



Illinois State Board of Education Special Education Department

Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Participation Guidance

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

Dr. Tony Sanders, State Superintendent

February 2023

Students must participate in the state assessment through one of the following:

- The regular state assessment for the student’s grade, without accommodations;
- The regular state assessment for the student’s grade, with accommodations; or
- The alternate state assessment for the student’s grade.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) [ESEA §111(b)(2)(D) and 34 CFR 200.6(c) and (d)], modifies the provision that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may participate in alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (alternate assessments). ESSA places a 1 percent threshold on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments per state.

Illinois uses the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA).

1. Who is eligible to take the DLM-AA?

The alternate assessment is intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students have intellectual functioning well below average (typically associated with an IQ below 55) that exists concurrently with impairments or deficits in adaptive functioning (e.g., communications, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-directions, functional academic skills, work leisure, health and safety).

The reference to “typically associated with an IQ of below 55” is to help distinguish between students with cognitive disabilities and significant cognitive disabilities from students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities. This means that many students with cognitive disabilities will not qualify for the DLM-AA Alternate Assessment. By default, students must take the regular state assessment with or without accommodations. The inclusion of the words "typically associated with" allows for some district/school flexibility. IQ is by no means an absolute requirement and should not be used as a lone determining factor.

Students taking the alternate assessment may be identified under a variety of special education eligibilities, including cognitive disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, and traumatic brain injury.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams may utilize the DLM-AA Participation Guidelines Checklist to assist in decision making.

2. Who is not eligible for consideration to take the DLM-AA?

Students who strictly have academic, language, social-emotional, physical or sensory disabilities without co-occurring intellectual functioning well below average are not eligible to take the DLM-AA.

For example, students who are eligible for special education under the categories of Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disability, Speech Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Deafness/Hearing Impairment, and Visual Impairment **without** a significant cognitive disability would not qualify for the DLM-AA.

3. What factors should NOT be used to determine if a student is eligible for the DLM-AA?

The decision that a student will take the DLM-AA cannot be based on the factors listed below; however, the existence of one or more of these factors does not prevent the student from participating in the DLM-AA:

- Student achievement is significantly below that of same-age peers.
- The student has an IEP.
- The student has a certain eligibility label or receives certain services (e.g., intellectual disability, autism)
- The student has excessive or extensive absences.
- The student has English learner (EL) status.
- The student may not perform well on the regular state assessment.

4. Can students who are ELs participate in the DLM-AA?

Some students who are English learners may also present with a significant cognitive disability. In this case, the student may participate in alternate academic assessment as well as alternate assessment of English proficiency. The IEP team may consider the student's EL status; however, the team must determine if the student also has a significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for the DLM-AA and the Alternate ACCESS test.

5. How does participation in the DLM-AA impact a student's long-term outcomes?

Students who participate in alternate assessment may not qualify for a regular high school diploma upon graduation because, while the student is taught using grade-level standards, their educational programming may be modified to align with alternate achievement standards. However, state alternate achievement standards are set to ensure students are on track to pursue postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment, as defined in the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Students who complete a course of study as defined by the IEP may still be eligible for a regular high school diploma as determined by the IEP team.

6. How should parents be informed about alternate assessment?

The decision to qualify a student for the DLM-AA is made by the IEP team, which includes the parent/guardian(s). The team must consider all factors and make an informed decision, to which the parent/guardian may agree by giving consent for services as outlined in the IEP. School teams should carefully outline the participation guidelines and possible long-term outcomes with the parent/guardian as part of the decision-making process.

The team may utilize the Parent Notification Letter template found on the ISBE website:

[Parent Notification Letter \(English\)](#)

[Parent Notification Letter \(Spanish\)](#)

Additional questions or concerns may be directed to altexception@isbe.net.

Resources

[ISBE: Alternate Assessment Participation 1% Threshold](#)

[ISBE: Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment \(DLM-AA\)](#)

[National Center on Educational Outcomes \(NCEO\), Alternate Assessments: AA-AAS](#)

[ISBE: Alternate Assessment Participation 1% Threshold](#)

[ISBE DLM-AA Participation Checklist](#)