



# Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD)

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families

### 1. What is the AASCD?

Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD) is a statewide assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the state's general assessment. The number of students who participate in this AASCD is approximately 1% of the total number of tested students. The AASCD is aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards–Extended (OLS-E) and designed to allow students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the state's general assessments to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in an appropriately rigorous assessment.

### 2. What is meant by Extended Standards?

Ohio's Learning Standards-Extended (OLS-E), commonly referred to as the "extended standards," were designed to make Ohio's learning standards more accessible to students with significant cognitive disabilities. The extended standards help to ensure that students who take an alternate assessment are provided with multiple ways to learn and demonstrate knowledge. At the same time, the extended standards are designed to maintain the rigor and high expectations of Ohio's Learning Standards (OLS).

Ohio's Learning Standards were extended across three complexity levels from "most complex" to "least complex," allowing teachers to adjust for various levels of difficulty. The extended standards serve as the foundation for the development of the test tasks for the AASCD.

The achievement of grade-level content by students with significant cognitive disabilities is very different from their general education classroom peers, but given the right kinds of supports, these students can learn academic content with reduced complexity, breadth, and depth.

More information about Ohio's Learning Standards-Extended, including what they are and how they are used in instruction, visit: [www.ohextendedstandards.org](http://www.ohextendedstandards.org)

Many educators have found that the OLS-E can help them differentiate instruction for some students who do not qualify for the alternate assessment. The extended standards can be used for this purpose as well, but it must be done with caution. Ohio's Learning Standards are written and assessed at a much higher level of expectation. Therefore, while these extensions can provide entry points into Ohio's Learning standards for students who need differentiation in the classroom, but do not take the Alternate Assessment, it is important to remember that these students must transition to and will be assessed using Ohio's Learning Standards.

### **3. Why should students with significant cognitive disabilities participate in academic instruction and assessment?**

In addition to learning functional life skills such as communication, self-determination, gross/fine motor skills, and social skills, it is generally accepted that all students—regardless of disability—deserve to have the same opportunity to learn academic content and demonstrate their mastery. All children, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities must have access to the general curriculum; be involved in the general curriculum; and progress in the general curriculum. General curriculum means the same grade level academic content standards curriculum that is afforded other students. For this reason, Ohio’s Learning Standards – Extended were designed to provide meaningful access to academic content for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Additionally, the AASCD provides an opportunity for these students to demonstrate what they know and can do as it relates to academic content.

There are also laws that require all students to participate in academic instruction and testing. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) reflects the intent to extend educational accountability and reform to all students, including those with disabilities. This legislation, along with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Ohio law, mandates that all students with disabilities be included in state and district-wide testing programs. Most students with disabilities can participate in the general state tests without or with allowable accommodations. However, some students may qualify to participate in the alternate assessment instead.

### **4. Should my child take the alternate assessment?**

Decisions concerning a student’s participation in statewide and district-wide tests are made at least annually by each student’s IEP team. The state of Ohio provides IEP teams with criteria for participation in the AASCD, which can be found on the Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal (<http://oh.portal.airast.org>) on the General Resources page.

The AASCD is appropriate only for students with a significant cognitive disability whose records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life. Student who participate in the AASCD are learning content linked to (derived from) Ohio’s Learning Standards (i.e. the Ohio Learning Standards – Extended [OLS-E]). These students also (a) require extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and (b) use substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across multiple settings. Having a significant cognitive disability is not determined by an IQ test score, but rather a holistic understanding of a student.

The decision to participate in the AASCD should not be based on:

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 services
8. English Learner (EL) status
9. Low reading level/achievement level

- 10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
- 11. Impact of student scores on the accountability system
- 12. Administration decision
- 13. Anticipated emotional duress
- 14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/AAC) to participate in the assessment process

**5. When and how will the AASCD be administered?**

Schools have an eight week window to administer the AASCD. The window opens in February and ends in April. This window was chosen to provide ample time to test all eligible students at each student’s own pace. There are no time restrictions on the test itself, and students may stop and resume the test at any point. All test results must be submitted by the test administrator for the student before the end of the testing window.

A test administrator designated by your child’s school will administer the tests to your child in a one-on-one environment. Your child will be able to respond in his or her most appropriate modality (oral, signed language, picture system, or augmentative communication device) and use appropriate accommodations that have been documented by the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team members.

**6. How is the alternate assessment designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities?**

The AASCD is designed to be accessible to students with diverse and significant disabilities. First, the test contains performance tasks that range in complexity. Second, the test uses picture symbols and stimuli to engage students in the content. Third, the test allows students to complete the tasks using their preferred method of communication (e.g., pointing, eye gaze, assistive technology, oral response, sign language) and test materials can be adapted to the specific needs and accommodations of the student. Fourth, two types of scripted test items are used: engagement, where the teacher rates the student’s level of involvement; and scaffolded, where students are often given multiple opportunities to respond correctly. Finally, there is no time restriction on the test; students may stop and resume the test at any point.

**7. In which grades and content areas will my child be tested?**

The AASCD is administered by grade band (3-5, 6-8, High School). Students will take the AASCD in the same grades and content areas that are administered for Ohio’s State Tests in grades 3-8. High school students take the AASCD in grade 10. All students will be tested in English language arts and mathematics. Students in grades 5, 8 and 10 will also be tested in science. Students in grade 10 will also be assessed in social studies.

<b>AASCD Form Assignment</b>		
<b>Grade Band</b>	<b>Student Grade Level</b>	<b>Content Areas to Be Administered to Each Student</b>
<b>Grades 3–5</b>	3	English language arts and mathematics
	4	English language arts and mathematics
	5	English language arts, mathematics and science
<b>Grades 6–8</b>	6	English language arts and mathematics
	7	English language arts and mathematics
	8	English language arts, mathematics and science
<b>High School</b>	10	English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies

**8. Can my child earn a high school diploma if he or she participates in the Alternate Assessment?**

The AASCD is the “alternate assessment” to the End of Course exams. If a student is eligible to participate in an alternate assessment per the AASCD participation guidelines, a proficient score in each of the assessed content areas — ELA, mathematics, science and social studies — may be used in lieu of attaining the required minimum composite score on the end-of-course tests for the graduation requirement.

**9. When will I receive my child’s results?**

The Family Score Report for the AASCD will be sent to your child’s district in the summer. Check with your child’s school to determine when you will receive your child’s report.

The score reports for the AASCD will show your child’s score and performance level on each content area of the test. It will also explain what students at your child’s proficiency level know and can do in each content area. Your child’s performance is also reported as a total score that allows you to monitor growth.

**10. What does my child’s performance level tell me?**

The performance levels indicate how often and accurately your child demonstrates the knowledge and skills being tested. Students are expected to demonstrate these skills at a proficient level or higher. For students who took the high school AASCD, families are encouraged to speak with their child’s school regarding the potential consequences of not passing part or all of the high school AASCD. Your child’s teacher will continue to work with your child to provide access to the general education curriculum and build upon his or her success.

For more information on AASCD Family Score Reports, visit the Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal ([oh.portal.airast.org](http://oh.portal.airast.org)) and download the Score Reports Interpretive Guide which walks through features of the reports and what they mean.

**11. Can I receive my Family Score Report in a second language?**

Yes— for more information, please contact the Office of Curriculum and Assessment at [Statetests@education.ohio.gov](mailto:Statetests@education.ohio.gov) or call 614-466-1317.

**12. Where can I learn more about Ohio’s Alternate Assessment?**

Families can visit the Ohio Alternate Assessment Portal ([oh.portal.airast.org](http://oh.portal.airast.org)) to find more information, including FAQs and sample tasks for the AASCD. Families are also encouraged to speak with their child’s teacher to learn more.

To learn about allowable accommodations, individual student test eligibility, graduation requirements and the testing rules of the alternate assessment, please refer to the Students with Disabilities section of the Ohio Statewide Assessments Program Rules Book ([education.ohio.gov](http://education.ohio.gov); search “Rules Book”).