

New Jersey

Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA)



2016–2017 Parent Information Guide

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Questions and Answers for Parents about the New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment in Science

During the 2016–2017 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education requires that students with the most significant intellectual disabilities in grade four, grade eight, and high school participate in the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) in Science. The participation of all students in the state assessment program is important to ensure that all students are provided an opportunity to learn the skills identified as being most critical for New Jersey students. For students in the APA program, the assessment reflects skills related to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ CCCS).

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004* (IDEA) and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) legislation require that all students with disabilities be included in state assessment programs. States must conduct alternate assessments for the small number of students who require a different type of assessment. The vast majority of students with disabilities in New Jersey participate in general state assessments. The APA is a state assessment that will measure the educational achievement of those students with the most significant intellectual disabilities and who require an alternate assessment to demonstrate what they know and can do.

The purpose of this document is to answer some common questions about the APA.

1. What is the purpose of the state assessment system?

New Jersey's state assessment program is designed to measure how well each student is learning skills related to content standards. The APA in Science is used to measure how well New Jersey schools and school districts are teaching the NJ CCCS in Science. The APA in science remains aligned to the NJ CCCS and is tested using the current APA program.

New Jersey transitioned the Mathematics and Language Arts assessments from the New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment to the Dynamic Learning Maps™ Alternate Assessment (DLM). For more information, please visit the Dynamic Learning Maps website at <http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/newjersey>. The DLM assessment is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS), is administered to students with the most significant intellectual disabilities, and will test English Language Arts and Mathematics

2. What are the components of the state assessment system?

The state assessment program for science includes the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) in grades four and eight, and the New Jersey Biology Competency Test (NJBCT) in high school. Students with significant intellectual disabilities will be administered the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) in Science in the comparable grades.

3. Who developed the APA?

The New Jersey Department of Education developed the APA with the assistance of several APA educator committees. The committees included representatives of various groups that are knowledgeable about educating students with significant cognitive disabilities and have an interest in alternate assessment. The committees consisted of panels of diverse educators including special education teachers, child study team members, general education teachers, and administrators. Participants were chosen because of their qualifications as well as their educational expertise. Selection criteria included number of years teaching, student population served, district factor group (DFG), type of educational facility, and regional location, as well as included gender and racial/ethnic representation. Additional support and guidance were provided by the U.S. Department of Education, national alternate assessment organizations, and a contractor group working on the APA.

4. How was the APA developed?

Development of the APA included identifying ways to measure the performance of the NJ CCCS for students with significant cognitive disabilities who required an alternate assessment rather than the traditional state assessment process to ensure that the assessment process and design was appropriate and valid. Development also included producing materials and procedures for the implementation of the assessment and the scoring process.

5. Why are all students with disabilities required to participate in the state assessment programs?

State assessment results are used to determine if schools and local districts are meeting state and federal requirements for educating New Jersey students. It is important that students with disabilities be included in the state assessment program so that educational decisions can be made based on the needs of all students. Assessing all students will encourage schools to direct instructional attention and resources to the needs of all students. The goal in holding schools accountable for every student's performance is to increase the achievement of all students, including those with disabilities. The information collected may also help each Individualized Education Program (IEP) team identify strengths and educational needs.

6. Which students will participate in the APA?

In New Jersey, a student with disabilities participates in the APA in Science if the student is determined to be a student with the most significant intellectual disabilities and the IEP Team has determined that the student is unable to participate in the general state assessment for his or her grade level based on the APA Participation Guidelines.

7. Who determines how a student with disabilities will participate in the state assessment program?

Each student's IEP team decides how he or she will participate in the state assessment program. Students with disabilities will either participate in the general assessment or the APA in the grades assessed. The student's teacher and IEP team work together to select the skills to be assessed from a test specification list that provides different levels of skills from which to be chosen.

In the 2016–2017 school year, students with disabilities in grades 4, 8, and high school whose IEP team determined that he/she will not take the general assessment in Science (NJASK or NJBCT) will take the APA as per their IEPs and assigned grade level. The APA assesses Science in grades 4 and 8, and in grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 depending on the grade in which the student receives Biology instruction.

8. How does the IEP team determine if a student should participate in the general assessment or the APA?

The student's IEP team, which includes the parent, should become familiar with the knowledge and skills assessed through the general state assessments as well as the types of questions on the assessments. The directories of Test Specifications and sample test questions for the NJ ASK and NJBCT are available for review by education personnel and parents. The New Jersey Department of Education website listed on page 6 contains information on how to obtain these resources. In addition, the IEP team members should be familiar with the list of accommodations and modifications approved for use during the general New Jersey state assessments. Based on this information and information about the student's learning, the IEP team will determine if the student can participate in the general assessment for his or her grade, with or without accommodations. Only students with the most significant intellectual disabilities are eligible to be considered for the APA. A document entitled *Guidelines to Determine Which Students Should Participate in the New Jersey Statewide Assessment through the Alternate Proficiency Assessment* includes questions that determine which students participate in the APA. This form must be completed by the IEP team when making participation decisions. If the student cannot participate in the general assessment in Science, the student will participate in the APA.

The IEP team can also review the sample IEP form on the department's website for assistance with the decision-making process and suggestions for documenting decisions on the IEP at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/form/>.

9. How should students prepare for the APA?

Students with disabilities must have access to the same educational resources and opportunities for learning that are afforded to students without disabilities, and IEP teams should work to provide all students with an effective means of communication when appropriate. Educators must implement the appropriate supports, modifications, and assistive technology throughout instruction required to enable access. In addition, including students in classroom activities that specifically address the NJ CCCS is crucial if they are to develop the required skills to learn these challenging standards and be prepared for the APA in Science.

10. How do students participate in the APA?

There is no set examination day for the APA. Instead, completed student work activities, also referred to as portfolio “pieces of evidence,” are collected throughout specified windows of time to represent a student’s performance relative to the NJ CCCS. The student completes instructional activities as part of his or her daily routine, and the teacher selects some of those activities to be submitted as the test itself.

The test specifications for the 2016–2017 school year specify a limited number of Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPIs) that are available for assessment and provide a choice within each grade and each content area.

Skill statements, known as CPI Links, define what skills may be assessed for the APA. The CPI Links were developed by general and special educators, content specialists, DOE personnel, APA advisory committee members, and national assessment specialists to assist New Jersey educators in determining an appropriate educational link to these CPIs for students with significant intellectual disabilities. The CPI Links are designed to vary in complexity and difficulty while maintaining content centrality. Complexity is the expectation level at which the student should perform the skill (recognize, apply, analyze, evaluate, create, etc.) and the difficulty involves the number of concepts, skills, or ideas the student works on within the CPI.

There are three types of links, which are ordered from most to least difficult. Once the generic skill statement is selected, it is modified for each student’s individual needs based on his or her IEP. Once a CPI Link has been selected, it becomes the basis of assessment within the APA. Links are chosen based on the individual student’s strengths, needs, and prior knowledge. Four skill statements must be assessed for each content area.

The different levels of the CPI Links do not correspond to a particular communication system, learning style, or disability category of a student. Students may be using a Matched Link in one entry and a Far Link in another entry.

11. Who will administer the APA?

The APA will be administered by the student’s teacher(s), with input from other specialists who provide educational services and supports to the student.

12. How will teachers and administrators be prepared to implement the APA?

Materials have been prepared for and disseminated to teachers and administrators to explain the APA and how it ensures appropriate learning opportunities for students. Both general and special education teachers receive this information as well as training. Training on how to select, administer, and score the APA portfolio appropriately is provided throughout the state.

The everyday instructional activities which occur in the classroom and other settings are used for assessment. Each student receives personalized instruction based on the student's IEP, which reflects his or her individual needs and provides the student access to learning. A teacher may modify the complexity or difficulty of a task for a student participating in the APA or may provide the student with supports. Supports are the instructional and assistive strategies that are provided to students to facilitate access to instructional activities and materials, and to increase independent performance. Supports can range from "no-tech," supports not requiring technology use such as having someone scribe or document the student's responses to questions, to "high-tech," providing technology based supports such as communication devices, specialized computer software, etc.

13. What will happen to the APA portfolios when they are completed?

Each APA portfolio will be sent to the New Jersey Department of Education's contractor for the assessment, and maintained in a secure place. The portfolios are reviewed and scored in the spring of the school year. Confidentiality of all portfolios is maintained throughout the process. Following the scoring and reporting process, each portfolio is returned to the student's school.

14. How will the alternate assessment results be reported and used?

Each student's APA results will be reported to school districts, parents, and the student's teachers. Individual student results will be reported for use in educational planning purposes. Your student's individual results will be provided to you by the district 30 days after they are received.

Summary results will be provided on school, district, and state reports to educators and the public. School and district accountability reports will include summary data about the performance of all students, including students with disabilities. The individual and summary results allow districts and schools to review their instructional programs from year to year, and are used to inform and improve the instructional program provided to the students.

15. Will students with significant intellectual disabilities who take the APA have to pass it in order to receive a diploma?

No. The APA is not a graduation test. The IEP team determines whether a student must meet state and local graduation requirements. While passing the APA is not a graduation requirement, participating in the APA is a federal and state requirement.

16. What opportunities do parents have to learn more about the APA, and how will they get this information?

Information about the APA and the statewide assessment program in general, including a list of allowable accommodations for the general assessments, is available on the New Jersey Department of Education website and via Questar Assessment's ServicePoint website, who is the vendor that supports the administration of the APA. The student's school may also be contacted for more information.

17. How can I get more information about the APA?

Your district's Director of Special Education and School APA Test Coordinator can help answer your questions. More information about the APA can also be found on the NJDOE's and the contractor's web pages.

NJDOE Main Website: <http://www.state.nj.us/education>

NJDOE Special Education Website: www.nj.gov/education/specialed/info

NJDOE Assessment Website: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/>

Assistive Technology (AT) Resource Website: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/tech/>

Questar APA Website: https://nj-servicepoint.questarai.com/NJxx01_Documentation.aspx



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