

# Rhode Island State Assessment Program

**Revised IEP Team Guidance on Determining  
Eligibility for Alternate Assessment**



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Participation in the Rhode Island Assessment Program is an important way of ensuring that each student has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills addressed in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Next Generation Science Assessment (NGSA) and have access to the general curriculum. The standards assessed in the DLM alternate assessments are the Essential Elements (EEs). The Essential Elements are aligned to the CCSS and the NGSS.

**What is an “alternate assessment”?** The majority of students with disabilities are able to participate in the general education curriculum and will take the RICAS assessments with accommodations and other supports. However, a small number of students with significant cognitive disabilities cannot participate in the general education assessments even with accommodations. These students require a different kind of test for them to show what they know and can do.

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 the purpose of participation in the statewide student assessment program. For a student to be considered as having a significant cognitive disability for purposes of participation in the alternate assessment, evidence collected must show that the student meets ALL of the criteria for eligibility for the alternate assessment.

Alternate assessments are designed around the unique needs of students that take into account motor, hearing, vision, and other physical disabilities as well as cognitive disabilities. While these assessments assess the Essential Elements, which are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, the level at which the content presented is less complex and students receive more scaffolding and supports than on the general education assessment. The number of standards assessed is also much less than what is assessed on RICAS.

**What is the purpose of this document?** This document is intended to help Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members decide whether the alternate assessment or the general education assessment, either with or without accommodations, is the most appropriate test for a student and to outline the required process and evidence that LEAs and IEP Teams must use to make an eligibility decision.

To help LEAs and IEP Teams make the most accurate decisions possible, this document contains the following:

- RIDE policy around when *to* make eligibility determinations.
- RIDE policy around when *not* to make eligibility determinations.
- Required rubrics, tools, and documentation form that every student must have in their IEP at the completion of the eligibility process.
- An outline of the process LEAs and IEP Teams must follow to ensure that the decision to include or exclude a student from the alternate assessment is defensible.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ELIGIBILITY PROCESS

The IEP team decision about whether a student participates in the alternate assessment is often one of the more difficult decisions that the team makes. It requires the consideration of many factors. To help IEP teams in this decision, several tools have been developed. These are based on a synthesis of the many tools that states may be using as they strive to provide relevant information to IEP teams so that the best and most accurate decisions are made for each student.

They were identified and developed by NCEO 2019 PLG 3 and NCEO to help states meet the assurances they must provide to the U.S. Department of Education:

- IEP teams in the state are adhering to the state’s alternate assessment participation guidelines and the state’s definition of a “student with the most significant cognitive disabilities.”

- IEP teams (and their LEAs) in the state inform parents of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities of the implications of participation in the alternate assessment.

This document outlines the process that should be followed to make eligibility decisions for students. Each step is explained and covered in detail in this document. The steps to the eligibility process are:

Step 1: Learn about the alternate assessments.

Step 2: Understand the eligibility process.

Step 3: Use the tools to make an eligibility determination.

Step 4: Document the decision.

## WHEN TO MAKE ELIGIBILITY DECISIONS

### **For MLL students with significant cognitive disabilities (K-2)**

Although RICAS and DLM begin at grade 3, the state assessment of language development (ACCESS) will begin in kindergarten starting in 2024.

MLL students participation in the Alternate ACCESS in K, first, or second grade **does not indicate** eligibility for the DLM. Once the MLL student reaches the end of second grade or beginning of third grade, the IEP Team must make a formal eligibility decision using the processes and rubrics in this guidance document.

### **Grade 2**

Since state assessments begin at grade 3, IEP teams should conduct a formal eligibility process at some point in grade 2. This would ensure that teachers and service providers have time to develop an instructional plan, IEP goals, etc., that will best position the student's teacher and the student for success in grade 3. Try to avoid waiting to make eligibility decisions at grade 3. It is important the students have as much instructional time as possible aligned to the Essential Elements before taking the DLM assessments.

### **Grades 3-8, and 11**

While there is no deadline for making eligibility determinations, it is important to do this as early in the school year as possible. Students found eligible at any point after the school year has started should take the DLM assessments for their designated grade level, however, if an IEP team reaches a decision two weeks or less before the start of the DLM tests, preparing for the DLM alternate assessments will be difficult.

In addition to all of the updates to the Enrollment and Special Education Censuses, registration must also happen in the DLM Kite Educator Portal. The First Contact Survey and Personal Needs Profile must be completed by the student's teacher *prior to the start of testing*. Please ensure that IEP team decisions are made as far in advance of this date as possible. Teachers run the risk of not being able to complete the required steps to administer the DLM assessments if decisions are made after this date.

### **Grade 9, 10, and 12**

State academic assessments are not administered in these grade levels but Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is. Most students at these grade levels will have an eligibility determination already. If a formal eligibility determination has not been made, then one must be completed in order for the student to take the Alternate ACCESS and to participate in the DLM in grade 11.

## STEP 1: LEARN ABOUT THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS

The basis for making decisions about which assessment is most appropriate for an individual student comes from having a solid foundation of knowledge about the state's assessment system, including the purpose of the general assessment and the alternate assessment. This knowledge should be demonstrated by all IEP team members, which may include parents or guardians, teachers, school psychologists, English language development specialists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, paraprofessionals, administrators, and others who may participate in the IEP team meeting. Below is an overview of the general and alternate state assessments available in Rhode Island.

### GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENTS

The English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science assessments are part of the federal elementary and secondary education legislation. The assessment program does the following:

- Measures specific claims related to the Rhode Island Core Standards in grades 3-8 and 11 in ELA and mathematics.
- Measures specific claims related to the Next Generation Science Standards in grades 5, 8, and 11 in science.
- Reports individual student scores along with each student's performance level.
- Provides subscale and total scores that can be used with local assessment scores to assist in improving a school's or district's programs in ELA, mathematics, and science.
- Learn more about the [Rhode Island Core Standards](#) and the [Next Generation Science Standards](#).

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS

**English language arts and mathematics:** grades 3-8 and 11

**Science:** grades 5, 8, and 11

Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessments are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom general state assessments are not appropriate, even with accommodations. DLM assessments offer these students a way to show what they know and can do in mathematics, English language arts, and science.

DLM assessments also help parents and educators establish high academic expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Results from DLM assessments support interpretations about what students know and can do. Results will also inform teachers' instructional decisions and meet federal requirements for reporting student achievement.

#### **Accommodations and Accessibility**

DLM assessments are designed to maximize accessibility for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Assessments are built to allow multiple ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. At multiple points during the assessment development process, teams of educators review the testlets to ensure instructional relevance and to minimize barriers for students.

During assessment administration, students have access to various tools and test supports that teachers will select to fit each student's needs and preferences. Some of these tools and supports are delivered through the online assessment system while others are provided outside the system, by the teacher. IEP teams will need to review these tools and test supports and make decisions about which ones are appropriate for the student.

## Standards and Content

The DLM Alternate Assessment System uses a learning map model to diagram the relationship among the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary to meet academic content standards (the Essential Elements). The learning map model plots out individual concepts. The connections among these nodes show the multiple ways that students' knowledge, skills, and understandings develop over time.

By examining the learning map model and the relationships between its nodes, educators can better uncover reasons a student may be struggling with a particular concept and also see paths ahead for that student to continue to expand their knowledge and skills.

To connect the model's extensive content to real-world expectations for students, certain nodes within the model are associated with **Essential Elements (EEs)**. EE's are specific statements about what students should know and be able to do. They are linked to grade-level-specific expectations described in college- and career-readiness standards for students in the general population, and they provide a bridge between those standards and academic expectations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

## Assessment Administration

Rhode Island administers the DLM alternate assessments each spring, with all students in a particular grade being assessed on the same Essential Elements.

The DLM assessments are adaptive tests. That means the students receive testlets of varying difficulty depending on their previous answers.

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION FOR IEP TEAM MEMBERS

There is a wealth of information available to assist IEP team members in making decisions about which assessment is most appropriate for a student to take. Unfortunately, local IEP teams may not know about this information unless it is provided to them. This tool includes information specifically designed for Rhode Island educators, as well as nationally available information from NCEO.

### Information for Administrators, Teachers, School Psychologists, and Related Services Specialists

#### Alternate Assessment Information

- [Video \*Who Are Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities?\*](#) (video and supporting materials)
- [Rhode Island Eligibility Guidelines](#)
- [Essential Elements](#)

#### General Assessment Information

- [RIDE Accommodations and Accessibility Features Manual](#)
- [RICAS assessment overview](#)
- Rhode Island Core Standards for ELA and mathematics
- [Next Generation Science Standards](#)

#### Information for English Language Development Specialists

- [State Assessment Decision-making Processes for ELLs with Disabilities](#)
- [Participation of English Learners with Disabilities](#)
- [Alternate ACCESS for ELLs](#)
- [Accessibility and Accommodations WIDA](#)

## Information for Parents

- [Parent Information Brochure about DLM](#)
- [Resources for Families](#) (RIDE web page)
- [Alternate Assessment Explanation and Information for Parents and IEP Teams](#)

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## ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT EXPLANATION AND INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND IEP TEAMS

### Academic Achievement Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards

The Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) alternate assessment is designed for those students identified with a most significant cognitive disability who require instruction based on alternate academic achievement standards.

The Essential Elements are descriptions of what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level from Kindergarten through 12th grade. They are essential skills that are linked to the Rhode Island Core Standards in English Language Arts and mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards.

### Differences Between Assessments Based on Grade-level Academic Achievement Standards and Those Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards

All students with a disability and an IEP have a right to a free appropriate public education. This right includes the opportunity for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to be involved in and make appropriate progress in the same general education curriculum as other students. Sometimes, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are not able to access the standards in a meaningful way or to the same degree as other students. These standards are at a reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. These alternate academic achievement standards are called the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Essential Elements (EE) in English language arts (ELA), mathematics and science.

The Rhode Island State Assessment Program (RISAP) provides parents, educators, and policymakers with one piece of information about student learning. The DLM is used to test academic achievement for students with a most significant cognitive disability. It is a completely individualized test designed so that students can show what they know and can do. The assessment is given in short parts called testlets so your child does not become too tired or stressed. The DLM ELA, math, and science assessments are given in April each year.

### The Impact of State and Local Policies for Students Who Take the DLM Alternate Assessments

Testing students using the DLM alternate assessments and working from the alternate academic achievement standards can place a student on a different trajectory. These students are measured using performance standards at a reduced depth, breadth, and complexity which can result in fewer post-secondary opportunities. Teachers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities use the Essential Elements to plan what is taught and how it is taught so that their students can learn as much as possible. The EEs may also be used to help teachers develop ways to measure student progress. They answer the question “What should my child be learning?”

If a student will participate in the DLM alternate assessment, IEP teams need to consider the EEs when developing the student’s IEP. The EEs help the teacher identify the student’s needs and plan grade level instruction and assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Information regarding the student’s performance is included on the IEP under Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. More information and copies of the EEs are available online at: [www.ride.ri.gov/dlm](http://www.ride.ri.gov/dlm).

### Participation in the Alternate Assessment May Affect Completion of a Regular High School Diploma

Students whose instruction is based on the EEs will not be exposed to curriculum at the same depth, breadth, and complexity as their grade-level peers. For these reasons, participation in the alternate assessment may affect your child’s completion of the requirements for a regular high school diploma.

It is vital that students with severe cognitive disabilities receive academic instruction in order to be able to take advantage of all post high-school options available and to have as much independence as possible. Students who qualify for the alternate assessment may be eligible for a diploma by demonstrating proficiency through their coursework on modified proficiency expectations on state-adopted standards. The number and types of courses required for a diploma are the same for all students.

## STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE ELIGIBILITY PROCESS

The decision about which assessment is most appropriate for an individual student can best be supported by preparing information directly relevant to the assessment participation decision before the meeting. This information should reflect considerations that are included in the state’s guidelines for participation in the alternate assessments.

According to ESSA regulations, states’ guidelines and definition must address “factors related to cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior” (Sec 200.6(d)(1)). The regulations also clarified that a specific disability category or being an English learner does not determine whether a student has a significant cognitive disability (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(i)), nor does a student’s “previous low academic achievement, or the student’s previous need for accommodations to participate in general State or districtwide assessments” (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(ii)). The regulations state:

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. (Sec 200.6(d)(1)(iii))

## WHEN TO USE THESE ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

**LEAs are required** to use the new eligibility guidelines and tools beginning with the 2023-24 school year at the IEP meetings for the following students:

- Students who qualified for alternate assessment under the previous eligibility guidelines.
- Students who are in non-tested grades and qualified for alternate assessment under the previous eligibility guidelines.
- Students who are being considered for alternate assessment.

**LEAs are not required** to apply the new eligibility guidelines and tools to the following students:

- Students without IEPs.
- Students who are not being considered for alternate assessment.
- Students who did not meet the alternate assessment criteria under the previous guidelines.

In the 2024-25 school year, RIDE will release additional guidance on how LEAs should handle re-eligibility decisions for students who were found eligible under the new guidelines.

## LEA REPRESENTATIVE AND TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important that anyone fulfilling the role of LEA representative understand their role and responsibilities during the eligibility process. It is not the responsibility of the student’s teacher to conduct the eligibility decision making process on their own. The lists below outline the responsibilities of the LEA representative and the teacher during this process.

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### LEA REPRESENTATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

- Meet with the teacher before the IEP Team meeting.
- Ensure that the most current evaluations and evidence is available to the teacher.



- Ensure the rubrics are complete.
- Review how the evidence and recommendations will be communicated to the family.
- Review how the IEP Team Assurances Form will be explained to families.
- Make sure that the completed rubrics, the assessment sheet and the IEP Team Assurances Form is included in the student’s special education record.
- Ensure that the family also receives copies of the completed rubrics, assessment sheet, and the signed IEP Team Assurances Form.

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## TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Read this document.
- Collect and analyze the appropriate evidence and data about the student.
- Complete the Intellectual Functioning Rubric, the Adaptive Rubric, and the State Assessment Tools sheet.
- Meet with the LEA representative and/or special education director *before the IEP Team meeting*.

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## GATHERING EVIDENCE FOR THE ELIGIBILITY DECISION

Using multiple pieces of evidence to inform this decision is important because it prevents decision-making that relies on one type of evidence (e.g., IQ score or disability category) and because it provides a complete picture of the student both academically and in social settings.

Below is a list of possible evidence that should be gathered **before** using Tools A, B, and C. It is important to remember that no one piece of evidence should be used to make an eligibility decision and no one person should be making the decision; it must be a decision agreed to by all members of the IEP team.

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## APPROPRIATE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE AND DATA TO USE FOR ELIGIBILITY DECISIONS

- Curriculum, instructional, and classroom evidence:
  - Examples instructional objectives and materials
  - Work samples and data on progress from both school- and community-based instruction
  - Classroom work samples and data
  - Teacher observations
- Assessment data and evidence:
  - past state assessments to compare with classroom work (**NOTE:** poor performance on a past state assessment cannot be used to make a decision about eligibility).
  - district-wide alternate assessments
  - reading assessments
  - any other academic achievement tests
  - language assessments like ACCESS for ELLs or Alternate ACCESS for ELLs
  - results of the initial or most recent evaluations of the student
  - observations by teachers and other service providers
  - observations by family members or guardians, such as the student’s adaptive behavior, in settings outside of school.
- IEP information, including:

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and short-term objectives or post-school outcomes from the IEP.
- Considerations for students with specific communication needs or modes.
- Considerations for students who may be learning English as a second or other language (i.e., English language learners).
- Evaluations, including:
  - Adaptive behavior assessments
  - Functional behavior assessments
  - Informal assessments
  - Psychological assessments and evaluations, including information associated with cognitive tests.
  - Speech and communication evaluations

## RHODE ISLAND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

The term “significant cognitive disability” is not a category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for the purposes of their participation in the state assessment program. For a student to be found as having a significant cognitive disability, each of the three criteria must be true as determined by the student’s IEP team:

1. The student meets the definition of having a significant cognitive disability.
2. Formative and summative evaluations and data show that the Essential Elements will be challenging for the student.
3. The student is unable to generalize daily living and community skills consistently in home, school, and community settings without intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction and supports.

## STEP 3: USE THE TOOLS TO MAKE ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

This section contains three tools that IEP teams must use to guide their eligibility decisions. They must look at the evidence collected and use the rubrics and the assessment table to help them understand the data and evidence they collected.

**NOTE:** *If the necessary evaluations and assessments are not available or the student demonstrated substantial changes in their cognitive abilities since the evaluations and assessments were last completed, the IEP team may not continue with the eligibility process until the evaluations and assessments are complete.*

## DIRECTIONS FOR USING TOOL A: INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING TOOL

Measuring intelligence and intellectual functioning is a common approach to trying to quantify cognitive functioning. Cognitive functioning is a general term that is broad in scope. It generally includes a number of mental abilities, including “learning, thinking, reasoning, remembering, problem solving, decision making, and attention” (Fisher, Chacon, & Chaffee, 2019). A single measure of intelligence should not determine cognitive functioning, nor should it determine the potential for grade-level academic performance (McGrew & Evans, 2004). Nevertheless, documentation of information on intellectual functioning is one element of determining if a student may appropriately participate in the alternate assessments. Please keep in mind the following as the rubric is completed:

- Teams need to remember that approximately 1% or less of the assessed students in the state would meet the criteria for the alternate assessments.

- Teams also need to remember that the following information **should not be used for determining eligibility for participation in the DLM Alternate Assessments**. Definitions and descriptions of this information can be found in Appendix A.
  - Disability category (or categories)
  - Physical capabilities and/or medical needs
  - Poor attendance or extended absences, for any reason
  - Poor performance on the general education academic assessments
  - English Language Learner (EL) status
  - Impact of the student’s test scores on the accountability score of the school and/or LEA
  - Location of special education services in more restrictive settings
  - Amount of time receiving special education services
  - Variety of services a student receives
  - Behavior issues, including test anxiety
  - Administrator decision

**Directions: The Intellectual Functioning Tool is designed to help IEP Teams determine if a student has a significant cognitive disability.** Circle the description in each row that most closely matches the student’s measured intellectual information. Which column you circle in each row may be different because a student’s skills and knowledge can vary.

For a student to be eligible for the alternate assessments as a student with a most significant cognitive disability, intellectual and cognitive assessment results should be in column 4. Data for the other rubric categories may vary and could be in either columns 3 or 4. Follow the guidelines below for using evaluations:

- **Initial evaluations:** You cannot continue to determine if a student is eligible for the alternate assessment until you have the initial set of evaluations: a cognitive evaluation, functional evaluation, and any other evaluations needed for special education services and qualification for alternate assessment.
- **Three-year or tri-annual reevaluations:** Unless there are substantial changes to a student’s disability or cognitive functioning, teams may opt to use previous cognitive and functional evaluations. However, if the student has not had a three-year or triannual evaluation for more than six years (two cycles of reevaluations), then new evaluations must be completed before continuing with the eligibility process.

However, if the student has not had a three-year or triannual evaluation for more than six years and there are extenuating circumstances preventing evaluations from being completed, LEAs should contact RIDE to discuss options for moving forward with the eligibility process.

- **Conflicting results from multiple evaluations:** There may be instances when the validity of the evaluation results fall into question, such as:
  - *when a student cannot or will not complete a section of the evaluation.* In this case, it is important to understand why the student wasn’t able to complete the full evaluation. If the reason is because of the student’s behaviors, then finding the ideal setting and person to perform another evaluation should be the next step. If a student is unable to complete the evaluation because they are nonverbal or do not speak English, then finding a different evaluation that better suits the student or supplementing the missing portions of the evaluation with other evidence to ensure that you have a fuller picture of the student, is important.

- *when multiple evaluation results conflict.* In this case, it's important to consider the other evidence to see if it supports one result or the other. For example, if a teacher's functional evaluation of the student is high and the parents' evaluation is low, does other evidence confirm the teacher's evaluation results or the parents'? As another example, if multiple evaluations were conducted in a short amount of time but have different results, does additional evidence confirm one of the results, but not the other?

## TOOL A: INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING TOOL

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Fill in the names, dates, and results of each evaluation done. The completed rubric must be included in the student’s special education record and provided to the family along with the IEP.

Type of Evaluation	Name of Evaluation	Date	Results
<b>Individual Cognitive Ability Evaluation</b>			Full scale IQ: Visual/Spatial: Fluid Reasoning: Working Memory:
<b>Speech Evaluation</b>			Receptive Score: Expressive Score:
<b>AAC Evaluation</b>			
<b>OTHER</b>			

Average Cognitive Ability		Most Significant Cognitive Disability	
1	2	3	4
<b>Verbal Intelligence/Cognition (related to language skills)</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Verbal intelligence in average range or above (85 or above).	Verbal Intelligence 1 to 2 standard deviations below the mean (between 84 and 76).	Verbal Intelligence 2 to 2.5 standard deviations below the mean (between 75 and 64).	Verbal Intelligence 2.5 standard deviations or more below the mean (63 or lower).
<b>Nonverbal Intelligence/Cognition (related to nonverbal reasoning, visual/spatial, nonverbal memory)</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Non-verbal intelligence in average range or above (85 or above).	Non-verbal Intelligence 1 to 2 standard deviations below the mean (84-76).	Non-verbal Intelligence 2 to 2.5 standard deviations below the mean (75 – 64).	Non-verbal Intelligence 2.5 standard deviations below the mean (63 or lower).
<b>Thinking/Reasoning/Problem-Solving</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Reasoning and problem-solving skills at age-level or within average range on an assessment.	Minimal assistance (e.g., general education interventions/supports) needed to carry out reasoning and problem-solving tasks.	Requires moderate assistance, interventions, and supports to support learning and completing cognitive tasks involving thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.	Requires intensive and consistent assistance, interventions, and supports to support learning and completing cognitive tasks involving thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.
<b>Executive Function/Attention/Memory</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Cognitive planning and working memory at age-	Minimal assistance (e.g., general education	Requires moderate modifications and levels of	Requires intensive modifications and substantial

level or within average range on an assessment.	interventions/supports) needed to support cognitive planning and working memory.	scaffolding to support cognitive planning and working memory.	levels of scaffolding to support cognitive planning and working memory.
<b>Learning</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Learning RI Core Standards as part of the general education curriculum with minimal to no support provided.	Learning RI Core Standards as part of the general education curriculum with maximum support provided and making progress.	Learning RI Core Standards as part of the general education curriculum with maximum levels of support and no progress.  OR Learning Essential Elements and mastering the Target linkage level with moderate to maximum levels of support.	Learning Essential Elements and making progress through linkage levels with maximum levels of support.  OR Learning Essential Elements and not making progress through linkage levels even with maximum levels of support.

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## DIRECTIONS FOR USING TOOL B: ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING TOOL

Adaptive functioning, sometimes referred to as adaptive behavior, is defined as “coping with everyday environmental demands and includes daily living skills that people perform to care for themselves and to interact with others” (Mitchell, 2018). It is recommended that information for formal or informal assessments of adaptive behavior be collected from people who regularly interact with the student, including family members, educators, and other professionals.

Teams need to remember that approximately 1% or less of the assessed students in the state would meet the criteria for the alternate assessments. Please keep in mind the following as the rubric is completed:

- Teams need to remember that approximately 1% or less of the assessed students in the state would meet the criteria for the alternate assessments.
- Teams also need to remember that the following information **should not be used for determining eligibility for participation in the DLM Alternate Assessments**. Definitions and descriptions of this information can be found in Appendix A.
  - Disability category (or categories).
  - Physical capabilities and/or medical needs.
  - Poor attendance or extended absences, for any reason.
  - Poor performance on the general education academic assessments.
  - English Language Learner (EL) status.
  - Impact of the student’s test scores on the accountability score of the school and/or district.
  - Location of special education services in more restrictive settings.
  - Amount of time receiving special education services.
  - Variety of services a student receives.
  - Behavior issues, including test anxiety
  - Administrator decision.

**Directions for using the Adaptive Functioning Rubric:** Teams should circle the cell in each row that most closely matches the student’s measured adaptive behavior information. Which column is marked for each row may be different. This is to be expected because students can vary in their skill levels or exhibit splinter skills that impact their adaptive functioning.

Behavior skills assessments should reflect skills and knowledge expected for a typical peer and be appropriate for the student’s physical capabilities and communication skills. For a student to be eligible as a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities in adaptive functioning, most data should appear in column 4. Data for the other rubric categories may vary and could be in either columns 3 or 4. Follow the guidelines below for using evaluations:

- **Initial evaluations:** You can’t continue to determine if a student is eligible for the alternate assessment until you have the initial set of evaluations: a cognitive evaluation, functional evaluation, and any other evaluations needed for special education services and qualification for alternate assessment.
- **Three-year reevaluations:** Unless there are substantial changes to a student’s disability or cognitive functioning, teams may opt to use previous cognitive and functional evaluations. However, if the student has not had an evaluation for more than six years (two cycles of reevaluations), then new evaluations should be completed before continuing with the eligibility process.

- **Conflicting results from multiple evaluations:** There may be instances when the validity of the evaluation results fall into question, such as:
  - *when a student cannot or will not complete a section of the evaluation.* In this case, it is important to understand why the student wasn't able to complete the full evaluation. If the reason is because of the student's behaviors, then finding the ideal setting and person to perform another evaluation should be the next step. If a student is unable to complete the evaluation because they are nonverbal or do not speak English, then finding a different evaluation that better suits the student or supplementing the missing portions of the evaluation with other evidence to ensure that you have a fuller picture of the student, is important.
  - *when multiple evaluation results conflict.* In this case, it's important to consider the other evidence to see if it supports one result or the other. For example, if a teacher's functional evaluation of the student is high and the parents' evaluation is low, does other evidence confirm the teacher's evaluation results or the parent's? As another example, if multiple evaluations were conducted in a short amount of time but have different results, does additional evidence confirm one of the results, but not the other?



## TOOL B: ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING RUBRIC

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Fill in the names, dates, and results of each evaluation done. The completed rubric must be included in the student’s special education record and provided to the family along with the IEP.

Type of Evaluation	Name of Evaluation	Date	Results
<b>Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment*</b>			Teacher Report: Parent Report:
<b>Speech Evaluation</b>			Receptive Score: Expressive Score:
<b>AAC Evaluation</b>			
<b>OTHER</b>			

\*Behavior skills assessments should reflect the skills and knowledge expected for a typical peer and be appropriate for the student’s physical capabilities and communication skills.

Average Adaptive Ability		Most Significant Disability	
1	2	3	4
<b>Adaptive Behavior Scale</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Overall adaptive behavior score in average range or above (standard score 85 or above).	Adaptive behavior 1 to 2 standard deviations below mean (standard score between 84 and 71).	Adaptive behavior 2 to 2.5 standard deviations below mean (standard score between 70 and 64).	Adaptive behavior 2.5 standard deviations or more below mean (standard score of 63 or lower).
<b>Conceptual</b> (Do not consider communication mode but rather how proficient and independent the student is in using their communication system).			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Has appropriate age and grade level expressive and receptive communication skills.	Has expressive and receptive communication skills that requires minimal prompting or assistance.	Beginning communicator. Minimal expressive and receptive communication skills. Communication is limited to wants, needs, and preferences.	Has limited to no reliable communication system.
<b>Social and Interpersonal Skills</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
No instruction is needed on age and grade appropriate interpersonal skills.	Instructional needs addressed through general education interventions for age and grade appropriate interpersonal skills.	Systematic, direct instruction in age and grade appropriate interpersonal skills.	Intensive, systematic, and direct instruction in age and grade appropriate interpersonal skills.
<b>Daily Living Skills - Instruction</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
No instruction needed on age and grade appropriate daily living skills.	Minimal instruction needed for student to learn age and	Requires frequent, individualized instruction, and supports across <b>multiple settings</b> to learn age and	Requires intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction and supports in <b>multiple settings</b> to learn and apply age

	grade appropriate daily living skills.	grade appropriate daily living skills.	and grade appropriate daily living skills.
<b>Daily Living Skills – Application Across Multiple Settings</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
Student is independently able to generalize age and grade appropriate daily living skills.	Student requires minimal supports to successfully generalize age and grade appropriate daily living skills.	The student’s ability to successfully generalize age and grade appropriate daily living skills is inconsistent and they routinely need support.	The student is unable to successfully generalize age and grade appropriate daily living skills without intensive support.
<b>Community Living Skills</b>			
<i>Comments:</i>			
No instruction needed on age and grade appropriate community living skills.	Minimal instruction needed for student to learn age and grade appropriate community living skills.	Requires frequent, individualized instruction, and supports across multiple settings to learn age and grade appropriate community living skills.	Requires intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction and supports in multiple settings to learn and apply age and grade appropriate community living skills.

**TOOL C: PREVIOUS TEST PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION**

Whether a student participated in the alternate assessments in the past should not be a definitive indication that a student should again participate in the alternate assessments. Similarly, participation in the general assessment does not necessarily mean that the student should again take the general assessment. With extreme caution, then, IEP team members should look at data on test participation and performance.

For every year in which the student was in a tested grade, the IEP team should document and review which test the student took and how the student performed on the test. In cases where a student, year after year, consistently achieves the Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on DLM alternate assessments, it may be necessary to consider whether or not the alternate assessments, and the limited content assessed in the Essential Elements, is truly appropriate for the student. In these cases, it may be necessary to transition the student to the general assessment in order for the assessment to be ambitiously challenging (Andrew F.).

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Enter the student’s proficiency level or score for each test the student took. Once complete, place a copy in the student’s special education records. **For grade 2 students** who do not have state assessment scores, use their universal screening scores instead.

Grade	Reading/Language Arts		Mathematics		Science	
	DLM/ Alternate Assessment	General/ Universal Screening	DLM/ Alternate Assessment	General/ Universal Screening	DLM/ Alternate Assessment	NGSA/ Science Assessment
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
10						
11						

**STEP 4: DOCUMENT THE DECISION**

**IEP Team Eligibility for Alternate Assessment Documentation Form**

**Directions:** This form should be completed, signed, and attached to the IEP at the time of the student’s annual IEP review along with completed copies of the Intellectual Functioning Rubric, Adaptive Functioning Rubric, and the Previous Test Participation and Performance Documentation sheet. Copies of this form, the rubrics, and the test participation documentation sheet should be provided to the family with their copy of the IEP.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

State-Assigned Student ID (SASID): 1000-\_\_\_\_\_ IEP Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the disability that is impacting the student’s cognitive functioning? \_\_\_\_\_

Participation Criteria		
<b>CRITERIA 1:</b> Student meets the definition of having a significant cognitive disability.		
In <b>Tool A: Intellectual Functioning Rubric</b> , is the student’s overall verbal and nonverbal intellectual functioning score 2.5 or more standard deviations below the mean (63 or lower)?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
In <b>Tool A: Intellectual Functioning Rubric</b> is the majority of the evidence in column 4?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>CRITERIA 2:</b> Formative and summative evaluations and data show that the Essential Elements will be challenging for the student.		
In <b>Tool A: Intellectual Functioning Rubric</b> , <i>Learning</i> section, is the majority of evidence in column 3 and 4?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Does the <b>Previous Test Participation and Performance Documentation Form</b> , show that the student is making progress toward the Essential Elements and/or that the Essential Elements are (or will be) challenging to the student?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>CRITERIA 3:</b> The student is unable to generalize daily living and community skills consistently in home, school, and community settings without intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction and supports.		
In <b>Tool B: Adaptive Functioning Rubric</b> , is the student’s adaptive behavior scale score 2.5 or more standard deviations below the mean (63 or lower)?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
In <b>Tool B: Adaptive Functioning Rubric</b> , is the majority of evidence in columns 3 and 4?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
In <b>Tool B: Adaptive Functioning Rubric</b> , <i>Daily Living Skills</i> and <i>Community Skills</i> sections, is the majority of evidence in column 3 and 4?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

*\*If any decision is no, the IEP team must follow the instructions on page 22, If the Decision is NO.*

**IEP Team Assurance:** The IEP team has thoroughly discussed the evidence gathered to determine eligibility, completed the Intellectual Functioning Rubric, Adaptive Functioning Rubric, and the Previous Test Participation and Performance Documentation sheet and affirms that they followed the processes and procedures outlined in this document.

The IEP team has informed the parent(s) of the implications of their child’s participation in the alternate assessments, namely that:

- Their child’s academic progress towards achievement of the content standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science will be measured using the Essential Elements.

- They understand the graduation options for their child.
- They have been informed of any other implications, including any effects of local policies on the student’s education, resulting from taking an alternate assessment.
- The IEP team *does / does not (circle one)* find this student eligible to participate in the alternate assessments.

Name of LEA Representative (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of LEA Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

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## IF DECISION IS YES

If the IEP team determines that the student is eligible, they must document their decision using the *Participation Criteria for Alternate Assessments Form*, include it with the IEP. An IEP team LEA representative must sign the completed form and a copy must be attached to the IEP, placed in the student's file, and a copy provided to the family. **This must be completed each year at the time of the IEP annual review for students in grades 3 – 11 unless the student is also an MLL student.** If the student is also an MLL student, then this form would need to be completed in grades K-12 in order to take the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs. See page 4 of this manual for more details on when eligibility decisions should be made.

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## IF DECISION IS NO

If the IEP team decides that the student is not eligible, then three things must happen:

1. The student must participate in the state assessments for their current grade level with appropriate accommodations as determined by the IEP team.
2. The student's instruction must be aligned to the Rhode Island Core Standards and NGSS via the general education curriculum. Without access to the general education curriculum, students will not be able to be able to learn the academic skills and knowledge for their grade level which will be assessed through the state assessments.
3. Record of the decision must be recorded on the *Participation Criteria for Alternate Assessments Form*, attached to the IEP and placed in the student's file.

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## DISAGREEMENT WITH THE DECISION

If the parent or guardian of the student disagrees with the IEP team decision regarding eligibility for the alternate assessments, they have the right to request mediation or initiate a due process hearing as described within the procedural safeguards by visiting the Rhode Island Department of Education webpage "When Schools and Families Disagree" at the address below or by contacting the Rhode Island Department of Education Call Center at 401-222-8999 or email at [ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov).

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/SpecialEducation/WhenSchoolsandFamiliesDoNotAgree.aspx>

Additionally, the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN), a nonprofit organization not affiliated with RIDE, also provides peer mentors to help parents through the IEP process. Any parent who would like access to a mentor can contact RIPIN's resource center at 401-270-0101 and [ripin.org](http://ripin.org). RIPIN does not provide advocates.

## REVIEW OF ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

To ensure that students are appropriately identified for the alternate assessments, and to ensure that guidance to the field from RIDE is clear and leads to appropriate identifications, RIDE will review data on eligibility determinations. RIDE will use this data to identify schools and districts that may need additional support and guidance to use the eligibility criteria to make valid and appropriate determinations.

## APPENDIX A: DO NOT USE THESE FACTORS OR DATA TO INFORM AN ELIGIBILITY DECISION.

The following factors are not appropriate to include in decision-making because they do not add to the IEP Team's understanding of what the student knows and can do. While some of the factors listed below make it difficult for a student to come to school ready to engage and learn, these issues should be addressed with staff that have appropriate expertise and experience in these areas.

- **Disability category (or categories).** There is no disability category that is able to predict 100% of a student's cognitive potential. Disability categories alone are not sufficient evidence to determine eligibility for the alternate assessment.
- **Physical capabilities and/or medical needs.** Many students who take the alternate assessments have physical disabilities in addition to cognitive disabilities and some have ongoing and serious medical conditions. It is important to remember that determinations around eligibility for the alternate assessment must be based on the student's *cognitive* ability, not physical ability or any medical issues.
- **Poor attendance or extended absences, for any reason.** Some students have medical conditions that prevent them from attending school regularly enough to receive instruction. While this is recognized as a factor that inhibits a child's exposure to educational experiences, it is not evidence of a child's ability or their potential to learn and must be addressed through the appropriate school resources.
- **Poor performance on the general education academic assessments.** Most students receiving special education services can and do participate in general education assessments with accommodations and other supports. Poor performance on these assessments is not an appropriate factor to use when making an eligibility decision. To consider accommodations and supports available on other state assessments, please refer to the *RISAP Accommodations and Accessibility Features Manual*: [www.ride.ri.gov/accommodations](http://www.ride.ri.gov/accommodations).
- **Multi-lingual Learner (MLL) status.** It is important to understand that a student's ability to learn and their knowledge of English are not connected. How well a student understands and speaks English has an impact on his/her ability to learn; however, it does not indicate a learning disability. Alternative methods of understanding what a student knows and can do may need to be investigated depending on the student's English proficiency level. Please contact your district MLL Director for options.
- **Impact of the student's test scores on the accountability score of the school and/or district.** How well or poorly a student may perform on any state assessment may not be used as a deciding factor in determining which assessment is appropriate for a student.
- **Location of special education services in more restrictive settings.** The setting in which a student receives his/her education is not a factor in determining cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. Districts routinely utilize staff with expertise in the challenges of a specific disability, behavior, or mental health issue, either within the school, district, or in another setting. Regardless of where a student accesses specialized care or services, meaningful academic instruction should

always be given to the student. Because of this requirement, the educational placement of a student is not to be used as factor for eligibility.

- **Amount of time receiving special education services.** Students receive special education services in a variety of ways and in varying degrees of intensity. It is more meaningful to consider the type and intensity of the structures and supports the student requires in order to participate academically and socially in their school than it is to consider the number of hours or days a student requires in order to receive appropriate special education services.
- **Variety of services a student receives.** Many students receive a variety of related services that address their physical, behavioral, or other challenges beyond their cognitive ability. The type of services a student receives does not indicate a significant cognitive disability.
- **Behavior issues, including test anxiety.** Behavior challenges can make learning difficult for some students and should be treated appropriately and professionally. Behavior challenges should not be considered when deciding if a student meets the criteria for an alternate assessment as they are not indicators of cognitive ability.
- **Administrator decision.** Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a school, district, or program administrator to unilaterally make an eligibility decision without the full cooperation and consensus of the IEP team, of which the parents or guardians are equal participants, or without following all standard procedures regarding educational decision-making for a student.



**Accommodation:** A change in materials or procedures that provide access during instruction and assessment. Accommodations do not change what is being taught or measured. Assessment accommodations are intended to produce valid results that indicate what a student knows and can do.

**Adaptive behavior:** Behavior that is essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.

**Rhode Island Core State Standards (RICSS):** The Core Standards are a set of content standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics that define what students are expected to learn at each grade in order to leave school ready for college or careers. The Core Standards were developed by teachers, school administrators, and experts, with support from the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

**Extensive direct individualized instruction:** Concentrated instruction designed for and directed toward an individual student. This type of instruction is needed by students with significant cognitive disabilities to acquire knowledge and skills in content. Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to need this extensively to apply knowledge and skills in multiple contexts.

**English Language Learner (ELL):** An ELL is a student who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency. An ELL's difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be a barrier to learning in classrooms instructed in English and to performance on assessments presented in English.

**Learning progression:** A learning progression is a description of the way that student learning of skills may develop and build over time.

**Modification:** A change in materials or procedures that may provide access during instruction and assessment, but that also changes the learning expectations in instruction and what an assessment measures. Modifications during instruction may be appropriate on a temporary basis for scaffolding the student's understanding and skills. Assessment modifications result in invalid measures of a student's knowledge and skills and thus should be avoided.

**Pervasive:** Present across academic content areas and across multiple settings (including school, home, and community).

**Substantial Supports:** These include support from the teachers and others (e.g., aides) and various material supports within the student's environment. Examples of substantial supports in instruction include adapting text, using manipulatives and other concrete objects, and extensive scaffolding of content to support learning.

**Substantially adapted materials:** Substantially adapted materials include various classroom and other materials that have been altered in appearance and content from the materials that peers without disabilities use for instruction or assessment.