

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

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The purpose of the *Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment (AKSA)* is to provide key terms and answer questions that parents may have about the Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment to make informed decisions for their child.

## Important Terms to Know

**Accommodation:** A change in materials or procedures that facilitates access during instruction and assessment. Accommodations do not change the construct or intent of what is being taught or measured. Assessment accommodations are intended to allow the student to participate in the assessment and to produce valid results that indicate what a student knows and can do.

**Adaptations:** Changes made specific to the student's individual needs. Changes made to existing materials or instructional delivery to meet the needs of a student. Examples include head pointers, Board maker (Mayer Johnson) symbols, photographs, symbols paired with real objects, real objects, enlarged pictures, textured or raised pictures, high contrast color or coactive signs.

**Adaptive Behavior:** Essential behaviors for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.

**Admissions and Release Committee (ARC):** The team of individuals that makes educational decisions for a child who needs special education. It includes the parent, child (as appropriate), regular education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), a district representative (principal, director of special education, guidance counselor, etc.), evaluators and related service providers. ([Kentucky Parent Guide for Special Education](#), 2019)

**Alternate Achievement Standards:** An alternate achievement standard sets an expectation of performance that differs in complexity from a grade-level achievement standard. In general, alternate achievement standards must be aligned with a state's academic content standards, promote access to the general curriculum and reflect professional judgment of the highest achievement standards possible. [See [34 C.F.R. §200.1\(d\)](#)]

**Alternate Assessment Target:** The target represents limits to a selected Kentucky Academic Standard (KAS). An Alternate Assessment Target may reduce parts of the standard with specific guidance to what an assessment item could represent. ([Kentucky Academic Standards - Alternate KSA 2023](#))

**Alternative High School Diploma:** Provided to students with disabilities who are unable to meet requirements for a regular high school diploma. Recipients of an alternative high school diploma will participate in alternate assessments and complete an alternative course of study. The alternative high school diploma is not equivalent to a regular high school diploma.

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

**Assistive Technology:** Tools and strategies used to assist students in developing and participating in meaningful academics, social relationships and employment activities; it can range from low technology (e.g., unaided communication systems, sign language, etc.) to high technology, such as computers with switch interfaces.

**Attainment Tasks:** Performance events that require students to complete a task, working step by step, as directed by the teacher.

**Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** Low, medium or high technology system that assists the student in expressive language (e.g., making a request, initiating and responding to questions, describing things or events and expressing refusal, speech-generating devices such as text-to-speech communication aids, picture or symbol boards).

**Communicative Competence:** The use of a communication system that allows students to gain and demonstrate knowledge.

**Content Target:** Content standards that are the focus of the assessment. For the Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment (AKSA), the content targets are defined by the Attainment Tasks by grade level in reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing.

**Current Data:** Data that are collected within the most recent 365-day time period. Examples include IEP progress monitoring data, IEP progress reports, classroom-based assessments, classroom observations, work samples, functional behavior assessment data, transition assessments, assistive technology evaluations and attendance records.

**English Learner (EL):** An EL is a student whose native language is a language other than English or a student who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency. An EL's difficulties in speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language may be a barrier to learning in classrooms instructed in English and to performance on assessments presented in English.

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** In December 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the main federal law governing preschool-grade 12 public education. Known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the measure replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and created a long-term policy that gives states additional flexibility and provides more state and local control over the accountability process. ([U.S. Department of Education](#))

**Evidence:** This refers to the specific sources of information being used to identify student characteristics that either meet or do not meet the participation criteria.

**Exceeds Accommodations:** Accommodations, modifications and assistive technology that EXCEED what is allowed on the general assessments for students, as described in the

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

[Inclusion of Special Populations in the State Required Assessment and Accountability Programs](#) and set forth in [703 KAR 5:070](#).

**Extensive Direct Individualized Instruction:** Concentrated instruction designed for and directed toward an individual student. This type of instruction is needed by students with significant cognitive disabilities to acquire knowledge and skills in context. Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to need this extensively to apply knowledge and skills in multiple contexts.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** A federal law enacted in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 and again in 2004. It is designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities by ensuring that everyone receives a free appropriate public education (FAPE), regardless of ability. IDEA not only strives to grant equal access to students with disabilities but also to provide additional special education services and procedural safeguards.

**Individual Education Program (IEP):** Written to meet the unique needs of a child identified with a disability. It is a legally binding agreement that guarantees the services specified in the plan will be provided to the child. ([Kentucky Parent Guide for Special Education](#), 2019)

The [Guidance for IEP Development](#) provides instructions and examples for developing IEPs.

**Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS):** Contain the minimum required standards that all Kentucky students should have the opportunity to learn before graduating from Kentucky high schools. The standards address what is to be learned, but do not address how learning experiences are designed or what resources should be used. The standards help ensure that all students throughout Kentucky are provided with common content and have opportunities to learn at high levels.

**Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines Documentation Form:** The form identifies the requirements a student must meet to be eligible to participate in the alternate assessment. These requirements must be agreed upon by the ARC and revisited at the annual meeting.

**Learning Progression:** A description of how typically developing students may develop and build academic competencies over time. Learning progressions can be useful tools for teachers to use when determining where a student is in the process of learning a specific skill or understanding a concept.

**Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI):** A questionnaire that assists the teacher in understanding the individuality of each student in various areas: expressive communication, receptive communication, hearing, vision, motor, engagement, attendance, reading skills and mathematics skills. The LCI has two primary purposes: 1) to describe the range of the characteristics of learners who participate in alternate assessments and 2) to describe the extent to which patterns of those characteristics emerged within and across the state.

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

**Longitudinal Data:** Data that has been collected and analyzed over time and are older than one year. A dataset is longitudinal if it tracks the same type of information on the same subjects at multiple points in time. Examples of longitudinal data include Social Developmental History, integrated assessment reports, diagnostic assessments, state and district-wide assessment results, adaptive behavior rating scales, progress monitoring data, functional behavior assessment data, transition assessment and technology evaluation.

**Mode of Communication:** The predominant way a student expresses his or her thoughts, such as through words, pictures, objects, tactile cues and augmented communication/assistive technology.

**Modification:** A change in materials or procedures during instruction and assessment that changes the learning expectations of the grade-level content. Modifications during instruction may be appropriate on a temporary basis for scaffolding the student's understanding and skills. Assessment modifications result in invalid measures of a student's knowledge and skills and thus should be avoided.

**No Child Left Behind:** A federal law passed in 2002 meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards. NCLB requires 100% of students (including special education students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds) within a school to reach the same set of state standards in mathematics and reading by the year 2014. NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015.

**Participation Criteria:** These descriptors provide further information about the student characteristics students required to meet the four participation criteria for the alternate assessment.

**Pervasive:** Present across academic content areas and across multiple settings (including school, home and community).

**Specially Designed Instruction (SDI):** Adapting the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the individual needs of the child and to ensure access to the curriculum so the child can meet the educational standards set in place.

**Selected Response Items:** Assessment items that are structured for students to respond by choosing an answer (e.g., multiple choice, true or false).

**Substantial Supports:** Includes support from the teachers and others (e.g., resource teacher, co-teacher, aide) and various material supports within the student's environment. Examples include adapting text for assessments and learning and extensive scaffolding of content to support learning.

**Substantially Adapted Materials:** Substantially adapted materials include various classroom and other materials that have been altered in appearance and content from the materials

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

that peers without disabilities use for instruction or assessment. Examples include significantly shortening the length of passages or using raised dots and hand-over-hand counting when identifying a matching number in mathematics.

**Transition Attainment Record (TAR):** A checklist that evaluates the student’s readiness in reading, mathematics and science.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment (AKSA)?

The AKSA (previously known as the Alternate K-PREP) serves students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These disabilities may require an alternate means of participation in Kentucky’s statewide assessment to demonstrate achievement. The alternative assessment is designed to address the needs of students by allowing greater depth of adaptations, modifications and alternative modes of participation for the state assessment.

More Information:

[Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment webpage](#)

### 2. Who is assessed?

Every student in grades 3 through 12 is assessed on specific standards at various grade levels. There are students with disabilities who participate in the regular Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) without accommodations and some with accommodations. Students who have been identified with a significant cognitive disability and meet the Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines will participate in an alternate assessment called the AKSA.

More Information:

Information about which subjects are tested at each grade level for students participating in the alternate assessment is posted on the [Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment webpage](#).

### 3. Which grade levels are assessed on the AKSA?

The alternate assessment has two major components:

- Attainment Tasks which measure the student’s performance on completing specified tasks/activities. Students will be assessed in:
  - Reading – Grades 3-8 and 10

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

- Mathematics – Grades 3-8 and 10
- Science – Grades 4, 7 and 11
- Social Studies – Grades 5 and 8
- Writing – Grades 5, 8 and 11
- Transition Attainment Record is completed by the ARC to measure student performance on academic skills needed for transition. Students will be assessed in reading (English and reading combined), mathematics and science readiness at grade 11.

#### **4. Who decides if my child will participate in an alternate assessment?**

An ARC makes decisions about the educational program and placement for students with disabilities. The ARC will also determine how students with disabilities participate in state and district assessments. The ARC determines if a student will participate in the state-wide assessment with accommodations, without accommodations or if they need to be assessed through the alternate assessment.

#### **5. How is the decision made by the ARC?**

Using the [Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines Documentation Form](#), the ARC will analyze student information, including on-going progress data specific to the student’s present level of performance. The guidelines contain participation criteria that describe specific learning aspects and characteristics. The ARC must discuss and agree to a “yes” answer and provide required documentation for each criterion from the guidelines to determine if the student is eligible for participation in the alternate assessment. The ARC must have specific data to provide evidence and support answering “yes” to each statement, including, but not limited to an integrated psycho-educational report, adaptive behavior rating scales, curriculum assessments, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring and student work.

#### **6. When does the ARC make the decision?**

The ARC meets at least annually to examine the student’s educational program by reviewing and revising the student’s Individual Education Program (IEP) and determine how the student will participate in the Kentucky statewide assessment. Using the [Kentucky Participation Guidelines Documentation Form](#), the ARC must review and re-determine alternate assessment participation annually.

#### **7. Once an ARC determines a student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment, is the decision final?**

Based upon current data at the time of the ARC, a student may initially be determined to participate in the alternate assessment. If new data emerge or changes occur, an

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

ARC may reconvene and determine that a student is no longer eligible for participation in the alternate assessment. The annual meeting held by the ARC should help the ARC make that determination on a year-to-year basis.

**8. Why is my child working with the same content as children who do not have a disability? If my child could do that, is special education necessary?**

“The ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act] requires the same academic content and achievement standards for all students (except alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities).” ESSA requires that alternate assessments be based on grade-level content standards. ([ESSA: Key Provisions and Implications for Students with Disabilities](#))

**9. Why must my child be assessed on the same grade level content standards as students who do not have an identified disability?**

There are two federal laws that determine how schools will be held accountable for the education of all students in the United States, ESSA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). Both ESSA and IDEA require high expectations for academic learning and access to the general curriculum for every child. This sets the expectation that all students are valuable and can learn at high levels. Recent research findings show that students with significant cognitive disabilities can learn. The state assessment information is used to assist in improving schools and programs along with providing the best educational experience for all students.

More Information:

Instruction on grade-level content standards provides the student with the opportunity to learn concepts that can be used in many situations along with learning more traditional functional (life) skills. The combination of these two opportunities creates a meaningful school experience. For example, as a student is working on the standard that asks the students to analyze data, create a graph and make an appropriate choice using the data or graph, the student could:

- Increase communication and social skills (including switches and augmentative communication boards) while conducting a survey to collect data;
- Increase number sense as he/she enters the data on a graph (e.g., one to one correspondence);
- Increase appropriate and informed decision-making skills when using the data to make a choice using the data or graph (e.g., which one has more); and/or,
- Increase skills that may be used for a job (e.g., entering data on a computer, using a switch to enter data, polling people at a mall).



# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

The students participating in the alternate assessment are allowed to use supports that help them learn and be independent. These supports may include reducing the level of difficulty, providing pictures or objects and using assistive technology.

## **10. Doesn't my child's IEP determine what they learn at school?**

The purpose of an IEP is to ensure that your child with disabilities receives a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). An IEP is a written plan describing the specially designed instruction (SDI), accommodations/modifications and related services needed to address the individual needs of your child. SDI is defined in IDEA as adapting the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child and to ensure access to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. ([34 CFR Section 300.39](#)) The educational standards in Kentucky are the KAS. As daily instruction specific to these content standards occurs within the classroom, the IEP's clearly defined components (e.g., present level of performance, annual goals and objectives/benchmarks, accommodations/modifications) are necessary for ensuring that an appropriate education occurs.

### More Information:

An IEP is not intended to be the student's entire educational program. Instead, it is the support program that students need to access to ensure progress in the general curriculum. The IEP is developed by the ARC as a record of decisions made by its members. The IEP is a plan of action and a commitment of the resources identified within the program. The IEP should determine the necessary special education and related services as well as supports the student requires when learning the general curriculum content.

## **11. Does the alternate assessment limit the help that my child receives?**

The teacher should provide the student with the help needed to learn the required skills in the curriculum. However, that instruction should be shaped over time to help the student move toward a greater level of independence so that during the assessment, the student can work independently to the greatest extent possible.

### More Information:

Assistance with the assessment should be based on the individual student's needs. The assistance provided to the student should in no way direct them to a correct response.

## **12. Is my child allowed to use any modifications on the alternate assessment?**



# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

The alternate assessment allows students to use supports (modifications, adaptations and assistive technology) during instruction and assessment. Providing these supports allows the student to learn content that is age appropriate, interesting and challenging. Modifications are not allowable if the support directly guides students to the correct answer. An example of an allowable support would be to color code, so a student knows to start with the green and end with the red. An example of a support that is not allowable would be to color code the correct answer green and the incorrect answer red. More information on allowable modifications is outlined in the [Inclusion of Special Populations In the State-Required Assessment and Accountability Programs 703 KAR 5:070](#).

### More Information:

The general state assessment also allows students to use supports during instruction and assessment. In order to justify appropriateness of the accommodations for any state mandated tests, the testing accommodations must be used consistently as part of routine instruction and classroom assessment as well as meet all additional requirements established by the [Inclusion of Special Populations In the State-Required Assessment and Accountability Programs 703 KAR 5:070](#).

### **13. How are accommodations for my student on the alternate assessment determined?**

The ARC must determine the accommodations needed based on your individual student's needs. The purpose of accommodations on assessments is to allow your child's score to reflect what he/she has learned from the general curriculum. Accommodations must be related to your child's disability, with evaluation data to support them. They must be documented on the IEP and used as part of the regular instructional routine. Accommodations cannot be used just for testing purposes. The IEP must be written to help your child gain the skills needed to be successful on the general curriculum, therefore accommodations are determined annually. As your child's skills improve, his/her reliance on specific accommodations may be reduced.

For example, a child whose disability requires them to need grade-level material read aloud to them, may over the course of time gain reading skills to the level that will allow the use of a reader to be reduced for some assignments and faded out. Accommodations are not intended to be a replacement for instruction or use of assistive technology. In writing the IEP, the ARC may discuss ways to reduce the use of accommodations over time. The IEP will include a statement explaining any accommodations your child will use on state and district-wide testing.

### More Information:

# Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative Assessment: Important Terms to Know and Questions and Answers

*Updated August 2023*

---

More information on the general conditions for using accommodations on state assessments can be found on the [Alternative Kentucky Summative Assessment](#) webpage.

## **14. Can my child receive a regular high school diploma if they participate in the alternate assessment?**

The ARC must determine if a student’s demonstrated cognitive ability and adaptive behavior prevents completion of the general education course of study (including the minimum graduation requirements) even with program modifications and/or accommodations. The ARC using a variety of data and information such as the Kentucky Participation Guidelines for the Alternate Assessment Documentation Form, psycho-educational integrated report, the Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI), student work, student observations and any other relevant information makes this determination. If this is the case, the ARC must determine the student would not be able to complete the general education course of study to earn a regular high school diploma and would therefore complete an alternate course of study to receive an Alternative High School Diploma as stated in Kentucky regulation [704 KAR 3:305, Section 10](#).

### More Information:

Participating in the alternate assessment does not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma as stated in [IDEA Participation in Assessments \(34 CFR §300.160 \(d\)\(2\)\)](#).

Information on graduation requirements can be found on the [Minimum High School Graduation](#) webpage.

## **15. When will my child work on functional (life) skills listed on the IEP?**

All teachers should look at the functional application of all learning. This is especially true for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Functional skills can be embedded in academic instruction. When an IEP skill cannot be taught within academic instruction, time should be set aside to teach the skill as necessary. Once a student has completed the state alternate assessment required in 12th grade, the student can then concentrate solely on transition into life skills until age 21.

### More Information:

Following the grade level standards that are designed for all students to help ensure that a sequence of skills is taught as the student moves from elementary to middle and on to high school, teachers can individualize the instruction and expectations to

**Parent Guide: Alternate Kentucky Summative  
Assessment: Important Terms to Know and  
Questions and Answers**  
*Updated August 2023*

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meet the needs of the student while following the curriculum. As teachers individualize the instruction and expectations, they can emphasize functional and IEP skills. For example, when an elementary student is learning about measurement of liquids, the student can learn to measure liquids for cooking or doing laundry. When a middle school class is studying fiction and nonfiction, the student can learn to identify nonfiction materials (e.g., cookbooks, newspapers, etc.) and fiction (novels on tape). When high school students are studying chemical reactions, the student can focus on which household chemicals to avoid mixing.

**16. What happens if it is determined that my child needs to stay at a grade more than one year?**

The student must be recorded in that grade again on the school records and participate in the grade level alternate assessment again. [[703 KAR 5:240, Section 8 \(3\)](#)]

More Information:

More information on retaining students with disabilities can be found in the [August 19, 2003 letter from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services \(OSERS\)](#).

**17. Where can I find more information on the Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines?**

More guidance on the [Kentucky Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines Documentation Form](#) can be found in the [Guidance for Admissions and Release Committees \(ARCs\) on Participation Decisions for the Kentucky Alternate Assessment](#) document located on the [Participation Guidance](#) page.