



Alternate Assessments

For Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Testing All Students

State and federal laws require that all students participate in state tests to measure student learning, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (SMSCD). The Wyoming Department of Education's (WDE) goal is to ensure that students take the correct state assessment. Wyoming students take either the state general or alternate assessment. Most students with IEPs take the general state assessment (WY-TOPP) with their documented accommodations. Only a small number of students designated as SMSCD take the alternate state assessment (WY-ALT) with their documented accommodations. There is also the alternate English language proficiency test, WIDA ALT-ACCESS, for students who are English Learners.

Key Information for Families

The WY-ALT for students designated as SMSCD is based on Wyoming's Extended Standards (WYES). It allows a small population of students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills using a 1:1 testing environment with a specially trained test administrator. The test, which consists of English language arts and math items (grades 3-10), as well as science items (grades 4, 8, & 10), utilizes Human Voice Recording (HVR) for each item, so that students can listen to each question posed, as well as all possible answer choices before making their selection. The WY-ALT is also computer-adaptive: the test adjusts to a student's abilities.

Finally, like the WY-TOPP, the WY-ALT assessment supports a large variety of IEP/504 accommodations, to ensure that each student testing receives fair treatment. Speak with your child's teacher or case manager to get further details about the various WY-TOPP/WY-ALT universal tools, supports, and accommodations.

For SMSCD students who are also English Learners, WIDA Alternate ACCESS is an alternate English Language Proficiency assessment that operates similarly to the WY-ALT, including a 1:1 testing environment and a large variety of IEP/504 accommodation supports. For more information, visit [WIDA ALT ACCESS](#).

How Eligibility Is Assessed by the IEP/504 Team

Students with IEPs/504s do not automatically take Wyoming state alternate assessments. The alternate assessments are for a small portion of students whose disabilities profoundly impact both their intellectual abilities and most daily living skills. Therefore, each student's IEP/504 team must make the determination annually for SMSCD designation and alternate assessment eligibility. The WDE expects that each IEP/504 team carefully consider three criteria:

Criterion #1: The student demonstrates cognitive abilities that significantly impact most adaptive behavior, all academic skills, and intellectual functioning.

Criterion #2: The student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction using adapted materials and substantial support to achieve measurable gains at their level of challenge.

Criterion #3: The student demonstrates learning from Wyoming Extended Standards (WYES) with substantial adjustments and supports to appropriately challenge the student.

A student's IEP/504 team uses a wide range of sources across multiple school years and settings to determine alternate assessment eligibility. It is very important that parents also share their knowledge or updates of how their child learns with reports from home, out-of-school therapy reports, extracurricular activities, etc. Determination evidence also may include:

- Parent reports, work samples, classroom informal and formal assessments.
- Data from evidence-based interventions, including non-school based therapy.
- Results from formative assessments and IEP goal progress.
- Support needs assessments from parents or educators and an adaptive behavior scale.
- Universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, and evaluation reports.
- Specialized instruction, services & supports provided by specialists, aids, paraprofessionals, etc..

Common Characteristics of Eligible Students

A student who qualifies for the alternate assessment is most likely:

- Inconsistent when expressing wants and needs, requiring adult assistance with communication.
- Requiring layers of supports to follow directions and for daily routine activities.
- Developing a functional and consistent mode of communication (nonverbal or non-symbolic).
- Requiring intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational and navigation skills.
- Requiring significantly modified curriculum and instruction using WYES; limited skills outside classroom.

An SMSCD determination should be based on unique and complex needs that significantly impact a student's intellectual functioning, adaptive behavior, and academic skills. A student may have adaptive skills well below average in two or more areas: self-care, communication, self-direction, social skills, leisure, home or school living, functional academics, community use, work, and health & safety. An SMSCD requires substantial, constant supports and supervision for most activities of daily living including meal preparation, dressing, grooming, personal hygiene, and personal safety.

An SMSCD determination would require extensive, individualized academic instruction for skill acquisition and measurable gains on the WYES. A student would demonstrate limited understanding of academic and conceptual skills; writing, language, vocabulary, grammar; numerical concepts: quantity, time, money.

To support families and IEP teams, the WDE has developed the [Alternate Assessment Participation Guidance](#). The guidance is recommended for use by the IEP team, including the parents, to determine if a student is qualified to take alternate assessments.

SMSCD Curricula and Graduation

The annual decision to designate a student as SMSCD has implications for curricula and may affect student post-secondary options. With the use of the Wyoming Extended Standards (WYES), students are often placed on a pathway to earn a certificate of completion, not a diploma. Thus, the IEP team and family should carefully discuss instructional settings and graduation path when designating SMSCD. Learn more about the alternate assessment and find guidance by talking with your child's IEP team or Special Education teacher.