

Participation Guidelines

Which Students Should Take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS?

Students with the *most significant cognitive disabilities* should be recommended to take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS if they are classified and reported to the state as an English learner and meet the following additional criteria:

Definition

[Massachusetts defines “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities”](#) as students who:

- have cognitive disabilities evidenced by significant delays in attaining age-level academic achievement standards, even with systematic, extensive individually designed instruction, related services, and modifications; and
- have cognitive disabilities that significantly impact their educational performance and ability to apply learning from one setting to another; and
- require 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; and
- perform significantly below average in general cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. This is defined as a student functioning two or more standard deviations below the mean on commonly accepted norm-referenced assessments in both cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior (*e.g., two or more adaptive skill areas such as daily living skills, communication, self-care, social skills, and academic skills*).

In addition to meeting all of the criteria in the definition of having the most significant cognitive disabilities, students being considered for the WIDA Alternate ACCESS:

- have a Home Language Survey indicating they are a potential English learner
- have WIDA screener results indicating they are an English learner
- have been determined by the student’s IEP team* to be [eligible to take the state’s alternate academic assessment \(MCAS-Alt\)](#), or would be eligible if the MCAS-Alt were available in the student’s grade; **and**
- have an IEP team which annually revisits the decision to assign the student to take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS until the student meets the exit criteria for English learner status

A student should not be assigned to take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS solely because he or she:

- has previously scored at the lowest achievement level on the standard ACCESS or MCAS test(s), or requires accommodations to take the standard test;
- has taken an alternate assessment previously (since this is an annual decision);
- has been excluded from general curriculum instruction;
- has had excessive absence from school;

- has not received adequate instruction in English language development (either by an ESL teacher or someone trained/endorsed to address the student's English language development);
- has a specific disability (e.g., all students with intellectual disabilities should not automatically be assigned to take an alternate assessment);
- attends a program where it is expected that students will take an alternate assessment;
- is economically disadvantaged or a child in foster care;
- requires, but does not currently have access to, an alternative augmentative communication system or device.

*IEP teams should include an ESL and/or communication specialist.