

Answers to Common Parent Questions Regarding the NCSC Alternate Assessments

1. What is the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC)?

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is a consortium of 24 states and five national organizations. NCSC received a grant to develop a new alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in math and English Language Arts (ELA) for grades 3-8 and 11 by the 2014-15 school year. ELA includes reading and writing. NCSC also developed curriculum and instructional resources and professional development modules which are publicly available at <https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki>. You can read more about NCSC partner states and organizations at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/about>.

2. Are schools required to give an assessment like this to students with significant cognitive disabilities?

Yes. Two federal laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) require that students with disabilities participate in state assessments. States are required to use an alternate assessment, like the NCSC assessment, for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are not able to participate in the general assessment even with accommodations and other supports.

3. Why are state assessments important for children with significant cognitive disabilities, including those whose disabilities are considered profound?

The performance data from all state assessments are expected to be used to improve the educational system. Research shows that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can perform well on academics when they have had the opportunity to learn the content. Challenging state assessments designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can raise expectations and improve instruction and performance. Although the assessments focus on academic content, working on this content also helps build critically important functional skills.

4. What is the process for deciding which students will participate in these assessments?

Each year, before the end of September, the IEP team reviews the criteria students must meet in order to be considered eligible for this test. The [2014-15 Guidance on Eligibility for IEP Teams](#) document explains the criteria and the evidence that IEP teams can and cannot use when making this decision. There are additional parent resources at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/resources>.

5. What computer skills are required for my child to take the test?

There are no required computer skills for this test. If a student were to take the test independently on the computer, being able to use a mouse and basic keyboarding skills would be necessary. While the test is delivered through the online testing platform, there is no

expectation that students be able to use a computer on their own because the test can be printed. It is also compatible with many assistive technology devices and tablets.

6. If my child can't use a computer, how can he/she take the test?

If a student cannot use the computer independently or with a mouse, the teacher has several options. One option is that the test and any other materials may be printed out. Another is that the test is also compatible with a wide range of assistive technology devices and programs that can help a student answer test questions on their own. There are other supports available for students to increase their ability to access the test. Please visit with your child's teacher for supports and accommodations that would fit your child's needs.

7. How will my child's teachers be able to focus on teaching my child the functional skills he/she needs to be successful in the community if the focus of the assessment is on academics?

Academic instruction will promote many important skills that improve the ability of a student to function successfully in the community. In addition, most other functional skills can be learned and practiced as part of academic instruction. Effective communication is the most important functional skill of all. Reading and writing instruction can include using picture symbols, objects, or other communication methods. NCSC has made it a priority to provide resources designed to help teachers find a way for students to communicate effectively.

8. If my child does not have a consistent way to communicate, will he/she be able to take this assessment?

There will likely be a few, rare situations where a student does not have an effective communication system with which to answer questions during the assessment. If a student does not complete the test, then we cannot provide accurate information to schools and parents about what that student knows.

9. How long will it take to get the assessment results and how will the results be reported to parents?

The length of time for receiving parent reports will differ by state. NCSC will meet state and federal timelines for release of test scores, including parent reports. Schools will distribute student reports to parents. These reports will provide test scores and performance levels in math and ELA as well as provide descriptions of what their child can do in reading, writing, and math.

10. What are the consequences for my child if they take the NCSC tests?

Any consequences that come from a student taking this assessment should be explained and discussed in detail upon entering high school or as early as possible at the IEP Team meetings. However, when parents ask this question they are often concerned that their children may not receive a diploma or be able to graduate from high school. Even though the NCSC assessment is more academically rigorous than the previous alternate assessment and is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), it measures a student's ability on the Core Content Connectors (CCCs) which are smaller pieces of the CCSS. In addition it is different in several important ways:

1. The test questions use language below grade level,
2. the teacher can model the task first and then give the test question to the student, and
3. all of the tests are designed to be read out loud and include pictures and graphics and other supports to increase student comprehension.

4. The PARCC assessment assesses most standards most appropriate for each grade level, the NCSC assesses about 8-10 CCCs at each grade level.

11. The NCSC is aligned to the CCSS. Does that mean my student can receive a diploma?

The Secondary Regulations have been out for public comment and are now on the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education's agenda for January 12. Guidance for students who are eligible for alternate state assessment will be made available after the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adoption of the Secondary Regulations. Regardless of which state assessment a student takes, they must demonstrate that they have met, at a minimum, the 10th grade level standards in order to be eligible for a diploma.

The Rhode Island diploma system is designed to ensure students leave school ready for success in college, career and life. To do this, districts must provide academic, life skills, transition planning, and other supports so students have multiple opportunities to meet the graduation requirements in order to access the best possible opportunities after high school.

Although aligned with Common Core State Standards, the NCSC assessment does not test enough of the Common Core standards at a sufficient level of rigor (difficulty) to meet the 10th grade level standards established by the RI Board of Education in 2011.

12. If my child won't receive a diploma, what other options are there for my child?

There are a variety of resources to assist districts as they continue to develop multiple pathways for students who may not reach the 10th grade standards, including career readiness standards and certificate options (available at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/RIPublicSchools/DiplomaSystem.aspx> (open the *Student Certificates* tab)).

The certificate options were originally designed for students taking the Alternate Assessment, however, given the variety of pathways students can use to meet the graduation requirements, these certificates can be used for a broader group of students regardless of the test they take or diploma determination.