. Overall, there is flexibility built in to the process, allowing the teacher to utilize materials that the student is most comfortable with, and to adjust the administration script to provide the student with a higher level of access, while not changing the standard being measured. After the CAA for Science has completed its pilot phase, this test will also move to the computerized platform for field and operational testing.

Participation Decisions

IEP teams should use the CAA Participation Decision Worksheet to determine whether a student is eligible to participate in the CAAs. The CAAs for ELA, and math are administered each year to students in grades three through eight and grade eleven whose IEPs determine participation in the alternate assessments, and who meet the required criteria. The CAA for Science is administered in grades five, eight, and once in high school. As reflected in the CAA guidelines, to participate in the CAAs, 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 someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.

2. **The student is learning content derived from the CA CCSS and CA NGSS.** Goals and instruction listed in the IEP for the student are linked to the enrolled grade-level CCSS and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.
3. **The student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-level and age-appropriate curriculum.** The student:
 - (a) Requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature; and
 - (b) Uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

Participation Descriptions

1. **A student with a significant cognitive disability** is one whose school records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is defined as actions essential for an individual 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.* IEP teams should be careful to consider...
 - 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, healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, use of the telephone.

As part of the IEP team decision, did the team also consider...

- community environment typical of the individual's peers and culture?
 - linguistic diversity?
 - cultural differences in the way people communicate, move, and behavior?
2. **The student is learning content derived from the CCSS and/or the CA NGSS.** The student's disability or multiple disabilities affect how the student learns curriculum derived from the CCSS or the CA NGSS. The student is learning content that is derived from the CA CCSS or CA NGSS that appropriately breaks the standards into smaller 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 (CCCs). CCCs were also developed for the CA NGSS standards. A CCC is a representation of the essential "core" content of a given standard. Each CCC was identified by examining learning progressions aligned with the CCSS or CA NGSS to determine the critical content for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

3. The student's need for extensive, direct individualized instruction is not temporary or transient. His or her need for substantial supports to achieve gains in the grade-level and age-appropriate curriculum requires substantially adapted materials and customized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

The IEP team 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
- Classroom work samples and data
- Examples of performance on assessment tasks to compare with classroom work
- Results of district-wide 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 English learner), which may interfere with an accurate assessment of his or her academic, social, or adaptive abilities

Some issues, such as those listed below, may affect a student's learning experience and his or her ability to learn that are *not appropriate* to consider during the decision-making process for the CAAs. ***Do not use the following as criteria for participation/eligibility decisions:***

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic and other services student receives
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education
8. Student identification as an English learner (EL); as above, this is a consideration of how the student's English fluency may affect their performance – as opposed to their disability
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior

11. Impact of test scores on accountability system
12. Administrator decision
13. Anticipated emotional distress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in assessment

For information about the CAAs, contact the Science and Alternate Assessments Office | CalAlt@cde.ca.gov | 916-445-8765