

Florida Department of Education

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Justification for Exceeding the 1% Cap Participation Action Plan (AP)

LEA: School Board of Highlands County

Please select one:

My LEA **does not expect to exceed** one percent of the number of assessed students participating in the Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) in the 2025-26 school year (SY).

My LEA **expects to exceed** one percent of the number of assessed students participating in the FAA in the 2025-26 SY.

Please check the LEA size.

Small

Medium

Large

Very Large

1.	<p>How has your LEA reviewed the data for assessment participation to make informed decisions for implementation?</p> <p>The Highland County School Board monitors and addresses overrepresentation in Reading, Mathematics, and Science to ensure appropriate participation in the FSAA program. Eligibility is determined using the Assessment Participation Checklist in PEER, supported by guidance from the IEP.Team.Guide.to.Assessment.for.Students.with.Disabilities, which is provided to decision-makers through the ESE Handbook, website, annual LEA training, and school-level ESE meetings. Psychologists provide input for first-time Alternate Assessment considerations, and scores more than two standard deviations below the mean on IQ assessments are taken into account. The district also completes the FDOE FSAA Assurances annually to confirm that all students assessed via the FSAA meet eligibility criteria for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.</p>
2.	<p>What are your LEA's percentages of students that participated in the FAA in the 2024-25 SY in each of the following subjects?</p> <p>ELA: 2.2% Math: 2.4% Science: 2.1%</p>
3.	<p>What is your LEA's projection for the percentage of students participating in the FAA in the upcoming SY in each of the following subjects?</p> <p>ELA: 2.2% Math: 2.4%</p>

	Science: 2.1%
4.	<p>What are your LEA's percentages of students participating in the Florida Assessment for Student Thinking (FAST) 3-10 Progress Monitoring and End-of-Course (EOC) assessments in the 2024-25 SY in each of the following subjects?</p> <p>ELA: 89.5% Math: 90% Science: 89.8%</p>
5.	<p>What is your LEA's projection for the percentage of students participating in the FAST 3-10 Progress Monitoring and EOC assessments in the upcoming SY in each of the following subjects?</p> <p>ELA: 90.9% Math: 91% Science: 90.6%</p>
6.	<p>Are there unique circumstances in the LEA that might draw large numbers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to live in the LEA, which in turn might result in more than one percent of students participating in the FAA? If so, describe those unique circumstances (i.e., migrant families, military bases, hospitals, rehabilitation centers or student enrollment).</p> <p>Highlands County is a small, rural district with a community significantly impacted by poverty. The lower cost of living relative to larger areas contributes to the affordability and appeal of the district for families. Due to the relatively small student population, percentages reflecting participation in ACCESS courses can be easily skewed. According to DATA USA, 15.4% of children in Highlands County live in poverty. Additionally, in 2024, 11.5% of the population experienced severe housing challenges. Over 94% of the district's students are identified as economically disadvantaged.</p>
7.	<p>List the percentages of the following primary/secondary exceptional categories in your LEA for students participating in the FAA in the 2025-26 SY for each of the following:</p> <p>Intellectual Disability (InD): 7.7% Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): 2.9% Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): 0.1% Other Health Impairment (OHI): 0.2%</p>
8.	<p>After reviewing your data on students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, were there any patterns that emerged? For example, were students who attended a specific class or school more likely to participate in the alternate assessment? Does the participation rate vary?</p>

	<p>The two largest schools in the district, both high schools, have the highest number of students participating in the FAA. Participation rates vary between the schools, with High School #1 at 21% and High School #2 at 11%.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Regarding the participation of students in alternate assessments, is the LEA aware of any disproportionate representation of students in the following subgroups: English Language Learners, African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, male/female students or low-income students? If so, please describe the steps the LEA will take in the coming year (or the steps already taken) to find the root cause and reduce the impact of any disproportionate representation of students in the above-referenced subgroups among those taking the FAA.</p> <p>Fifty percent of the students participating in the FAA are Hispanic/Latino. Within the district’s overall student population, Hispanic and White students each represent approximately 40 percent. Additionally, more than 94 percent of the district’s students are identified as economically disadvantaged.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>How will the LEA seek to assess 95% participation in all assessments, including students with disabilities in all grades and subjects? Review your individual educational plan (IEP) data and identification practices to identify the root cause of why the LEA is under the 95% participation rate and over the 1% threshold for students participating in the FAA.</p> <p>During the 2024-2025 school year, Highlands County achieved an LEA participation rate exceeding 95%. The District Assessment Coordinator collaborates closely with School Assessment Coordinators to monitor student test eligibility and completion rates, ensuring that both the district and individual schools consistently surpass the state’s minimum participation requirement of 95%.</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p>How are IEP decisions in all schools within your LEA consistently implementing the state’s guidelines and criteria regarding which students should take the FAA? (Please consider using the “Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation” for IEP team meetings within your LEA.)</p> <p>During the IEP meeting, the team answers the question, “Is the IEP team considering assessment on the Florida statewide, standardized alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?” Rules 6A-1.0943(5) and 6A-6.0331(10)(a), F.A.C. If the answer is YES, the committee then answers the questions/criteria under State Board Rule 6A-1.0943(5).</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>Describe the process and required evidence of finding a student eligible to participate in the FAA using all the criteria in Rule 6A-1.0943, Florida Administrative Code.</p> <p>The School Board of Highlands County uses PEER for IEPs Per PEER, “FLDOE’s Florida statewide, standardized alternate assessment Participation Guidelines</p>

	<p>support the IEP team’s decision-making process to determine whether the student will participate in the Florida statewide, standardized alternate assessment through the Performance Task or the Datafolio.” The following criteria must also be met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Even with appropriate and allowable instructional accommodations, assistive technology or accessible instructional materials, the student requires modifications as defined in Rule 6A-1.09401, F.A.C. and B. The student requires direct instruction in academic areas of English language arts (ELA), 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.
<p>13.</p>	<p>Has your LEA removed students from participating in the FAA using state guidelines? If so, please provide more information, such as how many, what process was followed and any other feedback.</p> <p>Yes, one student was identified during the 2024-2025 school year. During IEP meetings, the LEA, ESE teacher, or Program Staffing Specialist documents eligibility for FAST or FAA within PEER. This process serves as the district’s primary method for ensuring compliance with state guidelines and verifying that students participate in the appropriate statewide assessment. In cases where a student is exited from participation in the FAA, a reevaluation is conducted to determine appropriate placement and assessment.</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Describe how the LEA informs parents, families and students of the instruction in Access Points – Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and participation in the FAA, as well as the possible implications of this instruction and participation. How is it provided in the parent or student’s native language? How often is this information provided?</p> <p>Instruction in ACCESS Points is reviewed annually during IEP meetings. The consent form available in PEER is utilized to inform parents, families, and students about ACCESS Points instruction. This form is provided in paper format and is thoroughly reviewed and discussed with the family. Additionally, the link within PEER offers the form in ten different languages to support accessibility. The implications of ACCESS Points instruction are also discussed with parents during initial evaluations and transition IEP meetings.</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p>Describe how IEP teams will review the assessment data of students with advanced proficiency or perfect scores in one or more content area, and consider whether these students could participate in the general statewide progress monitoring (FAST) or EOCs with necessary supports and accommodations.</p> <p>IEP teams will meet each year to review and discuss the assessment data and together will consider and determine if the student could participate in FAST PM/ or EOCs and whether supports/accommodations are necessary.</p>

16.	<p>Describe your LEA's AP to assist schools in verifying the validity of the number of students taking the alternate assessment. The plan should include actionable steps and how the LEA will monitor progress or address challenges (it should not be the state's guidelines reiterated).</p> <p>Highlands County continues to strengthen its Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and initial eligibility determination processes to promote the implementation of best practices. In addition, the efficiency of the Pre-K Child Find process has been enhanced to ensure timely identification, eligibility determination, and the initiation of interventions at the earliest opportunity.</p>
17.	<p>Describe any improvement activities implemented by your LEA in the 2024-25 SY. Were they effective? If not, please describe why your LEA feels that they were not effective and what your next steps are.</p> <p>The district is actively working to transition students from modified curricula to general education standards. This initiative has been effective in increasing the inclusion of students in general education classrooms alongside their peers, although measurable changes in outcomes have not yet been observed.</p>
18.	<p>Describe your LEA's AP. List your progress monitoring activity and data source that will assist in determining the effectiveness of the AP. Identify the persons responsible for monitoring the progress of the AP.</p> <p>A designee at the school monitors the progress. Students take iReady (K-5), STAR (K-5), Dibels (K-5), HMH Growth Measurement Benchmark for ELA (Middle), NWEA Map Assessment, English 1-4. If a student is on alternate academic achievement standards is unable to assess using these assessments, the student uses assessments via Encore (TeachTown).</p>
19.	<p>What professional learning will your staff complete for the 2025-26 SY?</p> <p>The district will ensure that LEA training is accessible to all schools. In addition, projects such as FDLERS Heartland, ISR, and FIN will continue to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities throughout the year. Furthermore, annual training will be conducted for Staffing Specialists and School Psychologists to review district-specific procedures to be followed when a global, full-scale intelligence quotient score cannot be obtained.</p>
20.	<p>What other additional actions does your LEA plan to implement to ensure the reduction of the percentage of students participating in the FAA?</p> <p>The district has designated a Program Staffing Specialist to oversee and monitor data related to students participating in the FAA. This 1% data will be systematically reviewed during District-Level Staffing Specialist meetings to ensure compliance and informed decision-making.</p>

By submitting this LEA justification AP, the LEA verifies that all the information provided is valid and accurate and can provide any requested documentation of evidence.

Mrenda Longshore

Signature of Superintendent

10/1/25

Date

[Signature]

Signature of Exceptional Student Education
Director

10/01/2025

Date

[Signature] Director of MIS

Signature of Director of Data

10/1/25

Date