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# Participation Requirements for the Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students – Alternate (PAWS-ALT)

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A Guide for Individualized Education  
Program Teams, Parents, and Guardians

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Wyoming Department of Education  
Standards and Assessment Division



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## **Overview of Wyoming's Assessment System**

### **Background**

Wyoming's alternate assessment, Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students – Alternate (PAWS-ALT), is designed for a small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular assessment even with appropriate accommodations. It is part of a statewide instructionally supportive assessment system which complies with the requirements of ***No Child Left Behind Act*** of 2001 (NCLB) and the ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*** of 2004 (IDEA 2004).

Both federal and state laws require that all students with disabilities be administered assessments intended to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of students. As with the general assessment, the alternate assessment has clearly defined structure, guidelines for which students may participate, clearly defined scoring criteria and procedures, and a reporting format that clearly communicates student performance in terms of achievement standards.

### **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001**

One of the basic reform principles of NCLB is stronger accountability for results of student achievement toward academic proficiency for all students. Through this federal legislation, assessments aimed at increasing accountability provide important information with regard to:

- how successful schools are including all students in standards-based education;
- how well students are achieving standards; and
- instructional needs of specific groups of children.

State assessments are the mechanism for checking whether schools have been successfully making progress towards setting high standards for improving academic achievement in order to improve the quality of education for all students as defined by the content standards. Wyoming complied with NCLB by providing assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students, including students with disabilities, in grades 3 – 8 and grade 11. School, district, and state accountability are based on measuring success in educating all of its students and determining what needs to be improved for specific groups of students.

Under NCLB, each State establishes a definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school in achieving standards for all students and designated subgroups each year. Schools, districts, and states are held accountable for improvements on an annual basis by public reporting and ultimately through consequences if AYP is not achieved.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that all students be included in state accountability systems, which in most states occurs through large-scale assessments. Students with even the most significant disabilities must be included within these assessments. Further, IDEA '97 required that IEP teams address how students with disabilities can participate and show progress in the general curriculum as well as how they can be included in the assessment and accountability process.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 specifically governs services provided to students with disabilities. Accountability at the individual level is provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed on the basis of a child's unique needs.

**IDEA** requires that the IEP include a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments (consistent with assessment measurement constructs) of student

achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in these assessments. The IEP team determines a student's participation in the Wyoming Assessment System and documents the decision in the IEP. To document that alternate assessment is appropriate for an individual student, the IEP team reviews essential information about the student over multiple school years and instructional settings (e.g., school, home, community) as well as the consequences of participation. IEP teams meaningfully communicate this information to parents and guardians.

The purposes of assessment requirements under NCLB and IDEA include:

- Improved results for students with disabilities through improved teaching and learning;
- Raise expectations for students with disabilities;
- Increase access to the general curriculum;
- Provide parents information about their child's achievement in relation to the performance of other children in their school;
- Evaluate schools and programs; and
- Accountability for student learning.

To ensure that appropriate decisions regarding a student's participation in the state assessment system are made, NCLB states that districts should:

- Provide training to support sound IEP team decisions about which students should participate in an alternate assessment.
- IEP Team decisions should always be on a case-by-case basis and support access to the most challenging curriculum possible for the individual student.
- Monitor local implementation of assessments based on alternate achievement standards to ensure that alternate achievement standards are being used consistent with the best instructional practices known for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

## **Participation in State Assessments**

**In Wyoming, students participate in the regular Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students [PAWS] if they receive any instruction on the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards, which are assessed, regardless of where the instruction takes place.** However, for a student with a most significant cognitive disability, Wyoming's assessment system does include an alternate assessment. The term "significant cognitive disability" is not a separate category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the statewide student assessment system. Not all students with significant cognitive disabilities are appropriately assessed by the alternate assessment. Currently, less than 1% of Wyoming students identified with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in the alternate assessment. These students are working toward grade-level linked, extended Wyoming Academic Content Standards, which are reduced in complexity and breadth consistent with United States Department of Education guidance. They are required to participate in the alternate assessment, the Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students – Alternate (PAWS-ALT). Results from the alternate assessment are evaluated against Alternate Academic Achievement Standards to determine proficiencies for the grade in which the student is enrolled. Students are counted in the school and district accountability system for AYP.

### **Definition of Student with Disability**

For the purposes of the PAWS-ALT, a student with a disability has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 and **CHAPTER 7 SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**, or a plan provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Chapter 7 rules govern the operation of all special education programs and services provided to children with disabilities ages three (3) through the completion of the school

year in which the child turns twenty-one (21), pursuant to Wyoming law, by a school district, by State and local juvenile and adult correctional facilities, and by other public agencies within the State of Wyoming.

All students, including all students with disabilities, are to participate in the Wyoming Assessment System. **In Wyoming, students participate in the regular Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students [PAWS] if they receive any instruction on the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards which are assessed, regardless of where the instruction takes place.** Students with disabilities must participate in state and district assessments using the assessment format determined by their IEP team or 504 Team by participating in one of the following:

- PAWS, the general assessment without accommodations
- PAWS, the general assessment with standard accommodations
- PAWS-ALT, the alternate assessment

The Wyoming Content and Performance Standards and the extended Wyoming Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are carefully examined against the student's present levels of performance, opportunities to learn, and long-term goals to determine the appropriate assessment to administer to the student. IEP teams must take into consideration how the extended Wyoming Academic Content Standards and PAWS-ALT fit into the curriculum structure, graduation requirements, and eligibility for a high school diploma if a student participates in alternate assessment. These considerations and consequence are to be communicated to parents or guardians.

## **Participation in Alternate Assessment**

Students who participate in the PAWS-ALT are those whose IEP teams have determined that their achievement levels (proficiencies) will be measured against Alternate Academic Achievement Standards. Alternate Academic Achievement Standards define grade-level performance descriptions that are reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity as compared to the Achievement Standards used to determine proficiency levels of students who participate in the general assessment, Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS). Reasons for and consequences of participation in the PAWS-ALT must be discussed and documented on the student's IEP. To this end, the submission of the WDE-667 PAWS-ALT Requests, which is the form completed in the fall of each year by each school and accredited institution, provides the following assurances to the Wyoming Department of Education that:

- 1) The information contained within the *Requirements for Participation in Wyoming's Alternate Assessment: PAWS-ALT* were utilized by the IEP team to determine each student's participation in alternate assessment; and
- 2) Communication to parents/guardians of any state or district imposed consequences of a student's participation in PAWS-ALT and use of alternate achievement standards to measure student performance are documented; and
- 3) The request for alternate assessment for each student is consistent with academic instruction based on the extended Wyoming Academic Content Standards and assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards essential to the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as determined and documented by the IEP team.

### **The Role of the Individualized Education Team**

To ensure that appropriate decisions are made regarding a student's participation in the state assessment system, NCLB states that districts should:

- Provide training to support sound IEP team decisions about which students should participate in an alternate assessment.
- IEP Team decisions should always be on a case-by-case basis and support access to the most challenging curriculum possible for the individual student.
- Monitor local implementation of assessments based on alternate achievement standards to ensure that alternate achievement standards are being used consistent with the best instructional practices known for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Additional requirements from NCLB include that IEP teams:

- Document that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are, to the extent possible, included in the general curriculum and in assessments aligned with that curriculum; and
- Promote use of appropriate accommodations to increase the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are tested against grade-level academic achievement standards.

To aid IEP teams in their determination of individual student participation in the Wyoming state assessment system, the IEP team informs their decision making process by evaluating the following criteria. These criteria are not provided to serve as a checklist, but rather as points of discussion by the IEP team to determine a student's eligibility in the alternate assessment, PAWS-ALT, and determination of proficiency against Alternate Academic Achievement Standards.

### **PAWS-ALT Participation Criteria**

The Wyoming Department of Education has developed the following participation requirements for Local Education Agencies to determine student participation in the alternate assessment within the Wyoming Assessment System. Students in grades 3 – 8 and grade 11 must participate in either the PAWS or PAWS-ALT. The IEP team determines a student's participation in the Wyoming Assessment System and documents the decision in the IEP. **A student with a significant cognitive disability will participate in PAWS-ALT if he or she meets each and all of the criteria described below.**

<b>Criteria To Determine Participation in the PAWS-ALT</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student's access to the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards is provided by the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and standards which are reduced in breadth and depth at less complex levels with extensively modified instruction.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Decisions are made by each student's IEP team by persons who are most familiar with the student's individual needs, not an administrative decision.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student demonstrates a significant cognitive disability which results in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student's proficiency levels are appropriately measured against Alternate Academic Achievement Standards.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student's IEP goals and objectives are based upon the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards, which are reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity as compared to the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student's IEP goals and objectives are based upon the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards and define appropriate level of challenge given the student's present levels of performance, historical data, and rate of progress.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Proficiency determined by Alternate Achievement Standards does not under challenge the student or limit the educational opportunity of the student.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The student cannot participate in the PAWS with or without accommodations, as appropriate, based on his or her IEP.</b>
<b>AND</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>The request for alternate assessment for each student is to ensure the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as determined and documented by the IEP team.</b>

Criteria That Do NOT Determine Participation in the PAWS-ALT
<input type="checkbox"/> Program setting
<input type="checkbox"/> Category of disability
<input type="checkbox"/> Percentage of time in the general education setting
<input type="checkbox"/> Percentage of time in the special education setting
<input type="checkbox"/> Developmental level or mental age of the student

### **Adequate Yearly Progress**

The purposes of assessment requirements under NCLB and IDEA include providing parents/guardians information about their child's achievement, evaluating schools and programs, and accountability for student learning.

When measuring AYP, States and Local Education Agencies (LEA) have the flexibility to count the proficient scores of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards. However, the number of those proficient scores cannot exceed 1.0 percent of all students in the grades assessed (about nine percent of students with disabilities) at the LEA and State levels.

The 1% cap rule limits the use of alternate achievement standards to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. It provides an incentive for schools to provide maximum learning opportunities for each student. The rule protects meaningful interpretation and use of State assessment results for determining AYP and ensures accountability for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In consideration of schools that, for example, are small schools or provide special services to the most significant cognitive disabilities, the numerical cap does not apply at the school level. It applies at the district level.

The 1% cap does **not** restrict the number of students who may participate in an alternate assessment. It does limit the number of proficient and advanced scores based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards that may be used in the calculation of AYP. A limit is required to ensure a thoughtful application of Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and to protect IEP teams from pressure to assign low-performing students to assessments and curricula that are inappropriately restricted in scope, thus limiting educational opportunity for these students.

School and district assessment results will be reported as one component in the accountability system and are then made available to policymakers, educators, parents, administrators, media, and the general public.



## Decision Tree for Student Participation in Wyoming's Statewide Assessment System

