



Parent Guide to
Kentucky's Alternate Assessment
Based on
Alternate Achievement Standards



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What is the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS)?

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The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) is an assessment and accountability program for all schools in Kentucky. This program is a high-stakes system with rewards and sanctions attached to results as a means of ensuring accountability. CATS is designed to improve teaching and student learning in Kentucky. The purpose of CATS is to encourage and enable educators in each public school to increase the academic achievement of all their students.

More Information: The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) set the goal of all schools reaching Proficiency by the year 2014. The accountability system provides a way for measuring this goal and provides feedback to schools on how they are progressing toward Proficiency. By state regulation (703 KAR 5:020), Kentucky's accountability system focuses primarily on schools, not individual students. The system requires school district accountability (703 KAR 5:130) for the education of all the students attending school in a particular district.

CATS includes the Kentucky Core Content Tests, writing portfolios and prompts, readiness assessments, and the alternate assessment for students with severe to profound disabilities.

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Who is assessed?

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CATS assesses every student in grades 3 through 8 and grades 10 through 12, in Kentucky's public schools. Students are tested on specific standards at various grade levels. Students identified with educational disabilities are also assessed. Some students with disabilities will take the assessment without accommodations, some with accommodations, and some through an Alternate Assessment process.

More Information: You may find out more about what is specifically tested at each grade level by going to the Kentucky Department of Education's Web page at <http://www.education.ky.gov> or call (502) 564-4394.



What is the Kentucky Alternate Assessment?



Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may require an alternate means of participation in CATS to demonstrate achievement. The Alternate Assessment is designed to address the needs of these students by allowing greater depth of adaptations, modifications and alternative modes of participation.

More Information: Students participate in the Alternate Assessment either in Performance Dimension A: Attainment or Performance Dimension B: Progress. This determination is based on a description of the student’s communication level. The description of communication is as follows:

Performance Dimension A: Attainment should be chosen if the student’s communication is best described by the following indicators:

- Student uses verbal or written words, signs, Braille, or language-based augmentative systems to request, initiate, and respond to questions, describe things or events, and express refusal.

OR

- Student uses intentional communication, but not at a symbolic language level. Student uses understandable communication through such modes as gestures, pictures, objects/textures, points, etc., to clearly express a variety of intentions.

Performance Dimension B: Progress may be chosen if the student’s communication is best described by the following indicators:

- While students who participate in Performance Dimension B may be able to score at the proficient level, distinguished scores are *not* available if this performance dimension is chosen.
- Student communicates primarily through cries, facial expressions, change in muscle tone, but no clear use of objects/textures, regularized gestures, pictures, signs, etc., to communicate.
- Student alerts to sensory input from another person (auditory, visual, touch, movement), BUT requires actual physical assistance to follow simple directions, or the student’s response to sensory stimuli (e.g., sound/voice, sight/gesture, touch, movement; smell) is unclear.



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How does the Alternate Assessment look?

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The Alternate Assessment has three major components:

1. Alternate Portfolio for Reading, Mathematics and Science which measures student performance on specified standards and includes work samples. Students will be assessed in:
 - reading at grades 3 – 8 and grade 10;
 - mathematics at grades 3 – 8 and grade 11; and
 - science at grades 4, 7, and 11.
2. Attainment Tasks which measure the student’s performance on completing specified tasks/activities. Students will be assessed in:
 - social studies at grades 5, 8, and 11;
 - arts & humanities at grades 5, 8, and 11;
 - practical living/vocational studies at grades 4, 7, and 10; and
 - writing at grades 4, 5, 7, 8, and 12.
3. Transition Attainment Record which measures student performance on academic skills needed for transition. This is completed by the Admission and Release Committee members (ARC): Students will be assessed in
 - reading, English, mathematics, and science reasoning at grades 8, 10, and 11.

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Who decides if my child will participate in Alternate Assessment?

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An Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) makes decisions about the educational program and placement for students with disabilities. The ARC will also determine how students with disabilities participate in state and district assessments. The ARC determines if a student will participate in CATS with accommodations, without accommodations, or if they need to be assessed through the Alternate Assessment.

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How is the decision made by the ARC?

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Using the Participation Guidelines for Alternate Assessment, the ARC will analyze student information, including on-going progress data specific to the student’s present level of performance. The Participation Guidelines contain statements that describe specific learning aspects and characteristics. The ARC must agree to a “yes” answer for each statement from the Participation Guidelines in order to determine if the student is eligible for participation in the Alternate Assessment. The ARC must have specific data to evidence and support answering “yes” to each statement, including, but not limited to: an integrated psycho-educational report, adaptive behavior rating scales, curriculum assessments, diagnostic assessments and student work.

More Information: Once participation in the Alternate Assessment Program is determined, the ARC must then decide the performance dimension in which the student will participate. Performance Dimension A: Attainment or Performance Dimension B: Progress. This decision is based on the student’s communication level.



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When does the ARC make the decision?

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The ARC meets at least annually to review the student’s educational program by reviewing and revising the student’s IEP and determines how the student will participate in CATS. Using the Participation Guidelines, the ARC must review and re-determine Alternate Assessment participation.



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Once an ARC determines a student will participate in Alternate Assessment is the decision final?

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Based upon current data at the time of the ARC, a student may initially be determined to participate in the Alternate Assessment, however, if new data or changes with a student occur, an ARC may reconvene and determine that a student is no longer eligible for participation in the Alternate Assessment.

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Why is my child working with the same content as children who do not have a disability? If my child could do that, is special education necessary?

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Education has made tremendous gains since the first special education law was passed in 1975. In the 1980s, success was found in teaching students functional skills that helped them at home and in the community. In the 1990s, inclusion in same age classrooms helped students improve self-determination, communication, and social skills. Assistive technology has provided increased access to general curriculum for students with disabilities through providing alternative means of demonstrating their understanding of concepts. Beginning in 2000 it became evident that students with the most significant disabilities could find success in accessing academic learning. Building on these experiences the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that alternate assessments be based on grade level content standards.

More Information: Kentucky has held schools accountable for the progress of all students on state standards since 1990, including students with significant cognitive disabilities. In 2001 the federal law known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) required every state to develop an accountability system that includes all students to determine how well they are educating America's children. Kentucky's Program of Studies helps ensure that all students across the Commonwealth are given opportunities to learn at a high level.

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Why must my child be assessed on the same grade level content standards as students who do not have an identified disability?

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There are two very important federal laws that determine how schools will be held accountable for the education of all students in the United States, No Child Left Behind (NCLB 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). Both NCLB and IDEA very clearly require high expectations for academic learning and access to the general curriculum for every child. This sets the expectation that all students are valuable and can learn at high levels. Recent research findings show that students with significant cognitive disabilities can learn. The assessment information is used to assist in improving schools and programs along with providing the best educational experience for all students.

More Information: Instruction on grade level content standards provides the student with the opportunity to learn concepts that can be used in many situations along with learning more traditional functional skills. The combination of these two opportunities creates a truly meaningful school experience. For example, as a student is working on the standard that asks the students to analyze data, create a graph, and make an appropriate choice using the data or graph, the student could:

- increase communication and social skills (including switches and augmentative communication boards) while conducting a survey to collect data;
- increase number sense as she enters the data on a graph (e.g., one to one correspondence);
- increase appropriate and informed decision making skills when using the data to make a choice using the data or graph (e.g., which one has more); and/or,
- increase skills that may be used for a job (e.g., entering data on a computer, using a switch to enter data, polling people at a mall).

The students participating in the Alternate Assessment are allowed to use supports that help them learn and be independent. These supports may include reducing the level of difficulty, providing pictures or objects and using assistive technology.



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Doesn't my child's IEP determine what they learn at school?

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The purpose of an IEP is to ensure that your child with disabilities receives a free and appropriate education. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a written plan describing the specially designed instruction (SDI), accommodations/modifications and related services needed to address the individual needs of your child. Specially designed instruction is defined in IDEA as adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child and to ensure access to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

The educational standards are the content standards that Kentucky has developed for all students and can be found in the Program of Studies and the Core Content for Assessment. As daily instruction specific to these content standards occur within the classroom, the IEP's clearly defines components (i.e., present level of performance, annual goals and objectives/benchmarks, accommodations and modifications, etc.) are necessary for ensuring that an appropriate education occurs.

More Information: An IEP is not intended to be the student's entire educational program. Instead it is the support program that students need to access to ensure progress in the general curriculum. The IEP is developed by the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) as a record of decisions made by its members. The IEP is a plan of action and a commitment of the resources identified within the program. The ARC membership consists of the following members: parents; teacher(s), both general and special; chairperson; and the student if appropriate. By state and federal requirements, the IEP must be developed during the ARC meeting. The IEP should determine the necessary special education and related services as well supports that the student requires when learning the general curriculum content. For additional information, you may contact your local Special Education Cooperative and/or The Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Exceptional Children Services at (502) 564-4970.



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Does the Alternate Assessment limit the help that my child receives?

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The teacher should provide the student with the help needed in order to learn the required skills in the curriculum. However, that instruction should be shaped over time to help the student move toward a greater level of independence. So when it comes time to assess the student can do work independently.

More Information: The Alternate Assessment allows for whatever assistance the student needs during instruction. Assistance in the form of prompts and cues are allowed during the assessment sessions when they do not directly guide the student to the correct answer. An example of an allowable use of prompting would be a tap on the elbow to prompt the student to begin work, support the student’s arm to allow for intentional movement, etc. An example of a prompt that is not allowable would be a teacher touching the correct answer as the teacher asks a question.



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Is my child allowed to use any modifications in the Alternate Assessment?

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The Alternate Assessment allows the student to use supports (modifications, adaptations, and assistive technology) during instruction and during assessment. Providing supports allows the student to learn content that is age appropriate, interesting and challenging. The only time this is not allowable is when the support directly guides the student to the correct answer. An example of an allowable support would be to color code so that the student knows to start with the green and end with the red. An example of a support that is not allowable would be to color code the correct answer green and the incorrect answer red.



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Can my child receive a diploma if they participate in the Alternate Assessment?

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The ARC must determine if a student's demonstrated cognitive ability and adaptive behavior prevents completion of the general education course of study even with program modifications and/or accommodations. The ARC using a variety of data and information such as the Participation Guidelines for the Alternate Assessment, psycho-educational integrated report, student work, student observations and any other relevant information makes this determination. If this is the case, the ARC must determine the student would not be able to earn a high school diploma and would therefore receive a Certificate of Attainment **as stated in Kentucky Regulations 704 KAR 3:305. [Student in the Alternate Assessment program are eligible to receive a Certificate of Attainment.](#)**

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When does my child have the opportunity to work on functional life skills listed on the IEP?

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All teachers should look at the functional application of all learning. This is especially true for the student with significant cognitive disabilities. Functional skills can be embedded in much of the academic instruction. When an IEP skill cannot be taught within the academic instruction, time should be set aside to teach this skill as necessary. Once a student has completed the [state alternate assessment required in 12th grade](#) the student can then concentrate solely on transition into life skills.

More Information: Following the grade level standards that are designed for all students to help ensure that a sequence of skills are taught as the student moves from elementary to middle and on to high school, teachers can individualize the instruction and expectations to meet the needs of the student while following the curriculum. As teachers individualize the instruction and expectations they can emphasize functional and IEP skills. For example, when elementary student is learning about measurement of liquids, the student can learn to measure liquids for cooking or doing laundry. When a middle school class is studying fiction and nonfiction, the student can learn to identify nonfiction materials (e.g., cookbooks, newspapers, etc.) and fiction (novels on tape). When high school students are studying about chemical reactions the student is able to focus on which household chemicals to avoid mixing.

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What happens if it is determined that my child needs to stay at a grade more than one year?

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The student would be recorded in that grade again on the school records and would participate in the grade level alternate assessment again.

More Information: Retaining a student is an ARC decision and should be made on an individual basis, not as a school policy (e.g., a school keeps all students an extra year at any given grade level). When the student completes all high school assessments then the student can use the remaining years, through age 21, to work on transition life skills.

A few notes from teachers in Kentucky...

Some teachers in Kentucky have already reported that their students have surpassed expectations.

“He (the science teacher) is visiting my room and suggested the stages of meiosis because he knows the process and knew my kids could do this. As special teachers we are really learning a lot of material! We are surprising ourselves and our students are also surprising us.”

- High School Teacher

“This adaptation thing is FUN!!! We are really coming up with some innovative ways to teach REAL content!!! (for really involved kids!) Hope to see you soon to share ideas!!!!”

- District Consultant

“I used your strategy of pulling pictures from a board when the word is read aloud with a student in 6th grade LA class. She enjoyed the activity and seemed to pay more attention (something that has been a problem). She also read the story using a text reader on the computer. She took the regular ed. test with no modification except to have it read aloud to her and scored an 80%! Wow! She blew us all away! Thanks for sharing your idea.”

- Middle School Teacher