

Louisiana Believes

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT PATHWAYS + THE ACT: Frequently Asked Questions

I. ACT Information

Why is Louisiana requiring that students in grades 8-11 take the ACT series of tests?

Louisiana, like many other states, will begin testing students on the ACT series (EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT) in Spring 2013 because:

- **Taking the ACT will help students and educators prepare for the Common Core State Standards and Assessments in 2014-2015.** The complexity of texts students read and analyze on the ACT aligns with the expectations of the Common Core State Standards and tests, which the state adopted for all students two years ago.
- **Taking the ACT provides options for many students who traditionally have not had them.** A recent [study](#) highlights that, in states that administer the ACT for all kids, one-third to one-half of the students in those states would not have taken the test otherwise, “and that 40-45 percent of them, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, earned scores high enough to qualify for competitive-admission schools.”
- **It informs classroom teaching and post-secondary planning.** Taking the ACT series allows schools and educators to track students’ progress toward college and career readiness early and often. This progress monitoring helps educators provide proper support and guidance to students throughout their high school careers.

Who takes the ACT?

All students must take the ACT series in grades 8-11 with the exception of students who qualify for the “one percent” assessment (i.e., LAA 1). Students classified as eligible for LAA 2 will take the ACT with accommodations, as they do with End of Course tests today. It is particularly important, therefore, that schools and school districts appropriately classify students who are eligible for LAA 1. Below the Department has provided guidance on appropriate LAA 1 classification.

If parents of a non-LAA 1 student (e.g., students taking ACT and End of Course tests) do not wish for their child to take the ACT or the End of Course tests, may they exclude their child from testing?

Yes, parents are free to opt their children out of any state testing. However, schools are still held accountable through the accountability system (i.e., receive zeros for non-participants) and students are still held accountable through graduation requirements (e.g., passing End of Course tests) and high stakes policies (i.e., passing LEAP in grades 4 and 8).

II. LAA 2: Additional Information

What is LAA 2?

The Louisiana Alternate Assessment, Level 2 (LAA 2) is an alternate assessment given to students who demonstrate persistent academic difficulties. This alternate assessment, like other standardized assessments administered in Louisiana, is based on state standards. The LAA 2 is similar to the iLEAP, LEAP and GEE, except the LAA 2 has fewer questions, less reading, less writing, and a modified format to include fewer questions per page and a larger print size.

What classifications of students are included within LAA 2?

Eligibility to participate in LAA 2 is not limited to specific exceptionalities. Generally, students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are eligible to take the LAA 2 assessment if they:

- Scored at the lowest performance level (e.g., Unsatisfactory) on the previous year's iLEAP or LEAP in English language arts or Mathematics, or Needs Improvement on the End of Course (EOC) Algebra I, Geometry, English II or English III test; or
- Took LAA 1 or LAA 2 the previous year; and
- Have IEP goals based on the academic content standards; and
- Will not reach grade-level proficiency even with appropriate instruction during that school year.

For full details on eligibility, please refer to the Participation Criteria Form – [available here](#).

Are students taking LAA 2 expected to graduate from high school?

Students with disabilities who are taking the LAA 2 should be pursuing a high school diploma. Since there is documented evidence students taking LAA 2 are having ongoing persistent academic difficulties, students taking the LAA 2 assessment should receive targeted, systematic instruction to address deficit skill areas across all applicable content areas. Students taking LAA 2 should also receive supports and accommodations during instruction in the grade level content areas. At any time, the IEP Team can meet to discuss lack of progress and adjust the supports to increase success in required coursework and to stay on track to graduate.

What tests do LAA 2 students take?

Students eligible for LAA 2 have the potential to perform on grade level and are expected to graduate with a diploma. Therefore, students in grades 8 through 11 who are eligible for LAA 2 must take Louisiana's End of Course (EOC) tests when they are enrolled in a course with an EOC test and EXPLORE, PLAN, or ACT based on their grade enrollment.

NOTE: Students with disabilities, including students eligible for LAA 2, can receive testing accommodations to assist them in performing their best on these statewide tests. For more information on ACT testing accommodations, please refer to the website created just for Louisiana. <http://act.org/aap/louisiana/act.html>

What is the variation in LAA 2 rates by school district?

There is great variability and inconsistency in determining eligibility across districts. Some districts have more than four percent of students classified as eligible for LAA 2, while other districts have less than one percent of students classified. This demonstrates how the category's broad terms have led to widely varying interpretations and is among the reasons Louisiana is creating a transition plan for students taking LAA 2 to also take regular assessments, as is the case in most other states.

Is Louisiana ending LAA 2?

Louisiana is one of the few states across the country that offers "two percent" assessments. Most states offer accommodations on their regular statewide assessments, as required by students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and do not offer an alternate assessment for students with persistent academic disabilities.

The US Department of Education has signaled that they will not allow the minority of states with "two percent" assessments to include results from "two percent" assessments in school and district accountability in future years. Instead, the expectation is all students, except those with the most significant cognitive disabilities (i.e., LAA 1) will take regular assessments with appropriate accommodations if eligible. For states that have received ESEA waivers (34 states and the District of Columbia), "two percent" assessments may no longer be included in accountability starting with the 2014-2015 school year.

Because of inconsistent administration, the ability to meet students' accommodation needs through other means and the national trend away from the allowance of two percent assessments, the LDOE is working with advocates from across the state to develop a transition plan that ensures adequate support for students, parents, and educators across the state. We anticipate finalizing this proposal in the coming months and welcome suggestions on the development of this plan. However, changes will not occur until after the 2012-2013 school year and, at this time, we are proposing retaining LAA 2 for certain purposes (e.g., promotion in 4th and 8th grades). For information or to provide suggestions, please contact Bridget Devlin (bridget.devlin@la.gov).

III. LAA 1: Additional Information

What is LAA 1?

LEAP Alternate Assessment, Level 1 (LAA 1) is a standardized, performance-based assessment that correlates to the Extended Standards that are extensions of the Louisiana content standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science. LAA 1 participants include students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3-8, 10 and 11 who will not participate in general statewide assessments or in the LEAP Alternate Assessment, Level 2 (LAA 2). Students in grades 3 through 8 and 10 are assessed in English language arts and mathematics; students in grades 4 and 8 are also assessed in science.

When, if at all, may a student who is taking the LAA 2 be considered for LAA 1?

In rare instances, a student currently taking LAA 2 may be more accurately assessed using the LAA 1 assessment. For example, it is common practice to require students' adaptive behavior and cognitive functioning to both be 3+ standard deviations below the mean before allowing a student to take the LAA 1 assessment. However, federal law and BESE regulations do not require such a strict interpretation. Instead, as deemed appropriate by a student's IEP team, students with cognitive functioning of 3+ standard deviations below the mean may be most appropriately assessed using the LAA 1 assessment, despite adaptive behavior scores of less than three standard deviations from the mean.

What procedures must a district follow to move students from LAA 2 to LAA 1, where appropriate?

1. Districts should identify the students who should be reconsidered for LAA 1 based on the above information.
 - a. *NOTE: This decision should not be based on efforts to circumvent accountability for students with disabilities and, for accountability purposes, federal regulations still maintain the cap on counting 1% as proficient for AYP calculations.*
2. For those identified students, the IEP Team will use the LAA 1 Participation Criteria form to document the three required components of LAA 1 participation:
 - a. The student is functioning 3+ standard deviations from the mean in cognitive functioning;
 - b. The IEP reflects goals and objectives aligned with the Louisiana Extended Standards, along with other goals and objectives relating to the other needs of the student which results from his or her disability, such as functional skill or social skills development; and
 - c. This decision is not solely based on the list of student safeguards.
3. Parental approval for participation in LAA 1 must be obtained through the IEP Team Decision process.
4. Districts must submit the decision to Special Education Reporting (SER) by **February 25, 2013** and the District Test Coordinator must order additional testing materials, if needed, by the same date - **February 25, 2013**. This allows two weeks to complete testing within the LAA 1 testing window (February 4 through March 15, 2013.)

Are there supports or guidance documents that a school or district could review to assist in making the correct eligibility determination?

In addition to the eligibility requirements for LAA 1 and LAA 2, the Access Guide for Students with Significant Disabilities (<http://sda.doe.louisiana.gov/default.aspx>) provides guidance on curriculum, instruction, and assessment in supporting student with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The resources at this site are intended to support rigorous expectations and outcomes for students in LAA 1. In instances where clarity is needed to ascertain the appropriateness of a LAA 1 determination, IEP Team members may wish to review the various documents on this site to determine if LAA 1 aligns with a student's instructional needs.

Where can I receive additional information about LAA 1 and LAA 2 assessments?

Please contact your network staff who can assist you with any additional assessment or eligibility questions.