

HSA-Alt Participation Guidelines

Decision Making Questions and Examples

An IEP team may use the following questions and examples for each participation criterion to assist in the completion of the Participation Criteria Checklist.

The examples provided illustrate the types of **typical** educational situations that are important to consider when making decisions about alternate assessment participation for a student. Appropriate decisions should not be based upon one isolated incident, but based upon a more longitudinal and overall look at a student's educational performance.

(A) The student demonstrates significant cognitive disabilities that may be combined with limited adaptive skills, physical or behavioral limitations, and requires a highly specialized educational program with intensive modifications and accommodations for access to the general academic curriculum.

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **Does this student generally exhibit the learning characteristics of a student with a significant cognitive disability?** These learning characteristics are generally evidenced in how the student communicates, responds to the environment, and learns. A student who is appropriately identified to be assessed by the HSA-Alt is expected to have significantly accommodated receptive and expressive communication systems (e.g., supplemented by pictures/symbols, assistive technology devices, etc.), expectations for performances that are significantly modified by reductions in difficulty and/or complexity from grade-level expectations, and materials which have been significantly modified in order to provide meaningful access to the general curriculum. These accommodations/modifications make how the student communicates, responds to the environment, and learns look significantly different from those same characteristics of peers without disabilities. An IQ score is not an acceptable criterion to determine if a student should participate in the HSA-Alt. The HSA-Alt has been developed solely for use by students who would be expected to score significantly lower than their peers without disabilities on standardized tests of knowledge and cognition (or may not achieve a valid score at all).
- **Does this student perform significantly lower than peers without disabilities on adaptive behavior scales?** Are there longitudinal data indicating this situation? A student who performs significantly lower might still be included in the general assessment with or without accommodations.

Examples for Criterion A

At 13 years of age, Sandra is currently able to identify familiar pictures and picture symbols and has an emerging sight word vocabulary of around 35 words. She can answer basic recall questions regarding short passages of text that have been read to her and she speaks using two and three word phrases. Sandra can independently write her personal information and can copy text. She can click and drag using a mouse on the computer and can type, but only when provided a model. Because the expectations for Sandra's performance are generally reduced in terms of difficulty and complexity and she requires significant modifications to instructional materials and instructional delivery, the **IEP team determines that Sandra meets Criterion A of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria.**

Roger, who is 13 years old, uses an augmentative communication device with voice and print output to take part in classroom discussions and instructional activities as well as to participate in the statewide assessment. He reads (using large print version) and answers questions at grade

level. Even though Roger’s communication is supplemented by the use of assistive technology and he requires adaptations to materials, he does not exhibit the characteristics of a student with a significant cognitive disability. **Therefore, his IEP team determines Roger does not meet Criterion A of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria.** Instead, the team determines he would be most appropriately assessed using the general assessment with accommodations.

(B) The student’s daily instruction on the chronologically age appropriate academic content standards is substantively different from that of peers without disabilities, as evidenced by the intensity of supports necessary to access the general curriculum, the content and/or complexity level of the expectations for performance, and/or the difficulty of the instructional tasks. (In some cases, students who might participate appropriately in the HSA-Alt might not have historically been involved in the grade level general curriculum based upon academic content standards.)

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **Does the student require intensive supports in order to access the grade-level general curriculum?** A student who is appropriately assessed by the alternate assessment will need significant supports in order to access the instructional content, respond to instructional tasks and materials, and maintain interest.

Examples for Criterion B

During typical 7th grade instruction, Raymond needs pictures to supplement grade level text to overcome the print-only barrier to comprehend reading material. He needs an eye gaze board to respond to questions about grade level content, and content-related concrete objects to manipulate during specific instructional times and activities (lecture, large group discussion) along with a positive behavior support plan. In regards to the intensity of the instructional supports necessary to access the general curriculum, the **IEP team determines that Raymond meets Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria.**

Sylvia needs consistently delivered verbal cues to remain on task during most instructional activities. While reading text, she does need to have some grade level vocabulary words highlighted to aid her comprehension, in addition to having some text read to her. Even though Sylvia does need some support that would not typically be provided for her peers without identified disabilities, her **IEP team determines that she does not meet Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria** and instead determines she would be most appropriately assessed using the general assessment with accommodations.

- **Does the student require a substantial change to the content and or complexity levels of most standards?** The student might be expected to achieve only part or a component of a particular standard. The student might be expected to perform at a different level of cognitive demand from what is specified in the standard. It is important that the IEP team makes decisions like this based upon the highest expectations possible for the student in question.

Examples for Criterion B

While the grade level standard of 4.MD.1 specifies that students should “Know relative sizes of measurement units within one system of units including km, m, cm; kg, g; lb, oz.; l, ml; hr, min, sec,” nine-year-old Jackson is expected to use only metric units when measuring length as the base ten causes less confusion for him. He is also only expected to measure length and perimeter, but not area, as he is working on addition and is not working on the concept of multiplication. His **IEP team determines that Jackson does meet Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria.**

Christopher, who is 9-years-old, is expected to use both customary and metric units when measuring. Even though he does make frequent calculation errors, Christopher understands both the concepts of addition and multiplication, so he is expected to learn to measure all the components of 4.MD.1. Because Christopher does not require substantial changes to either the content or performance level of most standards, his **IEP team determines he does not meet Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**. The team decides Christopher should participate in the general assessment with no accommodations.

- **Does the student require a reduction in the difficulty of most instructional tasks?** The student might need to perform tasks that are simpler in expectations, shorter, more concrete, more explicitly structured, have fewer options to choose from, etc.

Examples for Criterion B

When other 8th grade students are interpreting information from a pie chart showing the results of a school-wide survey of favorite music genres, Caroline's teacher makes adaptations to the chart, such as only comparing the results of three genres that are the most obviously discrepant in terms of quantity. A pie chart representing those three response categories has been cut apart so that Caroline can overlay the sections to make her comparisons, and it is expected that Caroline can make distinctions such as "most" and "least" as opposed to specific numerical or percentage differentiations. Because these adaptations to the instructional task are typically necessary for Caroline, her **IEP team determines that she meets Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**.

For tasks that involve calculation, Wilson uses a calculator but otherwise requires no additional adaptations in terms of the difficulty of the task expected of all other students. His **IEP team determines Wilson does not meet Criterion B of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria** and should take the general assessment with appropriate allowable accommodations.

(C) The student requires intensive direct instruction in multiple contexts to accomplish the acquisition, application, and transfer of knowledge and skills.

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **When the student is required to generalize skills, concepts, or knowledge across other school, home, and/or community contexts, is he or she able to do that automatically?** It is typical that most students who would be appropriately assessed by the alternate assessment cannot perform a skill or concept in a different or new context.
- **If the student does not generalize skills, concepts, or knowledge, does he or she need direct instruction in multiple contexts to transfer that learning into each context itself?** A student may need to have direct, intense instruction in several different contexts in order to transfer skills and concepts learned in a specific environment or situation.

Examples for Criterion C

In his 11th grade reading class, Paul has learned several grade level vocabulary words from his adapted biography of Gregor Mendel. But in his biological science class, he is unable to recognize those same words in the science text or on informational posters. In fact, he needs direct instruction on those same words in both the text and on several posters. His **IEP team determines that Paul does meet Criterion C of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**.

Ansina has learned to compare data sets using a graphing calculator to determine which fast food restaurant generally has the lowest prices. When asked to determine which electronics store has the lowest prices, she needs to be reminded of the data comparison process, and when asked to do

the same comparison between grocery stores, she uses the process independently even though she makes some errors. Because she does not require direct instruction to generalize skills, concepts, or knowledge, her **IEP team determines that Ansina does not meet Criterion C of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**. The team decides she should take part in the general assessment with accommodations.

(D) The student's difficulty with the general academic curriculum demands is due to his or her significant cognitive disabilities and not to social, cultural or environmental factors, expectation of poor performance, or excessive absences.

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **Are cultural, social, and economic issues the cause of the low achievement?**
- **Is the decision about assessment participation based upon past behavioral issues and low academic performances or expectations?**
- **Is the student's specific learning disability, emotional disability, deaf/hard of hearing disability, or visual disability including blindness the primary factor impacting the ability to learn, rather than cognition?**
- **Is the past history of special education participation (disability category, type of service delivery, placement, etc.) affecting the decision?**
- **Has the student missed a lot of school and that is the cause of the low achievement?**

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes" then the student should not participate in the HSA-Alt.

Examples for Criterion D

Rochelle has vision and hearing impairments, which are believed to be corrected to within normal ranges, although the exact extent of the impairment/correction is not known. This is because standard tests have resulted in inconclusive results. Regardless of her sensory impairments, she still exhibits the learning characteristics of a student with a significant cognitive disability as defined in Criterion A. Her **IEP team determines that Rochelle does meet Criterion D of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**.

Elaine has a seizure disorder that is only partially corrected with medication. In addition, she also has a disorder of her immune system that causes her to miss many days of school each year. Her frequent absences have negatively affected her performance on classroom-based and large-scale assessments. Because of the effect her absences have had on her performance, **her IEP team determines Elaine does not meet Criterion D of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria**. Instead, the IEP team members decide that she should participate in the general assessment with no accommodations and will determine ways to provide her with the appropriate instruction, such as web-based technologies.