

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#

964 - Tennessee Schools for the Deaf

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

Bledsoe, Laura

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.* *

7.27

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.* *

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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.* *

12.5

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

8.93

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

4.62

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

4.41

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.* *

7.27

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.* *

1.82

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.* *

12.9

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

8.2

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

4.29

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

4.41

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

16. Science Participation Rates 2020-21 *

7.27

17. Science Participation Rates 2021-22 *

8.47

18. Science Participation Rates 2022-23 *

11.48

19. Science Participation Rates 2023-24 *

5.08

20. Science Participation Rates 2024-25 *

9.09

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

2.94

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**. *

0

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? *

IEP teams participated in a training in the spring of 2025. This training focused on students with significant needs and what that looks like. IEP teams are instructed that students are not to be placed on the Alternate Assessment because they think they will perform better on that assessment. IEP Teams are informed of the criterion and expectations during the IEP meeting as the team reviews all the criteria for determining alternate assessment. Determination is made by identifying students who have an IQ significantly below the average (scores falling in the 50s and low 60's) on either or both verbal and nonverbal intelligence assessments, and the student's adaptive behavior scores scoring significantly below the average (scores falling in the 50s and low 60s). The IEP Team considers how students are doing on district assessments. Are the students scoring significantly below their peers? Are we seeing growth? The IEP looks at how students are performing in the general education setting. Can the general education setting meet the student's needs with accommodations and/or modifications of materials? If modifications in content are needed, we look at student's work samples and the level of support the student needs.

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

Cognitive data is used both verbal and non-verbal and adaptive behavior scores. In addition, the school uses teacher observations, student work samples, behavior interventions, student's communication mode (pictorial system, ASL, or combination of the two), and the accommodations and modifications the student is using to determine that the most extensive supports and services are needed. The team looks at how the students access their education. Is the student able to access instruction with minimal accommodations or do they need modifications to what they are learning.

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

Process for Determining Alternate Assessment Eligibility:

Criterion One

The team looks at the adaptive behavior scores to see if the student is functioning significantly below the average. The IEP team uses these scores in conjunction with the cognitive scores to help make the determination.

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? *

Prior to student's identification for Alternative Academic Assessment, they participate in a general education classroom at Tennessee School for the Deaf where they are taught using state standards. When students struggle with academic success, progress, and rigor with maximum accommodations in place, the team will determine if testing is needed. The team uses student work samples, interventions used, supports tried, district testing, IEP progress data, cognitive and adaptive data to make the determination for Alternate Assessment.

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

The team uses student work samples, interventions used, supports tried, district testing, IEP progress data, cognitive and adaptive data to make the determination for Alternate Assessment.

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 along with the school psychologist review the data (or request assessments) annually at the IEP meeting. The school uses teacher observations, student work samples, behavior interventions, student's communication mode (pictorial system, ASL, or combination of the two), and accommodations/modifications the student is using to determine that the most extensive supports and services are needed. The team looks at how the students access their education. Is the student able to access instruction with minimal accommodations or do they need modifications to what they are learning. The team uses cognitive data (both verbal and non-verbal) and adaptive behavior scores to support this determination.

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? *

The IEP team looks at the student's strengths in each academic area. If a student has a strength in math, they will participate in the general education math class. The team reviews the supports and accommodations the student needs in each of those areas. The student is placed in the highly modified setting if they can't be successful in given appropriate accommodations and supports.

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 reviews observational data provided by the classroom teacher and related service providers. At each annual IEP, accommodations and modifications are reviewed to determine success. If there is a support that a student needs due to their disability that is not available, the IEP team and administration work on a solution to provide the support.

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.

All students at Tennessee School for the Deaf are considered disabled and have an IEP. Students are referred to TSD by the LEA, often based on the LEA's inability to provide a student with an appropriate academic program in their district. Due to this we have disproportionate number of students with additional disabilities and are unable to actively change this disproportionality. For this school year, TSD did not have a disproportionality among student groups. In years past, it is not surprising that there is a disproportionate number of Asian or Hispanic population. This is appropriate to the population of students served.

*(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 parents are informed during the IEP meeting of the decision to participate in alternative assessments and how that affects the diploma, educational, and career options for the student after high school. This is readdressed each year during the IEP meeting. The IEP team is transition focused and keep the end in mind when discussing postsecondary options with parents. Parents must sign the document in the IEP that states the team agrees that the student qualifies for the Alternative Assessment.
34. How are parents included in the IEP team decision-making process? *Parents are part of the IEP team. During IEP meetings, parents are informed of what it means to be on the alternate assessment. They are asked for their feedback related to their child participating in Alternate Assessment. The team discusses transition plans and what the parent hopes for their child.
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? *Each year, the IEP team reviews the criteria that is documented for Alternate Assessment. As a team, we revisit the three criterion.

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.* First, teachers are trained on what it means to have a significant cognitive disability and how that impacts a student in the classroom. Principals participate in a monthly IDEA meeting with the Special Education Director. This time is used to discuss Special Education requirements and what data is needed to support moving students to a more restricted environment.

Support Requested

37. Please describe any support needed from the department to assist in meeting the requirements outlined in this form. All reasonable requests will be considered. *
- The department has provided TSD support in the past. We may need a refresher with staff on making determinations for alternate assessment and of moving students to more restricted settings like deaf+.