

This document is intended to address policy changes that may impact students receiving special education services this school year.

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Assessments

Louisiana Alternate Assessment, Level 2 (LAA 2)

Louisiana was previously one of fourteen states to implement an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards. States were able to include results from this alternate assessment in accountability calculations as long as they did not exceed two percent of the student population. In Louisiana, the modified assessment was called the Louisiana Alternate Assessment, Level 2 or the LAA 2.

Due to revised federal regulations, starting with the 2014-2015 school year, all students, with the exception of those with significant cognitive disabilities, will participate in the regular state assessments. Students with significant cognitive disabilities will continue to take the LAA 1 assessments. In high school, LAA 2 assessments were available to help certain students meet graduation requirements. Students who entered a high school cohort in 2013-2014 or prior may still access the LAA 2 assessments for this purpose.

1. Will students with disabilities be able to receive the same IEP Team recommended accommodations on the LEAP or iLEAP as they received on the LAA 2?

Yes. The accommodations recommended by the student’s IEP Team will continue to be provided during the student’s instruction and the administration of the regular state assessments. Information about assessments to be used in the 2014-2015 school year will be released by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) later this fall.

2. Must an IEP Team meeting be held for each student in grades four through nine who was identified as eligible to participate in the LAA 2?

Yes. Any IEP amendments that are needed in order to reflect the new assessment a student will be administered should be completed prior to February 1, 2015. If the annual IEP meeting is scheduled prior to February 1, 2015, these amendments can be made during that meeting. Otherwise, the IEP team will need to hold an additional meeting to reflect the assessment changes to the IEP. If an IEP team identified a student in grades four through nine as eligible for LAA 2 and this was not validated prior the 2014-2015 school year, the IEP team will need to convene as soon as possible to amend the selected assessment before the IEP can be validated.

3. Are students currently identified as LAA 2 eligible able to participate in the LEAP Alternate Assessment, Level 1?

Students previously identified as eligible to participate in the LAA 2 are accessing regular academic content standards and, thus, either a Louisiana TOPS University Diploma or a Louisiana Career Diploma. Students identified as eligible to participate in LAA 1 are not accessing regular academic content standards and, thus, are not eligible for a TOPS University Diploma or a Career Diploma, but rather a Louisiana Certificate of Achievement.

In order to participate in the LAA 1, a student must meet the LAA 1 criteria including evidence that the student is functioning three or more standard deviations below the mean in cognitive functioning and/or adaptive behavior. Students who have previously taken the LAA 2 assessment who meet these criteria may transition to a LAA 1 designation and the LAA 1 assessment; however, the LDOE does not expect a significant increase in the number of students identified as LAA 1-eligible as a result of the elimination of the LAA 2.

4. Will the elimination of the LAA 2 impact a student's ability to obtain a Louisiana high school diploma?

No. The elimination of the LAA 2 will not impact a student's ability to pursue either a Louisiana TOPS University Diploma or Career Diploma. Refer to further information below that describes new ways in which students with disabilities may qualify for a high school diploma.

5. Which students are eligible to take LAA 2 assessments in high school?

Students who entered high school in 2013-2014 or prior may continue to access the LAA 2 assessments to meet graduation requirements, if they are unable to pass the required EOC test. These students are also eligible for the new graduation policy described below, so it is likely the use of these exams will decrease.

Students in Louisiana, with certain exceptions explained below, must pass a math, English, and either science or social studies End-of-Course (EOC) test to earn a high school diploma. Students who meet the LAA 2 participation criteria may fulfill this requirement by passing a LAA 2 subject test if they are unable to meet the proficiency score on an EOC test. For example, if a student is unable to pass the Algebra I EOC, he/she may take the Math LAA 2 test. If the student is able to pass the Math LAA 2 test, the math assessment graduation requirement is met. Students must also meet course requirements for graduation.

Non-Diploma Bound Student Designation

Legislation passed during the 2013 legislative session allowed IEP teams to classify a small population of LAA 2 students as "non-diploma bound" and therefore allow them to be excluded from state assessments. If an IEP team determined that a high school statewide assessment was not appropriate for a student with this designation, the school and district would not receive a non-tested zero in the accountability formula for that student. With the passage of Act 833, all students will have a pathway to graduation and are expected to participate in state assessments. For this reason, the option to designate students as "non-diploma bound" and non-participants in state testing has been eliminated on the IEP, and the checklist for identification has been removed.

1. Will students previously designated as non-diploma bound need to participate in statewide assessments in 2014-2015?

Pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, all students with disabilities must be included in all state and district assessment programs. If a student does not participate in a required state assessment, the student will be considered a non-participant for accountability purposes.

2. Must an IEP Team meeting be held for each student who was previously identified as non-diploma bound?

Similar to the required revisions for students previously identified as LAA 2, any IEP amendments that are needed in order to reflect the removal of this option should be completed prior to February 1, 2015. If the annual IEP meeting is scheduled prior to February 1, 2015 these amendments can be made during that meeting.

Promotion

A new state law (Act 833 of 2014) allows IEP teams of certain students with disabilities to determine promotion. Under this law, IEP teams may determine alternate standards required for promotion for students who meet certain eligibility requirements. BESE will vote on this policy at their meeting on August 12-13th and the final policy will be available on their website.

1. Are all students who receive special education services eligible for promotion through an IEP team decision?

No. IEP teams will determine promotion for students with disabilities, if in year prior the year in which the decision is made, the student meets one of the following criteria:

- A) The student did not meet the local requirements for promotion; or
- B) The student did not score at or above the basic achievement level on the English language arts or mathematics components of the required state assessment and at or above the approaching basic achievement level on the other.

2. Are students who become eligible for alternative pathways for promotion still required to participate in statewide assessments?

Yes. Students on an alternative path to promotion will continue to take all appropriate assessments for the classes/grades for which they are enrolled. However, it will be the IEP team's decision to determine if the assessment results will be a factor in the promotion decision.

3. Does the alternative promotion pathway apply to students who would have met the criteria at the end of the 2013-2014 school year?

No. Act 833 went into effect August 1, 2014 and does not affect promotion decisions made in the 2013-2014 school year. The law applies to promotion decisions made starting in Spring 2015.

4. When should IEP teams make promotion decisions for eligible students?

To make promotion decisions for eligible students, IEP teams must meet at the end of the school year after the release of assessment results.

5. What should the IEP team consider when making the promotion decision for eligible students and what must be included in the decision?

The LDOE will issue academic guidance this fall for IEP teams to use when making promotion decisions. Per the law, if an IEP Team determines that the student is not required to meet state or local established performance standards on any assessment for purposes of promotion, it shall:

1. Identify rigorous educational goals for the student;
2. Include diagnostic information, appropriate monitoring and intervention, and other evaluation strategies;
3. Include an intensive instructional program;
4. Provide innovative methods to promote the student's advancement including flexible scheduling, alternative learning environments, online instruction, or other interventions that are proven to accelerate the learning process and have been scientifically validated to improve learning and cognitive ability; and
5. Identify a course of study that promotes college or workforce readiness, or both, career placement and advancement, and transition from high school to postsecondary education or work placement.

Graduation

Act 833 also allows IEP teams of certain students with disabilities the option of determining alternate means of demonstrating proficiency for graduation requirements. Act 833 allows IEP teams to determine an alternate method for demonstrating proficiency on the state standards in lieu of passage of the EOCs.

1. What is meant by alternate means of demonstrating proficiency for graduation requirements?

Students in Louisiana are required to achieve a certain proficiency score on three End-of-Course (EOC) tests – Math, ELA, and either Science or Social Studies – to earn a high school diploma. Act 833 allows IEP teams to determine an alternate method for demonstrating proficiency on the state standards in lieu of passage of the EOCs. Academic guidance with suggestions for what to use as alternate methods will be released in the fall.

2. Are students who become eligible for alternative demonstrations of proficiency still required to participate in statewide assessments?

Yes. All students pursuing regular state standards must participate in any EOCs that correspond with the courses in which they are enrolled. Additionally, all students pursuing the regular state standards must participate in the Algebra I and English II EOC by the end of their third year of high school.

3. Are all students who receive special education services eligible to demonstrate proficiency through alternative means for graduation purposes?

Students are only eligible if they have failed to meet state-established benchmarks on their two most recent EOC tests or failed to score Approaching Basic/Basic on the ELA and Math assessments in two of the three most recent school years (sixth, seventh or eighth grade).

4. If an IEP team determines a student may use alternate mean of demonstrating proficiency, must they also meet all course passage requirements for graduation?

Yes. Students accessing the regular state standards must pass the required courses outlined in state law to earn a regular Louisiana high school diploma. IEP teams may determine alternate methods of demonstrating proficiency for purposes of earning course credit, as well as identifying individualized instructional methods and strategies, but may not alter the state academic standards.

5. Are students pursuing the extended standards (LAA 1) eligible to receive a standard high school diploma?

Yes, students on the extended or alternate standards (LAA 1) who meet the requirements determined by their IEP team will be recognized with a high school diploma. However, only diplomas awarded as a result of completing the regular academic standards are considered standard diplomas for purposes of state and federal accountability. LDOE, in consultation with special education parents and advocates, will be working on a proposal that identifies a meaningful way to include students pursuing the extended standards in the accountability system.

6. What is the timeline for IEP decisions around graduation?

If a student is eligible for an alternate means of demonstrating proficiency for graduation, within 30 days of the next school year or course, the IEP team must meet to establish minimum performance requirements relevant to graduation requirements. This decision, however, is optional. IEP teams are not required to allow a student to graduate by demonstrating proficiency through alternative means; it is an option available to them.

7. What should the IEP team consider when making the decision for eligible students and what must be included in the decision?

The LDOE will issue academic guidance this fall for IEP teams to use when deciding how a student will demonstrate proficiency through alternative means, including a list of multiple appropriate assessments and guidance for use in establishing minimum score requirements.

8. Who can I contact at the Department of Education with question regarding the new graduation policy?

Please contact Kay Rone at Keita.Rone@LA.GOV.