

What is an alternate assessment?

An assessment is a way of measuring what a student knows and can do. An alternate assessment is an assessment for students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the general assessments.

In Hawaii, the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) program is the state's system for tracking how well students are learning important skills and concepts. Generally when we think of assessment, we think of taking a test. The State Department of Education gives statewide tests in three areas: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. (Science tests are in development for administration in grades 5, 7, and 11 beginning in Fall 07.) The HSA in Reading and Mathematics is based on the standards the state uses to define what students in grades 3–8 and 10 should know. The Writing test is given to students in grades 4, 6, 9, and 11 in the fall. Many students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessments by taking these tests with accommodations, which are changes in the way the test is given (for example, extra time or repeating test directions).

Some students with significant cognitive disabilities are unable to take the statewide test even with accommodations. For these students, Hawaii created an alternate assessment called the Hawaii State Alternate Assessment (HSAA).

Who takes the HSAA?

A student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines whether the student will take the regular HSA (with or without accommodations) or an alternate assessment. If the student with a disability is being taught the same content and skills as other students his or her age in reading, mathematics, writing, and science, the

student should take the regular assessment for those subjects. If the student needs changes in the way the test is given in order to take it, the IEP team will decide which accommodations will be used.

The IEP team uses the following statements as a guide to determine whether the student should take the HSAA:

1. The student demonstrates significant cognitive disabilities that may be combined with limited adaptive skills and/or physical or behavioral limitations and requires a highly specialized educational program with intensive modifications and accommodations for access to the general academic curriculum.
2. The student's daily instruction focuses on the academic content standards through Alternate Performance Indicators that link to the grade-level benchmarks. The Alternate Performance Indicators are at a lower level of complexity and are designed to serve as access or entry points to the grade-level benchmarks.
3. The student requires intensive direct instruction in multiple settings to accomplish the acquisition, application, and transfer of knowledge and skills.
4. The student's difficulty with the general academic curriculum demands is due to his/her significant cognitive disabilities, and not to social, cultural, or environmental factors or to excessive absences unrelated to the disability.

If a student does not meet all four of the criteria for the HSAA, he/she should take the regular assessment with or without accommodations.

Why is the HSAA important?

The statewide tests that students take help teachers and schools improve. The HSAA:

- gives teachers a way to measure the educational progress of students with significant cognitive disabilities;
- aligns to the academic standards, curriculum, and instruction provided to most students with significant cognitive disabilities;
- assesses reading, writing, mathematics, and science skills in a way that is accessible for students with significant cognitive disabilities;
- provides information to schools and parents about how students with disabilities are learning skills and knowledge that match the state standards; and
- allows all students with disabilities to be included in school and state accountability reports.

