



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Special Education Directors and District Administrators (DA's) in TIDE

FROM: Bryan Klimkiewicz, Bureau Chief, Special Education
Abe Krisst, Bureau Chief, Performance Office

DATE: November 27, 2017

SUBJECT: Connecticut's Alternate Assessments - Participation Requirements Update

In the [June 1, 2017, memorandum](#) to district superintendents, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) explained the new provision in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) regarding participation in Connecticut's Alternate Assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For the relatively small number of students participating in Connecticut's Alternate Assessments, the new law creates a state-level cap. The state must ensure that in Grades 3-8 and 11 for each subject, the total number of students assessed in each subject using the alternate assessments does not exceed one percent of the total number of all students in the State who are assessed in such subject.

In the 2016-17 school year, 1.5% of all students assessed statewide participated in the Connecticut Alternate Assessments. Please refer to [The Count of Alternate Assessment Participants by Nexus District for 2016-17](#).

Connecticut's state plan under the ESSA is being fully implemented beginning with the 2017-18 school year. Therefore, the CSDE strongly urges districts to analyze their participation data in the Connecticut Alternate Assessments. Each district, but especially those with rates in excess of one percent, is recommended to establish a process to monitor the selection of students for the Connecticut Alternate Assessments. Suggested action steps and resources for districts are described on page 2.

In addition to district-level strategies, beginning in January 2018, the CSDE will start reviewing the identification of students scheduled to participate in the Connecticut Alternate Assessments in 2017-18 in the following two ways:

1. The CSDE will selectively audit the Learner Characteristic Inventory (LCI) submitted through the Data Entry Interface (DEI) through the AIR Comprehensive Assessment Portal. Staff from both the CSDE Performance Office, and the Bureau of Special Education will be reviewing the data collected through the submitted LCI's with a focus, among other things, on student learner characteristics.
2. The CSDE will be including a review of supporting evidence justifying a student's eligibility to participate in the Connecticut Alternate Assessments within the existing SEDAC Desk Audit of individualized education programs (IEPs). More information regarding changes to the Desk Audit will be shared with Directors of Special Education in January.

These reviews will enable the CSDE to provide targeted assistance to districts that may have high identification rates for the inclusion of students in alternate assessments. Also, beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the CSDE will require districts with participation in the Connecticut Alternate Assessments that exceeds one percent to submit a letter explaining the reasons for that excess and a plan to improve the selection processes of students for the alternate assessments. More information about this process will be provided soon.

As a reminder, below are some steps the CSDE recommends for districts to monitor the identification of students for the Connecticut Alternate Assessments:

1. If your district's percentage is greater than one percent, investigate whether those numbers are disproportionately represented in certain schools or grades.
2. Examine the process your planning and placement team (PPT) uses to determine how a student qualifies for the Connecticut Alternate Assessments. Convening a meeting with your staff with responsibilities in the decision-making process is highly recommended.
3. Research has shown that certain primary disabilities are most likely to be a reason for a student to be considered eligible to participate in Connecticut Alternate Assessments. The following primary disabilities represent those typically considered with evidence for eligibility: Intellectual Disability, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury and Multiple Disabilities. Other primary disability categories in isolation that would generally require more substantial evidence to support eligibility for the student to be selected to participate in Connecticut Alternate Assessments, include Specific Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment (OHI)-ADD/ADHD and Speech or Language Impaired. If these latter categories are considered, strong evidence review should be included in the PPT process. Generally, selecting the standard assessments with supports and accommodations as needed, is preferable to selecting students with these primary disability categories for alternate assessments.
4. The CSDE will continue to provide additional supports to districts addressing the process for appropriate selection of students for Connecticut Alternate Assessments. Below are resources currently available:
 - Districts may retrieve student test participation numbers through the American Institute of Research (AIR) reporting system. The [Online Reporting System \(ORS\) User Guide](#) provides information on how to access data on this Web site.
 - The CSDE provides a guidance document called [Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System](#). This document provides answers to specific questions about the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System.
 - [The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Participation Guidance for Planning and Placement Teams](#) is a quick guide for PPT teams to use to support decisions about determining the most appropriate assessment, and will help districts determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria for participation in the Alternate Assessment.
 - CSDE is conducting Alternate Assessment Counts! [Session 1](#) training sessions which are still available.
 - The [CSDE Assessment Guidelines](#) is intended to provide guidance for Connecticut school district personnel who must make decisions about testing special student populations for the following assessments: Smarter Balanced, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Field Test, Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, and the Alternate Science Field Test.

For additional information please contact Joe Amenta, Education Consultant, at 860-713-6855 [/joseph.amenta@ct.gov](mailto:joseph.amenta@ct.gov) or Janet Stuck, Education Consultant, at 860-713-6837/janet.stuck@ct.gov.