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**GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION IN
WYOMING'S ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT
FOR
STUDENTS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT
COGNITIVE DISABILITIES**

**PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT FOR WYOMING
STUDENTS – ALTERNATE
PAWS-ALT**

CHALLENGING EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL

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GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION IN WYOMING'S ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Wyoming's alternate assessment, Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students – Alternate [PAWS-ALT], is designed for a small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. It is part of a statewide instructionally supportive assessment system which complies with the requirements of *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* of 2004 (IDEA 2004).

Both federal and state laws require that all students with disabilities be administered assessments intended to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of students. IEP Team members must actively engage in a planning process that addresses:

- assurance of the provision of accommodations to facilitate student access to grade-level instruction and state assessments, and
- use of alternate assessments to assess the achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

In Wyoming, students participate in the regular Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students [PAWS] if they receive any instruction on the Wyoming Content and Performance standards which are assessed, regardless of where the instruction takes place.

However, for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, Wyoming's assessment system does include an alternate assessment. The term "significant cognitive disability" is not a separate category of disability. It is a designation given to a small number of students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the statewide student assessment system. Currently, less than 1% of Wyoming students are identified with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students may be working toward grade-level linked Academic Content Standards, which are reduced in complexity and breadth consistent with United States Department of Education guidance. They are required to participate in the alternate assessment, the Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students – Alternate (PAWS-ALT). Results from the alternate assessment are evaluated against Alternate Achievement Standards to determine proficiencies for the grade in which the student is enrolled. The students are counted in the school and district accountability system for AYP.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

One of the basic reform principles of NCLB is stronger accountability for results of student achievement toward academic proficiency for all students. Through this federal legislation, assessments aimed at increasing accountability provide important information with regard to:

- how successful schools are including all students in standards-based education,
- how well students are achieving standards, and
- instructional needs of specific groups of children.

State assessments are the mechanism for checking whether schools have been successfully making progress towards setting high standards for improving academic achievement in order to improve the quality of education for all students as defined by the content standards. By 2005 – 2006, Wyoming was in compliance with NCLB by providing assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students, including students with disabilities, in grades 3 – 8 and grade 11. School, district, and state accountability is based on measuring success in educating all of its students and determining what needs to be improved for specific groups of students. Under the NCLB, each State establishes a

definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school in achieving standards for all students and designated subgroups each year. Schools, districts, and states are held accountable for improvements on an annual basis by public reporting and ultimately through consequences if AYP is not achieved.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)

IDEA specifically governs services provided to students with disabilities. Accountability at the individual level is provided through an Individualized Education Program [IEP] developed on the basis of a child's unique needs. **IDEA** requires the participation of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments. Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations where necessary. **IDEA** requires that the IEP include a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments (consistent with assessment measurement constructs) of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in these assessments. The decision about a student's participation in assessment is made by the student's IEP team and documented in the IEP. To document that alternate assessment is appropriate for an individual student, the IEP team should review all important information about the student over multiple school years and multiple instructional settings (e.g., school, home, community) as well as the consequences.

PARTICIPATION IN STATE ASSESSMENTS

All students, including all students with disabilities, are to participate in the Wyoming assessment system. **In Wyoming, students participate in the regular Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students [PAWS] if they receive any instruction on the Wyoming Content and Performance standards which are assessed, regardless of where the instruction takes place.** Students with disabilities must participate in state and district assessments using the assessment format determined by their IEP team or 504 Team by participating in one of the following:

- PAWS without accommodations
- PAWS with standard accommodations
- PAWS-ALT

The Wyoming Content and Performance Standards and the Wyoming extended Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities need to be carefully examined against the student's present levels of performance, opportunities to learn, and long-term goals to determine the appropriate assessment to administer to the student. IEP teams must take into consideration how the extended Academic Content Standards and PAWS-ALT fit into the curriculum structure, graduation requirements, and eligibility for a high school diploma if they participate in alternate assessment.

PARTICIPATION IN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

Students who participate in the PAWS-ALT are those whose IEP teams have determined that their achievement levels (proficiencies) will be measured against Alternate Achievement Standards. Alternate Achievement Standards define grade-level performance descriptions that are reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity as compared to the Achievement Standards used to determine proficiency levels of students who participate in the general assessment, Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS). Reasons for and consequences of participation in the PAWS-ALT must be discussed and documented on the student's IEP. To this end, submission of the WDE-667. PAWS-ALT Requests, which is the form completed in the fall of each year by each school and accredited institution, provides assurances to the Wyoming Department of Education that:

- 1) Guidelines for Participation in Wyoming’s Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities were utilized by the IEP team to determine each student’s participation in alternate assessment; and
- 2) The school has documentation on file of communication to parents/guardians of any state or district imposed consequences of student participation in PAWS-ALT and use of alternate achievement standards to measure student performance.

To aid IEP teams in their determination of individual student participation in the Wyoming state assessment system, the IEP team can guide their decision making process by evaluating the following criteria. These criteria are not provided to serve as a checklist, but rather as points of discussion by the IEP team to determine a student’s eligibility in the alternate assessment, PAWS-ALT and determination of proficiency against Alternate Achievement Standards.

THE PAWS-ALT PARTICIPATION CRITERIA ARE DESCRIBED BELOW:

The Wyoming Department of Education has developed the following guidelines for Local Education Agencies to use in the determination of students for whom PAWS, the general assessment, is inappropriate. Students in grades 3 – 8 and grade 11 must participate in either the PAWS or PAWS-ALT. The decision for which assessment is appropriate for an individual student is made by each student’s IEP Team. **A student with the most significant cognitive disability will participate in PAWS-ALT if he or she meets each of the following criteria:**

CRITERIA TO DETERMINE PARTICIPATION IN THE PAWS-ALT	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The student’s access to the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards is provided by the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities standards, which are reduced in breadth and depth at less complex levels with extensively modified instruction.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decisions are made by each student’s IEP team by persons who are most familiar with the student’s individual needs, not an administrative decision.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The student demonstrates a significant cognitive disability, which results in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The student’s proficiency levels are appropriately measured against Alternate Achievement Standards.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The student’s IEP goals and objectives are based upon the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards, which are reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity as compared to the Wyoming Content and Performance Standards.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The student’s IEP goals and objectives are based upon the grade-level linked, extended Academic Content Standards and define appropriate level of challenge given the student’s present levels of performance, historical data, and rate of progress.
AND	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Proficiency determined by Alternate Achievement Standards does not under challenge the student or limit the educational opportunity of the student.

AND

- The student cannot participate in the PAWS with or without accommodations, as appropriate, based on their IEP.**

CRITERIA THAT DO NOT DETERMINE PARTICIPATION IN THE PAWS-ALT

- Program setting**
- Category of disability**
- Percentage of time in the general education setting**
- Percentage of time in the special education setting**
- Developmental level or mental age of the student**

CALCULATING ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS

When measuring AYP, States and LEAs have the flexibility to count the proficient scores of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards—so long as the number of those proficient scores does not exceed 1.0 percent of all students in the grades assessed (about nine percent of students with disabilities) at the LEA and State levels.

The 1.0 percent cap does not restrict the number of students who may participate in an alternate assessment. It does limit the number of proficient and advanced scores based on alternate achievement standards that may be used in the calculation of AYP. A limit is required to ensure a thoughtful application of alternate achievement standards and to protect IEP teams from pressure to assign low-performing students to assessments and curricula that are inappropriately restricted in scope, thus limiting educational opportunity for these students.

School and district assessment results will be reported as one component in the accountability system and are then made available to policymakers, educators, parents, administrators, media, and the general public.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN WYOMING'S ACCOUNTABILITY ASSESSMENTS

