

2021-22 Alternate Assessment Justification

The following must be completed by districts that contribute to the state exceeding the 1% cap for students participating in the alternate assessment and will be posted on the department website upon receipt.

District Name: Sweetwater City Schools

	% of Alternative Assessments 2017-18	% of Alternate Assessments 2018-19	% of Alternate Assessments 2020-21	% of Alternate Assessments 2021-22	Projected % of Alternate Assessments 2022-23
MSAA ELA	0.82%	1.05%	1.02%	1.05%	1.00%
MSAA Math	0.82%	1.05%	1.02%	1.05%	1.00%
TCAP- Alt Science	0.72%	<i>*Field test year, no data available</i>	.76%	1.05%	1.00%

1. **Eligibility Determination Process:** Describe the policies, training and supports in place to ensure IEP teams appropriately identify students for participation on the alternate assessments related to each of the three criteria. *Completing the form in EasyIEP is not sufficient justification. The description should include training or processes to ensure the IEP team is carefully considering both the student's data and the implication of participation in the alternate assessment.*
 - a. Criterion One: The student has a significant cognitive disability. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should be considered for the alternate assessment.
 - b. Criterion Two: The student is learning content linked to (derived from) state content standards.

- c. Criterion Three: The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.
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- A. All students who have been considered for the alternate assessment have had a comprehensive evaluation which included the TN state evaluation procedures needed for identification of a student with a significant cognitive disability. When an evaluation is completed, the evaluators regularly consider the exclusionary factors in order to ensure that the student truly meets the criteria to be identified as a student with a significant cognitive disability. In general, the majority of the system's students who have taken the alternate assessment score below a standard score of 60 on a cognitive assessment. In order to attain the best estimate of the student's cognitive ability, the evaluators may use a standardized assessment, non-verbal assessment, or developmental assessment. The decision as to which tool is most appropriate depends on other factors that may impact a student's performance on the assessment. A student's adaptive behavior skills are also assessed in both the home and school settings through norm referenced scales. Documented systematic observations in a variety of settings in the school environment are also completed. In general, the students also receive other services (speech/language, OT and/or PT); so, the evaluation includes several evaluators who consider all areas of the student's developmental skills.
 - B. All students participate in grade level standards based instruction in ELA, math, science and social studies on a daily basis as determined appropriate by the IEP team. Each student's IEP includes annual goals and short term objectives designed to increase the student's language skills and literacy skills in an effort to ensure that he/she can more readily access the grade level curriculum. Furthermore, any additional goals and objectives are developed to help increase the student's foundational skills in all areas. Some students are able to attend the classes with minimal support (i.e. regular teacher provides accommodations and/or modifications within the classroom), moderate support (i.e. an assistant is in the classroom to help with several students) or with full support (i.e. the student has a one on one assistant or a portion of their day in a comprehensive developmental classroom). Despite the level of support needed using additional personnel, other

accommodations are utilized regularly within the regular classroom. These accommodations include, but may not be limited to, reading material to the student, limiting instruction to key concepts in order to ensure better understanding of the most important skills (scaffolding), using assistive technology when it has been determined to help a student have a better understanding of the information and/or increase his/her participation in the lesson, and providing the instruction in smaller increments in order to increase the student's retention of the material. Each student's progress is continually monitored through both benchmark assessments on grade level reading and math concepts and instructional level assessments on skill specific areas in reading and math.

- C. Whenever an IEP team is discussing a change in a student's placement (to a less restrictive and/or more restrictive setting), all data is considered. This data includes the comprehensive evaluations (psychological, speech/language, occupational therapy, physical therapy), previous records (IEPs, benchmark assessments, progress monitoring), any outside agency reports and informal assessments (behavioral observations, classroom performance, teacher input, parent input). The team also considers the accommodations and/or modifications that are being provided and the effectiveness of their use within the classroom setting. Based on all of this information, the team will decide if the current placement is appropriate or if a change needs to occur. The student's performance in each individual subject will be considered and, depending on the information and data reviewed, a change may involve just one subject or multiple subjects. As with any IEP team decision, the needs of the individual student are always the primary consideration when looking at what is the least restrictive environment.

- 2. **Disproportionality:** Using your data by primary eligibility, describe your district data, including disproportionate participation on the alternate assessment and a plan for reducing/eliminating disproportionality.

Since the Sweetwater City School system is such a small system, the addition of one student scheduled to take the alternate assessment, can create a disproportionate participation on the alternate assessment. The 1% cap for the system has been 9 students for the last several years. A review of the number of each student within each

disability category also reveals that there are currently more students who meet the disability criteria in the low incidence categories (i.e. intellectually disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities). These statistics can further be noted in the fact that the system's SWD percentage (20.2%) continues to be higher than the state's percentage (13.5%). A review of the students scheduled to take the test revealed that the system has currently identified 8 students who meet the criteria and are scheduled to take the alternate assessment.

Students in this district with significant cognitive disabilities who are participating in alternative assessments fall within the categories of intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities. Characteristics of these students include significant deficits in receptive/expressive communication, cognitive functioning, processing deficits, and adaptive behavior skills across a wide range of settings. District IEP teams collect and organize evidence before making a decision about whether a student meets all of the criteria for participation. IEP teams utilize the Department of Education's Participation Guidelines, Checklist, and Decision Flowchart to assist in collecting and reviewing evidence to determine whether it is appropriate for an individual student to participate in alternate assessments. Students are determined to have a significant disability when it significantly impacts cognitive function and adaptive behavior which prevent the student from meaningful participation in the general academic core curriculum or achievement of the standards at their enrolled grade level. Additionally, the student's disability causes dependence on others for many, and sometimes all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive ongoing support in adulthood. The student is unable to apply academic, life, and job skills in home, school, and community without intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction and supports in multiple settings. The student's demonstrated cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior across these settings is significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations, and accommodations. Our district also serves students with significant cognitive disabilities who do not participate in alternative assessments because they do not meet those guidelines.

3. **Informed Parent Participation:** Describe the process and practices used to adequately inform parents of the eligibility requirements and implications of participation to ensure active parent participate in the IEP team discussion.

Whenever the IEP team discusses the possibility of a student taking the alternate assessment instead of the regular test, several pieces of information are reviewed during the meeting and with the parent. The school psychologist reviews in detail the psycho-educational assessment that includes the data that was utilized to determine the area of disability that a student meets. The three eligibility criteria to take the alternate assessment are reviewed. The team discusses the student's ability to achieve state grade level achievement expectations with accommodations and/or modifications which may preclude the student from taking the alternate assessment. The fact that participation in the alternate assessment means that the student is participating in a curriculum that will not lead to a high school diploma is clearly stated to all IEP team members, with specific focus on ensuring that the parents understand and are in agreement with this.

4. **Support Requested:** Please detail any support needed from the department. (All reasonable requests for supports will be considered.)

It is requested that the department continue to disseminate any additional guidance materials that are available and could be used by IEP teams when making decisions regarding a student's program.

Assurance: The district is committed to ensuring all students are participating in the most appropriate assessments. Students determined eligible for the alternate assessment will meet the three criteria.

Signed: Bethany Hughes Date: February 3, 2023