Spring 2021 Assessment Administration Frequently Asked Questions



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At this time, although Maine did solicit public comment regarding the request for a waiver from the administration of federally mandated assessments, this waiver was not submitted to the US Department of Education.   Secretary DeVos’s [September 3rd 2020 letter](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fstatic.politico.com%2Fc1%2F2d%2F5073bcb847c988afef9355bc3e08%2Fsecretary-devos-letter-to-cssos-09-03-2020-1.pdf.pdf&data=04%7C01%7CJodi.Bossio-Smith%40maine.gov%7C8c42d156e17a45f8c0c008d88a558d14%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C637411447325446009%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=1xmEg8L3l0PCF3vvqx%2BLkYHaslhra5nA6JO3De21jlM%3D&reserved=0), addressed to all state education agencies and chief state school officers, clearly communicated that the Department of Education would not be approving requests from states to waive assessments for the 20/21 school year.

This document is structured to address the more generalized assessment questions that may be applicable to the administration of assessments across all content areas, followed by assessment/content area specific questions.

Many associate the term MEA with the administration of only the math and EL.A/Literacy assessment or science assessments. For the purposes of this document, MEA references all Math, ELA/Literacy, Science, and English Language Proficiency assessments, including the alternate assessments.

The Maine Comprehensive Assessment System (MeCAS) includes all MEA assessments in addition to National and International assessments.

The contact information for each assessment coordinator is provided throughout this document. Alternatively, please reach out to [Janette Kirk](mailto:Janette.Kirk@maine.gov), Chief of Learning Systems/Assessment Director, with additional questions.

## **General Assessment Related Questions**

Assessment Director:[**Janette Kirk**](mailto:Janette.Kirk@maine.gov)

**Q: Are we administering MEAs this year?**

A: At the current time, all MEAs remain scheduledwith the goal of an in-person administration of the assessments. Assessment administration dates are outlined in the [MEA calendar](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.maine.gov%2Fdoe%2FTesting_Accountability%2FMECAS%2Fcalendar&data=04%7C01%7CJodi.Bossio-Smith%40maine.gov%7C8c42d156e17a45f8c0c008d88a558d14%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C637411447325455964%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=tNx6a0SH7Fe2BgIEFByL3qE%2B4qPmliSiM5UT5ESFQaE%3D&reserved=0). The majority of these assessments are designed to only be administrated in-person and are not supported through a remote administration. Because the administration of these assessments takes months of planning, we do request that schools/districts complete all pre-assessment activities – primarily materials ordering (ACCESS assessment only) and scheduling. The Department recognizes that the status of instruction with ME schools/districts continues to evolve in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and it will continue to work with schools/districts to support them in this process.

**Q: Why are we taking the time to assess during a global pandemic?**

A: During this unprecedented year and the impact to both instructional time and opportunities to learn, it has perhaps never been more critical to have a quantitative measure of where Maine students are with regards to academic development, so that educators – ranging from superintendents to principals to teachers to aides - can participate in data-driven planning for curriculum, instruction and assessment which will address these gaps in learning.

**ESSA requires states to test students in reading or language arts and mathematics every year in grades 3-8 and once in grades 9 through 12. ESSA requires states to test students at least three times in science, once in 3-5, once in grade 6-9, and once in grades 10-12. ESSA Section 1111(b)(2)**

**Q: We are short on technology to administer the assessments this year. How can we administer the assessment?**

A: The Department conducted five (5) iterations of a technology device and connectivity survey to support schools in obtaining additional connection options and devices. As in prior administrations of state assessments, schools may opt to have students participate using their own assigned devices or utilize devices earmarked for assessment only. Time should be allotted to ensure additional cleaning and sanitizing of devices to be used by multiple users.

**Q: The data comes back in the fall of the next school year which is too late to be useful. Why do we administer the assessment?**

A: The Department recognizes the receipt of data from the state summative assessments is not immediate. State assessments are generally summative in nature and, as such, the purpose is to examine **curriculum implementation at a systems level--** the purpose of a summative assessment is to examine student performance in relation to the content standards within the Maine Learning Results (e.g. has the student met the learning expectations for the applicable grade?). This data, used in combination with other locally administered assessments, provides a well-rounded picture of student performance and assists educators in ensuring the needs of students are addressed within classroom instruction and subsequent interventions if necessary.

**Q: What do I do if the district is remote?**

A: A large number of districts are implementing a hybrid approach to instruction which includes identified days engaged in remote and in-person learning. The Department anticipates the extension of assessment windows for assessment administration provides increased opportunity for students to participate in the assessment on days when they are attending in person. Should a school have all students within any one assessment grade, typically 3-8 and 3rd year of high school, engaged in remote learning for 100% of the time during the entire assessment window, please reach out to the assessment team. For individual students who may be engaged in 100% remote learning and are unable to attend school in-person as a direct result of COVID-19, a [special consideration request](https://neo.maine.gov/DOE/NEO/Accounts/Account/Login) may be submitted on behalf of the student.

**Q: What is a special consideration?**

A: A Special Consideration is a request for a student to be exempt from participation in a required Maine Educational Assessments (MEA) for medical reasons. Special Consideration requests must be submitted within the open assessment window of each specific applicable Maine Educational Assessment.

**Q: Can my district opt out of administering assessments?**

A: Following a tradition of local control within Maine, the Department defers decisions related to the administration of the assessments, district capacity and the safety, health and wellbeing of students to district superintendents. The Department would expect a good faith effort to administer the assessments be implemented. However, should the administration pose additional safety concerns for staff and students, a district should proceed accordingly. Non-participation may have unintended consequences in relation to the state’s ability to apply for additional waivers. For example, a 1% alternate assessment participation cap is imposed on States by the US Department of Education, a participation rate of less than 95% will impact the state’s ability to apply for a waiver and may impact funding received from the US Department of Education.

**Q: What happens if a school goes remote for the a large portion of the assessment window, and a student has not completed all sessions within an assessment?**

A: In the event that an entire school/district transitions to fully remote instruction for an extended period of time with significant impact to the assessment window, please reach out to the applicable assessment coordinator.

## **ACCESS for ELLs/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs**

Assessment Coordinator:[**Jodi Bossio-Smith**](mailto:Jodi.Bossio-Smith@maine.gov)

The ACCESS assessment begins in January and is administered to students identified as English Learners (ELs). Unlike other state administered assessments, the ACCESS provides English language proficiency data points in the domains of speaking, listening, reading and writing in addition to supporting the following:

* Establishing when multilingual learners have attained English proficiency according to state criteria/a benchmark by which to guide program exit decisions;
* Informing classroom instruction and assessment;
* Fulfilling the federal requirement, as outlined by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requiring states to standardize statewide criteria for designating students’ English learners and for reclassifying them as no longer needing extra language instruction.

The length of time to participate in the ACCESS assessment has long been and continues to be a concern, especially during this time of COVID-19 when instructional time with students is the most precious commodity.  We continue to listen, acknowledge and advocate on behalf of Maine educators and students to WIDA with respect to assessment administration time and receipt of student data. The student data from ACCESS assessments provide valuable, quantitative measures of student progress toward English language proficiency. This data can be used at both the district and school levels in instructional and curricular decision making and the development of [Lau Plans](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Maine%20DOE%20Lau%20Plan%20Template%20and%20Guidance.pdf). Additionally, the data can be used at the individual student level to inform instruction and develop [Individual Language Acquisition Plans](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/englishlearners/resources).

In addition, [ESSA](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ed.gov%2Fpolicy%2Felsec%2Fleg%2Fessa%2Fessatitleiiiguidenglishlearners92016.pdf&data=04%7C01%7CJodi.Bossio-Smith%40maine.gov%7C8c42d156e17a45f8c0c008d88a558d14%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C637411447325450986%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=gRYQPw%2BPxqfAqszURZIQw1dOKSE0taGsfr23UKLr2C8%3D&reserved=0) is clear regarding the administration of an English language proficiency assessment on an annual basis and the participation of English learners.

**Q: What happens if the school goes remote for the remainder of the assessment window, while a student has not completed all domains of the assessment?**

A: In the event that an entire school/district has gone fully remote for an extended period of time with impact to the assessment window, please reach out to the assessment team.

**Q: Why would we administer the assessment when the data comes back late?**

A: The ACCESS for ELLs assessment is a summative assessment, and it is a common frustration that summative data is returned to schools/districts 2-3 months after the assessment administration. While this is an unfortunate delay, it does not render the ACCESS for ELLs data useless. The ACCESS data comes to schools/districts in several different formats, with multiple opportunities to inform instruction, progress monitoring, individual language acquisition planning and informing parents of student progress towards proficiency.

[*See Appendix A; Interpretive Guide for Score Reports*]

**Q: Why would we administer the assessment when we can’t use the data?**

A: The ACCESS for ELLs data can be utilized in several meaningful ways.

*Individual student reports* provide detailed information regarding a student’s proficiency in each of the four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as across the four composite areas: language arts, mathematics, social studies and science. The proficiency scores are aligned to the [WIDA English Language Development Standards 2020](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/wida-english-language-development-standards-framework-2020-edition) as well as the [WIDA Can Do Descriptors,](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/can-do-descriptors-key-uses-edition-k-12-frequent-questions) providing educators with the opportunity and resources to impact student learning. These include:

* Establishing when multilingual learners have attained English language proficiency according to state criteria
* Making decisions about program entry and exit
* Informing classroom instruction and assessment, including:
  + Which domains teachers could focus on
  + Creation of speaking/writing rubrics which include criteria aligned to both the student’s current level of proficiency as well as the next level of proficiency
  + What the WIDA ELD Standards say about students’ current proficiency levels, thus informing the student’s [Individual Language Acquisition Plan [ILAP]](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Maine%20DOE%20Sample%20Student%20ILAP.pdf)
  + How teachers can scaffold using the next level up
  + Monitoring student progress by comparing current scores to previous scores

The individual student reports should also be shared with parents as a quantitative measure of student progress towards proficiency and **one snapshot** of student progress over time. It is helpful for educators to share with parents how the data is used in instructional and programmatic decision making.

*School and district reports* provide the number and percentage of students in each school/district achieved the different proficiency levels. This data are one critical component that must be considered as each district revisits its [LAU Plan](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Maine%20DOE%20Lau%20Plan%20Template%20and%20Guidance.pdf) on an annual basis.

[*See Appendix A; Interpretive Guide for Score Reports*]

## **Mathematics and ELA/Literacy**

Assessment Coordinator: [**Nancy Godfrey**](mailto:Nancy.Godfrey@maine.gov)

**Q: Although an assessment has not yet formally been announced, should districts forge ahead and administer their interim assessments as planned?**

A: Yes, districts should continue to administer interim assessments as planned in their regularly scheduled winter interim assessment window.

**Q: Will districts who already subscribe to the selected interim assessment be reimbursed by DOE?**

A: We continue to be in talks to secure an interim assessment. Should a district already subscribe to the selected assessment, the intent would be to reimburse costs.

**Q: When will districts who do not currently use the selected assessment receive the ability to administer? January/February? Not until later/spring?**

A: The expectation is for two administrations this year, the first being completed by February 28, 2021 (anticipated availability) and the second be completed between March 1, 2021 - May 28, 2021. Implementation of the assessment will be dependent upon the execution of the contract with the vendor.

**Q: When will professional development begin for districts who are new to using the selected assessment?**

A: We are hopeful this will be implemented as soon as possible once a signed contract is in place in order to ensure schools and staff are comfortable with administration.

**Q: Will there be specific protocols for how the assessment should be implemented?**

A: For the winter administration we’re relying on districts to do what makes sense for students and the community. In the spring there will be protocols for administering within the applicable assessment window (March 1 – May 28, 2021). We understand that due to community circumstances, some students and subsequent administration may be remote, in-person or a hybrid.

**Q: Who will provide access to the assessment training? The vendor, DOE or both?**

A: It will be a combination of both the vendor and the DOE. The DOE will work with the vendor to ensure that training is provided for administration and use of assessment data.

**Q: Are schools required to administer the assessment three times per year like a traditional interim assessment?**

A: The Department would expect schools/districts to participate in two administrations of the assessment. This typically would be fall and spring administrations, however, due to the pandemic and timing of assessment selection this year it will be a winter and spring administration requirement.

## **Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA – Math & ELA/Literacy)**

Assessment Coordinator:[**Jodi Bossio-Smith**](mailto:Jodi.Bossio-Smith@maine.gov)

**Q: Will the MSAA assessment be administered this spring?**

A: At the current time, Maine assessments, including alternate assessments, remain scheduledwith the goal of an in-person administration of the assessments. Assessment administration dates are outlined in the [MEA calendar](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.maine.gov%2Fdoe%2FTesting_Accountability%2FMECAS%2Fcalendar&data=04%7C01%7CJodi.Bossio-Smith%40maine.gov%7C8c42d156e17a45f8c0c008d88a558d14%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C637411447325455964%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=tNx6a0SH7Fe2BgIEFByL3qE%2B4qPmliSiM5UT5ESFQaE%3D&reserved=0). The alternate assessments are designed to only be administrated in-person and are not supported through a remote administration. Because the administration of these assessments takes months of planning, we do request that schools/districts complete all pre-assessment activities – primarily assessment training, reviewing student participation rosters, and scheduling. The Department recognizes that the status of schools/districts continues to evolve in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and it will continue to work with schools/districts to support them in this process.

**Q; What if I have a student who is remote? Do I have to administer the assessment?**

A: A large number of districts are implementing a combination of instructional models: in person, hybrid and fully remote. It is hoped that assessment administration windows are long enough to allow for students to participate in the assessment on days when they are attending in person. Should a school have all students in assessment grades, typically 3-8 and 3rd year of high school, engaged in remote learning for 100% of the time during the entire assessment window, please reach out to the assessment team. For individual students who may be engaged in 100% remote learning and are unable to attend school in-person as a direct result of COVID-19, a [special consideration request](https://neo.maine.gov/DOE/NEO/Accounts/Account/Login) may be submitted on behalf of the student.

**Q: When and how will there be MSAA assessment training this year?**

A: The Department has partnered with the assessment vendor to create an MSAA assessment training to be held the first week of March. This training will be in the form of a live webinar and is scheduled for two hours with time built in for questions. The training will cover both the ELA/literacy & mathematics as well as the science alternate assessments, and the focus will be on practical steps for getting organized, familiarizing with the MSAA platform, and an overview of the assessment. Registration for this webinar will be shared in late February in advance of the assessment window. This training is optional and highly encouraged. It will also be recorded.

Additionally, there are two online training modules within the MSAA platform that assessment administrators must complete in order to administer the assessment. These are required. The online training modules will go live in the MSAA System on March 1st, 2021.

## **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**

Assessment Contact: [**Dr. Regina Lewis**](mailto:Regina.Lewis@maine.gov)

**Q: Will NAEP be administered during the Spring of 2021?**

A: Due to circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic across the country, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) with the consultation and support of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) postponed the NAEP assessments. However, this postponement did not include the associated NAEP Survey Questionnaires customarily administered to administrators and content teachers. The assessments are currently scheduled to take place during the spring of 2022.

This postponement of NAEP assessment administration was shared in a [letter to state Chiefs](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/2021%20NAEP%20Update%20Letter_112420_Final%20%28002%29.pdf) on November 24, 2020. More detailed information from NCES and Commissioner Woodworth is available on the [NCES website](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/commissioner/remarks2020/11_25_2020.asp).

**Q: Does this mean that the NAEP Survey Questionnaires will still be administered during the Spring of 2021?**

A: With the support of Commissioner Makin, Maine DOE has decided to support the administration of this special study. Our state will receive useful data that will increase our understanding of the impact of the pandemic within Maine schools including variations in instructional practices. The administration of the survey will occur online February 15 through March 26, 2021.

**Q: Why is NCES still proceeding with the NAEP Survey Questionnaires during the Spring of 2021?**

A: The goal of the study is to gather important contextual information from schools and teachers on student learning opportunities and experiences during times of school closures, remote instruction, and hybrid instruction. NCES plans to release national and state results in the fall of 2021.

**Q: How do I know if a school or district needs to complete the NAEP 2021 Survey Questionnaires?**

A: Superintendents and Principals of the districts and schools that were originally notified of selection for NAEP 2021 will receive informational notices pertaining to this special study in early February. Beginning February 15, 2021, NAEP representatives will be contacting schools with more specific directions. School Coordinators will need to provide the names and email addresses of mathematics and reading teachers of the selected grade.

**Q: When do the NAEP 2021 Survey Questionnaires need to be completed?**

A: The administration of the survey will occur February 15 through March 26, 2021 and will be completed online.

**Q: Who needs to complete NAEP 2021 Survey Questionnaires?**

*A: Teachers of grade 4 and 8 mathematics and reading*, as well as *school administrators* at the selected schools will be completing the NAEP survey questionnaires. There are no student questionnaires for spring 2021.

**Q: Will a school identified to participate in the spring of 2021 now have to participate in the spring of 2022?**

A: A new sample of schools will be selected for the spring 2022 administration of the NAEP assessment. The same sampling procedure of proportional probability will be used to select schools. While there is no guarantee that a school will or will not be a part of the sample at this time, the complex methodology of sampling creates a greater likelihood that larger schools will be selected for participation than smaller schools.

**Additional NAEP Updates**

* NAEP will be conducted during the 2021-2022 school year
* 12th grade reading and math will be conducted during the 2023-2024
* Next biennial NAEP following 2021-2022 shall occur in the 2023-2024 school year

## **Science / Alternate Science**

Assessment Coordinators: [**Nancy Godfrey**](mailto:Nancy.Godfrey@maine.gov)/ [**Jodi Bossio-Smith**](mailto:Jodi.Bossio-Smith@maine.gov)

**Q: Are we administering a science assessment in the spring of 2021?**

A: Yes. Maine Department of Education completed a request for proposals (RFP) for a general science assessment late summer 2020. The selected bidder, New Meridian, is in current contract negotiations. The general assessment will be administered May 17-28, 2021.

**Q: Who is required to participate in the science assessment?**

A: Students in grades 5, 8 and 3rd year of high school are required to participate in the science assessment.

**Q: What’s new and different about this general science assessment?**

A: The New Meridian assessment (name TBD) assess what students know and can do related to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Maine adopted NGSS as part of the Maine Learning Results for science and engineering. These standards were signed into law on April 19, 2019. The 2021 administration will be the first year Maine students will be assessed using these newly adopted standards.

**Q: Will this be an online assessment?**

A: Yes. For the first time, the Maine science assessment will be administered online which, in time, will allow more opportunities for simulations, technology enhanced items, etc.

**Q: Will there be an opportunity for educators to see released items?**

A: New Meridian will provide training for educators which will include limited access to assessment items in this first year.

**Q: Will students eligible to participate in the alternate assessment participate in the New Meridian assessment?**

A: No, students participating in alternate assessments will participate in the Science Alternate Assessment (SAA). Maine is one of two states using the SAA as part of the MSAA consortium.

## **Special Considerations**

Contact: [**Cheryl Brackett**](mailto:Cheryl.Brackett@maine.gov)

**Q: Where can we find the webinar power point for Special Considerations?**

A: The slide deck with notes, webinar recording, and the Q&A document are posted on the [assessment homepage.](https://www.maine.gov/doe/Testing_Accountability/MECAS)

**Q: Should the teacher or principal be submitting Special Consideration requests during an open testing window? Is it ONLY the principals who have access to the NEO logins?**

A: The principal should be submitting the requests during the open assessment window. The individual submitting the request must have user access/login credentials to the [Special Consideration module](https://neo.maine.gov/DOE/NEO/Accounts/Account/Login). This access is determined at the SAU/administrative level. The Special Considerations module is not in the NEO public access dashboard.

**Q: If in March/ April, you check the COVID/Quarantine option for a remote student for any assessment, does that also exempt them from other tests?**

A: A separate request must be submitted for each individual assessment for which the student is eligible.

**Q: What if student(s) is/are totally remote this year? We have been completely remote since March and very likely will continue through the end of the year. What is the process? Is/are the student(s) exempt for all assessments based on this COVID/Quarantine definition? We will have to submit EL students who are fully remote per school.**

A: In most cases, individual exemption requests are submitted per student and per assessment. If a particular assessment cannot be administered remotely, and a district/school/(class) is fully remote for all students during the entire assessment window, please reach out to the applicable Assessment Coordinator:

* ACCESS/MSAA/MSAA [Jodi.bossio-smith@maine.gov](mailto:Jodi.bossio-smith@maine.gov) (207) 530-1462
* General Math & ELA/Literacy and Science [nancy.godfrey@maine.gov](mailto:nancy.godfrey@maine.gov) (207) 530-1273

**Q: If granted a special considerations exemption, the assessment will simply not be given for a year until the next window?**

A: Special Consideration exemption requests are submitted and determined on an annual basis at the individual student level. A special consideration can only be submitted for an assessment for which the student is eligible.

**Q: Are there make-up windows for each assessment?**

A: Make-up windows are not established for each individual assessment. For each assessment, the window is established and can be located on the [assessment calendar webpage](https://www.maine.gov/doe/Testing_Accountability/MECAS/calendar). If a student is absent form school during the administration of an assessment, it is the school’s responsibility to reschedule and provide the student an opportunity to complete the assessment. All sessions must be completed during the applicable assessment window.

**Q: For purposes of reporting the number of ELLs in our district, we will continue to use the student’s status from last year, correct?**

A: Students who are identified as English learners with an EL start date in Synergy, and who are unable to participate in the ACCESS assessment this year due to one of the special considerations criteria, will remain in EL status.

**Q: How long will it take to get a Special Consideration determination/decision from DOE? i.e. how late in the window can we wait before submitting a request? For example, if the student is remote in early April, is that a good time to submit the form?**

A: Once spring Maine Educational Assessments begin to open, the Assessment Team/Special Consideration Review Panel meets regularly each week to review exemption requests. The Department will aim to respond to requests within three (3) business days from submission. The final determination (approved/denied) may differ depending on the length of the assessment window, and the back-and-forth MEA portal communication/comments between DOE and the requesting school district.

NOTE: The windows for each assessment vary in length (2-weeks or up to 14-weeks) therefore, a student must be unable to participate for the entire duration of the applicable assessment window.

**Q: What are schools using for alternate assessments?**

A: For students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3-8 and 3rd year of high school, Maine will continue to administer Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) for math and English Language Arts (ELA)/ Literacy. Students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 5, 8 and 3rd year of high school will be participating in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment in science which is new this year.

**Q: How do special consideration approvals impact participation rates?**

A: If a Special Consideration request is submitted and APPROVED, the student is removed from the participation calculation. If a Special Consideration request is submitted and DENIED, the student is considered a non-participant in the applicable assessment.

**Q: Is it accurate that students with multiple physical and cognitive disabilities must be given an alternate assessment?**

A: The Alternate Assessment is utilized by students with the most significant cognitive disabilities as determined by a special education team and IEP process. The student must meet all participation criteria descriptors. Please visit the following for additional information:

* [Maine Department of Education MSAA home page](https://www.maine.gov/doe/Testing_Accountability/MECAS/materials/msaa)
* [Maine Department of Education MSAA Science home page](https://stateofmaine.sharepoint.com/sites/DOEAssessment/Shared%20Documents/General/Communication/Assessment%20Guidance%202021/•%09https:/www.maine.gov/doe/Testing_Accountability/MECAS/materials/saa)
* Resources for Determining Eligibility - These resources are designed to support IEP teams in making data-driven decisions about eligibility and participation in the alternate assessments.
  + [Participation Decision Flowchart](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Participation%20Decision%20Flowchart.pdf)
  + [Alternate Assessment Participation Checklist](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Maine%20Alternate%20Assessment%20Participation%20Checklist.pdf)

**Q: Should I do a Special Consideration for a very low, non-verbal, non-responsive student.**

A: Students with significant cognitive disabilities may qualify for Alternate Assessments based on a special education team and IEP process. All students eligible for assessments should be given the opportunity to participate.

**Q: If students are receiving in-person instruction and do not have a medical emergency, can they be exempted?**

A: A student is eligible to receive a special consideration for the a spring 2021 assessment administration if they meet one of the two following criteria:

* **Significant Medical Emergency** includes long-term hospitalization without access to academics, severe trauma, mental health crisis, placement in hospice care or mental health facility. A Medical Emergency may also include medically fragile students that are not able to participate in any academic activity and/or statewide assessments due to a debilitating disease.
* **COVID/Quarantine** includes student who has positive COVID test results, is unable to participate in statewide assessment due to the condition of quarantine according to Maine DOE [COVID19 Toolkit](https://www.maine.gov/doe/covid-19/toolkit), or has elected for full remote instruction during each individual assessment window.

If an assessment can be administered remotely and the student does not have a medical emergency or COVID-related health concern, the student is expected to participate. Several federally required assessments do not have the ability to be administered remotely. If a student is receiving 100% remote instruction and is unable to come to a school facility for in-person assessment administration during the entire assessment administration window, a Special Consideration request should be submitted.

**Q: Does the Parental Consent Form that principals will print and place in a student’s cumulative file require a parent signature?**

A: Yes. Parent consent is needed to acknowledge the following:

* I have consulted with the school district and agree with this request to exempt my child from statewide assessment. I understand that this means I will have no statewide assessment data for my child for the year of instruction being assessed
* I   **do /** I **do not** (check one) give the district permission to seek an exemption for my child from statewide assessment for medical or other extraordinary reasons.
* I   **do /** I **do not** (check one) give permission for the district to discuss the request if necessary, with a member of the Special Considerations Review Panel.

**Q: Can a parent exempt the student from taking the assessment with a letter?**

A: A parent can request that the school submit an exemption request for either of the Medical Emergency or COVID/Quarantine reasons and include any required supplemental documentation to support the request. If parents submit a letter requesting exemption from assessments for any other reason, the district/school may document this request, but the request must address one (1) of the two (2) reasons as defined in the [special considerations module](https://neo.maine.gov/DOE/NEO/Accounts/Account/Login).

**Q: Do we know the assessments so we can begin to think about accommodations that may be needed? I am wondering about the regular education assessments so I can think about accommodations as we are meeting. I heard it was changing.**

A: The general Math & ELA/Literacy and general Science will be new assessments and administered in the spring of 2021. The Department continues to negotiate contracts for these assessments and will provide additional information as the contracts are regarding supports and/or accommodations for each assessment as soon as it becomes available.

**Q: How do you recommend getting the parent exemption form signed if the parent is also [medically] unable to join a meeting?**

A: The consent form for requesting Special Considerations should be distributed to parents in the customary way the school sends other parental notifications and should likewise be returned to the school.

# Office Hours Questions and Answers

## February 5, 2021

**Q: Has the Math and ELA/Literacy assessment for grades 3-8 and 3rd year high school been announced? What is timing for that decision?**

**A:** The Department remains in contract negotiations with a vendor. Once the contract is executed, the Department will notify districts and begin the onboarding process.

**Q: The Science assessment is new for  grades that take it, online, and aligned to NGSS.  Is there a way to see sample questions yet or will that be at the training mentioned that is upcoming?**

**A**: DOE is currently under contract negotiations for the New Meridian Science assessment.  Details regarding professional learning and onboarding will be forthcoming. 

**Q: For students who are fully remote who we can't get in, is there a form we fill out?  We have 225 student who are fully remote and won't have busing for them.  The number who won't be able to take it is likely to be large.  Is it ok to exempt a large number of students?  Will that impact funding?**

**A:**A large number of districts are implementing a hybrid approach to instruction which includes identified days engaged in remote and in-person learning. The Department anticipates the extension of assessment windows for assessment administration provides increased opportunity for students to participate in the assessment on days when they are attending in person. Should a school have all students within any one assessment grade, typically 3-8 and 3rd year of high school, engaged in remote learning for 100% of the time during the entire assessment window, please reach out to the assessment team. For individual students who may be engaged in 100%  remote learning and are unable to attend school in person due to COVID-19, a special consideration request may be submitted on behalf of the student.

**Q: Is the science test paper and pencil or online?**

**A:**The New Science assessment will be administered online.    The alternate assessment in science is also online and administered , via the MSAA System.  Should a student require a  paper-based version of the assessment as an accommodation as outlined in a students IEP, a paper-based version of the assessment would be available.

**Q: Is there any possibility that another possibility of a waiver will happen with the new administration?**

**A:** The answer is, we just don't know.  With the recent confirmation of the new secretary for education, we are hoping additional federal guidance is forthcoming.

**Q: Will DACs will be cc’d on the correspondence regarding the NAEP 2021 survey studies that will be sent to superintendents, school principals and coordinators?**

**A:** Yes.  DACs will be cc’d on the district level communications from the NAEP coordinator pertaining to the NAEP 2021 questionnaires and the NAEP 2021 survey study.  The team makes every effort to ensure all individuals engaged in assessment administration receive the same information. This is achieved through emails to DACs and through established list servs.

**Q: We have many students who “choose” remote, but not necessarily due to medical needs. If a student is fully remote, does the special consideration apply or do they need to show a medical need?**

**A:** The Special Considerations module has a COVID/Quarantine option. This would also include health/safety concerns, related to the pandemic, and resulting in a student receiving remote instruction.  No medical documentation is required for COVID/Quarantine.

**Q: How many years do you anticipate the new Math and ELA/Literacy assessment contract to be in place?**

**A**: We are currently negotiating  an initial 2-year contract.

**Q: So to be clear, if a student is remote, and the assessment can’t be done virtually, we submit the request? We currently have over 100 students in remote status. I assume we are planning on the ELA/math/science assessment will be virtual and this is mostly for alternate assessments?**

**A**: If a student is receiving remote instruction due to being quarantined or has health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, the assessment cannot be administered remotely and the student is unable to enter the building to participate in person, a special consideration  request may be submitted.

If for example, there is an entire grade level that is impacted by COVID-19 and are unable to participate in the assessment  in person for the entire duration of the assessment window due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that the district reach out to the assessment coordinator of the assessment that is directly impacted. The Department is working on a process that would  streamline this process and be less burdensome to school districts.  All science assessments will be administered in person, there is no not a remote administration option. For math and ELA/literacy, the new assessment currently under contract negotiation has the option to be administered remotely if a student is unable to complete in person. The MSAA math and ELA/literacy assessment must be administered in person.

**Q: I would also like to know how to do a group submission of names for exemption for our fully distant learners.**

**A**: If there is a large group of students who are receiving instruction remotely and are unable to participate in the assessment in person as a direct result of  COVID-19, we ask that the district reach out to the assessment coordinator of the assessment that is directly impacted. The Department is working on a process that would  streamline this process and be less burdensome to school districts

**Q: Regarding the Assessment Re-Design, is it possible for DACs to receive a list of participants from their district once the work begins?**

**A:**   Absolutely. The deadline to express interest is February 26. Once the interest form is closed, we will work to get districts that information.

**Q: I am sure others have expressed concern, about the validity of remote assessments, and the impact those scores might have in selection on our schools?**

**A:** The Department is aware of concerns and continues to pose questions related to remote administration. It should be noted  the majority of the assessments (science, MSAA- math & ELA/Literacy, MSAA – Science, and ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS) are designed to administered in person and do not have a remote option.

**Q: Is there a reason why we need to give documentation for medical special considerations?  If we do not need to do so for COVID, I am not understanding the reason for the difference.**

**A:** Federal statute outlines specific language regarding to special considerations due to a significant medical emergency. Maine has adopted this federal language when receiving special consideration requests from Maine school districts. The special consideration related to COVID-19 is not a federal allowance and is a consideration that the Maine DOE, in response to district concerns, has instituted.

**Q: What assessments would be able to be given to a fully distant learner or is that not known yet?**

**A:** The possibility of remote administration exists only for the Math and ELA assessments but does not include the MSAA math and ELA/Literacy assessment.  All other assessments will continue to be administered in person where it is safe to do so.  More information will be provided after the new math and ELA/Literacy contract is fully executed.

**Q: Are you encouraging remote students to take the unnamed assessment at home if possible?**

**A:** The math and ELA assessment is able to be administered in person and remotely. Where possible and where it is safe to do so, students may be administered the assessment in person. Those students who are receiving instruction 100% remotely are able to participate in the assessment remotely if they are unable to participate in person. Should a student receiving instruction remotely not participate in the assessment either remotely, in person and is not eligible for special consideration, the student would be a non-participant.  The possibility of remote administration exists only for the new math and ELA/Literacy  assessments.  More information will be provided after the contract has been approved and signed.

**Q: How long does each session (reading and math) of the  mystery assessment vendor’s assessment take for a student?  This would help us understanding scheduling during our hybrid model.**

**A** :The average student will finish a session in 45-70 minutes.  However as the assessment is adaptive it is possible for students to spend multiple hours on an assessment session depending on their answers and their engagement. Schools may want to consider assessment completion spaces where a student who require a longer period of time can finish the sessions. For those concerned about students who typically rush through an assessment and hit submit, the proctor does have the ability to monitor and pause a student who seems to be moving at an accelerated pace.

**Q:  How does one sign up for the MEA Listerv?**

**A:** The assessment team has a number of listservs available which are assessment specific. Details can be found on the Maine DOE website within our monthly update and are included below for your convenience:

**General Assessment (MEA) Listserv:** <https://mailman.informe.org/mailman/listinfo/mea>

**Alt. Assessment Listserv:**<https://mailman.informe.org/mailman/listinfo/alternateassessments>

**ACCESS Listserv:**<https://mailman.informe.org/mailman/listinfo/esl.communication>

## February 12, 2021

**Q:  If waivers are possible, will Maine DOE apply?  How will it be determined which waivers are submitted?**

**A:**  The prior administration under Secretary DeVos had previously made it clear to states that no assessment waivers would be granted this year.  At this time, we are unsure if that will change under the new administration.  However if it is possible to apply for a waiver from assessment, accountability, or participation, the federal government is very clear that state education agencies must first solicit public comment. Last year in Fall 2020, public comment was sought very early and the feedback indicated that waivers for both assessment and accountability were supported by the field.  If we can utilize the public comment from Fall 2020, we can submit that as evidence.  If not, we will plan submit our waiver as soon as possible, and add public comment once the period has closed.  This year Maine did apply for a waiver from reporting for both the main and alternate science assessments, as both are field tests.

**Q: Will the (unnamed) assessment window open on March 1st, or is this dependent on the contract? Will PD be offered prior to the assessment window opening, or will this possibly take place tangentially?**

**A:**  For the assessment that shall not be named, it’s a multi- faceted approach. Some districts are already using this assessment. Therefore, there will be no interruption to these districts’ windows.  For any new districts onboarding the assessment, once the contract is executed the vendor stands ready to support you as quickly as possible, and Andy Wallace will also be on call and supporting. There have also been conversations about possible peer mentoring from districts that have used this tool in the past that may be able to help districts new to the assessment answer questions quickly and efficiently.  The implementation and professional learning stand ready to go, and Maine DOE’s intent is to make sure that schools districts are comfortable and confident in the assessment before they are asked to administer.

**Q:  Do we know assessment window?**

**A:**  The assessment window is March 1st  – June 15th, 2021.  Conversations happening in real time include feedback from the field that while typically districts due not like to assess in June, this year two additional weeks would be helpful.

The assessment window for ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is January 11th – April 16th, 2021.

The alternate assessments window [MSAA and MSAA Science] is March 15th – May 14th, 2021.

**Q:  How much time do you intend to give between the announcement of the assessment technology and the administration window opening? Will we have time for set up/practice?**

**A**:  The intent is to be a staggered implementation.  Once the school/district are in a place where you can assess students, you are asked to proceed. We want to make sure that all staff administering this assessment are comfortable and confident and have received the necessary professional development support that they require.

**Q:  We have over 400 remote learners in our district.  Should we be setting up times for these students to be tested, or should I be planning to submit 400 special considerations?**

**A**:  If learners are fully remote, for reasons related to health/safety/medical concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, the school can apply for a special consideration.  For students simply opting not to come to school, the Department asks that the district/school proceed with a good faith effort to assess when safely possible to do so.   If you have a high preponderance of students who are fully remote, and you cannot get them into the building to assess during the entirety of the assessment window, please reach out to that assessment coordinator directly.

**Q:  Which assessments can be administered remotely?**

**A:**  Almost all MEA assessments required an in-person administration.  This includes the science, MSAA and MSAA Science, and that ACCESS for ELLs assessments.  The only assessment with the opportunity for remote administration is the soon-to-be-announced main assessment in ELA & math.

**Q:  What do I do if my principal does not have access to NEO, for the special consideration module?**

**A**:  Please reach out to a member of the assessment team for support with this request.

**Question:  Will it be possible to assess different students at different times within the grade level?**

**A:**  Test security considerations can be a lot lighter with adaptive assessments, and districts/schools will enjoy that flexibility this year given current challenges to space, staffing, and cohort learning.

**Q:  Will the assessment that has not been named be available via the Internet on a home-device as opposed to a school device?**

**A**:  This is something the Department is checking into.  The vendor does appear to have some options related to this.  The Department is recommending a school device and not a personal device for purposes of assessment.  With further questions, please reach out to assessment coordinator Nancy Godfrey: [Nancy.godfrey@maine.gov](mailto:Nancy.godfrey@maine.gov).

**Q:  In terms of accountability, how will growth be measured this year with a new assessment?**

**A:**  For states with no interruption to their contracts, many are already talking about how to account for the gap in the year of data.  Maine does not have that luxury as we are changing our assessment this year and the two assessments cannot be aligned. One is criterion- referenced and the other is norm- referenced, therefore growth cannot be measured between the two.  Current feedback in the national educational community is that the federal government may be leaning more towards a waiver from accountability than from assessment, indicating that the assessment this year is vital as an additional data point to support students.  It is one data point, and thus there has been speculation that assessments will not be waived but accountability will possibly be revised for this year.  Maine DOE continues to monitor this and will keep districts informed of any developments.