

## 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#

560 - Macon County

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

Stafford, Cathy

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. \**

1.35

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. \**

1.35

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. \**

1.36

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

1.44

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

1.35

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

1.35

## 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.* \*

1.36

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.* \*

1.36

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.* \*

1.36

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

1.45

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

1.22

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

1.36

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

### 16. Science Participation Rates 2020-21 \*

1.33

### 17. Science Participation Rates 2021-22 \*

1.33

### 18. Science Participation Rates 2022-23 \*

1.38

### 19. Science Participation Rates 2023-24 \*

1.41

### 20. Science Participation Rates 2024-25 \*

1.47

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

1.36

## 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**. \*

7

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

0

## 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? \*

All special education teachers are trained annually on the alternative assessment guidelines and criteria. All special education teachers also given the Alternate Assessment Participation Guide, FAQ Alternative Academic Diploma, Parent Guide, Tennessee Diploma and Postsecondary Education options handout, and the Diploma Decision Guide to reference throughout the year when considering alternative assessments. Teachers are also given information about the low-incidence website on the TDOE website. All stakeholders must understand the implications of participating in the alternate assessment. The team uses the Alternative Assessments Participation Decision flowchart and the Determination of Eligibility for Alternative Assessment Participation during the IEP meeting.

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

1. Eligibility Determination Process: a. Criterion One: Each student's individual needs are considered when determining participation in the Alternate Assessment. Data is reviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the student. The trained IAIEP team reviews data relating to cognitive ability. This data is from multiple sources including adaptive behavior skills. These skills refer to those needed to live independently and to safely function in daily life. Other data sources include, but are not limited to, IQ testing results, systematic observations, adaptive behavior skills assessments in all domains (conceptual, practical, and social), exclusionary factors, developmental history, previous alternative assessment data and evaluations, teacher observations and checklists, progress monitoring data, summative and formative assessments, teacher-made assessments, etc.

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

Adaptive Behavior data is included in the decision-making process, as these skills refer to those necessary for living independently and safely functioning in daily life. The team must determine that the student has the most significant adaptive behavior deficits compared to same-age peers in multiple settings and requires the most intensive support in

## Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

### Criterion One

the classroom.

## 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? \*

b. Criterion Two: Each student's individual needs are considered when determining participation in the Alternate Assessment. Data is reviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the student. For the student to qualify for criterion two, the IAIEP team determines there is sufficient data to indicate the student is learning content linked to or derived from state content standards, the student's disability impacts their active participation in instruction that is aligned to state standards, instruction is designed to support the student's active participation, grade level standards are broken down into smaller steps, skills, or units that support individual student learning.

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

Data sources can include; but are not limited to, teacher observations, teacher checklists, work samples, summative and formative assessments, teacher-made assessments, progress monitoring data, present levels of academic and functional performance from the IAIEP, and goals and short-term objectives in the IAIEP. The team must determine the student's accommodations, modifications, services, and supports are extensive, repeated, individualized, and required across multiple settings. Additional considerations include:

- Sufficient data is included in the present levels of academic performance to determine where and how the student will participate in instruction.
- Data supports the LRE determined for each subject/class. If the LRE includes a special education setting, there is adequate evidence that general education was the first option considered by the IAIEP team.
- Evidence and data support the use of selected accommodations and/or modifications to support or increase meaningful participation.
- Student's identified strengths in the IAIEP are related to learning and academics
- Student strengths have been considered in the selection/use of interventions, accommodations, modifications, or supports
- Accommodations and/or modifications are subject and setting specific
- Evidence of changes to accommodations, modifications, services, and/or supports as the student learns additional skills, language, and content
- IAIEP contains sufficient evidence and data to indicate a student requires substantial accommodations, modifications, services and supports
- The impact of accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports has been verified
- Evidence the student actively uses the accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports when engaged in learning



## 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? \*

c. Criterion Three: Each student's individual needs are considered when determining participation in the Alternate Assessment. Data is reviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the student. For a student to qualify under criterion three, the student must require extensive direct individualized instruction with substantial support to make progress in the grade and age-appropriate curriculum. This support is not temporal or transient in nature. The student requires substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternate ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings. Evidence used to determine eligibility includes: the LRE determination is based on current comprehensive data, clear evidence that the IAIEP team made an individualized decision based on student strengths and needs, the accommodations, modifications, services, and/or supports identified in the IAIEP increase the student's active participation in instruction, evidence the student requires extensive and substantial specific accommodations, modifications, services or support, and accommodations, modifications, services and supports are appropriate for the student. Data sources can include; but are not limited to, teacher observations, teacher checklists, work samples, summative and formative assessments, teacher-made assessments, progress monitoring data, present levels of academic and functional performance from the IAIEP, and goals and short-term objectives in the IAIEP. The team must determine the student's accommodations, modifications, services, and supports are extensive, repeated, individualized, and required across multiple settings.

#### 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? \*

Sufficient data is included in the present levels of academic performance to determine where and how the student will participate in instruction. • Data supports the LRE determined for each subject/class. If the LRE includes a special education setting, there is adequate evidence that general education was the first option considered by the IAIEP team. • Evidence and data support the use of selected accommodations and/or modifications to support or increase meaningful participation. • Student's identified strengths in the IAIEP are related to learning and academics • Student strengths have been considered in the selection/use of interventions, accommodations, modifications, or supports • Accommodations and/or modifications are subject and setting specific • Evidence of changes to accommodations, modifications, services, and/or supports as the student learns additional skills, language, and content • IAIEP contains sufficient evidence and data to indicate a student requires substantial accommodations, modifications, services and supports • The impact of accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports has been verified • Evidence the student actively uses the accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports when engaged in learning

#### 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? \*

Sufficient data is included in the present levels of academic performance to determine where and how the student will participate in instruction. • Data supports the LRE determined for each subject/class. If the LRE includes a special education setting, there is adequate evidence that general education was the first option considered by the IAIEP team. • Evidence and data support the use of selected accommodations and/or modifications to support or increase

## 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.

meaningful participation. • Student's identified strengths in the IAIEP are related to learning and academics • Student strengths have been considered in the selection/use of interventions, accommodations, modifications, or supports • Accommodations and/or modifications are subject and setting specific • Evidence of changes to accommodations, modifications, services, and/or supports as the student learns additional skills, language, and content • IAIEP contains sufficient evidence and data to indicate a student requires substantial accommodations, modifications, services and supports • The impact of accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports has been verified • Evidence the student actively uses the accommodations, modifications, services and/or supports when engaged in learning

## 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.

Based on the data, there is no evidence of disproportionality. In Macon County, eighty-eight percent of students' primary disabilities are ID, Autism, and Multiple Disabilities of the students who are taking the alternate assessment. This is somewhat reflective of the overall state data, which is ninety-two percent. Eighty percent of students' primary disabilities are Autism and ID of students who are taking the alternate assessment. . Each student's individual needs are considered when determining participation in the Alternate assessment. The IAIEP team determines whether students with the most significant cognitive disabilities meet all three criteria for the Alternative Assessment. The IAIEP team uses the TN Alternate Assessments Participation Decision Flowchart and the Determination of Eligibility for Alternate Assessment Participation forms during the meeting. There is no evidence of disproportionality based on ethnic background of the students. Macon County data is reflective of the ethnic diversity in our county.

*(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? \*

Each student's individual needs are considered when determining participation in the Alternate Assessment. Data is reviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the student. The IAIEP team determines whether students with the most significant cognitive disabilities meet all three of the criteria for the Alternate Assessment. The team uses the Alternative Assessments Participation Decision flowchart and the Determination of Eligibility for Alternative Assessment Participation during the IEP meeting. All special education teachers are trained annually on the alternative assessment guidelines and criteria. All special education teachers are also given the Alternate Assessment Participation Guide, FAQ Alternative Academic Diploma, Parent Guide, Tennessee Diploma, and Postsecondary Education options handout, and the Diploma Decision Guide to reference throughout the year when considering alternative assessments. Teachers are also given information about the low-incidence website on the TDOE website. All stakeholders must understand the implications of participating in the alternate assessment. Macon County ensures that parents are fully informed of diploma options and implications of diploma types when determining whether the student will participate in the alternate assessment. The IAIEP team notes that participation in the alternate assessment means a student is enrolled in a curriculum that does not lead to a regular high school diploma, which may impact the student's post-secondary and career pathways. The parents are provided the Parent Guide, the Tennessee Diploma and Post-Secondary Education Options handout, and the Diploma Decision Guide to help them have a better understanding of the decision they are making for their child. It is the duty of educators to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to meet their full potential and to understand the implications of this decision.

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

Macon County ensures that parents are fully informed of diploma options and implications of diploma types when determining whether the student will participate in the alternate assessment. The IAIEP team notes that participation in the alternate assessment means a student is enrolled in a curriculum that does not lead to a regular high school diploma, which may impact the student's post-secondary and career pathways. The parents are provided the Parent Guide, the Tennessee Diploma and Post-Secondary Education Options handout, and the Diploma Decision Guide to help them have a better understanding of the decision they are making for their child. It is the duty of educators to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to meet their full potential and to understand the implications of this decision.

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 decisions regarding participation in state assessment at every IEP meeting; at least annually and every amendment meeting. This is included on an IEP meeting checklist the LEA reviews at each meeting .

## 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.\* MCS ensures that IEPs are developed and implemented to provide specially designed instruction that is reasonably calculated to enable each student to make appropriate progress in light of their individual circumstances. Procedures are in place to regularly monitor student progress through data-driven decision-making, including formative assessments, benchmark screenings, and ongoing progress monitoring aligned with IEP goals and state standards. Ongoing PD on evidence-based instructional strategies, differentiation, and inclusive practices to support access to the general education curriculum. Regular data reviews are conducted to evaluate effectiveness and adjust interventions.

## 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. \*
- Macon County Schools is not requesting any support from the state department at this time. We have carefully reviewed our district data and understand our teams are making the best decisions for each individual student based on individual needs.