

HSA-Alt Participation Guidelines

Decision-making Questions and Case Study Examples

An IEP team may use the following questions and case study examples that highlight the HSA-Alt participation criteria to assist in determining alternate assessment eligibility.

The examples provided illustrate some *typical* educational situations that might be encountered when making decisions about alternate assessment participation for a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Appropriate decision-making requires the consideration of all four criteria, with all four criteria needed for eligibility. Decisions should be based upon a preponderance of evidence with longitudinal data on intervention, student response, and growth over time, rather than upon an isolated incident or limited educational records. It is estimated that only about 1% of the total student population meet the eligibility criteria.

(A) The student demonstrates significant cognitive disabilities that may be combined with limited adaptive skills, physical or behavioral limitations.

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **Does this student demonstrate significant cognitive disability? What are the student's physical, behavioral, and adaptive skill limitations?** Students who are properly identified for the HSA-Alt are expected to have severe limitations in cognitive capacity and functioning. While an IQ score is not an acceptable criterion to determine if a student should participate in the HSA-Alt, students who take the Alt would be expected to score significantly lower than their peers without disabilities on standardized tests of knowledge and cognition (or would possibly not even achieve a valid score at all). Student limitations are generally evidenced in how the student communicates and responds to the environment. These limitations are evidenced by the need for significantly accommodated receptive and expressive communication systems (e.g., supplementation with pictures/symbols, assistive technology devices, etc.)
- **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.

(B) The student requires a highly specialized educational program with intensive modifications and supports in order to access to grade level academic 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 instructional content, respond to instructional tasks, and maintain interest.
- **Does the student require a substantial change to the content and or complexity level of most standards?** Modifications of grade-level content standards are typically needed for students with severe cognitive disability (SWSCD); learning program modifications for SWSCD typically include reductions in depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level targets.

(C) The student's daily instruction is substantively different from that of peers without disabilities and requires extensive, repeated individualized instruction and support across multiple settings.

The IEP team must consider the following:

- **How does the student's daily instruction differ from peers? Are communication and attention supports, accommodations, and modifications in grade level content a must for this student? Does the student require a reduction in the difficulty of most instructional tasks?** Communication and attention supports, accommodations, and modifications that typically mark instruction, make how the HSA-Alt student communicates, responds to the environment, and learns look significantly different from the instruction of peers without disabilities. The student consistently receives instruction and assessments that are reduced in expectation; e.g., shorter, more concrete, more explicitly structured, with fewer options to choose from, etc.
- **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?** SWSCD typically cannot perform a skill or concept in a new or different context. Each setting requires a complete re-teaching of the target skill.

(D) The student's difficulty with the demands of the general academic curriculum is not due 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 or low performance 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?**
- **Is the past history of special education participation (disability category, type of service delivery, placement, etc.) affecting the decision?**
- **Is the student frequently absent from school and is that the cause of the low achievement?**

A student must meet All Four Participation Criteria in order to participate in the HSA-Alt.

See the Case Study Examples below for an illustration of how to apply these criteria.

Case Study Examples

Example 1: 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 of severely limited cognitive functioning, reductions in depth, breadth, and complexity for performance, and the requirement for significant modifications to instructional materials and instructional delivery, the **IEP team determines that Sandra meets HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A-C**. In addition **Criterion D** is met because social, cultural or environmental factors, expectation of poor performance, or excessive absences are not primary contributing factors for her current difficulty.

Example 2: 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 and he is not eligible to take the alternate assessment.** Instead, the team determines he would be most appropriately assessed using the general assessment with accommodations.

Example 3: 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. Because of severely limited cognitive functioning, reductions in depth, breadth, and complexity for performance, and the intensity of the instructional supports necessary to access the general curriculum, the **IEP team determines that Raymond meets HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A-C.** In addition, **Criterion D** is met because social, cultural or environmental factors, expectation of poor performance, or excessive absences are not primary contributing factors for his current difficulty.

Example 4: 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 instructional support that would not typically be provided for her peers without identified disabilities, her **IEP team determines that she does not meet HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A and B** and instead determines she would be most appropriately assessed using the general assessment with accommodations.

Example 5: 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 system causes less confusion for him. He is also only expected to measure length and perimeter. For the concept of area, because Jackson is not currently working on multiplication, he uses strategies such as repeated addition to find the area of tiled rectangular interiors. His **IEP team determines that Jackson does not meet HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A and B** and instead determines he would be most appropriately assessed using the general assessment with no accommodations.

Example 6: 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 of the severely limited cognitive demand of tasks posed and the consistent use of accommodations and modifications to adapt curriculum and instruction for Caroline, her **IEP team determines that she meets HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A-C.** In addition, **Criterion D** is met because social, cultural or environmental factors, expectation of poor performance, or excessive absences are not primary contributing factors for her current difficulty.

Example 7: For tasks that involve calculation, eighth grader, 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 HSA-Alt Participation Criteria A and B**, and he should take the general assessment with appropriate allowable accommodations.

Example 8: In his 11th grade ELA class, Paul has learned several grade level vocabulary words from his adapted biography of Gregor Mendel. However, 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 meets HSA-Alt Participation Criterion C; however, they must gather additional documentation of Paul's current cognitive functioning, adaptive behavior, use of instructional/assessment program supports, accommodations, and modifications, as well his attendance record prior to reaching a decision on HSA-Alt eligibility.**

Example 9: 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 Criteria A-C. Her IEP team determines, however, that **Rochelle does meet Criterion D of the HSA-Alt Participation Criteria because environmental factors may be the cause of her current low performance.** The team decides for the time being that she should take part in the general assessment with accommodations and priority should be given to a fuller assessment of her possible vision disability.

Example 10: 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 HSA-Alt Participation Criterion D because of the potential deleterious impact of her repeated absence from school.** Instead, the IEP team members decide that Elaine should participate in the general assessment with no accommodations and will determine ways to provide her with the appropriate instruction, through methods such as web-based technologies.