

# WDE FAQ

WY-ALT *updated 9/1/2023*

## General WY-ALT Questions

### What is WY-ALT?

The WY-ALT is Wyoming's Alternate Assessment for those small number of students designated as Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SMSCD) as described in the Alternate Assessment Participation Guidance on the [WDE WY-ALT website](#). The WY-ALT is aligned to the [Wyoming Extended Standards](#) (WYES). The extended standards are grade-level standards designed to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in an appropriately rigorous, grade-level assessment. Students in grades 3-10 are tested in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Additionally, students in grades 4, 8, and 10 are tested in Science.

### What Are the Extended Standards?

Wyoming has extended standards that align to the [Wyoming Content and Performance Standards](#) (WYCPS). These Extended Standards were designed to make the WYCPS more accessible to students with significant cognitive disabilities, while maintaining the rigor and high expectations of the WYCPS. The [Extended Standards](#) ensure all students with significant cognitive disabilities are provided with multiple ways to learn and demonstrate knowledge. In the Extended Standards, WYCPS are extended to include four alternate achievement levels (I, II, III, IV) with level I requiring the most support and level IV being the most independent. This allows teachers to adjust for various levels of difficulty and provide appropriate supports. Extended Standards serve as the foundation for WY-ALT item development.

### When and How Will the WY-ALT be Administered?

Schools are given a six-week window to administer the WY-ALT. The WY-ALT testing window is typically early March to mid April. This provides schools ample time to assess all eligible students at their own pace. The WY-ALT assessment has no time restrictions. Students may stop and resume the WY-ALT assessment at any point during the testing window.

The test is provided online and administered one-on-one, Test Administrator (TA) to a student. The student takes the WY-ALT using a device (computer or tablet). The TA will ensure the student is able to respond in his or her most appropriate communication modality (oral, signed language, picture system, or augmentative communication device, such as that used with eye gaze). The TA uses a separate device (computer or tablet) to start and monitor the test session via the TA Interface. The TA also ensures students are provided accommodations as documented on their Individual Educational Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, or designated supports indicated on the student's Individual English Learner Plan (IELP).

### Is the WY-ALT Administered Online?

WY-ALT is administered online. However, for those students whose Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan requires a paper accommodation, Building Coordinators may order paper response options in the TIDE portal. IEP teams need to indicate for which subject areas the student requires the paper accommodation (e.g., ELA, math, science) and order those materials in advance of testing. The dates for the ordering window will also be announced on the [Wyoming Assessment Portal](#) by early January.

## How Will the WY-ALT be Administered to Students Who Are Not Able to Interact With Technology?

Students who are not able to interact with the technology may use paper accommodations, per their IEP or 504 plan. For information on ordering paper materials, please contact the Wyoming Help Desk (1-888-897-8024 or [wyohelpdesk@cambiumassessment.com](mailto:wyohelpdesk@cambiumassessment.com)).

## How is the WY-ALT Designed for Students With Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

The WY-ALT is a computer-adaptive test designed to be accessible to students with diverse and significant disabilities. The test contains performance items that range in complexity. After a student completes the first five items, successive items increase or decrease in difficulty based on student performance or non-response. The test uses picture symbols and stimuli to engage students in the content. Every item is embedded with a read-aloud human voice recording. The test allows students to complete the items using their preferred method of communication (e.g., pointing, eye gaze, assistive technology, oral response, sign language). There is no time restriction for the assessment; students may stop and resume the assessment at any point during the testing window upon discretion of the [WY-ALT Test Administrator](#) (ALT-TA).

## Why Should Students With Significant Cognitive Disabilities Participate in Academic Instruction and Assessment?

Alternate assessments were first developed in response to the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA](#)), which required that all states and districts develop, by the year 2000, alternate assessments for those students with disabilities unable to participate in regular assessments even with accommodations. The IDEA did not define which students should participate in an alternate assessment, nor did it use the term "significant cognitive disability." In 2003, regulations added to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ([ESEA](#)) allowed states to count as proficient those students with significant cognitive disabilities who participated in the alternate assessment and met rigorous alternate achievement standards set by the state.

In 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as the Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA](#)). ESSA reaffirmed that states administer an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). In Wyoming these are called the Extended Standards ([WYES](#)).

All children, including those designated as a student with the most significant cognitive disability (SMSCD), must have access to the general curriculum; be involved in the general curriculum; and progress in the general curriculum. General curriculum means the same grade-level, academic content standards-based curriculum that is afforded to students without disabilities. For this reason, extended standards that align to the WYCS were designed to provide meaningful access to academic content for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Additionally, the WY-ALT provides an opportunity for these students to demonstrate what they know and can do as it relates to academic, grade-level content. IEP teams determine who will be designated as a student with the most significant cognitive disability for participation in alternate state assessments. Guidance for making this designation is on the [WDE WY-ALT webpage](#).

## Who Can Administer the WY-ALT?

Only trained ALT-TAs, who are certified employees for the district, may administer the WY-ALT. It is the responsibility of each Building Coordinator (BC) to maintain proof of training attendance for all ALT-TAs, per state policy. All ALT-TAs must attend an annual training session and complete the online Test Administrator (TA) Certification Course. All ALT-TAs must also sign and adhere to the State Administered Large Scale Security Agreement for K-12 found on the [WY-ALT Portal](#).

## Who Determines Eligibility for the WY-ALT?

The student's IEP team determines whether a student will participate in the WY-ALT. IEP teams have the option of using the [WY-ALT Participation Checklist](#) when determining what statewide assessment a student will participate in. If an IEP team chooses not to use the WY-ALT Participation Checklist, the team is responsible for documenting how they made this determination.

## Can Districts Exempt Students From Statewide Assessments?

No. Federal law includes all students in assessment and accountability. Thus, all students receiving special education services are included in all state and district-wide assessments. The IEP team determines how students receiving special education services participate in assessments, not whether they participate.

## Can Parents Opt Their Child(ren) Out of Required Statewide Assessments?

No, opting out of state tests required by state statute is not allowed. In the spring of 2014, WDE requested an opinion from the Wyoming Attorney General's (AG) Office regarding parent opt-outs from state-mandated testing (e.g., WY-ALT, WY-TOPP, ACCESS, ALT-ACCESS, and ACT). The following is part of the [AG's response](#):

"In summary, the State Board of Education is authorized to establish the statewide accountability system pursuant to state law, including the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act. It has promulgated rules that require districts to administer the relevant assessments to all students in the appropriate grade-levels. These requirements are within the authority granted to the board by the legislature. Consequently, districts may not allow students or their parents to opt them out of the assessments provided by law."

## Can Students Participate in the General Assessment (WY-TOPP) in One Content Area Like Mathematics and Participate in the Alternate Assessment (WY-ALT) in Another Content Area Like ELA?

No. The majority of students receiving special education services or on 504 plans take general state assessments with or without accommodations. However, if a student receiving special education has also been designated as a Student with the Most Significant Cognitive Disability (SMSCD), then that student may take alternate state assessments. Only those small number of students designated as SMSCD participate in the entire WY-ALT. This is because included in the designation is the criterion that the student demonstrates cognitive abilities that significantly impact most adaptive behavior, all academic skills, and intellectual functioning.

## Should Students Who Are Not Expected to do Well on the General Assessment (WY-TOPP) Participate in the Alternate Assessment (WY-ALT)?

The decision about a student's participation in the WY-ALT must NOT be made on the basis of the student's "perceived probability" of poor achievement on the general assessment. Most students should participate in the general assessment. Approximately 1% of the student population will participate in the WY-ALT assessment. IEP teams use the Alternate Assessment Guidance and the Alternate Assessment Participation Checklist found on the [WDE WY-ALT Assessment webpage](#), in determining which assessment is right for students. In addition, the IEP team should consider any additional implications of this decision, like graduation path and instructional settings, were discussed thoroughly.

## ALT SCORE REPORTING

The WY-ALT ELA and math scale and performance-level cut scores were determined by standard-setting panels in July 2019 and in June 2022 for science. The standard-setting process addressed the Wyoming Extended Standards for grades 3-10 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics and grades 4, 8, and 10 in Science. Please see the [WDE Cut Scores webpage](#) for a detailed chart of all cut scores.

### How Were the Cut Scores Determined for ELA and Math?

From July 16–18, 2019, AIR (now CAI) facilitated standard-setting workshops for grades 3-10 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. The 72-member panel was composed of Wyoming teachers, curriculum specialists, education administrators, and other stakeholders.

The members were selected from large and small Wyoming school districts throughout the state, ensuring diverse perspectives throughout the standard-setting process.

The panelists used the Bookmark method, the most common procedure used throughout the country and for previous Wyoming assessments. Panelists were given a booklet of items ordered by level of difficulty. During the process, the panelists referenced the Wyoming Extended Standards, the Achievement-Level Descriptors (ALDs), and student performance data from the 2019 WY-ALT Summative Assessment. The panelists bookmarked items representative of minimum performance of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced performance levels. There were multiple rounds of review and resolution during the three-day workshop.

The cut scores are used to determine the four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

### How Were the Cut Scores Determined for Science?

From June 16-17, 2022, CAI facilitated a standard-setting workshop for Science in grades 4, 8, and 10. The 30-member panel was composed of Wyoming teachers, curriculum specialists, education administrators, and other stakeholders. The members were selected from large and small Wyoming school districts throughout the state, ensuring diverse perspectives throughout the standard-setting process.

The panelists used the Bookmark method, the most common procedure used throughout the country and for previous Wyoming assessments. Panelists were given a booklet of items ordered by level of difficulty. During the process, the panelists referenced the Achievement-Level Descriptors (ALDs), impact data, and student performance data from the 2022 WY-TOPP Science Summative Assessment. The panelists bookmarked items representative of minimum performance of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced performance levels. There were multiple rounds of review and resolution during the two-day workshop.

The cut scores are used to determine the four performance levels - Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

### Was Student Information From Wyoming Students Used to Set Cut Scores?

Yes. For ELA and math, panelists reviewed student performance data from the Spring 2019 WY-ALT Summative administration during each round of review in the bookmarking process. For science, panelists reviewed student performance data from the Spring 2022 WY-ALT Summative administration.

### How do I Get More Information on Assessments?

The [WDE Assessment](#) page provides further information about Wyoming Statewide Assessments. In the gray bar, found to the right on that page, is a list of additional child pages for more specific information on each assessment (i.e., ACCESS, ACT & WorkKeys, WY-ALT, WY-TOPP, NAEP). Other child pages include Accommodations and Accessibility, Blueprints and Rubrics, Assessment Calendar, and Test Security.