



EXTENDED

CONTENT STANDARDS

for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), our federal special education law, ensures that all students with disabilities have the right to participate in and make meaningful progress within the “general education curriculum.” This means that schools must expect the vast majority of students, with and without disabilities, in the same grade level to know and be able to do the same things in all subject areas. While the focus on standards and high expectations applies to all students, the law recognizes that a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may be unable to achieve the standards that apply to all students, even when provided with extensive and intensive specially designed instruction.

North Carolina has developed Extended Content Standards to guide the instruction for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This fact sheet will answer some key questions parents and educators may have about the most significant cognitive disabilities, the Extended Content Standards (ECS) and the NC Extend 1 Alternate Assessment.

What are the Extended Content Standards?

North Carolina determines academic content standards for each subject area at each grade level. These standards are known as the NC Standard Course of Study. The Extended Content Standards (ECS) are directly connected to these standards and may adjust the complexity, breadth, or depth of knowledge, based on each student’s unique needs and abilities. The Extended Content Standards (ECS) are alternate academic achievement standards adapted from the NC Standard Course of Study specifically for students who have a significant cognitive disability. These adapted standards, often referred to as the “adapted curriculum” or “extensions”, set an expectation of performance that differs in complexity from a grade-level achievement standard. ECS classrooms are typically smaller settings with fewer students so that teachers are able to focus on specific individual needs and provide meaningful, relevant and purposeful instruction so that students can obtain necessary skills. ECS teaches the essential elements of the traditional course of study (English, Math, Science, Social Studies), along with employment, independent living and recreation/leisure.

Who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?

Students identified with significant cognitive disabilities have one or more disabilities that significantly affect their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Intellectual functioning refers to the actual performance of tasks believed to represent intelligence, such as observing, problem solving and communicating. Adaptive behavior refers to the skills that people need to function independently at home, at school, and in the community, such as self-care, social skills and activities of daily living. These students require intensive individualized instruction and supports and benefit from modifications to assignments and learning materials. They are often referred to as having “extensive support needs” or “low incidence disabilities” meaning those disabilities that occur in low numbers. Students with significant cognitive disabilities receive special education based on a variety of disability categories, which commonly include intellectual disability, autism and multiple disabilities.





Who decides if a child is a student with the most significant cognitive disability?

IEP Team members, which includes parents, decide whether a child will follow the NC Extended Content Standards based on data from a wide range of sources. These sources typically include evidence of significant deficits in cognitive and adaptive skills, work samples, results from assessments, data from evidence-based interventions and the need for instruction on a substantially lower grade level than

that of peers with disabilities, the use of substantially adapted materials and accessing information in alternate ways and extensive and repeated individualized instruction. The decision to place a student on the Extended Content Standards is not an academically lifelong decision. The decision must be made and reviewed at each annual review to ensure students are receiving the appropriate instruction and assessment.

Do students who follow the ECS learn in a separate classroom?

Each child's IEP team decides where they will learn, based on their individual needs. While some students may need a separate classroom for part or all of the day, others can receive their instruction and special education services in a more inclusive classroom. All IEP teams must determine a student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in keeping with important concepts in special education law and policy.

Do all students who follow the ECS learn the same things?

While all students receive instruction based on the subject areas in their grade level, IEP goals and special education services must be personalized to each student's needs. Students can receive instruction in skills they need to be as independent as possible. Examples include hygiene, self-care, preparing meals, navigating public transportation, communicating wants/needs, and more.

How do students who follow the ECS participate in testing?

Federal laws and state policies require schools to give certain tests to ALL students, including End of Year or End of Course testing in certain subject areas and grade levels. Some students with the most significant cognitive disabilities take an alternate assessment known as NCEXTEND1. If the student is participating in any alternate assessment(s), the IEP Team must explain why the regular testing program, with or without accommodations, is not appropriate, and why the alternate assessment is appropriate. IEP Teams determine whether a student will participate in the alternative assessment.

What is the impact of ECS and EXTEND1 on high school and graduation?

Transition planning applies to all students with disabilities, including those on the Extended Content Standards (ECS). Parents of students on the Extended Content Standards should be clearly informed that their child's academic achievement will be measured based on alternate standards and how participation in alternate assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma. Students enrolled in ECS that complete high school earn a Graduation Certificate, and participate in graduation exercises with their peers. Students who remain in ECS in high school do NOT receive a North Carolina Diploma. Any child with a disability who requires special education and related services and who has not graduated from high school is eligible to continue to receive a free appropriate public education until the end of the school year in which that child reaches the age of 22.

