

2023



PARENT INFORMATION SERIES
Special Education Services in Maryland:

A Companion Guide to

The Alternate Education Framework



INTRODUCTION

The Parent Information Series is a collection of publications designed to support families in the statewide special education system of services in Maryland. With this booklet, we wish to welcome you into a community of dedicated professionals and guide you through a process created by federal and state law to support the success of your child and assist your family.



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For more information visit us at

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What is the Alternate **Education Framework?**

The purpose of special education is to ensure that all eligible children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education, or FAPE, that meets their unique needs and prepares them for further education, employment, and independent living.

All students are expected to have the same grade level standards and meet high expectations, however, the law recognizes that a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, may not achieve the same standards that apply to all students, even with intensive special education services.

These students may require instruction and assessment using modified achievement standards. This allows school staff to focus on essential grade level skills and allows for intensive, direct instruction and repeated practice. While the essential elements of the instruction using the Alternate Education Framework are aligned to the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, they are modified so that the student can learn key concepts while moving through the grade level curriculum. State assessments are also different in that they assess students on grade level standards that are modified and less complex with respect to what other students may be assessed on.

”

[A child’s] educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances....The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.”

— Andrew F. v. Douglas County School Dist. _ U.S. _ (2017)



How is a Child Determined Eligible to Participate in the Alternate Education Framework?

If the IEP team considers your child to have a significant cognitive disability, they must consider whether your child should participate in the Alternate Education Framework and/or the Alternate assessment. A significant cognitive disability is not a separate eligibility code. It refers to a student's cognitive functioning that is significantly below grade level expectations and affects their ability to function at home, in the community and at school. The IEP team will complete a form known as Appendix A as part of the IEP process. This document looks at the following:

- 1** Does the student have an IEP that includes specially designed instruction and performance data that demonstrates that even with these supports, the student cannot learn the general standards? AND
- 2** Does the student have a significant cognitive disability? AND
- 3** Is the student learning content derived from the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards in English/language arts, mathematics, and the Next Generation Science Standards aligned with grade level curriculum significantly modified in order for the student to make progress? AND
- 4** Does the student require extensive, direct, individualized, and repeated instruction and substantial support to achieve measurable gains in adapted and modified curriculum?





Parental Consent **in the Process**

In Maryland, separate consent is required for participation in the modified achievement standards and the Alternate State Assessments. Parents will be asked to sign for each. Both decisions-participation in the curriculum and assessment- are made each year, typically at your child’s annual review meeting.

Parents should understand that these are two independent decisions. The first decision, whether your child participates in the modified standards, addresses what your child will learn each day. With your consent, your child will be required to learn the “essential elements” of the grade level standards, but they will be modified. (See the example below).

The second decision, whether to provide consent for your child to participate in the Alternate State Assessment is also made annually. All students are required to participate in state assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school. The Alternate State Assessment tells us how your child has achieved the modified achievements standards.

Parents have the right to revoke consent for either or both of these decisions at any time. If a parent does not make a decision because they are unsure, or for some other reason, the IEP team will implement their decision after 15 calendar days.

5th Grade Level Standard	Essential Element from the 5th grade Standard
Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.	Compare two individuals, events, or ideas in a text
Essential Question: How does the Bill of Rights protect citizens of the United States? Student will analyze how individuals with varying interests contribute to the emergence of the federalists and antifederalists perspectives; Appraise how Maryland’s Declaration of Rights influences the debate over ratification between Daniel Carroll, Luther Martin, and John Francis Mercer; Identify the purpose and importance of the first ten Amendments of the Constitution; Explore how the amendments are exercised in current times in Maryland and the nation.	Essential Question: How does the Bill of Rights protect citizens of the United States? Students will read the first ten amendments to the US Constitution and explore how they are exercised in current times in Maryland and the nation.



Choices and Impact **Following Parent Consent**

A parent must provide consent for their child to participate in the Alternate Education Framework. If they say no, their child will be required to master the general curriculum, with unmodified grade level standards while being provided special education supports and services as outlined in their IEP. The student will be assessed and graded as a general education student according to the school system's policies. The student will also be assessed using the general state assessments with allowable accommodations and supports.

Separate consent is needed for the child to participate in the modified achievement standards and the Alternate State Assessments. While those two decisions may be aligned, parents may elect to provide consent for one and not the other, for both, or for none. Even if the IEP team has completed the Appendix A and determined that a child is eligible to participate in the Alternate Education Framework, a parent may still decide not to provide consent for them to do so. The school continues to have the obligation to provide the child with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). If the school decides that the only way to provide the child with a FAPE is for the student to participate in the Alternate Education Framework, they must access formal dispute resolution processes through mediation and/or a due process hearing to resolve the dispute. This is required by federal and state law.

In making their decision about whether to provide consent, parents should keep in mind that:

- The participation decision is made annually;
- They can revoke consent at any time;
- The participation decision does not dictate placement, learning environment, school, or program;
- The longer the child participates in the Alternate Education Framework, the less likely they will be able to earn a diploma; however;
- The child can still attempt to earn a diploma if possible.



Outcomes for Students Participating in the Alternate Education Framework



All students are expected to have rigorous instruction designed to meet their unique needs. Participation in the Alternate Education Framework does not dictate any specific placement of your child. These are completely separate decisions and the mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is that all students should be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible. This mandate applies equally to students with significant cognitive disabilities. The fact that they participate in the Alternate Education Framework does not require that they be educated in a separate program, classroom, or school, unless your child's individual needs require that they be provided instruction outside of the general education classroom.

Parents should understand that from elementary school forward, the longer their child participates in the Alternate Education Framework, either or both classroom instruction and state assessment, the more difficult it will be for the student to learn, and be assessed on their learning of, the general grade level curriculum standards needed to earn credits and pass state assessments required to earn their diploma once they reach high school. However, any student participating in the Alternate Education Framework should not be discouraged from attempting to earn their diploma.

Students who may be unable to earn their diploma will receive a Maryland Certificate of Program Completion. With high expectations and plans, their education will prepare them for a transition into career and community living with independence and success.



A Checklist for Parents

CAN YOU ANSWER “YES” TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS?

If not, call your child’s case manager, your child’s administrator, the Family Support Coordinator in your school system, or the Family Support team at MSDE.

The Alternate Education Framework

- Do I understand how a student is determined eligible to participate in the Alternate Education Framework in Maryland?
- Do I understand about my right to consent and the impact of those decisions?
- Do I understand my role in the decision-making process?
- Did I know that I can share my family’s concerns and priorities in planning for my child’s education?
- Do I understand that I have to provide written consent annually for my child to participate in the Alternate Education Framework?
- Do I understand the actions the school system may take based on my decisions?
- Do I understand the possible outcomes of my decisions regarding my child’s participation in the Alternate Education Framework?
- If my child was found eligible for participation in the Alternate Education Framework, do I understand why?



Glossary of Secondary Transition Terms

Alternate Education Framework

Includes both instruction and assessment intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS)

State-wide grade level standards that provide clear, high-quality, academic expectations for all students.

Significant Cognitive Disability

A significant cognitive disability is not a separate eligibility code. It refers to a student’s cognitive functioning that is significantly below grade level expectations and affects their ability to function at home, in the community and at school.

Essential Elements

Grade level achievement standards which have been derived from, and are aligned with the MCCRS, to ensure that all students achieve high academic outcomes.

Appendix A

IEP form that the team will fill out annually to determine whether the student meets the criteria to participate in the Alternate Academic Framework.

MCAP (Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program)

State Assessment program that provides information to educators, parents and the public on student progress towards proficiency on the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards.



What if I Have Questions or Need Help?

LOCAL FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES COORDINATORS

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES	AGES BIRTH TO 5	AGES 5 TO 21
Allegany	240-920-6829	240-920-6829
Anne Arundel	410-562-6303	410-424-3258
Baltimore City	410-396-1666	443-642-3848
Baltimore County	443-809-9696	443-809-5443
Calvert	443-550-8406	443-550-8375
Caroline	410-479-3609	410-479-3609
Carroll	410-751-3955	410-751-3955
Cecil	410-996-5637	410-996-5637
Charles	301-934-7456	301-934-7456
Dorchester	410-901-6915	410-901-6915
Frederick	240-578-1244	240-236-8744
Garrett	301-533-0240, x2	301-914-1351
Harford	410-273-5579	410-273-5579
Howard	410-313-7161	410-313-7161
Kent	410-778-5708	410-778-5708
Montgomery	240-777-4809	240-753-9487
Prince George's	240-521-5054	301-431-5675
Queen Anne's	410-556-6103, x10	410-758-2403, x135
Somerset	410-651-1616, x11385	410-651-1616, x11385
St. Mary's	301-475-5511, x32218	240-309-4113
Talbot	410-822-0330	410-822-0330
Washington	301-766-8221	301-766-8221
Wicomico	410-677-5250	410-677-5250
Worcester	410-632-5234	410-632-5234
Maryland School for the Blind	410-444-5000, x1489	
Maryland School for the Deaf	443-277-8899	
Maryland State Department of Education	410-767-0255	

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