

September 19, 2016

Dear Special Education Director and District Assessment Coordinator:

Greetings! We want to keep all districts informed regarding a significant change made by the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) regarding student participation rates in the alternate assessment, which in Wisconsin is the Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment. 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). This 1% cap is at the state level.

ESSA further requires that a school district exceeding the 1% cap in any subject must submit a justification to the department, and the department must provide appropriate oversight to that district. State/districts must still meet the 95% participation rate for students enrolled in tested grades. Previously, 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

Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should be participating in the alternate assessment, and no student should take the alternate assessment unless they are also participating in the alternate academic achievement standards.

What are Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?

In Wisconsin, the alternate academic achievement standards are the [Wisconsin Essential Elements](#) in English language arts, math and science. The Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements are specific statements of knowledge and skills linked to the grade-level expectations identified in the Wisconsin Academic Standards. The purpose of the Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements is to build a bridge from the content in the Wisconsin Academic Standards to academic expectations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Who are students with the most Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

The term “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities” refers to a child with a disability or disabilities receiving special education that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and supports, and is learning content in all academic areas based on alternate academic achievement standards.

The identification of a student as having a particular disability shall not determine whether or not a student is a student with the most significant cognitive disability; and a student with the most significant cognitive disability cannot be identified because of previous low academic achievement, status as an English learner, cultural/economic difference, or previous need for accommodations to participate in general State or districtwide assessments.

Next Steps

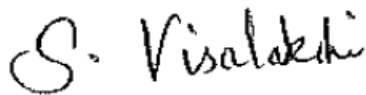
The department will notify all districts of their participation rates based upon the 2015-16 Alternate Assessment, outline Wisconsin's system of oversight and the response required from districts by December 2016. Based upon this letter, districts may be required to complete additional training and evaluate appropriateness of current Alternate Assessment placements prior to when ESSA takes effect in the 17-18 academic year.

We would like to thank you for all your efforts in ensuring that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are participating in the alternate assessment (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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Van Haren".

Barbara Van Haren, PhD
Director of Special Education
Division for Learning Support

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Visalakshi".

Visalakshi Somasundaram
Director of Student Assessment
Division for Student and School Success