

Academic Standards for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

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Academic content standards (what students are to know and do at each grade) are the same for all students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities. How students demonstrate their knowledge and skills may differ for students with significant cognitive disabilities, as reflected in alternate academic achievement standards identified for state tests. The purpose of this session is to clarify the distinction between academic content standards and alternate academic achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

KEY POINTS

- States define who the “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities” are. Frequent characteristics in state definitions are: significantly affected cognitive and adaptive functioning, requires extensive individualized instruction or supports, and benefits from modifications to assignments and learning materials.
- States develop their own content standards. They define the goals of instruction for **all students** in a grade, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and English learners.
- Federal education laws do not permit alternate content standards or alternate curricula for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- Academic Achievement Standards are developed for the state assessment. Grade-level achievement standards are for the general assessment. Alternate academic achievement standards are for the alternate assessment.
- Although expectations for how much a student will master of grade-level curriculum can be modified, all instruction starts from the **same content standards**.
- Instruction and materials can be tailored to the individual student as needed while maintaining content standards.
- English learners with disabilities are to be held to the same content standards as their peers. They are also held to the same grade-level English language proficiency standards

or for those with significant cognitive disabilities, to alternate ELP achievement standards.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [AA-AAS: Standards That Are the “Same but Different”](http://www.ncscpartners.org/Media/Default/PDFs/Resources/NCSCBrief1.pdf)
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- [The General Education Curriculum—Not an Alternate Curriculum](https://files.tiescenter.org/files/TNcTi9iMCX/brief5-the-general-education-curriculum-not-an-alternate-curriculum)
(<https://files.tiescenter.org/files/TNcTi9iMCX/brief5-the-general-education-curriculum-not-an-alternate-curriculum>)
- [Providing Meaningful General Education Curriculum Access to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities](https://files.nceo.info/files/Ay4cXYTgh7/ties-brief-4-providing-meaningful-general-education-curriculum-access-to-students-with-significant-cognitive-disabilities)
(<https://files.nceo.info/files/Ay4cXYTgh7/ties-brief-4-providing-meaningful-general-education-curriculum-access-to-students-with-significant-cognitive-disabilities>)
- [Updated Assessment Principles and Guidelines for English Learners with Disabilities](https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport424.pdf)
(<https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport424.pdf>)
- [Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Accessibility Decision Making \(Improving Instruction\)](https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/home) webpage (<https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/home>)
- [NCEO website](http://www.nceo.info) (www.nceo.info)
- [TIES Center website](http://www.tiescenter.org) (www.tiescenter.org)