

January 31, 2017

Dear District Superintendent,

Greetings! Earlier this fall, the Department of Public Instruction sent a [joint letter](#) to all special education directors and district assessment coordinators regarding proposed changes under the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) specifically in regards to the number of students participating in the alternate assessment, Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM). Under ESSA, the number of students who may take the alternate assessment is limited to no more than 1.0 percent of the total number of all students in the State who are assessed in a given subject (i.e., reading/language arts, mathematics, and science). 34 CFR 200.6(c)(2). Prior to ESSA, there was no cap on participation rates. Rather, the 1% cap was placed on the percentage of proficient scores that could be counted for federal accountability purposes. This 1% cap is at the state level. 34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)(i). This letter is the second letter in a series, designed to help districts understand their participation in the alternate assessment.

Despite the cap being at the State level, ESSA further requires that a school district exceeding the 1% cap in any subject must submit a justification to DPI, and DPI must provide appropriate oversight to the district. State/districts must still meet the 95% participation rate for students enrolled in tested grades. 34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)(ii).

Only students with *the most* significant cognitive disabilities may participate in the alternate assessment (DLM), and no student should take the alternate assessment unless they are also participating in the alternate academic achievement standards ([Wisconsin Essential Elements](#)). 34 CFR 200.6(a)(2)(ii)(B). It is important to remember that a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities will be impacted by all areas of *academic* and *adaptive* functioning. These students require extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains on the academic content standard for the grade in which they are enrolled. 34 CFR 200.6(d)(1)(iii). Research has shown that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and who are participating in alternate assessments share similar characteristics. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities:

- typically function at least three standard deviations below in the norm in both adaptive and intellectual functioning. The reference to “typically functioning at least three standard deviations below the norm” is to help distinguish between students with cognitive disabilities from the students with *the most* significant cognitive disabilities.
- were characterized as having an intellectual disability, autism, or multiple disabilities.
- use symbolic expressive and receptive communication, while about 10-11% use pre-symbolic communication or show no response to stimuli.

The IEP team is ultimately responsible for ensuring that student receives academic instruction that is the most appropriate and challenging based on the student's individual needs.

District Participation Rate

The table below shows your district's participation rates in the alternate assessment for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years. We have further identified the primary disability categories for students included in these calculations for your consideration. When calculating a district's participation rate, DPI considered only the grade levels that are factored into federal accountability (3-8 and 11) for each subject area. Calculations are applied to the district level, not to school level. In addition, the data includes any students sent outside of your district for services but for whom you are still accountable. Please note that in 2014-15, science was administered through the WKCE/WAA-SwD to students in grade 4, 8 and 10. Beginning in 2015-16, science was administered through the WI Forward Exam to students in grades 4 and 8, and the ACT in grade 11 for students taking the general assessment. Students participating in the alternate assessment were assessed through DLM in grades 4, 8 and 11.

Subject Area	2014-15 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2014-15 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2014-15 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2015-16 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment
ELA						
Math						
Science						

ELA						
Primary Disability ¹	2014-15 Number of Students taking the	2014-15 Number of Students in	2014-15 Percentage of students taking the	2015-16 Number of Students taking the	2015-16 Number of Students	2015-16 Percentage of students taking the

¹ A-Autism, EBD-Emotional Behavioral Disability, HI-Hearing Impairment, ID-Intellectual Disability, OI-Orthopedic Impairment, OHI-Other Health Impairment, SDD-Significant Developmental Delay, SLD-Specific Learning Disability, SL-Speech and Language, TBI-Traumatic Brain Injury, VI-Visual Impairment

	Alternate Assessment	Tested Grades	Alternate Assessment	Alternate Assessment	in Tested Grades	Alternate Assessment
A						
EBD						
H						
ID						
OI						
OHI						
SDD						
SLD						
SL						
TBI						
VI						

MATH						
Primary Disability	2014-15 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2014-15 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2014-15 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2015-16 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment
A						
EBD						
HI						
ID						
OI						

OHI						
SDD						
SLD						
SL						
TBI						
VI						

SCIENCE						
Primary Disability	2014-15 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2014-15 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2014-15 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students taking the Alternate Assessment	2015-16 Number of Students in Tested Grades	2015-16 Percentage of students taking the Alternate Assessment
A						
EBD						
HI						
ID						
OI						
OHI						
SDD						
LD						
SL						
TBI						
VI						

What can I expect next?

DPI will develop a process in which districts who have been identified as exceeding the 1.0 percent participation cap will provide additional justification and assurances. DPI will also provide additional oversight, guidance and training to LEAs as appropriate.

This rule is expected to be implemented with the 2017-18 academic school year. DPI will be hosting a webinar entitled *Who are Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities?* on February 15, 2017 from 2-3pm. Please watch for further information regarding this webinar as well as additional training opportunities.

We would like to thank you for all your efforts in ensuring that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are participating in Dynamic Learning Maps, and that all students are graduating with the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary to be college and career

ready. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact Molly Bever, Special Education Team, at (608) 264-9557, or Kristen Burton, Office of Student Assessment, at (608) 267-3164.

Sincerely,

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Director of Special Education

Viji Somasundaram
Director of Student Assessment

CC. Director of Special Education
District Assessment Coordinator