

## 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#

710 - Putnam County

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

Roberson, Sheri

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. \**

1.12

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. \**

1.06

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. \**

1.32

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

1.41

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

1.07

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

1.08

## 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.* \*

1.11

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.* \*

1.05

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.* \*

1.32

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

1.38

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

0.95

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

1.08

## 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 \*

1.23

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

1.29

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

1.37

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

1.28

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

1.5

## 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? \*

Putnam County ensures ongoing discussions and training are provided, targeting both assessment personnel and all special educators on the factors that should impact team decisions, as well as the impact the decision will have on the student's future learning trajectory and graduation plans, at regularly scheduled staff meetings and professional learning communities. This ensures that assessment personnel and special educators can assist educational teams in making data-based decisions in the best interest of each individual child based on historical and current information. For the 2025-2026 year, district-wide academic coaches and academic supervisors were additionally provided with overviews of these criteria. A system-wide special education coordinator is maintaining a database that includes the most recent cognitive and adaptive scores and the date of administration for all students identified to participate in alternate assessments. This is reviewed with all school psychologists at a staff meeting at the beginning of the year and regularly thereafter. This process assists in identifying situations in which an IEP should be convened to consider the need for further assessments or greater attention to a student's participation. Building-level administrators are provided with resources to ensure a thorough understanding of state guidelines, the factors to be considered, and the impact of assessment decisions on each student's educational path. All staff are informed of the state 1% guideline and of our district's current percentage of students identified for participation in alternate assessment to ensure a global view. All staff are made aware of ongoing efforts to ensure that educational teams have adequate knowledge and make data-based decisions in the best interests of each student. The district encourages ongoing conversations and training to ensure that educational teams do not make decisions primarily based on eligibility identification. The district will continue to encourage that educational teams look beyond the child's educational label to ensure that only the most globally affected of the intellectually disabled population are identified to participate in alternate assessments.

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

The district will continue to ensure that comprehensive reevaluations, rather than those completed by file review, are

## Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

### Criterion One

completed to establish a stable baseline of cognitive and adaptive functioning based on individual assessments, progress monitoring data, and observations. Teams will be encouraged to consider alternate assessments only after consistent data and historical information are available, indicating global deficits in cognitive and adaptive functioning, as well as the need for extensive, individualized supports. Observations are completed across settings to ensure that the obtained scores accurately reflect the student's competencies within the educational setting based on input from all staff members familiar with them. Ongoing discussion is encouraged to assist teams in identifying specific skill deficits that are impeding a student's access to increased participation and in developing necessary interventions and supports to address the identified barriers. Teams are encouraged to consider not only academic performance but also how students may benefit from exposure to typically developing peers in relation to social, emotional, behavioral, and adaptive skills when discussing programming. Teams are encouraged to consider the continuum of intellectual disabilities and give consideration to alternate assessment for only those students with the most global and significant deficits. Visual supports, such as a bell curve with the student's individual scores plotted, may be used by teams when discussing a student's profile to encourage greater understanding among all team members. Teams collect and analyze data from assessments (both formative and summative) to evaluate student progress toward meeting IEP goals and grade-level standards, collect data on student engagement and behavior during instruction to understand participation levels, and gather qualitative data through feedback from teachers regarding the student's engagement, participation, and understanding of the content.

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

Adaptive assessments are completed through home and school interviews to measure adaptive competencies and ensure performance is consistent with prior scores. When discrepancies occur, evaluation personnel conduct systematic observations across educational settings to provide clinical judgment regarding adaptive functioning. This will assist teams in clarifying each student's adaptive profile and identifying functional skills that would benefit from targeted support, enabling the student to have greater access to grade-level content. Results are reviewed at an IEP meeting, and the team determines that the results accurately reflect the students' abilities.

## 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? \*

To ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are provided access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction, the IEP team employs a systematic approach that includes various types of evidence and data. Teams use curriculum mapping to review the curriculum to ensure that it aligns with grade-level standards and is appropriate for the student's developmental level. Instructional materials are selected to meet state standards while remaining accessible to students with disabilities. Teams implement differentiated instructional strategies and partner with general education staff to ensure materials and instruction is accessible. Scaffolding is used to gradually increase the complexity of tasks while providing necessary supports to help students meet the expected rigor. Teams strive to tailor the intensity and duration of instruction to students' needs, ensuring they receive adequate time and support to understand and engage with the materials. Teams regularly assess the students' understanding and skills through formative assessments that measure their engagement with grade-level content. Teachers attend training on state standards, are provided with a curriculum aligned to state standards, meet with grade-level teams during common planning time to ensure that special education classrooms are on pace with the curriculum, and are provided with the district curriculum pacing guides. Special educators are increasingly involved in discussions about intellectual prep and are given the opportunity to observe with their general education peers during visits to sister schools. Throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, a focus of special educator professional development has been instructional coherence, as well as ongoing discussion of instructional access points, scaffolds, accommodations, and modifications, and ensuring accommodations preserve academic expectations while removing barriers, in partnership with general education colleagues. Additionally, students are mainstreamed into their core classes to the maximum extent possible. The educational team carefully considers supports and strategies that may help students access grade-level content, intentionally targeting the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills that pose the greatest barriers to a student's meaningful participation. Special education teachers are provided ongoing opportunities to participate in professional development on the Orton-Gillingham methodology and LETRS training to enable them to provide strong foundational instruction in reading. Teachers have received training from the district math coach in how to utilize Number Talks. District content coaches are a resource for special education personnel and help special educators understand and mirror the pacing and rigor of grade-level expectations. All special educators have access to Goalbook, and ongoing site-based training ensures teachers are aware of the scope of this resource. This allows teachers to identify anchor standards for each grade level aligned specifically to TN state standards. The standards staircase, which is provided for every goal developed, also allows teachers to identify prerequisite skills needed for a student to meaningfully engage in instruction and to facilitate backward



## 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. chaining as needed. Involvement of district content coaches and this resource also allows teams to identify the most critical skills when discussing modifications or modified course agreements being implemented. A focus of special educator professional development this year has also included identifying high-leverage, high-impact skills that will increase student access to the core curriculum, increase independence, and prompt generalization of skills across educational settings.

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

IEP teams employ a systematic approach that includes various types of evidence and data. The educational team carefully considers supports and strategies that may help students access grade-level content, intentionally targeting the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills that pose the greatest barriers to a student's meaningful participation. Each student's participation and opportunities for practice to integrate with typical peers are re-evaluated at annual IEP reviews. Transition plans are discussed and implemented to increase participation to the greatest extent possible based on each student's abilities. Teams strive to identify behaviors and other impediments that are hindering increased integration and implement as many functional skills and behavioral supports as possible to address them. Teams collect and analyze data from assessments (both formative and summative) to evaluate student progress toward meeting IEP goals and grade-level standards, collect data on student engagement and behavior during instruction to understand participation levels, and gather qualitative data through feedback from teachers regarding the student's engagement, participation, and understanding of the content.

## 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 special education team follows a structured process to identify needed supports and to ensure effective inclusion of students with special needs. Comprehensive assessments of students' needs are conducted to help teams understand students' strengths, weaknesses, and specific learning needs. Input from multiple sources is gathered to provide a holistic view of the student's learning profile. All students' progress-monitoring data are reviewed at data teams convened approximately every four weeks to inform ongoing intervention and instruction. The district utilizes academic progress monitoring at both the student's instructional and grade level, as well as benchmark and universal screener information to assess growth and inform ongoing supports.

#### 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? \*

Teams consider what resources and supports are available and what can be implemented, such as assistive technology, flexible seating, or peer support, as well as school-wide resources that may benefit all students. Teams review to ensure supports are effective and provide training for general education teachers/staff as needed to implement needed accommodations and modifications.

#### 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? \*

To assist a student in increasing behavioral, social, and emotional tolerance to integrated settings, transition plans are discussed, reviewed, and revised. Increased participation in lunch, recess, and encore settings, as well as preferred academic focus areas, may be implemented first to build tolerance and allow students to practice the skills that impact their performance. Adult support is faded as much as possible while promoting increased student independence. Teams are having ongoing discussions about which accommodations, modifications, and other supports can be implemented.

## 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.

While our overall district goal is to be in compliance with the states 1% cap, Putnam County continues to strive to make data-based decisions based on the whole child's performance, with consideration given to each student's cognitive, academic, and adaptive performance as well as historical data when determining participation in appropriate state assessments. Our plan to reduce/eliminate disproportionality includes continuing to provide guidance and training to educational teams on which factors should inform team decisions, as well as the impact those decisions will have on the student's future learning trajectory and graduation plans. This will include frank discussions with parents/guardians to ensure a thorough understanding of future impact. Our district will ensure general conversations are routinely held with building administrators to ensure a thorough understanding of the factors to be considered and the impact this decision may have on the student's future. Educational teams will be encouraged to consider alternate assessment only after consistent data and historical information are available, indicating global deficits in cognitive and adaptive functioning, as well as the need for extensive, individualized supports. Teams will be encouraged to have thorough conversations, particularly for those students for whom historical data is not available. Teams will continue to be made aware that the decision for alternate assessment is revisited each year at the student's annual IEP. Participation in traditional assessment is strongly encouraged until historical information indicates the need for extensive, individualized supports for a student to make measurable gains in grade-level curriculum.

*(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?

\* The IEP team implements several processes and practices designed to ensure clear communication, parental involvement, and collaborative decision-making. Parents are an integral part of the annual IEP team decision for their child's state assessment determination. During IEP meetings, parents receive information about alternate assessments, including eligibility criteria and potential impacts on diploma attainment. Procedural safeguards are reviewed with parents at each IEP meeting to ensure they understand that they are an integral part of the decision-making team for their student, and that procedures are in place if they were to disagree with team decisions. The district strives to make data-based decisions, considering multiple sources of information to inform decisions in the best interests of students. Team discussions are documented in the prior written notice. District educational teams also recognize that decisions about students' participation in traditional or alternate assessments must be revisited and confirmed annually. The district strives to have sensitive but thorough and direct conversations with parents in sharing evaluation results and the impact identified deficits may have on a student's ability to access grade-level curriculum. Educational teams explain how a student's decision to participate in alternate assessment affects the trajectory of their learning progression and graduation plan across all grade bands. Teams are encouraged to consider the continuum of intellectual disabilities and give consideration to alternate assessment for only those students with the most global and significant deficits.

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

\*During IEP meetings, parents receive information about alternate assessments, including eligibility criteria and potential impacts on diploma attainment. Procedural safeguards are reviewed with parents at each IEP meeting to ensure they understand that they are an integral part of the decision-making team for their student and that procedures are in place if they disagree with team decisions. The district strives to make data-based decisions, considering multiple sources of information to inform decisions in the best interests of students. Team discussions are documented in the prior written notice. District educational teams also recognize that decisions about students' participation in traditional or alternate assessments must be revisited and confirmed annually.

### 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? \*Team discussions a District educational teams are trained and recognize that decisions for students to participate in traditional or alternate assessments must be revisited and confirmed annually.

## 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.\*

To ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are provided access to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction, the IEP team employs a systematic approach that includes various types of evidence and data. Teams use curriculum mapping to review the curriculum to ensure that it aligns with grade-level standards and is appropriate for the student's developmental level. Instructional materials are selected to meet state standards while remaining accessible to students with disabilities. Teams implement differentiated instructional strategies and partner with general education staff to ensure materials and instruction are accessible. Scaffolding is used to gradually increase the complexity of tasks while providing necessary supports to help students meet the expected rigor. Teams strive to tailor the intensity and duration of instruction to students' needs, ensuring they receive adequate time and support to understand and engage with the materials. Teams regularly assess the students' understanding and skills through formative assessments that measure their engagement with grade-level content. Teachers attend training on state standards, are provided with a curriculum aligned to state standards, meet with grade-level teams during common planning time to ensure that special education classrooms are on pace with the curriculum, and are provided with the district curriculum pacing guides. Special educators are increasingly involved in discussions about intellectual prep and are given the opportunity to observe with their general education peers during visits to sister schools. Throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, a focus of special educator professional development has been instructional coherence, as well as ongoing discussion of instructional access points, scaffolds, accommodations, and modifications, and ensuring accommodations preserve academic expectations while removing barriers, in partnership with general education colleagues. Additionally, students are mainstreamed into their core classes to the maximum extent possible. The educational team carefully considers supports and strategies that may help students access grade-level content, intentionally targeting the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills that pose the greatest barriers to a student's meaningful participation.

## 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. \*
- Continue to provide training and webinars on alternate assessment (new expectations, courses and course codes, processes, etc.) that are accessible whenever new personnel are hired or as a refresher for teachers throughout the year. Provide additional guidance on how to support and program for students who fall within the mild to moderate range on the continuum of intellectual disabilities, particularly now that the state is referencing a three-standard-deviation threshold. Develop an FAQ/reference for general education staff that addresses why special educators reserve this recommendation only for students with the most severe intellectual disabilities. Address general education staff concerns regarding accountability for students participating in their classroom that special education can use to support discussions