

How are the alternate assessments designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities?

The South Carolina Alternate Assessments are designed to be accessible to students with diverse and significant disabilities. First, the test uses picture symbols and stimuli to engage students in the content. Next, the test allows students to answer the items using their preferred method of communication (e.g., pointing, eye gaze, assistive technology, oral response, sign language). Students may also use tablet technology, interactive whiteboards, or laptops to make their selections. There are also multiple types of test items used on the assessment. Finally, there is no time restriction on the assessment at any point.

Can a student earn a high school diploma if he or she participates in the South Carolina Alternate Assessment?

No, students who the IEP team determines meet the participation criteria for South Carolina Alternate Assessments are participating in a curriculum that does not lead to a high school diploma.

Who do I contact to find out more about the South Carolina Alternate Assessments?

If your child participates in the South Carolina Alternate Assessments, you may contact your child's teachers. For more information on the South Carolina alternate assessments, you may go to:

sc-alt.portal.airast.org

If you do not have access to a computer or the internet, ask your child's teachers for assistance in obtaining copies of information about the South Carolina Alternate Assessments.

Tell me more about the South Carolina Alternate Assessments.

SC-NCSC ELA and Mathematics

South Carolina was a member of the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), a collaborative of 24 states and five organizations. The collaborative was funded by a General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services (OSES) to develop an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities aligned to academic standards in ELA and mathematics.

SC-Alt Social Studies

First administered in 2004, the SC-Alt Social Studies is an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards in social studies for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

SC-Alt Online Assessment

The transition from the SC-Alt and the SC-NCSC to the new SC-Alt Online Assessments began during the spring 2017 administration with Independent Field Tests (IFTs) across all subject areas. This year, the SC-Alt Online Assessment is comprised of the unscored field tests and the scored Operational Field Tests (OFTs). The purpose of the field tests is to obtain psychometric information about item performance, eliminate poorly performing items, and support subsequent activities, such as test form development, standard setting, scaling, and scoring. Subsequent administrations will continue to build on this framework.

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South Carolina Alternate Assessments

What are the South Carolina Alternate Assessments?

The primary purpose of the South Carolina Alternate Assessments is to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities have the opportunity to participate in a challenging, standards-based curriculum that encourages high academic expectations. An assessment that provides a measure of student achievement and an opportunity to participate in the state's education accountability system facilitates this goal.

The following assessments make up South Carolina's alternate assessments for the spring 2018 administration:

- South Carolina National Center and State Collaborative (SC-NCSC) ELA and Mathematics, tested grades 3–8
- SC-Alt Social Studies, tested grades 5 and 7
- SC-Alt Online Assessments, including Science (tested grades 4, 5, and 8) and English I, Algebra I, Biology, and US History and the Constitution in tested grade 11

What are the academic standards?

Academic standards are general statements about what students should know and be able to do when they complete each grade or finish their school program.

These standards help to ensure that students with IEP (individualized education program) designations are provided with multiple ways to learn and demonstrate knowledge. The standards for each subject are available on the South Carolina Alternate Assessments portal (sc-alt.portal.airast.org).

Why should students with significant cognitive disabilities participate in academic instruction and assessment?

The primary reason to teach academic content to students who also require instruction in functional and life skills is to promote access and equity to the educational content all students receive as part of a free appropriate public education. Educators are finding that once this opportunity is provided, many students gain useful skills that benefit them now and in the future. Students may not master all of the grade level content, but they may master some content for their grade level. The South Carolina Alternate Assessments provide a way for them to demonstrate this mastery.

There are also state and federal laws that require that all students participate in academic instruction and assessment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1997, 2004), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), require inclusion for all students with disabilities in the state assessment system.

What are criteria for participation in alternate assessment?

The decision about a student's participation in required state assessments is made by the student's IEP team and documented in the IEP. Students must meet the following criteria:

- The student demonstrates a significant cognitive disability and adaptive skills that result in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications.
- The student accesses the state approved curriculum standards at less complex levels and with extensively modified instruction.
- The student has current adaptive skills requiring extensive direct instruction and practice in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of skills necessary for application in school, work, home, and community environments.
- The student is unable to apply or use academic skills across natural settings when instructed solely or primarily through classroom instruction.
- The student's inability to achieve the state grade-level achievement expectations is not the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Who are students with significant cognitive disabilities?

Students with significant cognitive disabilities are students who require substantial modifications, adaptations, or supports to meaningfully access the subject area content and require intensive individualized instruction in order to acquire and generalize knowledge. Their school curriculum includes functional and life skills as well as academic instruction.

Who decides if a student participates in the South Carolina Alternate Assessments?

The individualized education program (IEP) team, which includes the parents as equal members, determines how students will be assessed. The team reviews information about the student's progress across multiple years and areas and decides whether or not the student should take the state assessment with accommodations or whether the student meets the criteria for alternate assessment.

In what grades do students take the South Carolina Alternate Assessments?

Students are assigned a test based on their age. Students ages 8–13 take ELA and Mathematics. Students ages 10 and 12 take Social Studies. Students ages 9, 11, and 13 take Science. Students age 16 take English I, Biology, Algebra I, and US History and the Constitution.