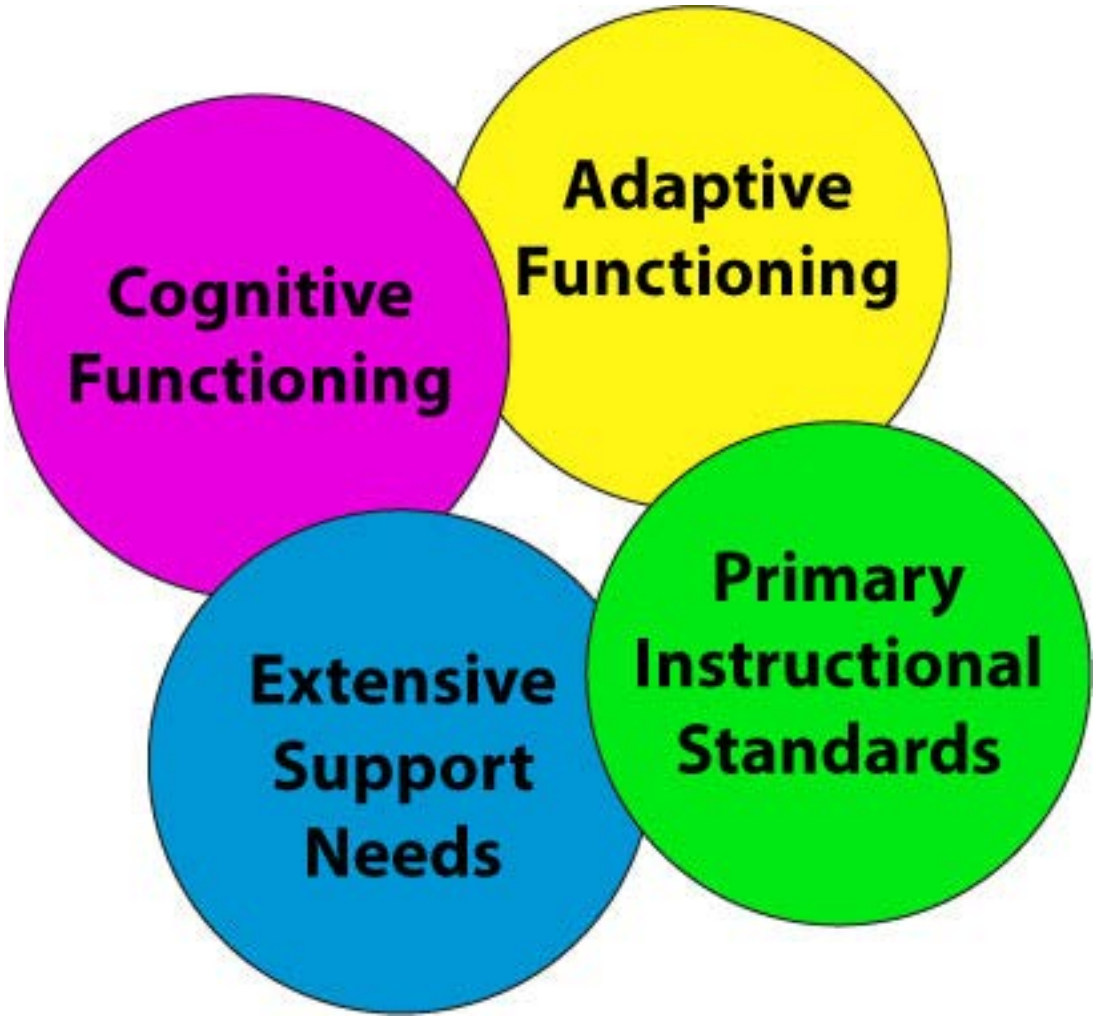

Rubric for Assigning Students to Alternate Standards for Instruction and Assessment

Office of Special Education
and
Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability
of the
Michigan Department of Education

REVISED MARCH 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTACT INFORMATION 2

INTRODUCTION 3

CRITERION 1: COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING 4

CRITERION 2: ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING DOMAINS 7

CRITERION 3: EXTENSIVE SUPPORT NEEDS 11

CRITERION 4: PRIMARY STANDARDS USED FOR INSTRUCTION 14

CONTACT INFORMATION

Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education Information Line
1-888-320-8384
Email: mde-ose@michigan.gov

Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) Call Center
1-877-560-8378 or 517-241-4102
Questions pertaining to the following:

- **Option 1:** For inquiries related to state assessment policy; the OEAA Secure Site; administration of the M-STEP, MI-Access, Early Literacy and Mathematics Benchmark Assessments; and School Accountability Reporting
- **Option 2:** For inquiries related to the SAT, PSAT, or WIN Work Readiness Assessment testing:
  - **Option 1:** eligibility to test and the OEAA Secure Site
  - **Option 2:** administration of the College Board assessments (PSAT 8/9, PSAT 10, SAT)
  - **Option 3:** administration of the WIN Work Readiness Assessments
- **Option 3:** For inquiries related to WIDA, the English Learner assessment
- **Option 4:** For all other calls
- **Option 5:** To report known unethical testing practices by a school on any state assessment
- **Option 6:** To repeat these options

INTRODUCTION

MI-Access is Michigan's alternate assessment system based on alternate achievement standards, and is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Michigan uses alternate content expectations (often referred to as the Essential Elements), as its alternate achievement standard, which are designed for the subset of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who have also demonstrated a lack of progress toward general grade level standards. While aligned to the Michigan K-12 standards, these alternate standards are reduced in depth and complexity, and are designed to be rigorous and challenging for this group of students. Alternate achievement standards alone, for instruction and curriculum, will seldom meet all the requirements for earning a diploma. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that states test no more than 1% of their students based on alternate standards.

To help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams in making data informed and appropriate decisions around the use of alternate standards for instruction and assessment, the Michigan Department of Education has developed this rubric, based on the four required criteria that all must be met in order for a student to take MI-Access. These four criteria include:

1. Substantial Impairment in Cognitive Functioning
2. Substantial Impairment in Adaptive Functioning across the Conceptual, Social, and Practical Domains of Life
3. Extensive Support Needs to Demonstrate Learning and to Generalize Across Settings
4. Primary Standards for Instruction and Educational Goals Rooted in Alternate Achievement Standards

On subsequent pages, you will find guidance on how to organize and better understand different types of information about the students' strengths, weaknesses, and level of support needs. You will find guidance on what types of information are valid and criterion relevant, and how to accurately interpret or make sense of that information for the appropriate use of Alternate Assessments.

CRITERION 1: COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

Directions: Cognitive Functioning refers to a person's ability to think, to reason, and to process information; recalling it, re-organizing it, and making plans or drawing conclusions from it. When making summative assessment decisions, consider the various types of Cognitive skills and abilities involved in overall Cognitive Functioning and the student's current ability levels.

An overall or global score of cognitive functioning may not always be the best gauge to use for students with disabilities and can vary widely from sub-domains of cognitive ability. For students with communication, hearing, or motor delays, measures of general Cognitive Functioning and some sub-domains based on verbal skills or speed of processing information may underestimate these students' cognitive abilities; in these instances, other sub-scales or types of tests such as non-verbal cognitive assessments are often a more accurate and reliable gauge of students' cognitive abilities. Considering the overall and various types and sub-scores of cognitive functioning can help to create a better picture of the whole child and his/her strengths and weaknesses.

To the greatest extent possible, valid measures and/or clinical judgement should help gauge the student's current cognitive functioning level for each domain. Valid short screeners for cognitive abilities may also be useful for getting a more up-to-date picture of cognitive abilities, especially when it has been more than three years since a full cognitive battery was used.

Standardized scores (SS) plus or minus a standard error should be considered. Clinically significant cognitive limitations involve standardized scores of 70 or less, and the most significant 1% levels of cognitive limitations involve SS of 62 or less. Clinical judgement from a licensed professional such as a school psychologist or clinical psychologist is also useful when recent valid scores or sub-scores on standardized measures or screeners were attempted but could not be attained (example: last valid data on cognitive skills is more than 3 years old; or cognitive scores from pre-school or early elementary years are all that is available for a student currently in middle school or high school). In such cases, professional judgment is used, drawing from older cognitive data in conjunction with more recent academic performance and classroom observations, all to infer the student's cognitive skills more indirectly, when timely and direct measures or screeners are not able to be attained. While the terms "mild-," "moderate-," and "severe-cognitive impairment" refer to types of special education programs in Michigan, terms like these have not been used to qualify a student for Special Education in Michigan since 2006. **A student's placement or consideration of placement in any particular impairment program may not be used to presume his or her cognitive abilities.** Instead, valid measures, screeners, and licensed professional judgement are needed.

For each type of cognitive skill, please rate the student's current level of cognitive functioning on a scale from **Not Limited** to **Most Significant Cognitive Limitations**. The typical standardized score (SS) ranges for each rating level are provided as a reference. Please note the scale ranges of 2 to 3 refer to typical clinical levels of cognitive impairment (2 or more standard deviations [SD] below average), and 3 refers to the most significant levels of cognitive impairment.

Verbal Cognition (related to language skills and knowledge)

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
Verbal cognition in average range or above	Verbal cognition 1 to 2 SD below mean	Verbal cognition 2 to 2.5 SD below mean	Verbal cognition more than 2.5 SD below mean
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Non-Verbal Cognition (related to visual-spatial skills and fluid thinking)

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
Non-verbal cognition in average range or above	Non-verbal cognition 1 to 2 SD below mean	Non-verbal cognition 2 to 2.5 SD below mean	Non-verbal cognition more than 2.5 SD below mean
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Thinking, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
Reasoning and problem-solving skills at age-level or within average range	Minimal assistance (e.g., general education interventions and/or supports) needed to carry out reasoning and problem-solving tasks	Requires special education services, including modifications and scaffolding to complete reasoning and problem-solving tasks	Dependent on others for completing tasks that require reasoning and problem-solving
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

For each type of cognitive skill, please rate the student's current level of cognitive functioning on a scale from **Not Limited** to **Most Significant Cognitive Limitations**. The typical standardized score (SS) ranges for each rating level are provided as a reference. Please note the scale ranges of 2 to 3 refer to typical clinical levels of cognitive impairment (2 or more standard deviations [SD] below average), and 3 refers to the most significant levels of cognitive impairment.

Executive Functioning, Attention, Memory, and Planning

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
Cognitive planning and working memory at age-level or within average range	Minimal assistance (e.g., general education interventions and/or supports) needed to support cognitive planning and working memory	Requires special education services, including modifications and scaffolding to support cognitive planning and working memory	Dependent on others for completing tasks that require cognitive planning and working memory
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Fluency or Speed of Processing Information

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

General or Full-Scale Cognitive Ability

This may be used when sub-scores are closely aligned (within 12 SS points of each other) and when all relevant sub-domains are completed with valid scores.

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Cognitive Limitations	2 Significant Cognitive Limitations	3 Most Significant Cognitive Limitations
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

CRITERION 2: ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING DOMAINS

Directions: Adaptive Functioning refers to the skills used to manage daily living and social interactions at home, school, and in the community, relative to age and normative expectations for independence and appropriate behavior. Below are questions about the student's overall adaptive functioning from different observers' perspectives (Teacher, Parent, Clinician), followed by questions about the student's adaptive functioning in each of three adaptive skills domains (Conceptual, Social, and Practical).

Please include ratings from at least 2 observers, one of which should be a parent observer. For each measure of adaptive skills, please rate the student's current level of functioning, on a scale from **Not Limited** to **Most Significant Adaptive Limitations.** Use valid measures and scores (+/- standard errors) and professional, clinical judgement as data to inform these ratings. The typical standardized score (SS) ranges for each rating level are provided as a reference. Please note the scale ranges of 2 to 3 refer to typical clinical levels of adaptive functioning impairment, which are 2 or more standard deviations (SD) below average.

After reviewing all available data, if the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is struggling to decide between two ratings, **presume competence** and select the next column to the left. For example, if the team is trying to decide between *Significant Adaptive Limitations* and *Slight Adaptive Limitations*, select *Slight Adaptive Limitations*.

Teacher/School Observation of Overall Adaptive Behavior Scale

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Adaptive Limitations	2 Significant Adaptive Limitations	3 Most Significant Adaptive Limitations
Overall adaptive behavior score in average range or above	Adaptive behavior 1 to 2 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior 2 to 2.5 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior more than 2.5 SD below mean
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Parent Observation of Overall Adaptive Behavior Scale

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Adaptive Limitations	2 Significant Adaptive Limitations	3 Most Significant Adaptive Limitations
Overall adaptive behavior score in average range or above	Adaptive behavior 1 to 2 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior 2 to 2.5 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior more than 2.5 SD below mean
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Licensed Practitioner Observation of Overall Adaptive Behavior Scale (e.g., from a School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Clinical Psychologist, or a Behavioral Health Professional)

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Adaptive Limitations	2 Significant Adaptive Limitations	3 Most Significant Adaptive Limitations
Overall adaptive behavior score in average range or above	Adaptive behavior 1 to 2 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior 2 to 2.5 SD below mean	Adaptive behavior more than 2.5 SD below mean
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)

Sub-Domain of Adaptive Behavior: Conceptual Domain

The Conceptual Domain covers skills that are needed to communicate, to apply academic skills, and to manage and to accomplish tasks.

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Adaptive Limitations	2 Significant Adaptive Limitations	3 Most Significant Adaptive Limitations
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)
The student is within typical grade level range academically in all content areas; **and**, The student has age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills, including conversation skills (verbally or through a communication device); **and**, The student expresses and makes independent choices, exhibits self-control and takes responsibility for choices at an age-appropriate level.	The student has difficulty learning some grade-level academic content but is making progress with appropriate supports and interventions as specified in the IEP; **and**, After learning new content, the student may need additional practice with direct instruction to generalize the new skills into daily living activities; **and**, The student has some age-appropriate receptive and expressive communication skills (verbally or through a communication device), uses and understands simple, nonverbal communication and can follow simple, age-appropriate directions and routines with prompting.	The student has difficulty learning grade-level academic content across all subject areas and may require multiple tiers of intervention, accommodations, or modifications; **and**, The student may need some instruction aligned to Michigan's alternate content expectations (Essential Elements) to build base skills to get back to grade level; **and**, The student may struggle to generalize skills outside the classroom, even with assistance and practice; **and**, The student has difficulty communicating wants, needs, thoughts and ideas but receptively understands messages; **and**, The student struggles to follow directions and routines without significant assistance.	The student has significant difficulty learning academic content, may require instruction that is designed by clustering grade-level standards into life-applied units of study with intensive accommodations for access; **and**, The student requires significantly modified curriculum and instruction using Michigan's alternate content expectations (Essential Elements) and likely is unable to apply or generalize skills outside the classroom setting; **and**, The student may be unable to clearly express wants and needs and may not seem to understand the messages conveyed by others. The student likely requires maximum adult assistance to communicate; **and**, The student requires layers of supports (accommodations, scaffolding and assistive technologies) to follow directions and complete daily routine activities.

Sub-Domain of Adaptive Behavior: Social Domain

The Social Domain covers behaviors needed to engage in interpersonal interactions, to act with social responsibility, and to use leisure time. This includes social competence, gullibility, naïveté (wariness), social problem-solving, following rules/obeying laws, and avoiding being victimized.

0 **Not Limited**	1 **Slight Adaptive Limitations**	2 **Significant Adaptive Limitations**	3 **Most Significant Adaptive Limitations**
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)
The student displays age-appropriate social, communication and leisure skills; **and**, The student can initiate and maintain friendships, express and recognize emotions with peers who are the same age; **and**, The student engages in play and recreational activities without additional support.	The student may have difficulty with social interactions (for example, may misinterpret social cues or others may consider the student's actions as immature); **and**, The student's communication, language and conversation skills are more concrete or immature than peers who are the same age; **and**, The student may have challenges in regulating emotion and behavior in an age-appropriate manner, and these challenges may be noticed by peers and adults.	The student has social, behavior, and communication skills markedly different from peers who are the same age; **and**, The student is understood by others but uses a mode for communication that is much less complex than peers who are the same age; **and**, The student may use behaviors to communicate; **and**, The student may not perceive or interpret social cues accurately; **and**, The student often needs significant support to engage in social situations and/or use communication skills; **and**, The student may be easily persuaded to do things that go against the rules or safe boundaries when coaxed to do so.	The student often uses behaviors to communicate; **and**, The student's communication skills are very *limited* in terms of vocabulary and grammar; **and**, The student may be in the process of developing a mode of communication, may be described as nonverbal or uses very limited non-symbolic communication; **and**, The student requires significant adult assistance to communicate with peers or adults and may require layers of support (simple speech, visuals, gestures, etc.) to communicate; **and**, The student *may not yet* show understanding of symbolic communication with speech or gesture.

Sub-Domain of Adaptive Behavior: Practical Domain

The Practical Domain covers behaviors needed to address personal and health needs; to take care of home, in classroom or work settings; and to function in a school or community.

0 Not Limited	1 Slight Adaptive Limitations	2 Significant Adaptive Limitations	3 Most Significant Adaptive Limitations
(Standard Score > 85)	(SS 84 - 71)	(SS 70 - 63)	(SS 62 or less)
The student is able to follow safety rules and functions in the community and classroom setting similarly to peers who are the same age; **and**, The student independently performs self-care activities such as eating, dressing, and taking care of personal hygiene.	The student often functions age-appropriately in personal care and daily living activities and using community resources; **and**, The student displays recreational skills typically on the same level as peers, although some additional support may be needed; **and**, The student may need support in navigating the school and community and may need reminders about being mindful of safety hazards.	The student may need support to care for personal needs (for example, eating, dressing, toileting needs), may have needed an extended period of explicit teaching in the past to gain skills in these areas, and may require prompting or cues; **and**, The student often requires additional support and learning opportunities for recreational skills; **and**, The student requires intensive support to safely navigate the school and community.	The student requires significant support and direct instruction across all activities of daily living (meals, dressing, bathing, toileting needs) or may be dependent on others for all aspects of physical care, health, and safety; **and**, The student requires intensive teaching and ongoing support for recreational and navigation skills, not because of physical ability but because of significant cognitive needs. The student requires supervision at all times.

CRITERION 3: EXTENSIVE SUPPORT NEEDS

Determine if the student requires extensive supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.

Directions: For each area of supports, please rate the student's current level of needed support to demonstrate learning, and achieve academic gains, on a scale from **None** to **Extensive**. Use the rating that best describes the student's supports, accommodations, modifications, and assistive technology needs.

After reviewing all available data, if the IEP team is struggling to decide between two columns, **presume competence** and select the column to the left. For example, if the team is trying to decide between *Moderate* and *Light* level of accommodations, select *Light*.

Instructional/Curriculum Supports

This section describes the accommodations and modifications needed for the student to engage meaningfully in daily instruction and curriculum.

0 None	1 Light	2 Moderate	3 Extensive
The student's IEP does not specify any specific accessibility or accommodations that are ***provided during instruction or while the student is engaging with the curriculum.***	The student's IEP outlines a few basic accessibility features or accommodations that are ***provided during instruction or while the student is engaging with the curriculum.***	The student's IEP outlines a broad list of accessibility features and accommodations and/ or modifications that are ***provided during instruction or while the student is engaging with the curriculum;*** **and**, These supports are not generally covered or offered as supports to students who are merely academically behind grade level.	The student's IEP outlines extensive individualized supports, accommodations and modifications and materials ***provided during instruction and while the student is engaging with the curriculum.*** These additional supports address the communication, motor and/or sensory needs of the learner and provide the learner opportunities to engage with the curriculum.

Accommodations/Modifications for Gauging Learning

This section describes the accommodations and modifications needed for the student to participate meaningfully in academic assessment activities.

0 None	1 Light	2 Moderate	3 Extensive
The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features that are presented in Michigan's Accommodations Manual under Universal Tools that are ***provided during assessment*** to support access.	The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features presented in Michigan's Accommodations Manual under Universal Tools, and/or Designated Supports and Accommodations that are ***provided during assessment*** to support access.	The student's IEP outlines a list of accessibility features presented in Michigan's Accommodations Manual under Universal Tools, and/or Designated Supports and Accommodations that are ***provided during assessment*** to support access; **and**, The student requires additional individualized accommodations, modifications, and scaffolds not allowed on Michigan's regular summative state assessments, such as M-STEP. These also are provided during formative assessment to provide the learner opportunities to convey what he or she knows and can do.	The student's IEP outlines individualized supports, accommodations, and modifications and materials beyond those presented in Michigan's Accommodations Manual under Universal Tools, and/or Designated Supports and Accommodations for Michigan's regular summative state assessments, such as M-STEP; **and**, These additional supports help to meet the cognitive and physical task demands of the assessment. These additional supports address the communication, motor and/or sensory needs of the learner and provide the learner opportunities to show what he or she knows and can do.

Assistive Technology

This section describes the use of assistive technologies needed for the student to actively engage and participate meaningfully and productively in daily activities in school, home, community, and work environments. Assistive technology as a support works best when IEP teams are intentional in their efforts to match the uses/functions of the technology device or features of the software applications to specific supports that the student needs. This feature matching is important for gauging what assistive technology, if any, may be needed by the student to support academic and daily activities.

Note: The assistive technology checkbox/section on the IEP should be a quick reference before taking a deeper look into the supports, services, and testing accommodations section of the IEP. There are several domains of assistive technology that IEP teams should consider.

0 None	1 Light	2 Moderate	3 Extensive
The student's IEP team has determined the student does not need any assistive technology. **or**, The student had an assistive technology evaluation completed and it was determined that no assistive technology is required as indicated in the IEP.	The student requires assistive technology supports and services. The IEP team is in the process of learning about assistive technology and determining specific supports for the student. **or**, The student's IEP includes assistive technology in the Special Instructional Factors, Measurable Annual Goals, Specially Designed Services, and/or Statewide and District Testing, or other relevant sections of the IEP.	The student's IEP outlines required assistive technology supports and services; **and**, An assistive technology assessment was used, or is in the process of being used, to feature match individualized, assistive technology to support academic instruction, communication, daily living, seating/positioning, mobility, sensory and/or motor needs, etc., **and/or**, The student currently is learning to use or is independently using assistive technology as a scaffold to access learning in his/her environment.	The student's IEP describes complex physical, sensory, or medical needs that require multiple assistive technology supports and services across most of the assistive technology domains. It may be challenging to determine access for the use of assistive technologies; **and**, The student currently requires person-dependent supports or scaffolds that may be replaced with assistive technology once feature matching can be determined.

CRITERION 4: PRIMARY STANDARDS USED FOR INSTRUCTION

Determine the primary standards on which the student's instruction in each subject is based.

Directions: Select the column that best describes the student's curriculum, instruction, and academic standards. IEP goals, instructional content, and curriculum may all be informative.

After reviewing all available data, please rate the student's Primary Standard of Instruction and goals on a scale from "*Primarily General Education Content*" to "*Primarily Alternate Education Content*." If the team is struggling to decide between two columns, **presume higher standards and expectations** and select the column to the left. For example, if the team is trying to decide between **A Mix of General and Alternate Education Content** and **Mostly General Education Content,** select **Mostly General Education Content**.

Curriculum, Instruction and Academic Standards

This section describes the student's daily learning needs as outlined in the IEP, instructional content, and curriculum.

0 **Primarily General Education Content**	1 **Mostly General Education Content**	2 **A Mix of General and Alternate Education Content**	3 **Primarily Alternate Education Content**
Majority of Instruction and All Academic Goals are Oriented toward General Education Content.	Majority of Instruction and Some Goals in a Majority of Subjects are Oriented toward General Education Content.	Mix of Instruction and Majority of Summative Goals in at Least One Content Area are Oriented toward Alternate Content Expectations (Essential Elements).	Majority of Instruction and Majority of Summative Goals Across All Content Areas are Oriented toward Alternate Content Expectations (Essential Elements).
The student's present levels of performance on the IEP goals indicate that skills are closely aligned with grade-level standards, concepts, and skills, with present level data showing skill gaps represented within Michigan's general grade level standards.	The student's IEP includes annual goals and objectives aligned to Michigan's general grade-level standards and may include short-term learning objectives aligned to Michigan's alternate content expectations in prescriptive area(s) of data-determined need; **and**, Instruction and summative objectives are aligned to grade-level targets, but interim objectives may build in complexity from Michigan's alternate content expectations; **and**, The student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that includes explicit instruction in all content areas based on general grade-level standards.	The student's IEP includes goals and objectives with a range of complexity that apex within Michigan's alternate content expectations (Essential Elements); **and**, Instruction and summative objectives are a mix across content areas, with summative general grade level targets for some content areas, but at least one in which summative targets apex within Michigan's alternate content expectations' range of complexity; **and**, The student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that includes life-applied grade-level learning in some content areas.	The student's IEP includes present level of performance statements that align learner data with Michigan's alternate content expectations for building base skills and engagement skills; **and**, Instruction and assessments are based on student data, likely showing skill gaps within the range of complexity described in Michigan's alternate content expectations for all content areas; **and**, The student's IEP requires Specially Designed Instruction that includes life-applied grade-level learning in all content areas.

Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA)
Phone: 1-877-560-8378
Website: www.michigan.gov/oeaa
Email: mde-oeaa@michigan.gov