



**Alternate Assessment Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAAS)  
Participation Plan  
August 1, 2019**

**Background Information**

On June 4, 2019, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) received a letter from the United States Department of Education (USED). The letter stated that FDOE, during the 2017-18 school year, had rates of AA-AAAS participation that were relatively high in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science (i.e., rates greater than 1.3%) without a waiver. The letter also stated that the USED would be placing a grant condition on Florida’s 2019 fiscal year Title I, Part A award and required Florida to submit a plan by August 1, 2019, to reduce the rate of AA-AAAS participation in future years to come into compliance with the 1.0 percent requirement. The state must also demonstrate that progress has been made in reducing the participation of students on alternate assessments in the 2018-19 school year by submitting data on participation on these students to ED*Facts* no later than October 1, 2019.

**Current Situation**

Florida is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest state in the country, with a population of 21.6 million people. There are approximately 2.8 million students in 4,200 public schools in Florida. In 2018-19, the number of Florida students with disabilities (SWD) was 401,745, which represents a steady increase from 350,816 in 2013-14. The percentage of SWD in the total student population grew as well, from 12.9% in 2013-14 to 14.1% in 2018-19.

Category	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
# of Students Enrolled	2,756,944	2,792,234	2,817,076	2,833,115	2,846,857
# of Students Identified as SWD	357,965	367,293	377,272	385,447	401,627
% of Students Identified as SWD	13.0%	13.2%	13.4%	13.6%	14.1%

The FDOE exists to increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system, by providing them with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities, and to maintain an accountability system that measures student progress.

Florida maintains high expectations for all students. No student in Florida is considered uneducable and all Florida students work toward a diploma. These high expectations have resulted in an increased level of student performance. Florida’s high school graduation rate has risen from 76.1% in 2013-14 to 86.1% in 2017-18 and the high school graduation rate for SWD has increased in the same period from 55.1% to 77%. The graduation gap between SWD and all students was 21 percentage points in 2013-14 and decreased to 9.1 percentage points in 2017-18.

## The Florida Standards Alternate Assessment

The Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) is designed for students whose participation in the general statewide assessment program (Florida Standards Assessments, Statewide Science Assessment, Next Generation Sunshine State Standards End-of-Course Assessments) is not appropriate, even with accommodations. The FSAA measures student academic performance on the Access Points in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Access Points are academic expectations written specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities: they reflect the essence or core intent of the standards that apply to all students in the same grade, but at reduced levels of complexity. It is expected that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will participate in the FSAA program.

Mirroring IDEA (Title 34, CFR section 300.320(a)(6)(ii)), [section 1008.22\(3\)\(c\), Florida Statutes \(F.S.\)](#), requires that the decision that a student with a significant cognitive disability will participate in the FSAA is made by the IEP team and recorded on the IEP. [Rule 6A-6.0331\(10\)\(a\)1, Florida Administrative Code \(F.A.C.\)](#), mandates that parental consent be obtained before the administration of an alternate assessment and provision of instruction on access points take place.

Before a student is placed on access points and assessed via the FSAA the following criteria must be met:

- a) Student has a significant cognitive disability.
- b) Even with appropriate and allowable instructional accommodations, assistive technology, or accessible instructional materials, the student requires modifications, as defined in paragraph [6A-6.03411\(1\)\(z\), F.A.C.](#), to the grade-level general state content standards pursuant to [Rule 6A-1.09401, F.A.C.](#); and,
- c) The student requires direct instruction in academic areas of English language arts, math, social studies, and science based on Access Points, pursuant to [Rule 6A-1.09401, F.A.C.](#), in order to acquire, generalize, and transfer skills across settings.

[Rule 6A-6.03028, F.A.C.](#), entitles students with disabilities to educational programs that are individualized to fit specific needs. Each program must meet the child's unique abilities, provide access to the general education curriculum, and meet State grade level standards. Decisions to place students on alternate academic standards must be based on data, and follow the requirements established by the IDEA and Florida Statutes and Florida State Board of Education Rules.

### Florida Assessment Participation Rates

Year	English Language Arts			Mathematics			Science		
	% Tested All	% Tested SWD	% Taking Alternate Assessment	% Tested All	% Tested SWD	% Taking Alternate Assessment	% Tested All	% Tested SWD	% Taking Alternate Assessment
2015-16	97.04%	94.62%	1.4%	96.95%	95.04%	1.2%	97.36%	94.33%	1.4%
2016-17	97.41%	95.20%	1.4%	97.46%	95.54%	1.4%	97.29%	94.63%	1.6%
2017-18	97.57%	94.99%	1.4%	97.89%	95.80%	1.5%	97.57%	94.65%	1.5%
2018-19	97.92%	96.07%	1.5%	97.91%	96.41%	1.6%	97.72%	95.67%	1.6%

Students in Florida who are most likely to have a significant cognitive disability are those who have been determined eligible for the exceptionalities Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disability (InD) and Other Health Impairments (OHI). In 2013-14, Florida public schools served 80,905 students in these three eligibility categories and they accounted for 24% of all SWD. In 2018-19 this number increased to 111,120 and 28% of all SWD. Therefore, it is to be expected that the number and percentage of students who take Access Courses and are assessed on the FSAA would increase.

Florida will be submitting a 1% Cap Waiver request for the 2019-20 assessment, which is the first year Florida has been eligible to apply for a waiver in all three subject areas since the 1% participation cap went into effect, based on our 2018-19 results.

#### Florida’s Collaboration with the National Center of Educational Outcomes (NCEO)

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) actively engages in opportunities for technical assistance provided by federal technical assistance centers, including NCEO. Florida’s required State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) for students with disabilities is based on the *Six Key Practices of Moving Your Numbers*, an NCEO developed product.

In October 2018, the FDOE sent a team to the NCEO Convening in Boston and was asked to present two plenary sessions, *The Decision for Alternate Assessment* and *Ensuring Equity and Access for All*. In addition to the convening, FDOE and its discretionary project staff have been participating in the NCEO 1% PEER Learning Groups; *Digging into Your Data: Building a One Percent Analysis* and *Evaluating District Justification for Exceeding the One Percent Threshold*. Participation in the *Building Capacity of IEP Teams and Parents in Making Decisions about Assessments Participation* PLG will begin on October 2, 2019.

#### Florida’s Support Plan

Florida provides a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) to assist LEAs in problem solving and making data-based decisions. Tier 1 (universal supports) includes general, statewide support designed to inform, assist, and improve results for all districts. Tier 2 (supplemental supports) includes more focused, targeted, frequent support in addition to and aligned with universal supports provided to subgroups of districts in response to identified needs. Tier 3 (intensive supports) is the most focused, targeted, frequent support in addition to and aligned with universal supports that are provided to individual districts in response to identified needs.

## Tier 1: Core Universal Professional Development and Supports

Available to all LEAs to improve the implementation of participation guidelines.

1. An [Assessment Planning Resource Guide for the IEP Team](#), which includes the definition of significant cognitive disability and a decision tree for IEP teams.
2. Annual Florida Alternate Assessment Alternate Assessment Coordinators (ACC) Meeting, and District Assessment Coordinators (DAC) meeting hosted by the FDOE. In 2019 this event will be held in mid-October. The document noted above will be reviewed and additional guidance will be provided.
3. A technical assistance paper (DPS-208, May 5, 2017) titled [Statewide Assessment for Students with Disabilities](#) includes information on the requirements for participation in the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment. A Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation (Appendix B) is also provided to assist LEA's in making the appropriate decisions.
4. All LEAs have their ESE Policies and Procedures (SP&P) approved and posted online at <https://beessgsw.org/spp/institution/public> by the FDOE. The SP&P includes a section (Part 2, Section E) on the LEA's Participation in State and District Assessments, including information on the FSAA.
5. During one or more monthly technical assistance calls that are held during the school year, information on the FSAA is provided. The LEAs are encouraged to call or email FDOE for technical assistance at any time.
6. Guidance and specific technical assistance is provided at annual Intellectual Disabilities (InD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and Other Health Impairment (OHI) state and regional contacts' meetings.
7. During the annual Administrators' Management Meeting (AMM), which will be held December in 2019, technical assistance regarding the FSAA and participation rates will be provided.
8. All educators who administer the FSAA are required to complete a training on the administration of the FSAA. Information regarding how to appropriately determine if a student should be on Access Points and assessed on the FSAA will be added to the training.
9. The Exceptional Student Education Director in each district is sent an annual email containing a table indicating the number and percentage of students who have taken the alternate assessment. Data on the primary exceptionality of students taking Access Courses is provided and districts are reminded of the following:
  - a) Only students determined to have a significant cognitive disability may be enrolled in Access Courses (Rule 6A-1.0943(5), F.A.C.)
  - b) Students determined to have a specific learning disability (SLD) have been determined NOT to have a significant cognitive disability and should not be enrolled in Access Courses (Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C.).
  - c) Students enrolled in Access Courses must be assessed using the FSAA.

## **Tier 2: Targeted Professional Development, Interventions, and Supports**

More focused, targeted professional development/intervention and supplemental support in addition to the core universal professional development and supports.

1. District- and school-level personnel responsible for attending IEP meetings will be encouraged to participate in FSAA training.
2. The FDOE will review school level FSAA participation data, including a comparison of the number of students taking Access Courses and the number taking the FSAA, and provide targeted professional development, technical assistance and support. This will include, but not be limited to, following up with districts to ensure that they have reviewed and acted upon the information provided to them in strategy 9, above and that they are taking measures to ensure that only students enrolled in Access Courses take the FSAA.
3. Districts with over 1% of their students on FSAA will provide a justification\*, which must include a reason for the overage, as part of the annual SP&P update process. This information will be reviewed and approved by FDOE prior to publishing online.

## **Tier 3: Intensive Individualized Interventions and Supports**

More frequently focused, targeted instruction/intervention and supplemental support in addition to and aligned with the core universal professional development, interventions, and supports.

1. District and school level personnel responsible for IEP meetings will be required to attend FSAA training.
2. The FDOE will review student level FSAA participation data and provide targeted and individualized professional development, technical assistance and support. This may include addressing disproportionality in the percentage of students taking the FSAA and assisting with strategies needed to move a student or students from Access Points and the FSAA to the general standards and assessments.
3. Districts with over 1% of their students on FSAA will provide a justification\*, which must include a reason for the overage, as part of the annual SP&P update process. This information will be reviewed and approved by FDOE prior to publishing online.

### **\* Justification Requirement**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), limits the percentage of students that a State may assess with an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) to no more than 1.0 percent of all assessed students in the grades assessed in a State for each subject. While there is a limit on the percentage of students statewide who may take the AA-AAAS, there is no such limit among local educational agencies (LEAs). However, 34 CFR 200.6(c)(3)(ii) and (iv) requires that an LEA submit information justifying the need to assess more than 1.0 percent of its students in any subject with an AA-AAAS. The State must make that information publicly available, provided that such information does not reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student.

Florida will, of course, comply with this requirement. The required justification information will be collected via the annual SP&P. However, the focus of Florida's training and technical assistance will continue to be on ensuring that IEP teams make the appropriate, individualized, and data-based decision for each student.