MONTANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Alternate Assessment Eligibility Guidelines

Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for Alternate Assessments

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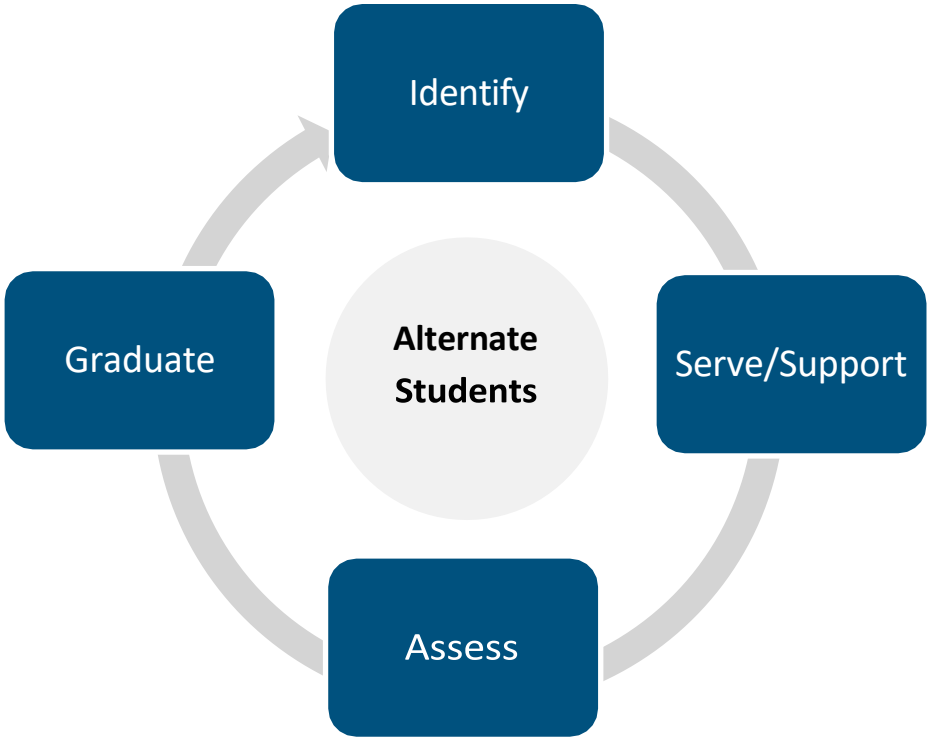


Table of Contents

PURPOSE 3

INTRODUCTION 3

CHAPTER 2: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS 4

CHAPTER 3: REQUIREMENTS 5

- **DLM Alternate Science Assessment (DLM ELA/Mathematics)** 6
- **DLM Alternate Science Assessment (DLM Science)** 7
- **WIDA Alternate ACCESS** 8

CHAPTER 4: IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES (SwSCDs) 9

- **IEP Team Considerations** 10
- **Parent/Guardian Notification** 10
- **Participation Tools** 11
- **English Learners with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities** 11
- **Non-Examples for Participation Decisions** 11
- **Participation Frequently Asked Questions** 12
- **First Contact Survey** 13

CHAPTER 5: SERVING ALL STUDENTS 14

- **Accessibility Features and Accommodations** 14
- **EDUCATE IEP Statewide Editor** 15
- **Needs-Based Selection of Test Settings** 15
- **Training Requirements** 16
- **Serving Student Needs Frequently Asked Questions** 17

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSING SwSCDs 17

- **Non-Participation Reporting** 17
- **Non-Participation Frequently Asked Questions** 18

CHAPTER 7 - PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS AND GRADUATION 18

CHAPTER 8 – BUILDING A STATE ONE PERCENT DATA ANALYSIS AND USE PLAN 18

GLOSSARY OF TERMS 19

APPENDIX A 19

APPENDIX B 19

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES 19

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to explain the Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) policies and procedures for assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs) using Montana's Alternate Assessments. This document is intended to help guide Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to determine whether participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate based on individualized student needs. Montana's Alternate Assessments were developed to ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to grade-level state standards. Readers are encouraged to supplement this guidance with the **MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments**.

INTRODUCTION

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is responsible for the administration of statewide assessments for all eligible students in Montana in accordance with the laws and regulations defined under the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM), and the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). The Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) includes a suite of statewide assessments that meet the testing requirements of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was most recently reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The ESEA-ESSA requires that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency in challenging state academic achievement standards and statewide assessments. State and federal law require all students in public schools to participate in the MontCAS statewide assessments in the defined content areas and grades. ARM Chapter 56 requires the same participation expectations for private schools seeking accreditation (see **ARM 10.56.101**).

In 2017, the Department released a template for the consolidated state plan under ESEA-ESSA. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all ESEA-ESSA requirements for each federal program. Montana's **ESSA State Plan** sets the expectations for school districts regarding the implementation of the testing, accountability, and reporting provisions under ESEA-ESSA.

In accordance with these expectations, each school district submits district plans to the OPI through the **Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP)** (ARM 10.55.601) or other school improvement plans and submits assurances through the **E-Grant Application** for the OPI to allocate funds. Statewide assessments have various stakeholders, data users, and numerous grants and other programs that rely on student participation in state tests. In some instances, the data from these assessments are used to make school determinations and/or allocate funding, such as Accreditation, Special Education, or Perkins Grants. Federal formula grants, such as Title I, Part A, require that school districts participate in the annual statewide assessment to receive funding.

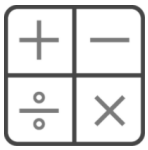
A key purpose of Title I under the ESEA-ESSA is to promote educational excellence and equity for all learners so that by the time they graduate high school, all students master the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in college and/or the workforce. The OPI provides support to school districts using data-driven approaches to identify and address the needs of every student and to assist school districts in providing equitable access to a broad, well-rounded education aimed at developing children into college-, career-, and community- ready young adults. The OPI meets obligations under Title I through its demonstration of the Department's statewide assessment **Peer Review (2018)** to describe the overall quality and technical soundness of its statewide assessment systems.

To address both the academic and non-academic needs of Montana students, the OPI encourages school districts to adopt a whole-child philosophy to ensure that all students reach their full educational potential (**Article X**). This work is rooted in the OPI's rigorous assessment standards and is based on an integrated multi-tiered model that includes supports for social and emotional well-being, health and safety, cultural responsiveness, and family and community factors in addition to the traditional academic and behavioral indicators typically used to identify a child's needs.

CHAPTER 2: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

The Montana Board of Public Education (Board) is responsible for adopting standards of accreditation for Montana schools including challenging academic achievement standards (see §20-2-121 and §20-7-101, MCA). All Montana public and non-public accredited schools are required to follow these standards of accreditation and participate in statewide assessments in the following content areas as shown in **Table 1** (see ARM 10.55.603):

Table 1. General Academic Achievement Standards

Mathematics (Math)	English Language Arts (ELA)	Science	English Language Proficiency (ELP)
ARM: 10.53.501–517	ARM: 10.53.401–413	ARM: 10.53.801–810	ARM: 10.53.301–311
			
General Math Model Curriculum Guide	**General** Reading/Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide	**General** Science Model Curriculum Guide	**General** WIDA Can-Do Descriptors

Beginning the 2025-2026 school year, Montana moved forward with the adoption of the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) alternate assessment. Historically, alternate assessments were supported by the Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AAAS), however, with the design, structure, and philosophy of the DLM Assessment, students' achievement is measured by the assessment's Essential Elements (EE). In Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and **Instructionally Embedded (IE) assessments,** the essential elements (EEs) are grade-level expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities, aligned with college and career readiness standards. They act as alternate achievement standards, guiding instruction and assessment.

Each EE has specific linkage levels that represent different levels of complexity, allowing for tailored assessment based on student needs. Essential Elements define what students with significant cognitive disabilities should know and be able to do at each grade level. EEs are related to the college and career readiness standards used for general education students, but they are reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity to be appropriate for students with cognitive disabilities. Each EE has multiple linkage levels that represent different levels of complexity. These levels help educators determine the most appropriate starting point for instruction and assessment for each student.

Educators use the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment System to assess what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities know and can do in the DLM subjects in Grades 3-8, and 11. Subjects and grades assessed include English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, assessed in Grades 3-8 and 11, and the science content area assessed in Grades 5, 8, and 11. The DLM Alternate Assessment System provides accessibility by design and is guided by the core beliefs that all students should have access to challenging grade-level content and that test administrators must adhere to the highest levels of integrity in providing instruction and in administering assessments based on this challenging content. **Table 2** shows the expectations that, in accordance with the Essential Elements, students with significant cognitive disabilities have the opportunity to show what they know and what they have learned.

For students who, because of their disability, cannot participate in the state's general assessment, the OPI has constructed and implemented guidelines for participation in the Alternate Assessment, including eligibility criteria (see **Appendix A**). The OPI meets the requirement of providing Alternate Assessments aligned to the Essential Elements (EEs) through its selection of the statewide assessments shown in **Table 3.**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the OPI "has established goals for the performance of children with disabilities in the State that are consistent, to the maximum extent appropriate, with other goals and standards for children established by the State." IDEA further requires that all students be included in

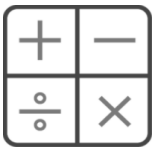
the State's accountability systems. Montana meets the requirements of IDEA and ESEA-ESSA through Alternate Assessments. The Alternate Assessment results are included in the state accountability system on an annual basis. The passage of IDEA prompted the creation of a range of test participation options making it possible for students with even the most significant disabilities to be assessed on a test aligned with general education content standards. Each student who receives special education services must have a written IEP that documents how the student will participate in statewide assessments (see **Appendix A**).

The decision to move a special education student to an Alternate Assessment has significant implications for the path that a student will take in their K–12 school career. It means the student is not able to participate in the general education curriculum even when provided with accommodations. A student who participates in an Alternate Assessment requires a modified curriculum. In addition, the IEP team for a student shall determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria for the Alternate Assessment. All students enrolled in accredited schools are expected to take part in statewide assessments in one of three ways:

1. Participate in the general education assessments without accommodations (**ARM 10.56.104(1)**).
2. Participate in the general education assessments with accommodations (**ARM 10.56.104(1)**).
3. Participate in Alternate Assessments when the participation criteria are met (see **Appendix A** and **ARM 10.56.104(2))**.

The Alternate Assessment Criteria Worksheet (**Appendix A**) provides information and a form to assist the IEP team in determining whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessments. Under ESEA-ESSA, the OPI or school districts may not develop or implement any alternate or modified Essential Elements that are not for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (see **34 CFR 200.6(c)(6)**).

Table 2. Essential Elements (Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment System)

Mathematics (Math)	English Language Arts (ELA)	Science	English Language Proficiency (ELP)
			
Alternate Essential Elements	**Alternate Essential Elements**	**Alternate Essential Elements**	**Alternate ACCESS Scores and Reports**

CHAPTER 3: REQUIREMENTS

Alternate Assessments are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Alternate Assessments shown in **Table 3** were selected by the OPI to fulfill the purpose as defined in **ARM 10.56.101**, "the primary purpose of assessment is to serve learning … and provide an integrated approach to meeting both classroom learning needs and school and state level information needs…" Alternate Assessments are one component of a system of standards, curriculum, and instruction that allows students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to access grade-level content aligned to the Essential Elements (and linkage levels) of the DLM Alternate Assessment.

The OPI's Alternate Assessments were specifically designed to measure the knowledge and skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities, recognizing that these students would need adapted curricular materials with reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. These students can participate fully in the big ideas and activities of the grade-level curriculum and build skills and knowledge that support their active engagement in the school, community, and with peers. These students are entitled to the same benefits but at a different level of expectation and achievement (see **NCSC Brief 1**).

Alternate Assessments ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are able to participate in an assessment that measures what they know and can do linked to grade-level Essential Elements and Linkage Levels for which the student is enrolled. They measure the grade-level achievement and yield results relative to these standards. Montana is a "local control" state, meaning school districts adopt policies to administer the testing requirements in accordance with the assessment rules and state accreditation rules. Districts must follow the OPI's policies and procedures for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training to deliver statewide assessments in a standardized way for the intended purposes under Title I. Valid and reliable test scores measure student growth at all Essential Element levels to help ensure that the assessment results can be used to improve student instruction (**34 CFR 200.6(c)(1)**).

The IEP team will determine whether participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate based on individualized needs. In summary, the Essential Elements must:

(1) Be aligned with Montana's Content Standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.
(2) Promote access to the general education curriculum consistent with the IDEA.
(3) Reflect professional judgment as to the highest possible standards achievable.
(4) Be designated in the IEP for each student to whom the Essential Elements apply; and
(5) Be aligned to ensure that a student who meets the Essential Elements is on track to pursue postsecondary education or employment.

Table 3. Essential Elements (Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment System)

☐	Test Name	Grades
☐	**DLM Alternate ELA/Math Assessment (DLM ELA/math)** The DLM ELA/math is the alternate math and reading/language arts assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 3–8 and 11 for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 3–8 and 11
☐	**DLM Alternate Science Assessment (DLM Science)** The DLM Science is the alternate science assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 5, 8, and 11 for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 5, 8, 11
☐	**Alternate WIDA ACCESS (Alt ACCESS)** Alt ACCESS is the alternate English Language Proficiency assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 1–12 for English Learners (EL) with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 1–12

The OPI has implemented policies and procedures for the standardized test administration of these three Alternate Assessments. As part of the test delivery process, the OPI has established and communicates to educators regularly and consistently on the standardized procedures for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and training of these assessments, including administration with or without accommodations.

The OPI has determined that the accommodations provided in these assessments (1) are appropriate and effective for meeting the individual student's need(s) to participate in the assessments, (2) do not alter the construct being assessed, and (3) allow meaningful interpretations of results and comparison of scores for students who need and receive accommodations and students who do not need and do not receive accommodations. These guidelines have been prepared to ensure that general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, teachers of English learners, specialized instructional support personnel, and other appropriate staff receive necessary training to administer assessments, including, as necessary, Alternate Assessments. This further includes knowing how to make use of appropriate accommodations during assessment for all students with disabilities (see **34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students**).

DLM Alternate ELA/Math Assessment (DLM ELA/math)

The DLM ELA/math is the alternate version provided in place of the MAST Statewide Assessment and the ACT with Writing. The DLM ELA/math has 2 fifteen-week test administration windows; a Fall Window beginning in September

and a Spring Window that begins in February. The assessment is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards in ELA and Math utilizing Essential Elements and Linkage Levels.

This assessment opportunity is available only to students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 3–8 and 11 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average, the total testing test takes up to one hour for students to complete; however individual testlets should be administered throughout each testing window with one testlet administered in a testing session. To gain an understanding of the DLM ELA/math assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 15:00 minute **Program Overview Video** describes foundational aspects of the DLM ELA/math statewide assessment.

The DLM ELA/math contains built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. DLM alternate assessments are called testlets because they are short. Most testlets have three to five items. Together, the items increase the instructional relevance of the assessments and provide a better estimate of a student's knowledge, skills, and understanding of the Essential Elements than can be achieved by a single item. Each testlet assesses only one Essential Element except for the writing testlet, which assesses all writing Essential Elements together in one testlet. Each content target is assessed by items that have been carefully and intentionally designed to assess a range of abilities and performances. To the extent practicable, the DLM ELA/math has incorporated **Universal Design for Learning** principles.

Students eligible for the DLM ELA/math will be included within Montana's accountability system for K–8 schools under the MAST Assessment achievement categories and for high schools under the ACT achievement category. For more information on this state selected assessment, follow the links for each icon listed below.

Table 4. DLM ELA/Math Resources

DLM ELA/math Assessment Profile	**DLM ELA/math Consortium Map**	**DLM ELA/math Training Resources**	**DLM ELA/math Testing Time Facts**

DLM Alternate Science Assessment (DLM Science)

The DLM Science is the alternate version provided in place of the Montana Science Assessment. DLM Science has a fifteen-week test administration window that begins in February. The assessment is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards in Science.

This assessment opportunity is available to only students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 5, 8 and 11 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average, testing times vary with DLM assessments based on the content area, along with other outside factors, such as student levels of understanding, growth, and students as individuals. In the Science content area, the average duration of the testlets is approximately 5-15 minutes, not including the preparation times needed by the test administrator. Additionally, it may vary based on individual student needs. To gain an understanding of the DLM Science assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 15-**minute Program Overview Video d**escribes foundational aspects of statewide assessment.

DLM Science contains many built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. The assessment is computer based with multiple options for student interaction. To the extent practicable, the DLM Science has incorporated **Universal Design**

for Learning principles. For more information on this statewide alternate assessment content area, follow the links found with icons in **Table 5** below.

Table 5. DLM Science Resources

DLM Science Assessment Profile	DLM Science Consortium Map	DLM Science Training Resources	DLM Science Testing Time Facts

WIDA Alternate ACCESS

The WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment is the alternate version provided in place of WIDA ACCESS, which is given annually to monitor EL progress in acquiring academic English. This assessment has a 9-week test administration window that starts in January. Federal law requires that 100 percent of English Learners participate in the ELP assessment. The WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment is aligned to the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment's (WIDA) English language development standards (2012) and includes the four testing domains of listening, speaking, writing, and reading.

This assessment opportunity is available only to identified English learner students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades K–12 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average the test takes about 4 hours for students to complete; however, student needs for scheduling should be accommodated as allowable to provide the ideal testing experience for the student to demonstrate what they know and can do. To gain an understanding of the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 10-minute Program Overview Video describes foundational aspects of the statewide assessment.

WIDA Alternate ACCESS is administered one-on-one and contains both embedded and non-embedded supports that allow students to interact with items and respond in ways most familiar to them to demonstrate their proficiency in academic English. Reading and listening are multiple-choice. Students may use eye gaze, gross motor skills, point, etc. to indicate their choice. Writing and Speaking are constructed response items. Students may use their preferred writing instrument (e.g., pencil, pen, whiteboard, alternative pencil, etc.) to complete writing tasks. To the extent practicable, WIDA Alternate ACCESS has incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles. Montana's accountability system uses results from the WIDA Alternate Access for schools with ten or more English Learners to calculate the "ESSA EL Progress" indicator. Students with significant cognitive disabilities testing on the WIDA Alternate ACCESS must reach, at a minimum, a proficiency level of "P2" to exit English learner status. The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) Project has established a definition of English Learners with significant cognitive disabilities (Research Brief).

For more information on the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment, follow the links on the icons found in **Table 6** below.

Table 6. WIDA Alternate ACCESS Resources

Alt ACCESS Assessment Profile	WIDA Consortium Map	Alt ACCESS Training Resources	Alt ACCESS Testing Time Facts

CHAPTER 4: IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES (SwSCDs)

In general, all school-aged children with disabilities as defined by Section 504 and IDEA are entitled to free appropriate public education (FAPE) which includes the opportunity to participate in state testing regardless of the educational setting (**ARM 10.16.3121**). In accordance with **34 C.F.R §200.6,** decisions about how to assess students with disabilities must be made by the IEP team under IDEA, the placement team under Section 504, or the individual or team designated by a district to make that decision under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as applicable, based on each student's individual needs (**ARM 10.56.104**). For more information on special education in Montana, read the **Montana Special Education Guidance Document.**

Montana school districts work in partnership with the OPI to ensure that all data is collected, maintained, and reported. The **EDUCATE Data Collection Schedule** publishes specific data collections that are required by the OPI to meet necessary state and federal program reporting needs. This schedule is published in the fall to share information with schools and the public on these important data collections. Across the DLM ELA/math, DLM Science, and Alt ACCESS, it is important that registration information within EDUCATE (IC) be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the Alternate Assessments. IEP teams should consider the testing cycles that will occur during the student's IEP year and include suitable instructional time before test windows. The Alternate Assessment decisions must be determined by the "Special Education Child Count Date" for the OPI's annual determination of the percentage of Montana students that are eligible to participate in Alternate Assessments 90 days prior to the OPI's **published test windows** (see **34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)**).

This responsibility for data collection and reporting helps maintain accurate student records to ensure the State, district, school, principals, teachers, and parents have a clear picture of the children we serve. The IEP team should consider the participation criterion, descriptors, and things to consider shown in **Table 7** as they make decisions about the student participation in Alternate Assessments. For more information on these participation criteria, see **Appendix A.**

Table 7 – Four Criterion for Participation

Participation Criteria	Participation Criterion Descriptor
1. The student has a significant cognitive disability.	**Criterion 1:** Review of student records indicates a disability[ies] that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. **Note**: Adaptive behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.
2. Student has an active IEP and receives services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	**Criterion 2**: Test registration information within **EDUCATE (IC)** must be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for Alternate Assessments. **Note**: Districts must complete the Special Education Child Count and Assessment Registration Collections to be rostered by the OPI into the test delivery systems. IEP teams will ensure EDUCATE (IC) is synced to ensure the Alternate Assessment checkbox is marked under the Statewide Assessments Editor for students who meet these participation criteria.

3. Student demonstrates cognitive abilities and adaptive behavior required for substantial adjustments, or modifications, to the general curriculum.	**Criterion 3:** Goals and instructions listed in the IEP for this student are linked to the enrolled grade-level state standards and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student. Goals are written to allow for suitable instructional time prior to test administration. **Note**: The student is learning content linked to (derived from) the state content standards and Essential Elements/Linkage Levels of the DLM Alternate Assessments. **Things to Consider:** ● Content aligned to chronological age-appropriate grade-level content standards, Essential Elements/Linkage Levels. ● Varies in depth, breadth, or complexity of learning outcomes. ● Content is prioritized to focus on most essential skills for higher post-secondary outcomes.
4. Student requires direct and extensive instructions to acquire, maintain, generalize and transfer new skills.	**Criterion 4:** The student (a) requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and (b) uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across academic content areas (and multiple settings). **Note**: The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-and-age-appropriate curriculum. **Things to Consider:** ● Specific research-based strategies for this population. ● Student has difficulty maintaining learning over time. ● Difficulty generalizing to other settings. ● Daily living skills are incorporated into instruction rather than having them exist as a supplement to instruction.

IEP Team Considerations

IEP teams must consider a student's individual needs and characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations, or in an Alternate Assessment. As required under IDEA, IEP teams need to ensure that parents/guardians are clearly informed as part of the process for developing the IEP that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on alternate standards and that participation in Alternate Assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma (**34 CFR 200.6(d)(2)**, **34 CFR 200.6(d)(3)**, and **34 CFR 200.1(d)**).

These guidelines outline the steps the IEP team should take in determining whether Alternate Assessments are appropriate for a student. These include:

a. reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community), and
b. determining whether the student meets all the criteria for participating in Alternate Assessments, as outlined in **Appendix A**.

Parent/Guardian Notification

Parents/guardians are members of the IEP team and need to remain engaged in the assessment process beyond determination of student eligibility for the Alternate Assessments. Thus, they need to receive accurate information about

these assessments. The OPI publishes resources for families under the **Parent Corner Site** and through collaboration and involvement of educators, parents, students, and tools, such as alternate assessment, IEP Directors are able to make informed decisions around a student's placement and ensure growth is occurring year to year with the Dynamic Learning Maps alternate assessment(s).

Participation Tools

IEP teams determine on a case-by-case basis which students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will be assessed based on Essential Elements (EEs) as part of the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessments. The IEP team uses the OPI's definition of "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" within the evaluation process (**34 CFR 200.6(d)**). A student is identified as having the most 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 **(34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(iii)**).

There are tools that may be helpful to IEP teams as they collect and review evidence before making a decision about whether a student meets all the criteria. The participation forms and decision flowchart are designed to assist teams in collecting and evaluating evidence to determine whether it is appropriate for an individual student to participate in the Alternate Assessments.

> **Appendix A. Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria Worksheet.** This form is used by the IEP team to document conversations, evidence, and decisions when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments.
>
> **Appendix B. Decision Flowchart for Participation**. This guides the sequence of decisions to be made by IEP teams when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments.

English Learners with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

The WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment is a large-scale assessment of English language proficiency intended for English learners (ELs) with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students are individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their IEP, and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language. In addition to the participation criteria (**Appendix A**), the student must have an EL designation. The policies and procedures for identification of ELs is published in the **English Learner Guidance for School Districts**.

Non-Examples for Participation Decisions

In addition to the criteria for determining participation, there are other issues that may affect a student's learning experience and their ability to learn which are not appropriate to consider during the decision-making process for Alternate Assessments.

Below are a few things IEP teams can consider in the identification of students eligible to participate in the Alternate Assessments:

1. 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 most significant cognitive disabilities **34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(i).**

2. A student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is **not** identified based on the student's previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general state or districtwide assessments (**34 CFR 200.6(1)(ii)**).

The following should NOT be considered in the eligibility determination process:

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic achievement and other services received
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education services
8. EL status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of test scores on accountability system
12. Administrator's decision
13. Anticipated emotional duress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative communication to participate in assessment process)

Note: Students cannot be exempted from statewide assessments through an IEP, 504 Plan, and/or an EL designation.

Participation Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How is Student Eligibility to Test Determined?

A: Montana's procedures for determining which students are eligible to test uses the current fiscal year school records that begin on July 1 and end on June 30 of each year (see **§20-1-301**, MCA). The OPI expects all students enrolled in accredited schools with "primary" educational service type records in the State Student Information System (Infinite Campus) and with the "Alternate" designation selected within the IEP under the statewide assessments tab of EDUCATE (IC) to be administered the alternate assessments.

Q: Who decides whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessment?

A: After consideration of all the evidence as it satisfies each of the qualifying criteria (**Appendix A**), the IEP team determines how a student will participate in statewide assessments. The IEP team must follow the Alternate Assessment guidelines. No one member of the IEP team makes this decision. Parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators make the decision based on evidence and adherence to the guidelines. Eligibility determination is part of the annual IEP and must be considered every year.

Q: How do we know that a student has a "significant cognitive disability"?

A: The OPI does not define a "significant cognitive disability" in terms of a "cut off" IQ score. Most students with significant cognitive disabilities have intellectual disabilities but not all. Not all students with these disabilities are considered to have a "significant cognitive disability." A significant cognitive disability will be pervasive, affecting student learning across content areas and in social and community settings. Verifiable evidence will demonstrate the impact of the significant cognitive disability in all aspects of the student's life [**Appendix A**]. Determinations for student participation in statewide assessments must be data-centered and made individually for each student by the IEP team. Alternate Assessments are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For more information see the **Glossary of Terms**.

Q: How do I know if the Alternate Assessment content is appropriate for an EL with an IEP whose language proficiency makes it difficult to assess content knowledge and skills?

A: EL students should be considered for the Alternate Assessment if (a) their intellectual functioning indicates a significant cognitive disability using assessments in their home language as appropriate, and (b) they meet the criteria above in **Table 7**. Assessments of adaptive behavior and communication should consider linguistic and sociocultural factors for valid interpretation of the results of these assessments, alongside the information on goals and instruction in the student's IEP used to determine what may or may not be a significant cognitive disability. If an EL with an IEP does not meet the criteria for Alternate Assessments, then they should take the general assessment with language support and

accommodations as appropriate.

Q: If a student has been tested in the past on an Alternate Assessment, but the current IEP team determines that the student does not meet the participation guidelines, can the student be assigned to the general assessment?
A: Yes. The IEP team must ensure that the student has received appropriate instruction on the state grade level standards throughout the year in preparation for transition to the general assessment; therefore, these assessment discussions should occur early in the school year.

Q: Is it possible that a decision to participate in Alternate Assessments could change as a student gets older?
A: Participating in Alternate Assessments requires that the student has significant cognitive impairment and interacts with content that has been significantly modified from that which is provided to the student's typically developing peers. Even though students with significant cognitive disabilities often are identified early, prior to starting school, they may be able to participate in the general assessment during their elementary grades. IEP teams should be especially cautious about assigning students with significant cognitive disabilities to an Alternate Assessment in their early school years. When the level of support needed for the student to participate in the depth and breadth of the state standards, Essential Elements, and the general assessment increases, the team may determine that participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate. Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to continue to need supports to live as independently as possible throughout their adult lives after high school. Students who did not need early intervention services, or who are unlikely to need substantial daily supports in their adult lives, probably do not have a significant cognitive disability and would not be appropriately assessed with the Alternate Assessment.

Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: Contact the OPI Assessment Help Desk at 1-844-867-2569 or email at **opiassessmenthelpdesk@mt.gov**.

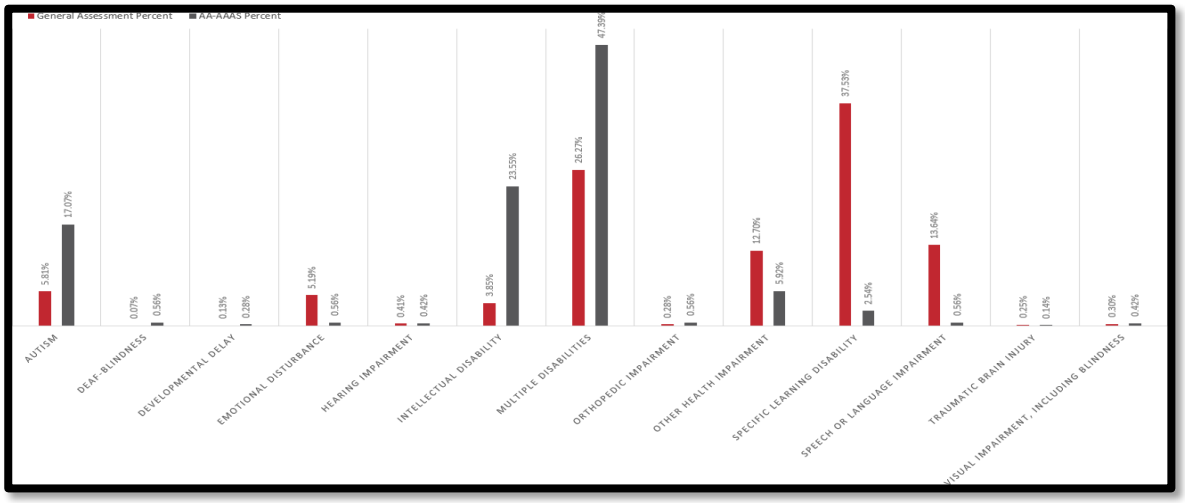
First Contact Survey

The purpose of the First Contact Survey is to collect basic demographic information about each student who is eligible for the DLM alternate assessments. In addition to demographic information, the survey includes items on communication, assistive technology devices, motor and sensory impairments, and academic performance. The data is analyzed using a complex algorithm and then used to recommend the linkage level for each Essential Element for each subject at the beginning of the fall window. **The First Contact Survey must be submitted every year and is typically the responsibility of the test administrator, although the district and building assessment coordinators also have permission in the Educator Portal to submit it.** It is also additionally important to note that the First Contact Survey and PNP Profile need to be reviewed prior to each window (Fall/Spring). Before the Spring window administration, you will want to ensure that they are both up to date with student progress and any potential IEP updates.

The assessment coordinator's main responsibility with the survey is to provide guidance to test administrators and to monitor that they have successfully submitted each student's survey before the opening of the fall window. The test administrator will not be able to select Essential Elements for instruction or assessment in the Instruction and Assessment Planner until the First Contact Survey is completed. The First Contact Survey is discussed in the Required Test Administrator Training, and all the items in the survey are listed in the appendix of the Test Administration Manual. **NOTE: If the First Contact Survey is submitted for a student after the opening of the fall window, the linkage level recommendations for the Essential Elements will be updated after the Instruction and Assessment Planner screen is refreshed**.

About 13% of the student population in the United States are classified as students with disabilities where 13 disability categories are defined by IDEA [**34 CFR 300.8(a)**]. **Figure 1** below represents the distribution of children in Montana who are served under IDEA.

Figure 1. Primary Disability Categories of Montana Students with Disabilities Who Participate in Statewide Assessments - ELA and Math



CHAPTER 5: SERVING ALL STUDENTS

Schools are obligated to ensure equal access to educational services and programs including inclusion in a safe environment free from discrimination. Every child has the right to an education and must be afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers (**§20-9-309, MCA**). The **MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments** are designed to ensure student inclusion to the fullest extent possible and to provide clear and consistent information on the program-specific test registration processes. It is required that students with significant cognitive disabilities are provided the opportunity to participate in the statewide assessments, that they receive the same benefits of participation that are afforded to students without disabilities, and that they are not denied these rights (see **34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students**).

Schools must take affirmative steps to ensure all students can meaningfully participate in the provided educational programs and services; therefore, Montana school districts and the OPI must work in partnership to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to participate in statewide assessments. This joint responsibility is important to ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. It is never allowable to exclude students based on expected performance, difficulty in administering the test, disability, or English Learner status. The OPI has prepared these guidelines to fully ensure inclusion within statewide assessments, including participation within the Alternate Assessments.

Alternate Assessments serve students, families, educators, and school leaders by providing individual student reports to help these stakeholders address the specific academic needs of students regarding achievement on the Essential Elements. Achievement information from these assessments indicates student growth at all Essential Elements/Linkage Levels to help ensure that the assessment results can be used to improve student instruction (see **34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students**). The OPI provides for the production and delivery of individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports after each administration of its Alternate Assessments in partnership with its test delivery contractors. Further, the OPI follows an annual process and timeline for delivering individual student reports to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as practicable after each test/when results become available.

Accessibility Features and Accommodations

The OPI's Alternate Assessments provide for appropriate accommodations, such as interoperability with and the ability to use assistive technology devices consistent with nationally recognized accessibility standards so that students with disabilities are able to participate in academic instruction and assessments consistent with their instructional experience (**34 CFR 200.6(b)(1)**). Note: Each statewide assessment comes with its own specific set of accessibility features (or test settings).

The OPI defines these options as test settings. The selection of test settings (i.e., universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations) and participation within Alternate Assessments is a systematic, data-based process made by educators familiar with individual student needs. Though these assessments differ in the terminology that is used to describe the supports for accessibility, they all focus on **Universal Design for Learning** principles. These assessments embed accessibility resources, policies, and features important for educators to know and appropriately utilize for each student.

There are many ways to provide support and increase accessibility for students. The OPI's Alternate Assessments have two designations of test support. First, there are accessibility features available to any student who benefits from the support. The second test support designations are accommodations, which are outlined in the student's IEP and must be made available on statewide assessments. With the implementation of Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), one large contribution is that it takes into account the individualized needs of each student and comes with accessibility features embedded in the design of the assessment itself.

When selecting which accessibility features and accommodations are most effective, keep the following in mind:

- Accessibility features and accommodations may not restrict a student's independence or communication.
- Accessibility features and accommodations must be based on what the student uses during daily instruction.
- Students and Test Administrators should become familiar with the assessment features selected and should practice using them with the sample items prior to administration of the test.

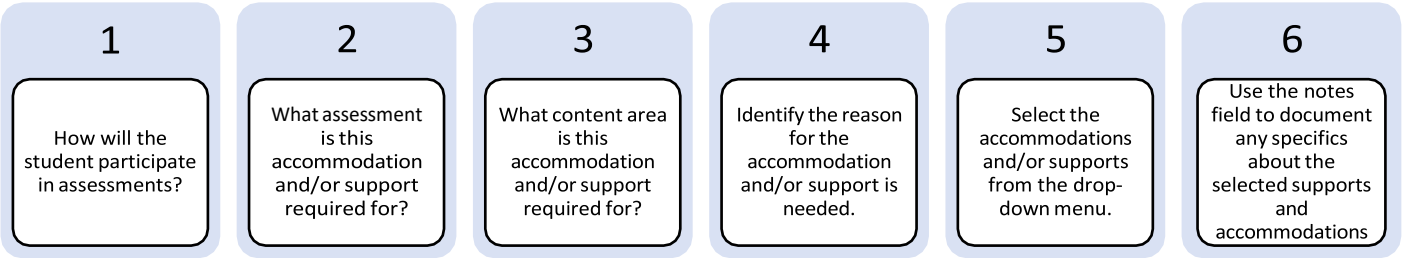
In this section, there is information to support IEP teams in **EDUCATE (IC)** with determining the selection of the appropriate statewide assessment including which accommodations are most appropriate.

EDUCATE IEP Statewide Editor

The IEP Statewide Editor has an editor to provide additional support for IEP teams in implementing an individualized, needs-based approach to selecting accommodations and supports for statewide assessments. The changes help IEP teams to know which accessibility supports are allowable for different assessments and content areas. The editor facilitates communication between case managers and System Test Coordinators by providing a tool that documents the specific, approved accommodations and supports that are needed for each assessment and content area. The IEP Statewide Assessment Editor collects information from the IEP to support meaningful participation in assessments.

The hierarchy of the cascade includes six components, the (1) participation decision (2) assessment, (3) content area, (4) reason for accessibility support, (5) supports and accommodations that meet the reasons, and (6) a notes section for documentation of accessibility support specifics or documentation of non-routine accommodations. **Figure 2** shows the information contained in each step of the editor cascade.

Figure 2 – OPI IEP Needs-Based Editor Approach



Needs-Based Selection of Test Settings

IEP teams use the **Appendix A** form to indicate how the child will participate in statewide assessments. If the IEP team has a student who is eligible to take the Alternate Assessments, they should mark the Alternate Assessment checkbox under the Statewide Assessments Editor in the EDUCATE (IC) student information system. For students who are both eligible to take the Alternate Assessments and are designated as English learners (EL), districts must also enroll them

in the EL program in EDUCATE (IC). For more information on the decision-making process for the needs-based approach, explore the **Needs-Based EDUCATE IEP Statewide Assessment Editor**. Parents/guardians must be knowledgeable about the needs and accommodations planned for their child to ensure parents/guardians are aware of the conditions under which their child will participate in the assessment.

Training Requirements

The OPI requires Test Administrators (or TAs) to receive training on test security and test administration in advance of testing to maintain the validity and reliability of statewide assessments. Since 2013, all statewide assessments must be administered to students by Montana licensed professionals who have been trained, are familiar with standardized testing procedures, and are employed by the School System (**MontCAS Test Security Manual**). In addition to these requirements, the OPI requires all Test Administrators to complete all required training and review all manuals specific to the assessment the proctor will be administering.

Test Administrators must become familiar with the administration steps ahead of testing day, so they are comfortable with the process and flow of the test. The manuals for Alternate Assessments can be found on the test delivery portals linked in Chapter 3. The System Test Coordinator can use the OPI's **test administration, test accessibility, test security, data use,** and **test training** plans for the school district to identify critical partners and to build an assessment team to deploy the annual Alternate Assessments in a standardized and secure fashion. The research shows that all students do better with assessment when assessing under ideal conditions and in familiar learning environments. This extends to ensuring Test Administrators are familiar to the students and experienced in student educational plans such as IEPs to assist in setting up individual student supports and accommodations.

All educators, parents and teams making decisions about how students will participate in state assessment must be aware of the testing plan for the student[s]. The OPI encourages the testing process to match as closely as possible to the real classroom experience/setting where the student is familiar with the test supports and accommodations and has practiced these for at least three months before the assessment. Supports and accommodations should be similar in classroom instruction and other assessments that the student participates in throughout the school year. The assessment experiences should reflect the learning experience, and the testing location should be free from distractions and follow the OPI's policies and procedures for test security and administration.

For the DLM ELA/math and DLM Science, Test Coordinators and Test Administrators must complete the annual training requirements as outlined in accordance with DLM requirements, which can be found in the resources found on **the Montana DLM Page**. Test Coordinators are responsible for completing the appropriate training modules in alignment with your staff role within assessment in your district. System Test Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed the training course accordingly. More information on this can be found in the **Assessment Coordinator Manual** from the DLM Montana webpage. Training must be completed for all assessments that will be administered by individuals.

For WIDA Alternate ACCESS, all Test Administrators must complete the appropriate test administration and certification course(s) in the **WIDA Secure Portal** once every two years. System Test Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that Test Administrators have completed the annual training required and certifications for the screening tests that they will administer, including training courses for scoring student responses. The WIDA Secure Portal houses all training courses and user guides for WIDA AMS. WIDA also provides a **screening and placement guide** and a **checklist** to help districts plan their testing activities. System Test Coordinators are also responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed test security requirements.

An important reminder for the timing and scheduling of Alternate Assessments — persons charged with scheduling and planning for the Alternate Assessment should consider the varying degrees of stamina and levels of ability to stay on task for each child. Each child is unique, and an individualized approach should be taken to prepare a testing plan that is consistent for the student with their classroom instructions so they can fully demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This may include pausing the test to take a break at any time or only presenting a few items at a

time during a test session. Alternate Assessments are not timed and can be paused for a variety of reasons, including frustration, lack of engagement, refusal to participate, or sickness. Test Administrators may pause and resume the administration of the test as often as necessary during the entire test administration window. A break may consist of a few minutes to a few days, depending on the student's needs. With the design of Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessments, testlets are broken down to match individual student needs based on the Essential Elements, Linkage Levels, and Nodes that are selected by the SPED educator/test administrator.

Serving Student Needs Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do students with disabilities participate in statewide assessments?
A: All students, including students with disabilities, are required by state and federal law to take part in statewide assessments with or without accommodations. Generally, if a student can receive instruction, then they are also able to participate in statewide assessments.

Q: Why is it important to indicate that a student participating in Alternate Assessments is receiving instruction on content linked to statewide standards, and his/her performance is measured against Essential Elements?
A: The purpose of the OPI's Alternate Assessments is to provide an opportunity for students to show what they know and can do in relation to grade-level standards, as required under ESEA-ESSA. These students can participate fully in the big ideas and activities of the grade-level curriculum and build skills and knowledge that support their active engagement in the school, community, and with peers. These students are entitled to the same benefits but at a different level of expectation and achievement. This limited or modified exposure to the grade-level standards may have a significant impact on academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities. The Essential Elements of the DLM assessments help provide through-year growth opportunities for students with Linkage Levels that give them the best opportunity to show what they know and can do.

Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: Contact the OPI Assessment Help Desk at 1-844-867-2569 or email at **opiassessmenthelpdesk@mt.gov**.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSING SwSCDs

The OPI administers the DLM ELA/math, DLM Science, and Alternate ACCESS as comprehensive assessment systems designed to promote higher academic outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities in preparation for a broader array of post-secondary outcomes. The Alternate Assessments are designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is linked to (derived from) the Board- adopted state content standards. These assessments contain many built-in supports that allow students to take the test using materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible.

All statewide assessments must be administered by Montana licensed educators who have completed the required training and certification requirements. Test Administrators must be familiar with standardized testing procedures, adhere to the state standardized procedures for test administration (**ARM 10.56.101**), and must be employed by the school system. Best practice is to also have the same special education teacher who works with the student administering the test(s), which are administered in a one-to-one format using a script. The test administration training and best practice videos will prepare Test Administrators to provide standardized administration of the test that meets the needs of this student population. For more information on the test administration certification requirements, read the **MontCAS Test Security Manual**.

Non-Participation Reporting

As defined in Chapter 3, all students must participate in statewide assessments either with or without accommodations, or when the participation criteria are met for Alternate Assessments (**ARM 10.56.104(1)**). There are rare and unique situations in which a student is unable to participate in statewide assessments due to a documented, significant, and incapacitating condition, or a medical emergency that extends across the entire (or remaining) test window. If the student can participate in learning activities and education, either in their school, home, or outplacement facility, then the student

is able to participate in statewide assessments. To apply for a medical exemption, school districts must gather documentation that the student meets two criteria:

1. The student's situation is so severe that the child cannot participate in any learning or educational activities in any setting (e.g., home, school, or outplacement facility); and
2. The student cannot participate in any tests, even with adjustments (e.g., accommodations or supports) that could allow them to participate.

Each reason for non-participation (due to medical reasons) is handled by the OPI on a case-by-case basis. The OPI reserves the right to handle these non-participation reports on an individualized basis and will use the reported reason to determine whether the situation reported qualifies for medical exemption. Anything not considered a medical exemption will be reported as non-participation for both state and federal accountability purposes. For more information on the OPI's Medical Exemption Policy, read the **MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments.**

Non-Participation Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What if it is impossible to assess a student because the student does not appear to communicate?
A: DLM alternate assessments are tailored to include students who do not yet communicate using spoken words, signs, or other symbols. By using items that access lower levels of cognitive processing, DLM alternate assessments capture the unique cognitive and communication modes among students who communicate exclusively in non-symbolic ways. A key advantage of this approach is that it moves beyond simple right or wrong answers and instead captures student understanding as they move from pre-intentional to intentional then conventional and symbolic communication. The DLM system includes an expanded taxonomy of cognitive processes dimensions (Bechard et al., 2021) to support the full participation of students who communicate in non-symbolic, unconventional, or pre-intentional ways. Items designed for this group of students target these cognitive processes in the context of academic subjects to provide information about student progress toward grade-level academic expectations. Teachers administer the assessment and record student responses. You can access this **DLM Research Synopsis** for more information on how to approach this.

Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: The Montana Office of Public Instruction Special Education Unit at 406-444-2504.

CHAPTER 7 - PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS AND GRADUATION

Proficiency on statewide assessments must ensure students who are "at or above proficient" are on track to pursue postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment, consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (see **34 CFR 200.2(b)(3)(ii)(B)(2)**).
The OPI and school districts may not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an Alternate Assessment based on Essential Elements from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma (ESEA-ESSA Section 1111(b)(2)(D)(vii)). Each child's IEP must include a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to:

1. meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and
2. meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability.

CHAPTER 8 – BUILDING A STATE ONE PERCENT DATA ANALYSIS AND USE PLAN

Students eligible to participate in Alternate Assessments make up approximately 1.0 % of Montana's total tested student population. The OPI adopted the **recommendations and strategies** from the technical assistance organization "National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)." That is:

1. Gather district and school data on current participation rates in the Alternate Assessment. It is important to

know the landscape of participation rates in the Alternate Assessment in districts and in schools throughout the state.
2. Gather data on the characteristics of students participating in Alternate Assessment.
3. Create or examine a state definition of "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" and revise guidelines, as needed, for determining whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessment.
4. Provide professional development for IEP team members and other educators on the nature of the Alt. Assessment and who should participate in it. IEP team members need to understand the purpose of the Alt. Assessment and the characteristics of students who most appropriately participate in that assessment.
5. Provide information sessions for parents/guardians of students with disabilities so that they can participate in the IEP decision-making process about the assessment in which their child participates. The decision of which assessment a student participates in has major implications, yet families often don't have the necessary information to confidently participate in the IEP decision-making process.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For assessment defined terms, visit the **MontCAS Test Security Training Portal**.

APPENDIX A

Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria Worksheet. This form is used by the IEP team to document the conversations, evidence, and decisions when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments.

APPENDIX B

Decision Flowchart. The Decision Flowchart is designed to guide the sequence of decisions to be made by IEP teams when determining whether a student should participate in Montana's Alternate Assessments.

RERERENCES AND RESOURCES

The information presented here includes the resources linked throughout this manual in alphabetical order along with additional references to learn more about Alternate Assessment topics.

Resource Name	Resource Description
ACCESS General WIDA Can-Do Descriptors	The "Can Do" descriptors highlight what language learners can do at various stages of language development. For more information, visit the **OPI English Language Acquisition page** for various resources related to assistance and guidance for EL supports and federal guidelines/title services & resources.
WIDA ACCESS Checklist	To help districts plan their testing activities, the System Test Coordinators are also responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed test security requirements.
Alternate ACCESS Scores and Reports	Alternate ELP Standards: Alternate standards are not formally adopted by the OPI but are aligned to and used in the creation of Montana's WIDA Alternate ACCESS.
Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Sample Items	To help teachers understand how students will be assessed and to help students gain comfort and familiarity with the assessment, this website provides sample items for all four language domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
Alternate ACCESS Assessment Profile	This assessment profile contains the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the Alternate ACCESS program.
Alternate ACCESS WIDA Consortium Map	This resource provides information on the member states and territories that use this WIDA assessment.

Alternate ACCESS Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the Alt ACCESS assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch the approximately 10-minute describes foundational aspects of the statewide assessment.
ALTELLA Research Brief Considerations for Educators	Considerations for Educators Serving English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities.
ALTELLA Research Brief Definitions	The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) Project has established a definition of English Learners with significant cognitive disabilities. The ALTELLA project has researched instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence- centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students.
Article X	After a bill is signed by the governor or passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto, it is incorporated into the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). This is a compilation of the Montana State Constitution and all state laws, also called statutes or Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Article X is the Educational Goals and Duties within Montana.
ARM 10.56.101	Administrative rules are agency regulations and standards used to implement, interpret, or set policy. Rules can also describe an agency's organization, procedures, or practices. Chapter 56 provides the policies for public and accredited non-public schools for participation in statewide assessment.
ARM 10.55.603	ARM Chapter 55 provides the policies for public and accredited non-public schools for accreditation.
Characteristics of English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities	A report that presents findings from information gathered from the Individual Characteristics Questionnaire for ELs.
District Dialogue Guide: Addressing the Percentage of Students Participating in the Alternate Assessment	A National Center on Education Outcomes (NCEO) tool for conversations on Alternate Assessments.
Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment(s)	The Dynamic Learning Maps® (DLM®) Alternate Assessment System is designed to measure what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities know and can do in specific subjects from grades 3–8 and 11 (ELA/Math) and grades 5, 8, and 11 (Science). The system is built for accessibility and is grounded in the belief that all students should engage with challenging, grade-level content. It also emphasizes that test administrators must maintain the highest standards of integrity when instructing and administering the assessments.
Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Assessment Profiles (ELA/Math)	These assessment profiles contain the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the DLM Alternate Assessment Systems.
Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Assessment Profiles (Science)	These assessment profiles contain the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the DLM Alternate Assessment Systems.
Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) ELA/Mathematics Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the DLM (ELA/Mathematics) assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch approx. 20-minute video which describes the foundational aspects of the alternate statewide assessment.

Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Science Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the DLM (Science) assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch approx. 15-minute video which describes the foundational aspects of the alternate statewide assessment.
English Learner Guidance for School Districts	This manual is intended to assist educators and STCs with identifying, serving, and assessing English learner (EL) students. The guide describes the OPI's policies and procedures required to serve English Learner (EL) students in the state of Montana.
ESSA State Plan	In 2017, the Department released a template for the consolidated state plan under ESEA- ESSA Section 8302. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all ESEA-ESSA requirements for each federal program. The OPI submitted to the Department the ESSA State Plan, which was approved in 2018, and Montana's ESSA State Plan sets the expectations for school districts regarding the implementation of the testing, accountability, and reporting provisions under ESEA-ESSA. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all requirements for each federal program including statewide assessments.
Essential Elements (EE) (ELA/Mathematics)	The DLM content standards for ELA, mathematics, and science are called Essential Elements and are the learning targets used for the assessments. The purpose of the Essential Elements is to build a bridge from grade-level content standards to academic expectations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. ELA and mathematics have several similarities and will be discussed together, while science will be discussed in its own sections.
Essential Elements (EE) (Science)	The DLM science Essential Elements are the learning targets used in science assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These elements consist of clear statements of knowledge, skills, and understandings, including science and engineering practices. They are aligned with grade-level expectations from the National Research Council's Framework for K–12 Science Education. The goal of these Essential Elements is to bridge the gap between general education science standards and the academic expectations appropriate for these students.
Guidance for Examining District Alternate Assessment Participation Rates	A brief paper published by the National Center on Education Outcomes (NCEO) and the Center for Assessment for Alternate Assessments.
Linkage Levels	The DLM alternate assessment uses five linkage levels in ELA and math, with the Target level showing how a student performs relative to grade-level expectations. Other levels are mapped to connect to the Target level, both before and beyond it, to support varied learning pathways.