

2025-26 Alternative Assessment Justification

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Justification and Assurances for Exceeding the 1.0 Percent Cap

Purpose

In accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(c), local educational agencies (LEAs) contributing to the state exceeding the 1.0 percent cap must submit a justification and assurances.

1. Select LEA Name and ID#

200 - Decatur County

2. Enter the Last Name, First Name of the individual submitting this form.

Michelle McElrath

3. Identify your role within the LEA. Special Education Director

- a. Special Education Director
- b. Special Education Coordinator
- c. Other

ELA Participation Rates for School Years 2020-21 through 2025-26

4. **ELA Participation Rates 2020-21** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.78

5. **ELA Participation Rates 2021-22** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.61

6. **ELA Participation Rates 2022-23** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.57

7. **ELA Participation Rates 2023-24** *Note: Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

2.04

8. **ELA Participation Rates 2024-25** *Note: Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.47

9. **ELA Participation Rates 2025-26** **2025-26 is an estimated participation rate using LEA assessment provisioning data.* *

1.72

Math Participation Rates for School Years 2020-21 through

10. **Math Participation Rates 2020-21** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.75

11. **Math Participation Rates 2021-22** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.59

12. **Math Participation Rates 2022-23** *Note: Prior to the 2023-24 SY, Tennessee participated in the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.58

13. **Math Participation Rates 2023-24** *Note: Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

2.05

14. **Math Participation Rates 2024-25** *Note: Beginning in the 2023-24 SY, the Dynamic Learning Maps (OLM) embedded alternate assessment replaced the MSAA.* *

1.29

15. **Math Participation Rates 2025-26** **2025-26 is an estimated participation rate using LEA assessment provisioning data.* *

1.54

Science Participation Rates for School Years 2020-21 through 2025-26

16. Science Participation Rates 2020-21 *

1.1

17. Science Participation Rates 2021-22 *

1.33

18. Science Participation Rates 2022-23 *

1.73

19. Science Participation Rates 2023-24 *

2.15

20. Science Participation Rates 2024-25 *

1.43

21. Science Participation Rates 2025-26 *2025-26 is an estimated participation rate using LEA assessment provisioning data. *

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Number of Students Scoring

To calculate: Log into KITE - Reports - Alternate Assessment Reports - Year 2025 - LEA Name and select the .PDF file. The first table in the report provides the number of students scoring Advanced by grade and subject. Calculate the total number of students scoring Advanced for each subject.

22. In school year 2024-25, list the total number of students scoring **"Advanced"** for **ELA**. *

1

23. In school year 2024-25, list the total number of students scoring **"Advanced"** for **Math**.

1

Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

Criterion One

In this section, describe the processes in place to ensure the IEP team is making informed, data-based decisions aligned to the alternate assessment participation criteria. Please note that completion of the Alternate Assessment Worksheet in TN PULSE alone is not sufficient evidence.

Criterion One: The student has a significant cognitive disability. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should be considered for the alternate assessment.

You must also describe the process for reviewing alternate assessment eligibility for any student scoring Advanced in at least one subject. Advanced performance scores may indicate that the student's skills exceed the eligibility criteria and should prompt a review of the student's continued participation in the alternate assessment.

In the questions below, describe the process used to ensure the IEP team considers only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (approximately 1.0 percent of the student population).

24. How are IEP teams informed of the criterion and expectations for determining if the student meets expectations for participation? *

Decatur County Schools will continue to monitor and ensure that IEP teams appropriately identify those students offered the opportunity to participate in the alternate assessment. We will have training opportunities for our staff, the Special Education Director and School Psychologist will train special educators on the Eligibility Process and the three Criterion options. Decatur County Schools training will focus on the process and to make sure that the special education teachers ensure the IEP team is carefully considering both the student's data and the implication of participation in the alternate assessment.

25. What data are used to make the determination (e.g., cognitive and adaptive behavior data)? *

Special educators, along with our school psychologist make participation decision based on the severity of the students cognitive ability as well as adaptive ability, along with formative and summative assessments.

26. How is adaptive behavior data incorporated into the decision-making process? *

Special educators, along with our school psychologist make participation decision based on the severity of the students cognitive ability as well as adaptive ability, along with formative and summative assessments.

Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

Criterion Two

In this section, describe the processes in place to ensure the IEP team is making informed, data-based decisions aligned to the alternate assessment participation criteria. Please note that completion of the Alternate Assessment Worksheet in TN PULSE alone is not sufficient evidence.

Criterion Two: The student is learning content linked to (derived from) state content standards. All students, regardless of the assessment or the least restrictive environment (LRE) should receive standards-aligned instruction that is rigorous, meaningful, and sufficient in duration to increase student outcomes. Special education services are provided in addition to, not in place of, standards-based instruction.

In the questions below, describe the evidence used to ensure the student was provided access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction. This should include an explanation of the process used to ensure the student received instruction aligned to grade-level standards at an appropriate level of rigor, intensity, and duration comparable to their peers.

27. How does the IEP team ensure the student's performance and skill level are due to a significant cognitive disability rather than an instructional disadvantage? *

Special Educators ensure that IEP teams develop IEPs that clearly aligns with state content standards, modifications and accommodations tailored to individual needs, and participation in general education settings with appropriate supports. Special Educators ensure that IEP teams take an individualized approach for addressing student needs tailored to their abilities and challenges as well as student learning being linked to state content standards. Special Educators develop measurable goals and objectives tied to state academic standards that demonstrate progress toward expectations.

28. What data are used to make an informed determination? *

Formative and summative assessment, Individual Cognitive Ability Test & Adaptive Behavior skills Assessment

Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility: Criterion Three

In this section, describe the processes in place to ensure the IEP team is making informed, data-based decisions aligned to the alternate assessment participation criteria. Please note that completion of the Alternate Assessment Worksheet in TN PULSE alone is not sufficient evidence.

Criterion Three: The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.

In the questions below, describe the process used to determine that the student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports.

29. What data are used to support this determination? *

The IEP team considers multiple sources of information and data to support determination. Data used : formative and summative assessment, cognitive ability test and adaptive behavior skills assessment.

30. How do IEP teams determine the type and level of supports needed, including for students whose least restrictive environment (LRE) is a highly modified special education setting for all or part of the day? *

Decatur County Schools especially target those CDC special education classroom teachers, thoroughly explaining to them to be able to justify offering the alternate assessment to those students who will potentially be administered the alternate assessment. Our plan going forward is to reduce the participation rates for those students who meet the three eligibility criteria and for whom participation in the alternate assessment is the most appropriate assessment. Special Educators ensure that the IEP teams take an individualized approach for addressing student needs tailored to their specific abilities and challenges.

31. How does the IEP team distinguish between supports required due to the student's disability and supports that are available as part of the instructional environment? *

Decatur County Schools especially target those CDC special education classroom teachers, thoroughly explaining to them to be able to justify offering the alternate assessment to those students who will potentially be administered the alternate assessment. Our plan going forward is to reduce the participation rates for those students who meet the three eligibility criteria and for whom participation in the alternate assessment is the most appropriate assessment. Special Educators ensure that the IEP teams take an individualized approach for addressing student needs tailored to their specific abilities and challenges.

Disproportionality

Using data by primary eligibility (disability) category and demographic groups, describe LEA patterns of participation in the alternate assessment, including any disproportionate participation and a plan for reducing or eliminating disproportionality. Include a description of the LEA population demographics as compared to statewide demographics.

32. Describe any identified disproportionality in alternate assessment participation and the LEA's plan to address and reduce disproportionate participation, as applicable.

The data chart provided by TDOE depicting the participation rate calculations is very useful as far as alternate assessment guidelines. Although we exceeded the 1 % rate (1.47% ELA, 1.29% Math, and 1.43% for Science), our two largest disability categories - Autism and Intellectual Disability — fall appropriately in line with the state's largest distribution percentages. It is evident that statewide and in our LEA that the ID category displays the highest participation rate, and justifiably so. As a public school system, we will continue to monitor this data as well as ensuring that only those students who meet eligibility criteria will be given the alternate assessments. Difficult conversations sometimes must take place at the IEP team table to make sure that we are doing what is in the best interest of the student — now and in their future. Ongoing District training will be provided and will be conducted at the very least on an annual basis in an effort to reinforce to our special educators the need for a specific, student — specific individual plan as well as a plan to assist our district in their effort to reduce/eliminate disproportionality.

*(For example, if the LEA student population is evenly distributed among White, Black, and Hispanic students, the alternate assessment participation data should reflect a similar distribution across those groups.) **

Informed Parent Participation

Students who participate in alternate assessments are significantly less likely to earn a traditional diploma due to the highly modified content and potential for lower expectations.

In the questions below, describe the processes and practices used to ensure parents are fully informed of the eligibility requirements and implications of alternate assessment participation.

33. How are parents informed of the eligibility criteria and implications of participation? *

As part of an IEP team meeting, parents are made adequately informed of the eligibility requirements and implications of participation in the alternate assessments, as well as the implications of that participation. Parents are an active, integral participant of the IEP team and process. Parents are asked if they have any questions about the process and parent signatures are secured to validate their understanding/participation. Parents are specifically made aware that participation in the alternate assessment does not align to the state's general high school diploma criteria.

34. How are parents included in the IEP team decision-making process? *

As part of an IEP team meeting, parents are made adequately informed of the eligibility requirements and implications of participation in the alternate assessments, as well as the implications of that participation. Parents are an active, integral participant of the IEP team and process. Parents are asked if they have any questions about the process and parent signatures are secured to validate their understanding/participation. Parents are specifically made aware that participation in the alternate assessment does not align to the state's general high school diploma criteria.

35. Participation in the alternate assessment must be reviewed at least annually. Students may transition to the general assessments at any time, as determined by the IEP team.

What processes are in place to ensure these decisions are fully discussed and reviewed at least annually? *

As part of an IEP team meeting, parents are made adequately informed of the eligibility requirements and implications of participation in the alternate assessments, as well as the implications of that participation. Parents are an active, integral participant of the IEP team and process. Parents are asked if they have any questions about the process and parent signatures are secured to validate their understanding/participation. Parents are specifically made aware that participation in the alternate assessment does not align to the state's general high school diploma criteria.

Ensuring Students Are Making Academic Progress

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, the U.S. Supreme Court clarified that an IEP must be "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education denied the state's 2024-25 waiver request, noting that it did "not find that approving the waiver will advance student academic achievement, as required in section 8401(b)(1)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)."

Thus, LEAs that contribute to the state exceeding the 1.0 percent cap must provide assurances that students participating in alternate assessments are provided access to and engagement in standards-based instruction and are making appropriate academic progress.

36. Describe the policies, procedures, and practices used in your LEA to ensure students are provided instruction that meets the requirements set forth by ESEA and *Endrew F.*, and that students make appropriate academic progress.*

Decatur County Schools consults with teachers, parents, and community members to review our comprehensive plan that ensures all SWDs meet state standards. (procedures: Implementation of evidence-based frameworks to provide academic and behavioral supports; Regular analysis of student performance data to identify gaps, adjust instructional practices, and monitor progress; Eligibility Determination for identifying students with disabilities and implementing IEPs to ensure continued progress in the general education curriculum. Decatur County Schools monitors the selection and implementation of resources to ensure equitable allocation of resources in schools for students with disabilities through a data-driven, continuous improvement process aligned with Every Student Succeeds Act. This process ensures that all funding (state, federal, and local) are utilized to support SWDs subgroup by focusing on teacher experience, high-quality instructional curriculum and student access to services.

Support Requested

37. Please describe any support needed from the department to assist in meeting the requirements outlined in this form. All reasonable requests will be considered. * * None needed/requested at time.