

## 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#

620 - Monroe County

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

Ferguson, Trey

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. \**

1.18

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. \**

1.25

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. \**

1.27

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

1.54

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

1.55

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

1.24

## **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.* \*

1.13

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.* \*

1.23

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.* \*

1.28

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

1.5

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

1.33

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

1.24

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

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

1.25

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

1.29

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

1.23

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

1.74

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

1.64

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

1.17

## 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**. \*

4

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? \*

A School Psychologist is included on every IEP team that is considering alternate assessment. All district School Psychologists have been trained in and understand the State guidance for participation in the alternate assessment and the local criteria (IQ and Adaptive Behavior Ratings below 60) used to determine what constitutes the "most significant cognitive and adaptive behavior skill deficits." The goal is not to exceed the 1% cap for students participating in the alternate assessment while still allowing IEP teams the right to make the most appropriate decisions for each student.

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

In making an informed decision about participation in the Alternate Assessment, the IEP team relies on comprehensive data. This includes a review of the student's present levels of academic and functional performance, as detailed in the IEP. Progress monitoring data is also analyzed to confirm the student is making progress with individualized supports in place. Furthermore, results from cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments are used to establish that the student meets the criteria for a significant cognitive disability. In Monroe County the starting point for consideration of Alternate Assessment participation is an IQ score and Adaptive Behavior Ratings (home and school) of below 60.

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

Adaptive Behavior Ratings are given equal consideration when determining whether or not a student requires the Alternate Assessment. In Monroe County, both full scale IQ and comprehensive Adaptive Behavior Ratings (from both home and school) must be below 60 for consideration. In instances where the team believes one of the adaptive behavior ratings is artificially inflated, they request a Systematic Observation be conducted by the School Psychologist to give a better estimate of the student's adaptive functioning.

## 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? \*

The IEP team ensures that any student being considered for the Alternate Assessment receives instruction from a certified Special Education teacher, utilizing the Unique Learning System, which is aligned with Tennessee's Extended Standards (Alternate Academic Standards). Lesson plans, adapted instructional materials, and individualized supports are intentionally designed to ensure alignment with grade-level content. Additionally, the team documents the student's engagement with rigorous instruction at a level of intensity and duration comparable to their grade-level peers. This is achieved by making necessary accommodations to address the student's significant cognitive disability while maintaining high expectations. General education and special education staff collaborate closely to provide access to the general education curriculum as appropriate. To confirm that the student's skills reflect their significant cognitive disability rather than an instructional disadvantage, the IEP team thoroughly reviews a variety of data sources. This includes formal and informal assessment data, such as results from prior state and district-wide assessments, classroom-based assessments, and progress monitoring tools. The team also examines records of accommodations, modifications, and supports provided during instruction to ensure the student has received consistent and equitable access to grade-level content. Observational data and input from teachers, specialists, and parents are gathered to provide additional insight into the student's learning needs and progress. Through these efforts, the IEP team ensures that the student receives rigorous, standards-based instruction and that decisions about assessment participation are made based on their unique needs and abilities and data, not on an instructional disadvantage.

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

In making an informed decision about participation in the Alternate Assessment, the IEP team relies on comprehensive data. This includes a review of the student's present levels of academic and functional performance, as detailed in the IEP. Progress monitoring data is also analyzed to confirm the student is making progress with individualized supports in place. Furthermore, results from cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments are used to establish that the student meets the criteria for a significant cognitive disability. In Monroe County the starting point for consideration of Alternate Assessment participation is an IQ score and Adaptive Behavior Ratings (home and school) of below 60.

## 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 process to determine that a student requires the most extensive direct individualized supports and services involves a thorough review of multiple data sources and collaboration among IEP team members. The team examines formal evaluations, including cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments, as well as progress monitoring data and documentation of prior interventions. This data is used to confirm that the student's needs are due to a significant cognitive disability and not environmental factors or lack of access to appropriate instruction

#### 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? \*

To identify the necessary supports, the team reviews the student's present levels of performance, considering input from teachers, service providers, and parents. The team evaluates the student's ability to access and engage with the general education curriculum and determines which supports are essential for success. For students whose Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a highly modified special education setting, the team differentiates between supports inherent to the environment (such as smaller class sizes or additional staff) and those specific to the student (such as assistive technology, sensory supports, or individualized instructional strategies). By focusing on the unique needs of the student and utilizing comprehensive data, the team ensures that supports are individualized and aligned with the student's requirements for meaningful access to instruction and participation in their educational program.

#### 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? \*

The IEP team discusses whether each support is individually necessary for that student to access and make progress in the curriculum, or whether it is something that is typically available to any student in the classroom. Supports that are required due to a disability are specifically designed to address the student's unique needs and are not commonly provided to all students. These often include individualized instruction, prompting, or significant modifications to content. In contrast, supports that are part of the general instructional environment are broadly available and could reasonably be accessed by other students without an IEP, such as common classroom strategies or flexible instructional practices. When determining participation in Alternate Assessment, the team considers whether the student requires extensive, individualized supports beyond what is typically available in general education and whether the student is receiving instruction aligned to alternate academic standards. If the student can access grade-level content with supports that are commonly available to all students, the general assessment with appropriate accommodations is usually more appropriate. However, if the student requires substantial and ongoing individualized supports and is working on content with reduced depth, breadth, and complexity, the Alternate Assessment may be determined as the more appropriate option.



## 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.

Monroe County's alternate assessment participation data does not reveal evidence of significant disproportionality compared to state averages. Students with Intellectual Disabilities account for 57.45% of participants, which is higher than the state average of 47.17%. Autism is underrepresented at 19.15% compared to 35.88% statewide. Multiple Disabilities (19.15%) and Other Health Impairments (4.26%) make up the remainder of our Alternate Assessment participants for 2024-2025. While these are both slightly higher than the State percentages, Monroe County had no other eligibility categories represented. Economically Disadvantaged students make up 40.43% of participants, exceeding the state average of 37.43%, but in line with district-wide demographics. White students represent 89.36% of participants compared to 49.30% statewide, but also in line with district demographics. There are no English Learners in Monroe County's alternate assessment group, whereas they make up 3.91% of participants at the state level. To address any concerns of possible disproportionality, Monroe County will conduct a detailed review of IEPs to ensure compliance with alternate assessment eligibility criteria and provide professional development to IEP teams on equitable decision-making and Tennessee's guidelines. Additionally, Monroe County will evaluate identification processes to eliminate biases and engage families to ensure transparent, data-driven decisions. These efforts aim to align Monroe County's alternate assessment participation more closely with state demographics while supporting the diverse needs of students.

*(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? \*

Monroe County ensures parents are fully informed and actively involved in decisions regarding alternate assessment participation, adhering to Tennessee's guidelines. At each annual IEP meeting, the team provides detailed information about eligibility criteria, the distinction between alternate and general assessments, and the implications of participation, including postsecondary considerations. Resources are shared to reinforce this understanding, and parents are encouraged to provide input, which is considered alongside academic, cognitive, and developmental data during the decision-making process. Participation is reviewed annually as a standard agenda item during the IEP meeting to confirm continued eligibility or determine if a transition to the general assessment is appropriate. Parents are informed that transitions can occur anytime based on the student's progress and current needs. This collaborative, transparent process ensures decisions are individualized, data-driven, and revisited yearly to best support the student's educational trajectory.

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

They are invited to attend every annual IEP meeting. Discussion and consideration of the Alternate Assessment is included as an agenda item for every qualifying student. Parent input is always requested, considered, and valued by the IEP team when making the assessment 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? \*Monroe County ensures that decisions regarding alternate assessment participation are fully discussed, documented, and reviewed at least annually through established IEP procedures and oversight practices. At each annual IEP meeting, alternate assessment participation is addressed as a required component of the meeting agenda. The IEP team reviews current eligibility criteria, including the student's cognitive functioning, adaptive behavior, and instructional alignment to alternate academic standards, and considers multiple sources of data to determine whether continued participation remains appropriate. Parents are provided with clear information regarding the differences between alternate and general assessments, including the academic expectations, diploma implications, and potential postsecondary impacts. The team actively seeks parent input and ensures that parents understand that participation decisions are not permanent and may be reconsidered at any time based on the student's progress and needs. To support consistency and compliance, the district utilizes state-approved eligibility guidance and documentation tools, and IEPs are reviewed by district-level staff to ensure that decisions are well-supported and aligned with Tennessee requirements. Prior Written Notice (PWN) is used to document the team's decision, including the rationale for participation or any change in assessment status. This structured and collaborative process ensures that alternate assessment participation is not only reviewed annually, but also remains individualized, data-driven, and responsive to each student's evolving 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.\*

Monroe County Schools ensures students with disabilities receive instruction aligned with ESEA and the *Endrew F.* standard by focusing on individualized planning, strong instruction, and ongoing progress monitoring. Students are provided access to grade-level standards, with supports based on their individual needs. IEP teams use current data to develop measurable goals and identify the services, accommodations, and specially designed instruction needed for each student to make meaningful progress. General and special education staff work collaboratively to support students, and additional supports are provided through MTSS when needed. Student progress is reviewed regularly, and IEP teams make adjustments if a student is not making expected progress. The district also reviews IEPs and provides guidance to ensure decisions are appropriate and aligned with state expectations. This process helps ensure instruction is tailored to each student and supports continued academic growth.

## 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. \* Since Sweetwater City Schools will be taking over ownership of one of our high schools (Sweetwater High School) next year, our overall N-count will be significantly reduced, which will tighten our Alt Assessment numbers even more. I believe we need some assistance in helping determine how we need to adjust our "starting point" scores (IQ and Adaptives of below 60) for moving forward and coming closer to meeting the 1% cap.