Connecticut Alternate Assessment System: Overview of the Early Stopping Rule and Student Response Check

UNLOCKING *Lifelong* POTENTIAL

CONNECTICUT Education

2025-2026

Regulations for Part B of the IDEA require states to make available to eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities an alternate assessment designed to measure their knowledge and skills (34 CFR §§ 200.1(d) and 300.160 (c)).

(b) (1) For the school year commencing July 1, 2015, and each school year thereafter, each student enrolled in grades three to eight, inclusive, and grade eleven in any public school shall, annually, take a mastery examination in reading, writing and mathematics during the regular school day.

(3) For the school year commencing July 1, 2018, and each school year thereafter, each student enrolled in grades five, eight, and eleven in any public school shall annually take a state-wide mastery examination in science during the regular school day.

The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System adjusts for:

Depth (the level of cognitive complexity of the knowledge, skills, and abilities within the standard),

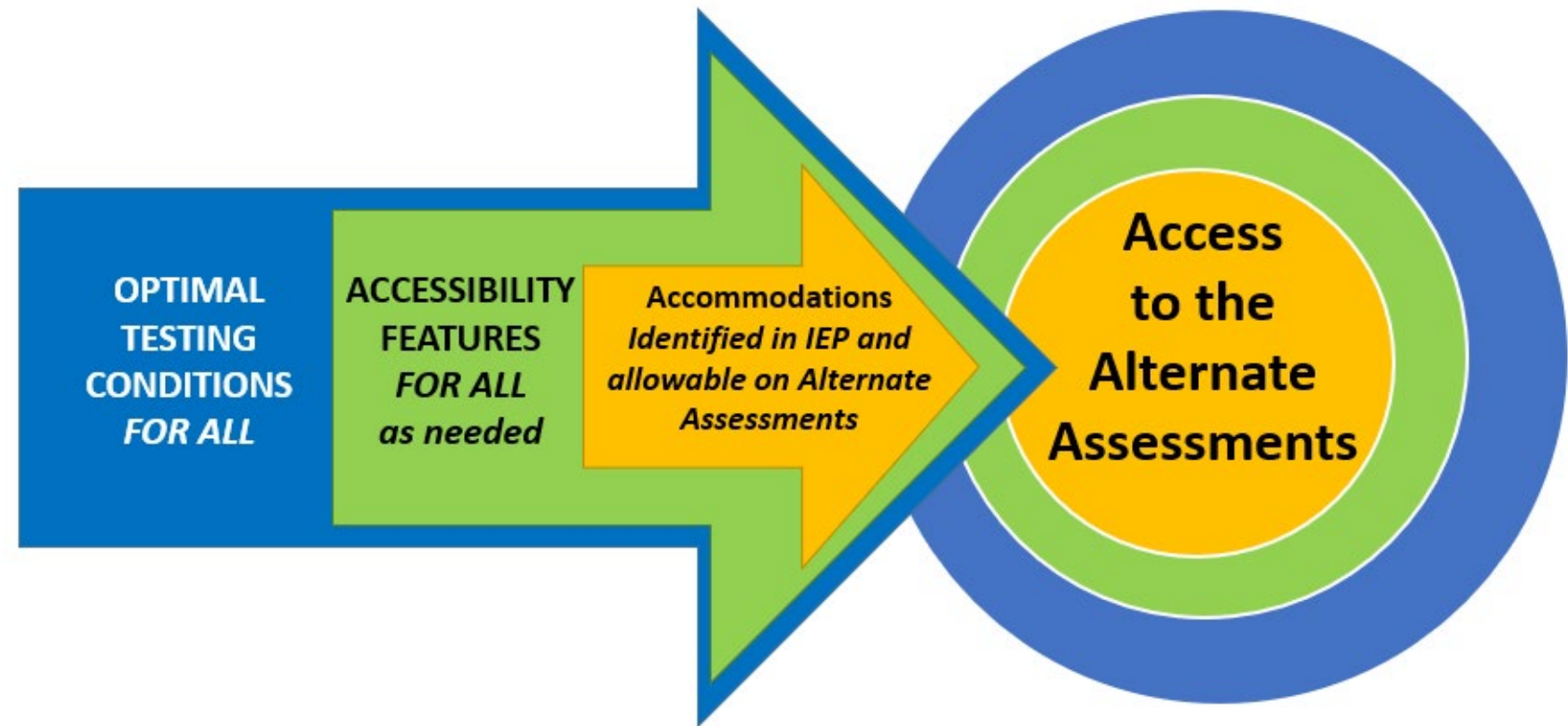**Breadth** (how many standards are measured), and

Complexity (describes the difficulty of content with built-in scaffolding to support accessibility needs).

Accommodations include, but are not limited to:
- American Sign Language
- Assistive Technology
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication
- Read Aloud
- Scribe

OPTIMAL TESTING CONDITIONS FOR ALL

ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES FOR ALL *as needed*

Accommodations *Identified in IEP and allowable on Alternate Assessments*

Access to the Alternate Assessments

Students may respond to test items using their modes of communication while the trained teacher records the responses. Communication might include:

- Verbalizing the answer;

- Gesturing, signing, or pointing to the answer;

- Using an eye gaze system to select the answer;

- Using assistive technology (AT) to indicate the answer;

- Circling or marking the answers on a paper copy of the test for educator transcription (CTAA only); or

- Using the mouse to select the answer online (applicable on the online CTAA and CAAELP only)

Physical prompting such as hand-over-hand is not permitted during the administration of the CTAA.

Types of AAC
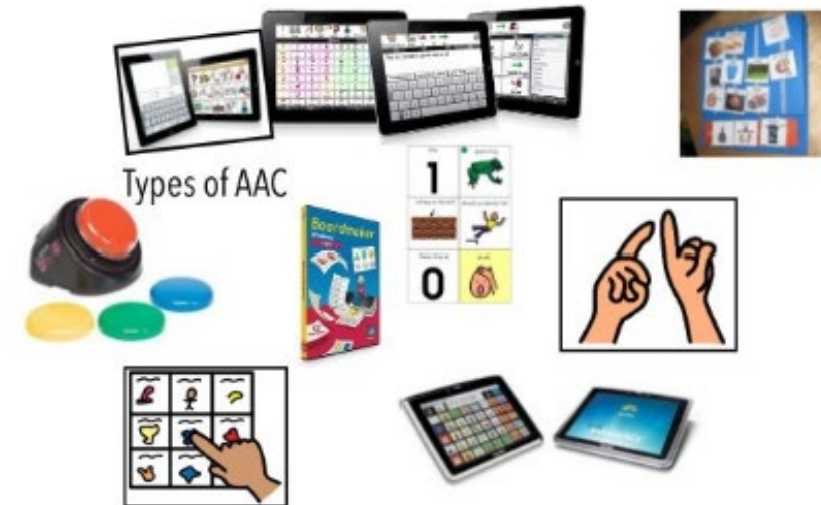
What is the Early Stopping Rule (ESR)
and Student Response Check (SRC)?

The ESR process is for a relatively small number of students participating in the Alternate Assessment System who <u>do not</u> demonstrate an observable mode of communication and, therefore, are not able to participate fully on the alternate assessments.

Students who are typically eligible for the ESR have

- An uncertain response to stimuli.
- The most significant functional adaptive behavioral needs.
- Not yet established a mode of communication.
- A pervasive need for adult support throughout their lives.
- IEPs with focus on medical and functional needs.
- IEPs that document goals that support the development of the student's communication.
- IEPs that documents the use of assistive technology or augmentative and alternate communication devices.

The purpose of the ESR is for teachers to identify students that may qualify **before** the onset of the testing window as students approved will not take the alternate assessments since they meet the ESR criteria. TEAs should:

- Review the [Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule and Student Response Check](#) guidelines as early in the school year as possible.

- Note timelines for screening eligible students.

- Ensure that **all** paperwork is completed, signed, and submitted to District Administrators by published deadlines. Incomplete or incorrect forms will be denied approval.

Connecticut Alternate Assessment System

2025-2026 Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule

Connecticut Alternate Assessments measure the knowledge and skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These assessments are designed to support student independence to the greatest extent possible by making academic and language content accessible and the expected achievement levels appropriate. The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System is comprised of the following assessments:

- The Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA) aligned to the same Connecticut Core Standards (CCS) used to instruct and assess all of Connecticut's public school students. It is upon these standards that summative assessments in Grades 3-8 and 11 in math and English language arts were developed.
- The Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) Assessment—aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and administered to students in Grades 5, 8, and 11.
- The Connecticut Alternate Assessment of English Language Proficiency (CAAELP)—aligned to and derived from the Connecticut English Language Proficiency Standards. This alternate assessment is designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades K-12 who are dually identified as English learners/multilingual learners (ELs/MLs) receiving services under IDEA. The test measures skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Connecticut's Alternate Assessments vary in test design, format, and administration procedures. The CTAA and CAAELP are online, while the CTAS is a paper, performance task-based assessment. Each assessment may be accessed in a variety of formats based on the diverse needs of the student. Generally, **students may access the test items by**:

- Listening to the trained teacher read the test;
- Reading the test question independently if the trained teacher determines this is appropriate;
- Having the test question signed by a qualified trained educator; or
- Listening to a recorded voice read the test question (applicable to the online CTAA and CAAELP only).

Students may respond to test items while the trained teacher records responses by:

- Verbalizing the answer;
- Gesturing, signing, or pointing to the answer;
- Using an eye gaze system to select the answer;
- Using assistive technology (AT) to indicate the answer;
- Circling or marking the answers on a paper copy of the test for educator transcription; or
- Using the mouse to select the answer online (applicable on the online CTAA and CAAELP only).

Most students eligible to participate on alternate assessments will be able to complete the assessments. This is because they can access the test questions and communicate their responses when provided supports and accommodations that mirror those provided during instruction. However, a *very* small percentage of students with the most significant cognitive and functional adaptive behavioral needs have **no** observable way to communicate responses to participate in classroom or large-scale assessments. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) developed a method for identifying and determining the eligibility of these students prior to the testing window using special test code status called the Early Stopping Rule (ESR). Students that qualify will not take the CTAA, CTAS, or CAAELP (if the student is identified as EL/ML) during the assessment window. This is because they are **not** able to demonstrate an observable mode of communication during the completion of the Student Response Check

SRC and ESR Submission Deadlines

Important:

TEAs, Special Education Directors and DAs need to be aware of the SRC and ESR submission deadlines.

Submission and deadlines for each year can be found on the [Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule and Student Response Check website](#).

What is the ESR process?

Administer the Student Response Check. (One trial per day for a total of 3 trials.)

Take notes of each trial using the SRC Administration Behavioral Notes.

If student does not indicate a mode of communication to all three trials, complete the Early Stopping Rule Request and Attestation Form in its entirety.

Submit a copy of the SRC Administration, Behavioral Notes, Observational Notes, and ESR Request and Attestation Form to your District Administrator by the stated deadlines.

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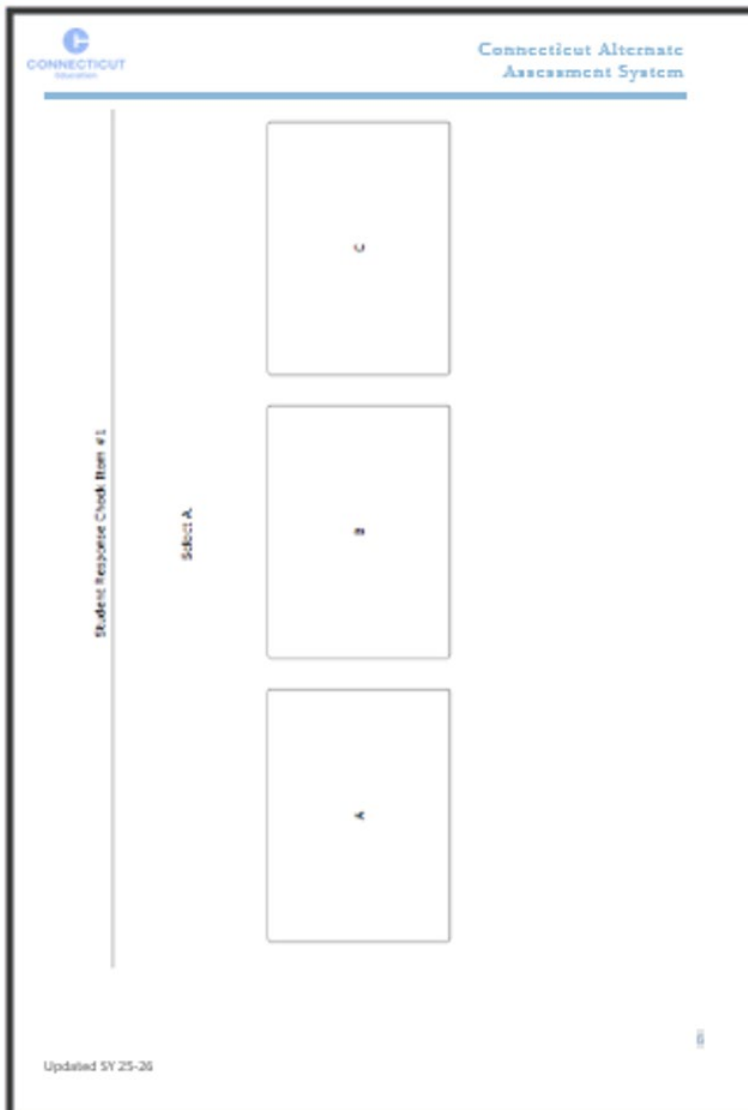
Excerpt of the SRC Eligibility Process

Example of the first step for administering the SRC (see Appendix A):

Present **Student Response Check Card Item #1** to the student in paper form or on a device.

☐ Using the following potential communication modes, ask the student to "Select A". The student should respond using one or more of the following communication modes:

1. Verbalizing, gesturing, signing, or pointing to the answer

2. Using the mouse/touchscreen to select the answer on a device

3. Using assistive technology (AT) to indicate the answer

4. Using an eye gaze system to select the answer

5. Circling or marking the answer on the Student Response Check Card Item #1

☐ Use Appendix B to note the communication behaviors of the student.

Repeat Steps for Items 2 and 3.

Present **Student Response Check Card Item #1** to the student in paper form or on a device.

☐ Using the following potential communication modes, ask the student to "Select A". The student should respond using one or more of the following communication modes:

1. Verbalizing, gesturing, signing, or pointing to the answer
2. Using the mouse/touchscreen to select the answer on a device
3. Using assistive technology (AT) to indicate the answer
4. Using an eye gaze system to select the answer
5. Circling or marking the answer on the Student Response Check Card Item #1

☐ Use Appendix B to note the communication behaviors of the student.

Repeat Steps for Items 2 and 3.

Early Stopping Rule Request and Attestation Form

- If the student does not demonstrate an observable communication response, the TEA will complete the ESR Request and Attestation Form (Appendix C).

- All portions of the student's form should be accurate and complete.

- **NEW!** Submit a copy of the SRC Behavioral Notes and completed Request and Attestation Form to the DA by these dates:
  - January 5, 2026 – CAAELP
  - February 2, 2026 – CTAA/CTAS

Connecticut Alternate Assessment System

Appendix C: Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule Request and Attestation Form

Effective 2025-2026, this form and a copy of the completed SRC Administration Behavioral Notes should be submitted in TIDE by the District Administrator for Testing (DA in TIDE) indicating that for the purposes of summative testing, this student does not demonstrate an observable mode of communication. This form should only be submitted if the following is true:

1. The trained TEA conducted **three separate administrations** of the three-item SRC between **December 1, 2025, and January 5, 2026 (students rostered for CAAELP), or December 1, 2025, and February 2, 2026 (students rostered for CTAA/CTAS only).**
2. The student did not show any response using an observable mode of communication during **any** of the three administrations of the SRC.
3. The student's IEP documents goals that support the student's *development of communication*.

Directions:

The trained TEA who administered the Student Response Check must:

1. Complete the table and check boxes (below) and include all specified signatures.
2. Provide a completed copy of the SRC Administration Behavioral Notes to the DA for Testing **no later than January 5, 2026 (students rostered for CAAELP), and February 2, 2026 (students rostered for CTAA/CTAS only).**
3. Maintain the original forms locally for record retention purposes.

The DA for Testing must submit this form and a copy of the completed SRC Administration Behavioral Notes in TIDE for processing **no later than January 12, 2026 (CAAELP), and March 2, 2026 (CTAA/CTAS).** For submissions past this date, the CSDE may request additional information from the district and late submissions may be denied unless the CSDE is notified of extenuating circumstances. Remember: The purpose of the ESR process is to identify eligible students **before** the onset of the 2025-26 assessment window.

Ten-Digit State Assigned Student Identifier (SASID):	Student Response Check	Date Conducted (mm/dd/yyyy)	Name of Trained TEA
	SRC Administration 1		
	SRC Administration 2		
	SRC Administration 3		

☐ Based on the TEA's administration of the Student Response Check (for the purposes of the Alternate Assessment System), the student did not demonstrate an observable mode of communication.

☐ The student's IEP documents goals that support the student's *development of communication*.

Trained TEA Signature: _____ Date: _____

TEA's Ten-Digit Educator ID Number (EIN): _____

Special Education Director Signature: _____ Date: _____

No further action on behalf of the student is required by the TEA or DA unless notified by the CSDE. Forms submitted by DAs on or before **January 12, 2026 (CAAELP), and March 2, 2026 (CTAA/CTAS)**, will be processed by the CSDE and Cambium Assessments Incorporated (CAI). Students who qualify, and have been approved by the CSDE review process, count as participants and their tests will be processed internally. A special code indicating that the student qualifies for the ESR will be applied to the student's alternate assessments for math, English language arts, and science (if applicable), and the CAAELP (if applicable). This status can be reviewed by TIDE users when selecting various reports under the Monitoring Test Progress option in TIDE. Refer to the Monitoring Test Progress: Test Status Code Report and Test Completion Rates brochure and the TIDE User Guide for details.

The student is **ineligible for the ESR** if they communicate a response to <u>any</u> of the three items during <u>any</u> of the three SRC administrations. (Responses do not have to be correct.)

- The trained TEA will discontinue the SRC administration.

- The student will participate in the
  - CTAA (Grades 3-8, 11) and
  - CTAS (Grades 5, 8, or 11), and
  - CAAELP (K-12) if they are EL/ML.

Refer to [CTAA Assessing Students who are Blind, Deaf, or Deaf-Blind Additional Guidance](), the [CTAS Assessing Students who are Blind, Deaf, or Deaf-Blind Additional Guidance](), and the [CAAELP Accessibility and Accommodations Manual]()for information on accessibility.
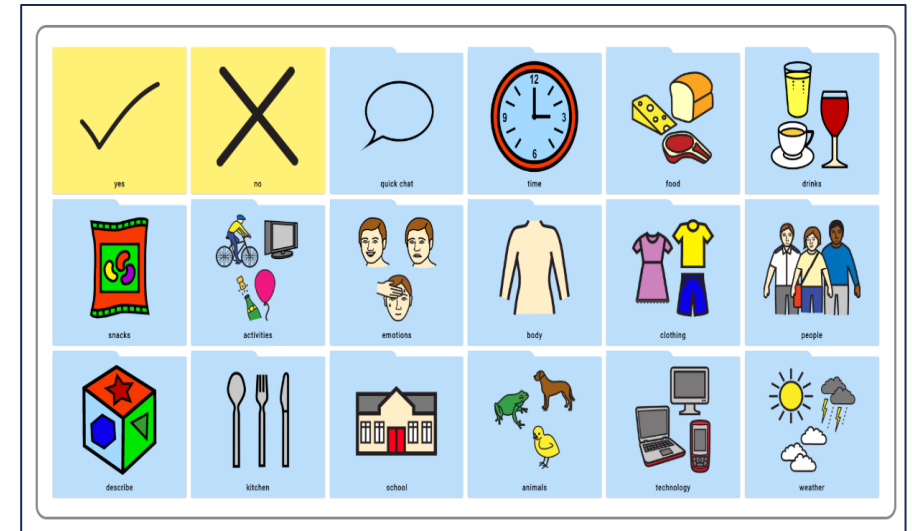
If the Student Doesn't Qualify

- Review and determine the access points used for the students to access their instruction within the learning environment.

- Understand accessibility supports including assistive technology that may be available for that student to access the learning environment, including curriculum and social emotional learning.

- Based on accessibility supports utilized throughout instruction, review designated supports and accommodations associated with each applicable standard assessment.

- Trial practice and training tests with appropriate supports and accommodations to gather information and evaluate student need.

Photo Credit from the Open AAC.

Guidance for District Administrators

- First, verify that the student's Alternate Assessment Indicator is activated to Yes in TIDE.
- Review the ESR Request and Attestation Form for accuracy and completion (e.g., SASID, dates, signatures).
- Follow the steps outlined in the [How to Submit the Student Response Check and Early Stopping Rule (ESR) Request and Attestation Form in TIDE.](#)
- Submit the SRC Observational Notes and ESR Request and Attestation Form using the upload feature in the TIDE Form by the following dates:
  - CAAELP - No later than January 12, 2026
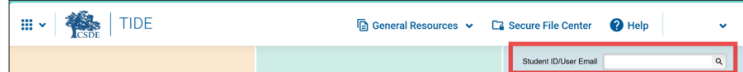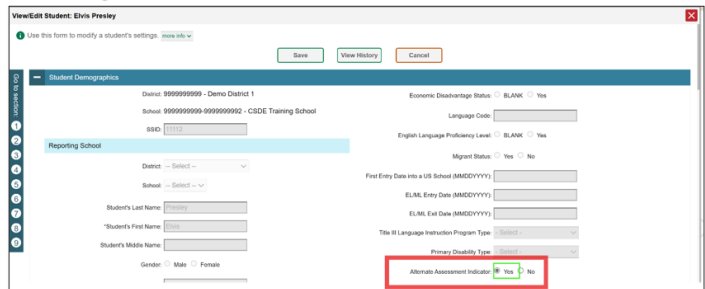 - CTAA/CTAS - No later than March 2, 2026

- DAs in TIDE will receive an email notification from Cambium Assessment on the reviewed status of the ESR.

- All educators with access to TIDE can check the student's ESR status by searching the student and viewing the student dashboard. If the student has been approved for an ESR, "Yes" will be indicated in TIDE.

- If the student has been approved for an ESR, **no** further action is required by the TEA. **TEAs should not open or attempt any tests with the student during the assessment window. The student will count as a test participation through the approved ESR, and their tests will be closed out by Cambium Assessment.**

| NO | YES | Alternate Assessment Indicator |
| NO | YES | Early Stopping Rule Indicator |

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[The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule Checklist](#) is a new and optional resource to support accurate ESR and SRC submissions.

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Connecticut Comprehensive Assessment Program

The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule Checklist

The optional Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Early Stopping Rule Checklist was created to support trained Teachers Administering the Alternate (TEA) assessment complete the appropriate procedures for determining student qualifications for a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who do not have an established mode of communication. This checklist also includes critical steps to ensure TEA credentials, user access to related systems, and information pertaining to student eligibility. These combined activities support the approval process for teachers requesting the Early Stopping Rule (ESR) for their students. If applicable, please review this checklist early in the school year (Fall 2025) to appropriately screen and identify eligible students and submit documentation by the test-specific deadlines described in this resource.

VERIFY TEA CREDENTIALS

☐ Verify that you can access the TIDE system with your username and established password.

☐ Confirm you have been assigned the user role of TEA by your District Administrator (DA) in TIDE.

☐ For TEAs who will be administering the Connecticut Alternate Assessments (CTAA) for Math and ELA and the Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) Assessment, review and complete the updated 2025-2026 Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Training - Required for Teachers Administering the Alternate (TEAs) and pass with a score of 80% accuracy or better each school year.

☐ For TEAs who will be administering the Connecticut Alternate Assessment for English Language Proficiency (CAAELP), review and complete the updated 2025-2026 required training for the CAAELP administration and pass the quiz each school year. Information on the required CAAELP training can be found on the CAAELP Resources Webpage.

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Thank you for your participation and for all you do for your students!