

Illinois State Board of Education

Special Education Department

**ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT:
1 PERCENT THRESHOLD
WAIVER REQUEST SCHOOL
YEAR 2024-25**

December 2024

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Introduction

Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 [ESEA §111(b)(2)(D) and 34 CFR 200.6(c) and (d)], modifies the provision that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may participate in alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards. ESSA places a 1 percent cap on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. States that anticipate exceeding the 1 percent cap must submit a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) utilizes the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA) as its alternate assessment. DLM-AA participation rates for 2023-24 were 1.16 percent for English language arts (ELA), 1.16 percent for mathematics, and 1.04 percent for science. Based on these data, ISBE anticipates exceeding the 1 percent cap for the 2024-25 DLM-AA administration in these three subjects and is submitting the required waiver request.

One Percent Threshold Waiver Request Requirements

Submission 90 Days Prior to the State Testing Window

The ISBE spring testing window begins in March 2025. ISBE is submitting its 1 percent threshold and 95 percent participation requirement waiver request to ED for the areas ELA, mathematics, and science on December 16, 2024.

State Measured Achievement of at Least 95% of Students

Illinois met the 95 percent participation requirement for all students and for students in ELA, mathematics, and science in the 2023-24 school year, as illustrated in Table 1. Illinois also met the 95 percent participation requirement for students with disabilities in ELA and mathematics in the 2023-24 school year. However, only 92.66% of students with disabilities participated in the science assessment.

Table 1: Overall Rates of Assessment Participation for SY 2023-24

Student Subgroup	All Students Grades 3-8 & 11	Students with Disabilities Grades 3-8 & 11
English Language Arts		
Students Assessed	937,661	144,502
Students Enrolled	952,139	149,633
Assessment Participation Rate	98.48%	96.57%
Mathematics		
Students Assessed	935,322	143,979
Students Enrolled	950,744	149,434
Assessment Participation Rate	98.38%	96.35%
Science		
Students Assessed	397,046	57,167
Students Enrolled	414,066	61,697
Assessment Participation Rate	95.89%	92.66%

State-Level Data for Alternate Assessment Participation Rates

Table 2 illustrates ISBE's state-level data for the number and percentage of students in each subgroup who participated in the statewide alternate assessment for the 2023-24 academic year.

Table 2: Alternate Assessment Aligned to Alternate Academic Standards (AA-AAAS) Participation Rates by Subgroup for SY 2023-24

Student Subgroup	# of Students Assessed in Grades 3-8 & 11*	Total # of Students Assessed in Grades 3-8 & 11	Percent Taking AA-AAAS in Grades 3-8 & 11
All	952,139	11,048	1.16%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2,241	24	1.07%
Asian	54,495	632	1.16%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	878	16	1.82%
Black or African American	154,919	2,624	1.69%
Hispanic or Latino	270,238	3,177	1.18%
White	429,549	4,120	0.96%
Two or More Races	41,949	464	1.11%
English Learners	156,885	3,066	1.95%
Economically Disadvantaged	488,393	7,145	1.46%
Male	488,210	7,418	1.52%
Female	463,633	3,630	0.78%

State Alternate Assessment Participation Rate by Subject Over Time

Table 3 demonstrates ISBE's alternate assessment participation rate data in ELA, mathematics, and science from the inception of the waiver program during the 2017-18 school year through the 2023-24 school year. There was a slight increase in the alternate assessment participation rates in ELA and math. The alternate assessment participation rate for science decreased from 1.06 percent to 1.04 percent during the 2023-2024 school year. Some of the rates increased, but IBSE has been working to make significant changes to our monitoring processes that we believe will result in a decrease in participation rates in the coming year.

Table 3: AA-AAAS Rates by Subject, by Year

School Year	ELA	Math	Science
2017-18	Data unavailable		
2018-19	1.10%	1.11%	1.10%
2019-20	Testing suspended due to COVID-19 pandemic		
2020-21	1.02%	1.03%	1.04%
2021-22	1.14%	1.14%	1.12%
2022-23	1.15%	1.14%	1.06%
2023-24	1.16%	1.16%	1.04%

State-Level Longitudinal Enrollment and Assessment Data

One factor that continues to impact Illinois' performance in reducing the alternate assessment participation rate is decreasing enrollment. Table 4 displays the longitudinal enrollment data for Illinois. Enrollment in Illinois public schools has decreased 7.51 percent over the last seven years. However, the number of students with the most significant disabilities has remained relatively constant. This drop in enrollment impacts the calculation of the

alternate assessment participation rate. A smaller denominator (due to decreasing enrollment) with little change in the numerator results in higher participation rates.

Table 4: Student Enrollment in Illinois by School Year, 2018-19 through 2023-24

Year	Total Enrollment	Difference SY to SY (Decrease)
2017-18	2,001,529	--
2018-19	1,984,519	17,010 (0.85%)
2019-20	1,957,018	27,501 (1.39%)
2020-21	1,887,316	69,702 (3.56%)
2021-22	1,869,325	17,991 (0.95%)
2022-23	1,857,790	11,535 (0.62%)
2023-24	1,851,290	6,500 (0.35%)

State Assurances the LEAs followed State Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) were made aware of changes to the 1 percent exception rule in 2018 via conference presentations that were held throughout Illinois. ISBE posted the alternate assessment participation guidelines on its website and conducted webinars and presentations to make clear that all students who are being considered for the alternate assessment must have the participation guidelines within their Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs).

ISBE sent formal identification letters to LEAs identified as above the 1 percent threshold on November 22, 2024. ISBE identified 409 LEAs that exceeded the 1 percent cap in 2023-24. A little more than half of the identified LEAs were above the 1 percent threshold for three consecutive years (n=230). Seventeen percent (n=70) of those identified were above the 1 percent threshold for the first time during the three-year cycle. All LEAs above the 1 percent threshold were required to complete our justification and assurances form by December 13, 2024. This information will be posted to the ISBE Alternate Assessment Participation -- 1 % Threshold webpage by the end of December.

The LEAs and student population in Illinois are diverse in composition. Size, location, and availability of resources all impact an LEA's alternate assessment participation rate. ISBE's justification and assurances form asks LEAs to document all factors that impact their alternate assessment participation rate.

The most frequent justification that has been noted in the past is district size. Illinois has 866 LEAs, 3,835 schools, and 1,851,290 enrolled students. Communities fall into three categories -- rural, suburban, or urban. Chicago Public Schools had the third-largest student enrollment in the United States in 2021, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Only 631 of the remaining LEAs in Illinois have student populations of more than 1,000. Seventy-seven percent of Illinois LEAs serve 500 or fewer students and 6 percent serve fewer than 100 students. This data is from the 2023-24 Illinois Report Card. Even small changes to student enrollment and alternate assessment participation numbers can have a significant impact on the alternate assessment participation rate for these small districts.

The availability of school and community resources also impacts alternate assessment participation rates for many LEAs. Districts that have developed outstanding educational programs for students with significant

disabilities tend to draw families of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to the area. Also, districts near areas with specialized community resources, such as medical programs or therapeutic day schools, often draw families of students who need to access these resources. These relocation trends result in disproportionately high numbers of students needing to take the alternate assessment in these areas.

Regardless of the justification for being above the 1 percent cap, LEAs must ensure they are:

- Utilizing the alternate assessment participation guidelines,
- Training appropriate staff on participation guidelines and administering the alternate assessment,
- Addressing identified disproportionality, and
- Informing IEP teams they must discuss the long-term impacts of taking the alternate assessment annually.

ISBE supports LEAs identified as being above the 1 percent threshold by:

- Providing resources and guidance to use their data to identify the root causes of being above 1 percent;
- Appropriately identifying students for the alternate assessment using the alternate assessment participation guidelines;
- Developing goals to address areas of concern, when appropriate; and
- Documenting the internal evaluation process and decision-making practices.

State Assurances that LEAs Will Address Disproportionality of Subgroups

ISBE will provide LEAs above the 1 percent threshold with technical assistance related to a risk ratio approach to analyze alternate assessment participation data for disproportionality for all subgroups of students. As part of the justification and assurances process, LEAs commit to addressing disproportionality in subgroup participation based on inappropriate policies, practices, and procedures utilizing ISBE technical assistance, resources, and supports. Furthermore, LEAs above the 1 percent threshold for three consecutive years must address disproportionality within their LEA Action Plans.

Below is the list of subgroups included in the risk ratio analysis:

1. Racial/Ethnic Groups
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Pacific Islander or Other Pacific Islander
 - d. Black or African American
 - e. Hispanic or Latino
 - f. White (Non-Hispanic)
 - g. Two or More Races (Multiracial not Hispanic)
2. Disability
3. Limited English Proficient
4. Socio-Economic Status
5. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

ISBE also analyzes the primary and secondary eligibilities of each DLM-AA participant to ensure only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are found eligible to take the DLM-AA.

The risk analysis will allow LEAs to determine if any subgroup is more likely than other subgroups to participate in the alternate assessment. Analysis of these data will provide LEAs with information so they can focus on reducing disproportionality in the participation of students in the alternate assessment for individual subgroups. Information that is collected through the risk analysis will provide additional data that will be used to address the overall percentage of students participating in the alternate assessment.

The risk ratio compares the risk of participating in the alternate assessment for each subgroup to the risk for all other students at the LEA level. A risk ratio of 1.0 for a subgroup means that the rate of participation in the alternate assessment is proportionate by students in the subgroup to the rate of participation for students not in the subgroup. The higher the risk ratio, the greater the chance that students in the subgroup will participate in the alternate assessment as compared to students not in the subgroup.

ISBE uses the following formula to calculate the risk ratio for each subgroup:

- A. The risk of participating in the alternate assessment by students in the subgroup: The number of students in the subgroup who participated in the alternate assessment divided by the number of students in the subgroup who participated in statewide assessments multiplied by 100.
- B. The risk of participating in the alternate assessment by all other students (comparison group): The number of students in the comparison group who participated in the alternate assessment divided by the number of students in the comparison group who participated in statewide assessments multiplied by 100.
- C. The risk ratio for the subgroup: The risk of the subgroup (A) divided by the risk of the comparison group (B).

ISBE also will provide technical assistance that allows LEAs to evaluate alternate assessment participation data by disability category. ISBE uses the following:

1. Disability Category
 - a. Intellectual Disability
 - b. Orthopedic Impairment
 - c. Specific Learning Disability
 - d. Visual Impairment
 - e. Hearing Impairment
 - f. Deafness
 - g. DeafBlind
 - h. Speech and/or Language Impairment
 - i. Emotional Disability
 - j. Other Health Impaired
 - k. Multiple Disabilities
 - l. Developmental Delay
 - m. Autism
 - n. Traumatic Brain Injury

State Plan and Timelines

The ISBE plan for addressing issues related to exceeding the 1 percent cap on alternate assessments participation rates includes short- and long-term activities, some of which have already occurred.

ISBE uses three years of finalized data to determine how much support to provide LEAs above the 1 percent threshold and which activities they must complete. We reviewed finalized data from school years 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 during the 2024-25 monitoring cycle. LEAs identified as being above the 1 percent threshold during the 2023-24 school year were assigned Level 1 supports and activities. LEAs identified as being above the 1 percent threshold for two consecutive years (2022-23 and 2023-24) were assigned Level 2 supports and activities. LEAs identified as being above the 1 percent threshold for three consecutive years (2021-22 through 2023-24) were assigned Level 3 supports and activities. Table 5 describes the supports and activities for each level.

Table 5: Monitoring Supports and Activities by Level

Level	Supports	Activities
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assigned principal consultant to answer questions.Professional learning event at the beginning of the cycle (January).Guidance documents and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete justification and assurances form.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assigned principal consultant to answer questions.Professional learning event each quarter (January, April, July, October).Guidance documents and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete justification and assurances form.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assigned principal consultant to answer questions.Professional learning event monthly January through November (no August meeting).Guidance documents and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete justification and assurances form.LEA Action Plan.

All LEAs with alternate assessment rates above the 1 percent threshold are required to complete a justification and assurances form. A total of 296 of the LEAs that were identified completed the form. These responses are available upon request.

ISBE noted that LEAs had difficulty completing the form in a timely manner during the 2023-24 cycle. Districts were not notified that they were above the 1 percent threshold until February, and LEAs did not submit the form promptly after they were notified. ISBE fully understands that LEAs must complete the assurances before we submit our waiver and has therefore developed a communication plan to address this requirement. The justification and assurances form for the 2024-25 school year must be completed by LEAs no later than December 16, 2024. ISBE began sharing this deadline at the Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE) Conference in October. LEA superintendents and state-approved special education directors will be notified if they are above the 1 percent threshold by November 22, 2024 and that notification will inform them of the deadline for completing the justification and assurances form. A reminder communication will be sent one week before the due date.

The justification and assurances form was amended for the 2024-25 monitoring cycle to address the long-term impacts of taking the alternate assessment. LEAs must now ensure that IEP teams, parents, and students are aware of the long-term impact of taking the alternate assessment, including graduation exit requirements. LEAs also must ensure that they are completing the alternate assessment participation guidelines form every time eligibility for the alternate assessment is considered. See Appendix B to view the justification and assurances form.

LEAs receiving Level 3 support must complete an LEA Action Plan. ISBE revised the LEA Action Plan for the 2024-25 school year. The questions are the same, but the format of the form changed and was condensed into two sections to make it easier for LEAs to use. This document is intended to be a living document that LEAs add to and revise throughout the cycle. It should document the process the LEA follows. See Appendix C to view the LEA Action Plan template.

ISBE noted during the 2023-24 monitoring cycle that accessing and interpreting data was a challenge for many of its districts. To address this, ISBE will be using its professional learning events:

- To provide technical assistance that helps LEAs examine root causes of exceeding the alternate assessment cap,
- To locate and use their data to internally monitor their alternate assessment participation rate, and
- To assess and address disproportionality.

Last year only LEAs receiving Level 3 support were required to attend monthly meetings. All LEAs above the 1 percent threshold must attend at least one professional learning event during the 2024-25 cycle. Level 1 support requires attendance at one event and Level 2 support requires attendance at quarterly events. The professional learning events are one hour long. There will be a morning and afternoon meeting option offered this cycle to accommodate participants’ busy schedules. These learning events are recorded and posted on ISBE’s Alternate Assessment Participation – 1% Threshold webpage. ISBE principal consultants will also establish office hours to allow individualized supports for LEAs above the 1 percent threshold.

Table 6: SY 2024-25 Monitoring Cycle Timeline

Timeline	Action
Spring 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing work with National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO): ISBE joined a consortium of states in the NCEO 1 percent working group initially in 2018. As new ISBE staff have been assigned to monitor LEAs that exceed the 1 percent threshold, renewed participation with this project has resulted in improved strategies and activities to help LEAs.

October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification and assurances form updated. • LEA Action Plan form revised. • ISBE began to draft a state request to exceed the 1 percent cap. • Technical assistance presentation addressing participation guidelines and monitoring activities presented at the IAASE Conference.
November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate assessment participation guidelines form updated and finalized. • Participation decision-making tool developed and finalized. • Communication templates and resources reviewed/drafted and finalized. • 2023-24 finalized alternate assessment data available. • 409 LEAs identified as above the 1 percent threshold. • ISBE determined level of support for each LEA based on three-year finalized data. • Draft of the 2024-25 waiver request posted for public comment on November 21, 2024. Public comment closed on November 29, 2024. • Technical assistance presentation addressing participation guidelines and monitoring activities presented at the 2024 Proficio Conference (a conference for nonpublic educational facilities). • Notification letters sent to identified LEAs on November 22, 2024. • Beginning in November, ISBE analyzed IEP status and primary disability category for students rostered for the 2025 spring alternate assessment twice a month. If discrepancies are identified, ISBE will provide guidance to the district and verify that IEP amendments are completed.
December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to public comments on the waiver and included it in the waiver application by December 6, 2024. • Deadline for all districts identified as exceeding the 1 percent threshold to submit their justification and assurances form was December 13, 2024. • Final waiver submitted to ED on December 16, 2024.
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. • Professional learning event for all districts identified as about the 1 percent threshold held on January 14. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. • Professional learning event to address justification and assurances, participation guidelines, IEP documentation, disproportionality and risk ratio, and monitoring activities and deadlines. • LEAs assigned to Level 3 support are assigned to develop an LEA Action Plan before the professional learning event planned for February.
February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In February, ISBE will analyze IEP status and primary disability category for students rostered for the 2025 spring alternate assessment weekly until the testing window opens. If discrepancies are identified, ISBE will provide guidance to the district and verify that IEP amendments are completed. • Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on February 18. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. LEA Action Plans will be discussed at the professional learning event. Several good examples will be provided. Brainstorm activities and deliverables. LEAs assigned to Level 3 support must submit their LEA Action Plan to altexception@isbe.net by February 28, 2025.
March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 1, 2025, spring testing window opens. Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. Professional learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on March 18. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m.
April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testing window remains open. Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. Quarterly professional learning event for LEAs assigned to Level 2 and Level 3 support will be held on April 22. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. Professional learning event to address finding, reviewing, and using data. Districts will be assigned to look up data from the previous school year to use during this session.
May 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISBE to review business rules and amend, as appropriate. Testing window closes. Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. Professional learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on May 20. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m.
June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical assistance presentation addressing participation guidelines and monitoring activities presented at the 2025 State Special Education Directors Conference. (Date to be determined) Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. Professional learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on June 17. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. Professional learning event to cover establishing effective and consistent policies, procedures, and practices.
July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. Quarterly professional learning event for LEAs assigned to Level 2 and Level 3 support will be held on July 22. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. Professional learning event to cover evaluating preliminary test data and making corrections in the Student Information System (SIS).
August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 22, 2025, window for AA-AAAS corrections in SIS closes. School year 2025-26 begins. NO professional learning events will be held to allow for administrators to be present with their students and staff in the first few weeks of school.

September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISBE begins preparing for next cycle by reviewing preliminary data; reviewing and updating resources and documents; and beginning draft of waiver, if appropriate. • Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. • Professional learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on September 16. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. Professional learning event to involve discussion about completing and documenting LEA Action Plan activities and artifacts/deliverables. Effectiveness of the plan also will be evaluated.
October 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. • Quarterly professional learning event for LEAs assigned to Level 2 and Level 3 support will be held on October 21. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. • Professional learning event to review identifying students using participation guidelines, what is required as part of an IEP, and documenting decisions. • LEA Action Plan with completed activities and deliverables due October 31, 2025.
November 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass communication will be used to remind LEAs of an upcoming professional learning event. • FINAL professional learning event for LEAs assigned Level 3 support will be held on November 18. LEAs may attend at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. • Finalized 2024-25 data available. • Identify and notify LEAs above the 1 percent threshold for the 2025-26 monitoring cycle. • Determine level of support for LEAs above the 1 percent threshold for the 2025-26 monitoring cycle. • If necessary, post draft of the 2025-26 waiver request for public comment.

Public Comment

November 22, 2024

Natasha Harris, Special Education Director
Calumet Public School District 132

My name is Natasha Harris, and I serve as the Special Education Director for Calumet Park School District 132. Our district recently completed a district improvement plan due to exceeding the DLM 1 percent participation threshold. Our district is part of Eisenhower Cooperative, which provides services for students with the most significant disabilities, including autism, multiple disabilities, and intellectual disabilities. We place students with the most significant needs either at the Cooperative or in private facilities to ensure appropriate programming.

Our decisions regarding assessment participation are based on individual student data, including intellectual functioning, adaptive behavior, alignment with the Essential Elements, and necessary accommodations or

modifications to the curriculum. Upon reviewing our data, we identified no evidence of disproportionality among racial, gender, or socioeconomic groups contributing to the district's DLM participation percentage.

It is frustrating that we must annually complete a plan for exceeding the 1 percent threshold, even though the needs of our students remain consistent. The same students who required the DLM assessment last year will continue to need it this year, causing our district to again exceed the threshold. If maintaining a participation threshold is necessary for accountability, the state should consider increasing the threshold to 2% or recognizing districts' efforts to improve participation rates over time. Requiring districts to submit plans and attend monthly meetings each year is burdensome and detracts from our focus on serving students effectively.

Districts should not feel pressured to administer the IAR to students with significant disabilities simply to avoid penalties from ISBE. Such pressures compromise the integrity of individualized decision-making and may not serve the best interests of the students.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comment. As established in the proposed waiver, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a 1 percent cap on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. As this cap is established by federal law, ISBE is unable to increase the threshold.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 22, 2024

Dr. Andrew Lobdell, Principal

Lena-Winslow Junior High School – District 202

The 1 percent waiver poses a significant challenge for our small school. We have a high population of special education students due to several factors, including our rural location and the limited services and opportunities provided by nearby schools. For example, we recently welcomed a family to our district with a student who has Down syndrome, specifically because of the support we offer.

Unfortunately, with participation capped at 1 percent, many of our current students do not qualify for the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessment when they otherwise would. Consequently, students who should be taking the DLM often end up taking the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) instead, solely because of this 1 percent threshold. Many of these students struggle with the IAR test, even when accommodations are provided. As a result, they often fail to attempt the assessment or do not put forth any effort during testing resulting in a waste of time for everyone involved.

Increasing this threshold would allow all of our students to participate in a more suitable assessment.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comment. As established in the proposed waiver, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a 1 percent cap on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. As this cap is established by federal law, ISBE is unable to increase the threshold.

ISBE encourages districts to continue to utilize the participation guidelines to appropriately identify students with the *most significant* disabilities to take the alternate assessment.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 25, 2024

Kristin Jones

High School Special Education

In my opinion I believe it is unfair to mandate that everyone take the ACT/SAT. Many of our students with disabilities have not even seen coursework that is presented on these tests. The students then feel overwhelmed, upset with themselves and their abilities to perform on this test. This then leads them into marking down any answer just to "get it over with." As much as I prompt them to try their best, and guess an answer, the content of the questions are still too advanced. Many students are low in their reading and math skills but do not meet the requirements to take the DLM, so how is it fair to ask students who read at a 1st-2nd grade level to answer questions that are asked at an upper high school level? The best suggestion or recommendation that I could give is that students with an IEP who do not meet the DLM should be allowed to choose whether they want to take the ACT/SAT test or not. Some may opt to do so, but to make it mandatory for all is not beneficial for the students or the district as their low scores will be reflected on the district report card. I believe that by making this an option for students, test results will increase as the students will try harder because it wasn't something they were forced to do. If there is an opt out sheet to fill out a FAFSA, why is there not an opt out permission slip for the ACT/SAT? I think they are one in the same, if students are not college bound, they should not be required to take a college entrance exam.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comment. Federal law requires the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to administer certain assessments to all students who attend Illinois public schools. According to federal law, students must take an achievement exam in reading/language arts and mathematics in high school. In Illinois, students in Grades 9 through 11 take either the PACT 8/9, PACT 10, or the ACT. Students must also take an achievement exam in science three times from third through 12th grade. In Illinois, students take the Illinois Science Assessment in fifth, eighth, and 11th grades. Federal and state law does not authorize districts or schools to excuse students from testing. School districts must administer assessments to at least 95 percent of students and at least 95 percent of each student demographic group or face lower public school recognition status, which leads to increased state oversight and may put districts' state and federal funds at risk. Individual high school students who had the opportunity to -- but chose not to -- take the required state accountability assessments lose their eligibility to receive a regular high school diploma.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 25, 2024

Melissa Taylor, Executive Director

Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education

One of the concerns our organization has regarding the continued emphasis on lowering LEA's participation rate in the alternative assessment to 1 percent or below is the rising incidence rate. We notice in the waiver you discuss the decrease in total enrollment (the denominator) and how that impacts our percentage. Have we seen increases in the pool of students that should reasonably be taking the IAA? Particularly, schools are reporting

more students with significant disabilities. Are those anecdotal reports reflected in our state data? If so, shouldn't the waiver also address increases in incidence that directly impact the numerator? Thank you.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comment. Data from the last three years shows an increase in the number of students identified to take the alternate assessment. However, there is no data that can suggest whether this trend is a result of an increase in population or the result of inconsistent or inaccurate application of the participation guidelines. Any data that ISBE has that shows trends across disability categories would also not be a reliable indicator of change in the population of students with the most significant disabilities as students are not eligible to take the alternate assessment based on disability category alone.

As part of the waiver plan, districts identified as above the 1 percent threshold must complete a justification and assurances form where they can provide anecdotal information if changes in its student populations impacts alternate assessment participation rates. Information from these forms will be available to the public on ISBE's website after ISBE's waiver request is submitted to the US Department of Education.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 26, 2024

Peter Schmidtknecht, Director of Special Education
McHenry Community High School District

Good afternoon,

It [sic] taking time to review and digest the draft provided, District #156 would offer the following feedback:

- In line with comments that were made during one of the remediation sessions, declining enrollment statewide has made it more of a statistical probability that both small and large districts would be affected. Our own district has seen an increase this year of 3 students being enrolled in our district who would take the alternate assessment, with zero students exiting due to a change in district. If that trend continues, it will be a challenge for us to maintain being below the 1 percent threshold. As a high school only district, we have to determine quickly whether our feeder districts (both of whom were also in remediation) had made the right team determinations as to the appropriateness of which assessment students should be taking. The collaboration that occurred with both of these districts was important and worthwhile work to improve outcomes for the students in our respective districts.
- Looking at our cohort of students through the lens of maintaining a baseline of less than 1 percent of our total population was useful in working with teacher teams and district administration to identify whether we were underserving certain populations by identifying them as a student to take the alternate assessment. This changed the conversation with some student teams as to whether or not taking the alternate assessment was really appropriate for that student. The creation of the action plan certified much of the work we were already doing/planned to do but made it actionable and is now embedded as part of our practice moving forward.
- The layout of the upcoming communications and professional development opportunities appears fair and measured in its approach. It will hopefully be helpful for those districts who are consistently

identified as needing support in this area. Our plan is to avoid exceeding the threshold going forward as it is a metric that is important for maximizing student outcomes.

Respectfully submitted,

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments. Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 26, 2024

**Kelly Voliva, Director of Student Services
School District 146**

My District, Tinley Park School District 146, has been placed on Level 3 of support based on exceeding our 1 percent threshold for the past three years. We were at 1.78%, 1.84%, and 1.92%. I anticipate it being the same if not higher for the 24-25 school year.

First of all, why does the State even allow us to submit "justification and assurances" forms, if they aren't acceptable to exceed the 1 percent? Also, I have sat in meetings with ISBE about this topic, completed a plan to reduce it, and followed all the steps of the plan. My teams have been retrained on the use of the guidance document and each and every student that is found eligible to the take the IAR goes through me for review. They are all appropriate.

The only thing that will allow me to reduce this number is if 1) student move out of the District; or 2) I force students with significant communication deficits and cognitive delays to take the IAR. Most of the parents would refuse their participation, and I wouldn't say they were wrong. This would be cruel and wrong.

Like all Districts, we have a large number of students that are placed in and out of the District with significant disabilities (including Autism) that truly limit their ability to access any type of standardized assessment, including a standardized cognitive assessment to even demonstrate their level of cognitive functioning. Making a student like this take the IAR with any level of accommodation is absolutely inappropriate; and I simply won't put a child through this level of assessment.

The State needs to reexamine their application of this rule and consider pushing back on the Federal requirement. I'm quite sure if you look at the number of students within special education that have significant disabilities (as described above), it would be far more than 1 percent of the overall population of special education. High incidence disabilities, such as SLD and OHI, are slowly becoming less and less of the overall population.

Use your time to target the districts that are putting students with high incidence disabilities on IAR, not those of us completing justification forms and using it appropriately. Making a group of very busy administrators, already stretched thin, sit in monthly meetings thinking you are going to share some insight that will correct this, for most of us, is a complete waste of our time. Furthermore, keep in mind it isn't easy to administer the DLM to any student. I'm sure if you really looked closely at the performance of the 1.92% in my district that took the DLM last year, they aren't even hitting that "out of the park." Teachers don't choose to put a student on DLM unless it is absolutely necessary.

I'm happy to speak to anyone in person about this. This is my 29th year in special education, and I've never written a plan more unachievable than the one I was required to write to "reduce" the amount of those participating in DLM.

Please worry about the schools that are abusing this and stop targeting those of us that are doing it right.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments.

The annual justification and assurances form allows school districts to document their unique situation and make the required assurances to the state that they are following the alternate assessment participation guidance provided by both ISBE and the US Department of Education. ISBE monitoring activities and resources provide support to districts to help them appropriately identify students with the *most significant* disabilities to take the alternate assessment. The goal for school districts is to ensure and document that they have done this rather than focusing on reducing their percentage.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 26, 2024

Mary P. Ford, Executive Director of Student Services
Lansing School District 158

It seems that we are being disciplined for exceeding the 1 percent threshold, even when the DLM-AA is appropriately assigned to students with significant disabilities. We follow the correct procedures, and we will continue to do what is best for our students. It seems that a random audit of districts to ensure they are following the correct procedures for assigning the DLM-AA is more appropriate if an accountability measure is needed. Having to submit an Action Plan, attending monthly meetings, and being monitored for exceeding the threshold seems unfair given that we are appropriately assigning these. We have had an influx of students transfer to our District because we offer high-quality services to all students, especially our special education students.

We appreciate you taking the time to hear our concerns.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comment. Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

November 30, 2024

Kelly Legrenzi, School Social Worker/Special Education Liaison
Oglesby Public School District 125

Good Morning,

I have reviewed the draft document regarding the waiver request, including the justifications and assurances.

We are a small district that continually engages in maintaining the necessary requirements for those students meeting the criteria for DLM-AA assessments.

Within our small district, we have 2 Cross Categorical Life Skills programs. Additionally, we have a higher number of students that are currently receiving their programming in an LRE setting, but within a private day programming due to limited resources available within our area. Many of these students fulfill the requirement for taking the DLM-AA.

We are legally obligated to provide special education services and programming to the students that reside in our district. Therefore, when they meet the criteria for the DLM-AA, we utilize that assessment.

As a small district, currently and in the foreseeable future, we will continue to exceed the 1 percent threshold for the DLM-AA assessment.

To sustain legal requirements within eligibility, services, and programming, we will be unable to decrease the rate of DLM-AA enrollment, as the factors of student enrollment within the district are beyond our control.

Despite the notification letters, waivers, justification and assurance forms, LEA Action Plans, trainings, amendments, etc., as a small district with limited local resources and programming, our district will continue to meet the criteria for exceeding the 1 percent DLM-AA.

Without ISBE's realistic familiarity of our county and district dynamics, including the students they serve, it is a moot point to consider there will be resolution in reducing the number of students that will qualify for the DLM-AA.

Thank you for your time.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments. Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

December 2, 2024

Kim Moore, Special Education Coordinator
Madison CUSD 12

Good Morning,

I feel that if school districts are having their students take the alternative assessment, it is needed. This test is not easy to administer and to complete with the number of students that need it per district. If this is because the state feels districts are having students complete the test that should not take the test, then audit those districts. LEAs have enough hoops to jump through. This is another hoop because "someone" is not doing what they are supposed to do. I feel districts that are doing what is correct and reporting correctly are being punished with more paperwork.

Thanks,

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments. Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

December 2, 2024

**Ginger Payne, Assistant Director
Tri-County Special Education Association**

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to express great concern with the 1 percent threshold for DLM. Being an administrator for a special education cooperative, I am viewing this for districts from very small (less than 100 students tested) to bigger districts in the cooperative (just under 2,000). I realize this is still small compared to many districts in Illinois but this still has an impact on schools.

Our IEP teams within TCSEA absolutely look at the criteria for a student to take part in DLM. We do not "fudge" on IQ scores. Many families in central Illinois prefer small districts that welcome all students. I've had a number of families move to this area because of school district reputation. When referring to state testing, specifically DLM, this hurts districts. All it takes is one move in, or in one district's case, one student identified to take DLM, that puts them over 1 percent. How can this be? We do not have control who moves in or out of school districts.

Thank you for reading this response.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments. Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

12/6/2024

**Katie Kreller, Director of Student Services
Community Consolidated School District 89**

**CC: Clodagh McCall
Kristine Goebbert
Molly Victor
Melissa Mendoza-Thompson
Michele Bonham
Rosanne Sikich**

All of the directors copied on this email were present for a session to review this document: [School Year 2024-25 draft of the Alternate Assessment One Percent Threshold Waiver Request](#).

Questions:

1. Is this a published tool we are supposed to be using? It's not dated and it's not on the DLM page, it's on Resources and Documents.

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/DLM-Decision-Making-Companion-Tool.pdf>

2. Or, are we to use these two documents, which are both on the ISBE website:

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Teacher-Checklist.pdf>

https://www.isbe.net/documents/dlm_participation_guidelines.pdf

SO ... we're finding DLM resources on DIFFERENT pages on ISBE's website - and it took 6 directors almost 30 minutes to find the document on ISBE linked in my Question 1.

Feedback:

1. temporarily increase the 1 percent threshold to 2 percent while we are all managing increases in our overall special education population
2. issue waivers to districts with high rates of move in students with significant needs
3. We need a modified IAR - something in between. There is an alternate ACCESS, can we have an alternate IAR and reserve DLM for most SIGNIFICANTLY impacted learners.
4. On page 6 the draft
 - a. outlines what LEAs should be utilizing the AA participation guidelines - which one from the links above are the updated guidelines to use? Neither are dated.
 - a. We are directors/LEAs need support from ISBE on what defines long term impacts of the AA annually and how to our multidisciplinary teams on how to make these decisions
5. On page 8 - we like the three years of compiled data regarding being over the 1 percent cap to get cited rather than one-off years of being over the cap (similar to significant disproportionality findings)

We are all happy to give more feedback based on more directed questions? Asking for general feedback - we really weren't sure exactly what you were looking for.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for reaching out. I will respond to your questions first and then to your feedback.

Questions:

1. Districts are required to complete the [participation and guidelines form](#) *every time they consider alternate assessment for a student* (which should occur annually). This form may already be built into your IEP system. If it is not, or if there is no place to document the decision-make process, the district will need to complete the form and attach it to the IEP. As we planned for the 2024-25 monitoring cycle, we recognized that some districts needed further guidance to help them determine whether a student had the most significant cognitive disability. We developed the [Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria: Decisions-Making Companion Tool](#) to assist LEAs in identifying students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. LEAs are not required to use this tool, but it can be used internally to review alternate assessment rosters or train staff. It can also be used as a decision-making tool prior to an IEP meeting and as evidence to support the required Participation Guideline form. We will go over requirements, tools and resources more in depth at the January 14 meeting.
2. Please keep in mind that the Assessment Department oversees the administration of the Alternate Assessment -- which is the DLM-AA at this time. All documents related to the assessment itself are housed on their website. The Special Education Department only oversees the monitoring of districts with an alternate assessment participation rate above the 1 percent threshold. All resources related to the 1 percent threshold are on the [Special Education Alternate Assessment – 1% Threshold](#) webpage or provided during professional learning sessions.

Feedback:

Thank you for your comments. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) established the requirements related to student assessment. ESSA places a 1 percent cap on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. As assessment requirements are established by federal law, ISBE is unable to increase the alternate assessment threshold or develop a modified general assessment.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

December 6, 2024

**Lindsey Nixon, Assistant Director of Special Education
Danville Community Consolidated School District 118**

To Whom It May Concern;

I am submitting feedback regarding the one percent threshold waiver request for the DLM.

- Monthly meetings seem to repeat the same information with a very large group; perhaps districts meeting with their ISBE representative in smaller group would be more beneficial.
- In many districts, there is a rising rate of students who are enrolling with significant intellectual disabilities from out of state with alternative assessments listed on their IEPs.
- There is pushback from administrators within the district who are wanting some students with significant intellectual disabilities to take the DLM because those student's IAR scores are causing their schools to reach designation status.
- Clearly defined adaptive scores would be beneficial to have in the DLM criteria.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments.

IEP teams are required to use the Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines form every time alternate assessment is considered. This should occur at least once a year at the annual review. ISBE developed an Alternate Assessment Eligibility Criteria: Decision-Making Tool that includes an adaptive behavior criteria domain. This decision-making tool will be submitted with our waiver request. It is already available for use on our website and we will be reviewing it at our January 14 alternate assessment learning event.

As the Every Student Succeeds Act established the 1 percent threshold for alternate assessment, ISBE is unable to make changes to eligibility criteria for this assessment.

Your feedback will be reviewed by our team and included in the waiver application.

December 8, 2024

**Leslie Guyot, Principal/ Assistant Special Education Coordinator
Sullivan School District**

Hello,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the draft. We are a school district who is identified as rural but does not fall under the (small district designation). We are a district of around 1100 students from Prek –

12th grades. We have special programming for children within the district and community resources for adults with disabilities which brings higher numbers of families of children with disabilities.

Within the report, I appreciate the enrollment data and state numbers for AA. I appreciate the timeline and breakdown month by month of steps which ISBE and the districts need to be completing.

How do we combat the decline of enrollment numbers in public schools to balance out the 1 percent? How can we justify a student with a cognitive disability and more than two grade levels below to take the IAR or state standardized test and not the DLM - AA? We have already revamped our criteria and justifications stricter than what the state suggests which has dropped our AA numbers over the last three years, but we are still a Level 3 school.

We have a new SPED Coordinator this school year and communication should be shared with Haley Seeley, District SPED Coordinator, seeleyh@sullivan.k12.il.us.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments.

ISBE encourages districts to continue to utilize the participation guidelines to appropriately identify students with the *most significant* disabilities to take the alternate assessment. As part of the leveled supports we offer districts, ISBE provides training and resources on understanding the alternate assessment criteria and documenting unique circumstances that school districts face. As part of the 2024-25 monitoring cycle, we have developed additional decision-making resources and will be providing targeted training on data-driven decision-making and application of the alternate assessment participation guidelines.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

December 9, 2024

Jessica Nall, Coordinator of Assessments
DeKalb CUSD 428

Here are our suggestions for the waiver request draft.

On page 6 - should Middle Eastern or North African be an additional subgroup whose participation is monitored? And since nonbinary is an option for school registration, should that subgroup also be included?

I find the appendices very useful.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

December 9, 2024

Candice Hartranft, Director of Special Education
Niles Township District for Special Education 807

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the stringent 1 percent threshold for Alternate Assessment Waiver Requests for the 2024-2025 school year. Nearly half of Illinois school districts have exceeded this threshold, often by a negligible margin. While I fully support high expectations for all learners, the current 1 percent cap appears unrealistic for a significant portion of our state's educational institutions.

Furthermore, the proposed monthly monitoring program would place an additional burden on an already overstretched system. To streamline this process and ensure equitable outcomes, I propose two alternative approaches:

Increase the Threshold: Consider increasing the 1 percent threshold to a more realistic level, such as 2% or 3%. This would alleviate the burden on many districts while still maintaining rigorous standards.

Implement a Data-Driven Approach: Develop a data-driven approach that considers the unique circumstances of each district. This could involve a statistical formula that takes into account factors like district size, student population, and the percentage of special education students. By using a more nuanced approach, we can ensure that the waiver process is both fair and effective.

Additionally, I suggest refining the current DLM portion of IEP development to more explicitly address the 1 percent threshold expectations. This would provide a more standardized approach to identifying students who may require alternative assessments.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to learning more.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for your comments.

As established in the proposed waiver, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a 1 percent cap on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. As this cap is established by federal law, ISBE is unable to increase the threshold.

As part of the leveled supports we offer districts, ISBE provides training and resources on understanding the alternate assessment criteria and documenting unique circumstances that school districts face. As part of the 2024-25 monitoring cycle, we have developed additional decision-making resources and will be providing targeted training on data-driven decision-making and application of the alternate assessment participation guidelines.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

Candice Hartranft Response:

Thank you for your response. I do wonder if there would be any value in the state reviewing DLM student performance to identify whether or not a large number of the students within the 400+ LEAs are, in fact, meeting or exceeding the standards of the DLM. In my experience, the students taking the DLM were appropriately identified for an alternate assessment based on their cognitive skills, curriculum alignment, and current instructional approaches.

I worry that in order to avoid exceeding the 1 percent threshold, many districts will capriciously move the learners with the most significant needs to the IAR. This disruption could result in potential hours of loss of instruction as well as tremendous increases in frustration on the part of the learners.

As the Director of Special Education in a low-incidence cooperative, many of our learners meet the ISBE-published guidance criteria to participate in the DLM. However, our member districts are identified as exceeding the 1 percent threshold. I believe this may be a common theme in our state. If there is an opportunity to participate on a committee or a work group to support our state in the implementation of improved practices related to the assessment of students with low-incidence disabilities, I would welcome the chance to apply.

Thank you again for your attention to this important matter.

ISBE Response:

Thank you for following up on our response with your thoughts. As part of the technical assistance we provide LEAs, we specifically address how districts should use data to make decisions about whether students qualify to take the alternate assessment and how districts should document this decision in the IEP. This includes a review of students' previous performance on the DLM. ISBE stresses the importance of identifying students who meet the criteria for the alternate assessment first and foremost. During the 2024-25 monitoring cycle we are providing new decision-making tools and opportunities for districts to practice using them and ask questions.

Our department is always open to receive feedback from the LEAs we work with and we regularly review it during team meetings. There are opportunities for discussion at our monthly learning events and our principal consultants are available via email, phone, or during office hours.

Your submission will be reviewed by the team and included in the SY 2024-25 waiver request.

Appendices

Appendix A: Correspondence Templates

Notification Letters

LEA Action Plan Acceptance Letter

Alternate Assessment 1 Percent Threshold Monitoring Closing Letter

Appendix B: [Justification and Assurances Form](#)

Appendix C: [LEA Action Plan Template](#)

Appendix D: [Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines Form](#)

Appendix E: Resources for LEAs

ISBE [Special Education Alternate Assessment Participation – 1% Threshold](#) Webpage

[Alternate Assessment Eligibility Decision-Making Tool](#)

[Alternate Assessment 1 Percent Threshold Guidance Document](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions Alternate Assessment 1 Percent Threshold Frequently Asked Questions](#)