



Utah State
Board of
Education

Special
Education
Services

UTAH ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Updated March 2026

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The criteria for participating in alternate assessments are students who reflect the pervasive nature of a student with complex support needs that have **the most significant cognitive disability** and who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as determined by the IEP team. Utah's alternate assessments are for students with **the most significant cognitive disabilities** that measure the students' academic achievement based on alternate achievement standards, the Essential Elements. All content areas must be considered when determining eligibility for these assessments. Thus, a student who participates in alternate assessments participates in these assessments for all content areas (ELA, Math, and Science).

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

The answer to all the following criteria must be met and the student's current special education eligibility and Individualized Education Program (IEP) must include documentation to support each criterion for the student.

- Student is a student with the most significant cognitive disability that significantly impacts their **intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (typically functioning at least two and a half or more standard deviations below the mean)**; and
- Student requires **intensive, repeated, significantly modified**, and direct individualized instruction that requires **substantial supports to learn, maintain, and generalize skills** in the student's grade and age-appropriate curriculum; and
- Student is learning content linked to the Utah Core Standards through the support of Utah's Alternate Achievement Standards, the Essential Elements; and
- Is determined by the IEP team.

The student is eligible to participate in alternate assessments if *all criteria above* are met.

NOT PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

In addition, evidence for the decision to participate in alternate assessments is **not based** solely on:

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| • A disability category or label | • Educational environment or instructional setting |
| • Poor attendance or extended absences | • Percent of time receiving special education services |
| • Native language, social, cultural or economic difference | • English language acquisition level |
| • Expected poor performance on the general education assessment | • Low reading level/achievement level |

- Anticipated student's disruptive behavior
- Impact of student scores on accountability system
- Administrator's decision
- Anticipated Emotional Duress
- Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology, scribe, extended time...) to participate in assessments

USBE DEFINITION OF STUDENTS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY R277-705-2

(8) "Student with the most significant cognitive disability" or "SWMSCD" is determined by a comprehensive understanding of a whole student, including review of educational considerations and data obtained through the IEP process, including whether a student:

(a) requires intensive, repeated, modified, and direct individualized instruction and requires substantial supports to learn, maintain, and generalize skills in the student's grade and age-appropriate curriculum;

(b) has special education eligibility documentation indicating the disability significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior which means typically functioning at least two and a half or more standard deviations below the mean;

(c) demonstrates cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior in home, school, and community environments, which are significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations;

(d) has a severe and complex cognitive disability, which limits the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards established at grade level, without substantial support, modifications, adaptations, and accommodations;

e) has a course of study that addresses the significant impact in adaptive behavior skills;

(f) may be eligible to participate in alternate assessments; and

(g) has a disability, which increases the need for dependence on others for many, if not all, daily living needs, and is expected to require extensive ongoing support through adulthood.

[Utah Administrative Code R277-705-2\(15\)](#) (amended February 2026)