Alternative Assessment

Roadmap to Determine Eligibility

1 When to Make Eligibility Decisions

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams should conduct formal eligibility process at some point in grade 2 and then each year after that at the annual IEP meeting.

2 Understanding the Eligibility Criteria for Alternate Assessment

Review the five (5) participation criteria from the Participation Guidelines[1] or Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM)[2].

3 Gathering Evidence

Using multiple pieces of evidence to inform the decision of eligibility in an alternate assessment.

4 Documenting the Decision

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that the student is eligible, they must document their decisions using the Participation Guidelines[1] or Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM)[2] and include it in the IEP.

5 If Decision is **YES**

An IEP team LEA representative must sign the completed form.

If Decision is **NO**

If the IEP team decides that the student is not eligible, then the student takes the Kansas Assessment Program (KAP) with appropriate accommodations.

6 Review of Eligibility Determinations

To ensure that students are appropriately identified for the alternate assessments the eligibility determination is reviewed annually.

Click on the numbered map pins throughout for additional information.

KANSAS STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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August 12, 2026

1 When to Make Eligibility Decisions

Grade 2

Since state assessments begin at grade 3, IEP teams should conduct a formal alternate assessment eligibility process at some point in grade 2 This would ensure that teachers and service providers have time to develop an instructional plan, IEP goals, etc., that will best position the student's teachers and the student for success in grade 3. Try to avoid waiting to make eligibility decisions at grade 3. It is important the students have as much instructional time as possible aligned to the Essential Elements before taking the DLM assessments.

Grade 3-12

While there is no deadline for making eligibility determinations, it is important to do this as early in the school year as possible. Students found eligible at any point after the school year has started should take the DLM assessments for their designated grade level, however, if an IEP team reaches a decision two weeks or less before the start of the DLM fall test window in September, preparing for the DLM alternate assessments will be difficult.

In addition to all of the IEP updates, registration must also happen in the DLM Kite Educator Portal. The First Contact Survey and Personal Needs Profile must be completed by the student's teacher prior to the start of testing. Please ensure that IEP team decisions are made as far in advance of this date as possible. Since Kansas participates in the instructionally embedded DLM assessment, students are required to meet the blueprint requirements in the fall and spring test window. Therefore, IEP teams need to reach a decision in the fall in order for the student to participate in both the fall and spring test windows. Teachers run the risk of not being able to complete the required steps to administer the DLM assessments if decisions are made after this date.



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2 Understanding the Eligibility Criteria for Alternate Assessment

Required Assessments

If the IEP team determines that the student is eligible for the alternate assessments, then the student must participate in the appropriate DLM alternate assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science for their current grade level. For the HGSS classroom based assessment, these students will use the **Alternate History Government Social Studies Rubric**.[3]

The term "significant cognitive disability" is not a category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the state assessment program. For a student to be found as having a significant cognitive disability, each of the five (5) criteria must be true as determined by the student's IEP team:

1. Cognitive assessment data supports a most significant cognitive disability (intellectual disability).

Review of student records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning. Typically functioning 2 ½ or more Standard Deviations (SD) below the mean.

Regardless of a student's disability category, evidence collected should show that the effect of the student's disability significantly impacts their ability to function cognitively.

2. Adaptive assessment data supports a most significant deficit in adaptive behavior.

Review of student records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact adaptive behavior (those skills and behaviors essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life). Typically functioning 2½ or more SD below the mean.

- The student has a significant intellectual disability that will affect their ability to live independently or find employment after they finish school. They may require ongoing support and assistance to secure appropriate housing or employment opportunities that align with their abilities and needs. This statement acknowledges that the student may require additional support beyond what is typically required for **other students to achieve similar outcomes**.

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3. The student is primarily being instructed (or taught) using the DLM Essential Elements as content standards.

IEP teams should review the student's present levels of performance, short- term goals and objectives, and the performance targets for the student to ensure that the concepts and skills the student is working on not only reflect the skills and concepts in the Essential Elements but that the short-term goals closely align with the learning maps that will lead to grade-level performance targets.

- The short-terms goals and objectives reflect the skills and concepts contained in the learning map steps.
- The annual academic goals are closely aligned to the alternate achievement standards for the student's current grade level.

4. The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in ALL grade-and age-appropriate curriculum at a reduced depth, breath and complexity.

The student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is neither temporary nor limited to specific content areas.

- The student's demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior across settings are significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations. This covers the aspects of learning and what the student needs in order to learn. In other words, the student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and supports from teachers and other professionals. Temporary is used to describe a situation that lasts only a short time or is constantly changing. Therefore, the instructional support needed is long-standing and there is a demonstrated history of required support across settings and content areas.

The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings.

- The student's demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior across settings are significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations. This covers the aspects of learning materials and accessing information. The types of materials required in order for the student to learn. Materials are significantly modified, customized, and adapted in order to facilitate understanding. His or her need for substantial support to 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.

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5. Parent/legal education decision-maker notification includes discussion of ALL of the following areas.

The differences between the alternate achievement standards and academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled, including any effects of State and local policies on the student's education resulting from taking an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.

AND

That the student's achievement will be measured based on alternate achievement standards:

AND

How the student's participation in alternate standards and assessment(s) may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma;

AND

That the student will not be prevented from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma.

AND

The LEA provided the parent(s)/legal education decision-maker with ALL of the above information in an understandable and uniform format and in a written language or oral translation that the parent(s)/legal education decision-maker can understand.

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3 Gathering Evidence

Using **multiple pieces of evidence** to inform the decision is important for two reasons:

1. It prevents decision-making that relies on one type of evidence, and
2. It provides a complete picture of the student both academically and in social settings.

Below is a list of possible evidence that IEP teams should gather before the decision if the student meets the participation criteria. **It is important to remember that no one piece of evidence should be used to make this decision** and **no one person should be making the decision**; it must be a **decision reached and agreed to by all members of the IEP**.

Curriculum, Instructional and Classroom Evidence

- Example instructional objectives and materials.
- Work samples and data on progress from both school- and community-based instruction.
- Classroom work samples and data.
- Teacher observations.

Assessment Data and Evidence

- Past state assessments to compare with classroom work.
- District-wide alternate assessments.
- Reading assessments.
- Any other academic achievement tests.
- Results of initial or most recent evaluations of the student.

IEP Information

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and short- term objectives or post-school outcomes from the IEP.
- All goals must have at least 2 benchmarks or objectives.
- Considerations for students with specific communication needs or modes.

Evaluations

- Adaptive behavior assessments.
- Informal assessments.
- Psychological assessments and evaluations, including information associated with IQ tests
- Speech and communication assessments.

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DO NOT USE THESE FACTORS OR DATA TO INFORM AN ELIGIBILITY DECISION.

The following factors are not appropriate to include in decision-making because they do not add to the IEP Team's understanding of what the student knows and can do. While some of the factors listed below make it difficult for a student come to school ready to engage and learn, these issues should be addressed with staff that have appropriate expertise and experience in these areas.

The following factors may not be the sole criteria used to determine participation in the alternate assessment:

1. A specific disability category or label.

   There is no disability category that is able to predict 100% of a student's cognitive potential. Disability categories alone are not sufficient evidence to determine eligibility for the alternate assessment.

2. Poor attendance or extended absences.

   Some students have medical conditions that prevent them from attending school regularly enough to receive instruction. While this is recognized as a factor that inhibits a child's exposure to educational experiences, it is not evidence of a child's ability or their potential to learn and must be addressed through the appropriate school resources.

3. Native language/social /cultural or economic difference.

   It is important for educators to understand and use strategies to help them engage students with native language/social/cultural and economic differences. These differences may impact the student's ability to learn and their knowledge if the content is not connected. A comprehensive adaptive skills assessment is based on a body of evidence that reflects the child's social, linguistic, and cultural background.

4. Expected poor performance on the general statewide assessment.

   Most students receiving special education services can and do participate in general education assessments with accommodations and other supports. Poor performance on these assessments is not an appropriate factor to use when making an eligibility decision.

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5. Academic and other services the student receives.

Many students receive a variety of related services that address their physical, behavioral, or other challenges beyond their cognitive ability. The type of services a student receives does not indicate a significant cognitive disability.

6. Educational environment or instructional setting.

The setting in which a student receives his/her education is not a factor in determining cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. Districts routinely utilize staff with expertise in the challenges of a specific disability, behavior, or mental health issue, either within the school, district, or in another setting. Regardless of where a student accesses specialized care or services, meaningful academic instruction should always be given to the student. Because of this requirement, the educational placement of a student is not to be used as factor for eligibility.

7. Percent of time receiving special education.

Students receive special education services in a variety of ways and in varying degrees of intensity. It is more meaningful to consider the type and intensity of the structures and supports the student requires in order to participate academically and socially in their school than it is to consider the number of hours or days a student requires in order to receive appropriate special education services.

8. English language learner (ELL) status.

It is important to understand that a student's ability to learn and their knowledge of English is not connected. How well a student understands and speaks English has an impact on his/her ability to learn; however, it does not indicate a learning disability.

Alternative methods of understanding what a student knows and can do may need to be investigated depending on the student's English proficiency level.

9. Low reading level/achievement level.

A student's reading level and achievement level should not be a determining factor in whether a student is eligible for the alternate assessment. Teams need to consider appropriate accommodations to assist these students. Only students with a most significant cognitive disability and most significant deficits in adaptive behavior may take the alternate assessment.

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10. Students anticipate disruptive behavior.

Behavior challenges can make learning difficult for some students and should be treated appropriately and professionally. Behavior challenges should not be considered when deciding if a student meets the criteria for an alternate assessment as they are not indicators of cognitive ability.

11. Impact of student score on the accountability system.

How well or poorly a student may perform on any state assessment may not be used as a deciding factor in determining which assessment is appropriate for a student.

12. Administrative decision.

Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a school, district, or program administrator to unilaterally make an eligibility decision without the full cooperation and consensus of the IEP team, of which the parents or guardians are equal participants, or without following all standard procedures regarding educational decision-making for a student.

13. Anticipated emotional duress.


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4 Documenting the Decision

5 If the Decision Is **YES**

If the IEP team determines that the student **is eligible**, they must document their decision using the Participation Guidelines[1] or Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM)[2] form and include it with the IEP. An IEP team LEA representative must sign the completed form and a copy must be attached to the IEP and placed in the student's file. This must be completed each year at the time of the IEP annual review for students.

This must be done regardless of grade level. For example, grade 9 students do not take an alternate assessment but the Participation Guidelines[1] or Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM)[2] form should be completed and kept with the student's IEP since most IEPs will carry over to the next school year.

If the Decision Is **NO**

If the IEP team determines that the student is **not eligible**, then three (3) things must happen:

1. The student must participate in the state assessments for their current grade level with appropriate accommodations as determined by the IEP team.
2. The student's instruction must be aligned with Kansas Curricular Standards via the general education curriculum. Without access to the general education curriculum, students will not be able to learn the academic skills and knowledge for their grade level which will be assessed through state assessments.
3. Record of the decision must be recorded on the Participation Guidelines[1] or Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM)[2] form, attached to the IEP, and placed in the student's file.

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6 Review of Eligibility Determinations

To ensure that students are appropriately identified for the alternate assessments, and to ensure that guidance to the local educational agencies (LEA) and IEP teams is clear and leads to appropriate identifications, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Special Education and Title Services Team will conduct targeted monitoring and review data on eligibility determinations based on LEAs that exceed the 1% participation cap or have a high number or percentage of DLM red flags. KSDE will use the percent of participation in an alternate assessment and the percent of DLM red flags to identify schools and districts that may need additional support and guidance to use the eligibility criteria to make valid and appropriate determinations.



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Endnotes

1. Kansas State Department of Education [KSDE].(2026). *Dynamic Learning Maps Participation Guidelines for Kansas.* [PDF]: https://www.ksde.gov/docs/default-source/sets/dlm-participation-guidelines-for-kansas.pdf

2. KSDE.(2024). *Rubric for Determining Student Eligibility for the Kansas Alternate Assessment (DLM) for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities.* [PDF]: https://www.ksde.gov/docs/default-source/sets/rubric-for-determining-student-eligibility-for-the-dlm.pdf

3. KSDE. (2023). *History, Government and Social Studies Alternate Rubric.* [PDF]: https://www.ksde.gov/docs/default-source/sets/history-government-and-social-studies-alternate-rubric-and-information.pdf

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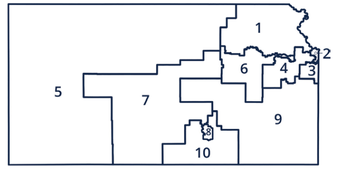


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