

PURPOSE

This guide explains participation policies and registration processes for the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS).

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT

Montana's Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS):

MontCAS is a suite of statewide assessments that meets the testing requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, recently reauthorized in 2015 and known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (or ESSA). Specifically, ESSA requires that states test students in the content areas of reading/English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. Montana must also annually assess the English language proficiency of identified English Learners (ELs) and participate in the biennial grade 4 and 8 reading and mathematics assessments under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

ESSA requires testing in specific content areas and grades. ELA and mathematics must be assessed in grades 3–8 and once in high school. In Montana, we assess all students in grades 3–8, and grade 11 in ELA and mathematics. Science must be administered at least once in the elementary (grades 3–5), middle school (grades 6–9), and high school (grades 10–12). In Montana, we assess all students in science at grades 4, 8, and 10. ELs must be assessed annually in grades K–12 or until they reach proficiency.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

The SBAC test is used to determine student progress in grades 3–8 toward Montana's Content Standards in ELA and mathematics. The test is administered online and is adaptive. This test is administered from late March to the end of the school year. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student participation is mandatory for both federal and state compliance. Student performance within Montana's accountability system will use results from this assessment for K–8 schools to calculate academic achievement and growth over time.

Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)

The MSAA is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measures academic content that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards in ELA and mathematics. The MSAA is the alternate version provided in place of the SBAC test and the ACT for students with significant cognitive disabilities. This assessment contains many built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. The assessment is computer based with multiple options for student interaction. This assessment has a five-week test window that starts in late March. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the alternate assessment. Student participation is mandatory for both federal and state compliance. Students eligible for the alternate assessment will be included within Montana's accountability system for K–8 schools under the SBAC achievement categories and for high schools under the ACT achievement category.

Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) and CRT Alternate - Science

The Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT)-Science is aligned to the Montana Content Standards in science (2006). The CRT is a paper-based test and it includes an alternate version for students with significant cognitive disabilities, known as the “CRT-Science Alternate” or CRT-ALT. The CRT-Science is administered from February to March. With the implementation of new science standards in July 2017, a transition to a new science assessment is scheduled for the spring of 2020. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student participation is mandatory for both federal and state compliance. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for K–8 schools to calculate the Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) indicator.

ACT plus Writing

The ACT with Writing assesses the content areas of English, writing, reading, science, and mathematics. This assessment is given to all grade 11 students as the statewide accountability assessment for mathematics and ELA. The test is delivered via paper with ACT allowable accommodations and the option for online testing in 2019. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student participation is mandatory for both federal and state compliance. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for schools with grades 9–12 to calculate academic achievement.

English Language Proficiency Assessment for English Learners (ELs)

The ACCESS for ELLs (or WIDA) is a large-scale English language proficiency assessment aligned to the WIDA English language development standards (2011). Subtests include the domains of listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The ACCESS for ELLs is given annually to monitor EL progress in acquiring academic English. There is an Alternate ACCESS for ELLs for students who are ELs and have significant cognitive disabilities. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for this assessment. Student participation is mandatory for both federal and state compliance. Montana’s accountability system uses results from this assessment for all schools with ten or more ELs to calculate the ESSA EL Progress. ELs take this assessment until they reach proficiency according to Montana’s proficiency criteria: a minimum of a 4.0 on the literacy composite along with a minimum of 5.0 overall.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

NAEP better known as “Nation’s Report Card” is the only national perspective on American education. NAEP is congressionally mandated project overseen by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to monitor knowledge, skill, and performance of the nation’s children and youth over time. NAEP measures and reports on a regular basis what America’s students know and can do in core subjects like reading, mathematics, writing, and science. From 1969 through 2002, participation in NAEP was voluntary. As of the 2003 administration, participation in mathematics and reading at grades 4 and 8 became a requirement in all states and school districts receiving Title I funding. With over a decade of trend in these grades/subjects, the biennial NAEP state-level administration is a vital data collection for

Montana and it helps inform policymakers of what Montana students know and can do in these various subjects/grades.

Table 1, provides an overview of content areas and tests that meet each requirement.

Table 1. MontCAS Assessments by Grades and Subjects

GRADE	SMARTER BALANCED OR NCSC/MSAA	ACT WITH WRITING OR NCSC/MSAA	CRT SCIENCE OR CRT SCIENCE ALT	ACCESS FOR ELLS (ONLY IF IDENTIFIED)	NAEP (ONLY FOR SELECTED SCHOOLS)
REQUIRED SUBJECTS	Math and ELA	Math and ELA	Science	ELP	Math and ELA
K				✓	
1				✓	
2				✓	
3	✓			✓	
4	✓		✓	✓	✓
5	✓			✓	
6	✓			✓	
7	✓			✓	
8	✓		✓	✓	✓
9				✓	
10			✓	✓	
11		✓		✓	
12				✓	✓

Participation Expectations and Special Circumstances

The expectation is that all students participate in statewide assessments, but there are some special unexpected circumstances, such as a major medical event, that might make it impossible for a student to participate. In these rare cases, the district must report non-participation and the reason to the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) using the [MontCAS application](#). It is never allowable to exclude students based on expected performance, difficulty in administering the test, disability, or EL status.

For accountability, school districts must annually assess all students and in instances of special circumstance may not fall below the 95 percent threshold or 95 percent threshold for student subgroups. School districts must also adhere to the 1 percent of the total population student cap for students identified as eligible to participate in the alternate assessment(s). Students who meet participation requirements and who do not test are typically assigned a score of “Novice” and designated as a non-participant for accountability purposes.

Including Students with Disabilities

In addition to the ESSA participation requirements, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 requires that all students with disabilities be included in statewide assessments. This has prompted the creation of a range of test participation options, making it possible for students with even the most significant disabilities to be assessed on a test aligned with general education content standards.

Participation Options for Students with Disabilities

1. Participate in general population assessments without accommodations.
2. Participate in general population assessments with accommodations.
3. Participate in alternate assessments when the [participation criteria](#) are met.

Special Circumstances

English Learner (EL) Students:

- Exempted from ELA portion of the challenging academic content subject assessments if enrolled within a US school for less than 12 months.

Part Time Students:

- Participate if enrolled at least quarter time (180 or more hours).

Digital Academy:

- Participate if enrolled at least quarter time.

Montana Youth Challenge, Job Corps, and students in treatment centers:

- Participate if enrolled at least quarter time in the home district.
- Participate if included in the home school data and reporting.
- ACT: Students that are enrolled quarter time in the home district may arrange to take the ACT at the home district testing site.

Private Accredited School Students:

- May participate in statewide assessments for accreditation purposes, but are not included for accountability.

Home School Students:

- May only participate in assessments if the student is enrolled in the Achievement in Montana (AIM)/Infinite Campus statewide student information system and included into MAEFAIRS for purposes of determining the Average Number Belonging (ANB), but are not included for accountability.

Foreign Exchange Students:

- Participate if the student is enrolled in the Achievement in Montana (AIM)/Infinite Campus statewide student information system and included into MAEFAIRS for purposes of determining the Average Number Belonging (ANB), but are not included for accountability.

REGISTRATION PROCESS

The OPI uses data from AIM/Infinite Campus to identify and register students for statewide assessments.

General Population Assessments (SBAC, ACT, CRT-Science, and NAEP):

Students who are enrolled in the applicable grades are identified in AIM and a registration list is uploaded to online testing systems or securely transferred to test vendors by the OPI.

English Language Proficiency Assessment (ACCESS for ELLs):

Students who are identified in AIM as ELs by the program participation date, will be registered at the end of October. An additional upload will be completed by the OPI the week prior to the test window opening. Districts will be responsible for adding any newly identified students during the test window.

Alternate Assessments (MSAA and CRT-Science Alternate):

Alternate assessments allow students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to participate in statewide assessments. The decision to have a student participate in an alternate assessment is made by the IEP team and is based on Montana's alternate assessment participation criteria. The decision must be documented in the IEP. The OPI uses data from the statewide assessment section of the locked electronic IEP to identify students that need to be registered.