

## **Guidance for Individualized Education Program Teams California Alternate Assessments for English Language Arts and Mathematics: Participation Decisions**

This document is intended to help guide individualized education program (IEP) teams in determining whether the California Alternate Assessments (CAAs)—alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards—are the most appropriate assessments for an individual student. The CAAs were developed by the California Department of Education to ensure that all students are able to participate in assessments that are a measure of what they know and can do in relation to the grade-level Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In addition, the CAAs were developed to be part of a system of curriculum, instructional, and assessment tools so that students with significant cognitive disabilities would be able to participate in content instruction and assessments that are aligned with the CCSS. This is accomplished by a linkage between the CCSS and Core Content Connectors (CCCs), which are in turn aligned with the CCC and CAA items.

IEP teams must consider a student’s individual characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability participates in the general assessments, with or without accommodations, or in the alternate assessments. This document outlines steps that an IEP team should take in determining whether the CAAs are appropriate for a student, including reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community) and determining whether the student fits the criteria for participating in the CAAs as outlined in this document.

### **Description of the California Alternate Assessments**

#### *Assessment Design*

The CAAs are assessments for English language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics in grades three through eight and grade eleven. They are on-demand assessments of approximately 27 test items that assess approximately 10 to 12 prioritized content targets per grade level, depending on the grade level. These content targets were identified for each grade on the basis of learning progressions and alignment with the grade-level CCSS. The assessments include multiple-choice items and constructed-response items. Each content target is assessed by items that have been carefully and intentionally designed to assess a range of ability and performance.

#### *Assessment Administration*

The CAAs are delivered via computer, with allowances for flexibility in administration (e.g., a student may respond to administrator-presented item stimuli rather than to the item stimuli on the computer). A trained testing examiner familiar to the student (e.g., the student’s teacher) facilitates the administration, presenting items via computer, paper, or manipulatives, as appropriate for the student. Items are administered to the student over the course of one or more testing sessions, as needed for the student to complete a content-area assessment. For the 2015–16 school year, the CAAs are scheduled to be administered between April 11, 2016, and June 17, 2016.

The CAAs are stage adaptive tests, meaning that each student receives items that have been determined to be an appropriate level of challenge. The survey of student characteristics and routing rules help determine the items a student encounters. The administration script provides flexibility in the ways in which a student may interact with items, so that what is being measured is not changed.

## Participation Decisions

IEP teams should use the CAA Participation Decision Worksheet document to aid in the determination of whether a student should participate in the CAAs. The CAAs are administered each year to students in grades three through eight and grade eleven. A student's IEP team must determine participation in the alternate assessments. As reflected in the CAA guidelines, to participate in the CAAs, a student must have an IEP and should meet all three of the following criteria:

1. **The student has a significant cognitive disability.** Review of the student's school records indicates a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.
2. **The student is learning content derived from the CCSS.** Goals and instruction listed in the IEP for the student are linked to the enrolled grade-level CCSS (for ungraded students these may be age determined) and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.
3. **The student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-level and age-appropriate curriculum.** 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 multiple settings.

## Participation Descriptions

1. **A student with a significant cognitive disability** is one whose school records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is defined as actions essential for an individual to live independently and to function safely in daily life. *Having a significant cognitive disability is not determined by an IQ test score; rather, a holistic understanding of the student is required.*
2. **The student is learning content derived from the CCSS.** The student's disability or multiple disabilities affect how the student learns curriculum derived from the CCSS. The student is learning content that is derived from the CCSS that appropriately breaks the standards into smaller steps. These smaller steps are called Core Content Connectors (CCCs). A CCC is a representation of the essential "core" content of a standard in the CCSS. Each CCC was identified by examining learning progressions aligned with the CCSS to determine the critical content for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

3. The student's need for extensive, direct individualized instruction is not temporary or transient. His or her need for substantial supports to achieve gains in the grade-level and age-appropriate curriculum requires substantially adapted materials and customized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

The IEP team should consider the following information to determine whether the CAAs are appropriate for an individual student:

- Description of the student's curriculum and instruction, including data on progress
- Classroom work samples and data
- Examples of *performance* on assessment tasks to compare with classroom work
- Results of district-wide assessments
- Results of individualized reading assessments
- IEP information, including:
  - Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and short-term objectives
  - Circumstances of a student with individualized and substantial communication needs or modes (from multiple data sources)
  - Circumstances of a student who may be learning English as a second or other language (i.e., an EL student), which may interfere with an accurate assessment of his or her academic, social, or adaptive abilities

Some issues, such as those listed below, may affect a student's learning experience and his or her ability to learn that are *not appropriate* to consider during the decision-making process for the CAAs. ***Do not use the following as criteria for participation/eligibility decisions:***

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 and other services student receives
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education
8. Student identification as an EL student; as above, this is a consideration of how the student's English fluency may affect their performance-as opposed to their disability
9. Low reading level and/or achievement level

10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of test scores on accountability system
12. Administrator decision
13. Anticipated emotional distress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in assessment process

For information about the CAAs, contact Terry deBoer, Education Programs Consultant, Assessment Development and Administration Division, by phone at 916-319-0481 or by e-mail at [tdeboer@cde.ca.gov](mailto:tdeboer@cde.ca.gov) or Don Kilmer, Education Administrator I, Assessment Development and Administration Division, by phone at 916-319-0350 or by email at [dkillmer@cde.ca.gov](mailto:dkillmer@cde.ca.gov).