

Overview of the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System





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Overview of Today's Presentation

- Inclusive Education
- Review of Alternate Assessment System: The Design, Purpose, and Participation.
- Review Eligibility Criteria
- Early Stopping Rule and Student Response Check
- Domain Exemptions (CAAELP)
- Additional Alternate Eligibility Considerations
- Resources



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Inclusive Education

“ *Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having **high expectations** for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.* ”

IDEA Section 1400 (c) (5) (emphasis added)



Promoting Inclusive Education

Two Federal laws that address the education for children with disabilities.

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and;
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), signed into law in 1965 and 1975, respectively.



Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education



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)).



Participation - Connecticut General Statutes 10-14n Act

- (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.



General Principles of Inclusive Education

- Every student is an integral part of the general education community.
- Students thrive and succeed when they are valued and actively engaged in their classroom and school communities.
- The IEP should honor the student and family voice and intentionally align supports to the general education setting, curriculum, routines, activities and social opportunities throughout the school day.





General Principles of Inclusive Educational Practices

- Integrate evidence-based Universal Design for Learning (UDL), [Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) (MTSS), and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
- Implement educator training, preparation, and professional development for all personnel working with students.
- Provide systematic supports/technical assistance to promote inclusive educational practices.
- Recognize families as critical collaborative partners.





This section of the IEP requires a **clear individualized justification** for each standard assessment the student is taking, and the **rationale for why** the selected alternate assessment is appropriate.

- Why the student **CAN'T** participate – references the disability related needs (cognitive functioning, instructional level, access needs) demonstrate the level that the student meets state eligibility criteria.
- Why the Alternative Assessment is appropriate – shows that the CTAA aligns with the students` instructional goals, Present Levels of Performance (PLOP), and mode of access.



Start with the End in Mind

The Connecticut Alternate Assessment System is designed for a very small number of children with the **most significant cognitive** disabilities. When planning for the alternate assessment, and the subsequent programming that aligns to that profile, we need to be cognizant of possible implications to the student's future. We should always strive for the highest degree of competencies and opportunities for all students.



Graduation



Further Education
and Training



Military Service



Employment



Five Things to Consider When Making Decisions About Student Participation on State Alternate Assessments

1. Disability

Only children with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities can take the alternate assessment.

2. Yearly

Every year the PPT should make the determination of which assessment is **most appropriate** based on the students dynamic learning profile.

3. Guidelines

PPT members use the **Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Eligibility Form** to determine if there is current evidence to support the student taking the alternate assessment.

4. Agreement

Each PPT member is aware of implications and should agree that the student meets all of the eligibility criteria for taking the alternate assessment.

5. Instruction

All children are taught academic content for their enrolled grade level. Students who take the alternate assessment may need content presented in reduced depth, breadth, or complexity.



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Review of the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System: The Design, Purpose, and Eligibility Criteria



Pyramid of Connecticut's Statewide Assessment

GOAL: 1% or less of the state's total tested population participate in alternate assessments

**Connecticut
Alternate
Assessment System
(CTAA, CTAS, & CAAELP)
based on alternate
achievement standards**

**Smarter Balanced Assessments*,
Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)
Assessment *, and the CT SAT School Day with
accommodations**

**Smarter Balanced Assessments*, Next Generation Science Standards
(NGSS) Assessments*, and the CT SAT School Day**

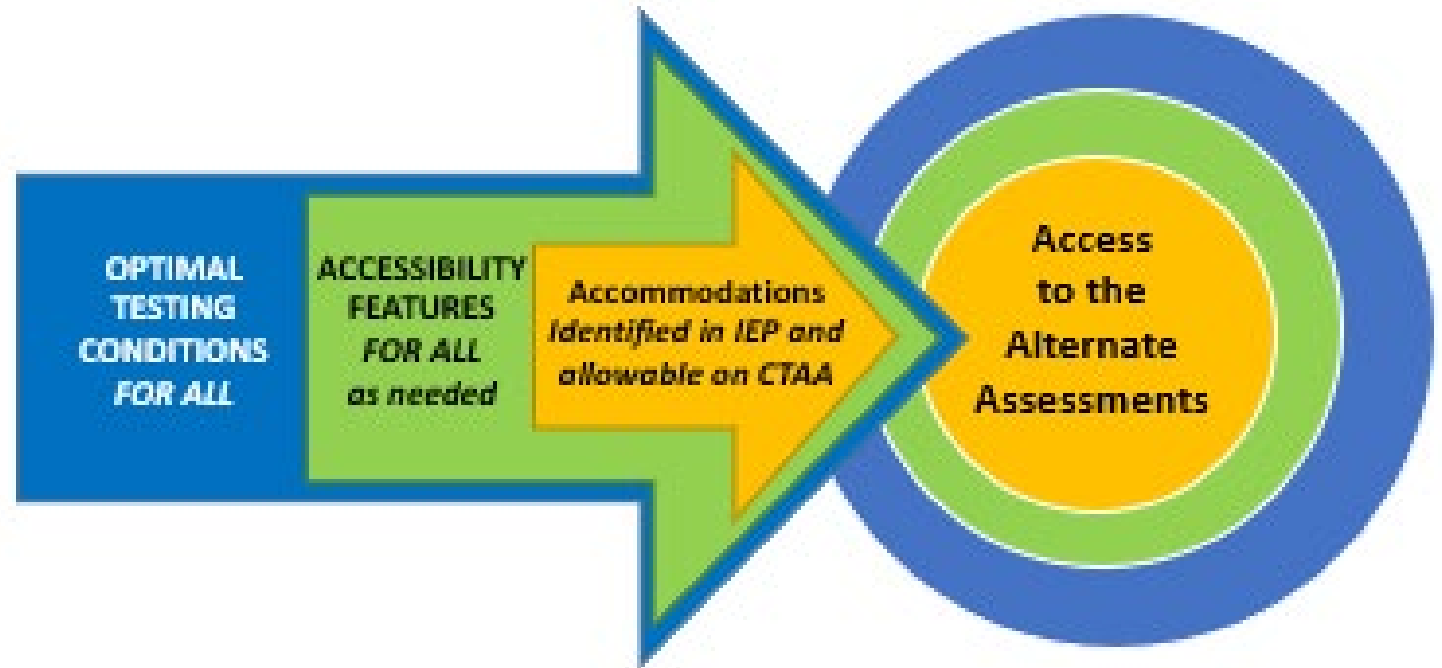
***Designated supports are available for these subtests.**



Optimal Testing Conditions for All

Accommodations include, but are not limited to:

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication
- American Sign Language
- Assistive Technology
- Read Aloud
- Scribe





The Design of Alternate Assessments: How Students Respond

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.





Design of the Alternate Assessment





The Alternate Assessment is Comprised of Three Assessments

- The Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA) for English language arts and mathematics (Grades 3-8 and 11),
- The Connecticut Alternate Science (CTAS) Assessment (Grades 5, 8, and 11), and
- The Connecticut Alternate Assessment of English Language Proficiency (CAAELP) (Grades K-12).




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Eligibility for the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System (CTAA, CTAS, CAAELP)



Eligibility in CT-SEDS



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**Connecticut Alternate
Assessment
System
Eligibility Form**

**Required for Participation in the
Connecticut Alternate Assessment System
Including CTAA, CTAS, and CAAELP**

This resource is a copy of the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Eligibility Form embedded in CT-SEDS that can be used as a planning tool for Planning and Placement Teams to facilitate discussion and aid in determining eligibility. Official eligibility is determined and finalized within the CT-SEDS system.



 District and State
Testing





Is the student being considered for participation in the Connecticut Alternate Assessment system?

☐ Yes ☐ No



Eligibility in CT-SEDS, Continued

Is the student being considered for participation in the Connecticut Alternate Assessment system?

☒ Yes

☐ No

The Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form is required. The form must be used to determine the student's eligibility to participate in the Alternate Assessment system.



Alternate Assessment Eligibility



The student must meet all criteria outlined below to participate in Connecticut Alternate Assessments.

Primary Disability
Autism

The student has a significant cognitive disability, as evidenced by

1. Student has an intellectual impairment.

- ☐ A. No evidence exists to support that this student has an intellectual impairment.
- ☐ B. In the absence of standardized, cognitive assessments/scores, there is evidence to substantiate the presence of an intellectual impairment.
- ☐ C. Results of cognitive testing (e.g., Full-Scale IQ score < 70, developmental age).

2. Student has adaptive behavior well below age-level expectations.

(Adaptive behavior is defined as those conceptual, social, and practical skills necessary to meet the common demands of everyday life across multiple settings.)

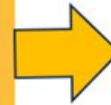
- ☐ A. Student has adaptive behaviors necessary for the student to live independently and function safely in daily life for their age group (34 CFR §§ 200.1(d) and 300.160 (c)).
- ☐ B. Results of adaptive behavior assessment(s) (e.g., scored more than 1.5 standard deviations below average)

3. Student requires intensive instruction and significant supports.

- ☐ A. Student does not require extensive, repeated, individualized instruction.
- ☐ B. Student requires extensive, repeated instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature, and uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, demonstrate, and transfer skills.

Verification

SAVE



Verification

☐ The PPT verifies that supporting evidence relates to the student's eligibility for the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System.



Alternate Data Sync from CT-SEDS to TIDE

Resident Town Code

IDEA Indicator

EL/ML

Section 504 *

Economic Disadvantage Status

Language Code

English Language Proficiency Level

Migrant Status

First Entry Date into a US School **EL/ML Entry Date** **EL/ML Exit Date**

Title III Language Instruction Program Type

Primary Disability Type

Alternate Assessment Indicator

Early stopping Rule Indicator

Hispanic or Latino *

American Indian or Alaska Native *

Asian *

Black or African American *



Characteristics of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities



The Alternate Assessment Criteria

For participation in the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System, the identification of a significant cognitive disability is not based on IDEA disability category or English learner/multilingual learner status; nor is it based on previous low academic achievement or need for accommodations to participate in general state assessments.



What are the characteristics of a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities?

- Students in this group are heterogeneous in their characteristics and current skill levels.
- Many, but not all, are identified prior to entering kindergarten.
- A small percentage of these students do not yet have a communication system.
- Students may often use augmentative communication devices or assistive technology for access to their environment, daily living, and instruction.



What are the characteristics of a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities? -Continued

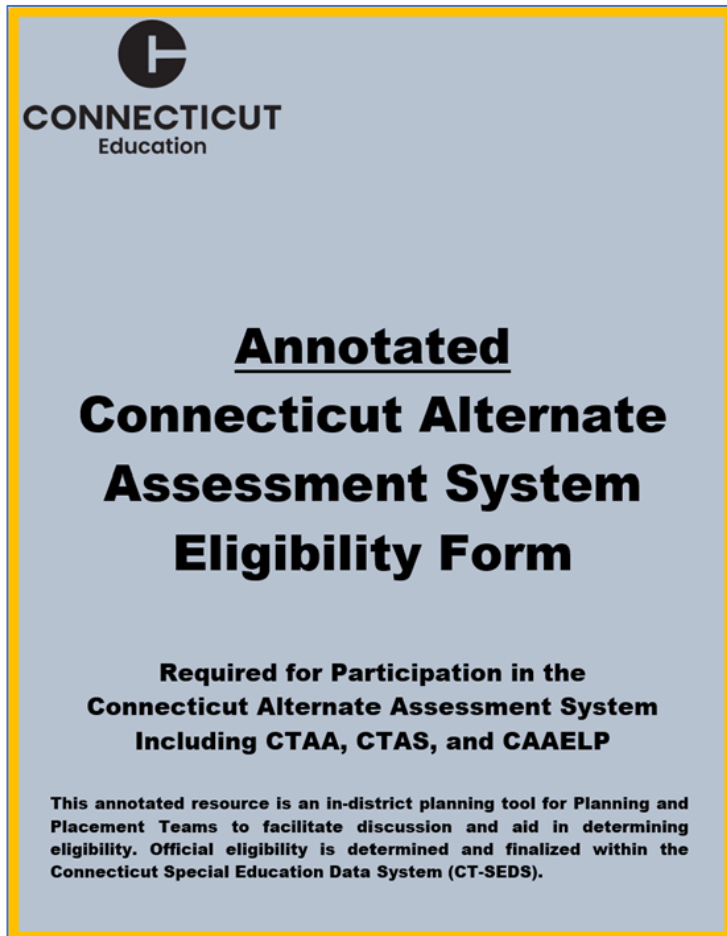


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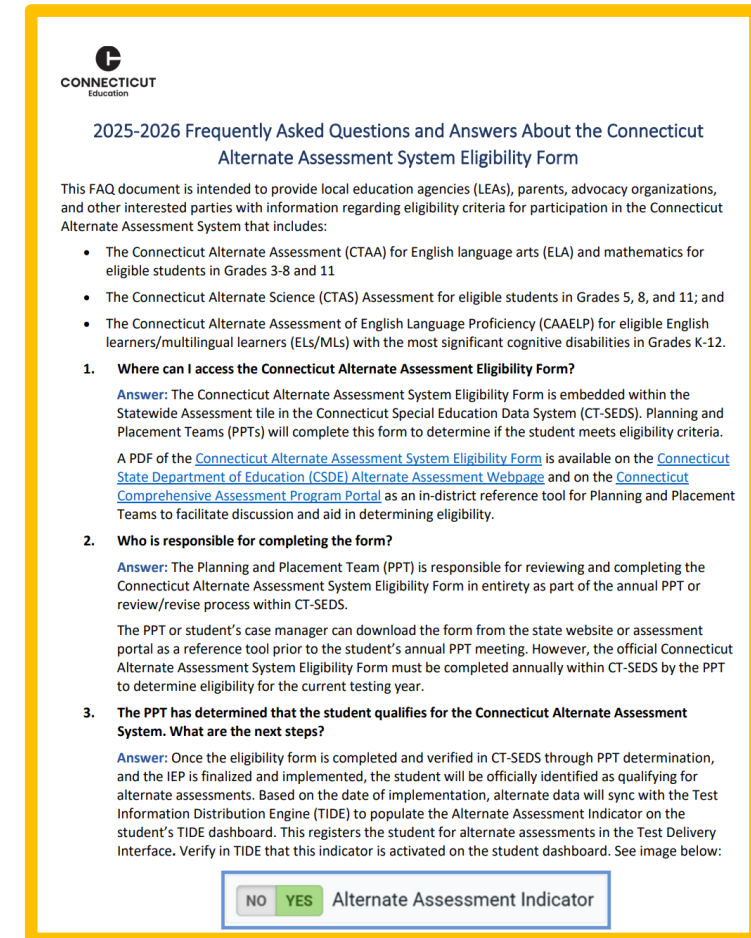
- Students are identified with one or more of the existing categories of disability under the IDEA.
- Significant Intellectual Impairment
- Functional adaptive skills are well below age level expectations.
- Student requires intensive instruction and significant supports.
- For students with the most complex characteristics who do not have an established mode of communication, refer to the [Early Stopping Rule](#) guidelines.



An In-Depth Look at Eligibility Criteria



[Annotated Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form](#)



[2025-2026 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers About the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Eligibility Form](#)



Eligibility Criteria #1

Identification Under IDEA

While a student may not be determined to have a significant cognitive disability based solely on an IDEA classification, individuals with an intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, autism, or traumatic brain injury are more likely to be eligible for an alternate assessment.

For more information, refer to Sections 34 CFR 300.309 (3)(a)(1) and (2) and 300.8(c)(4)(i) of IDEA.



Eligibility Criteria #2

Student has an intellectual impairment.

- To qualify, the PPT must determine that the student has an **intellectual impairment**.
- This determination is documented through an assessment of cognitive functioning, that places the individual significantly below age/grade-level expectations.
- Results of cognitive testing (e.g., Full-Scale IQ score < 70).
- Assessment results should be within 3 years of the triennial IEP.
- In the absence of cognitive assessments, the PPT must determine there is evidence throughout other areas of the plan that substantiates a significant cognitive disability.

Common Cognitive Assessments Used:

- Cognitive Assessment System (CAS)
- Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (CTONI)
- Differential Ability Scales (DAS)
- Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (KABC)
- Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT)
- Pictorial Test of Intelligence (PTI)
- Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales (RIAS)
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (SB)
- Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (TONI)
- Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT)
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Spanish
- Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability (WNV)
- Wechsler Preschool & Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI)
- Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities (WJ)



Eligibility Criteria #3

Student has functional adaptive behavior skills well below age-level expectations.

- Functional adaptive behavior is defined as those conceptual, social, and practical skills necessary to meet the common demands of everyday life across multiple settings.
- Functional adaptive scores should be more than 1.5 standard deviations below the mean score.
- Assessment results should be within 3 years of the triennial IEP.

Functional Adaptive Behavior Assessments Used

- Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS)
- Scales of Independent Behavior-Revised (SIB-R)
- Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS)
- Other



Eligibility Criteria #4

Student requires intensive instruction and significant supports.

Student requires extensive, repeated instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, demonstrate, and transfer skills.

Examples of Documentation in the IEP

- Goals and objectives are linked to (and derived from) the Connecticut Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.
- If the student is dually identified as EL/ML, the goals and objectives are linked to (and derived from) the Connecticut English Language Proficiency Standards.
- Documentation of evidence in the Present Levels of Performance across multiple settings and subject areas.
- Documentation of accommodations and supports in the Supplemental Aids and Services.



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



What is the Early Stopping Rule?

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



General Characteristics of Eligible Students

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 ESR Guidelines

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 (CAELP)—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 CAELP 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 CAELP 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 CAELP 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 CAELP (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



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.



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.](#)



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CAAELP Domain Exemptions



CAAELP Domain Exemptions- Eligibility

A small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may be unable to participate in the Listening or Speaking Domains of the Connecticut Alternate Assessment of English Language Proficiency (CAAELP) because of the complexities of their disability.

Domain Exemptions are available on the Listening and/or Speaking subtests for the following students:

- Students who are identified as D/deaf or hard of hearing and even with amplification may not be able to participate in the Listening subtest due to this disability.
- Students who are non-verbal/non-speaking or unintelligible and, even when provided with assistive technology (AT) or augmentative and alternate communication supports (AAC), may not be able to participate in the Speaking subtest.

For more information please see: [CAAELP Domain Exemptions](#).



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Additional Alternate Eligibility Considerations



When There is Insufficient Evidence to Meet Eligibility Criteria

- Review and determine the access points used for the students to access their instruction within the learning environment.
- Understand accessibility supports 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.
- Document the accessibility supports needed for the summative assessment and the student will take the grade applicable standard assessments in the IEP.



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Addressing Assumptions and Changing the Paradigms



When to Reconsider Eligibility for the Alternate Assessment

Revisit the student's alternate eligibility status if you find the following:

- The student participated in standard state assessments (e.g., Smarter Balanced) in the past.
- The primary disability category is a learning disability, learning disability/dyslexia, or emotional disability.
- The reason provided as to why the student qualified is that:
 - “they are in a life skills class” or
 - “they are in the self-contained class” or
 - “they are in the alternate assessment class” or
 - anything having to do with “behaviors” as the primary issue.



When to Reconsider Eligibility for the Alternate Assessment - Continued

Revisit the student's alternate eligibility status if you find the following:

- The student takes a content-area class in a general education setting with their typical peers without significant supports and modifications.
- The student is slightly below, or even at, grade level in one content area.
- The student demonstrates functional adaptive behaviors necessary for the student to live independently and function safely in daily life for their age group.
- The student **never** took the alternate assessment and then, in middle or high school, they do.



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Tips and Best Practices for Administrators and PPT Teams



Best Practices for Administrators

- Review participation rates and identify possible trends by disability categories or other demographics that might be disproportionate to students taking standard assessments.
- Ensure that teams are accurately completing the Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form as designed. Use the [annotated form](#) as reference.
- Provide continuous professional development opportunities for staff, so that they can maximize differentiated learning and inclusion teaching practices.



Best Practices for Administrators-Continued

- Hold office hours, team meetings, or mini trainings for PPT staff including building administration, on alternate eligibility criteria.
- Provide opportunities to engage families in discussions regarding appropriate identification and eligibility for the alternate assessment.
- Communicate and share resources for teachers and administration on preparing students to participate on standard assessments if they do not meet alternate eligibility criteria.



Best Practices for Special Education Teachers and PPTs

- Communicate with parents/guardians on summative assessments and eligibility.
- Carefully consider the impact of placing a student on an alternate assessment.
- Thoroughly review and verify student alternate eligibility data in IEP.
- Review evidence and eligibility criteria at annual PPT; do not automatically accept decision from previous year.
- Review justification for student eligibility; ensure evaluations are current and within the triennial.
- Accurate completion of the Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form with all current and applicable data in CT-SEDS.
- Attend trainings, office hours, and have team meetings on eligibility criteria for alternate assessments.



- Create and communicate a vision for inclusive educational practices.
- Build professional knowledge and capacity and collaborative partnerships across educator specialties (e.g., general and special education, English Learner/Multilingual Learner educators, school counselors, related service specialists) – we all have an accountability to create inclusive communities!
- Create a master schedule that supports implementation of inclusive educational practices.
- Engage in data-driven improvement strategies.
- Prioritize collaborative communication, visibility, transparency with families.



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Resources



Resources from National Organizations

- [TIES Lessons for All: 5-15-45 | TIES Lessons for All: The 5-15-45 Tool | Institute on Community Integration Publications](#)
- [IRIS Center: Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Supports in the General Education Classroom](#)
- [TIES helps educators, parents, and administrators create and support inclusive school communities | TIES Center](#)
- [Leveraging Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\) To Enhance Educational Leadership](#)
- [AA-AAS: Standards That Are the “Same but Different” \(NCSC Brief #1\) \(archive-it.org\)](#)
- [NCSC Partners - Welcome to the National Center and State Collaborative!](#)
- [NCSC Wiki](#)



Resources for Determining Eligibility

- [Developing an Assessment Participation Action Plan: A Tool for District Leaders](#)
- [IEP Team Resource: Making Decisions about Participation in the Alternate Assessment](#)
- [Parent Overview of the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System](#)
- [Determining Student Participation on Connecticut Statewide Summative Assessments](#)
- [FAQ About the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System](#)
- [Connecticut Alternate Assessment Participation Guidance for Planning and Placement Teams](#)



Resources for Teams to Support Eligibility and Accessibility for State Assessments

- [State Assessment Decision-making Processes for ELLs with Disabilities](#)
- [Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Accessibility Decision Making \(Improving Instruction\): Training Module](#)
- [Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form](#)
- [Annotated Connecticut Alternate Assessment Eligibility Form](#)
- [FAQ About the Connecticut Alternate Assessment System Eligibility Form](#)
- [Accessibility Considerations](#)
- [CSDE Assessment Guidelines](#)
- [Special Documented Accommodations](#)
- [Resources for Planning and Placement Team/Section 504 webpage](#)
- [Assessment Resources Quick Guide for Planning and Placement/Section 504 Teams](#)



Alternate Assessment Score Reports and Interpretative Guides

- [Guide for CTAA Score Report Interpretation](#)
- [Guide for CTAS Score Report Interpretation](#)
- [CTAA English Language Arts Performance Level Descriptors](#)
- [CTAA Mathematics Performance Level Descriptors](#)
- [CTAA Individual Student Report Performance Literals – Mathematics](#)
- [CTAA Individual Student Report Performance Literals – English Language Arts](#)
- [Parent Overview of Connecticut's Alternate Assessment System \(English\)](#)
- [CAAELP Parent Guide to Individual Student Reports ISR \(English\)](#)



ESSA Resources

- Every Student Succeeds Act. 2015. 20 USC § 1001.
<https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>
- US Department of Education. 2017. Every Student Succeeds Act: Assessments under Title 1, Part A & Title 1, Part B: Summary of Final Regulations.
- Every Student Succeeds Act: Assessments under Title 1, Part A & Title 1, Part B: Summary of Final Regulations (2017):
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaassessmentfactsheet1207.pdf>



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Thank You for Your Participation!