

## 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#

750 - Rutherford County

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

Ralston, Anna

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

- 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.* \*

1.02

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.* \*

0.98

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.* \*

1.04

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

1.13

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

1.12

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

1.06

## 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.* \*

1.01

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.* \*

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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.* \*

1.04

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

1.13

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

1.12

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

0.91

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

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

1.18

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

1.02

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

1.01

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

1.14

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

1.25

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

1.3

## 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**. \*

30

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? \*

Special Education Staff members (school psychologists, SpEd instructional coaches, LEAs, and teachers) receive regular training on the Alternate Assessment Criterion based on guidance from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). District staff work closely with schools who have a participation rate greater than 1% to ensure clear understanding of the criteria and provide additional training if needed. Special Education Instructional Coaches provide continuing support, as needed, to school teams using the TDOE provided resources to ensure consistent understanding of the participation criteria and expectations.

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

IEP teams analyze data from multiple sources, including: classroom performance, parent input, intervention data, cognitive assessments, adaptive behavior data.

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

Adaptive behavior data is carefully reviewed alongside other data points to evaluate whether a student demonstrates significant deficits in conceptual, social, and practical skills necessary for daily living.

## 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 differentiate significant cognitive disabilities from instructional disadvantages, the IEP team evaluates data such as classroom performance, progress monitoring, intervention outcomes, parent input, and adaptive behavior and cognitive assessments. This data ensures decisions are based on the student's needs rather than gaps in instruction, addressing any identified deficits with targeted interventions.

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

The IEP team evaluates data such as classroom performance, progress monitoring, intervention outcomes, parent input, and adaptive behavior and cognitive assessments.

## Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

### Criterion Three

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

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

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

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

The IEP team reviews data including academic performance, adaptive behavior assessments, intervention outcomes, and parent/teacher input to determine the need for significant supports. Decisions are not based on disability, placement, absences, language acquisition, or accountability factors.

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? \*

Supports are individualized, focusing on direct instruction, accommodations, and strategies to help students access curricula and standards across settings.

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 team distinguishes between student-specific supports (e.g. assistive technology) and environmental modifications (e.g. small group settings) to ensure needs are met regardless of location.



## 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.

Rutherford County Schools (RCS) serves a diverse student population (approximately White 48%, Black 21%, Hispanic 25%, Asian 5%, Other 1%; 15% economically disadvantaged; 18% English Learners). Analysis of 2024–25 alternate assessment participation shows that the majority of students are identified with Intellectual Disability (48.66%) and Autism (38.93%), consistent with statewide patterns and expected eligibility criteria. When compared to district demographics, participation is generally aligned; however, there is slight overrepresentation of Asian (7.30%) and Black (25.55%) students and slight underrepresentation of White students (45.50%). Economically disadvantaged (21.17%) are overrepresented, and EL students (4.62%) are underrepresented relative to district enrollment. Overall, no systemic pattern indicates inappropriate assignment based on non-disability factors, but subgroup variances will continue to be monitored. To ensure appropriate participation and reduce any disproportionality, RCS will provide ongoing IEP team training on alternate assessment criteria; strengthen culturally and linguistically responsive evaluation practices; and continuously review process for alternate assessment decisions. The district will also continue family communication efforts and engage in state-provided technical assistance. These actions are designed to ensure that participation is limited to students who meet all criteria and to support continued alignment with federal requirements, including the 1.0% cap.

*(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? \*

Special Education Instructional Coaches and Central Office staff provide school teams with information about diploma options and the implications of Alternate Assessment participation, ensuring accurate communication with families. The district offers parent guides created from TDOE resources, outlining eligibility requirements, diploma impacts, and post-secondary implications. Teams are encouraged to share online resources and materials with families to further support understanding.

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

Parents are key participants in the IEP meeting, where data is reviewed and eligibility for Alternate Assessment is discussed. The team ensures parents understand that participation is reviewed and decided annually, and students may transition to general assessments at any time if deemed appropriate by the IEP team.

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? \*Participation in Alternate Assessment is reviewed annually as part of the IEP process. The team evaluates the student's progress, updated data, and eligibility criteria during each meeting to ensure the decision aligns with the student's 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.\* Rutherford County Schools (RCS) ensures that all students participating in alternate assessments receive access to and engagement in grade-level, standards-based instruction aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards, including alternate achievement standards. The district requires that all IEPs are developed in compliance with *Endrew F.*, ensuring goals are reasonably calculated to enable progress appropriate in light of the student's individual circumstances. Present levels of performance, including academic and functional data, are used to develop measurable annual goals, and progress is monitored regularly and reported to families. Instructional practices include the use of evidence-based interventions, differentiated instruction, and specialized supports designed to provide access to rigorous content through appropriate accommodations and modifications. To support consistent implementation, RCS provides ongoing professional development for special education teachers, administrators, and related service providers on standards-based IEP development, alignment of instruction to grade-level standards, and progress monitoring practices. The district utilizes curriculum resources aligned to alternate standards, incorporates assistive technology and communication supports as needed, and ensures collaboration between general and special education staff. Additionally, RCS conducts periodic reviews of IEPs and student data to ensure fidelity of implementation and that students are demonstrating appropriate academic progress. These practices ensure compliance with ESEA requirements and support improved outcomes for students participating in alternate assessments.

## 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. \* We have received great training from TDOE on this topic in recent years. Please keep it up.