

Alternate Assessment 1% Threshold

Guidance and
Timeline

School Year 2025-26

Updated December 2025

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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.

Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act (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 students' 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. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 [ESEA §111(b)(2)(D) and 34 CFR 200.6(c)] places a 1% threshold on the number of students who may participate in alternate assessments. It also requires states to provide oversight to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) when the alternate assessment 1% participation threshold is exceeded.

Updated in 2016, ESSA specifies that a student's eligibility for participating in the alternate assessment is determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The Alternate Assessment Participation Guidelines are designed to support IEP teams in making this decision.

Alternate Assessment Participation Calculation

The percentage of students taking the alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic standards (AA-AAAS) is calculated by dividing the total number of students in an LEA taking the alternate assessment by the total number of students in the LEA participating in state accountability assessments then multiplying by 100. (See Figure 1.) State accountability assessments include the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, the Illinois Science Assessment, the ACT, and the AA-AAAS. The ACT 8/9 and the ACT 10 are not included in the calculation.

$$\left\{ \frac{\text{Total number of students in Grades 3-8 and 11 taking the ALTERNATE assessment}}{\text{Total number of students in Grades 3-8 and 11 across ALL assessments}} \right\} \times 100$$


Figure 1: Formula used to calculate the percentage of students taking the alternate assessment.

Monitoring Activities

ISBE reviews annual assessment data to verify that participation in English language arts, math, and science meets the required 95% rate for all students including students with disabilities. ISBE monitors districts with alternate assessment participation rates above 1% and provides tiered support and technical assistance based on established metrics, such as Tier 1 (Universal Support), Tier 2 (Targeted Support), and Tier 3 (Intensive Support).

Assigned Levels of Support

ISBE analyzes three years of finalized data to assign each LEA to a tiered level of support and outlines the corresponding monitoring activities. Table 1 describes the levels of support and the metrics used for tiering along with required monitoring activities.

Table 1: Alternate Assessment 1% Threshold Support Levels, Tiering Metrics, and Activities

Support Level	Metrics for Tiering	Activities
Tier 1: Universal Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LEAs between 0%-1.99% for SY2025 and/or,LEAs with fewer than five students tested in each subject area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete Justification and Assurances Survey
Tier 2: Targeted Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LEAs above 1.0% for two consecutive years and have an increase of 0.5 percentage points or higher between SY 2024 and SY 2025 and/or,LEAs above 1.0% for SY2025 and have an increase of 0.5 percentage points or higher between SY2024 and SY2025 and/or,LEAs above 2% for SY2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete Justification and Assurances SurveyComplete LEA Alternate Assessment Self-Reflection Tool
Tier 3: Intensive Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LEAs above 2% for two or more consecutive years between SY2024 and SY2025 and/or,LEAs with three consecutive years above 1.0% and the rate increased by 0.50 percentage points or greater over the three year timeline of SY2023 vs SY2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete Justification and Assurances SurveyComplete an LEA Action Plan; submit for ISBE approval.Attend three required /recorded trainings; submit verification of training completion.Complete five IEP Content Review Forms for Participation in Alternate Assessment

Required Activities

All LEAs

Justification and Assurances Survey

Each district must submit a Justification and Assurances Survey to confirm that decisions for student participation in the alternate assessment are based on multiple criteria reviewed by the IEP team. Districts that exceed the 1% threshold in any of the subject areas (ELA, math, science) must complete the Justification section of the survey, explaining factors that contribute to exceeding the threshold, and outlining strategies to adhere to the participation guidelines.

Justification and Assurance Surveys must be completed by the district superintendent in IWAS. However, notification of the availability of the survey will be sent out to the district superintendent and the state approved director of special education.

Tier 2

Alternate Assessment Self-Reflection Tool

LEAs assigned to Tier 2 support must complete and submit the Alternate Assessment Self-Reflection Tool to ISBE for review. This tool guides districts in analyzing their data processes and implementing proactive measures to manage participation rates. It involves evaluating district policies, procedures, and practices used to determine which students with the most cognitive disabilities should participate in the alternate assessment.

Tier 3

LEA Action Plan

LEAs assigned to Tier 3 support are required to complete and submit a LEA Action Plan. This plan requires districts to conduct improvement analysis to identify gaps in their processes, procedures, and practices for determining student participation in the alternate assessment. Districts must then develop an action plan that addresses these areas of needed improvement, including defined activities, a timeline, and evidence of completion. The LEA Action Plan is meant to be a working document that the LEA updates during the monitoring cycle. Initial plans are due in March, with finalized plans including progress on goals and evidence of activities due in October.

LEA IEP Content Review Form for Participation in Alternate Assessment

LEAs in Tier 3 support must review the IEPs of students participating in the alternate assessment to confirm that evaluation results justify the student's participation. A total of five IEPs should be examined using the IEP Content Review Form for Participation in the Alternate Assessment. The assigned ISBE principal consultant will provide the district with a list of student names whose IEP should be reviewed.

Office Hours Professional Learning

Attendance is required at three scheduled professional learning events for all LEAs assigned to Tier 3 (Intensive) support. These learning opportunities will focus on assisting LEAs to review district policies, procedures, and practices regarding the assignment of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to participate in the alternate assessment.

Office Hours Professional Learning Registration

March 5, 2026, 10-11a.m. - [Alternate Assessment Office Hours Professional Learning 1](#)

April 9, 2026, 10-11a.m. - [Alternate Assessment Office Hours Professional Learning 2](#)

May 7, 2026, 10-11a.m. - [Alternate Assessment Office Hour Professional Learning 3](#)

Alternate Assessment 1% Threshold Timeline and Activities

Timeline	Activities
November 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IAASE hosted webinar regarding newly defined processes for Alternate Assessment 1% threshold
December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISBE hosted webinar regarding newly defined processes for Alternate Assessment 1% threshold. (12/4/25)
January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISBE reviews finalized data and determines level of support for each LEA.
February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notification letters will be sent to all LEAs with their level of support determination. (2/6/26) Justification and Assurances Survey submission window opens. (2/13/26)
March 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Office Hours Professional Learning</u> event required for LEAS assigned Tier 3 support (Tier 2 & 1 recommended). Topic will focus on data systems and analysis. (3/5/26) Testing window for DLM-AA opens. (3/11/26) LEAs assigned to Tier 3 support must submit their LEA Action Plans (3/16/26) Justification and Assurances Survey submission window remains open.
April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Office Hours Professional Learning</u> event required for LEAS assigned Tier 3 support (Tier 2 & 1 recommended). Topic will focus on ISBE resources to support LEAs in making decisions on assessments. (4/9/26) LEAs assigned to Tier 2 support must submit their LEA Self-Assessment (4/13/26) Justification and Assurances Survey submission window remains open. Testing window for DLM-AA remains open.
May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testing window for DLM-AA closes (5/6/26) <u>Office Hours Professional Learning</u> event required for LEAS assigned Tier 3 support (Tier 2 & 1 recommended). Topic will focus on LEAs policy, procedure, and practice development pertaining to alternate assessments. (5/7/26) IEP reviews due for Tier 3 LEAs (5/11/26) Assessment corrections window for SY26 opens in SIS. (5/11/26) Justification and Assurances Survey submission window closes (5/29/26) Assessment Enrollment Verification Report available in SIS for review/verification
June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISBE Special Education Directors Conference
July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEAs review assessment scores and unassigned reports. Assessment Enrollment Verification Report window closes
August 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment corrections window for SY2026 closes in SIS
September 2026	
October 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEAs assigned Tier 3 support submit progress report on goals from LEA Action Plan (10/15/26)