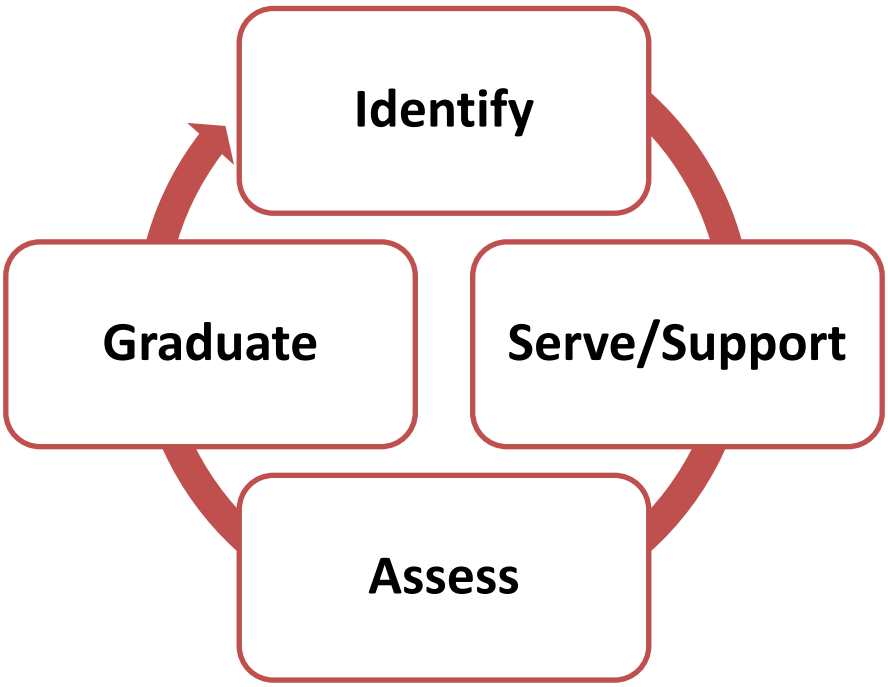
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Alternate Assessment Eligibility Guidelines

Guidance for IEP Teams on Participation Decisions for Alternate Assessments



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to explain the Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) policies and procedures for assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs) using Montana's Alternate Assessments. This document is intended to help guide Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to determine whether participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate based on individualized student needs. Montana's Alternate Assessments were developed to ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to grade-level state standards. Readers are encouraged to supplement this guidance with the MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is responsible for the administration of statewide assessments for all eligible students in Montana in accordance with the laws and regulations defined under the U.S. Department of Education's (Department), Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM), and the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). The Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) includes a suite of statewide assessments that meet the testing requirements of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was most recently reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The ESEA-ESSA requires that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. State and federal law require all students in public schools to participate in the MontCAS statewide assessments in the defined content areas and grades. ARM Chapter 56 requires the same participation expectations for private schools seeking accreditation (see ARM 10.56.101).

In 2017, the Department released a template for the consolidated state plan under ESEA-ESSA. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all ESEA-ESSA requirements for each federal program. The OPI submitted the ESSA State Plan to the Department which was approved in 2018. Montana's ESSA State Plan sets the expectations for school districts regarding the implementation of the testing, accountability, and reporting provisions under ESEA-ESSA.

In accordance with these expectations, each school district submits district plans to the OPI through the Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) (ARM 10.55.601) or other school improvement plans and submits assurances through the E-Grant Application for the OPI to allocate funds. Statewide assessments have various stakeholders, data users, and numerous grants and other programs that rely on student participation in state tests. In some instances, the data from these assessments are used to make school determinations and/or allocate funding, such as Accreditation, Special Education, or Perkins Grants. Federal formula grants, such as Title I, Part A, require that school districts participate in the annual statewide assessment to receive funding.

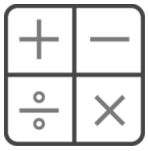
A key purpose of Title I under the ESEA-ESSA is to promote educational excellence and equity for all learners so that by the time they graduate high school, all students master the knowledge and skills that they need in order to be successful in college and/or the workforce. The OPI provides support to school districts using data-driven approaches to identify and address the needs of every student and to assist school districts in providing equitable access to a broad, well-rounded education aimed at developing children into college-, career-, and community-ready young adults. The OPI meets obligations under Title I through its demonstration of the Department's statewide assessment Peer Review (2018) to describe the overall quality and technical soundness of its statewide assessment systems.

To address both the academic and non-academic needs of Montana students, the OPI encourages school districts to adopt a whole-child philosophy to ensure that all students reach their full educational potential (Article X) work is rooted in the OPI's rigorous state content standards and is based on an integrated multi-tiered model that includes supports for social and emotional well-being, health and safety, cultural responsiveness, and family and community factors in addition to the traditional academic and behavioral indicators typically used to identify a child's needs.

CHAPTER 2: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

The Montana Board of Public Education (Board) is responsible for adopting standards of accreditation for Montana schools including challenging academic achievement standards (see §20-2-121 and §20-7-101, MCA). All Montana public and non-public accredited schools are required to follow these standards of accreditation and participate in statewide assessments in the following content areas as shown in **Table 1** (see ARM 10.55.603):

Table 1. General Academic Achievement Standards

Mathematics (Math)	English Language Arts (ELA)	Science	English Language Proficiency (ELP)
ARM: 10.53.501–517	ARM: 10.53.401–413	ARM: 10.53.801–810	ARM: 10.53.301–311
			
General Math Model Curriculum Guide	**General** Reading/Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide	**General** Science Model Curriculum Guide	**General** WIDA Can-Do Descriptors

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), within the Department, awarded a grant to the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) consortium. Montana was a member-state of this consortium and leveraged the grant to help design, develop, and deliver the OPI's Alternate Assessments that assess student proficiency and progress on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AAAS) in mathematics (math), English Language Arts (ELA), science, and English language proficiency (ELP) for students with significant cognitive disabilities (NCSC Brief 1 and ARM 10.53).

The AAAS set expectations of performance that differ in scope and complexity from grade-level achievement standards shown in **Table 2**. In Montana, the AAAS are not adopted separately by the Board because they are the "same but different" standards-based expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. For students who, because of their disability, cannot participate in the state's general assessment, the OPI has constructed and implemented guidelines for participation in the Alternate Assessment, including eligibility criteria (see Appendix A). The OPI meets the requirement of providing Alternate Assessments aligned to the State challenging academic achievement standards through its selection of the statewide assessments shown in **Table 3.**

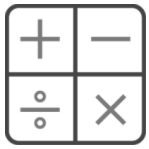
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the OPI "has established goals for the performance of children with disabilities in the State that are consistent, to the maximum extent appropriate, with other goals and standards for children established by the State." IDEA further requires that all students be included in the State's accountability systems. Montana meets the requirements of IDEA and ESEA-ESSA through its Alternate Assessments, of which the results are included in the state accountability system on an annual basis. The passage of IDEA 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. Each student who receives special education services must have a written IEP that documents how the student will participate in statewide assessments (see Appendix A).

The decision to move a special education student to an Alternate Assessment has significant implications for the path that a student will take in their K–12 school career. It means the student is not able to participate in the general education curriculum even when provided with accommodations. A student who participates in an Alternate Assessment requires a modified curriculum. In addition, the IEP team for a student shall determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria for the Alternate Assessment. All students enrolled in accredited schools are expected to take part in statewide assessments in one of three ways:

1. Participate in the general education assessments without accommodations (ARM 10.56.104(1)).
2. Participate in the general education assessments with accommodations (ARM 10.56.104(1)).
3. Participate in Alternate Assessments when the participation criteria are met (see Appendix A and ARM 10.56.104(2)).

Appendix A (Alternate Assessment Criteria Worksheet) provides information and a form to assist the IEP team in determining whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessments. Under ESEA-ESSA, the OPI or school districts may not develop or implement any alternate or modified academic achievement standards that are not alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (see 34 CFR 200.6(c)(6)).

Table 2. Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AAAS)

Math	ELA	Science	ELP
			
Alternate Core Content Connectors	**Alternate** Core Content Connectors	**Alternate** Science Essence Statements	**Alternate** Alternate ACCESS Scores and Reports

CHAPTER 3: REQUIREMENTS

Alternate Assessments are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Alternate Assessments shown in **Table 3** were selected by the OPI to fulfill the purpose as defined in ARM 10.56.101, that is, "the primary purpose of assessment is to serve learning … and provide an integrated approach to meeting both classroom learning needs and school and state level information needs…" The Alternate Assessments are one component of a system of standards, curriculum, and instruction that allows students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to access grade-level content aligned to the AAAS.

The OPI's Alternate Assessments were specifically designed to measure the knowledge and skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities, recognizing that these students would need adapted curricular materials with reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. These students can participate fully in the big ideas and activities of the grade-level curriculum and build skills and knowledge that support their active engagement in the school, community, and with peers. These students are entitled to the same benefits but at a different level of expectation and achievement (see NCSC Brief 1).

The Alternate Assessments ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are able to participate in an assessment that measures what they know and can do **linked** to grade-level state content standards for which the student is enrolled. They measure the grade-level achievement and yield results relative to these standards. **Montana is a "local control" state, meaning school districts adopt policies to administer the testing requirements in accordance with the assessment rules and state accreditation rules**. Districts must follow the OPI's policies and procedures for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training to deliver statewide assessments in a standardized way for the intended purposes under Title I. Valid and reliable test scores measure student growth at all AAAS levels to help ensure that the assessment results can be used to improve student instruction (34 CFR 200.6(c)(1)).

The IEP team will determine whether participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate based on individualized needs. In summary, the AAAS must:

(1) Be aligned with Montana's Content Standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.
(2) Promote access to the general education curriculum consistent with the IDEA.
(3) Reflect professional judgment as to the highest possible standards achievable.
(4) Be designated in the IEP for each student to whom the AAAS apply; and
(5) Be aligned to ensure that a student who meets the AAAS is on track to pursue postsecondary education or employment.

The following AA-AAAS are used to satisfy the state and federal requirements for Alternate Assessments:

Table 3. OPI Alternate Assessment Systems

☒	Test Name	Grades
☐	**Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)** The MSAA is the alternate math and reading/language arts assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 3–8 and 11 for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 3–8 and 11
☐	**Alternate Montana Science Assessment (AMSA)** The AMSA is the alternate science assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 5, 8, and 11 for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 5, 8, 11
☐	**Alternate ACCESS for ELLs (Alt ACCESS)** Alt ACCESS is the alternate English Language Proficiency assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 1–12 for English Learners (EL) with significant cognitive disabilities (SwSCDs).	Grades 1–12

The OPI has implemented policies and procedures for the standardized test administration of these three Alternate Assessments. As part of the test delivery process, the OPI has established and communicates to educators regularly and consistently on the standardized procedures for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and training of these assessments, including administration with or without accommodations.

The OPI has determined that the accommodations provided in these assessments (1) are appropriate and effective for meeting the individual student's need(s) to participate in the assessments, (2) do not alter the construct being assessed, and (3) allow meaningful interpretations of results and comparison of scores for students who need and receive accommodations and students who do not need and do not receive accommodations. These guidelines have been prepared to ensure that general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, teachers of English learners, specialized instructional support personnel, and other appropriate staff receive necessary training to administer assessments, including, as necessary, Alternate Assessments. This further includes knowing how to make use of appropriate accommodations during assessment for all students with disabilities (see 34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students).

Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)
The MSAA is the alternate version provided in place of the MAST Statewide Assessment and the ACT with Writing. The MSAA has a seven-week test administration window that begins in March. The assessment is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards in ELA and Math.

This assessment opportunity is available only to students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 3–8 and 11 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average, the test takes between 5–6 hours for students to complete; however, the test is not designed to be completed in one sitting as tests may be paused and resumed as often as necessary. A break may consist of a few minutes to a few days. To gain an understanding of the MSAA assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 10:00 minute Program Overview Video describes foundational aspects of the MSAA statewide assessment.

The MSAA contains 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, including print options to allow for paper-based administration per the student's IEP. It is an on-demand assessment of approximately 45 test items that assess approximately 10 prioritized content targets per grade level. Each content target is assessed by items that have been carefully and intentionally designed to assess a range of abilities and performances. To the extent practicable, the MSAA has incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles.

Students eligible for the MSAA will be included within Montana's accountability system for K–8 schools under the MAST Assessment achievement categories and for high schools under the ACT achievement category. For more information on this state selected assessment, follow the links for each icon listed below.

Table 4. MSAA Resources

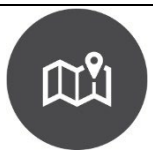
MSAA Assessment Profile	MSAA Consortium Map	MSAA Testing Calendar	MSAA Testing Time Facts

Alternate Montana Science Assessment (AMSA)
The AMSA is the alternate version provided in place of the Montana Science Assessment. The AMSA has a seven-week test administration window that begins in March matching the MSAA published test window. The assessment is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is aligned to Montana's Content Standards in Science.

This assessment opportunity is available to only students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 5, 8 and 11 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average the test takes between 1.5 – 2 hours for students to complete; however, to accommodate for diverse student needs, the test can be paused for a break and resumed as often as necessary. The assessment has about 40 test items. A break in the test can be anywhere from a few minutes to a few days, depending on student needs. To gain an understanding of the AMSA assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 10 minute Program Overview Video describes foundational aspects of statewide assessment.

The AMSA 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. To the extent practicable, the AMSA has incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles. Student performance within Montana's accountability system will use results from the AMSA for K–8 schools to calculate the STEM indicator. For more information on this state selected assessment, follow the links for each icon listed below.

Table 5. AMSA Resources

AMSA Assessment Profile	 AMSA Consortium Map	AMSA Testing Calendar	AMSA Testing Time Facts

Alternate ACCESS for ELLs (Alt ACCESS)
The Alternate ACCESS for ELLs assessment is the alternate version provided in place of ACCESS for ELLs, which is given annually to monitor EL progress in acquiring academic English. This assessment has a 12-week test administration window that starts in December. Note that federal law requires that 100 percent of English Learners participate in the ELP assessment. The Alt ACCESS is aligned to the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment's (WIDA) English language development standards (2012) and includes the four testing domains of listening, speaking, writing, and reading.

This assessment opportunity is available only to identified English learner students with significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 1–12 using the OPI's published guidance for test administration, test accessibility, test security, and test training. On average the test takes between 4 – 4.5 hours for students to complete; however, student needs for scheduling should be accommodated as allowable to provide the ideal testing experience for the student to demonstrate what they know and can do. To gain an understanding of the Alt ACCESS assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, the approximately 10-minute Program Overview Video describes foundational aspects of the statewide assessment.

Alt ACCESS is administered one-on-one and contains both embedded and non-embedded supports that allow students to interact with items and respond in ways most familiar to them to demonstrate their proficiency in academic English. Reading and listening are multiple choice. Students may use eye gaze, gross motor skills,

point, etc. to indicate their choice. Writing and Speaking are constructed response items. Students may use their preferred writing instrument (e.g., pencil, pen, white board, alternative pencil, etc.) to complete writing tasks. To the extent practicable, Alt ACCESS has incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles. Montana's accountability system uses results from the Alt ACCESS for schools with ten or more English Learners to calculate the "ESSA EL Progress" indicator. Students with significant cognitive disabilities testing on Alternate ACCESS for ELLs must reach, at a minimum, a proficiency level of "P2" (see English Learner Guidance for School Districts). The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) Project has established a definition of English Learners with significant cognitive disabilities (Research Brief).

For more information on this state selected assessment, follow the links for each icon listed below.

Table 6. Alt ACCESS for ELLs Resources

WIDA Assessment Profile	WIDA Consortium Map	WIDA Testing Calendar	WIDA Testing Time Facts

CHAPTER 4: IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES (SWSCDS)

In general, all school-aged children with disabilities as defined by Section 504 and IDEA are entitled to free appropriate public education (FAPE) which includes the opportunity to participate in state testing regardless of the educational setting (ARM 10.16.3121). In accordance with 34 C.F.R §200.6, decisions about how to assess students with disabilities must be made by the IEP team under IDEA, the placement team under Section 504, or the individual or team designated by a district to make that decision under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as applicable, based on each student's individual needs (ARM 10.56.104). For more information on special education in Montana, read the Montana Special Education Guidance Document.

Montana school districts work in partnership with the OPI to ensure that all data are collected, maintained, and reported. The AIM Collection Schedule publishes specific data collections that are required by the OPI to meet necessary state and federal program reporting needs. This schedule is published in the fall to share information with schools and the public on these important data collections. Across the MSAA, AMSA, and Alt ACCESS, it is important that registration information within AIM/Infinite Campus be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the Alternate Assessment. IEP teams should consider the testing cycles that will occur during the student's IEP year and include suitable instructional time before test windows. **The Alternate Assessment decisions must be determined by the "Special Education Child Count Date" for the OPI's annual determination of the percentage of Montana students that are eligible to participate in Alternate Assessments 90 days prior to the OPI's** published test windows (see 34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)).

This responsibility for data collection and reporting helps maintain accurate student records to ensure the State, district, school, principals, teachers, and parents have a clear picture of the children we serve. The IEP team should consider the participation criterion, descriptors, and things to consider shown in **Table 7** as they make decisions about the student participation in Alternate Assessments. For more information on these participation criteria, see Appendix A.

Table 7. Four Criterion for Participation

Participation Criteria	Participation Criterion Descriptor
1. The student has a significant cognitive disability.	**Criterion 1:** Review of student records indicates a disability[ies] that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. **Note**: Adaptive behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.
2. Student has an active IEP and receives services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	**Criterion 2**: Test registration information within AIM/Infinite Campus must be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the Alternate Assessments. **Note**: Districts must complete the Special Education Child Count and Assessment Registration Collections to be rostered by the OPI into the test delivery systems. IEP teams will ensure AIM/Infinite Campus is synced to ensure the Alternate Assessment checkbox is marked under the Statewide Assessments Editor for students who meet these participation criteria.
3. Student demonstrates cognitive abilities and adaptive behavior required for substantial adjustments, or modifications, to the general curriculum.	**Criterion 3:** Goals and instructions listed in the IEP for this student are linked to the enrolled grade-level state standards and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student. Goals are written to allow for suitable instructional time prior to test administration. **Note**: The student is learning content linked to (derived from) the state content standards. **Things to Consider:** ● Content aligned to chronological age-appropriate grade-level content standards. ● Varies in depth, breadth, or complexity of learning outcomes. ● Content is prioritized to focus on most essential skills for higher post-secondary outcomes.
4. Student requires direct and extensive instructions to acquire, maintain, generalize and transfer new skills.	**Criterion 4:** The student (a) requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and (b) uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across academic content areas [and multiple settings]. **Note**: The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade-and-age-appropriate curriculum. **Things to Consider:** ● Specific research-based strategies for this population. ● Student has difficulty maintaining learning over time. ● Difficulty generalizing to other settings. ● Daily living skills incorporated into instruction rather than having them exist as a supplement to instruction.

IEP Team Considerations
IEP teams must consider a student's individual needs and characteristics when determining whether a student with a disability should participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations, or in an Alternate Assessment. As required under IDEA, IEP teams need to ensure that parents/guardians are clearly informed as part of the process for developing the IEP that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on alternate standards and that participation in Alternate Assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma (34 CFR 200.6(d)(2), 34 CFR 200.6(d)(3), and 34 CFR 200.1(d)).

These guidelines outline the steps the IEP team should take in determining whether Alternate Assessments are appropriate for a student. These include:

a. reviewing student records and important information across multiple school years and settings (e.g., school, home, community), and
b. determining whether the student meets all of the criteria for participating in Alternate Assessments, as outlined in Appendix A.

Parent/Guardian Notification
Parents/guardians are members of the IEP team and need to remain engaged in the assessment process beyond determination of student eligibility for the Alternate Assessments. Thus, they need to receive accurate information about these assessments. The OPI publishes resources for families under the Parent Corner Site and educators can use the NCSC Resource Library to make this information available to parents/guardians (and all IEP team members) well before the assessment participation decisions are made for the current school year.

Participation Tools
IEP teams determine on a case-by-case basis which students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will be assessed based on AAAS. The IEP team uses the OPI's definition of "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" within the evaluation process (34 CFR 200.6(d)). **A student is identified as having the most significant cognitive disabilities because the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the challenging State academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled** (34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(iii)).

There are tools that may be helpful to IEP teams as they collect and review evidence before making a decision about whether a student meets all of the criteria. The participation forms and decision flowchart are designed to assist teams in collecting and evaluating evidence to determine whether it is appropriate for an individual student to participate in the Alternate Assessments.

> Appendix A. Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria Worksheet. This form is used by the IEP team to document the conversations, evidence, and decisions when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments.
>
> Appendix B. Decision Flowchart for Participation. This guides the sequence of decisions to be made by IEP teams when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments.

English Learners with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities
The Alt ACCESS is a large-scale assessment of English language proficiency intended for English learners (ELs) with the most significant cognitive disabilities. **These students are individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their IEP, and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language**. In addition to the participation criteria (Appendix A), the student must have an EL designation. The policies and procedures for identification of ELs is published in the English Learner Guidance for School Districts.

Non-Examples for Participation Decisions
In addition to the criteria for determining participation, there are other issues that may affect a student's learning experience and their ability to learn which are not appropriate to consider during the decision-making process for Alternate Assessments.

Here are few things IEP teams can consider in the identification of students eligible to participate in the Alternate Assessments:

1. The identification of a student as having a particular disability as defined in the IDEA or as an English learner does not determine whether a student is a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities 34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(i).

2. A student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is not identified on the basis of the student's previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general state or districtwide assessments (34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(ii)).

The following should NOT be considered in the eligibility determination process:

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic achievement and other services received
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education services
8. EL status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of test scores on accountability system
12. Administrator decision
13. Anticipated emotional duress
14. Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative communication to participate in assessment process)

Note: Students cannot be exempted from state testing through an IEP, 504 Plan, and/or an EL designation.

Participation Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How is Student Eligibility to Test Determined?

A: Montana's procedures for determining which students are eligible to test uses the current fiscal year school records that begin on July 1 and end on June 30 of each year (see §20-1-301, MCA). The OPI expects all students enrolled in accredited schools with **"primary"** educational service type records in the State Student Information System (i.e., Achievement in Montana (AIM)/Infinite Campus) and with the **"Alternate"** designation selected within the IEP under the statewide assessments tab of AIM to test.

Q: Who decides whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessment?

A: After consideration of all the evidence as it satisfies each of the qualifying criteria [Appendix A], the IEP team makes the determination of how a student will participate in statewide assessments. The IEP team must follow the Alternate Assessment guidelines. No one member of the IEP team makes this decision. Parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators make the decision based on evidence and adherence to the guidelines. Eligibility determination is part of the annual IEP and must be considered every year.

Q: How do we know that a student has a "significant cognitive disability"?

A: The OPI does not define a "significant cognitive disability" in terms of a "cut off" IQ score. Most students with significant cognitive disabilities have intellectual disabilities but not all. Not all students with these disabilities are considered to have a "significant cognitive disability." A significant cognitive disability will be pervasive, affecting student learning across content areas and in social and community settings. Verifiable evidence will demonstrate the impact of the significant cognitive disability in all aspects of the student's life [Appendix A]. Determinations for student participation in statewide assessments must be data-centered and made individually for each student by the IEP team. Alternate Assessments are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For more information see the Glossary of Terms.

Q: How do I know if the Alternate Assessment content is appropriate for an EL with an IEP whose language proficiency makes it difficult to assess content knowledge and skills?

A: EL students should be considered for the Alternate Assessment if (a) their intellectual functioning indicates a significant cognitive disability using assessments in their home language as appropriate, and (b) they meet the criteria above in **Table 7**. Assessments of adaptive behavior and communication should consider linguistic and sociocultural factors for valid interpretation of the results 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 significant cognitive disability. **If an EL with an IEP does not meet the criteria for the Alternate Assessment, then they should take the general assessment with language support and accommodations as appropriate**.

Q: If a student has been tested in the past on an Alternate Assessment, but the current IEP team determines that the student does not meet the participation guidelines, can the student be assigned to the general assessment?
A: Yes. The IEP team must ensure that the student has received appropriate instruction on the state grade level standards throughout the year in preparation for transition to the general assessment; therefore, these assessment discussions should occur early in the school year.

Q: Is it possible that a decision to participate in an AA-AAS could change as a student gets older?
A: Participating in Alternate Assessments requires that the student has a significant cognitive impairment and interacts with content that has been significantly modified from that which is provided to the student's typically developing peers. Even though students with significant cognitive disabilities often are identified early, prior to starting school, they may be able to participate in the general assessment during their elementary grades. IEP teams should be especially cautious about assigning students with significant cognitive disabilities to an Alternate Assessment in their early school years. When the level of support needed for the student to participate in the depth and breadth of the state standards and the general assessment increases, the team may determine that participation in the Alternate Assessments is appropriate. Students with significant cognitive disabilities are likely to continue to need supports to live as independently as possible throughout their adult lives after high school. Students who did not need early intervention services, or who are unlikely to need substantial daily supports in their adult lives, probably do not have a significant cognitive disability and would not be appropriately assessed with the Alternate Assessment.

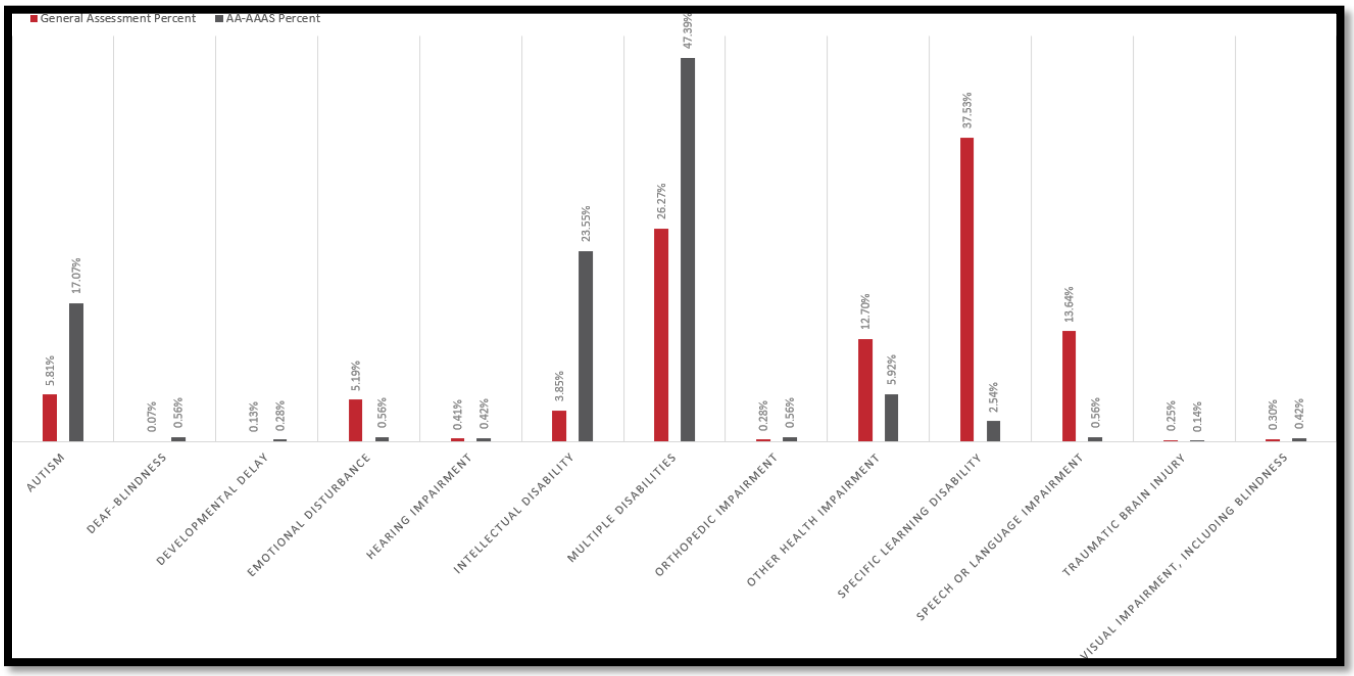
Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: Contact the OPI Assessment Help Desk at 1-844-867-2569 or email at opiassessmenthelpdesk@mt.gov.

Learner Characteristic Inventory
The OPI's Learner Characteristic Inventory (or LCI Survey) is collected in the MSAA Assessment but is used on behalf of all state Alternate Assessments. This survey provides the OPI and school districts with a general picture of the characteristics for most SwSCDs in the state of Montana and a benchmark for judging whether it is possible that students are participating in the Alternate Assessment who do not have significant cognitive disabilities. For a detailed look at the MSAA Consortium LCI trends, read the "MSAA LCI Data Analysis" report.

The Montana data from the LCI survey is valuable to further explore and understand the characteristics of students participating in the Alternate Assessment in certain districts, schools, or even in grades. The state LCI data were presented during the annual statewide training and shared on the State 1.0 Percent Cap Guidance and Monitoring Web Site. In the LCI survey, there are sixteen questions presented to the educator. As part of the OPI's data analysis and monitoring procedures, connections to the LCI responses and Early Stopping Rule are examined. In instances where these data disagree, the OPI's Student Support Services Division provides technical assistance and training.

About 13% of the student population in the United States are classified as students with disabilities where 13 disability categories are defined by IDEA [34 CFR 300.8(a)]. **Figure 1** below represents the distribution of children in Montana who are served under IDEA.

Figure 1. Primary Disability Categories of Montana Students with Disabilities Who Participate in Statewide Assessments - ELA and Math



CHAPTER 5: SERVING ALL STUDENTS

Schools are obligated to ensure equal access to educational services and programs including inclusion in a safe environment free from discrimination. Every child has the right to an education and must be afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers (§20-9-309, MCA). The MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments are designed to ensure student inclusion to the fullest extent possible and to provide clear and consistent information on the program-specific test registration processes. It is required that students with significant cognitive disabilities are provided the opportunity to participate in the statewide assessments, that they receive the same benefits of participation that are afforded to students without disabilities, and that they are not denied these rights (see 34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students).

Schools must take affirmative steps to ensure all students can meaningfully participate in the provided educational programs and services; therefore, Montana school districts and the OPI must work in partnership to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to participate in statewide assessments. This joint responsibility is important to ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. It is never allowable to exclude students based on expected performance, difficulty in administering the test, disability, or English Learner status. The OPI has prepared these guidelines to fully ensure inclusion within statewide assessments, including participation within the Alternate Assessments.

The Alternate Assessments serve students, families, educators, and school leaders by providing individual student reports to help these stakeholders address specific academic needs of students regarding achievement on the AAAS. Achievement information from these assessments indicates student growth at all alternate academic achievement levels to help ensure that the assessment results can be used to improve student instruction (see 34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students). The OPI provides for the production and delivery of individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports after each administration of its Alternate Assessments in partnership with its test delivery contractors. Further, the OPI follows an annual process and timeline for delivering individual student reports to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as practicable after each test administration (Roles and Responsibilities for Distributing Score Reports).

The MSAA Parent Brochure is a brochure designed for families with students with significant disabilities to support their child at home during remote learning situations, and to provide insight into resources to support the student in instruction and assessment.

The Montana Science Development Site has been prepared to share information with educators on the development of the state science assessments including the AMSA. It includes detailed information on what the tests are like, how to prepare students for the assessments, and why the OPI has implemented new science assessments.

The ALTELLA project provides numerous reports and resources for families and teachers of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to help identify and serve diverse student needs. The ALTELLA project has researched instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students. The "Characteristics of English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities" report presents findings from information gathered from the Individual Characteristics Questionnaire.

Formative Resources

The MSAA consortium has provided instructional supports and a practice site on the NCSC Wiki site and a recorded webinar on instructional supports and resources is made at the annual OPI data and assessment conference. This information should be shared with teachers. A release of sample items accompanied by Teacher Guides on the MSAA Website is available to support students, families, and educators. In addition to using the sample items to practice and become familiar with the testing platform, teachers can use the sample items as a formative assessment tool. The Teacher Guides allow educators to understand what students may be able to know and do based on the sample items and how teachers can respond to this information through instruction. Sample MSAA Items can be accessed on the MSAA Website without logging in. It is recommended that teachers view the sample items throughout the year as they plan for instruction and try out the MSAA Test Features with their students prior to the test window opening. In addition, two best practice videos that capture writing prompt administration are posted with the sample items.

The AMSA asks students to use the scientific knowledge from the three dimensions (core ideas, crosscutting concepts, and scientific practices) to make sense out of real-world phenomena. Families and students can see what the science expectations are and they can become familiar with the item types, test format, and functionality of the online system by using the Practice Test. **[Note:** Practice tests **are not adaptive and the difficulty of the items may be higher than what students will see on the actual test.]**

The Alt ACCESS from WIDA also provides Alternate ACCESS for ELLs sample items to help teachers understand how students will be assessed and to help students gain comfort and familiarity with the assessment. There are sample items for all four language domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The ALTELLA project has also published resources for considerations for educators serving English Learners with significant cognitive disabilities (Research Brief). For more information on the ALTELLA project, visit the ALTELLA Resource Page.

Accessibility Features and Accommodations

The OPI's Alternate Assessments provide for appropriate accommodations, such as interoperability with and the ability to use assistive technology devices consistent with nationally recognized accessibility standards so that students with disabilities are able to participate in academic instruction and assessments consistent with their instructional experience (34 CFR 200.6(b)(1)). **Note: Each statewide assessment comes with its own specific set of accessibility features (or test settings).**

The OPI defines these options as test settings. The selection of test settings (i.e., universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations) and participation within Alternate Assessments is a systematic, data-based process made by educators familiar with individual student needs. Though these assessments differ in the terminology that is used to describe the supports for accessibility, they all focus on Universal Design for Learning principles. These assessments embed accessibility resources, policies, and features important for educators to know and appropriately utilize for each student.

There are many ways to provide support and increase accessibility for students. The OPI's Alternate Assessments have two designations of test support. First, there are accessibility features available to any student who benefits from the support. The second test support designations are accommodations, which are outlined in the student's IEP and must be made available on the statewide assessments.

When selecting which accessibility features and accommodations are most effective, keep the following in mind:

- Accessibility features and accommodations **may not restrict** a student's independence or communication.
- Accessibility features and accommodations **must be based** on what the student uses during daily instruction.
- Students and Test Administrators should become familiar with the assessment features selected and should practice using them with the sample items prior to administration of the test.

In this section, there is information to support IEP teams in AIM/Infinite Campus with determining the selection of the appropriate of statewide assessment including which accommodations are most appropriate.

AIM IEP Statewide Editor

The IEP Statewide Editor has an editor to provide additional support for IEP teams in implementing an individualized, needs-based approach to selecting accommodations and supports for statewide assessments. The changes help IEP teams to know which accessibility supports are allowable for different assessments and content areas. The editor facilitates communication between case managers and System Test Coordinators by providing a tool that documents the specific, approved accommodations and supports that are needed for each assessment and content area. The IEP Statewide Assessment Editor collects information from the IEP to support meaningful participation in assessments.

The hierarchy of the cascade includes six components, that is, the (1) participation decision (2) assessment, (3) content area, (4) reason for accessibility support, (5) the supports and accommodations that meet the reasons, and (6) a notes section for documentation of accessibility support specifics or documentation of non-routine accommodations. **Figure 2** shows the information contained in each step of the editor cascade.

Figure 2. OPI IEP Needs-Based Editor Approach

Needs-Based Selection of Test Settings

IEP teams use the Appendix A form to indicate how the child will participate in statewide assessments. If the IEP team has a student who is eligible to take the Alternate Assessments, they should mark the Alternate Assessment checkbox under the Statewide Assessments Editor in the AIM/Infinite Campus student information system. For students who are both eligible to take the Alternate Assessments and are designated as English learners (EL), districts must also enroll them in the EL program in AIM. For more information on the decision-making process for the needs-based approach, explore the Needs-Based AIM IEP Statewide Assessment Editor. Parents/guardians must be knowledgeable about the needs and accommodations planned for their child to ensure parents/guardians are aware of the conditions under which their child will participate in the assessment.

Training Requirements

The OPI requires Test Administrators (or TAs) to receive training on test security and test administration in advance of testing to maintain the validity and reliability of the statewide assessments. Since 2013, all statewide assessments must be administered to students by Montana licensed professionals who have been trained, are familiar with standardized testing procedures, and are employed by the School System (MontCAS Test Security Manual). In addition to these requirements, the OPI requires all Test Administrators to complete all required trainings and review all manuals specific to the assessment the proctor will be administering.

Test Administrators must become familiar with the administration steps ahead of testing day, so they are comfortable with the process and flow of the test. The manuals for the Alternate Assessments can be found on the test delivery portals linked in Chapter 3. **The System Test Coordinator can use the OPI's** test administration, test accessibility, test security, data use**, and** test training **plans for the school district to identify critical partners and to build an assessment team to deploy the annual Alternate Assessments in a standardized and secure fashion**. The research shows that all students do better with assessment when assessing under ideal conditions and in familiar learning environments. This extends to ensuring Test Administrators are familiar to the students and experienced in student educational plans such as IEPs to assist in setting up individual student supports and accommodations.

All educators, parents and teams making decision about how students will participate in state assessment must be aware of the testing plan for the student[s]. **The OPI encourages the testing process to match as closely as possible to the real classroom experience/setting where the student is familiar with the test supports and accommodations and has practiced these for at least three months before the assessment.** Supports and accommodations should be similar in classroom instruction and other assessments that the student participates in throughout the school year. The assessment experiences should reflect the learning experience, and the testing location should be free from distractions and follow the OPI's policies and procedures for test security and administration.

For the MSAA, Test Coordinators and Test Administrators must complete the annual training requirements within the MSAA System Portal. Test Coordinators are responsible for completing the MSAA Training Modules housed in the portal and made available three weeks prior (Updated for FY25 Administration) to the opening of the testing window. If a Test Coordinator will also be administering the MSAA Alternate Assessment, they are also required to complete the Test Administrator training modules and pass the final quiz. Test Administrators are responsible for completing all modules as well as passing a final quiz with 80% accuracy before access to the test and testing materials will be available. The training modules are broken down into short modules based on test administration topics. The average time to complete the six training modules is two hours. The OPI Assessment Unit can provide a professional development hours certificate for participation in Alternate Assessment trainings. **System Test Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed the training course.**

For the AMSA, Test Administrators must complete the annual training requirements within the Montana Testing Portal. Test Administrators (and any other individuals who will be administering the AMSA) must complete the Alternate Test Administrator training course. This online course must be completed annually to deliver the statewide assessment. **System Test Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed the training course and test security requirements**.

For Alt ACCESS, all Test Administrators must complete the appropriate test administration and certification course[s] in the WIDA Secure Portal once every two years. System Test Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that Test Administrators have completed the annual required trainings and certifications for the screening tests that they will administer, including training courses for scoring student responses. The training course takes approximately one hour to complete. The WIDA Secure Portal houses all training courses and user guides for WIDA AMS. WIDA also provides a screening and placement guide and an ACCESS for ELLs checklist to help districts plan their testing activities. System Test Coordinators are also responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed test security requirements.

An important reminder for the timing and scheduling of Alternate Assessments — persons charged with scheduling and planning for the Alternate Assessment should consider the varying degrees of stamina and levels of ability to stay on task for each child. Each child is unique, and an individualized approach should be taken to prepare a testing plan that is consistent for the student with their classroom instructions so they can fully

demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This may include pausing the test to take a break at any time or only presenting a few items at a time during a test session. Alternate Assessments are not timed and can be paused for a variety of reasons, including frustration, lack of engagement, refusal to participate, or sickness. Test Administrators may pause and resume the administration of the test as often as necessary during the entire test administration window. A break may consist of a few minutes to a few days, depending on the student's needs.

Serving Student Needs Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do students with disabilities participate in statewide assessments?
A: All students, including students with disabilities, are required by state and federal law to take part in the statewide assessments with or without accommodations. Generally, if a student can receive instruction, then they are also able to participate in statewide assessments.

Q: Why is it important to indicate that a student participating in Alternate Assessments is receiving instruction on content linked to statewide standards, and his/her performance is measured against Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
A: The purpose of the OPI's Alternate Assessments is to provide an opportunity for students to show what they know and can do in relation to grade-level standards, as required under ESEA-ESSA. These students can participate fully in the big ideas and activities of the grade-level curriculum and build skills and knowledge that support their active engagement in the school, community, and with peers. These students are entitled to the same benefits but at a different level of expectation and achievement. This limited or modified exposure to the grade-level standards may have significant impact on academic outcomes and post-secondary opportunities.

Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: Contact the OPI Assessment Help Desk at 1-844-867-2569 or email at opiassessmenthelpdesk@mt.gov.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSING SWSCDS

The OPI administers the MSAA, AMSA, and the Alternate ACCESS as comprehensive assessment systems designed to promote higher academic outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities in preparation for a broader array of post-secondary outcomes. The Alternate Assessments are designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is linked to (derived from) the Board-adopted state content standards. These assessments contain many built-in supports that allow students to take the test using materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. For more information on the math and ELA Alternate Assessment, visit the MSAA States Website, and for more information on the science Alternate Assessment, visit the Montana Science Development Website. Information on the Alternate ACCESS can be found on the Advancing ALTELLA Website.

All statewide assessments must be administered by Montana licensed educators who have completed the required training and certification requirements. Test Administrators must be familiar with standardized testing procedures, adhere to the state standardized procedures for test administration (ARM 10.56.101), and must be employed by the school system. Best practice is to also have the same special education teacher who works with the student administer the test(s), which are administered in a one-to-one format using a script. The test administration training and best practice videos will prepare Test Administrators to provide a standardized administration of the test that meets the needs of this student population. For more information on the test administration certification requirements, read the MontCAS Test Security Manual.

Early Stopping Rule

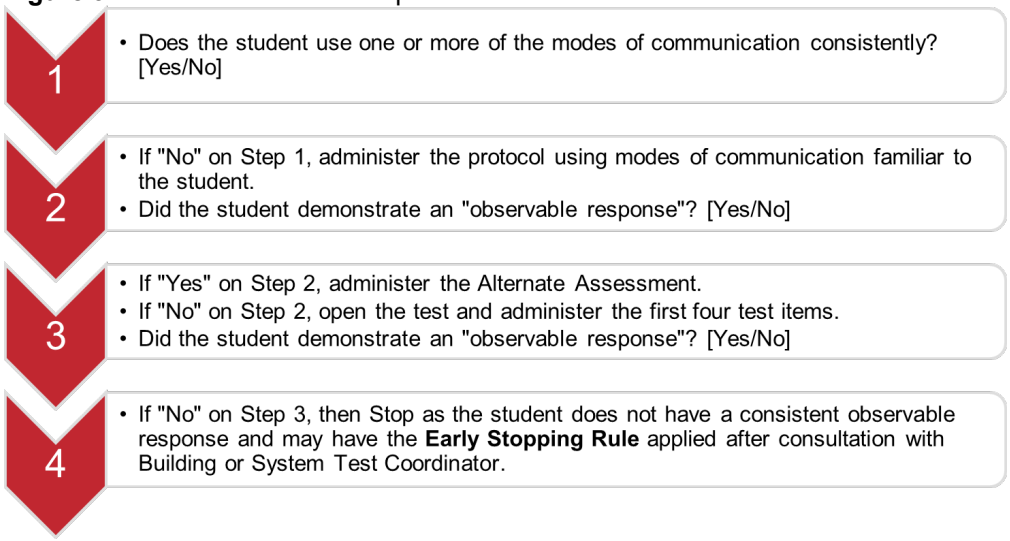
The purpose of the Student Response Protocols for the MSAA and the AMSA are to determine if the student demonstrates an observable response mode. This protocol ensures that the student can meaningfully participate in statewide assessments and respond to test items. In this protocol, the student is asked to demonstrate their preferred mode(s) of communication. A student may use as many, or as few, communication modes as they are comfortable with and use on a daily basis in instruction. Student answers to these protocols are not scored and these items are NOT practice test items. If the student already has a consistent mode of communication that is readily understood by the educator, then the student would not need to have this protocol administered.

In order for students to meaningfully participate in the Alternate Assessments, they must be able to demonstrate communicative competence through an observable response. An observable response mode is a predictable and consistent behavior or movement that is understood by a communication partner as intentional communication. For more guidance on these modalities, read the MSAA and AMSA Test Administration Manuals. If a student's responses to test items are not clearly observable or understood by the Test Administrator or scribe, the testing

experience may need to be ended early. This process is called the Early Stopping Rule (ESR). In order to end the test for a student the ESR procedures must be followed. Test Administrators must apply the protocol more than one time during the testing window before the ESR can be reported to the OPI. **Test Administrators should consider changing the time of day, day of week, or location of testing when administering protocol to ensure these factors have not influenced the outcome in any unforeseen way.** **Figure 3** illustrates an abbreviated version of the student response protocol. Consult the Test Administration Manuals for the MSAA and AMSA to follow the exact procedures. **Here are a few reminders on applying the ESR:**

- The lack of an observable response mode is the only reason the ESR can be applied.
- The ESR cannot be applied based on a student's behavior, stamina, knowledge of the content, frustration level, or refusal to participate in the test.
- The ESR cannot be applied if the student responds to one of the first four items, if any other items are administered, or if the student provides a response in the other content area.
- The ESR cannot be applied if the test status for any content area is "not started."

Figure 3. Montana's Student Response Protocol



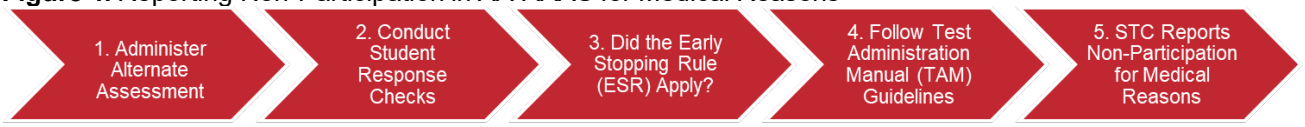
Non-Participation Reporting

As defined in Chapter 3, all students must participate in statewide assessments either with or without accommodations, or when the participation criteria is met for Alternate Assessments (ARM 10.56.104(1)). There are rare and unique situations in which a student is unable to participate in statewide assessments due to a documented, significant, and incapacitating condition, or a medical emergency that extends across the entire (or remaining) test window. If the student can participate in learning activities and education, either in their school, home, or outplacement facility, then the student is able to participate in statewide assessments. To apply for a medical exemption as shown in **Figure 4**, school districts must gather documentation that the student meets two criteria:

1. The student's situation is so severe that the child cannot participate in any learning or educational activities in any setting (e.g., home, school, or outplacement facility); and
2. The student cannot participate in any tests, even with adjustments (e.g., accommodations or supports) that could allow them to participate.

Each reason for non-participation (due to medical reasons) is handled by the OPI on a case-by-case basis. The OPI reserves the right to handle these non-participation reports on an individualized basis and will use the reported reason to determine whether or not the situation reported qualifies for medical exemption. Anything not considered a medical exemption will be reported as non-participation for both state and federal accountability purposes. For more information on the OPI's Medical Exemption Policy, read the MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments.

Figure 4. Reporting Non-Participation in AA-AAAS for Medical Reasons



Non-Participation Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What if it is impossible to assess a student because the student does not appear to communicate?
All attempts should be made to find a means of communication with the student as soon as he or she is enrolled. If various approaches and technologies do not appear to demonstrate a means of communication, then consider that all behavior that the student exhibits is a form of communication and use this as the starting point. A critical element in assessing all students is a focus on communicative competency as the base for student access to state standards. Best practice would indicate that students entering Kindergarten should have a communication system that allows them to demonstrate an understanding of academic concepts prior to entering the third grade. In the case of the MSAA, the NCSC Wiki contains a Communications Toolkit specifically designed to address development of communicative competence. A student with an observable response is expected to participate in an Alternate Assessment. Test Administrators will refer to the training modules and Test Administration Manual for instructions on administering the assessment to a student who has no observable communication in response to test items.

Q: Who can we ask if we have questions about this important decision?
A: Contact the OPI Assessment Help Desk at 1-844-867-2569 or email at opiassessmenthelpdesk@mt.gov.

CHAPTER 7: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS AND GRADUATION

Proficiency on statewide assessments must ensure students who are "at or above proficient" are on track to pursue postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment, consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (see 34 CFR 200.2(b)(3)(ii)(B)(2)). The OPI and school districts may not preclude a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes an Alternate Assessment based on AAAS from attempting to complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma (ESEA-ESSA Section 1111(b)(2)(D)(vii)). Each child's IEP must include a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to:

1. meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and
2. meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability.

CHAPTER 8: BUILDING A STATE ONE PERCENT DATA ANALYSIS AND USE PLAN

Students eligible to participate in Alternate Assessments make up approximately 1.0 percent of Montana's total tested student population. For more information on the OPI's statewide plan for monitoring and training around the federal 1.0 percent cap, visit the State 1.0 Percent Cap Guidance and Monitoring Web Site. The OPI shared with school districts at the December 3, 2020, webinar its State 1.0 Percent Data Analysis and Use Plan. The OPI adopted the recommendations and strategies from the technical assistance organization "National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)." That is:

1. Gather district and school data on current participation rates in the Alternate Assessment. It is important to know the landscape of participation rates in the Alternate Assessment in districts and in schools throughout the state.
2. Gather data on the characteristics of students participating in the Alternate Assessment.
3. Create or examine a state definition of "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" and revise guidelines, as needed, for determining whether a student should participate in the Alternate Assessment.
4. Provide professional development for IEP team members and other educators on the nature of the Alternate Assessment and who should participate in it. IEP team members need to understand the purpose of the Alternate Assessment and the characteristics of students who most appropriately participate in that assessment.
5. Provide information sessions for parents/guardians of students with disabilities so that they can participate in the IEP decision-making process about the assessment in which their child participates. The decision about which assessment a student participates in has major implications, yet parents/guardians often do not have the information needed to confidently participate in the IEP decision-making process.

OPI Monitoring and Implementation Plan, Procedures, and Timeline

In May 2017, the Department provided information regarding the procedures for a state to apply for a waiver should the 1.0 percent cap be exceeded. In August 2018, the Department published additional information for states to extend the existing one-year waiver for an additional year. In March 2019, the Department provided states with further information on the consequences of not meeting the requirement to assess not more than 1.0 percent of students on the AA-AAAS assessment. On June 9, 2020, the OPI received a memo due to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic with guidance on how to ensure that the learning for all students continues during these difficult times and strategies for monitoring these percentages using current year IEP test registration data. On October 29, 2021, the OPI received a memo regarding the requirements to request a waiver including flexibility to the participation of students assessed given the continued impacts of the pandemic. This public comment survey allows the OPI to provide further clarification on the requirements and solicit any comment on any training or technical assistance needs that are necessary to address the concerns of the state 1.0 percent cap requirement under ESSA. A detailed overview of the federal guidance and key dates and deadlines is published on the Communication History Page.

The OPI's "Data Analysis and Use Plan" conducts district monitoring through the Student Support Services Division, Title I common compliance monitoring, and the Assessment Unit's quality assurance monitoring procedures. The OPI has prepared a statewide plan and timeline for district technical assistance and monitoring including the test registration data, past AA-AAAS assessment participation and completion data, and Learner Characteristic Inventory data from the MSAA assessment. Should the OPI provisionally exceed the 1.0 percent cap based on these test registration eligibility criteria, the OPI will submit a waiver no later than second week of December or 90 days before the first testing window opens in March. **The Alternate Assessment Eligibility Snapshot is taken on December 1.**

OPI Data Analysis and Use Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is this 1.0 percent all of the identified special education students or 1.0 percent of the entire student body?
A: The OPI looks at all students who participate in statewide assessments, including general and Alternate Assessments. The 1.0 percent is determined based on the entire student body or all students participating in statewide assessments.

Q: Why is the Alternate Assessment participation capped at 1.0 percent?
A: Historically, states were allowed to create Alternate Assessments starting in 1997. At that time, the number of students who participated in Alternate Assessments was about 0.5 percent, well below the 1.0 percent current cap. Over the years, it was noticed that more and more students were being administered Alternate Assessments; therefore, under No Child Left Behind some requirements were added such as a cap on how many students could be counted in the state accountability system. Over the years, researchers released information that probably less than 1.0 of the students met the criteria to participate in an Alternate Assessment. Since researchers published this information, the reauthorization of ESEA as ESSA has accepted these guiding principles and made the 1.0 cap provision on states.

Glossary of Terms

For assessment defined terms, visit the MontCAS Test Security Training Portal.

Appendix A

Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria Worksheet. This form is used by the IEP team to document the conversations, evidence, and decisions when determining whether a student should participate in Alternate Assessments. This form was modeled after Arizona's published website guidance for the MSAA Eligibility Guidelines, which were adapted from the NCSC Guidance for Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams.

Appendix B

Decision Flowchart. The Decision Flowchart is designed to guide the sequence of decisions to be made by IEP teams when determining whether a student should participate in Montana's Alternate Assessments.

References and Resources

The information presented here includes the resources linked throughout this manual in alphabetical order along with additional references to learn more about Alternate Assessment topics.

Resource Name	Resource Description
ACCESS General WIDA Can-Do Descriptors	The "Can Do" descriptors highlight what language learners can do at various stages of language development – for more information, please visit the OPI English Learner page where you can find various resources related to assistance and guidance for EL supports.
ACCESS for ELLs Checklist	To help districts plan their testing activities, the System Test Coordinators are also responsible for ensuring that individuals administering the test have completed test security requirements.
AIM Collection Schedule	The AIM Data Collection Schedule contains a complete list of all AIM/Infinite Campus data collections occurring throughout the year. The data collections are intended for state and federal programs. The OPI uses the IEP test registration data from the "Special Education Child Count" and the Winter Assessment Registration collection to determine how many students are eligible for the AA-AAAS assessment.
Alternate Core Content Connectors	Alternate Math Standards (Core Content Connectors): Alternate standards are not formally adopted by the OPI but are aligned to and used in the creation of the Montana's Multi-State Alternate Assessment.
Alternate Core Content Connectors	Alternate ELA Standards (Core Content Connectors): Alternate standards are not formally adopted by the OPI but are aligned to and used in the creation of the Montana's Multi-State Alternate Assessment.
Alternate Science Essence Statements	Alternate Science Standards (Essence Statements): Alternate standards are not formally adopted by the OPI but are aligned to and used in the creation of the AMSA.
Alternate ACCESS Scores and Reports	Alternate ELP Standards: Alternate standards are not formally adopted by the OPI but are aligned to and used in the creation of the Montana's Alternate ACCESS for ELLs.
Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Sample Items	To help teachers understand how students will be assessed and to help students gain comfort and familiarity with the assessment, this website provides sample items for all four language domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
Alternate ACCESS Assessment Profile	This assessment profile contains the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the Alternate ACCESS program.
Alternate ACCESS WIDA Consortium Map	This resource provides information on the member states and territories that use this WIDA assessment.
Alternate ACCESS Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the Alt ACCESS assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch the approximately 10-minute describes foundational aspects of the statewide assessment.
ALTELLA Research Brief Considerations for Educators	Considerations for Educators Serving English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities.

ALTELLA Research Brief Definitions	The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) Project has established a definition of English Learners with significant cognitive disabilities. The ALTELLA project has researched instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students.
AMSA Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the AMSA assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch the 10:40 minute describes foundational aspects of state assessment.
AMSA Assessment Profile	This assessment profile contains the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the AMSA program.
AMSA Consortium Map	This resource provides information on the member states and territories that use this AMSA assessment.
AMSA Practice Test	Families and students can see what the science expectations are, and they can become familiar with the item types, test format, and functionality of the online system.
Article X	After a bill is signed by the governor or passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto, it is incorporated into the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). This is a compilation of the Montana State Constitution and all state laws, also called statutes or Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Article X is the Educational Goals and Duties within Montana.
ARM 10.56.101	Administrative rules are agency regulations and standards used to implement, interpret, or set policy. Rules can also describe an agency's organization, procedures, or practices. Chapter 56 provides the policies for public and accredited non-public schools for participation in statewide assessment.
ARM 10.55.603	ARM Chapter 55 provides the policies for public and accredited non-public schools for accreditation.
ARM 10.53.501–517	ARM Chapter 55 provides the policies for state content standards in Mathematics.
Characteristics of English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities	A report that presents findings from information gathered from the Individual Characteristics Questionnaire for ELs.
District Dialogue Guide: Addressing the Percentage of Students Participating in the Alternate Assessment	A National Center on Education Outcomes (NCEO) tool for conversations on Alternate Assessments.
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA)	This law was first passed in 1965 becoming the U.S. Department of Education's primary funding vehicle for providing resources to the nation's schools. The most recent act was passed by Congress and signed into law in 2015. In general, the ESEA-ESSA includes provisions that will help ensure success for students and schools.
English Learner Guidance for School Districts	This manual is intended to assist educators and STCs with identifying, serving, and assessing English learner (EL) students. The guide describes the OPI's policies and procedures required to serve English Learner (EL) students in the state of Montana.
ESSA State Plan	In 2017, the Department released a template for the consolidated state plan under ESEA-ESSA Section 8302. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all ESEA-ESSA requirements for each federal program. The OPI submitted to the Department the ESSA State Plan which was approved in 2018 and Montana's ESSA State Plan sets the expectations for school districts regarding the implementation of the testing, accountability, and reporting provisions under ESEA-ESSA. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all requirements for each federal program including statewide assessments.
Guidance for Examining District Alternate Assessment Participation Rates	A brief paper published by the National Center on Education Outcomes (NCEO) and the Center for Assessment for Alternate Assessments.

IDEA	The Department has the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which in the context of statewide assessment to ensure equitable access to statewide assessments with or without accommodations, or through participation in Alternate Assessments based on the students IEP. Children ages 3 through 21 receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. This law makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities and ensures special education and related services to those children.
Learner Characteristic Inventory (or LCI Survey)	Survey for educators with 16 questions required for the MSAA.
Math General Model Curriculum Guide	Montana Mathematics Content Standards and Resources – for questions contact the Mathematics Instructional Coordinator Sonja Whitford at 406-444-0706.
ARM 10.53.401–413	ARM Chapter 55 provides the policies for state content standards in Reading/Language Arts.
MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in Statewide Assessments	This guide explains the participation policies and procedures to register and include students in each of the statewide assessments.
§20-2-121, MCA	This statue is the Board of Public Education's Powers and Duties in the state of Montana.
§20-7-101, MCA	This statute is the Standards of Accreditation in the state of Montana.
§20-1-301, MCA	This statute is the School Fiscal Year in the state of Montana.
MontCAS Test Security Manual	Describes the standardized test administration and test security procedures to be used by each accredited school.
Montana Science Development Site	A website prepared to share information with educators on the development of the state science assessments including the AMSA. It includes detailed information on what the tests are like, how to prepare students for the assessments, and why the OPI has implemented new science assessments.
Montana Special Education Guidance Document	For guidance on special education policies in the state of Montana this manual covers brief descriptions of various processes and procedures, and responses to the most frequently asked questions that the OPI staff have collected over time.
MSAA Assessment Profile	This assessment profile contains the who, what, when, where, why, and how for the MSAA program.
MSAA Consortium Partners	This resource provides information on the member states and territories that use this MSAA assessment.
MSAA LCI Data Analysis	A white paper analysis of the MSAA Consortium Learner Characteristic Inventory (LCI) trends.
MSAA Parent Brochure	A brochure designed for families with students with significant disabilities to support their child at home during remote learning situations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide insight into resources to support the student in instruction and assessment.
MSAA Program Overview Video	To gain an understanding of the MSAA assessment and to assist with the planning and preparation needs, watch the 11:00 minute describes foundational aspects of statewide assessment.
MSAA Test Administration Manual SY23/24	This is the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) Test Administration Manual for the school year (SY) 2020-2021.
MSAA System Website	The MSAA Consortium website that houses released sample items accompanied by Teacher Guides. The Teacher Guides allow educators to understand what students may be able to know and do based on the sample items and how teachers can respond to this information through instruction.

NCEO SEA Recommendations and Strategies	from the technical assistance organization "National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)."
NCSC Consortium	The National Center and State Collaborative website was formed through a multi-state, multi-organizational consortium awarded from the General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) in late 2010. The purpose of the grant was to develop an alternate assessment system and related content to assess the ELA and Math achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
NCSC Brief 1	NCSC Brief 1: AA-AAS: Standards That Are the "Same but Different".
NCSC Brief 2	NCSC Brief 2: AA-AAS: Defining High Expectations for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities
NCSC Brief 3	NCSC Brief 3: AA-AAS: How Do Our Students Learn and Show What They Know?
NCSC Brief 4	NCSC Brief 4: Promoting Communication Skills in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities
NCSC Brief 5	NCSC Brief 5: Standards-based Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Students Who Participate in AA-AAS
NCSC Brief 6	NCSC Brief 6: NCSC's Age- and Grade-Appropriate Assessment of Student Learning
NCSC Brief 7	NCSC Brief 7: NCSC's Content Model for Grade-Aligned Instruction and Assessment: "The Same Curriculum for All Students"
NCSC Brief 8	NCSC Brief 8: Characteristics of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Data from NCSC's 2015 Assessment
NCSC Brief 9	NCSC Brief 9: NCSC's Theory of Action and Validity Evaluation Approach
NCSC IEP Team Guidance for Alternate Assessment Participation Decisions	Guidance published by the NCSC for Alternate Assessments.
NCSC Wiki Site	The Wiki site was formed through the NCSC consortium to house a plethora of resources. This page directs to the parents/guardians' resources.
Needs-Based AIM IEP Statewide Assessment Editor	This describes the process used with the AIM/Infinite Campus IEP Statewide Assessment Editor for IEPs; however, this general protocol can be used for all students participating in statewide assessment to determine the student's necessary accessibility features.
Parent Corner Site	The OPI publishes resources for families on this website.
Peer Review (2018)	The purpose of the Department's peer review of Statewide assessment systems is to support States in meeting statutory and regulatory requirements under Title I of the ESEA-ESSA for implementing valid and reliable Statewide assessment systems. This document represents the Department's current thinking on the critical elements and best practices for State development and implementation of assessment systems.
Reading/Language General Arts Model Curriculum Guide	ELA Content Standards and Resources – for questions contact the English Language Arts & Literacy Coordinator Stephanie Swigart at 406-444-0736.
ARM 10.53.801–810	ARM Chapter 55 provides the policies for state content standards in science.
Roles and Responsibilities for Distributing Score Reports	The OPI's annual process and timeline for delivering individual student reports to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as practicable after each test administration. This memorandum provides information on the school district roles and responsibilities for distributing score reports to key stakeholders and gives information on the general process and timeline for releasing student achievement results.
Science General Model Curriculum Guide	Montana Science Content Standards and Resources – for questions contact the Science Instructional Coordinator Michelle McCarthy at 406-444-3537.

ARM 10.53.301–311	Administrative rules are agency regulations and standards used to implement, interpret, or set policy. Rules can also describe an agency's organization, procedures, or practices. Chapter 55 provides the policies for state content standards in English Language Proficiency.
State 1.0 Percent Cap Guidance and Monitoring Web Site	This OPI website is intended to centralize the guidance on Alternate Assessments, assist the OPI with the public comment process for 1.0 percent cap, and share various resources with the public.
Strategies for Meeting the 1% State-level Cap on Participation in the Alternate Assessment	Guidance published by the National Center on Education Outcomes (NCEO) for Alternate Assessments.
Test Administration Plan	The BLANK testing plan "test administration" is intended to give districts guidance to make sure that statewide assessments are given within each school consistently in a standardized fashion in order to be valid, reliable, comparable, and fair for the purposes for which the assessments are used.
Test Accessibility Plan	The BLANK testing plan "test accessibility" is intended to give districts guidance to fully maintain student inclusion practicable and to ensure that every student has equal opportunity to participate in assessments and are NOT denied the opportunity.
Test Security Plan	The BLANK testing plan "test security" is designed to offer activities intended to protect the integrity and confidentiality of statewide assessments to yield valid and reliable results.
Data Use Plan	The BLANK testing plan "Data Use Plan" is designed to provide guidance to schools and districts to use assessment results for addressing specific academic needs and continuous improvement processes.
Test Training Plan	The BLANK testing plan "test training" is designed to describe strategies that all schools should have a plan in place to make sure that all personnel involved in assessments know how to administer the assessments with fidelity.
Universal Design for Learning	The UDL Guidelines are a tool used in the implementation of Universal Design for Learning, a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn
WIDA Screening and Placement Guides	The WIDA Secure Portal houses all training courses and user guides for WIDA AMS.
34 CFR § 200.6 – Inclusion of all students	The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is the codification of the general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government. This section provides information on the inclusion of all students.
May 16, 2017	Department provided information regarding the procedures for applying for a waiver should the 1.0 percent cap be exceeded.
Aug. 27, 2018	Department published additional information for states to extend the existing one-year waiver for an additional year.
Mar. 28, 2019	Department provided states with further information on the consequences.
June 9, 2020	Department provided a memo due to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic on how to monitor these percentages using current year IEP test registration data.
Dec. 3, 2020	OPI's Assessment Division and Student Support and Service Division will hold a webinar on the 1.0 percent cap. 1. [Review the Agenda] 2. [Presentation Slides] 3. [YouTube Recording] 4. [State 1.0 Percent Cap Monitoring Presentation Minutes]
Oct. 29, 2021	Department provided a memo to states regarding the requirements to request a waiver for the 2021-22 School Year (SY) including flexibility to the participation of students assessed given the continued impacts of the pandemic.

APPLICATIONS

Application Name	Application Description
MontCAS Application	This is an OPI-owned application which is the centralized, restricted-use portal to annually report test security information, non-participation results, testing incidents, and other applicable assessment information for the MontCAS statewide assessments. It is intended for use by System Test Coordinators unless otherwise specified.
AIM/Infinite Campus	Achievement In Montana (AIM) is the OPI statewide student information system. This system allows school districts to submit required student information electronically. AIM provides the OPI, the state of Montana, federal entities, and the education community, timely and accurate data about the progress of our students, schools, school districts, and the state. If you have questions on where/how to enter the data students with disabilities into AIM/Infinite Campus, call the OPI AIM help desk at 1-877-424-6681 **or** submit an AIM Help Desk Ticket or call or 406-444-3800.
Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP)	To ensure continuous education improvement, the Montana Board of Public Education established the requirement for a continuous school improvement plan. The school district and each of its schools shall develop, implement, and evaluate continuous school improvement plans and make the plans available to the public. These plans shall be reviewed on a yearly basis to reflect a continuous improvement process.
E-Grant Application	E-Grants is a web-enabled system for K-12 education and supports the grant application process from allocation of funds and application for funding through payment accountability, reporting to the grantor and grant closeout for both state and federal grants. E-Grants is accessible to all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and other subgrantees via the Internet without need for installing any special software or hardware.