

**Iowa Alternate Assessment  
Master FAQ  
Revised July, 2012**

This guide provides information on Iowa’s Alternate Assessment. A question-and-answer format is used to summarize information. Please contact Emily Thatcher, Alternate Assessment Consultant at [Emily.thatcher@iowa.gov](mailto:Emily.thatcher@iowa.gov) or at 515-281-3500 for additional information regarding the Iowa Alternate Assessment.

**IAA Background/Policy**

Question	Answer
<b>What is an Alternate Assessment?</b>	An alternate assessment is an assessment designed for a small number of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular grade level state assessment (ITBS/ITED) even with appropriate accommodations.
<b>What is the purpose of an Alternate Assessment?</b>	The purpose of the Iowa alternate assessment (IAA) is to assess the educational performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Science</li> </ul> The alternate assessment ensures students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.
<b>Why does Iowa have an Alternate Assessment (IAA)?</b>	<i>No Child Left Behind (NCLB)</i> requires that all students, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, have access to the general education curriculum. For accountability purposes, all students in grades 3-8 and at a high school grade must be assessed on performance against grade level state content standards. In addition, the <i>Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA)</i> also requires students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and participate in the statewide assessment system. Alternate assessment allows students who cannot participate in the general assessment, to be assessed more equitably given their current performance.
<b>What is the ESEA?</b>	<i>The Elementary and Secondary Act, last reauthorized as No Child Left Behind</i> is federal government legislation that requires that all students (including those with disabilities) have access to general education curriculum and be assessed on their performance.
<b>What is IDEA?</b>	The <i>Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)</i> is federal government legislation that requires students with disabilities to participate in the statewide assessment
<b>Who should participate in the IAA?</b>	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team, which includes parents, uses state participation guidelines (found on the Department IAA Website) to determine eligibility for alternate assessment Students in grades 3-8 and 11 participate in the reading and mathematics alternate assessment and students in grades 5, 8, and 11 participate in the science alternate assessment. Students in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, 10, or 12 do not need to be assessed <i>unless</i> the district gives a reading, mathematics, and/or science assessment to all

	students in those particular grades. In that case, rating scales developed for the grade nearest to the student's grade <i>could</i> be administered as an assessment, but there are no performance levels for these grades. Results at Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, 10, or 12, count for Chapter 72 reporting, but results do not need to be sent to the Iowa Department of Education for purposes of Adequate Yearly Progress determination.
<b>What are consequences of participating in the IAA?</b>	The consequences of participating in alternate assessment, beyond access to and participation in the general curriculum, is that some students who historically have received a parallel or a different "functional" curriculum may now have part of their school day devoted to instruction aligned to grade level content that all students in their school receive. All students with disabilities in Iowa graduate with a regular diploma, and alternate assessment participation will not impact the type of diploma your child will receive when your child completes the course of study outlined in their IEP.
<b>When is the IAA administered?</b>	The Iowa Alternate Assessment is an instructionally embedded assessment. It is administered from the start of school to March 31st.
<b>What does 1% of the alternate assessment mean?</b>	NCLB does not limit the percent of students able to take the alternate assessment. The IEP team decides a student's participation. Any student taking the alternate assessment is counted in the participation rate. However, you can only use a maximum of 1% of the IAA proficient scores at the district level toward meeting district adequate yearly progress (AYP). The 1% refers to the percent of students (in all tested grades combined) taking the alternate assessment that may be able to be counted as proficient for AYP purposes. There is no limit at the building level.
<b>What does a district do if they are over the 1% limit?</b>	The Department will contact the district and send them a 1% exemption request form.
<b>When is the IAA administered?</b>	The Iowa Alternate Assessment is an instructionally embedded assessment. It is administered from the start of school to March 31st.
<b>What is the alternate assessment process?</b>	The process consists of evidenced-based rating scales, which focus on student knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science. The process requires teachers to generate classroom-based student evidence. These rating scale items are aligned to the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks.
<b>What are Content Standards and Benchmarks?</b>	Content Standards and Benchmarks define what students should know and be able to do. The Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks describe what students should be doing in grade 3-8 and 11 in reading and mathematics, and grades 5, 8, and 11 in science.
<b>What content areas and grades does the IAA assess?</b>	Reading is assessed at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11. Math is assessed at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11. Science is assessed at grades 5, 8, and 11.
<b>Do my districts standards and benchmarks need to align to the rating scale items?</b>	No. The Department has already aligned the rating scale items with the state's Core Content Standards and Benchmarks (CCSBs) and districts have assured the Department of Education that their standards include the CCSBs
<b>Are functional and access skills on student's IEPs measured in the IAA?</b>	The focus of the alternate assessment is on academics as represented by the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks.

<b>What are cut scores?</b>	Cut scores are used to determine if a student scores “basic,” “proficient or “advanced on the alternate assessment. When you enter your data on the rating scales into our electronic calculator, the calculator will determine a cut score and then indicate if the student is basic, proficient, or advanced. You can use the cut scores as a way to determine before you enter data what the proficiency level of each student might be.														
<b>What are achievement standards?</b>	<p>Achievement standards are the standards in which performance is based and compared. Achievement standards have three components:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="480 485 1511 894"> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 485 821 667"><b>1 – Performance levels</b> label each level of achievement</td> <td data-bbox="824 485 1166 667"><b>2 – Performance Descriptors</b> (for example...)</td> <td data-bbox="1169 485 1511 667"><b>3 – Cut scores</b> separate the different levels of performance (for example...)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 672 821 743">Basic</td> <td data-bbox="824 672 1166 743">Reflect what students know</td> <td data-bbox="1169 672 1511 743">0-50 scores= basic performance</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 747 821 819">Proficient</td> <td data-bbox="824 747 1166 819">Reflect what students know</td> <td data-bbox="1169 747 1511 819">51-100 = proficient performance</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 823 821 894">Advanced</td> <td data-bbox="824 823 1166 894">Reflect what children can apply/generalize</td> <td data-bbox="1169 823 1511 894">101 and higher= advanced performance</td> </tr> </table>			<b>1 – Performance levels</b> label each level of achievement	<b>2 – Performance Descriptors</b> (for example...)	<b>3 – Cut scores</b> separate the different levels of performance (for example...)	Basic	Reflect what students know	0-50 scores= basic performance	Proficient	Reflect what students know	51-100 = proficient performance	Advanced	Reflect what children can apply/generalize	101 and higher= advanced performance
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<b>Why is the IAA based on alternate achievement standards?</b>	<p>Students have the right to be assessed fairly.  The alternate assessment measures student progress on Iowa’s Core Content Standards and Benchmarks at a reduced complexity, and is judged against a different definition of proficiency than the ITBS/ITED.  Student’s participation will most likely be supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assistive technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adaptations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prompting and cueing strategies</li> </ul>														
<b>Can a student participate in the IAA in one content area and participate in the ITBS in another content area?</b>	Yes. Students who can meaningfully participate in any portion of the general assessment should do so.														
<b>Can the IEP be used as the alternate assessment?</b>	<i>No Child Left Behind</i> in Non- Regulatory Guidance to states is quite clear. The IEP cannot be used as an alternate assessment.														
<b>Can a student be exempted from the Iowa Alternate Assessment?</b>	<p>No! Every student is to be tested, even those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (even those with medical conditions – teachers are to teach at least one item in each content area).  Not testing certain students will affect a local school district’s participation and <i>Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)</i> rates. An IEP Team cannot make the decision to opt out students from the Iowa Alternate Assessment (IAA).  Teachers should do their best with medical needs that result in frequent absences or who’s medical needs impact their attention span. Students who are receiving homebound instruction must be assessed also, even, if only a few skills are taught and assessed. Remember, the assessment is a year-long process, so to say, “we need to exclude this child from the testing window” means that the child is being excluded from participating in the general curriculum.</p>														

<b>Is parental permission required for students with disabilities to participate in the IAA process?</b>	Not directly. Parents are members of the IEP team and will be involved in IEP team decisions on how an individual student will participate in accountability assessment programs.
<b>Can parents refuse to have their child included in the alternate assessment?</b>	No. All students must be assessed under federal regulations. Students with IEPs are assessed through either general or alternate assessments as determined by the IEP team. If the local school district has a policy allowing parents to request the district to not test students, this policy should extend to parents of children with disabilities. Parents of enrolled students need to know that if their child does not take the alternate assessment, they are counted as exclusions under federal regulations, which could eventually cause problems for districts in making <u>adequate yearly progress under the <i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</i></u> .
<b>How is Chapter 12 reporting for District Wide Assessment align with State reporting for Alternate Assessment? (Do grades kindergarten, 1, 2, 9, 10, and 12 needs to be assessed by the IAA process?)  (What do I do about district wide assessment for students in grades 3-8 &amp; 11 who are in the alternate assessment for state accountability?)</b>	<p>The State of Iowa’s accountability system requires students to be tested in grades 3-8 &amp; 11 in reading and math and grades 5, 8, &amp; 11 in science. The Iowa Alternate Assessment meets this requirement and is the State of Iowa’s AYP assessment for students with the most significant disabilities.</p> <p>An alternate assessment for state accountability reporting (AYP) is not required at grades K-2, 9, 10, and 12; however, Iowa Chapter 12 requires participation in district wide assessments (Non AYP assessments) for all children, including those with the most significant disabilities.</p> <p>To meet the Non AYP district wide assessment requirement, and to ensure their students participate in an assessment that appropriately measures their skills, teachers may use the nearest grade level AYP Iowa Alternate Assessment as their Non AYP alternate district wide assessment. For example, a teacher of a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student who has alternate assessment checked on Pg. G of the IEP for Non AYP district wide assessment (science), may select 5 items off the Iowa Alternate Assessment 5<sup>th</sup> grade science rating scale, instruct and assess those items throughout the year, and provide parents and their district with evidence of those 5 items.</p>
<b>Can teachers who do not have their Strategist II license assess students in the alternate assessment?</b>	Yes, they can provide instruction to their students in order to fulfill the requirements of the alternate assessment process. Teachers who are working on their Strategist II or need to secure their Strategist II must fulfill all the requirements of the Licensure board of the Educational Examiners at the Department and their local school district.
<b>What does grade mean?</b>	It means the grade the student is currently in.
<b>We do not use grades but group students according to their ages?</b>	You must identify a grade for each student based on the ages of non-disabled students in particular grades.
<b>Should we assess a student who comes to school only 2-3 hours per day?</b>	Yes. Each student should have access to the general education curriculum on a regular basis.
<b>Should an alternate assessment be given to a student who spends all day</b>	Yes. If appropriate, this student should be receiving hospital/homebound instruction. In this case, it would be appropriate for this student to take the alternate assessment.

in a hospital?	
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**IAA Process & Administrative Support**

<b>How do you document participation in the IAA?</b>	<p>Page G on the IEP allows for a complete description of how the student is being assessed. This will assist parents to understand how their child will participate in district-wide assessments. IEP teams are encouraged to use the <i>Criteria for IEP Teams in Determining Student Eligibility for the Iowa Alternate Assessment 1%</i> document in determination for participation in the IAA located on the DE IAA webpage:  <a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a></p>
<b>What are the steps in the IAA process?</b>	<p>The alternate assessment has several steps. Once the IEP team has determined participation, the teacher will do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe student characteristics using a general survey</li> <li>2. Rate students after instruction using rating scales that focus on reading, math, and science. These rating scales are aligned with the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks (material covered in the ITBS / ITED)</li> <li>3. Use evidence gathered as part of the student’s school program to support the ratings</li> <li>4. Review results with building administrators and parents</li> <li>5. Complete a survey about the process and supports needed to better meet the needs of students</li> </ol>
<b>What is a rating scale?</b>	<p>These scales in reading, mathematics, and science are a list of essential skills and knowledge for each grade and content area tested. Over the course of several months, a teacher gathers information that results in a rating of the student’s achievement of these skills and knowledge. These scores are based on alternate achievement standards which NCLB allows states to develop to determine proficiency of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.</p>
<b>What is the role of building administrators in the IAA process?</b>	<p>Throughout the school year, review the alternate assessment rating scales, student performance ratings, and supporting evidence through conversations with teachers  Encourage district instructional technology personnel to work with teachers to access assistive technology on the district server  Ensure teachers understand the process and feel supported  Provide release time for teachers of students in the alternate assessment to attend training and to work with general education content teachers in adapting general education curriculum content for their students.</p>
<b>What happened to the building administrator assurance process?</b>	<p>Prior to 2011-2012, Building Administrators completed the Assurance Process. Review of data on the assurance process suggested that the assurance process rarely identified inappropriate assessments. For 2011-2012, the Assurance process has replaced by the Evidence Audits. A new role for building administrators has been crafted in supporting teachers in delivering aligned instruction of the Iowa Core to the Iowa Alternate Assessment. The Department has identified six ways administrators can provide in supporting teachers through the use of administrator walk through tool. Please view the DE Administrator Support Webinar and</p>

	Administrative Walk-Through tool located on the DE IAA webpage: <a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a>
<b>What are the audit visits?</b>	<p>The Audit replaces the assurance process in the 2011-2012 school year and was added as a result of data review from the last four years.</p> <p>There are Two Fall Audits. One audit is an <i><b>Audit Visit</b></i> the other audit is an <i><b>Evidence Audit</b></i>.</p> <p>The <i><b>Fall Audit visit</b></i> is based on performance on the assessment in 2010-2011. The Fall Audit visit provides the opportunity for the Department to have conversations with teachers who have established effective instructional procedures so that their methods may be shared with others around the state. The Audit visit additionally provides the opportunity to have conversations with IEP teams who may have identified students in the wrong assessment.</p> <p>The <i><b>Evidence Audit</b></i> is based on 90 students selected randomly across the state in November 2011. If a student from your district is selected you will be required to submit evidence that generated the performance score, to the Department. For more detailed information regarding both audit visits, please view the Audit Visit Webinar located on the DE IAA webpage: <a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a></p>
<b>Who inputs IAA rating scale data into the IAA system?</b>	The teacher who is responsible for instruction for the student inputs the data.
<b>Should a copy of the completed rating scales be placed in the student's cumulative folder?</b>	No. Only the rating scale <b>results</b> should be placed in the cumulative folder. Rating scales and evidence can be destroyed in September of each new school year.
<b>What happens to the IAA process when a student moves in or moves out of district?</b>	<p>The sending teacher completes the transfer form on the IAA online system. The receiving teacher starts a new record on the IAA online system. Depending on if the transfer is within district or between two districts in Iowa the expectation for reporting data differs. See the webinar Iowa Alternate Assessment Adding, Deleting, &amp; Transferring Students on the Online System on the DE IAA website for directions within the IAA process.</p> <p><a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a></p>
<b>How do parents review the rating scales?</b>	<p>Parents may review the rating scales by asking a teacher or viewing them on the Iowa Department of Education IAA website -</p> <p><a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a></p>
<b>Do the IAA rating scales need to be given to the parents?</b>	No. However, the teacher should review the completed rating scales with parents or they can be reviewed during the IEP meeting. If the parents want a copy of the rating scales, teachers can print off a copy for them or they can print a copy from the department's IAA webpage.
<b>May parents request a copy of their IAA results?</b>	At the end of the testing period, teachers will provide a report to give to parents that summarizes their child's performance on the alternate assessment for that

	academic year.
<b>How long is the previous year's IAA evidence kept?</b>	You may destroy evidence after September 1st of each new school year.
<b>Is the IEP the curriculum for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?</b>	Students should be exposed to the range of skills representative of the general curriculum including academic, social, and adaptive skills. The IEP represents skills that the IEP team has prioritized for the student, that require on-going monitoring and are evaluated annually. Hence, while the IEP certainly represents educational priorities and supports to achieve those educational priorities for the individual student, it does not represent the entire range of curriculum; nor does it represent the academic standards upon which a curriculum should be based.
<b>How does instruction change for students as a result of participating in the IAA?</b>	Students participating in the alternate assessment receive instruction on grade level content that is reduced in complexity. Students receive access to the general education curriculum, and are allowed to demonstrate their performance on content aligned to grade level standards. IEP teams review participation annually, and it is expected that as students become more proficient on more skills, that students would be considered for exit from the alternate assessment against alternate achievement standards, into the general assessment. Students must participate in the alternate assessment because participation ensures that the general curriculum is taught to students with severe disabilities.
<b>Is it possible to learn both academic and functional skills at the same time?</b>	Currently many children with the most significant cognitive disabilities have IEP goals that focus on learning life skills. NCLB and IDEA recognizes that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can learn both functional and academic skills at the same time. That is, we should not wait to teach a child to read until they have mastered functional skills. Many students with significant cognitive disabilities thrive by learning academic content while they are learning life skills, just as their typical peers do.

### Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

<b>Can a student be exempted from the Iowa Alternate Assessment?</b>	No! Every student is to be tested, even those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (even those with medical conditions – teachers are to teach at least one item in each content area). Not testing certain students will affect a local school district's participation and <i>Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)</i> rates. An IEP Team cannot make the decision to opt out students from the Iowa Alternate Assessment (IAA). Teachers should do their best with medical needs that result in frequent absences or who's medical needs impact their attention span. Students who are receiving homebound instruction must be assessed also, even, if only a few skills are taught and assessed. Remember, the assessment is a year-long process, so to say, "we need to exclude this child from the testing window" means that the child is being excluded from participating in the general curriculum.
<b>Another district in Iowa has tuitioned the student</b>	The teacher who is implementing the IEP in the <i>attending</i> district is responsible for completing the IAA process including rating scale data entry.

<p><b>into our district. Does that district enter the rating scale data? Does that district get the results of the alternate assessment?</b></p>	<p>If the student is a tuition-in student from another school district, the attending district must share the IAA information with the resident district. The resident district has tuitioned the student to the attending district and the resident district still has a responsibility to ensure that a child receives a free and appropriate public education even though the resident district is paying another district to provide the free and appropriate public education described within the IEP. IAA results for tuitioned-in students will be returned to the resident district. <b>When districts have a 28E agreement for service, the student’s performance and participation goes to the sending district, not the attending district.</b></p>
<p><b>A student is open enrolled into our school district. Which district “gets” the student’s score?</b></p>	<p>An open enrolled student counts for participation and performance (if full academic year is met) in the attending district.</p>
<p><b>For accountability purposes, how are home-schooled students, foster care students, out of state placements, residential placements and homebound students treated in the IAA?</b></p>	<p><i>Home school</i> students fall under their own rules and regulations associated with competent private instruction. They are not counted as full time equivalency (FTE) by the local school district and would not be a part of the district’s local accountability system.</p> <p><i>Foster Placement</i> students have been placed by the court system and if they do not attend a public school, their scores would roll up to the state level.</p> <p><i>Out-of-State Placements</i> are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The most likely scenario would be that they were placed by the court system out of state. More than likely these students would not be counted in the local district’s accountability system. If the district was a part of the decision to send a student out of state then that sending district must make sure the student is tested (other state’s test not the IAA) and the scores sent back to the district.</p> <p><i>In-State Private Residential Placements:</i> if a local district was involved in this decision and a 28E agreement was executed, then the score(s) for that student in the residential facility should come back to the sending district. If a parent made a unilateral decision or open enrolled to this facility then the district educating that student would keep the score in that district.</p> <p><i>Home bound</i> students (usually for medical reasons) who are receiving educational services from a district are required to be tested for NCLB. Homebound students take the same assessments as if they were in the building. For homebound students whom instruction and assessment on 15-items may be problematic, the District IAA Coordinator should contact the IDE for guidance. IEP teams must come to consensus to reduce the number of rating scale items for assessment prior to requesting guidance from the IDE.</p> <p><i>Students who attend less than a Full Week of School:</i> For students attending school less than a full week and for whom instruction and assessment on 15-items may be problematic, the District IAA Coordinator should contact the IDE for guidance. IEP teams must come to consensus to reduce the number of rating scale items for assessment prior to requesting guidance from the IDE.</p>
<p><b>Does a child who is home-schooled and eligible for alternate assessment following the rating scale</b></p>	<p>No. Children who are home-schooled do not have test results included in Adequate Yearly Progress calculations, so they do not need a score for alternate assessment.</p> <p>However, IAC 281.31.9(1) on competent private instruction requires baseline data,</p>

<b>format and have a score generated?</b>	standardized test results, and portfolio data to be reported to the school district by June 30th of the school year during which test was taken or information was generated.
<b>Are students in accredited nonpublic schools included in AYP?</b>	Nonpublic school students, even if they are shared time, are not included in AYP decisions.
<b>How many days can a student miss school to not be considered for a full-academic year?</b>	If the student was enrolled on the first day of the testing period the previous year and is still enrolled on the first day of testing for the current school year, full academic year applies. Only if the student was dropped from the enrollment rolls of the school or district is the student considered not continuously enrolled for the full academic year.
<b>How do we count students for AYP decisions if they are open-enrolled (parent decision?)</b>	Open enrolled students count for participation and performance (if full academic year is met) in the attending district
<b>How do we count students for AYP decisions if they are tuitioned in or out of our district?</b>	Tuition in/out students counts for participation and performance (if full academic year is met) in the resident (sending) district. However, participation and performance of tuition-out students count only at the district level of the resident district (not at the building level).
<b>How do we count students who have been court adjudicated for AYP decisions?</b>	If the student attends a school district that is under the jurisdiction of a local school board, that student counts in that district, but at the district level only. If a court adjudicates a student out of your district and your district is no longer responsible for the student's education and is not paying tuition to another district/institution for the student's education, you will not be held accountable for that student.
<b>What constitutes exclusion?</b>	Exclusions may be determined if any of the 15 items on a content area rating scale are indicated as being not taught. Using this option may result in an exclusion in that content area.