



**DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY  
& SECONDARY EDUCATION**

# **Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Manual**

**2023-2024**

# Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Manual

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# Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Criteria for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science

## Introduction

This document is intended to help guide Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to determine whether the Arkansas Alternate Assessment, an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards, is the most appropriate assessment for an individual student. The Arkansas Alternate Assessment was developed to ensure that all students are able to participate in an assessment that is a measure of what they know and can do in relation to the grade-level state content standards. This assessment program was developed to be part of a system of curriculum, instructional, and assessment tools, so that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are able to participate in content instruction and assessments that are aligned to the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Essential Elements which are linked to the Arkansas Academic Standards. Teams of special educators and content specialists are developing crosswalks to show the alignment of the DLM Essential Elements to the new Arkansas academic standards.

IEP teams must consider a student's individual characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations, or in the Alternate Assessment. This document outlines steps that an IEP team should take in determining whether the Alternate Assessment is appropriate for a student. These include (a) reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community), (b) the likelihood that the student will not be able to live independently and (c) determining whether the student fits all the criteria for participating in the Alternate Assessment as outlined in this document.

## Adoption of Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment

DLM offers an online assessment with appropriate accessibility features for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Assessment content includes the core academic areas of English Language Arts, mathematics, and science in a single platform. Arkansas began utilizing this alternate assessment in 2018.

## Assessment Administration for English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics (Math), and Science

The assessment is a computer-based test with allowances for flexibility in administration. (For example, a student may respond to administrator-presented item stimuli rather than to the item stimuli on the computer.) A trained testing administrator familiar to the student (e.g., the student's teacher) facilitates the administration, presenting items via 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 a student to complete testlets in each content area assessed. Testing sessions for ELA and math are part of an instructionally-embedded model scheduled within two windows, the fall window and the spring window. Testing sessions for the science portion will be available during the fall window but will be required during the spring window.

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will test in **grades three through ten** in ELA, math, and science.

The assessment uses an adaptive approach, meaning that each student receives items that have been determined to be an appropriate level of challenge. 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 Description

1. **A student with the most significant cognitive disability** is characterized by significantly below average cognitive functioning (IQ scores typically below 55 or 3 or more standard deviations below the mean) occurring with commensurate deficits in adaptive behavior that are frequently evident in early childhood. Further, the cognitive disability must significantly impact the child's performance and ability to generalize learning across settings (educational, home, community). Substantial modifications to the general education curriculum are required. Augmentative communication devices are often necessary to communicate with others. These students require substantial supports for all activities of daily living including meal preparation, dressing, grooming, and personal hygiene. Their personal safety is dependent upon constant supervision and will be a concern throughout their lifetime. They will likely require supported or assisted living which may involve a guardian when the student turns 18. *Having a significant cognitive disability is not determined by an IQ test score, but rather a holistic understanding of a student. For example, all students with an intellectual disability do not automatically meet the criteria for the alternate assessment.*
2. **The student is learning content linked to (derived from) the Arkansas Academic Standards.** The student's disability or multiple disabilities affect how the student learns curriculum linked to the Arkansas Academic Standards. The student is learning content that appropriately breaks the standards into smaller steps. DLM has derived these smaller steps from the Arkansas Academic Standards to guide instruction and has called them the Essential Elements (EEs). An EE is a representation of essential curricular content. Each EE was identified by examining learning progressions to determine the critical content for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
3. **The student's need for extensive direct individualized instruction is not temporary.** His or her need for substantial supports to achieve gains in the grade and age-appropriate curriculum requires substantially adapted materials and customized methods of accessing information in alternate ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.

### ***Do Not Use the Following as Criteria for Participation Decisions***

In addition to the three criteria for determining participation, there are other issues that may affect a student's learning experience and his/her ability to learn that are **not appropriate** to consider during the decision-making process for the Arkansas Alternate Assessment. These are:

1. IQ score or disability category alone
  - For example, not all students with an intellectual disability meet the criteria for the alternate assessment.
2. English Learner (EL) status
3. Poor attendance
4. Expected poor performance on the general assessment
5. Educational environment or instructional setting
6. Low reading or achievement level
7. Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress
8. Impact of scores on accountability system
9. Administrative decision

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Who decides that a student should participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment?

The IEP team determines how a student will participate in statewide assessments. The student must meet the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Criteria to participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment. No one member of the IEP team makes this decision. Parents, teachers, and administrators make the decision based on evidence and adherence to the *Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Manual*.

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

An EL student should be considered for the alternate assessment if (a) his/her intellectual functioning indicates a most significant cognitive disability, and (b) he/she meets the other participation criteria for the Arkansas Alternate Assessment. Assessments of adaptive behavior and communication should consider linguistic and sociocultural factors for valid interpretation 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 student with an IEP does not meet the criteria for the alternate assessment, he/she should take the general assessment with accommodations as appropriate.

### 4. Why is it important to specify that a student participating in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment is receiving instruction on content linked to the Arkansas Academic Standards while his/her performance is measured against alternate achievement standards?

The decision to align a student's academic program to the ELA, Math, and Science Essential Elements limits a student's direct contact with the breadth of the Arkansas Academic Standards for the grade level in which he/she is enrolled. This limited or modified exposure to the grade level standards may have significant impact on academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities.

### 5. What if we are unable to obtain IQ scores?

There are multiple evaluation tools for students who are nonverbal and students with limited communication abilities. If a score cannot be obtained using the assessments that the district typically uses, the district should explore additional evaluation tools.

### 6. What if it is impossible to assess a student because the student does not appear to communicate?

All attempts should be made to find a route of communication with the student as soon as he or she is enrolled. This can include speaking, eye gaze, gestures, pointing, signing, or other augmentative methods. If various approaches and technologies do not appear to demonstrate a route of communication, then consider that all behavior that the student exhibits is a form of communication, and use this as the starting point. A critical element in assessing all students is a focus on communicative competency as the base for student access to the Arkansas Academic Standards. Best practice would indicate that students should enter kindergarten with a communication system that allows them to demonstrate an understanding of academic concepts prior to entering the third grade. However, with or without a communication system, students must still participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment. **Test administrators must attempt every testlet in the required blueprint coverage** and indicate the response or lack of response to each item.

**7. 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 Arkansas Alternate Assessment Participation Criteria, can the student be assigned to the general assessment?**

Yes. The IEP team must ensure that the student receives appropriate instruction on the Arkansas Academic Standards and participates in the required general assessments for their current grade level with or without accommodations. Please see page 11 of this document for the appropriate codes when changing assessments.

**8. Is it possible that a decision to participate in the General Assessment could change to the Arkansas Alternate Assessment as a student gets older?**

Yes. Participating in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment requires that the student has a most significant cognitive disability 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 the most significant cognitive disabilities often are identified early, prior to starting school, they may be able to participate in the general assessment during the early grades. IEP teams should be especially cautious about assigning students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to an alternate assessment in their early school years.

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are likely to continue to need supports to live as independently as possible after high school and throughout their adult lives. Students 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 placed in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment.

**9. Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?**

Contact the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education if you have any questions about participation decision making for the Arkansas Alternate Assessment, or for assistance with instruction for students who participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment:

Office of Special Education  
Robin Stripling  
501-682-4296  
[Robin.Stripling@ade.arkansas.gov](mailto:Robin.Stripling@ade.arkansas.gov)

Office of Student Assessment, Dynamic Learning Maps  
Debbie Young  
501-682-4946  
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Dr. Alan Lytle  
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[Alan.Lytle@ade.arkansas.gov](mailto:Alan.Lytle@ade.arkansas.gov)

## Arkansas Participation Criteria

The criteria for participation in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment reflect the pervasive nature of a most significant cognitive disability. A student who participates in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment participates in this assessment for English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science.

### Definition of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are characterized by significantly below-average cognitive functioning (IQ scores typically below 55 or 3 or more standard deviations below the mean) occurring with commensurate deficits in adaptive behavior that are frequently evident in early childhood. Further, the cognitive disability must significantly impact the child's performance and ability to generalize learning across settings (educational, home, community). Substantial modifications to the general education curriculum are required. Augmentative communication devices are often necessary to communicate with others. These students require substantial supports for all activities of daily living including meal preparation, dressing, grooming, and personal hygiene. Their personal safety is dependent upon constant supervision and will be a concern throughout their lifetime. They will likely require supported or assisted living which may involve a guardian when the student turns 18.

In addition, evidence for the decision for participating in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment is **not based** on:

- IQ score or disability category alone
  - For example, not all students with an intellectual disability meet the criteria for the alternate assessment.
- English Learner (EL) status
- Poor attendance
- Expected poor performance on the general assessment
- Educational environment or instructional setting
- Low reading or achievement level
- Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress
- Impact of scores on accountability system
- Administrative decision



## Arkansas Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Tool

The Arkansas Alternate Assessment Eligibility Decision-Making Tool is to be used by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams in determining eligibility for Arkansas’s chosen Alternate Assessment, Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM). DLM is appropriate for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet all four requirements listed below. Additional considerations are provided that further define the criteria and assist the IEP team in decision making. Factors that the IEP team should not consider in eligibility determination are also identified. Although each requirement must be met, the decision for participation in the alternate assessment must be based on a holistic view of the student and no single element.

The IEP team must answer “YES” to all four criteria for the student to be eligible to participate in the DLM. If the answer is “NO” to any of the questions, the student must participate in the statewide 3-10 and any applicable EOC summative assessments, with or without accommodations. The IEP team will determine whether an eligible student shall participate in the DLM or the general assessment.

<p>Does the student have a disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning?</p>	<p>Does the student have a disability that significantly impacts adaptive behavior?</p>	<p>Does the student require extensive adaptations and support to perform and/or participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and home environments?</p>	<p>Does the student require substantial modifications to the general education curriculum?</p>
<p>Intellectual functioning well below average (IQ typically below 55 or 3.0 or more standard deviations below the mean).</p>	<p>Adaptive behavior* scores are typically two to three standard deviations below the mean in two or more areas.</p>	<p>A significant cognitive disability is pervasive, affecting student functioning across all academic, social, and community settings. The student is expected to require intensive and ongoing support after graduation and throughout life.</p>	<p>Substantial modifications change the content expectation through a significant reduction in depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level standards.</p>
<p>_____ Yes</p>	<p>_____ Yes</p>	<p>_____ Yes</p>	<p>_____ Yes</p>

\* The term adaptive behavior is defined as those skills that are essential for someone to live and function independently and safely in daily life. The student’s post-secondary outcomes for independent living will likely require supported or assisted living and may involve a guardian when the student turns 18.

<b>The Following Should Not Be Used in Making This Assessment Decision:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IQ score or disability category alone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, not all students with an intellectual disability meet the criteria for the alternate assessment.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
• English Learner (EL) status
• Poor attendance
• Expected poor performance on the general assessment
• Educational environment or instructional setting
• Low reading or achievement level
• Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress
• Impact of scores on accountability system
• Administrative decision
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Evidence shows that the decision for participating in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment was not based on the above list - check <math>\checkmark</math></b>

IEP Team Statement of Assurance: Our decision was based on multiple pieces of evidence that, when taken together, demonstrated that the Arkansas Alternate Assessment is the most appropriate assessment for this student; that his/her academic instruction will be based on the Essential Elements linked to the Arkansas Academic Standards; that the Additional Considerations listed above were not used to make this decision; and that any additional implications of this decision were discussed thoroughly.

Each of us agrees with the participation decision in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s)/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Alternate English Language Proficiency Information

### What is the Alt ELPA?

- The Alt ELPA is a standards-based English language proficiency (ELP) assessment for eligible English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities in kindergarten through grade twelve.
- The purpose of the Alt ELPA is to measure students' progress toward the attainment of English language proficiency in the four recognized language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and includes the academic English language students need to access and achieve grade-appropriate content taught in English.

### Why do we have to use the Alt ELPA?

- Federal legislation requires states to establish challenging standards, develop aligned assessments, and build accountability systems for districts and schools that are based on educational results.

### Who are the students who will participate in the Alt ELPA?

- English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This is a relatively small population of students, but the group is highly diverse.
- English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities are students
  - who are not proficient in the English language and have been identified as needing English language development services;
  - who meet the Federal definition of an English learner (ESEA as amended by ESSA §8101(20) and 20 USC 20));
  - who meet the state definition for having a most significant cognitive disability; and
  - whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams have determined an alternate assessment is appropriate for the student.

[Alt ELPA Participation Guidelines/Tools](#) have been developed with input from educators across CAAELP states.

## Alternate Assessment (labeled Alternate Portfolio) Field in eSchool

There are four available flags for *Alternate Portfolio* selection in the *School Age Student* module fields in eSchoolPlus:

**NA = Not Applicable** or Null (default). Selected for all students in grades K-12 that do NOT take an alternate assessment – **both ELs and Non-ELs**.

**ALMS = Alternate Literacy, Math & Science**. Selected for **Non-ELs ONLY** in grades **3-10** taking Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM).

**AELP = Alternate English Language Proficiency**. Selected for **ELs ONLY** in grades **K-2 and 11-12** who will take the Alt ELPA.

**ABOTH = Alternate Both**. Selected for **ELs ONLY** in grades **3-10** that will take both the DLM and Alt ELPA.

**PAAHS = Past Alternate Assessment in High School**. Selected for **Non-ELs** in grades **11-12** who took DLM in grades 9-10, have the **alternate pathway flag indicated**, and will not take an ATLAS EOC math or science test.

**Please note: Course codes are not tied to the type of assessment the student takes but are required to accurately roster students to their teacher of record when using a Cognos report or auto-rostering solution. Course codes must be entered accurately in eSchoolPlus.**

Alternate Assessment Flag Selection Based on Test, Grade, and English Learner (EL) Status				
Grade	ATLAS 3-10 and/or ELPA21 (ELs and Non-ELs)	DLM (Non-ELs)	Alt ELPA (ELs)	DLM & Alt ELPA (ELs)
K	NA	--	AELP	--
1	NA	--	AELP	--
2	NA	--	AELP	--
3	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
4	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
5	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
6	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
7	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
8	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
9	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
10	NA	ALMS	--	ABOTH
11	NA	PAAHS	AELP	--
12	NA	PAAHS	AELP	--

**NOTE: The Arkansas Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Tool on the following two pages is provided in black and white to facilitate printing.**

## Arkansas Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Tool

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Does the student have a disability that significantly impacts intellectual functioning?	Does the student have a disability that significantly impacts adaptive behavior?	Does the student require extensive adaptations and support to perform and/or participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and home environments?	Does the student require substantial modifications to the general education curriculum?
Intellectual functioning well below average (IQ typically below 55 or 3.0 or more standard deviations below the mean).	Adaptive behavior* scores are typically two to three standard deviations below the mean in two or more areas.	A significant cognitive disability is pervasive, affecting student functioning across all academic, social, and community settings. The student is expected to require intensive and ongoing support after graduation and throughout life.	Substantial modifications change the content expectation through a significant reduction in depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level standards.
_____ Yes	_____ Yes	_____ Yes	_____ Yes

\* The term adaptive behavior is defined as those skills that are essential for someone to live and function independently and safely in daily life. The student’s post-secondary outcomes for independent living will likely require supported or assisted living and may involve a guardian when the student turns 18.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s)/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_