Exceptional Student Education and Student Services

Instruction in Florida Standards Access Points and Participation in the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA)

Guidelines, Eligibility Criteria, and Decision-Making Process for IEP Teams

PURPOSE
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) mandates that the total number of students with a significant cognitive disability who participate in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards must not exceed 1% of the total number of students assessed. Therefore, Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams must carefully consider the overall impact of qualifying a student for alternate achievement and assessment standards, based on the ESSA legislation and recognizing that such curriculum decisions can significantly impact the extent of a student’s access to postsecondary opportunities. Furthermore, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act ( IDEA, 2004), the US Department of Education, and the Office of Special Education Programs provide clear expectations that the general education curriculum is to be the first consideration for providing educational services to a student with a disability.

As a result, the district is providing this guidance to (1) ensure that students with the “most significant cognitive disabilities” (USDOE, 2005) are fully included in state accountability systems and have access to rigorous, standards-based instruction linked to state content standards, and (2) provide IEP teams with guidance to facilitate informed and equitable decision-making related to the following three questions, provided by the state to determine eligibility for alternate assessment and instruction in Florida Standards Access Points.

1. Does the student have a significant cognitive disability?
2. Even with appropriate and allowable instructional accommodations, assistive technology, or accessible instructional materials, does the student require modifications, as defined in Rule 6A-6.03411(1), F.A.C., to the grade-level general state content standards pursuant to Rule 6A-1.09401. F.A.C.?
3. Does the student require direct instruction in academic areas of English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, and science, based on Access Points, in order to acquire, generalize, and transfer skills across settings?

EVIDENCE AND DOCUMENTATION
Only students with a demonstrated, documented significant cognitive disability qualify for instruction in the Florida Standards Access Points and assessment via the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA). Students being considered for instruction in Access Points should present with global deficits in ALL of the following domains:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Independent Functioning
- Social and Emotional Behavior
- Communication
- Leisure and Recreation
- Community Living
- Independent Living

Relying solely on intelligence quotient (IQ) scores or the presence of a significant gap in a single domain is insufficient evidence of a significant cognitive disability. IEP teams must consider all available data and evidence regarding the student and his/her cognitive ability. The decision must be based on a thorough review of the student’s diagnostic information, adaptive functioning, and academic performance data.

Challenges associated with meeting a student’s needs as they relate to behavior, ESE service delivery, and/or the availability of support staff on the school campus must not factor into the determination of whether a student meets the criteria to receive instruction in Access Points.

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The IEP team must determine and document that the student is unable to work toward mastery of the Florida Standards, even with all allowable accommodations, due to the significance of his/her cognitive impairment. Documented data should include, but not be limited to:

- Cognitive evaluation
- Diagnostic assessments
- Achievement test data
- Previous state and district assessments
- Aptitude tests
- Observations
- Attendance records
- Medical records
- Mental health assessments
- Adaptive behavior assessments
- Language assessments
- Exposure to grade-level curricular content
- Response to Intervention data
- Overall level of performance

The focal point for discussion is the impact of the student’s cognitive disability and how it affects all aspects of the student’s academic, independent functioning, community living, leisure, and vocational activities, as well as the student’s potential for independent adult living. If there is any doubt regarding the appropriateness of a student’s participation in Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA), IEP teams are encouraged to allow the student to begin or continue a Florida Standards, general education course of study, while implementing appropriate accommodations to ensure student access.

It is not appropriate for students with a single exceptionality of, or a combination of, Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Emotional/Behavioral Disability (E/BD), or Speech/Language Impairment to be determined eligible for instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA. These exceptionalities do not indicate a significant cognitive disability.

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1. How does the IEP team determine that a student has a significant cognitive disability?
The IEP team must thoroughly review the student’s cognitive and adaptive functioning, diagnostic information, and academic performance data, led by a school psychologist. Even with documentation that all allowable accommodations have been implemented, the IEP team must also determine and document that the student is unable to work toward mastery of the Florida Standards. Students receiving instruction in Access Points generally require intensive assistance in all areas of functioning, including academic instruction, independent functioning, communication, social/emotional behavior, community living, leisure, and vocational activities (FLDOE, 2012). They need direct, explicit, systematic instruction to generalize skills across learning environments and at home, require small group or individual support for the majority of learning activities, and require modifications that alter the curriculum framework or performance standards in order to access the general education curriculum.

2. What is the cut-off score for a significant cognitive disability?
The Florida Department of Education does not define a “significant cognitive disability” in terms of a “cut off” test score. Reliance on an intelligence quotient (IQ) or any other score alone is not sufficient. All student data must be considered collectively. A test score is only one piece of data.

3. What are the outcomes for students who receive instruction in Access Points and participate in FSAA?
Students who receive instruction in Access Points and participate in FSAA need early intervention and identification as individuals who will need agency support before they leave the protection of the K-12 system, as access to postsecondary opportunities will be limited. The waiting list for support from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) can take up to ten years. The IEP team, including the student’s family, must consider the impact and consequences of this decision, and critical need for support from agencies. If the IEP team does not feel that a student will need support from government or community agencies to live independently, that may not be a student who should be considered for instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA.

4. Are all students with disabilities eligible for instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA?
Students with a single exceptionality of, or a combination of, SLD, E/BD, or Speech/Language Impairment should not be determined eligible for instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA. If a student with one of, or a combination of, these exceptionalities is currently working toward Access Points and participating in FSAA, eligibility should be re-examined as soon as possible to confirm or establish evidence and documentation of a significant cognitive disability.

5. If a student has been instructed in Access Points and assessed in the past with FSAA, and the IEP team decides that the student does not meet the eligibility criteria, can the student’s means of assessment be changed to the FSA?
If the IEP team determines that the student does not meet the criteria to receive instruction in the Access Points and participate in FSAA, the student would be instructed in a course of study based on Florida Standards and the means of statewide assessment should be changed to FSA.

6. If a student has a primary disability of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Intellectual Disability (InD), should he/she automatically be considered for Access Points and FSAA?
A student who has a primary disability of ASD or InD does not automatically qualify for instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA. Not all students with an Intellectual Disability (InD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a “significant cognitive disability.” Many students with InD or ASD are cognitively able to participate general education standards with accommodations, take the FSA with accommodations, and graduate with a traditional standard diploma.
7. Who decides that a student should receive instruction in Access Points and participate in the FSAA?

The decision for a student to receive instruction in Access Points and participate in FSAA is an IEP team decision guided by the FLDOE Assessment Planning Resource Guide for Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Teams, and the Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation. No one member of the IEP team decides whether the student qualifies for instruction in Access Points and participation in the FSAA.

8. Is there a cut-off date during the school year for determining that a student is eligible to receive instruction in Access Points and be assessed via FSAA?

There is not an established cutoff date; however, the district’s expectation is that students who participate in FSAA have received instruction throughout the year in the Access Points. Based on federal and state requirements, assessment must align with the standards that have been taught to the student. The purpose of the FSAA is to determine student progress toward achieving the Access Points. As a general rule, it is not advisable to change a student’s course of instruction and assessment after the first semester of the school year.

9. Can a student be made eligible for Access Points and FSAA and then switch back later on, for example, when they have “caught up?”

Participation in Access Points instruction is not to be used as an intervention; it is a curricular pathway. Once a student starts down an Access Points and FSAA pathway, it becomes harder and harder, as time progresses, to come back to the FSA/Florida Standards. Even if it is not clear whether a student will be able to master the Florida Standards, the IEP team should allow the student to try with all allowable accommodations.

10. What if the IEP team just isn’t sure?

IEP teams are encouraged to make the least dangerous assumption. This means that, in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions should be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults (Donnellan, 1984; Jorgenson, 2005). If there is any doubt, the IEP team is encouraged to allow the student to begin or continue a Florida Standards, general education course of study.

References:


This document has been revised and adapted from its original version, created by Orange County Public Schools.
APPENDIX B
Process for Consideration of FSAA and Access Points Instruction


Step 2: Review the Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation (page 7 of the document referenced above, or in the VCS IEP – assessment section).

If instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA are being considered for the first time, or if more information is needed for a student previously identified:

2A) The Case Manager completes the Consideration for Access Points Instruction and Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) form (2017-010-EN). At the secondary level, the Case Manager collaborates with the ESE Assistant Principal. The form is then submitted to the ESE Program Specialist for the program in which the student is currently served.

2B) The ESE Program Specialist collaborates with school and other district staff (i.e., school psychologists, other program specialists, etc.) to discuss the evidence provided and to generate recommendations and interventions to be shared with and documented by school staff.

2C) If the student is still under consideration after completing the previous step, the ESE Program Specialist submits the completed form to the Elementary or Secondary ESE Coordinator. The coordinator will review all documentation with the FSAA Task Force and return it to the case manager and ESE Program Specialist with feedback.

2D) If appropriate, proceed to step 3, using the information gathered through the consideration process to document student performance and needs on the IEP.

Step 3: The IEP team, led by a District Placement Specialist (DPS), discusses and answers the eligibility questions for FSAA and Access Points instruction.

Step 4: If all questions are answered with “yes,” the student is determined eligible for Access Points instruction and assessment via alternate assessment (FSAA).

Step 5: Complete the IEP to reflect instruction in Access Points and assessment via FSAA, obtaining specific parental consent for that decision (“Parental Consent Form – Instruction in the State Standards Access Points Curriculum and Florida Alternate Assessment Administration”).

Step 6: Ensure that the student’s schedule reflects enrollment in access courses for all core academic areas. For students age 14 and up, change the diploma option and graduation plan to Standard Diploma via Access Courses.

Step 7: File the completed Consideration for Access Points Instruction and Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) form in the student’s compliance (“pink”) folder.

Note: For an initial ESE placement, the assigned school psychologist completes the Consideration for Access Points Instruction and Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) form and submits it to the appropriate ESE Coordinator.

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IEP Committee is considering the Florida Standards Access Points curriculum pathway and assessment via the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment

Is the student new to ESE?

Case Manager completes consideration form and submits to ESE Program Specialist

ESE Program Specialist collaborates with school/district staff to review evidence, generate interventions and recommendations, and document those activities

Were recommendations and interventions successful?

Access Points and FSAA are not appropriate for the student

ESE Program Specialist submits considerations form to FSAA Task Force, via the Elementary or Secondary ESE Coordinator

FSAA Task Force reviews evidence, gathers further information if needed, and provides feedback for the IEP Committee to use in making curriculum pathway and assessment decision

School Psychologist completes consideration form and submits to FSAA Task Force via Elementary or Secondary ESE Coordinator

Feedback provided to school psychologist to share with school staff

Is the primary exceptionality SLD, E/BD, Speech, or a combination of those?

Yes

No

Yes

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

Case manager documents on considerations form and files in cumulative folder

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