

# PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

For Alaska Students  
in State Assessments

2002/2003



**Alaska  
Department  
of Education  
& Early  
Development**

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## FOREWORD

Dear Alaskans,

In 1997 and 1998, the Alaska State Legislature enacted laws that require the assessment of Alaska students to ensure accountability of Alaska's public schools. To achieve this goal, the Department of Education & Early Development established the Comprehensive System of Student Assessments as the primary tool for assessing the academic achievement of our students. The system consists of Benchmark Examinations at Grades 3, 6, and 8, the TerraNova CAT/6 at Grades 4, 5, 7, and 9, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination.

In the past, some students were excluded from assessment; particularly those not proficient in English or those with severe disabilities. The Federal Government has mandated that all Alaska students participate in the Comprehensive System of Student Assessments. This publication, Participation Guidelines for Alaska Students in State Assessments was prepared to help Alaska fulfill its commitment to include all students in state assessments. This booklet provides guidance for making decisions about the participation, in regular assessments, of students with disabilities. It also provides guidance for deciding if a student requires a testing accommodation, modification or optional assessment.

This document should be viewed as a work in progress and has been published knowing the difficulty of anticipating each circumstance that may arise when making decisions about assessing students with disabilities.

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## OVERVIEW

The policy for assuring accountability of Alaska's public school system is provided by the Quality Schools Initiative. The Quality Schools Initiative (QSI) requires school districts to adopt challenging academic standards in reading, writing and mathematics, and to assess whether students are attaining the standards.

To ensure full accountability, districts must assess all students, including students with disabilities and those who are limited English proficient (LEP). To accomplish this, the Department of Education & Early Development has developed a three-tiered Comprehensive System of Student Assessments:

**REGULAR ASSESSMENTS** These assessments include criterion-referenced tests at grades three, six and eight (called Benchmark Examinations) and a High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) for the high school level. Regular assessments also include norm-referenced tests given at selected grade levels and test accommodations and modifications for some students.

**OPTIONAL ASSESSMENTS** These assessments are available for students with mild disabilities who are unable to pass the HSGQE even with accommodations. Optional Assessments must be reviewed and approved in writing by the department before they may be administered.

**ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS** These assessments are available for students with severe disabilities, who are unable to participate in regular assessments.

The following sections describe procedures to assist schools in making decisions about how to include students with disabilities in state assessments. These guidelines promote the inclusion of all students in regular assessments. They are consistent with Alaska statutes and regulations and such federal laws as the *Improving America's Schools Act* and *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

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## MAKING DECISIONS

### About Students with Disabilities

The **Individualized Educational Program** (IEP) is the cornerstone for educating a child with a disability. The IEP is a written statement of a child's educational program that identifies services needed for the child to grow and learn during the school year. The IEP defines goals for the school year; the services needed to help the child meet those goals; and a method of evaluating progress. As its name suggests, the Individualized Educational Program is written to reflect the child's *individual and unique* needs. The student's IEP team makes one of four decisions regarding assessment participation. These are:

- Participation in regular assessments *without* accommodations.
- Participation in regular assessments *with* accommodations.
- Participation in optional assessment.
- Participation in special education alternate assessments.

It is expected that a small (less than 2 percent) number of all students will participate in alternate assessments. These will be students whose disabilities are so significant that they are not involved in a standard course of study leading to a high school diploma. When a student's IEP calls for alternate assessments, the reasons must be documented on the IEP.

In deciding that a student should participate in alternate assessments, an IEP team must ensure that:

- The student's cognitive ability and adaptive skill levels prevent completing the standard academic curricula, even with modifications and accommodations.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to apply and transfer skills.
- The student is involved in a functional, basic-skills education program.
- The student's inability to complete the standard academic curricula is not the result of extended absences; visual, auditory, or physical disabilities; emotional-behavioral disabilities; specific learning disabilities; or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires accommodations for some students with disabilities. Its purpose is to help students whose disabilities may limit their access to instruction. A 504 Accommodation Plan is not an Individual-

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ized Education Program. However, a student moving from a special education to a regular education placement could be served under a 504 Accommodation Plan. As with students in special education, the 504 team makes one of the above decisions regarding how students will participate in assessments.

## **The Importance of Including Parents**

The consequences of testing have changed significantly with the implementation of Sec. 14.03.075. Beginning in 2004, students will need to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in order to receive a diploma. Students with disabilities and students who are Limited English Proficient are included in this requirement. For this reason it is very important that schools make concerted efforts to involve parents in decisions about testing that may affect their children. Decisions about testing are often difficult to make and the probability of making the best choices are improved when the student and parent are included.

## **Accommodation Guidelines for Students in Special Education and Students with a 504 Accommodation Plan**

In order to provide fair and valid assessments, students will be allowed appropriate accommodations when being tested. Test accommodations are defined as follows:

A testing accommodation is a change made to ensure that information obtained from a test is an accurate reflection of what the test is intended to measure rather than a measure of the student's disability. Accommodations are changes to the setting, scheduling, timing, presentation or response format of a test made to reduce confounding influences of a disability. Accommodations are designed for specific individuals to meet specific needs that these individuals have. While meeting these needs, accommodations must not compromise the validity of the test. (adapted from Models for Understanding Task Comparability).

## **Test Accommodations versus Test Modifications**

Some changes to the setting, scheduling, timing, presentation or response format of a test alter what is measured by the test. For example, when the questions on a reading test are read to an examinee, the test results do not represent reading ability. Other changes can alter the level of performance expected on a test, for example administering a 3rd grade test to a 6th grade student. Changes to a testing situation that alter what the test measures or the level of performance that must be met are called test modifications. Thus, modified tests produce invalid test scores.

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## Selecting Test Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Because of the close link between assessment and instruction, accommodations for assessment must be part of the student's instruction. The IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan of students with disabilities must describe the accommodations. This allows those who best understand the student's needs to choose assessment accommodations.

Research shows that new test accommodations given to students with disabilities that have not been a part of their special education program can actually lower achievement levels in some cases. In other words, an accommodation should not be added immediately before an examination in the mistaken hope that it will improve test scores. In general, any accommodations provided to a student should have been used in that student's regular or special education classes for at least three (3) months prior to testing. Educators must document on the IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan their use and provide a clear rationale for determining assessment accommodations.

Any list of accommodations will eventually be rendered incomplete because advances in the technology of adaptive and assistive devices will eventually lead to new accommodations. For this reason, the accommodations listed in Table 1 should not be viewed as exhaustive. In some circumstances an IEP team may have to consider the appropriateness of an accommodation not included in Table 1. In such circumstances, the IEP team should evaluate the appropriateness of a potential accommodation by considering the following questions:

1. Is the change being considered a modification or an accommodation? In other words, will the change alter the validity of the test?
2. Will the change give the student an unfair advantage in the test?
3. Is the change needed to lessen the impact of a disability, or will it artificially raise the test score of the student?
4. Will the change compromise test security or violate test administration rules?

Once test accommodations have been selected and documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, the person responsible for administering the test must be informed. If this important step is omitted a student may be denied an accommodation for the simple reason that the test administrator or test proctor is not aware of the need to provide the accommodation. Additionally, some accommodations may require the assistance of support personnel or assistive devices and plans should be made to ensure their availability at the time of testing.

**Table 1. Accommodations That Require Documentation**

<p><b>TIMING/SCHEDULING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administering the test over several days, specifying duration (not permitted for HSGQE).</li><li>• Allowing frequent breaks during testing.</li><li>• Allow additional time.</li></ul> <p><b>SETTING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administering the test individually in a separate location.</li><li>• Administering the test to a small group in a separate location.</li><li>• Providing special lighting.</li><li>• Providing adaptive or special furniture.</li><li>• Providing special acoustics.</li><li>• Administering the test in locations with minimal distractions, in a small group, study carrel, or individually.</li><li>• Using a communication device such as auditory amplification to give directions.</li><li>• Using a special test administrator, including the examinee's teacher.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using CTB McGraw-Hill tape-recorded version of HSGQE writing and mathematics tests.</li><li>• Signing the HSGQE writing and mathematics tests (signing the HSGQE reading test is not permitted).</li></ul> <p><b>Use of Assistive Devices/Supports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using visual magnification devices.</li><li>• Using templates to reduce visible print.</li><li>• Using auditory amplification device, hearing aid, or noise buffers.</li><li>• Securing papers to work area with tape/magnets.</li><li>• Using a device to screen out extraneous sounds.</li><li>• Using masks or markers to maintain place.</li><li>• Using dark, heavy or raised lines.</li><li>• Using assistive devices.</li></ul>
<p><b>PRESENTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using a Braille edition or large-type edition.</li></ul> <p><b>Test Directions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Signing directions to student.</li><li>• Allowing student to ask for clarifications.</li><li>• Reading directions to student.</li></ul> <p><b>Test Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading or signing math and/or writing test questions on the Benchmark Examinations to student (test questions on the Reading test may NOT be read or signed to student).</li><li>• Reading or signing test questions on the norm-referenced test to student (test questions on Reading subtests may NOT be read or signed to student).</li></ul>	<p><b>RESPONSE</b></p> <p><b>Test Format</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using graph paper.</li><li>• Using paper in an alternative format (Braille, etc.).</li><li>• Allowing students to mark responses in test booklet if test employs a separate answer sheet.</li><li>• Using a scribe.</li></ul> <p><b>Use of Assistive Devices/Supports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allowing student to tape response for later verbatim transcription.</li><li>• Using typewriter or computer <i>without</i> spell or grammar checker.</li><li>• Dictating to a proctor/scribe.</li><li>• Allowing alternative responses such as oral, sign, typed, pointing.</li><li>• Using a Braille.</li><li>• Using a large-diameter, special-grip pencil.</li><li>• Using markers to maintain place.</li></ul>

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## OPTIONAL ASSESSMENTS

### For Students With Disabilities

Optional Assessments are available for students with disabilities who have been unable to pass all or some of the tests on the HSGQE. Optional Assessments are changes to the administration of the HSGQE, but not to its content or format. There are five requirements for the administration of an Optional Assessment:

1. A student must make one attempt to pass all sections of the HSGQE with or without accommodations before being eligible to take an Optional Assessment.
2. Optional Assessments must be recommended by an IEP or Section 504 team and the need for an Optional Assessment must be mentioned in the IEP or Section 504 plan.
3. Approval in writing by the Department of Education & Early Development must be received prior to administration of the Optional Assessment.
4. A copy of the IEP or Section 504 plan must be included in the application.
5. The student is eligible, with department approval, to take an Optional Assessment in those content areas for which the student received a *below* or *not proficient* score, only.
6. Although a student's original Optional Assessment may be given during the junior or senior year, an Optional Assessment may not be **changed** after February 1<sup>st</sup> of the student's junior year.

Application for an Optional Assessment must be made on a form provided by the department. The department will ensure that sufficient numbers of the forms are provided to each district special education or assessment director. However, they may also be obtained directly from the department by calling 465-2981.

### What is the Difference Between an Optional Assessment and a Test Modification?

No definitive list of Optional Assessments can be made because of the variety of disabilities and educational programs provided to students with disabilities. There are some changes to the HSGQE and its test administration procedures that cannot be allowed because they clearly invalidate the test score or compromise

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the security of the test (see Test Accommodations versus Test Modifications on page 8). Examples of these would include, but not be limited to:

- reading the HSGQE reading test to a student
- helping a student find the correct answer to a question
- allowing a student to take the HSGQE at home
- using a grammar check on a word processor
- using a graphing calculator on the math test

The items listed above are *test modifications* and change what the HSGQE measures. IEP and Section 504 teams may still give students modifications (because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 allows it) but the exams will be invalidated and the student will not be eligible for a high school diploma. Although the above list of modifications to test administration is not exhaustive, it should give guidance to IEP and Section 504 teams attempting to select appropriate Optional Assessments. When attempting to decide on an Optional Assessment, it may be helpful to compare the above list of test modifications with the sample of acceptable Optional Assessments below.

Optional Assessments that the department has already considered and will approve are listed in Table 2. **If using these accepted optional assessments an application for an optional assessment must still be submitted to the department and approved.** Table 2 is not comprehensive, however, and the department may approve other HSGQE test administration changes as Optional Assessments. Applications for Optional Assessments will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**Table 2. Samples of Acceptable Optional Assessments**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allow a student with a specific learning disability in mathematics to use a four-function calculator</li><li>• Allow a student with a specific learning disability in reading, writing and/or mathematics to ask a test proctor for clarification about a test question</li><li>• Allow signer to interpret test questions for a deaf student</li><li>• Allow use of a spell check on a word processor</li><li>• Allow a student the use of a dictionary or thesaurus</li></ul> |
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## Steps for using an Optional Assessment

1. Convene a meeting of the IEP or Section 504 team and ensure that the team is in agreement with the need for an optional assessment. Make sure that

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the IEP or Section 504 plan includes specific mention of the need for an optional assessment. It is not necessary to provide the details of the optional assessment in the IEP or Section 504 plan.

2. Complete an **Application for Optional Assessments** form and mail to the appropriate address. Be sure to include a copy of the page in the IEP or Section 504 plan that calls for an Optional Assessment. If there is no information on the IEP or Section 504 plan that identifies the individual student, include a copy of the first page (it is not necessary to send a complete IEP or Section 504 plan with the **Application for Optional Assessments** form).
3. When you receive notice of acceptance or rejection of your application:
  - a. Revise and resubmit your application if it is rejected;
  - b. Notify your testing coordinator if your application is accepted to ensure that the Optional Assessment is available on examination day.
4. If the student receives a proficient score on the Optional Assessment(s), the student has satisfied state requirements for passing this particular examination. A student may meet state requirements for passing the HSGQE using any combination of testing under standard conditions, testing with the use of accommodations and/or Optional Assessments.
5. If the student is unable to achieve a proficient score on the Optional Assessment, regardless of the number of attempts to do so, the student is eligible to receive a certificate of achievement.