



Parent Overview of Connecticut's Alternate Assessment System

This overview is designed to describe Connecticut’s alternate assessments available to eligible students in English language arts, mathematics, and science. Resources are provided to support families and teachers in their combined work.

Alternate Assessments

Alternate assessments measure the knowledge and skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and later amended in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This assessment system is based on the same state standards established for all Connecticut public school students. Alternate assessments support student independence to the greatest extent possible by making academic content accessible and the expected achievement levels appropriate.

Connecticut’s Alternate Assessment System

CONTENT AREA	ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT	GRADES
English language arts	Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA)	3–8 and 11
Mathematics	Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA)	3–8 and 11
Science	Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS)	5, 8, and 11

CONNECTICUT ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

The Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA) is an assessment of English language arts and mathematics skills aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards for eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3–8 and 11. It is a secure test presented to individual students via computer by teachers trained by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Student responses are entered into the computer by the teacher or, if appropriate, by the student. Students may have the items presented on paper if necessary.

The CTAA is designed to work with your child’s modes of communication. Teachers provide the assistive technology, communication supports, and accommodations included in your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), consistent with the CTAA assessment policies.

This alternate assessment is created in accordance with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The entire test—including passages, items, and response options—is read aloud to the student. Additional built-in supports include

- ◇ reduced passage length in reading;
- ◇ added pictures and graphics to help students understand test content;
- ◇ models in reading, writing, and mathematics; and
- ◇ common geometric shapes and smaller numbers on the mathematics test.

The CTAA is given during the multi-week testing window the CSDE establishes each year. Teachers administer the assessment over multiple days based on the needs of each student, providing breaks as necessary. The English language arts test is composed of three sessions: two reading and one writing. The mathematics test is composed of two sessions. The majority of the CTAA items are multiple-choice. Teachers are encouraged to access the practice test with students to assist them in becoming familiar with the online test format and accessibility features.

Your child's teacher can select and use appropriate curriculum and instructional resources located at <https://wiki.ncscpartners.org>. These resources provide explanations of the skills taught at each grade level, curriculum materials, and examples of lesson plans and systematic instruction.

The CTAA test results are reported in the Individual Student Report (ISR) and are provided to parents and guardians by your child's school. These results may be used to identify areas where improvement is needed as well as areas of strength so that everyone can work together to help your child. Teachers may use the results as one source of information to guide their teaching so that your child continues to learn the knowledge and skills of the grade-level academic content with appropriate supports.

CONNECTICUT ALTERNATE SCIENCE ASSESSMENT

The Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) is an assessment designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 5, 8, and 11. The CTAS is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which were adopted by Connecticut in 2015. The CTAS is an assessment meant to be administered to eligible students throughout the school year, providing multiple opportunities to engage with the grade-level science content and materials derived from the NGSS. Trained teachers utilize a working document to rate student understanding of science concepts. The teacher works with the student to assess his or her performance on a series of activities that represent important skills and knowledge involving real-world scenarios across Life, Earth, and Physical Sciences. The CTAS was field-tested in the spring of 2018 and was modified to reflect educator feedback. Participation is expected for all students eligible for an alternate assessment in grades 5, 8, and 11. Performance results from the CTAS are available in Individual Student Reports (ISRs) provided to parents and guardians by each child's school.

The Importance of Academic Instruction

Changes in culture, technology, and the workplace are happening rapidly. There are recognized college, career, and community skills that prepare our children for the world they will live in as adults. This preparation requires instruction that is individualized to meet your child's unique needs, focused on communicating, reading, writing, using mathematics, and developing work skills.

Teachers have many tools and techniques to teach academic content. Teachers will provide the supports identified in your child's IEP. These methods should help your child learn the content and improve his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as demonstrate on the test what he or she knows and understands.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provide flexible approaches to curriculum and are used in the assessment system to offer support and accessibility as needed for all children, including your child. Teachers can use these same strategies to support your child in learning. For example, in reading, your child may listen to the story read by someone else and answer questions using a communication system. In mathematics, your child might use counters to help solve problems and follow steps that are supplied for

calculations instead of having to memorize the steps. Supports are important as your child is introduced to new content.

Additional examples include

- ◇ information presented in different formats (e.g., pictures, manipulatives, and simplified text);
- ◇ alternative ways to access learning materials (e.g., listening to a story while using a screen reader or a version enhanced with textures, providing word or picture choices);
- ◇ different ways to show what your child has learned (e.g., using a switch-activated audio device to record answers, using technology to present items, using an eye-gaze response system to select words or pictures in order to write a story); and
- ◇ multiple options to engage your child (e.g., offering choices, using topics of personal interest).

You can find more information about UDL at:

<http://www.udlcenter.org>.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

- ◇ [Content Modules](#) (explanations of grade-level content)
- ◇ [Instructional Families](#) (skills for each grade)
- ◇ [Curriculum Resource Guides](#) (examples for teaching grade-level content)
- ◇ [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Units](#) (models of universally designed lesson plans)
- ◇ [Instructional Resource Guides](#) (instructional strategies)
- ◇ [Language Arts Sample Systematic Instruction Script](#) (LASSIS) and [Mathematics Activities for Scripted Systematic Instruction](#) (MASSI)

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND COMMUNITY SKILLS

- ◁ **Reading and writing** are important skills to develop to understand books, gather and learn new information, make notes, share thoughts and stories, compare information, read schedules, etc.
- ◁ **Mathematics and science** are important to understand numbers, solve problems, understand the environment, use schedules, arrange transportation, manage money, etc.
- ◁ **Communication skills** are important to advocate for self, participate in social and educational conversations, express wants and needs, access information, make requests, or refusals, shop, prepare a meal, etc.
- ◁ **Age-appropriate social skills** are important to build knowledge and shared experiences with peers in school, the community, and work.
- ◁ **Independence and teamwork** are important to build problem-solving skills, understand and follow directions, complete new tasks, use supports that are provided, and to work well with others.
- ◁ **Skills to access support systems** are important for academic instruction, collaborating with peers, developing independence, requesting assistance, and using appropriate tools (e.g., calculator) to complete a task.

Families Working with Teachers

Children learn well when teachers and families work together. You can help your child learn when you and your child’s teachers share information with each other. You can share how your child learns best and what his or her interests are. It is also important to provide your child with learning activities suggested by the teachers. To do this, you should find out what your child’s instruction looks like and what your child is expected to learn and do. For example, a teacher might say that the most important part of reading for your child is to answer the questions, which he or she can do after listening to the story instead of reading it alone. Likewise, writing might include the way your child communicates his or her thoughts and ideas by using the computer, assistive technology, dictation, or a communication system instead of using a pencil and paper.

To see examples of what these supports look like and how teachers may use them, go to NCSC Resources at <https://wiki.ncscpartners.org>. Parents can use the resources on this site to help increase their child’s knowledge and skills. The site includes a “Parent Tips and Tools” section that can help parents use the resource materials. These resources help teachers and parents know what content to teach in each grade, offer suggestions and models for how to teach specific content, and show how the content relates to the real world. Working closely with your child’s teacher and using these resources helps your child to develop college, career, and community skills.

Summary

As everyone works together to support your child’s learning of content related to college, career, and community skills, Connecticut’s Alternate Assessment system, as well as the CSDE Performance Office and your child’s teacher, will provide guidance on appropriate content and supports. Teachers and families working together make individualized instruction meaningful and will help your child develop these necessary skills.

Additional Resources

NAME	WEBSITE
CSDE Bureau of Student Assessment	https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Student-Assessment/Main-Assessment/Student-Assessment
CSDE Comprehensive Assessment Program Portal	https://ct.portal.airast.org/
National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC)	http://www.ncscpartners.org/
National Center and State Collaborative Wiki	https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Main_Page
Universal Design for Learning	https://medium.com/udl-center