

Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) Participation Decision-Making Tool

Background

To guide and support individualized education program (IEP) teams in determining whether a student is appropriately assessed using Virginia's alternate assessment, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in consultation with parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders, has developed the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) Participation Decision-Making Tool¹.

In 2015, the United States Department of Education *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*² was signed into law, which replaced and updated components of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The purpose of ESSA is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close educational achievement gaps. The [assessment provisions of ESSA](#) require that the vast majority of students take a state's general assessment at various grade levels, as this helps to measure educational progress.

To help maintain a critical focus on educational equity and excellence for all students, and as permitted in the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* (34 CFR §200.1(d) and 34 CFR §300.160(c)(2)(i)), only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are eligible to be assessed using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards. ESSA limits the number of students who may take such assessments to one percent of all tested students in a given subject.

A supplemental document to this decision-making tool, the [VAAP Participation Decision-Making Tool: Frequently Asked Questions](#)³, was developed to address questions pertaining to the requirements and completion of the tool to determine if the student is eligible to participate in Virginia's alternative assessment. It also contains a glossary of terms used throughout the tool.

¹ VDOE's decision-making tool includes adapted content published in Ohio's Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool. https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/AASCDDecisionmakingTool_Final_Accessible-pdf.aspx.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US.

² *Every Student Succeeds Act*, 20 U.S.C. § 1001 (2015).
<https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>.

³ VDOE's decision-making tool frequently asked questions includes adapted content published in Ohio's Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool Frequently Asked Questions:
https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Testing/Ohios-Alternate-Assessment-for-Students-with-Sign/DecisionMakingToolFAQ_Accessible.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US.

Student Information

Date:

Student Name:

STI:

Date of Birth:

Grade:

Instructions

The IEP Team must complete this tool every school year that a student would participate in the state's general assessment or prior to a student participating in the VAAP.

This tool comprises Sections A-D and a Decision Summary. The IEP Team must follow the steps outlined below.

- Work through the document in its entirety, in sequence, starting with Section A.
- At the end of each section, the team should determine if the student meets the criteria to proceed to the next section.
- If, after reviewing all completed information, a student does not meet the eligibility criteria in all sections, the student may not participate in Virginia's alternate assessment.
- All team members must sign and date the Decision Summary section at the end of this document.
- Maintain the completed document attached to the student's IEP.

To complete this tool, the IEP Team must consider multiple sources of student-specific data. These sources may include but not limited to:

- formal and informal assessment results;
- evidence-based intervention data;
- assistive technology evaluation or assessment data;
- learner characteristics; and
- current and recent IEPs documenting supports, services, and progress.

Note: The word "most" is being used in this guidance document to reflect language used in IDEA and ESSA.

Section A: Determining Initial Eligibility

Directions: Complete the following questions to determine if the student may be eligible for participation in the alternate assessment.

1. **Does the student have a current individualized education program (IEP)? If you answer no, do not proceed further as the student is not eligible for the alternate assessment.**

Yes, the student has a current IEP.

No, the student does not have an IEP.

2. **Review the student's eligibility identification(s) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Select all applicable disability category designations that meet the student's eligibility criteria.**

- **A student identified solely with any one of the following disability categories very rarely will be a student with a most significant cognitive disability; therefore, rarely or if ever, the student will qualify for the alternate assessment. Proceed with caution to Section B.**

Deafness/Hearing Impairment

Specific Learning Disability

Emotional Disability

Speech or Language Impairment (only)

Orthopedic Impairment

Visual Impairment

Other Health Impairment

Developmental Delay

- **A student identified with any one of the following disabilities may have a cognitive disability. However, not all students eligible under one of these disability identifications may have a most significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for the alternate assessment. Proceed to Section B.**

Autism

Multiple Disabilities

Deaf-Blindness

Traumatic Brain Injury

Intellectual Disability

3. **Provide a brief summary of data used in making decisions for Section A.**

Section B: Determining the Most Significant Cognitive Disability

Directions: Select the most applicable row that best describes the student’s daily functioning for each of the **adaptive skills domains: Conceptual, Social, and Practical**. After reviewing all available data, if the team must decide between two rows, **presume competence** and select the previous row. For example, if the team must decide between number 2 or number 3, the team should select number 2.

Conceptual Domain

This domain describes skills that are needed to communicate, apply academic skills, and manage and accomplish tasks.

Adaptive Skill Domain: Conceptual	Criteria	Selection
Conceptual - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is on grade level academically in all content areas. • The student has age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills, including conversation skills (verbally or through a communication device). • The student expresses and makes independent choices, exhibits self-control, and takes responsibility for choices at an age-appropriate level. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conceptual - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has difficulty learning academic content aligned to Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) but is making progress with appropriate supports and interventions as specified in their IEP. • After learning new content, the student at times requires additional practice with direct instruction to generalize the new skills into daily living activities. • The student has some age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills (verbally or through a communication device); uses and understands simple, nonverbal communication; and can follow simple, age-appropriate directions and routines with prompting. • The student may have been referred for an initial evaluation during elementary school due to academic difficulties. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adaptive Skill Domain: Conceptual	Criteria	Selection
Conceptual - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has difficulty learning grade-level academic content across all subject areas and may require multiple tiers of intervention, accommodations, or modifications. • The student struggles to generalize skills outside the classroom, even with assistance and practice. • The student has difficulty communicating wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas but receptively understands messages. • The student struggles to follow directions and routines without significant assistance. • The student most likely was referred for an evaluation in preschool or kindergarten based on developmental differences. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conceptual - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has significant difficulty with learning academic content and may require instruction that is designed by clustering grade-level standards into life-applied units of study with intensive accommodations for access. • The student requires significantly modified curriculum and instruction using Virginia's Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOL) and is likely unable to apply or generalize skills outside the classroom. • The student may be unable to clearly express wants and needs and may not seem to understand the messages conveyed by others. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate. • The student requires layers of supports (accommodations, scaffolding, and assistive technologies) to follow directions and daily routine activities. • The student was most likely identified with developmental delays as an infant or toddler and received early intervention services through the Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Social Domain

This domain describes behaviors needed to engage in interpersonal interactions, act with social responsibility, and use leisure time. This includes social competence, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (wariness), social problem-solving, following rules and obeying laws, and avoiding being victimized.

Adaptive Skill Domain: Social	Criteria	Selection
Social - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student displays age-appropriate social, communication, and leisure skills.• The student can initiate and maintain friendships and express and recognize emotions with same-age peers.• The student engages in play and recreational activities without additional support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student may have difficulty with social interactions (e.g., may misinterpret peers' social cues, others may consider student's actions as immature).• The student's communication, language, and conversation skills are more concrete or immature than same-age peers.• The student may have challenges in regulating emotion and behavior in an age-appropriate manner, and these challenges may be noticed by peers and adults.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student has social, behavioral, and communication skills markedly different from peers who are the same age.• The student is able to be understood by using a mode of communication that is much less complex than peers who are the same age.• The student may use behaviors to communicate.• The student may not perceive or interpret social cues accurately.• The student often needs significant support to engage in social situations and/or use communication skills.• The student may be easily persuaded to do things that go against the rules or safe boundaries when coaxed to do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adaptive Skill Domain: Social	Criteria	Selection
Social - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student often uses behaviors to communicate.• The student's communication skills are very limited in terms of vocabulary and grammar.• The student may be in the process of developing a mode of communication; may be described as nonverbal; or uses very limited non-symbolic communication.• The student requires significant adult assistance to communicate with peers or adults and may require layers of support (e.g., simple speech, visuals, gestures) to communicate.• The student may not yet show an understanding of symbolic communication with speech or gesture.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Practical Domain

This domain describes behaviors needed to address personal and health needs; take care of home, classroom, or work settings; and function in a school or community.

Adaptive Skill Domain: Practical	Criteria	Selection
Practical - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student is able to follow safety rules and functions in the community and classroom settings similarly to same-age peers. The student independently performs self-care activities such as eating, dressing, and taking care of personal hygiene. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student often functions age-appropriately in personal care daily living activities and using community resources. The student displays recreational skills typically on the same level as peers, although some additional support may be needed. The student may need support in navigating the school and community and may need reminders about being mindful of safety hazards. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student may need support to care for personal needs (e.g., eating, dressing, toileting needs); may have needed an extended period of explicit teaching in these areas; and may require prompting or cues. The student often requires additional support and learning opportunities for recreational skills. <p>The student requires intensive support to safely navigate the school and community.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student requires significant support and direct instruction across all activities of daily living (e.g., meals, dressing, bathing, toileting needs) or may be dependent on others for all aspects of physical care, health, and safety. The student requires intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational and navigation skills because of significant cognitive needs, not because of physical limitations. The student requires supervision at all times. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Provide a brief summary of data used in making decisions for Section B.

Most Significant Cognitive Disability Determination

Students with a most significant cognitive disability will have significant deficits in **all** adaptive skills domains. Review the following statements to determine the appropriate next step.

1. If the student's daily functioning skills do not align with Conceptual - 4, Social - 4, and Practical - 4, **do not proceed further as the student is not eligible for the alternate assessment.**
2. If the student's daily functioning skills align only with Conceptual - 4, Social - 4, and Practical - 4, **then the student has a most significant cognitive disability. Proceed to Section C.**

Section C: Determining if the Student Requires Extensive, Direct, Individualized Instruction Aligned to Virginia’s Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOL) and Substantial Support to Achieve Measurable Gains in the Grade- and Age-Appropriate Curriculum

Directions: Select the most applicable row that best describes the student’s needs for each area: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Accommodations and Modifications; and Assistive Technology (AT). After reviewing all available data, if the team must decide between two rows, **presume competence** and select the previous row. For example, if the team must decide between row 2 or row 3, the team should select row 2.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

This area describes the student’s daily learning needs as outlined in their IEP.

Student Daily Learning Need	Criteria	Selection
Daily Learning Need - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) in the student’s IEP indicates that skills identified for specially designed instruction (SDI) are closely aligned with grade-level standards, concepts, and skills with present-level data showing skill gaps represented within the Standards of Learning (SOL). 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daily Learning Need - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student’s IEP includes annual goals and possibly objectives aligned with the SOL in data-determined area(s) of need. Instruction and assessment are aligned to grade-level targets that build in complexity toward achievement of learning aligned with the SOL. The student’s IEP requires SDI that is standards-based and includes explicit instruction in all content areas on grade-level standards. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student Daily Learning Need	Criteria	Selection
Daily Learning Need - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student’s IEP includes goals and objectives that target modified grade-level standards within the VESOL. • Instruction and assessment are aligned to modified grade-level targets within the VESOL. • The student’s IEP also identifies the need for SDI that is standards-based and includes functional life skills and the application of knowledge and skills to work-based or community-based experiences. The student requires both accommodations and modifications to access curriculum towards modified grade-level standards. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daily Learning Need - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student’s PLAAFP in their IEP aligns with grade-level standards following the VESOL. • Instruction and assessment are highly individualized and address student-specific needs and strengths. Intensive, individualized, dynamic assessment may be required to accurately capture student levels and progress in adaptive skills; early learning skills capacity (attending, visual discrimination); communication, etc. • The student’s IEP also identifies the need for SDI that is standards-based and includes functional life skills and the application of knowledge and skills to work-based or community-based experiences. The student requires extensive accommodations and modifications to access curriculum towards modified grade-level standards. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Accommodations and Modifications

This area describes the accommodations and modifications needed for the student to participate meaningfully in daily instructional and assessment activities.

Student Accommodation and Modification Need	Criteria	Selection
Accommodation and Modification Need - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP outlines a list of accommodations that are presented in Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests that are provided during instruction and assessment to support access. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accommodation and Modification Need - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP outlines a list of accommodations that are presented in <i>Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests</i> are provided during instruction and assessment to support access. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accommodation and Modification Need - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP outlines a list of accommodations that are presented in <i>Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests</i> that are provided during instruction and assessment to support access. The student requires additional individualized accommodations, modifications, and scaffolding not allowed on Virginia's state tests. These are also provided during instruction and assessment to support the student's access. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accommodation and Modification Need - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP outlines individualized supports, accommodations and modifications, and materials beyond those noted in <i>Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests</i> in order to meet the cognitive and physical demands required during instruction and assessment. These additional supports may address the communication, motor and/or sensory needs of the learner and provide the student opportunities to show what they know and can do. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Assistive Technology (AT)

This area describes the use of assistive technologies needed for the student to actively engage and participate meaningfully and productively in daily activities in school, home, community, and work environments. **All items listed in a row must be true to meet its criteria, except row 3 in the table below.**

Note: The assistive technology (AT) consideration process is required during IEP development to assist teams in determining if AT services or devices may be required to access free appropriate public education (FAPE). The team may utilize the [Virginia Assistive Technology, Tools, and Strategies \(VATTS\): Considerations and Assessment Guidance Document](#) to facilitate meaningful discussion around the student's strengths and needs; the environments in which the student lives, works, and plays; the tasks the student will need to complete; and the potential tools that are needed to address challenges; as well as any other technology tools and strategies the student may require.

Student AT Need	Criteria	Selection
AT Need - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team has determined that the student does not need any AT, or an AT evaluation was completed, and it was determined that no assistive technology is required as indicated in the AT Consideration section of the student's IEP. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
AT Need - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student requires AT support and services. The team is in the process of evaluating AT and determining specific support for the student or the student's IEP identifies the need for AT in the factors for IEP Team consideration in order to make progress toward measurable annual goals, access SDI, and/or participate in statewide and divisionwide testing. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
AT Need - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP outlines required AT supports and services; An AT assessment was used or is in the process of being used to identify individualized AT to support academic instruction, communication, daily living, seating/positioning, mobility, sensory, and/or motor needs, etc.; and/or The student is currently learning to use or is independently using AT as a scaffold to access learning in their environment. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
AT Need - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student's IEP describes complex physical, sensory, or medical needs that require multiple AT supports and services across most domains. It may be challenging to determine appropriate assistive technologies despite comprehensive assessment. The student currently requires person-dependent supports or scaffolds that may be replaced with AT once appropriate devices and/or services are determined. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Determining whether the student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial support

The characteristics of students who qualify for the alternate assessment will only reside in row 3 or row 4.

Provide a brief summary of data used in making decisions for Section C.

Based on your summary review the following statements to determine the next step.

Required Support for Student

1. If the student's learning characteristics include some characteristics from row 1 and row 2 in each table, **do not proceed further as the student is not eligible for the alternate assessment.**
2. If the student's learning characteristics are in rows 3 and rows 4 only, **then the student requires extensive direct, individualized instruction aligned with the VESOL and substantial support to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum. Proceed to Section D.**

Section D: Additional Considerations

The IEP Team's decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is made after reviewing the entire decision-making tool and the collection of student-specific evidence used in Sections A, B, and C. The final decision to participate in the alternate assessment is **not** made based solely on any of the following considerations:

- Disability category, educational environment, or instructional setting.
- Student's instructional reading level is below grade level.
- Expected poor performance on the grade-level general assessment with or without accommodations and/or modifications.
- Administration decision or anticipated impact of student scores on the accountability system.
- Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress during general assessments.
- Poor attendance or extended absences.
- The student is an English learner or other social, cultural, or economical differences.
- Need for accommodations (such as AT or augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in the general assessment.
- Academic and other services the student receives and percentage of time receiving those services.
- Visual or auditory disabilities.

Review the following statements to determine the next step.

1. If the IEP Team's decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is based solely on one of the factors listed in Section D, **do not proceed further as the student is not eligible for the alternate assessment.**
2. If the IEP Team's decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is based on meeting **all criteria upon completion** of this tool. **Proceed to the Decision Summary.**

Decision Summary

Based on review of evidence in Sections A, B, and C and ensuring the decision is not based solely on any of the additional considerations listed in Section D, does the student **meet all criteria for participation** in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)?

Yes

The student meets all criteria in Sections A, B, and C and is eligible to participate in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program. All members of the IEP Team understand that instruction on modified grade-level standards and participation in the VAAP may impact the type of diploma the student is eligible to receive.

No

The student does not meet all criteria in Sections A, B, and C and is not eligible for participation in the alternate assessment. The IEP Team may consider how specially designed instruction, accommodations, and/or differentiation of the core curriculum may be used to ensure access to grade-level standards.

IEP Team Signatures:

Local Educational Agency Administrator or Designee (Name/Date):

Signature:

Special Education Teacher (Name/Date):

Signature:

General Education Teacher (Name/Date):

Signature:

Parent/Guardian/Adult Student (Name/Date):

Signature:
