Minnesota Department of Education

Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Participation Guidelines

The Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is an assessment developed to measure the English language proficiency of English learners in grades 1–12 who have significant cognitive disabilities. English learners eligible to take the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) in MARSS and receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

In Minnesota, the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs would be considered for English learners who have been identified as eligible to take the Title I alternate assessment—the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)—in mathematics, reading or science. The MTAS is not administered before grade 3, however, so decision makers may not have MTAS eligibility as a criterion to consider when selecting the appropriate English language proficiency assessment for a student.

IEP team members and EL staff are expected to collaborate to apply the criteria outlined in the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Test Administration Manual*[1] and in this document when determining how an English learner with a disability will participate in statewide English language proficiency testing. Participation decisions must be made annually.

These are the initial steps in the decision-making process:

- **Ensure that the student is identified as an English learner**: Students must be identified as LEP in MARSS in order to take an English language proficiency assessment.
- **Determine that the student has a significant cognitive disability**: Students who have been identified as eligible to take the MTAS in mathematics, reading or science meet this criterion. For students in grades where an MTAS is not administered, decision makers must answer the following questions affirmatively in order to establish that the student has a significant cognitive disability:
    - Does the student have cognitive functioning significantly below age expectations?
    - Does the student's disability have a significant impact on his or her ability to function in multiple environments, including home, school and community?
    - Does the student need explicit and intensive instruction and/or extensive supports in multiple settings to acquire, maintain and generalize academic and life skills in order to actively participate in school, work, home and community environments?
- **Consider whether the ACCESS for ELLs (the assessment taken by the majority of English learners) is appropriate for the student**: IEP team members and EL staff must first consider student participation in the ACCESS for ELLs, with or without accommodations, before considering student participation in the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs. If it is determined that the ACCESS for ELLs is not an appropriate measure of the student's English language proficiency, even when the student is provided allowable and appropriate accommodations, decision makers should document:
    - The reasons why the ACCESS for ELLs is not an appropriate measure of the student's English language proficiency
    - The selection of the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs as the appropriate English language proficiency assessment for the student

[1] It is necessary to log in to the secure portal on the WIDA website to access the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Test Administration Manual*.

Participation decisions are individualized and are **NOT** based on the following factors:

- Disability category (for example, do not determine that all students with Autism Spectrum Disorder will take the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs)
- Participation in a specialized curriculum or separate placement (for example, do not determine that all students receiving instruction in a resource room will take the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs)
- Current level of English language proficiency
- The expectation that the student will receive a low score on the ACCESS for ELLs
- Language, social, cultural or economic differences
- A concern for accountability calculations

Glossary of Frequently Used Terminology

ACCOMMODATIONS

Changes in assessment administration such as setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, etc., that do not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of resulting scores. Used for equity, not advantage.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A provision of the federal ESEA legislation that requires schools, districts and states to demonstrate, based on test scores, that students are making academic progress (Adequate Yearly Progress) and progress in the acquisition of English language proficiency (Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives).

APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

Instruction that (1) meets the child's unique needs resulting from the disability and (2) allows the child to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

A device or service that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.

DISABILITY CATEGORY

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies 13 disability categories: mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech or language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities and developmental delay.

EXPLICIT AND INTENSIVE INSTRUCTION

During explicit instruction, skills are taught sequentially and directly. No assumptions are made about what students might acquire on their own. Intensive instruction is most often achieved in an individual and/or small group setting.

EXTENSIVE SUPPORTS

Supports may include an array of services provided by school personnel, such as augmentative and adaptive communication systems and assistive technology devices. Supports may be considered extensive if they require specific instruction and ongoing teacher support.

MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS

Indicates more than one of the environments in which the student spends a typical day (i.e., home, school and community).

PLACEMENT

Where a student with a disability will receive special education services; decided by an IEP team.

PROFICIENCY

Level of knowledge or skills that demonstrates a mastery level of achievement.

SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW AGE EXPECTATIONS

Significantly below the average cognitive functioning of typically developing peers; determined by:

- At least “two standard deviations below the mean, plus or minus one standard error of measurement” (Minn R. 3525.1333) on a standardized norm-referenced measure of cognitive functioning; OR
- When formal cognitive assessments are inappropriate or invalid, other data-based measures may be used to document functioning significantly below age expectations consistent with IDEA Sec 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VI)(bb).

SPECIALIZED CURRICULUM

A curriculum differing from that for non-disabled students (e.g., a life skills curriculum).

VALIDITY

The appropriateness or correctness of inferences, decisions or descriptions made about individuals, groups or institutions from test results. There is no such thing as a generally valid test. Validity must be considered in terms of the correctness of a particular inference.