



# **West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) Eligibility *Guidance for IEP Teams***



West Virginia DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**



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# **West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) Eligibility: Guidance for IEP Teams**



## **West Virginia Department of Education**

Federal Programs and Support, Special Education  
Office of Teaching & Leadership for Effective Schools, Assessment  
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## Overview

The federal requirements for alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards changed in 2015 with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Revisions in ESSA placed a 1% cap on the total number of students in each state who may *participate* in a state's alternate assessment, specifying that such assessments are appropriate only for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Because ESSA provides funds for West Virginia's elementary and secondary education system, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) and its Local Educational Agencies (LEA) must adhere to ESSA requirements, including those about state and Local Educational Agency (LEA) assessments.

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### ESSA 2015 Language on Alternate Assessments

#### SEC. 1111. STATE PLAN

#### (D) ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES. —

##### (i) ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS ALIGNED WITH ALTERNATE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS. —

**A State may provide for alternate assessments aligned with the challenging State academic standards and alternate academic achievement standards described in paragraph (1)(E) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, if the State—**

- (I) consistent with clause (ii), ensures that, for each subject, the total number of students assessed in such subject using the alternate assessments does not exceed 1 percent of the total number of all students in the State who are assessed in such subject;**
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The regulations also specify that parents of students determined eligible to participate in alternate assessments are to be made fully aware of the implications of alternate assessment participation.

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### ESSA 2015 Language on Informing Parents and Diploma Implications

- (II) ensures that the parents of such students are clearly informed, as part of the process for developing the individualized education program (as defined in section 614(d)(1)(A) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A)))—**

- (aa) that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on such alternate standards; and**
- (bb) how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma;**
- 

Provisions in 34 CFR § 200.6 (d)(1) further specify that identification under a particular disability category, English learner status, low achievement, or need for accommodations does not determine whether a student is a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Rather, the State's definition of significant cognitive disability, as well as evidence supporting that the "student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the challenging State academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled" are used to assist in determining whether a student should be assessed based on alternate academic achievement standards.

The criteria outlined in the "Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the WV Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)" and this companion guidance document are intended to provide defining criteria to assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams in West Virginia with making valid and reliable assessment decisions regarding eligibility for WVASA participation, to provide possible sources of evidence to use for data-based decision making, and to ensure only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are participating in the WVASA.

## Clarifications and Instructions

The remainder of this document provides guidance for IEP Teams to assist in the decision-making process for determining whether a student is eligible for participation in the WVASA using the “Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA).” The criteria are listed along with brief overviews of each, descriptions of characteristics often associated with significant cognitive disability to compare with the characteristics of the referred student, as well as possible sources of evidence to support the student’s eligibility determination. Note that the “Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)” incorporates and replaces the WVDE’s previous rubric for determining student eligibility for the WVASA.



**Sources of evidence marked with an asterisk (\*) are considered the most robust and should be included and considered when determining eligibility.**

### Criterion 1

**The student has been evaluated and found eligible as a student with a disability under WVBE Policy 2419.**

- *The student has been identified as having an educational disability as defined in WVBE Policy 2419.*
- *The student has a current Individualized Education Program (IEP), or one is being developed at an initial IEP meeting.*

If an Eligibility Committee has determined the student is eligible to receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and WVBE Policy 2419: *Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities*, and is receiving special education services, then the IEP Team would select “YES.” If the student has **not** been determined by an Eligibility Committee to be eligible to receive special education services under the IDEA and WVBE Policy 2419, then there will be no IEP Team meeting and no IEP Team will be considering these questions.

**Students who only receive accommodations through a Section 504 plan or Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) are NOT eligible to participate in the WVASA.**

### Criterion 2

**The student has a significant cognitive disability as manifested by either A or B, and C.**

The impact of intellectual or cognitive disabilities is highly variable as intellectual and adaptive functioning exist on a continuum of severity. The most significant cognitive disabilities, however, are global in nature, affecting learning in all academic content areas, as well as everyday living skills in most or all adaptive domains and across multiple environments, including school, home, and community settings. Additionally, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities exhibit diverse receptive and expressive communication skills (Kerns et al., 2012). The expressive language skills range from presymbolic behaviors such as cries and body movements, to symbolic communication skills such as pictures and objects, to verbal, written words, or language-based augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) (Kearns et al., 2011; Thurlow & Lazarus, 2017).

General intellectual functioning encompasses a wide variety of verbal and nonverbal cognitive skills including, but not limited to, reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, learning from instruction and experience, practical understanding (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), memory, perception, and attention (Brue & Wilmschurst, 2016). Many of these attributes are measured and summarized by contemporary intelligence tests. Evaluators should select intelligence tests based on their technical adequacy and whether they are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the student being assessed. Because WVASA participation is a high-stakes decision, evaluators should use intelligence tests published approximately within the last decade when possible to reduce the influence of the “Flynn effect” on obtained test scores. The “Flynn effect” refers to the phenomenon of steadily increasing IQ scores over time (Flynn, 2012).

Students with a primary disability category of Speech or Language Impairment *do not* meet the definition of a significant cognitive disability, although students with a significant cognitive disability may have speech or language therapy as a related service. Students with a primary disability category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) should not be eligible to participate in the WVASA, as ruling out the presence of an intellectual disability is included in the eligibility criteria for SLD. See WVBE Policy 2419 for further information on SLD. Finally, students with a primary disability category of Emotional Disturbance should not typically be considered for WVASA eligibility.



## Criterion 2A

*“Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities typically have general intellectual functioning more than three standard deviations below the mean, in consideration of 1.0 standard error of measurement as determined by a qualified psychologist or school psychologist, using an individually administered, culturally and linguistically appropriate intelligence test.”*

This is typically associated with an intellectual summary score (e.g., Full-Scale IQ) of about 55 or below for cognitive tests with a mean score of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. This cutoff score is intended to be a guideline to assist in differentiating between students with mild to moderate intellectual disability and those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, rather than a fixed rule used to grant or deny eligibility for participation in the WVASA.

**School-based professionals with expertise in the administration, scoring, and interpretation of psychological and educational assessment instruments such as school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, special education specialists, and educational diagnosticians, should be invited to participate in this decision-making process.**

When considering eligibility for students with intellectual summary scores between 55 and 65, for example, documentation and evidence supporting the remaining eligibility criteria should be exhaustive and provide detailed, data-based justification as to why participation in the general summative assessment is inappropriate. Evidence should be very clearly linked to the need for alternate standards instruction and assessment. **Students within this range of intellectual functioning should be considered on a very limited basis.**

### Possible Evidence for Criterion 2A

- Results of individually administered cognitive/intellectual ability assessment(s) not older than three years\*
  - Mental status examination and/or test behavior recorded during the intellectual ability evaluation
- 

## Criterion 2B

*“The student’s significant cognitive disability is such that traditional assessment with an individually administered, culturally and linguistically appropriate intelligence test is rendered extremely difficult, inappropriate, or impossible, and the severity is instead evidenced by the need for extensive and substantial supports, and estimates of conceptual thinking as indicated by appropriate standardized norm-referenced rating scales.”*

In many cases, direct assessment of intellectual ability is achievable and should be attempted. Evaluators will need to use professional judgment when selecting the most appropriate test to use with a specific student (e.g., whether to use a nonverbal ability test due to significant language or articulation problems). However, direct assessment of intellectual ability may sometimes be difficult or impossible due to co-occurring sensory or physical disabilities, serious problem behaviors or unwillingness to cooperate, and in particularly severe cases, the inability of the student to reasonably participate in the testing process within standardization parameters.

### Possible Evidence for Criterion 2B

- Documentation of the frequency, duration, intensity, and nature of the extensive and substantial supports required for the student to reasonably participate in the learning environment (see Criterion 3).\*
- Documentation of estimated conceptual/cognitive ability as measured by standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scales (e.g., the Conceptual composite from the most recent version of the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System rating scale, the Cognitive scale from the most recent version of the Developmental Profile rating scale).\*
  - **Examiners should obtain ratings from two or more respondents familiar with the student in different environments.**
- Documentation of testing attempt(s) by the evaluator, including a mental status examination and/or behavior observations of the student conducted during the attempt(s).

## Criterion 2C

*“The student’s significant cognitive disability severely limits the student’s performance of adaptive behavior across multiple environments and domains of adaptive functioning, including Conceptual, Social, and Practical domains, based on clinical and standardized assessment.”*

Adaptive behavior refers to an individual’s ability to apply social and practical skills in everyday life, and is divided into three domains: conceptual, social, and practical. Moreover, adaptive skills are developmental, defined by societal expectations, modifiable, and defined by typical performance (Brue & Wilmschurst, 2016). Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will have considerable difficulty in more than one domain of adaptive functioning. Such students tend to require extensive adaptation and support to perform and participate meaningfully and productively in the everyday life activities of integrated school, home, community, and work environments, and are often expected to require intensive, significant, and ongoing functional supports after graduation. Personal safety may be dependent on continuous supervision and may be a lifelong concern. Post-school outcomes for independent living often require supported or assisted living including meal preparation, dressing, grooming, and personal hygiene, and the student may have a guardian after reaching the age of 18. Moderate to significant supervision may be required to access recreation, employment, and training. Post-school outcomes for employment may result in sheltered or supported employment, part-time employment, or participation in adult day centers or programs.

For additional information on adaptive functioning severity levels, see *Appendix B – Severity Levels for Adaptive Functioning*, which is adapted from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition – Text Revision (DSM-5-TR). Typically, students whose adaptive skills primarily align with the “Mild” severity level descriptions should not take the WVASA. Adaptive skills of students taking the WVASA should be consistent with the “Moderate,” “Severe,” or “Profound” severity levels for each domain.

### **Possible Evidence for Criterion 2C**

- Standardized, norm-referenced adaptive behavior assessments, not older than three years, suggesting significantly low levels of performance across most or all adaptive domains.\*
  - **Examiners should obtain ratings from two or more respondents familiar with the student in different environments.**
  - Adaptive behavior assessment results should reflect both composite and domain scores that fall approximately 2.5 or more standard deviations below the mean, or are near or below the 1st percentile rank.
  - If adaptive functioning between raters is inconsistent in severity, professional judgment should be used to follow up with one or more raters for clarification or to correct any misconceptions.

**Consult the examiner’s manual of the specific assessment tool for further information on interpreting and addressing significant discrepancies between raters, and for information on obtaining valid responses from raters.**

- Speech, language, and augmentative communication evaluation(s) that describe how receptive and expressive communication deficits significantly impact adaptive behavior (*See Appendix C*).
- Sensory (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing assessments, or vision assessments), and fine and gross motor assessments (e.g., occupational and physical therapy evaluations).
- Rate of progress on functional, daily living, and life skill standards.
- Systematic adaptive behavior observation(s).

## Criterion 3

**The student’s significant cognitive disability severely impacts the student’s educational performance and access to the curriculum.**

- *The student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature, **AND***
- *The student requires substantially adapted and/or modified materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer academic, functional, and adaptive behavior skills across multiple settings, **AND***
- *Goals and instruction listed in the student’s IEP are comparable to the enrolled grade-level West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.*



The most significant cognitive disabilities are pervasive, impacting functioning across all academic, social, and community settings. In academic settings, individualized instruction typically occurs in a one-to-one or small group setting with opportunities to generalize and transfer skills across multiple settings. Instruction on age-appropriate academic content standards is substantially different from that of peers, with or without disabilities, and these students are unable to demonstrate knowledge and skills fully or partially on a summative assessment, with or without accommodations. Students with significant cognitive disabilities will likely require objectives, materials, prompting hierarchies, and teaching modalities considerably different from the general education curriculum. Materials are significantly modified, customized, and adapted to facilitate understanding. Information is typically obtained primarily through methods other than reading due to limited reading skill, and alternate methods to express or communicate oral or written ideas and information may be necessary. Substantial curriculum modifications change the content expectation, resulting in a significant reduction in depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level standards as exemplified in the West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (WV-AAAS).

The student's goals and objectives are typically comparable to the WV-AAAS for the student's current grade level, and there is a documented need for significant curriculum modifications. Often, the student's IEP will include goals and objectives to support acquisition of expressive/receptive language and communication skills, and sensory/motor access for active participation and engagement. The student's Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance (PLEPs) indicate the ability to make adequate progress through the alternate standards and objectives that include alternate standards skills and concepts or learning progression steps that lead to grade-aligned performance target(s). Adequate progress usually requires increasing or maximal levels of supports and scaffolding. The course of study for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will typically also include functional skills, such as self-care, health and safety, social skills, and communication. Prescriptive, systematic, direct instruction is often needed within two or more domains of adaptive skills, or across many or all adaptive skills within each domain.

Examples of ongoing, substantial, and intensive supports may include the following:

- Significantly lowered Lexile levels
- Picture or symbol supports for reading materials
- Voice output communication devices or other forms of expressive communicative support
- Symbol differentiation (e.g., picture supports, object supports) or other forms of receptive communicative support
- Repetitive, systematic instruction
- Task analytic instructional methods (i.e., deconstructing tasks into component steps, teaching one step at a time until mastery is obtained, ultimately working toward independently completing all steps in a task)
- Discrete trial instructional methods (i.e., a teaching method that involves an antecedent, prompt, response, consequence for correct or incorrect response, and a brief pause before beginning the next trial sequence)
- Use of concrete learning materials unusual for grade-level (e.g., math manipulatives)
- Additional, direct adult support or supervision throughout the school day (e.g., paraprofessional)

### **Possible Evidence for Criterion 3**

- Documentation of the frequency, duration, intensity, and nature of the extensive and substantial supports required for the student to reasonably participate in the learning environment.\*
- Present levels of academic and functional performance that are comparable to the WV-AAAS for the student's grade level.\*
  - For students initially considered for WVASA participation, it will be beneficial to reference WVBE Policy 2520.16: *West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards* to determine comparability between student performance and the alternate standards.
- IEP goal/objectives progress data supportive of the need for alternate assessment.
- Current examples of student work in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Communication Matrix profile indicating the student's expressive communication skills are at or below Level VII-Language, combining two- to three-symbols according to grammatical rules and syntax. The Evaluating Acquired Skills in Communication, Third Edition (EASIC-3) provides receptive and expressive skill levels to support the severe communication needs. For more information regarding the Communication Matrix and the EASIC-3, see Appendix C.

#### **Criterion 4**

**Consideration of the student's participation in the alternate assessment is due to the presence of a significant cognitive disability, and is NOT based on:**

##### ***A disability category or label.***

Specific disability categories cannot predict an individual's cognitive or behavioral potential and therefore should not be used in itself as evidence of a significant cognitive disability.

##### ***Poor attendance or extended absences.***

Students may miss school for many reasons (e.g., medical conditions, anxiety, transportation issues), and these reasons should be addressed through the appropriate channels at school. However, poor attendance, regardless of the reason, is not evidence supportive of a significant cognitive disability.

##### ***Social, cultural, or economic difference.***

Differences in social, cultural, or economic factors are not essential to the identification of a significant cognitive disability. These factors should ideally be supported to the extent possible through the WVTSS process and in collaboration with other school-based professionals.

##### ***Expected poor performance on the general education assessment.***

Most students who receive special education services participate in the WVGSA with appropriate accommodations and designated supports. Achieving mastery can be difficult even for general education students. As such, expected poor performance on the WVGSA is not an appropriate reason to consider when making an eligibility decision.

##### ***Academic or other services student receives.***

Students may receive special education or related services for a variety of needs (e.g., academic, social/emotional, behavioral, physical, medical). Therefore, this should not be a primary consideration for WVASA participation.

##### ***Educational environment, instructional setting, or percent of time receiving special education services.***

The environment in which a student is provided an education or the amount of time a student receives special education services has no direct bearing on a student's cognitive and adaptive functioning.

##### ***English Learner (EL) status or native language.***

A student's level of English language proficiency can impact learning ability when instruction is provided in English; however, English proficiency and cognitive ability are distinct factors. It can take multiple years for ELs to develop adequate social and academic language. **If an EL student is being considered for WVASA participation, an individual with related expertise, such as an EL teacher or coordinator, should be a participating team member in the discussion.**

##### ***Low reading/math/achievement level.***

Numerous factors can contribute to low levels of academic achievement, only one of which may be the presence of a significant cognitive disability. Consequently, this should not be a primary reason for considering WVASA eligibility.

##### ***Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional distress.***

Disruptive behavior and emotional distress are difficulties some students may face that could interfere with their education; however, these should be addressed by appropriate professional personnel and are not necessarily indicative of significant cognitive disability.

##### ***Impact of student scores on the accountability system.***

A student's performance on a state assessment, whether poor or excellent, may not be used as a deciding factor in determining which assessment is appropriate for a student.

##### ***Administrative decision.***

It is inappropriate for an LEA, school, administrator, or chairperson to decide eligibility without the input and agreement of the IEP team, including the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student, or without reasonably adhering to the criteria on the eligibility checklist and its accompanying guidance document.

***Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication [AAC]) to participate in the general summative assessment.***

Many different types of accommodations are allowed and appropriate for providing students with disabilities reasonable access to the general summative assessment. The need for these accommodations should not necessarily preclude participation in the WVGSA.

***Possible Evidence for Criterion 4***

- A description of ways in which the student's significant cognitive disability prevents this student from participating in the general assessment even with appropriate accommodations and designated supports. This description should not reference or consider any of the above factors as primary contributors to the reason the student should be assessed with the WVASA.\*

**Final Considerations**

**Extensive documentation supporting each criterion above is attached to, or included within, the IEP.**

When multiple, independent sources of information converge to substantiate the student's participation in the WVASA, and the evidence sufficiently supports each criterion, the determination is more valid and reliable. The IEP Team should check "Yes" for this item if a body of evidence has been collected and attached to, or included with, the IEP that supports each criterion on the eligibility determination checklist as described in this guidance document.

**Describe any educationally relevant medical information.**

Any medical conditions or medical information that may further impact the student's access to the general education curriculum should be noted in this box. While there may be certain medical conditions more often associated with significant cognitive disabilities, a student's eligibility for WVASA participation is not based solely on a diagnosis of any kind.

**Making the Determination to Participate in the WVASA**

If the IEP Team answers "No" to any of the "Yes/No" items then the IEP Team should check the last box on page 2 of the checklist indicating the student **DOES NOT** meet the criteria, and the student should not participate in the WVASA. Students who do not meet the criteria should participate in the WVGSA with or without accommodations as determined by the IEP Team.

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If **all** items on the eligibility determination checklist are answered "Yes" based on an accurate and thorough review of each piece of supporting evidence, then the student may be considered eligible to participate in the WVASA as a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and the IEP Team can check the box that states the student **DOES** meet the necessary criteria. If the IEP Team has not already done so prior to the completion of the checklist, the parent should be informed of the implications of participation in the WVASA as indicated on page 2 of the eligibility determination checklist.

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Regardless of the final decision, the IEP Team members must complete the signature page after a determination is made by signing the appropriate line and indicating whether each team member agrees with the determination. Any team member who disagrees with the final determination must submit a written statement presenting the member's conclusions and attach a copy to the checklist to be kept in the student's file.

Finally, bear in mind that students who qualify to participate in the WVASA are not necessarily prohibited from attempting to satisfy graduation requirements to earn a regular diploma during the timeframe in which students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). For more information on West Virginia's graduation requirements, see WVBE Policy 2510.

## English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (ELSCD)

According to WVBE Policy 2417: *Regulations and English Language Proficiency Standards for English Learners and Alternate English Language Proficiency Standards for English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*, ELSCDs are individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their IEPs, and who are progressing toward English Language Proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding. As of Fall 2022, the Alternate ELP (ALT ELP) Assessment will be in the pilot testing phase with plans to be available statewide for the 2023-2024 school year. During this development process, ELSCD students are expected to complete the ELPA21 with appropriate accommodations. To be eligible for the ALT ELP Assessment, students must meet the criteria for significant cognitive disability as described in this guidance document. The ALT ELP Standards for ELSCDs were developed for the following grades and grade bands: K, 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. For more information regarding Title III, ELP Standards, and Policy 2417, please visit the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) website.

## Conclusion

Although not always the case, many students with significant cognitive disabilities often have intellectual disabilities, autism, or multiple disabilities, and many were made eligible for special education prior to kindergarten. Implications for students taking alternate assessments include receiving instruction that is reduced in breadth, depth, and complexity, the potential inability to meet requirements for a regular high school diploma, and potential ineligibility for some post-secondary education, training, military service, or employment (Hawes et al., 2019).

Determining which students are eligible for WVASA participation is typically a difficult process, and each determination should be made with careful consideration of the available data and the short- and long-term impacts of the decision, including the understanding that the student may graduate with an alternate diploma.

For more information about the West Virginia General Summative Assessment, West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment, and accommodations for state testing, please see the most recent *“Participation Guidelines for West Virginia State Assessments: Guidance for Accommodations for State Testing”* document, which can be found at <http://wvde.us/assessment/participation-guidelines/>.

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***“The criterion of least dangerous assumption holds that in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults.”***

***-Anne Donnellan (1984)***

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## Appendix A – Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)

### Local Educational Agency (LEA)

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent(s)/Guardian(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ WVEIS#: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City/State/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

The IEP team should answer “Yes” to each of the “Yes/No” items for the student to be eligible to participate in the WVASA as a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. If the answer is “No” to any of the items, the student should participate in the grade-appropriate general summative assessment, with or without accommodations, as determined appropriate by the IEP team. Extensive documentation should be provided to the IEP team for review for each criterion to which the team answers “Yes.” (See the document “West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) Eligibility: Guidance for IEP Teams” for technical assistance regarding this decision-making process.)

**Note:** Intelligence quotient (IQ) scores are not always a reliable measure for determining eligibility as many of the assessment tools used to determine IQ may not be fully accessible for learners with significant motor, communication, and sensory complexities. IQ scores should never be used in isolation to determine eligibility for WVASA participation.

<p><b>1. The student has been evaluated and found eligible as a student with a disability under WVBE Policy 2419.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student has been identified as having an educational disability as defined in WVBE Policy 2419.</li> <li>• The student has a current Individualized Education Program (IEP), or one is being developed at an initial IEP meeting.</li> </ul>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>2. The student has a significant cognitive disability as manifested by either A or B, and C.</b></p> <p><b>A.</b> Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities typically have general intellectual functioning more than three standard deviations below the mean, in consideration of 1.0 standard error of measurement as determined by a qualified psychologist or school psychologist, using an individually administered, culturally and linguistically appropriate intelligence test.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> The student’s significant cognitive disability is such that traditional assessment with an individually administered, culturally and linguistically appropriate intelligence test is rendered extremely difficult, inappropriate, or impossible, and the severity is instead evidenced by the need for extensive and substantial supports, and estimates of conceptual thinking as indicated by appropriate standardized norm-referenced rating scales.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>C.</b> The student’s significant cognitive disability severely limits the performance of adaptive behavior across multiple environments and domains of adaptive functioning, including Conceptual, Social, and Practical domains, based on clinical and standardized assessment.      - See <i>Severity Levels for Adaptive Functioning</i> Appendix in either WVBE Policy 2419 or “West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) Eligibility: Guidance for IEP Teams.”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>3. The student’s significant cognitive disability severely impacts the student’s educational performance and access to the curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature, <b>AND</b></li> <li>• The student requires substantially adapted and/or modified materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer academic, functional, and adaptive behavior skills across multiple settings, <b>AND</b></li> <li>• Goals and instruction listed in the student’s IEP are comparable to the enrolled grade-level West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (WV-AAAS) and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">(34 CFR § 200.320(a)(6)(ii))</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

<p><b>4. Consideration of the student's participation in the alternate assessment is due to the presence of a significant cognitive disability, and is NOT based on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A disability category or label</li> <li>• Poor attendance or extended absences</li> <li>• Social, cultural, or economic difference</li> <li>• Expected poor performance on the general education assessment</li> <li>• Academic or other services student receives</li> <li>• Educational environment, instructional setting, or percent of time receiving special education services</li> <li>• English Learner (EL) status or native language</li> <li>• Low reading/math/achievement level</li> <li>• Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional distress</li> <li>• Impact of student scores on the accountability system</li> <li>• Administrative decision</li> <li>• Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/ Augmentative and Alternative Communication [AAC]) to participate in the general summative assessment</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>
<p><b>Extensive supporting documentation is attached to, or included within, the IEP, and is labeled according to each corresponding criterion listed above.</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>
<p><b>Describe any educationally relevant medical information.</b> Write "N/A" if no relevant medical information applies.</p>	

**The IEP Team used the above evaluation data analysis and discussion to determine:**

- ☐ The student **DOES** meet the criteria to participate in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and this determination will be reviewed annually.

Additionally, the IEP Team has:

- provided informational resources about the WVASA and Alternate Diplomas to the parent(s)/guardian(s), including the "*West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment: An Informational Guide for Parents/Guardians*" and "*Understanding Alternate Diplomas*" handouts, **AND**
- explained to the parent(s)/guardian(s) that participation in the WVASA may lead to an Alternate Diploma, which is not a regular high school diploma, and may not be accepted by colleges, universities, technical or trade schools, certain employers, or the U.S. military, **AND**
- explained to the parent(s)/guardian(s) that the West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (WV-AAAS) assessed by the WVASA are less complex than the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards (WVCCR) assessed by the West Virginia General Summative Assessment (WVGSA), **AND**
- included the parent(s)/guardian(s) in the discussion about the decision for their child to participate in the WVASA.

Administrator/Designee/Chairperson Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ The student **DOES NOT** meet the criteria to participate in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and will therefore participate in the West Virginia General Summative Assessment (WVGSA) with or without accommodations as determined by the IEP Team.

### IEP Team Members

**Signature**

**Agreement with  
Decision**

_____	Administrator/Designee/Chairperson	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	Parent/Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	Parent/Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	School Psychologist/Specialist/Evaluator	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

**NOTE:** Any member(s) with a dissenting opinion must submit a separate written statement presenting the member's conclusions.

## Appendix B – Severity Levels for Adaptive Functioning

*Adapted from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR)*

Severity Level	Conceptual Domain	Social Domain	Practical Domain
<b>Mild</b>	For preschool children, there may be no obvious conceptual differences. For school-age children and adults, there are difficulties in learning academic skills involving reading, writing, arithmetic, time or money, with support needed in one or more areas to meet age-related expectations. In adults, abstract thinking, executive function (i.e., planning, strategizing, priority setting and cognitive flexibility) and short-term memory, as well as functional use of academic skills (e.g., reading, money management), are impaired. There is somewhat concrete approach to problems and solutions compared with age-mates.	Compared with typically developing age-mates, the individual is immature in social interactions. For example, there may be difficulty in accurately perceiving peers' social cues. Communication, conversation, and language are more concrete or immature than expected for age. There may be difficulties regulating emotion and behavior in age-appropriate fashion; these difficult are noticed by peers in social situations. There is limited understanding of risk in social situations; social judgement is immature for age and the person is at risk of being manipulated by others (gullibility).	The individual may function age-appropriately in personal care. Individuals need some support with complex daily living tasks in comparison to peers. In adulthood, supports typically involve grocery shopping, transportation, home and child-care organizing, nutritious food preparation and banking and money management. Recreational skills resemble those of age-mates, although judgement related to well-being and organization around recreation requires support. In adulthood, competitive employment is often seen in jobs that do not emphasize conceptual skills. Individuals generally need support to make health care decisions and legal decisions and to learn to perform a skilled vocation competently. Support is typically needed to raise a family.
<b>Moderate</b>	All through development, the individual's conceptual skills lag markedly behind those of peers. For preschoolers, language and pre-academic skills develop slowly. For school-age children, progress in reading, writing, mathematics and understanding of time and money occurs slowly across the school years and is markedly limited compared with that of peers. For adults, academic skill development is typically at an elementary level, and support is required for all use of academic skills in work and personal life. Ongoing assistance on a daily basis is needed to complete conceptual tasks of day-to-day life, and other may take over these responsibilities fully for the individual.	The individual shows marked differences from peers in social and communicative behavior across development. Spoken language is typically a primary tool for social communication but is much less complex than that of peers. Capacity for relationships is evident in ties to family and friends, and the individual may have successful friendships across life and sometimes romantic relations in adulthood. However, individuals may not perceive or interpret social cues accurately. Social judgment and decision-making abilities are limited, and caretakers must assist the person with life decisions. Friendships with typically developing peers are often affected by communication or social limitations. Significant social and communicative support is needed in work settings for success.	The individual can care for personal needs involving eating, dressing, elimination, and hygiene as an adult, although an extended period of teaching and time is needed for the individual to become independent in these areas and reminders may be needed. Similarly, participation in all household tasks can be achieved by adulthood, although an extended period of teaching is needed, and ongoing supports will typically occur for adult-level performance. Independent employment in jobs that require limited conceptual and communication skills can be achieved, but considerable support from co-workers, supervisors and others is needed to manage social expectations, job complexities and ancillary responsibilities such as scheduling, transportation, health benefits and money management. A variety of recreational skills can be developed. These typically require additional supports and learning opportunities over an extended period of time. Maladaptive behavior is present in a significant minority and causes social problems.

<b>Severe</b>	Attainment of conceptual skills is limited. The individual generally has little understanding of written language or of concepts involving numbers, quantity, time, and money. Caretakers provide extensive supports for problem solving throughout life.	Spoken language is quite limited in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Speech may be single words or phrases and may be supplemented through augmentative means. Speech and communication are focused on the here and now within everyday events. Language is used for social communication more than for explication. Individuals understand simple speech and gestural communication. Relationships with family members and familiar others are a source of pleasure and help	The individual requires support for all activities of daily living, including meals, dressing, bathing, and elimination. The individual requires supervision at all times. The individual cannot make responsible decisions regarding well-being of self or others. In adulthood, participation in tasks at home, recreation and work requires ongoing support and assistance. Skill acquisition in all domains involves long-term teaching and ongoing support. Maladaptive behavior, including self-injury, is present in a significant minority.
<b>Profound</b>	Conceptual skills generally involve the physical world rather than symbolic processes. The individual may use objects in goal-directed fashion for self-care, work, and recreation. Certain visuospatial skills, such as matching and sorting based on physical characteristics, may be acquired. However, co-occurring motor and sensory impairments may prevent functional use of objects.	The individual has very limited understanding of symbolic communication in speech or gesture. He or she may understand some simple instructions or gestures. The individual expresses his or her own desires and emotions largely through nonverbal, nonsymbolic communication. The individual enjoys relationships with well-known family members, caretakers and familiar others, and initiates and responds to social interactions through gestural and emotional cues. Co-occurring sensory and physical impairment may prevent many social activities.	The individual is dependent on others for all aspects of daily physical care health and safety, although he or she may be able to participate in some of these activities as well. Individuals without severe physical impairment may assist with some daily work tasks at home, like carrying dishes to the table. Simple actions with objects may be the basis of participation in some vocational activities with high levels of ongoing support. Recreational activities may involve, for example, enjoyment in listening to music, watching movies, going out for walks, or participating in water activities, all with the support of others. Co-occurring physical and sensory impairments are frequent barriers to participation (beyond watching) in home, recreational, and vocational activities. Maladaptive behavior is present in a significant minority.



## Appendix C – Speech and Language Evaluations for Individuals with Severe Cognitive Disabilities

### Communication Matrix

The Communication Matrix is an online assessment that helps families and professionals identify the communication status, progress, and unique needs of anyone functioning at the early stages of communication or using forms of communication other than speaking or writing. Access to the assessment requires the user to set up a free account and answer background demographic questions about the student. The demographic information is used for research purposes. For privacy protection, the student's profile should not be saved using their full name. Each account can complete five free Communication Matrix Profiles that are stored online. After that, the cost of each profile is two dollars (\$2.00). In addition, Custom Reports are available for examiners to create individualized informational documents beyond the Communication Profile for an additional seven dollars (\$7.00).

Expressive language skills are divided into Seven Levels of Communicative Competence. Students may be functioning across different levels. Each level has an age range and communication behaviors, plus identified communicative intents, which may be used to identify IEP goals. The Communication Matrix Profile may be stored online and used for yearly progress monitoring. The Communication Matrix measures expressive language functioning below twenty-four (24) months. The Seven Levels of Communicative Competence are:

- Level I – Pre-Intentional Behaviors
- Level II – Intentional Behaviors
- Level III – Unconventional Communication
- Level IV – Conventional Communication
- Level V – Concrete Symbols
- Level VI – Abstract Symbols
- Level VII – Language – use symbols in two- to three-word combinations

An individual who is functioning above the twenty-four month to thirty-six (36) month level should not be given the Communication Matrix.

For more information, please visit: <https://communicationmatrix.org/>.

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### Evaluating Acquired Skills in Communication-3 (EASIC-3)

The EASIC-3 is a five-level inventory developed for use with individuals who are developmentally delayed, have autism, or have moderate to severe cognitive and language disorders. The assessment provides items in the following areas:

- Prelinguistic Skills
- Semantics
- Syntax
- Morphology
- Pragmatics

The results of the test can be graphed into a profile and can be used to identify IEP goals. The following inventories are included:

- Prelanguage
- Receptive I and II
- Expressive I and II

The EASIC-3 is currently available for checkout through the West Virginia University Speech and Language Acquisition and Disorders Lab in Morgantown, West Virginia.

For more information, please visit:

<https://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/communications-sciences-and-disorders/research/school-age-language-acquisition-and-disorders-lab/>

## Appendix D – Frequently Asked Questions (and Answers) about WVASA Eligibility

This FAQ document is intended to provide local education agencies (LEAs), parents, advocacy organizations, and other interested parties with information regarding eligibility criteria for participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA).

*Note:* Nothing in this guidance should be construed to indicate that students who qualify to participate in the WVASA are prohibited from attempting to satisfy graduation requirements to earn a regular diploma. West Virginia's graduation requirements are outlined in WVBE Policy 2510. This FAQ draws from federal and state policy for informational sources. Additional information may be found in LEA policies and guidance from the WVDE.

### 1. Where can I access the **Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)**?

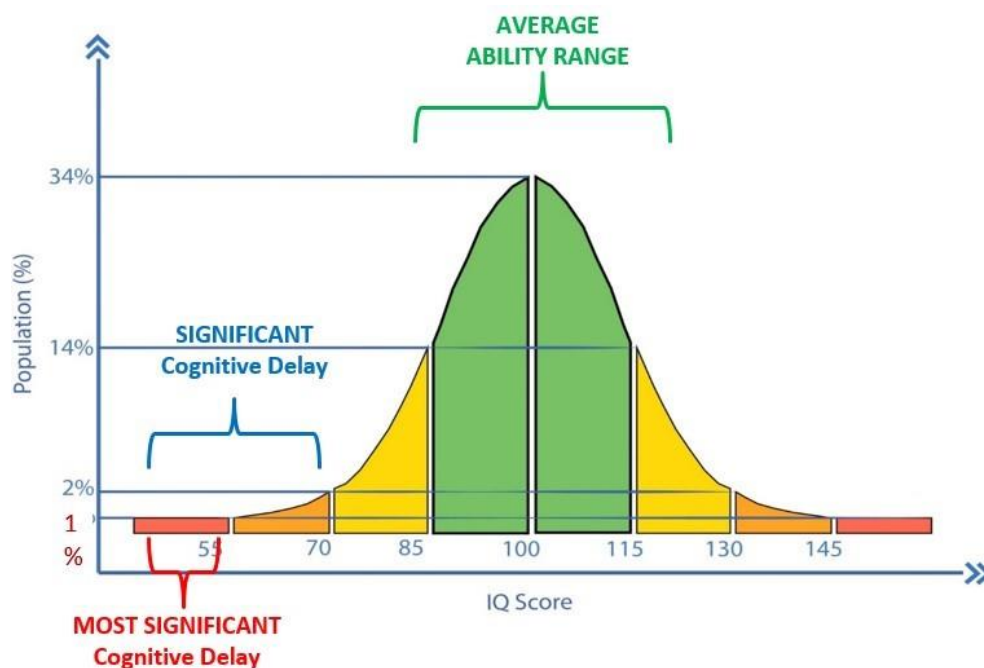
- » The WVASA eligibility checklist can be found at <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WVASA-Eligibility-Checklist-Fall-2022.pdf>

### 2. Who is responsible for completing the WVASA eligibility checklist?

- » The WVASA eligibility checklist should be readied for discussion by the student's case manager prior to the annual IEP meeting. This includes having all relevant documentation supporting each criterion at the meeting to enable the committee to make the best decision for the student's needs.

### 3. What is the most significant cognitive disability?

- » A student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is not identified solely based on the student's previous low academic achievement, or the student's previous need for accommodations to participate in general state or LEA-wide assessments.
- » A student is identified as having the most significant cognitive disabilities because the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the challenging state academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.
- » The most significant cognitive disabilities are typically those who measure at least three standard deviations below the mean on an ability assessment and have *major* limitations in adaptive skills.



- 4. The IEP team has determined that the student qualifies for the WVASA. What are the next steps?**
- » Enter the information supporting the decision into the student's IEP, and on the IEP mark the West Virginia Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (all grades) and the WVASA (grades 3 and up).
  - » Create high quality standards and objectives (minimum of 2 per goal) demonstrating high expectations for the student's success.
  - » Document in the IEP the parent's understanding of the decision and the outcomes of the student receiving their education through the WVAAAS and graduating with an alternate diploma, and provide the parents with a copy of ***Understanding Alternate Diplomas: What Teachers, Parents, and Students Need to Know*** found at <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Understanding-Alternate-Diplomas.fall2022.pdf>, and the ***West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment: An Informational Guide for Parents/Guardians*** found at <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-WV-Alternate-Summative-Assessment-Informational-Guide.pdf>
    - This is accomplished by appropriately completing the WVASA eligibility checklist.
  - » Follow your LEA's notification guidelines (i.e., special education director).
- 5. Does an IQ score of less than 70 assure eligibility on the alternate assessments?**
- » No. An intelligence quotient (IQ) score should never be used in isolation to determine a student's eligibility to participate in the WVASA. Participation in the WVASA is limited to those who have the most significant cognitive disabilities. Typically, the most significant cognitive disabilities are those who measure at least three standard deviations below the mean on an ability assessment and have major limitations in adaptive skills. Therefore, a student whose IQ is under 70 but above the three standard deviations below the mean would be unlikely to have a significant cognitive disability.
  - » Additional considerations must include the student's academic and adaptive supports, and whether the student can demonstrate their understanding of the standards in the general education environment and on the general summative assessment. The committee must also have information from a standardized adaptive skills assessment demonstrating the student has adaptive behavior skills well below age level expectations in multiple areas.
- 6. Can a student who is eligible for special education services with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) qualify for participation in the WVASA?**
- » No. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines an SLD as not including learning problems that are "primarily the result of ... intellectual disability..." [34 CFR §300.8(c)(10)]. An eligibility of specific learning disability must have positively ruled out a student having a cognitive disability to qualify as needing services under the SLD category.
- 7. My student is unable to complete a cognitive assessment. Can they still participate in the WVASA?**
- » Yes. However, in the absence of a standardized cognitive/ability assessment, other evidence must be presented and considered to substantiate the presence of the most significant cognitive impairment. Evidence might include, but is not limited to, norm-referenced rating scales, curriculum-based assessment scores, detailed present levels of performance information, goals and objectives, observations, and progress report data. The IEP committee should review the WVASA eligibility checklist and accompanying guidance document for other sources of data.
- 8. Can a student identified as an English learner also be eligible to participate in the WVASA?**
- » Yes. Students who qualify as an English learner must participate in a state summative assessment in addition to an English Language Proficiency assessment. If the student meets the participation criteria for the WVASA in addition to being an EL student, they must be provided with the opportunity to participate in the WVASA.
- 9. Should the WVASA eligibility checklist be reviewed and completed each year to verify eligibility?**
- » Yes. With the understanding that intellectual ability is not fixed, and a growth mindset while presuming competence, to assume a student's continual eligibility based on an earlier finding could be discriminatory and pre-determinative. It is beneficial to assume a student can do more rather than less. The completed and signed WVASA eligibility checklist should be attached to the IEP with a copy provided to the parents.

**10. Can a student with only a Communication Disorder qualify to participate in the WVASA?**

- » No. Students with a speech-only IEP do not present evidence of having a cognitive disability to the extent necessary to qualify to participate in the WVASA. Should a teacher feel additional academic support may be necessary, the student should be referred to the eligibility committee through the appropriate procedures.

**11. What happens should the IEP team determine if a previously WVASA-eligible student is no longer eligible to participate in the WVASA?**

- » Switch the IEP to general academic standards and state assessment with appropriate accommodations.
- » Document what supports the student will need to make progress in and demonstrate mastery of the general education standards.
- » Create goals with high expectations.
- » Follow the LEA's notification guidelines (i.e., special education director).

**12. Students who participate in the WVASA usually receive instruction in a self-contained, separate classroom. Can a student who qualifies to participate in the WVASA receive instruction in the general education environment?**

- » Yes. Eligibility to participate in the WVASA is not based on placement of services.

**13. What grades complete the WVASA?**

- » Students in grades 3-8 and 11 are assessed annually in math and English. Additionally, students in grades 5, 8, and 11 are assessed in science. Students are assessed based on the grade-level they are registered for in WVEIS. Off-grade level summative assessments are not permitted.

**14. My student is eligible to participate in the WVASA, but they receive their instruction in a homebound setting. Do they still have to take the test?**

- » Yes. Every student has the right to have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the grade-level standards through which they have received instruction. The student's homebound instructor can receive training to administer the assessment in the student's home.

**15. In previous years a student has not been able to complete the general assessment due to severe test anxiety. Can this student participate in the WVASA?**

- » Only those students who are eligible based on the WVASA eligibility guidelines and requirements may participate in the WVASA. Anticipated student anxiety and historical poor performances are not considerations for WVASA eligibility. For this student, the team should consider all accessibility options to make the general assessment as accessible as possible.



David L. Roach  
West Virginia Superintendent of Schools