



219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641 (p) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835

PARENT GUIDELINES TO STATEWIDE DECISION-MAKING

Federal law, including both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), requires all publicly funded students to have access to the grade-level general education curriculum (GLGEC) and to participate in the statewide assessment system. The purpose of this testing is to use the school's academic curriculum to promote high expectations for all children and to determine the effectiveness of school instruction in core academic programs (reading, math, and science). Unlike some other states, in Vermont, test results are not directly considered for graduation or placement. There are currently three testing options for students in Vermont:

1. General assessment
2. General assessment with accommodations
3. The Vermont Alternate Assessment Portfolio (VTAAP) for science; Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) for reading and math

Assessment decisions must be made in each assessment year and are specific to individual students and specific academic content areas (reading, math, and/or science). Also required by law, parents/guardians must be provided an opportunity to provide input or otherwise participate with the other members of the educational team in this decision-making process. The final decision is documented in the accommodation section of the student's IEP.

Simply put, the outcome of this collective team process is to determine the best match between the individual student and the assessment from the available options. The idea is to identify the testing instrument that will allow the student to best demonstrate what s/he knows and is able to do. Because of the standardized nature of statewide testing and the limited number of testing options, not all students, unfortunately, will be matched with the perfect assessment. However, regardless of the option selected and administered, the test results are considered to be comparable, and there are no consequences that apply to one and not the others.

It is important to note that while the statewide test results are important to parents and schools, they do not provide information on the entirety of a child's program nor should they be considered as the only meaningful source of information with respect to the quality of a particular academic program. The general assessment and the alternate assessment both present a relatively small number of items or tasks that cover a broad range of knowledge and skills.

Understandably, parents and guardians typically do not have the same depth of information and familiarity with the assessment tools as do educational professionals. The *IEP Decision-making for Statewide Assessment* document included with this introduction is intended as a simple reference tool to provide parents and guardians with enough information to participate actively and productively in the discussion. The column on the left describes the learning circumstances of the child and the column on the right recommends the appropriate action.

The vast majority of students, even those with IEPs, will take the general assessment with or without accommodations. Only about one percent of all t students tested will participate in the alternate assessment which assesses students using alternate achievement standards. An alternate achievement standard sets an expectation of performance that differs in complexity from a grade-level achievement standard. In general, alternate achievement standards must be aligned with a State’s academic content standards, promote access to the general curriculum, and reflect professional judgment of the highest achievement standards possible. A state is permitted to use alternate achievement standards to evaluate the performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students require significant modification/ adaptation of the grade-level curriculum and intensive individualized instruction.

Regardless of the quality of the student program, these students, by definition, will not be able meaningfully access and participate in the general assessment in any way. Any participation performance results, therefore, are of little or no value in measuring student skills and knowledge.

Because the alternate assessment can be significantly designed to meet the needs and capabilities of the individual student, it offers a viable alternative for them to demonstrate what students with significant disabilities know and can do. Poor results on the alternate assessment, therefore, may indicate the need for more resources to be directed to the student academic program. This can include time, personnel, collaboration, and professional development to build additional content knowledge and teaching flexibility.

Parents can learn more about the importance of alternate assessments in creating new learning opportunities for students with severe disabilities by reading [Learning Opportunities for your Child Through Alternate Assessments](#) by Rachel Quenemoen and Martha Thurlow.