



Illinois State Board of Education Special Education Department

Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Participation Rate and Justification Guidance

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

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Dynamic Learning Maps

Alternate Assessment Participation Rate and Justification Guidance

Table of Contents

	Introduction	Page 3
A.	Guidelines for Participation in State-Developed Alternate Assessment	Page 3
B.	Calculating the DLM-AA Participation Rate	Page 4
	LEAs within the 1 percent threshold	Page 5
	LEAs exceeding the 1 percent threshold	Page 5
C.	Tiered ISBE Supports to LEAs that Exceed the 1 Percent Threshold	Page 6
D.	1 Percent Threshold Waiver Request	Page 7
E.	Resources	Page 7

Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes regulations that promote the participation of every child in state and districtwide assessments, a requirement in existence since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004.

The regulations allow students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to be assessed against Essential Elements alternate achievement standards, which are specific statements of knowledge and skills linked to the grade-level expectations aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards.

The regulations specify that a State Education Agency (SEA) participation rate of students taking the alternate assessment must be below 1 percent of the total number of students participating in state accountability assessments. This is commonly referred to as the “1 percent threshold.”

A. Guidelines for Participation in State-Developed Alternate Assessment

ESSA and the IDEA amendments of 2004 stipulate that all students, including those with disabilities, must participate in the state accountability assessments, including the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment (DLM-AA) as is used in Illinois.

In Illinois, the following three options exist for meeting this requirement:

- Participation in the regular state assessment without accommodations,
- Participation in the regular state assessment with accommodations, or
- 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. A list of acceptable assessment accommodations can be found in the assessment’s accommodations manual that is typically provided by the publisher.

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 [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 (ED) 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.

B. Calculating the DLM-AA Participation Rate

Use this formula to determine if a Local Education Agency (LEA) population of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participating in assessments is over 1 percent.

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

Note: This calculation is done for total participation across the LEA and for each subject area: English language arts, mathematics, and science at each tested grade level.

LEAs within the 1 percent threshold:

LEAs with 1 percent or fewer of the enrolled 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.

LEAs exceeding the 1 percent threshold:

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. For example, if a district with 50 children participating in assessments in the tested grades also had one student with a significant cognitive disability participating in standards-based alternate assessment, that one student would account for 2 percent of the total enrolled population taking an alternate assessment.
 - 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.
 - 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 including 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 around assessment, alternate assessment, and/or accommodations.
- Accountability data: ISBE will also consider other accountability data related to [state performance indicators](#).

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

C. Tiered ISBE Supports to LEAs that Exceed the 1 Percent Threshold

- Universal:
 - 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 [webpage](#).
 - If the LEA exceeds the 1 percent cap for the first year, the LEA must complete the justification form. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
- Targeted:
 - Available to LEAs that exceed the 1 percent cap for the second year in a row without acceptable justifications.
 - The LEA must complete the justification form for exceeding 1 percent threshold. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
 - LEA staff must complete the required webinar and provide assurances of efforts to address the DLM-AA participation rate.
 - Targeted supports will last for one year.
- Intensive:
 - Available to LEAs that exceed the 1 percent cap for three or more years in a row without acceptable justifications.
 - The LEA must complete the justification form for exceeding the 1 percent threshold. This form will be reviewed by ISBE.
 - IEP reviews will be completed by an ISBE consultant. That may result in a plan for the LEA to make efforts, such as professional development, data analysis, and collaboration, with ISBE staff.
 - 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.

D. 1 Percent Threshold Waiver

Each year the state reviews assessment participation data to determine if participation in the DLM-AA will exceed 1 percent for the following school year. If the SEA predicts the participation rate in DLM-AA will exceed 1 percent, it drafts and submits a waiver request to ED Office of Special Education Programs. The waiver is accepted or rejected based on the data presented, justifications, and a description of efforts to reduce the DLM-AA participation rate.

The waiver request must be submitted 90 days prior to the DLM-AA testing window. The SEA must post the waiver request for public comment on the ISBE [Alternate Assessment Participation 1 Percent Threshold Webpage](#) before it is submitted.

Questions or comments may be emailed to altexception@isbe.net

E. Resources

[ISBE Alternate Assessment Participation 1 Percent Threshold Webpage](#)

[ISBE DLM-AA Participation Guidelines](#)

[National Center on Educational Outcomes: Guidebook to Including Students with Disabilities and English Learners in Assessments](#)

[National Center and State Collaborative: Characteristics of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities](#)

[TIES Center](#)

[TIES Center Briefs: Providing Meaningful General Education Curriculum Access to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities](#)

[U.S. Department of Education: Every Student Succeeds Act](#)

[U.S. Department of Education: ESSA Fact Sheet](#)