



MISSISSIPPI SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY (SCD)

GUIDANCE DOCUMENT



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Overview and Background

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law and replaced and updated the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The purpose of ESSA “...is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.” As part of the assessment provisions of the ESSA, the law requires the majority of students take a state’s general assessment at various grade levels, as this helps to measure educational progress. To help maintain a critical focus on educational equity and excellence for all students, only students with the significant cognitive disabilities can take an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards. ESSA limits the number of students who may take such assessments to 1% of all tested students in a given subject. CFR 200.6

To guide and support individualized education program (IEP) committees in determining if a student qualifies as having a significant cognitive disability (SCD) and thereby can participate in the alternate assessment, the Mississippi Department of Education has developed this decision-making tool.

How to Use

Each year the IEP committee should review this decision-making tool to appropriately determine if a student is 1) significantly cognitively disabled (SCD) and 2) if they should participate in the alternate assessment.

This tool is divided into four parts, Part A through Part D. IEP committees should work through the document, starting with Part A. At the end of each part, the committee should review if the student meets the criteria. If, after reviewing the information, a student does not meet the eligibility criteria in all sections, the student is not SCD and is not eligible to participate in Mississippi’s alternate assessment program. The decision-making tool should remain with the student’s educational records.

Throughout the tool, IEP committees should review multiple sources of information, including the student’s IEP, comprehensive evaluations, and other data, such as results from formative assessments, evidence-based interventions, assistive technology assessment and the student’s educational records documenting supports and services.







SCD Determination: Decision-Making Tool



Student:		DOB:	
MSIS #:		Date:	

Part A – Determining SCD Status

Directions: Complete the three questions to determine if the student may meet the criteria to be classified as a student having a significant cognitive disability.

1. Does the student have a current individualized education program (IEP)?	
No, the student does not have an IEP.	Yes, the student has a current IEP.
	
Stop here. The student may not be classified as having a significant cognitive disability.	Proceed to the next statement.

2. Review the student’s eligibility category.	
Student meets the state eligibility criteria under the following disability categories:	Student meets the state eligibility under the following disability categories:
Specific Learning Disability Speech or Language Impairment Emotional Disturbance Orthopedic Impairment Visual Impairment Hearing Impairment Developmentally Delayed	Autism Deaf-blindness Intellectual Disabilities Multiple Disabilities Other Health Impairment Traumatic Brain Injury
	
Stop Here. The student may not be regarded as having a significant cognitive disability.	Proceed to the next statement.

3. Does the student have an IQ score two or more standard deviations below the mean using a preponderance of evidence?	
NO	YES
	
Stop here. The student does not meet the criteria for significant cognitive disability.	Proceed to Part B

Part B: Analysis of Adaptive Skills

Directions: Select the column in each of the three adaptive skills domains (*Conceptual, Social and Practical*) that best describes the student’s daily functioning. After reviewing all available data, if the committee still struggles to decide between two columns, **presume competence** and select the column to the left. For example, if the committee is trying to decide between 2 points or 3 points, select 2 points.

Conceptual Domain: This domain covers skills needed to communicate, apply academic skills, and manage and accomplish tasks.			
1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>The student is on grade level academically in English Language Arts and math most of the time, And The student has age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills, including conversational skills (verbally or through a communication device), And The student expresses and makes independent choices, exhibits self-control, and takes responsibility for choices at an age-appropriate level.</p>	<p>The student has difficulty learning grade level academic content aligned to Mississippi’s College and Career Readiness standards, but is making progress with appropriate supports and interventions as specified in the IEP, And After learning new content, the student may need additional practice with direct instruction to generalize the new skills into daily living activities, And The student has some age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills (verbally or through a communication device), uses and understands simple, nonverbal communication and can usually follow simple, age-appropriate directions and routines with prompting.</p>	<p>The student has difficulty learning grade-level academic content across all subject areas and may require multiple tiers of intervention, accommodations and/or modifications, And The student may struggle to generalize skills outside the classroom, even with assistance and practice, And The student has some difficulty communicating wants, needs, thoughts and ideas but receptively understands messages, And The student usually struggles to follow directions and routines without significant assistance.</p>	<p>The student has significant difficulty with learning academic content and requires instruction through adapted/modified grade-level standards, And The student may be unable to clearly express wants and needs and may not seem to understand the messages conveyed by others. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate, And The student requires layers of support to follow directions and daily routine activities.</p>

Social Domain: This domain covers behaviors needed to engage in interpersonal interactions, act with social responsibility and use leisure time appropriately. This includes social competence, self-esteem, awareness, caution, social problem-solving, following rules/obeying laws and avoiding being victimized.

1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
☐	☐	☐	☐
<p>The student displays age-appropriate social, communication and leisure skills most of the time, and The student can usually initiate and maintain friendships, express and recognize emotions with peers who are the same age, and The student engages in play and recreational activities without additional support most of the time.</p>	<p>The student may have some difficulty with social interactions compared to same age peers (for example, may misinterpret peers' social cues or others may consider the student's actions as immature), and The student's communication, language and conversation skills are occasionally more concrete or immature than peers who are the same age, and The student may have challenges in regulating emotion and behavior in an age-appropriate manner, and these challenges may be noticed by peers and adults.</p>	<p>The student has social, behavior and communication skills markedly different from peers who are the same age, and The student is able to be understood, but uses a mode of communication that is less elaborate than peers who are the same age (for example pointing, gesturing, etc.), and The student may use behaviors to communicate, and The student may not perceive or interpret social cues accurately, and The student often needs significant support to engage in social situations and/or use communication skills, and The student may be easily persuaded to do things that go against the rules or safe boundaries.</p>	<p>The student often (frequently) uses behaviors to communicate, and The student has limited awareness of other people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences; empathy, making and maintaining friendships, and social judgements, and The student requires extensive direct supervision for daily social tasks.</p>



Practical Domain: This domain covers behaviors needed to address personal and health needs; home, classroom or work settings; and function in a school or community.

1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
☐	☐	☐	☐
<p>The student is able to follow safety rules and functions in the community and classroom setting similarly to peers who are the same age with little to no assistance, and</p> <p>The student independently performs self-care activities such as eating, dressing, and taking care of personal hygiene with little to no assistance.</p>	<p>The student often functions age-appropriately in personal care daily living activities and using community resources, and</p> <p>The student displays recreational skills typically on the same level as peers, although some additional support may be needed, and</p> <p>The student may need some support in navigating the school and community and may need reminders about being mindful of safety hazards.</p>	<p>The student may need some support to care for personal needs (for example, eating, dressing, toileting needs), may have needed an extended period of explicit teaching in these areas and may require some prompting or cues, and</p> <p>The student often requires additional support and learning opportunities for leisure activities, and</p> <p>The student requires intensive support to safely navigate the school and community.</p>	<p>The student requires significant support and direct instruction across all activities of daily living (meals, dressing, bathing, toileting needs) or may be dependent on others for all aspects of physical care, health, and safety, and</p> <p>The student requires intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational, directional, and safety skills, not because of physical ability but because of significant cognitive needs. The student requires supervision at all times.</p>

Determining Significant Cognitive Disability

The characteristics of students with significant cognitive disability will fall almost exclusively in the 4-point range, with no more than one characteristic in the 3- point range.

The student scores 10 or fewer points

The student scores 11 points or more. The student has a significant cognitive disability.



Stop here. The student does not meet the criteria for significant cognitive disability.

Proceed to Part C.

Part C – Determining if the student requires direct individualized instruction aligned to Mississippi’s Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.

Directions: Select the column that best describes the student’s grade-and age-appropriate curriculum, instruction, supports, accommodations, and assistive technology. After reviewing all available data, if the committee is still struggling to decide between two columns, presume competence and select the column to the left. For example, if the committee is trying to decide between 2 points or 3 points, select 2 points.



Curriculum, Instruction, Supports, Accommodations and Assessments		
1 Point	2 Points	3 Points
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student’s present levels of performance on the IEP indicates deficits, but current data indicates that present levels are closely aligned with grade-level standards, concepts and skills.	The student’s present levels of performance on the IEP indicates deficits and the student’s IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that is standards-based and includes explicit instruction in all content areas on grade-level standards.	The student’s IEP includes present level of performance statements that align student data with grade-level standards through Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards.

Assistive Technology			
1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student’s IEP committee has determined the student does not need any assistive technology, or the student had an assistive technology evaluation completed and it was determined that no assistive technology is required as indicated in the check box on the IEP.	The student requires low-tech assistive technology supports and adaptive services (i.e. pencil grips, picture schedules, positioning cushions, etc.) The student may or may not have gone through a formal assistive technology evaluation.	The student’s IEP outlines low to mid-tech assistive technology supports and services, and an assistive technology assessment may have been used or is in the process of being used to feature match individualized, assistive technology to support academic instruction, communication, daily living, seating/positioning, mobility, sensory and/or motor needs, etc., or the student currently is learning to use or is independently using assistive technology as a scaffold to access learning in their environment.	The student’s IEP describes complex physical, sensory, or medical needs across most of the assistive technology domains. It may be challenging to determine access for the use of assistive technologies, and the student currently requires person-dependent supports or scaffolds that may be replaced with assistive technology once feature matching is determined.

*For additional information regarding Assistive Technology, visit [US-DOE AT Guidance](#).



Determining whether the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports:

<p>The student scores 4 or fewer points</p>	<p>The student scores 5 points or more. The student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction with learning targets aligned to Mississippi’s Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.</p>
	
<p>Stop here. The student does not meet the criteria for significant cognitive disability.</p>	<p>Proceed to Part D.</p>

Part D – Additional Considerations

The determination of a significant cognitive disability is made after reviewing the entire decision-making tool and the collection of evidence used in parts A, B, and C. The SCD determination is NOT made based solely on any of the following considerations:

- Disability category, educational environment, or instructional setting.
- Student’s instructional reading level is below grade level.
- Expected poor performance on the general education assessment.
- Administration decision or anticipated impact of student scores on the accountability system.
- Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress if taking general assessments.
- Poor attendance or extended absences.
- The fact the student is an English learner or other social, cultural, or economic differences.

GLOSSARY

Accommodation: Tool that enables a student with a disability to better access the general curriculum. Some accommodations are applicable to instruction only (for example, an assignment that is shortened but still addresses the state standard); others are permitted for both instruction and assessment (for example, change in formatting or timing).

Adaptive skills: Practical, everyday skills needed to function and meet the demands of one's environment, including the skills necessary to effectively and independently take care of oneself and interact with other people (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017). Those used in daily living such as eating, dressing, and toileting. These are also referred to as self-help skills.

Assistive technology: An assistive technology device is any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of that device.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC): All forms of communication (other than speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. examples include visual schedules, first-then schedules, alphabet charts, picture boards, etc.

English Learner (EL): English learners are students whose primary or home language is other than English who need language assistance to effectively participate in school instructional programs.

Comprehensive Evaluation Report: The Comprehensive Evaluation Report is the summary of testing for the initial evaluation and/or reevaluation.

Modes for communication: Can include, but are not limited to, sign language, bilingualism, cued speech, verbal therapy, braille, assistive technology devices and written language.

Modification: Adjustment to an assignment, test, or activity in a way that significantly simplifies or lowers the standard or alters the original measurement. Modifications change what a student is taught or expected to learn, and most are applicable to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Significant cognitive disability: In order for a student to be classified as having a significant cognitive disability, all the following criteria must be true:

(1) The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student's comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.

all (2) The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.

all (3) The student's inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI): Universally required component that defines special education and stipulates that students with disabilities receive instruction that includes changes in content, methodology,



and/or delivery. It is not dependent on setting and is a primary responsibility of special education professionals.

Autism Is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three (3), that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Additional characteristics often associated with Autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. It is not necessary for the student to exhibit all of these additional characteristics to meet the criteria.

Intellectual disability means significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

(a) Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning is defined as two (2) standard deviations or more below the mean, including a standard score of 70, on a measure of cognitive ability.

(b) A child with an eligibility of ruling of Intellectual Disability exhibits learning problems that vary in degree from mild to severe. Delays in cognitive abilities, adaptive behavior, and developmental milestones must have been evidenced during a child's developmental period and, upon entering school, such delays must have adversely affected a child's educational performance.

Deaf-Blind means concomitant hearing and visual impairments that adversely affect a child's educational performance, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Hearing Impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Emotional Disability means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors (e.g., intellectual disability, severe auditory/visual disorders, chronic health concerns-medications, etc.).

(b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers (e.g., disregards the feelings of others, avoids social interactions, difficulty making and keeping friends, hurts or threatens others when confronted, initiates or picks fights, appears unaware of how others feel about him/her, anxious or uncomfortable around others, gets taken advantage of by peers, etc.).

(c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances (e.g., difficulty controlling anger, jumps from one thing to another when talking or performing tasks, fails to show remorse, refuses to speak, overreacts, fails to react appropriately, self-injurious, speaks in disorganized ways - makes no sense, refuses to eat, poor hygiene, etc.).

(d) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia.

Multiple disabilities include concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability blindness or intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that children cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Although



disabilities in two (2) or more areas may exist in the following categories, Deaf-Blindness, Specific Learning Disability, Developmental Delay or Language or Speech Impairment, these categories do not constitute Multiple Disabilities, in and of themselves. Language/speech, along with another disability, is generally viewed as a secondary condition, not Multiple Disabilities.

Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that:

(a) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome; and

(b) adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Orthopedic impairment means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly (e.g. clubfoot or absence of one or more members), impairments caused by disease (for example, poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis) and impairments from other causes (for example, cerebral palsy, amputations and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

Specific learning disability

(a) Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.

(b) Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural differences or economic disadvantage.

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Speech disorders include impairments in articulation, fluency, and/or voice. Language disorders include developmental or acquired impairments in receiving, sending, processing, and comprehending or verbal, nonverbal, and graphic symbol systems. A communication disorder may range from severity from mild to profound and may appear in combination with other communication disorders. A communication disorder may be the primary disability or secondary to other disabilities.

Traumatic brain injury means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment or both that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Visual impairment including blindness, means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.



Individualized Education Program A document written for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with State and Federal policies.

Cognitive Skills The ability to think, learn, and solve problems. It is how your child explores the world around them with their eyes, ears, and hands. This includes attention spans, memory, logic, and reasoning as well as processing information

FAQ

Question 1 asks, “Does the student have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP)?” If the IEP committee is considering participation for the student as part of the initial IEP, does that count as current?

Yes. If this is the student’s initial IEP or the IEP is being reviewed, the committee should consider the student having a current IEP for alternate assessment participation decision-making.

What is a significant cognitive disability?

Significant cognitive disability is not a disability category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

A student with a significant cognitive disability:

(1) The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.

and (2) The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.

and (3) The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Students are eligible to participate in the alternate assessment if they meet all the criteria in sections 1 through 3 of the tool.

What does presume competence mean? In 2005, Cheryl Jorgensen published an article titled *The Least Dangerous Assumption: A Challenge to Create a New Paradigm*. In this article, she quoted another respected researcher in special education, Anne Donnellan, who in 1984 wrote, “the criterion of least dangerous assumption holds that in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults.” She went on, “we should assume that poor performance is due to instructional inadequacy rather than to student deficits.” Thus, Dr. Jorgensen argued that presuming competence when addressing students with significant cognitive disabilities is the least dangerous thing to do because to do otherwise is more likely to result in harm through fewer educational opportunities, inferior literacy instruction, a segregated education, and fewer choices as an adult. In the decision-making tool, presuming competence means that in the absence of a clear choice between two columns, it is more beneficial to the student to assume the student can do more rather than less.



Who is eligible to participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards?

Only students with significant cognitive disabilities may be assessed based on alternate achievement standards.

The Every Student Succeeds Act §200.6 expands on the idea of students with the significant cognitive disabilities.

- (d) State guidelines for students with significant cognitive disabilities: if a state adopts alternate academic achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities and administers an alternate assessment aligned with those standards, the state must—
- (1) Establish, consistent with section 612(a)(16)(C) of the IDEA, and monitor implementation of clear and appropriate guidelines for IEP committee to apply in determining, on a case-by-case basis, which students with the significant cognitive disabilities will be assessed based on alternate academic achievement standards. Such guidelines must include a state definition of “students with the significant cognitive disabilities” that addresses factors related to cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior, such that—
 - (i) The identification of a student as having a particular disability as defined in the IDEA or as an English learner does not determine whether a student is a student with the significant cognitive disabilities;
 - (ii) A student with the significant cognitive disabilities is not identified solely on the basis of the student's previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general state- or district-wide assessments; and
 - (iii) A student is identified as having the significant cognitive disabilities because the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the challenging state academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

Why can't a student identified with a specific learning disability or a speech or language impairment qualify for participation in the alternate assessment?

A student with a specific learning disability, by definition, does not have an intellectual component to his or her disability and therefore cannot be a student with a significant cognitive disability. The definition of specific learning disability reads, “Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.”

A speech or language impairment is a communicative disorder that impacts a student’s learning. It also does not have an intellectual aspect.

Does the student’s cultural and socioeconomic context matter when determining placement in a column for adaptive behavior?

Yes. When determining limitations in adaptive behavior for students, committees should be careful to separate intellectual disabilities from external factors that are not related to students’ cognitive functioning.

For example, in some scenarios, due to a student’s home situation, the student may not have good hygiene, but this is not related to the student’s intellectual level. The student may not have been taught or had access to resources for hygiene or good personal hygiene might not have been viewed as a cultural priority (as the student’s parents, family and/or friends may be similar).

Does the decision-making tool need to be completed every year? Does it need to be signed and kept in the student's file or attached to the IEP?



IEP committees should review the decision-making tool at least annually if participation in the alternate assessment is being considered and at each IEP meeting where participation in the alternate assessment is discussed. All members of the IEP committee listed on the tool should sign the tool.

Does there have to be data to support each decision-making point?

Yes. For all parts of the decision-making tool, decisions must be data driven. Exactly what data evidence is used depends on what is being considered. Examples of data include results from formative assessments, data from evidence-based interventions, information from multiple sections of the IEP, assistive technology assessment data, learner profile or cumulative folder data documenting supports and services, and more.

What does the committee do when it is having difficulty in determining which column to select?

Go back to the data to review current evidence. It may be necessary to collect additional information. In the absence of additional data, presume competence and select the column that represents the present evidence. When considering which column best describes a student, the committee should take a holistic approach to the student's characteristics. Do not tally the number of characteristics in each column to make a decision, rather consider which column overall best represents the student.

What should the IEP committee do if the student has taken the alternate assessment in previous years but the committee determines the student no longer is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment?

Sometimes IEP committees determine that a student who previously participated in the alternate assessment no longer qualifies. If a student does not qualify for the alternate assessment, the committee should switch the student to the general assessment, most likely with accommodations. The committee also should consider other elements of the student's program, such as whether the student requires new or additional assistive technology and whether the student should be moved to a more inclusive setting. Instructional practices and support services should be considered that may allow the student to make progress in the general education curriculum. Committees should continue to hold high expectations for all students with disabilities and focus on each student's individual strengths, understanding that all students with disabilities first and foremost are general education students.

After the IEP committee completed the decision-making tool, the student does not qualify for participation in the alternate assessment. However, the committee believes the student is unable to take the general assessments and show what the student knows and can do. Can the student still take the alternate assessment?

No. Only students who meet all criteria for participation in the alternate assessment may take the alternate assessment.

In our school, students in our self-contained classrooms for students with intellectual disabilities take the alternate assessment. Do the IEP committees of these students have to use the decision-making tool to determine if each of these students qualify for participation in the alternate assessment?

Yes. Participation in the alternate assessment is an IEP committee decision for each individual student. Where a student is placed is not a criterion for participation in the alternate assessment. Only students who meet all criteria for participation in the alternate assessment may take the alternate assessment.

The IEP committee feels the student it is considering for alternate assessment will not perform well on the general assessments and this will impact the school and district report cards and reflect poorly in teacher evaluations. Since the district has less than 1% of the total student population participating in the alternate assessment, is it okay to include additional students who do not meet all criteria for alternate assessment participation to the alternate assessment until the



district reaches the 1% threshold?

Only students who meet all criteria for participation in the alternate assessment may take the alternate assessment. Some districts will have less than 1% participation in the alternate assessment. Districts and schools should not try to maximize their 1% threshold to improve school and district report cards or teacher evaluations. Student participation in the alternate assessment must not be based on anticipated negative impact on school or district report cards or teacher evaluations.

The IEP committee is considering a student for participation in the alternate assessment. This student “melts down” when confronted with difficult tasks, such as taking the general assessments. The student does not meet all the criteria for participation in the alternate assessment, but the committee feels it would be better for the student emotionally. May the student take the alternate assessment?

Only students who meet all criteria for participation in the alternate assessment may take the alternate assessment. If a student does not meet all criteria for participation in the alternate assessment but struggles taking the general assessments, it is imperative the IEP committee consider all available testing accessibility features. For a student who gets frustrated easily during testing, the committee may consider features such as one-on-one test administration, a familiar test administrator, music, white noise or ear plugs, the time of day the student will test, taking frequent breaks and the location the student will test. The student also may benefit from assistive technology and frequent opportunities to practice test taking.

