

Each year, students enrolled in grades 3-8 and high school who meet the state's criteria for alternate assessments take LEAP Connect for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities, a statewide test to measure their academic progress in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics and science. This test is an alternate assessment to LEAP 2025.

The LEAP Connect alternate assessment is aligned to learning expectations called the Louisiana Connectors. These learning expectations are themselves fully aligned to the Louisiana Student Standards in ELA, mathematics and science. The Louisiana Connectors reinforce the "big ideas" found in the standards and provide developmentally-appropriate pathways for working toward the Louisiana Student Standards while also maintaining high expectations for all students.

This frequently asked questions (FAQ) document reflects the newly revised Bulletin 1530 alternate assessment eligibility criteria. This FAQ can help guide evaluation teams in administering and documenting cognitive and adaptive assessments that provide individualized education program (IEP) teams with the information they need to make an informed decision about alternate assessment participation.

IEP teams should begin this decision-making process with the understanding that all students, including students with disabilities, can achieve and should participate in the regular standards, curricula, and assessments to the maximum extent possible.

**1. *What criteria should an IEP team use to determine if a student is eligible for the alternate assessment?***

The new eligibility criteria, [Bulletin 1530 Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria](#), can be found on the Louisiana Believes website in the students with significant cognitive disabilities [library](#) in the alternate assessment eligibility criteria section.

**2. *What is the timeline for applying the new eligibility criteria; and how soon can we start?***

The revisions to Bulletin 1530 are final and teams must start using the new criteria to conduct and plan for evaluations, reevaluations and IEP meetings.

**3. *What is an assessment of cognitive and/or adaptive functioning?***

*Cognitive development* is characterized by the way a child learns, acquires knowledge and interacts with his or her environment. A cognitive assessment provides information on a student's ability to reason, to think abstractly, and to solve problems. It provides an overall cognitive (sometimes called a global intelligence, full scale intelligence quotient, general intellectual ability, mental processing index, or composite) result. The cognitive assessment helps the evaluation team understand how the student's functioning impacts the way he or she is able to learn. When combined with other information about the student, cognitive assessments help teams develop effective plans or accommodations in the classroom that are tailored to the student's specific needs.

*Adaptive behavior* describes how individuals meet the natural and social demands of their environment. Assessments of adaptive behavior typically measure conceptual (communication, functional academics, self-direction, etc.), social (leisure, etc.) and practical (community use, home living, self-care, etc.) functioning. These assessments help evaluation teams, including parents, understand whether the student is able to function independently and safely in daily life.

**4. How should evaluation teams document cognitive assessment scores?**

BESE [Bulletin 1530](#): *Louisiana's IEP Handbook for Students with Exceptionalities*, Chapter 5, Section §505, defines three eligibility criteria for participation in the alternate assessment. To determine if a student meets the first criterion, IEP teams use a full scale cognitive assessment score from the student's most recent evaluation. This score is reported as standard deviations from the mean. School systems document the cognitive assessment score from the evaluation report in Special Education Reporting (SER) when the evaluation is completed. IEP teams then consult this information during the annual IEP meeting to verify whether the student meets the first criterion for participation in the alternate assessment.

**5. What is the standard deviation and why does it matter?**

If a student is functioning significantly below the mean on an assessment of cognitive and/or adaptive functioning, they may meet the first criterion for participation in the alternate assessment. Cognitive and adaptive assessments are standardized and norm-referenced, typically with a mean (or average) of 100. From here, a standard deviation is calculated. It determines how far the student is above, or below, the average. About two-thirds of students will fall within 1.0 (+/-) standard deviation of the mean (average). The standard deviation results for students who may qualify for the alternate assessment will be significantly below the mean, at least 2.0 (-) standard deviations for students who have completed fifth grade, or 3.0 (-) standard deviations for students who have not completed fifth grade. Around 2 or 3 out of 100 students (< 2.5%) will score 2 standard deviations or more below the mean, and only 1 or 2 out of 1,000 (< 0.1%) will score 3.0 standard deviations or more below the average.

**5.a. How will the IEP team locate the student's cognitive and/or adaptive assessment results to determine if he or she meets the standard deviation criteria?**

School systems are required to add standard deviation information into the SER system for all students who may be eligible for the alternate assessment. SER hosts required evaluation information and IEP forms. The student's cognitive and adaptive assessment results, including the standard deviation, will automatically be entered into the LEAP Connect eligibility form. All IEP teams must use this standard deviation calculation when deciding if the student meets the state's first criterion for alternate assessment participation. IEP teams will have this information available at the exact point when they will verify whether the student meets the criterion for functioning on cognitive and/or adaptive assessments.

**6. What happens if the student has multiple evaluations with a cognitive and/or adaptive assessment?**

When the IEP team determines LEAP Connect eligibility, they should use evaluation results from the most recent evaluation report that included a cognitive and/or adaptive assessment. Evaluation report results used to inform alternate assessment eligibility should be as up-to-date as possible.

**7. Do school systems need to do a reevaluation and administer a cognitive assessment for all students who previously qualified for alternate assessment participation on adaptive scores alone?**

Not every student should be given a cognitive assessment and/or adaptive measure(s). This decision should be made with pupil appraisal staff and school psychologists. The team's decision is based on the reason for referral for a reevaluation and determined on a case-by-case basis. If a school system decides to administer a cognitive or adaptive assessment for purposes of alternate assessment participation, it should always be done as part of the evaluation or reevaluation process. Evaluation decisions and instruments should be chosen in

accordance with best practices, no one instrument should be recommended or required for use with all students.

**8. Does the pupil appraisal team have to conduct a full evaluation every three years in order for the student to be eligible for the alternate assessment?**

Not necessarily. The school system will typically administer a cognitive and adaptive assessment during the initial evaluation. While a reevaluation of services (which may result in a waiver) every three years is mandatory, a new cognitive and/or adaptive assessment is not. The pupil appraisal team may decide that a new assessment is or is not needed to determine if the student continues to be eligible to receive special education and related services for his or her disability. School systems should make this decision based on a review of the student's current functioning.

**9. What if it is impossible to assess a student, because the student does not appear to communicate?**

The assessment process (including mode of communication) should be extensively documented and the decision explained. If an evaluator must deviate from standardized administration of a cognitive measure, a detailed description of testing administration procedures must be documented in the final evaluation report.

**10. How should cognitive assessment scores be documented in the evaluation report and in SER for students when the evaluation team is unable to obtain a single clear score?**

Evaluation teams must report cognitive functioning as a standard deviation from the mean in the evaluation report when an assessment of cognitive functioning is administered. Cognitive functioning scores must be clearly stated in the report, so the score can be entered in SER. SER documentation is required and IEP teams must use a cognitive functioning score when they meet annually to determine eligibility for the alternate assessment.

In the rare instance evaluation teams are unable to obtain a single clear score of cognitive functioning because the student's skills (or skill limitations) were incompatible with the response demands of standardized cognitive assessments (including nonverbal tests), it would be acceptable for the evaluation team to use the eligibility criteria language from criterion one in estimating and documenting commensurate cognitive functioning scores in the evaluation report.

For example, the evaluation team may include in the evaluation report that the student's level of cognitive functioning is commensurate with scores falling three or more standard deviations below the mean. In this case, the documentation entered into SER and used by the IEP team to determine eligibility would be three standard deviations below the mean.

Another example might be the evaluation team documenting in the evaluation report a cognitive score commensurate with scores falling no greater than two standard deviations below the mean. In this case, the documentation entered into SER and used by the IEP team to determine eligibility would be two standard deviations below the mean.

An evaluation team's inability to obtain a single clear cognitive functioning score is most likely to occur in cases when the team suspects the child meets criteria for severe intellectual disability. Again the assessment

process (including mode of communication) should be extensively documented by the evaluation team and the reason for an estimated cognitive functioning score should be explained in the evaluation report. This is particularly important for monitoring or other review.

**11. When does the IEP team determine if the student is eligible for the alternate assessment?**

Starting in third grade, IEP teams must annually determine if a student is eligible to take the LEAP Connect alternate assessment. If a student is eligible to take the alternate assessment this must be documented at least 30 days prior to the alternate assessment administration in the spring of each year.

**12. If a student is eligible under the state's criteria, is he or she required to take the alternate assessment?**

No. Even if a student meets Louisiana's criteria for LEAP Connect, the IEP team may determine that the regular LEAP 2025 statewide assessment, with or without accommodations, is a more appropriate measure of the student's achievement. It is the IEP team's responsibility to determine if LEAP 2025 or the LEAP Connect alternate assessment is the most appropriate measure of the student's ability, based on Louisiana's criteria.

**13. If a student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment, but the team decides the student will not participate in the alternate assessment, does this mean the student does not have to take a statewide assessment?**

Federal law requires that all students participate in statewide assessments. If an eligible student does not participate in the alternate assessment, they must participate in the regular assessment with accommodations as appropriate.

**14. If the school system receives a student from out of state with an IEP that indicates the student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment, does the school system still need to conduct an evaluation?**

The school system needs to ensure they have the necessary information to determine eligibility based on Louisiana alternate assessment participation eligibility requirements found in Bulletin 1530. If the team does not have this information and suspects the student has a significant cognitive disability, then an evaluation may be necessary and the school system should make this determination with their pupil appraisal staff.

**15. How do teams determine if the alternate assessment is appropriate for an English language learner with an IEP whose language proficiency makes it difficult to assess content knowledge and skills?**

An English language learner should be considered for the alternate assessment if the student's cognitive functioning indicates a significant cognitive disability using assessments in the student's home language as appropriate, and the student meets the other participation guidelines for the alternate assessment. Assessments should take into account linguistic and sociocultural factors for valid interpretation of these assessments, alongside the information on goals and instruction in the student's IEP used to determine what may or may not be a student with a significant cognitive disability. If an English language learner with an IEP **does not meet** the criteria for the alternate assessment, he/she should take the general assessment with accommodations as appropriate.

**16. Why is it important to indicate that a student, participating in the alternate assessment, is receiving instruction on content linked to the grade level and his/her performance is being measured against alternate achievement standards (or the Louisiana Connectors Standards)?**

The decision to align a student's academic program with alternate achievement standards limits a student's exposure to the full range of grade-level academic content. This limited or modified exposure may impact academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities.

**17. How will the IEP team know that the student requires extensive modified instruction aligned with LEAP Connectors to acquire, maintain, and generalize skills?**

The LEAP Connect alternate assessment measures student progress towards benchmarks outlined in the Louisiana Connectors. Students who participate in the LEAP Connect alternate assessment should have a disability or multiple disabilities that affects how they access and learn curriculum, resulting in the need for alternate, aligned student standards. Any student who participates in the LEAP Connect alternate assessment must be enrolled in an instructional program aligned with the Louisiana Connector standards. The following questions should help IEP teams determine if the student meets this criterion:

- a. Is the student instructed using Louisiana Connectors for any LEAP Connect alternate assessment they participate in (ELA, mathematics, and/or science)?
- b. Does the student require extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantive supports to achieve measurable gains, across multiple content areas and settings? Can the IEP team confirm that the student's needs are not temporary?
- c. Are the goals and objectives listed in the student's IEP linked to the enrolled grade level Louisiana Connectors?
- d. Do they address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student?
- e. Does the student have IEP goals and objectives that address functional skills and/or social skills development.
- f. Does the student use substantially-adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize and demonstrate skills?

There are additional factors the IEP team may consider. However, IEP teams should be able to answer "yes" to most, if not all, of these questions to meet this criterion.