

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#

490 - Lauderdale County

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

Stevens, Nicholas

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.* *

1.65

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.* *

1.65

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.* *

1.8

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

1.49

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

1.54

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

1.62

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.* *

1.61

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.* *

1.65

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.* *

1.8

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

1.49

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

1.54

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

1.92

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

16. Science Participation Rates 2020-21 *

1.74

17. Science Participation Rates 2021-22 *

1.93

18. Science Participation Rates 2022-23 *

1.53

19. Science Participation Rates 2023-24 *

1.66

20. Science Participation Rates 2024-25 *

1.65

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

1.43

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**. *

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

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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? *

IEP teams are informed of the criteria for alternate assessment participation through ongoing training, clear guidance, and built-in supports within the IEP process. The district provides annual training to special education staff and administrators on state expectations, emphasizing that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should be considered. Teams are guided to use multiple data sources—such as cognitive assessments, adaptive behavior, and instructional needs—and to avoid basing decisions solely on disability category or low academic performance. Standardized checklists and documentation requirements help ensure that eligibility decisions are consistent and aligned with state criteria. In addition, the district monitors participation and provides support to schools through periodic reviews of IEPs and targeted feedback. For any student who scores Advanced on the alternate assessment, the IEP team is required to reconvene and review the student's performance and eligibility. This ensures that students whose skills may exceed the criteria are appropriately considered for transition to the general assessment with accommodations.

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

IEP teams use multiple sources of data to determine eligibility for the alternate assessment, with a primary focus on evidence of a significant cognitive disability. This includes formal cognitive assessment results, adaptive behavior assessments, and present levels of academic and functional performance. Teams also review progress monitoring data, classroom-based assessments, and information about the student's need for extensive, direct individualized instruction and supports across settings. In addition, teams consider how the student accesses the general education curriculum, including whether the student is working on alternate academic standards and requires substantial supports to demonstrate learning. By using a combination of formal evaluation data and ongoing instructional data, the IEP team ensures that decisions are comprehensive and aligned to state criteria.

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

Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

Criterion One

process? *

Adaptive behavior data is a critical component in determining eligibility for the alternate assessment and is considered alongside cognitive data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the student's functioning. IEP teams review results from standardized adaptive behavior assessments, as well as input from teachers, families, and related service providers, to evaluate how the student performs in daily living, communication, and social skills across settings. This information helps the team determine the level of independence and the extent of supports the student requires in everyday activities. Teams look for evidence that the student needs substantial, ongoing support across multiple environments, which is characteristic of a significant cognitive disability. By incorporating adaptive behavior data into the decision-making process, the IEP team ensures that eligibility decisions reflect the student's overall functioning, not just academic performance.

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? *

IEP teams use multiple sources of data to ensure that a student's performance is not the result of limited or inappropriate instruction, with strong involvement from the school psychologist throughout the process. The school psychologist plays a key role in interpreting formal evaluation data, including cognitive and adaptive behavior assessments, to help the team understand the extent of the disability and its impact on the student's ability to access grade-level content. This ensures that decisions are grounded in comprehensive, research-based evaluation data rather than assumptions about performance. In addition, teams review documentation of the student's access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction, including lesson plans, progress monitoring data, and work samples. They consider the frequency, duration, and intensity of instruction, as well as the supports and accommodations provided. When a student demonstrates limited progress despite appropriate, high-quality instruction and interventions, the team—guided by the school psychologist's expertise—can more confidently determine that the student's needs are due to a significant cognitive disability rather than an instructional disadvantage.

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

IEP teams use a comprehensive set of data to make informed decisions, with strong input from the school psychologist. This includes formal evaluation data such as cognitive assessments (e.g., WISC, Woodcock-Johnson) and adaptive behavior scales, which provide critical insight into the student's intellectual functioning and overall level of independence. The school psychologist plays a key role in interpreting these results and explaining how the disability impacts the student's ability to access grade-level content. In addition, teams review present levels of academic and functional performance, progress monitoring data, classroom assessments, and work samples. They also consider documentation of the student's access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction, including the type, frequency, and intensity of instruction and supports provided. Together, these data sources ensure that decisions are grounded in a thorough understanding of the student's needs and are not based on a single measure.

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? *

IEP teams use multiple data sources to determine whether a student requires extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports, with guidance from the school psychologist and special education staff. This includes formal evaluation data such as cognitive assessments (e.g., WISC, Woodcock-Johnson) and adaptive behavior measures, which help establish the student's overall level of need across settings. Teams also review ongoing instructional data, including progress monitoring, IEP goal data, work samples, and classroom-based assessments to evaluate the student's rate of learning and response to instruction. In addition, the team considers the student's ability to access grade-level content within their least restrictive environment (LRE), including how much of the school day the student is able to meaningfully participate with peers, with or without supports. While placement is not used as a determining factor, this information helps the team understand the level and consistency of supports needed. When data consistently show that the student requires intensive, sustained supports and direct individualized instruction to make measurable progress, the team can confidently determine that the criteria are met.

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? *

IEP teams determine the type and level of supports a student needs by reviewing a range of data and examining how the student performs over time across settings. This includes progress monitoring, IEP goal data, classroom assessments, work samples, and input from teachers, related service providers, and families. The school psychologist helps interpret formal evaluation results, such as cognitive and adaptive behavior data, to provide a clearer understanding of how the student's disability impacts learning and independence. Teams consider the level of support required for the student to access grade-level content, including accommodations, prompting, and specially designed instruction, as well as how the student functions in different instructional environments throughout the day. For students whose LRE includes a more specialized setting, decisions are based on documented needs rather than placement, ensuring that the intensity and type of supports are individualized and aligned to the student's demonstrated needs.

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? *

IEP teams distinguish between supports related to a student's disability and those available in the general instructional environment by examining the level and consistency of support the student needs to make progress. They review data such as progress monitoring, classroom performance, and IEP goals to determine if the student requires supports beyond what is typically provided to all students, such as frequent individualized instruction, ongoing prompting, or specialized materials. Input from the school psychologist and team members helps clarify how the student's cognitive and adaptive needs impact learning. When a student consistently requires intensive, individualized supports across settings, the team can determine those needs are directly related to the disability rather than general classroom supports.

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.

Current data show that a higher percentage of students participating in the alternate assessment are served in self-contained settings; however, the district recognizes that placement should not determine assessment participation. To address this, the LEA is strengthening its processes to ensure decisions are based on individual student data, including cognitive, adaptive, and instructional performance. The district will continue to monitor participation and student progress, with IEP teams regularly reviewing eligibility and reassessing students' ability to access the general assessment with appropriate supports. Increased oversight, collaboration with school psychologists, and ongoing training will reinforce that placement in a self-contained classroom does not automatically result in alternate assessment participation, ensuring decisions remain individualized and aligned to established criteria.

*(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?

* Parents are informed of the eligibility criteria and implications of alternate assessment participation through the IEP process, where teams provide clear, consistent communication and documentation. During IEP meetings, staff explain that participation in the general state assessment is the expectation for all students, and that the alternate assessment is only appropriate for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Teams review the specific eligibility criteria, including cognitive and adaptive functioning, and discuss how these relate to the student's individual needs. In addition, parents are informed of the long-term implications of alternate assessment participation, including the impact on diploma options and postsecondary opportunities. The IEP team ensures that decisions are based on comprehensive data and not solely on parent request, while still valuing parent input as part of the decision-making process. This approach helps ensure parents have a clear understanding of both the requirements and consequences before consenting to participation.

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

* Parents are actively included in the IEP team decision-making process and participate in all discussions related to assessment participation. During IEP meetings, the team reviews relevant data and clearly explains the eligibility criteria and implications of alternate assessment, including the impact on diploma options and future opportunities, while reinforcing that the general state assessment is the expectation for all students. Parents are encouraged to ask questions and share input, and if they have concerns about the implications of the alternate assessment, the team may support continued participation in the general assessment with appropriate accommodations while additional data are considered. However, decisions regarding alternate assessment participation are based on documented need and established criteria, ensuring that placement is not determined solely by parent request.

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? * The IEP team reviews alternate assessment participation at least annually during the IEP meeting to ensure the decision remains appropriate. During this process, the team discusses the criteria for participation, reminds parents of the implications of the alternate assessment, and reviews current data, including classroom performance, progress monitoring, and benchmark assessments. The team uses this information to determine whether the student continues to meet eligibility criteria or if participation in the general assessment with accommodations should be considered. This ongoing review ensures that decisions are data-based, clearly communicated, and responsive to the student's current performance and needs.

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.*

The LEA ensures that students participating in the alternate assessment receive standards-based instruction and make appropriate progress through clear processes, ongoing data review, and consistent support. IEP teams develop goals aligned to grade-level standards (including alternate standards when appropriate) and ensure that specially designed instruction is provided alongside core instruction, not in place of it. Teachers use evidence-based practices and provide the accommodations, modifications, and supports needed for students to meaningfully engage with grade-level content. Teams regularly review data such as IEP goal progress, classroom performance, and benchmark assessments to monitor growth and adjust instruction as needed. The school psychologist and other team members help interpret this data to ensure instruction is appropriately matched to the student's needs and that progress is reasonable given the student's individual circumstances. In addition, the district provides ongoing training, oversight, and IEP reviews to ensure alignment with ESEA and *Endrew F.*, and to support continuous improvement in student outcomes.

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. * The district has made strong progress in increasing supports in the general education setting, which has helped close gaps related to access and allowed teams to make decisions based on true disability rather than academic deficits. As a result, we have seen a decrease in the number of students participating in the alternate assessment. However, as a smaller district (1,600–1,800 test takers in a given subject), even small changes in numbers can significantly impact our percentage, and we remain slightly above the 1% cap. We feel our teams are making informed, data-based decisions, but additional support from the department—such as reviewing sample student cases that may be incorrectly identified—would help us better understand expectations and continue refining our practices.