

Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA)

What is the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA)

Students with disabilities who are unable to participate in assessments given to the general school population, even when accommodations or modifications are provided, may participate in an alternative assessment program. This is called the Georgia Alternate Assessment or the GAA. This is a way for students with the most significant disabilities, to be evaluated on what they learn.

Why have the GAA?

There are two federal laws [Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Education Act (IDEA)] that require states to teach specific subjects to *all students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities*. These laws also require that *all students* be evaluated on what they have learned in these subjects.

How is the GAA different from the testing of other students?

Most students are tested on their knowledge in language arts, math, science and social studies through standard paper and pencil testing. The GAA is based on these same subjects, but, because of their significant cognitive disabilities, students tested using the GAA will have learned at a different level. The way they are tested will also be different from the traditional paper and pencil method.

For example, students in 3rd grade may study simple machines. They may be expected to correctly identify, name and explain how they these machines work. They will show they can do this by responding correctly to answers on a statewide standard test. A student using the GAA would also study simple machines. S/he might be expected to choose and operate one or more of the simple machines (turn the knob, push the lever, etc.) needed to complete a task, and the assessment might take place over a period of weeks.

Who decides what students using the GAA are expected to learn?

Teachers determine the expectations for each student based on individual learning styles and needs. Instruction is provided to each student in a way that is appropriate for the individual student.

If the GAA is not a paper and pencil test, what does it look like?

The GAA is a showcase portfolio. This means that it shows the best work the student has done in the areas being tested. The portfolio may contain photos, videos, or samples of student work. There are requirements about the number of student work samples that must be included, the types of evidence to include, and the times during the year when the information must be collected.

How is my child's GAA portfolio scored or reviewed and how do I find out the results?

The GAA is used to measure how well your child has learned the grade level curriculum based on alternative achievement standards. The portfolio is scored according to how well it addresses the curriculum, the degree to which the work uses grade appropriate materials, the increase in a child's skills across two collection periods, and the ability of your child to apply the learned skill in other settings.

Will I be able to see my child's portfolio and get the results of the scoring?

As with other standardized tests, parents are not allowed to view the actual portfolios. Portfolios are submitted to the state, and a review team scores them. The results are then sent to your child's school and shared with parents.

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When are students assessed using the GAA?

Students are assessed using the GAA on the same schedule as all Georgia students. In Georgia, that means that students are assessed when they are in kindergarten, in 3rd through 8th grades, and in the 11th grade.

Who decides if my child should be assessed using the GAA?

The IEP team, which includes you, the parent/guardian, is responsible for deciding if your child should be assessed using the GAA. The team must agree that your child has a significant cognitive disability and cannot participate in the assessments generally given to students, *even with maximum accommodations*. Maximum accommodations might mean having the test read to the student or allowing the student to respond verbally, or allowing extra time to take the test. **Couldn't the IEP team just excuse my child from testing of any kind?** No. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits schools from excluding students with disabilities from any school programs or activities. Therefore, IEP teams can only decide HOW your child will participate in the testing.

Can I change the way my child is tested?

The IEP team must meet and agree to make the change in the IEP. Remember, you are a part of the team and can request a meeting to discuss changing the way your child is tested.

How can the GAA help my child?

It is important that all students, including those with significant cognitive disabilities have access to a curriculum based on the same subjects and academic content standards that their grade level peers are learning. Your child's results can be used to identify what s/he has learned, to help develop IEP goals and teaching strategies, and to progress from year to year.

Can the GAA be used to determine if my child can receive a high school diploma?

Under Georgia's graduation rules, students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to receive a high school diploma once certain requirements are met. One requirement is to achieve a passing score on all subjects of the high school GAA.

What happens if my child does not receive a passing score?

If your child does not achieve a passing score on one or more subjects assessed on the GAA in high school, s/he will be offered retest opportunities. S/he will only be required to retest on the content areas, e.g., Science, English Language Arts, etc. in which they did not achieve a passing score.

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia
770 451-5484 or 800-229-2038
www.p2pga.org

Georgia Department of Education, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports
404 656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education
http://www.gadoe.org/ci_exceptional.aspx

Additional resources: Contact the **Special Education Director** for your school system.