



## **NSCAS Alternate Assessment Frequently Asked Questions for Families**

### **1. What is the NSCAS-AA?**

The NSCAS-AA is Nebraska's Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities. It was administered for the first time in the spring of 2011. The NSCAS-AA is aligned to the Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards Extended Indicators and is designed to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on an appropriately rigorous assessment.

### **2. What is meant by extended indicators?**

The extended indicators refer to the Nebraska's College and Career Ready Academic Standards Extended Indicators. The extensions were designed to make NSCAS more accessible to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These extended indicators help to ensure students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are provided with multiple ways to learn and demonstrate knowledge. At the same time, the standards extensions are designed to maintain the rigor and high expectations of NSCAS.

### **3. Why should students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in academic instruction and assessment?**

In addition to learning functional life skills such as communication, self-determination, gross/fine motor skills, and social skills, it is generally accepted that all students—regardless of ability—deserve to have the same opportunities to learn academic content and demonstrate their mastery. All children, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, must have access to the general curriculum; be involved in the general curriculum; and progress in the general curriculum. General curriculum means the same grade level academic content standards curriculum that is afforded to other students. For this reason, extended indicators that align to the Nebraska's College and Career Ready Academic Standards were designed to provide meaningful access to academic content for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Additionally, the NSCAS-AA provides an opportunity for these students to demonstrate what they know and can do as it relates to academic content. There are also laws requiring all students to participate in academic instruction and assessment. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) reflects the intent to extend educational accountability and reform to all students, including those with disabilities. This legislation, along with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates that all students with disabilities be included in general state and district-wide assessment programs. Most students with disabilities are able to participate in the general state assessments with allowable accommodations. However, some students may qualify to participate in the alternate assessment in its place.

#### **4. Should my child take the alternate assessment?**

The decision if a student participates in statewide and district-wide assessments are made by each student's IEP team. NDE provides IEP teams with guidelines for participation in the NSCAS-AA. These documents can be found on NDE's Statewide Assessment website (<https://www.education.ne.gov/assessment/>).

Students who participate in the NSCAS-AA have the following characteristics:

- a most significant cognitive disability documented in their Individualized Education Program (IEP),
- requires substantial modifications, adaptations, or supports to meaningfully access the grade-level content,
- requires intensive individualized instruction in order to acquire and generalize knowledge,
- instruction is aligned to the Nebraska's College and Career Ready Academic Standards Extended Indicators.
- instruction is at multiple levels below age or grade-level, and
- the general assessment unlikely will not provide valid and reliable measures of proficiency in content areas even with allowable accommodations.

#### **5. When and how will the NSCAS-AA be administered?**

Districts have a six-week window during which they will have the opportunity to administer the NSCAS-AA, mid-March through April. There are no time restrictions to the assessment itself, and students may stop and resume the assessment at any point. A Test Administrator designated by your child's school will administer the assessments to your child in a one-on-one environment. Your child will be able to respond in his or her most appropriate mode of communication (oral, signed language, picture system, or augmentative communication device) and use appropriate accommodations that have been documented by the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team members.

#### **6. How is the NSCAS-AA designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities?**

The NSCAS-AA is designed to be accessible to students with diverse and significant disabilities. First, the test uses picture symbols, words and stimuli to engage students in the content. Second, the test allows students to complete the tasks using their preferred method of communication (e.g., pointing, eye gaze, assistive technology, oral response, sign language). Third, the test is administered online with the option of a paper/pencil version being printed. Finally, there is no time restriction on the assessment; students may stop and resume the assessment at any point during the testing window upon discretion of the teacher.

### 7. In which grades and content areas will my child be tested?

The NSCAS-AA is administered in the same grades and content areas administered for the NSCAS.

NSCAS-AA Form Assignment	
Student Grade Level	Content Areas to Be Administered to Each Student
3	English language arts and mathematics.
4	English language arts and mathematics.
5	English language arts, mathematics, and science.
6	English language arts and mathematics.
7	English language arts and mathematics.
8	English language arts, mathematics, and science.
11	English language arts, mathematics, and science.

### 8. When will I receive my child's results?

The Individual Score Report for the spring NSCAS-AA will be made available to your child's district in early August. Check with your child's school to determine when you will receive your child's report. The score reports for NSCAS-AA will show your child's score and performance level on each content area of the assessment. It will also explain what students at your child's proficiency level know and can do in each content area. Your child's performance is also reported as a total score that allows you to monitor growth.

### 9. Where can I learn more about Nebraska's Alternate Assessment?

Families can visit NDE's Statewide Assessment website (<https://www.education.ne.gov/assessment/>) to find more information, including sample tasks for the NSCAS-AA. Families are also encouraged to speak with their child's teacher to learn more.