



Dynamic Learning Maps
Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA)

1 Percent Threshold Guidance

Dr. Tony Sanders, State Superintendent

January 2024

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education at altexception@isbe.net.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	Page 3
<u>Guidelines for Participation in the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA)</u>	Page 3
<u>Exception Guidance</u>	Page 6
<u>Tiered Supports for LEAs that Exceed the 1 Percent Threshold</u>	Page 7

Introduction

Students in Illinois with the most significant cognitive disabilities are assessed using Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessments that measure achievement against Common Core Essential Elements, which are specific statements of knowledge and skills linked to grade-level expectations aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by 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 (alternate assessments). ESSA places a 1 percent threshold on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. States that anticipate exceeding the 1 percent threshold must submit a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education.

The 1 percent threshold is calculated based on a ratio of the total number of students assessed in a subject using an alternate assessment as compared with the total number of students assessed in that subject using all state assessments.

ISBE utilizes the following formula at the state and Local Education Agency (LEA) levels:

$$\left(\frac{\text{The number of students in the LEA taking the DLM-AA}}{\text{The total number of students in the LEA participating in state accountability assessments}} \right) \times 100$$

State accountability assessments include Illinois Assessment of Readiness, Illinois Science Assessment, SAT, DLM. The PSAT is not included in the calculation.

Guidelines for Participation in the Dynamics Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA)

ESSA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendments of 2004 stipulate that all students, including those with disabilities, must participate in the state accountability assessments. In Illinois, the following three options exist for meeting this requirement:

- (1) Participation in the regular state assessment without accommodations,
- (2) Participation in the regular state assessment with accommodations, or
- (3) Participation in a state-approved alternate assessment with accommodations.

Students with disabilities should receive needed accommodations as allowed by the state accountability assessment (that do not compromise the purpose or security of the test) as a means of facilitating their participation. These accommodations should be a part of the student's regular instructional routine and should not be used or introduced solely for the purpose of state-required accountability assessment. It is expected that the alternate assessment offers the most appropriate opportunity for participation in state accountability assessment for a small percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA) Participation Guidelines will assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams in determining whether students should participate in the alternate assessment.

The determination as to how a student with disabilities will participate in state accountability and districtwide assessments is to be made by each student's IEP team, at least annually, at an IEP meeting. If an IEP team determines that the state's alternate assessment is most appropriate for a Grade 11 student, that student would participate in alternate assessment in all subject areas. Participation in the alternate assessment should not be based on the disability category, achievement level, school attendance, or social/cultural factors.

The IEP team should consider the three options for meeting the state accountability assessment requirement and document how the student will participate in state accountability and districtwide assessments in the "Supplementary Aids and State and Districtwide Assessment" sections of the student's IEP. The district may be asked to provide a copy of these sections from the IEP of each DLM-AA participant.

The U.S. Department of Education and state of Illinois are not defining "most significantly cognitively disabled students" at this time. This determination will continue to be made at the local level. School districts should not seek to attain 1 percent participation of their students with disabilities as a goal. The 1 percent rule does not give districts permission to override individualized educational decision-making using Illinois criteria.

Who is eligible to take the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA)?

The alternate assessment is intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students have intellectual functioning well below average (typically associated with an IQ below 55) that exists concurrently with impairments or deficits in adaptive functioning (e.g., communications, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-directions, functional academic skills, work leisure, health and safety).

The reference to "typically associated with an IQ of below 55" is to help distinguish between students with cognitive disabilities and significant cognitive disabilities from students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities. This means that many students with cognitive disabilities will not qualify for the DLM-AA. By default, students must take the regular state assessment with or without accommodations. The inclusion of the words "typically associated with" allows for some district/school flexibility. IQ is by no means an absolute requirement and should not be used as a lone determining factor.

Students taking the alternate assessment may be identified under a variety of special education eligibilities, including cognitive disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, and traumatic brain injury.

IEP teams may utilize the [DLM-AA Eligibility Criteria: Decision Making Companion Tool](#) to assist in decision-making.

Who is not eligible for consideration to take the DLM-AA?

Students who strictly have academic, language, social-emotional, physical, or sensory disabilities without co-occurring intellectual functioning well below average are not eligible to take the DLM-AA. For example, students who are eligible for special education under the categories of Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disability, Speech Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Deafness/Hearing Impairment, and Visual Impairment **without** a significant cognitive disability would not qualify for the DLM-AA.

What factors should NOT be used to determine if a student is eligible for the DLM-AA?

The decision that a student will take the DLM-AA cannot be based on the factors listed below; however, the existence of one or more of these factors does not prevent the student from participating in the DLM-AA:

- Student achievement is significantly below that of same-age peers.
- The student has an IEP.
- The student has a certain eligibility label or receives certain services (e.g., intellectual disability, autism).
- The student has excessive or extensive absences.
- The student has English learner (EL) status.
- The student may not perform well on the regular state assessment.

Can students who are English learners participate in the DLM-AA?

Some students who are English learners may also present with a significant cognitive disability. In this case, the student may participate in alternate academic assessment as well as alternate assessment of English proficiency. The IEP team may consider the student's EL status; however, the team must determine if the student also has a significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for the DLM-AA and the Alternate ACCESS test.

How does participation in the DLM-AA impact a student's long-term outcomes?

Students who participate in alternate assessment may not qualify for a regular high school diploma upon graduation because, while the student is taught using grade-level standards, their educational programming may be modified to align with alternate achievement standards. However, state alternate achievement standards are set to ensure students are on track to pursue postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment, as defined in the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Students who complete a course of study as defined by the IEP may still be eligible for a regular high school diploma as determined by the IEP team.

How should parents be informed about alternate assessment?

The decision to qualify a student for the DLM-AA is made by the IEP team, which includes the

parent/guardian(s). The team must consider all factors and make an informed decision, to which the parent/guardian may agree by giving consent for services as outlined in the IEP. School teams should carefully outline the participation guidelines and possible long-term outcomes with the parent/guardian as part of the decision-making process.

The team may utilize the Parent Notification Letter template found on the ISBE website:

[Parent Notification Letter \(English\)](#)

[Parent Notification Letter \(Spanish\)](#)

Exception Guidance

State Education Agencies are required to include the scores of all students with disabilities, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, in calculating accountability for schools, LEAs, and the state, according to 34 CFR Part 200 of Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; Final Rule, Section 200.13. It specifies that states may include the proficient and advanced scores of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities based on alternate academic achievement standards in Section 200.1(d), provided that the number of those students who score at the proficient or advanced level on those alternate achievement standards at the LEA and at the state levels – separately -- does not exceed 1 percent of all students in the grades assessed districtwide in English language arts, mathematics, and science. The state may grant an exception to an LEA permitting it to exceed the 1 percent threshold only if the state evaluates the LEA’s request using the conditions consistent with paragraph (c)(2) of Section 200.13.

It is specified in 34 CFR Section 200.13(c)(3) that the state may grant an exception to an LEA permitting it to exceed the 1 percent threshold. The state cannot bar an LEA from assessing more than 1 percent of students using the alternate assessment; however, annual justifications are required. The state must use criteria consistent with that described in the regulations applicable to a state request for an exception [34 CFR Section 200.13(c)(2)]. The state must regularly review whether an LEA’s exception to the 1 percent threshold is still warranted. If the justification for the exception is approved, then the district will be given an approval for exceeding the 1 percent threshold for one year.

LEAs with 1 percent or fewer of the student population taking the alternate assessment will not be subject to review by ISBE. Districts should not seek to attain 1 percent of their students with disabilities participating in the alternate assessment. Participation guidance should be adhered to in making individualized decisions on behalf of the student.

Some LEAs may qualify for an exception for reasons such as those described below.

If the LEA exceeds the 1 percent threshold, the LEA must complete and submit a justification form to ISBE. The justification form should include factors, such as the following:

- Student population: As a general rule, districts with small overall populations would be given consideration. Small population is based on Fall Enrollment, not students assessed.
- If applicable, include descriptions and data showing school, community, or health programs in the LEA that have drawn large numbers of families of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- Eligibility of students taking the DLM-AA: The alternate assessment is reserved for students who have the most significant cognitive disabilities. Students with developmental, learning,

emotional, sensory, and speech disabilities who do not have a significant cognitive disability do not qualify. The LEA might begin to look more closely at the eligibility of students taking the DLM-AA. LEAs should examine and maintain the following items:

- LEA guidelines for IEP teams to apply in determining when a child’s significant cognitive disability justifies taking the DLM-AA.
- A description of how parents are informed when their student’s score is based on alternate standards.
- LEA policies for including students with significant cognitive disabilities in the regular curriculum and assessments.
- Policies for the use of accommodations and modifications in testing.
- Specific efforts by the LEA to reduce DLM-AA participation rate: LEAs may address other factors including, but not limited to, the following items:
 - Description of data and processes related to least restrictive environment and eligibility determinations.
 - Description of processes for IEP teams developing and implementing specially designed instruction that includes supplementary aids, accommodations, and modifications.
 - Descriptions of how regular and special education teachers are trained to administer alternate assessments and regular assessments with accommodations or modifications.
 - Descriptions of professional development options pertaining to assessment, alternate assessment, and/or accommodations.

ISBE provides a monitoring and support system for LEAs that exceed the 1 percent threshold without acceptable justification.

ISBE will review the participation rate data and an LEA’s justification form and decide what level of supports the LEA may require.

Tiered Supports for LEAs that Exceed the 1 Percent Threshold

The ISBE Special Education Department uses a tiered supports model to provide an appropriate level of assistance for LEAs. LEAs that are assigned a level of support must carry out specific activities that are intended to both ensure compliance and help districts improve results. The procedures outlined in the Illinois Special Education Accountability and Support System facilitate ISBE’s efforts in the following activities:

- Fulfilling its responsibility to provide appropriate general supervision to LEAs.
- Differentiating levels of support for LEAs based on degree/intensity of needs.
- Allocating resources to address specific need(s) of LEAs.

The tiered support model consists of three levels, with required activities and supports in place at each level to ensure accountability for both compliance and results measures as well as resources to

strengthen and improve student outcomes.

LEA Determination Designation	Tiered Level of Support
Exceeding the 1 Percent Threshold for the First Year	Universal (Support Available) Tier 1
Exceeding the 1 Percent Threshold for Two Years	Targeted (Guidance Needed) Tier 2
Exceeding the 1 Percent Threshold for Three or More Consecutive Years	Intensive (Coaching Required) Tier 3

- **Universal (Tier 1):**
 - Available to all LEAs and LEAs that exceed the 1 percent cap for the first year.
 - DLM-AA participation guidance and resources are available to all LEAs via the [ISBE Alternate Assessment Participation -1% Threshold webpage](#).
 - If the LEA exceeds the 1 percent cap for the first year, it must complete the justification form. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
- **Targeted (Tier 2):**
 - Available to LEAs that exceed the 1 percent cap for the second year in a row.
 - The LEA must complete the justification form for exceeding 1 percent threshold. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
 - LEA staff must complete a required [webinar](#) and submit a Corrective Action Plan (Appendix A) to address the DLM-AA participation rate.
 - Targeted supports will last for one year.
- **Intensive (Tier 3):**
 - Available to LEAs that exceed the 1 percent cap for three or more years in a row.
 - The LEA must complete the justification form for exceeding the 1 percent threshold. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
 - LEA staff must complete a required [webinar](#) and submit a Corrective Action Plan (Appendix A) to address the DLM-AA participation rate.
 - IEP reviews will be completed by an ISBE consultant. That may result in a plan for the LEA to work with ISBE staff in certain areas, such as professional development, data analysis, and collaboration.
 - Intensive supports will last one or more years based on yearly participation rate data. Timelines will be adjusted if the LEA falls below the 1 percent cap or presents acceptable justifications.

Additional Intensive Tier 3 Activities for Some LEAs

LEAs that have unsatisfactory IEP reviews require further action by the district. After reviewing the IEPs, the ISBE special education consultant will initiate an onsite or virtual visit to provide support to the district in the development of an action plan. The action plan may include one or more of the following activities:

- Reviewing and/or revising district policies, procedures, and/or practices.
- Providing professional development and support to relevant staff.
- Utilizing national, state, or local technical assistance resources.

The district can begin implementation of the action plan after the ISBE special education consultant approves it. The ISBE consultant will provide implementation support to the district throughout the one-year determinations cycle.

The ISBE special education consultant will verify action plan implementation via the LEA's mid-year and end-of-year evaluations. If the district remains in the Tier 3 level of support for subsequent LEA determinations, district staff will continue to work with the ISBE special education consultant until the district's participation rate in the alternate assessment falls within the 1 percent threshold.

Description of the Action Plan Procedures

The LEA will collaborate with a special education consultant to complete the first two sections of the action plan. Upon review of Sections 1 and 2, the LEA and consultant will collaborate on Section 3 of the action plan.

Section 1: Defining the Issue

The district will clearly define the problem or deficiency, determine the root cause, describe how to carry out the activities, explain where to find information, and provide a broad overview of the methodology that will lead to improvement (improvement strategies, activities, revision of policies, procedures, practices, etc.).

Section 2: Defining the Steps for Improvement

The district will list specific steps, including detailed improvement activities, anticipated completion date of the activities, title/role of persons responsible for implementing the activities, and documentation of the plan it will implement to correct the problems.

Section 3: Evaluating the Process

Upon completion of the action plan, the ISBE consultant will notify the LEA of the dates the evaluations are due. The LEA must submit evidence that the activities have been implemented and will result in a changed practice leading to being within the 1 percent threshold. The ISBE consultant will review the documentation and determine whether it is sufficient. If not, the district must submit additional documentation based on the ISBE consultant's feedback. At the end of the year, the LEA and the ISBE consultant will review the final evaluation to discuss progress on the action plan.

Appendix A

ISBE 1 Percent Threshold Participation LEA Action Plan

The ISBE Special Education Department uses this monitoring tool to ensure that the total number of students assessed in English language arts, mathematics, and science does not exceed 1 percent of the total number of students who took the state’s assessments. Districts that are exceeding the 1 percent threshold are required to complete brief narrative reports about deliverables/products that outline the progress and completion of each activity included in the LEA Action Plan.

ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

The LEA Action Plan has three sections. First, the district will document what is known about the areas that need improvement. In the second section, the district maps out -- step by step -- how the district is going to correct the problems or make other improvements. In the third section, the district will document the results of the LEA Action Plan.

This form will need to be completed and submitted to ISBE. Table cells will automatically expand to accommodate any amount of text.

SECTION 1: DEFINING THE ISSUE

Use this section to clearly define the problem or deficiency, determine the root cause, describe how to carry out the activities, explain where to find information, and provide a broad overview of the methodology that will lead to improvement.

The district has been identified as having _____ students who take the alternate assessment for the _____ school year. This exceeded the 1 percent threshold on the number of students who can take the alternate assessment in your district. In addition, the district has been identified as having disproportionality in one or more subgroups, as applicable.	
What disability categories are identified among students who take the alternate assessment based on the justification form? Are there students in disability categories that do not typically include students with significant cognitive disabilities?	

<p>What demographic groups have been identified based on the justification form? Is there a subgroup (racial/ethnic, limited English proficient, gender, socio-economic, migratory) that is more likely than other subgroup to participate in the alternate assessment?</p>	
<p>What are the root causes in the areas of concern? What district policies, procedures, and/or practices contributed to the results?</p>	<p>Policies: Procedures: Practices:</p> <p><i>Address revisions to policies, procedures, and/or practices below.</i></p>

SECTION 2: DEFINING THE STEPS FOR IMPROVEMENT

List the specific steps you will take to correct the problem(s) and when they should be completed.

- The activities should be specific tasks to complete. Each activity should progress logically toward the attainment of the desired goal.
- Designate a due date for completion of each activity that is realistic and attainable.
- Multiple people might work on a single step, but there should be one person responsible for ensuring the step is done on time.
- List the materials that will document that the tasks were implemented and completed.
- Comments can be made as the action plan is developed to mark progress or can be made as the work is completed.

#	Activity	Due Date for Activity Completion	Name/Title/Role of Person(s) Responsible for Implementation	Materials Used as Evidence of Activity Implementation	Status, Comments, and Date Reviewed for Verification

SECTION 3: EVALUATING THE PROCESS

Evaluate the process after all activities have been implemented. Deliverables could include training, guidance documents, and any other information used to ensure the identification of students for the alternate assessment has been evaluated. Deliverables must be submitted no later than two weeks after the submission of the evaluation.

Activity to Evaluate			Data Collection Plan		Evaluation of Activity Implementation	
#	Activity	Person Responsible for Implementation	Deliverable	Date Due	Person Responsible for Evaluation	Information on Implementation