Florida Department of Education

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

LEA: _____Sumter County School District_____

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.

☐ **X** Small   ☐ Medium   ☐ Large   ☐ Very Large

1.	***How has your LEA reviewed the data for assessment participation to make informed decisions for implementation?*** **Individual Student Review and Eligibility Verification:** Because we are a small district, with only 76 students participating in the alternate assessment, it is both manageable and practical to review each student individually. This allows us to ensure that every student is appropriately identified as needing to take the Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA). As part of this process, we also examined a sample of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to confirm that participation decisions were based on the state's established eligibility criteria and accurately reflected each student's instructional needs. **Data Analysis of Participation Rates**: We examined historical and current participation rates in alternate assessments across schools and grade levels to identify trends, anomalies, and areas needing attention. We have decreased the number of students participating in FAA from the year prior, we still anticipate that we will maintain the current FAA participation rate of approximately 1.3 - 1.5 percent.
2.	***What are your LEA's percentages of students that participated in the FAA in the 2024-25 SY in each of the following subjects?*** ELA: 1.1% Math: 1.3% Science: 1.5%
3.	***What is your LEA's projection for the percentage of students participating in the FAA in the 2025-26 SY in each of the following subjects?*** ELA: 1.2% Math: 1.4% Science: 1.5%

4.	***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?*** ELA: 90% Math: 83% Science: 91%
5.	***What is your LEA's projection for the percentage of students participating in the FAST 3-10 Progress Monitoring and EOC assessments in the 2025-26 SY in each of the following subjects?*** ELA: 92% Math: 88% Science: 94%
6.	***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).*** Between 2020 and 2025, Sumter County's population grew by over 26%, making it the fastest-growing county in Florida. Wildwood, in particular, was named the fastest-growing place in the U.S. in 2025. The primary driver of growth is the continued expansion of *The Villages*, a massive and nationally recognized retirement community. While it attracts mostly older adults, the surrounding areas, like Wildwood, are seeing a boom in younger families and working-age residents. **Rising Enrollment**: The Sumter County School District saw a **10% increase in student enrollment** in just one year—from 9,000 to 10,000 students. This is a significant jump for a relatively small district.
7.	***List the percentages of the following primary/secondary exceptionality categories in your LEA for students participating in the FAA in the 2025-26 SY for each of the following:*** Intellectual Disability (InD): 6% Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): 8.5% Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): 0.1% Other Health Impairment (OHI): 18%
8.	***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?*** After reviewing our data on students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, no unusual patterns or anomalies were identified. Participation in the alternate assessment appears to be consistent across schools and classrooms, with decisions aligning appropriately with the eligibility criteria. There were no indications that students from a particular school or instructional setting were disproportionately represented. Additionally, the participation rate does not show significant variation and remains within expected ranges, suggesting that IEP teams are making thoughtful, individualized decisions based on student needs. Overall,

	the data supports that our practices are in alignment with state and federal guidelines for alternate assessment participation.

9.	***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.***
	
	Based on the provided data, the LEA **is aware** of disproportionate representation in several student subgroups participating in alternate assessments (FAA). The subgroups with representation rates above 1% include:
	    • **Black students**: 1.40%
	    • **Hispanic students**: 1.38%
	    • **Students eligible for Free-Reduced Lunch (low-income)**: 1.47%
	    • **Male students**: 1.29%
	
	All other categories are below 1%, indicating no significant disproportionality in those groups.
	
	To address this, the LEA will take the following steps in the coming year (or has already begun implementing them):
	
	Root Cause Analysis: Conduct a thorough review of referral, evaluation, and placement processes to determine why these subgroups are overrepresented. This includes analyzing academic performance data, teacher referral patterns, and access to general education curriculum.
	
	Professional Development: Provide targeted training for educators and evaluators on culturally responsive practices, implicit bias, and appropriate use of alternate assessments.
	
	Review of IEP Decision-Making: Ensure that IEP teams are using standardized criteria and considering all supports before recommending alternate assessments, especially for students from historically marginalized groups.

10.	***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.***
	The district has successfully achieved 95% or higher participation in assessments, including for students with disabilities. To maintain this, the LEA will continue monitoring participation rates, provide staff training on inclusive assessment practices, and ensure accommodations are properly implemented through IEPs.
	To address exceeding the 1% threshold for students in the Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA), the LEA will review IEP data and identification practices to ensure FAA eligibility aligns with state criteria. A root cause analysis will be conducted to identify patterns in placement decisions, and corrective actions will be taken where needed. Clear expectations will be communicated to schools, and leaders will be held accountable for appropriate assessment participation.

11.	***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.)***
	In our LEA, IEP teams consistently implement the state's guidelines and criteria for determining which students should participate in the Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) by using the "Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation" during all IEP meetings. This checklist ensures that decisions are made based on the student's present level of educational performance in relation to Florida's academic achievement standards. IEP teams are trained to understand and apply the eligibility and exclusionary criteria outlined by the Florida Department of Education.
	To be eligible for FAA, a student must be receiving ESE services through a current IEP, be enrolled in courses aligned with Access Points for two consecutive full-time equivalent reporting periods and require modifications to the general education curriculum even after all allowable accommodations and supports have been exhausted. Additionally, the student must have a most significant cognitive disability, as evidenced by a full-scale cognitive score within the first percentile or through an approved district procedure when a score is not obtainable.
	IEP teams are also careful to apply exclusionary criteria, ensuring that students are not placed in Access Points or assessed via FAA due to poor academic performance, behavioral challenges, language barriers, or lack of exposure to the general curriculum. All decisions are documented in the IEP, and parental consent is obtained when a student is instructed using Access Points and assessed through FAA.
	To maintain consistency across schools, the LEA provides annual training for IEP team members on the guidelines, appropriate use of accommodations, and the implications of Access Point instruction. The LEA also conducts periodic audits of IEPs to ensure compliance with state criteria and the consistent use of the checklist in decision-making.
12.	***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.***
	Eligibility Determination Process
	• The student must be receiving Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services as documented in a current Individual Educational Plan (IEP). This ensures that the student has been formally identified as having a disability and is receiving specialized instruction. • The student must be enrolled in courses aligned to Access Points for at least two consecutive full-time equivalent (FTE) reporting periods prior to the assessment. Access Points are alternate academic achievement standards designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

	- The student must have a most significant cognitive disability, which is defined as a global cognitive impairment that adversely affects multiple areas of functioning across many settings. This impairment must be the result of a congenital, acquired, or traumatic brain injury or syndrome. - The cognitive disability must be verified by one of two methods: 1. A full-scale IQ score of 67 or below, which places the student in the first percentile rank. 2. If a full-scale IQ score is unattainable due to extraordinary circumstances, the district may use a Florida Department of Education-approved alternative procedure to verify the disability. - The student must require extensive, direct instruction and substantial supports to make measurable gains in the curriculum. This means that even with accommodations, the student cannot access the general education curriculum and requires significant modifications. - The student must not be able to participate in the general statewide assessment, even with the full range of allowable accommodations. This decision must be based on comprehensive data and not solely on the student's disability label or placement. **Required Documentation and Evidence** To support the eligibility decision, the IEP team must gather and review the following evidence: - **Psychological evaluation reports** that include cognitive testing results or documentation of why testing was not possible. - **IEP documentation** that clearly states the student's instructional level, curriculum (Access Points), and assessment participation. - **Enrollment records** showing that the student has been in Access Points courses for the required duration. - **Instructional data** demonstrating that the student requires modifications to the general curriculum, even after exhausting all appropriate accommodations and supports. - **Assistive technology and supplementary materials usage records**, showing that these supports were tried but were insufficient for the student to access general standards. - **Parental consent forms**, which must be completed annually. If the parent does not respond after reasonable efforts, the district may proceed. If the parent refuses, the district must prevail in a due process hearing to proceed with FSAA participation.
13.	***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.*** No, our district has not removed students from participating in the FAA using state guidelines. Historically, we have done a thorough and effective job in identifying students who meet the criteria for alternate assessment. Our teams follow the established state guidelines closely to ensure appropriate participation decisions are made, and we have not encountered situations requiring removal from the FAA.

14.	*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?* The district provides an annual written parental consent for students to receive instruction aligned with Access Points and to participate in the FAA. This is done through the Parental Consent Form for Instruction in Access Points and FAA Participation, which includes: • A clear explanation of what Access Points are: simplified versions of grade-level standards designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. • The purpose and nature of the FAA: an alternate assessment aligned with Access Points. Parents must sign this form annually, and LEAs must document reasonable efforts to obtain consent if parents do not respond.
15.	*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.* When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) shows advanced proficiency or perfect scores in one or more content areas, the IEP team reviews all available assessment data. This includes results from statewide assessments like FAST progress monitoring or End-of-Course Exams (EOCs), classroom performance, and other evaluations. The team considers whether the student should continue participating in general statewide assessments and what supports or accommodations are needed. Even if a student performs at a high level, they may still need accommodations to access the test in a way that reflects their true abilities. The team identifies supports that help the student without changing what the test is designed to measure. These decisions are based on the student's individual needs and are documented in the IEP. Unless a student qualifies for alternate assessments due to significant cognitive disabilities, they are expected to participate in general assessments. For high-performing students, the team does not assume they no longer need accommodations or should be excluded from testing. Instead, the team evaluates whether the student continues to benefit from the assessments with appropriate supports. This decision-making process is collaborative, based on data, and reviewed each year to ensure it remains appropriate.
16.	*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).*

Our district ensures that students participating in the FAA meet all eligibility criteria and none of the exclusionary criteria, as outlined by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). This plan is designed to support schools in verifying the validity of the number of students taking the alternate assessment and to promote equitable and informed decision-making by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams.

To begin, the LEA will provide annual professional development for IEP team members. This training will focus on Florida's academic achievement standards, the eligibility and exclusionary criteria for FAA participation, the appropriate use of accommodations and modifications, and the administration and interpretation of cognitive assessments. Decision-making tools such as checklists and flowcharts will be distributed to guide teams through the eligibility determination process.

IEP teams will be required to follow a standardized review process when recommending students for FAA participation. This includes documenting evidence that instructional accommodations, supplementary materials, and assistive technology have been exhausted, and that the student still requires modifications to the general education curriculum. Teams must also provide documentation of the student's global level of cognitive functioning using appropriate assessment instruments that minimize the impact of existing impairments. All eligibility criteria must be met, and none of the exclusionary criteria may apply for a student to be considered for Access Points instruction and FAA participation.

The District ensures that schools use the FDOE Parental Consent Form (Form 313181) to obtain written informed consent before administering the alternate assessment or providing instruction in Access Points. Schools must provide families with clear and accessible information about the implications of Access Points instruction and the FAA program. All efforts to obtain consent, including follow-up communications, must be documented.

To maintain consistency and oversight, the LEA will establish a district-level review team responsible for auditing IEPs that recommend FAA participation. This team will verify that all documentation is complete and accurate and will approve or request revisions as needed. Additionally, the LEA will maintain a centralized database to track students participating in the FAA, including their instructional history, cognitive assessment scores, and trends by school and grade level.

Monitoring will be conducted through annual audits of randomly selected IEPs to ensure compliance with eligibility requirements and proper documentation. Schools will also be required to submit quarterly reports detailing new FAA recommendations, instructional changes, and parental consent status. These reports will help the LEA identify patterns and address any inconsistencies.

To address challenges such as inconsistent application of criteria, the LEA will provide targeted retraining for schools with high participation rates or audit discrepancies. Peer review panels may be used to support IEP teams in complex cases. If documentation is lacking, the LEA will implement standardized IEP templates and require principal sign-off on all FAA recommendations. In cases where parental consent is delayed, the LEA will develop a

	parent outreach protocol that includes multiple contact attempts, translation services, and in-person meetings when necessary.
	Finally, to prevent misidentification, the LEA will use data validation tools to flag students who may not meet FAA criteria, such as those identified with specific learning disabilities or those who previously scored Level 2 or higher on statewide assessments. Any exceptions due to medical documentation will require district-level review and approval.
17.	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.

The district welcomed a new Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Director and several new district-level ESE staff members at the start of the 2025-26 school year. To the best of their knowledge, no formal improvement activities were scheduled or implemented during the 2024-25 school year. However, the newly formed ESE team has already initiated targeted improvement efforts for the current school year by implementing a structured classroom initiative across all schools.

A dedicated Structured Classroom Team has been established to partner with schools in implementing the Structured Teaching Program. This initiative includes:

    a. Hands-on training and modeling of effective instructional strategies.
    b. Support in the consistent use of visual aids, structured schedules, environmental arrangements, token economy systems, and routines.
    c. Empowering model teachers to serve as peer leaders, providing opportunities for observation and ongoing support to fellow educators.

These improvement activities are newly implemented and are currently in progress. While it is too early to fully assess their effectiveness, the district is committed to monitoring outcomes and making data-informed adjustments as needed. The next steps include collecting feedback from school teams, evaluating student outcomes, and refining support strategies to ensure sustainable and impactful improvements in ESE services.

A structured classroom provides elementary students with the optimal environment to learn by offering consistency, clear expectations, and supportive routines. This predictability helps young learners feel safe and focused, which is essential for academic and behavioral success. When students know what to expect and how to behave, they are more likely to stay engaged, follow directions, and participate meaningfully in lessons. This structure also allows teachers to better support diverse learning needs, helping students build independence and confidence.

For students who may be at risk of being identified for Access (special education services), a well-structured classroom can be a powerful preventative tool. It helps maintain momentum in general education by reducing behavioral disruptions, improving self-regulation, and |

	increasing time-on-task. With the right supports in place, students are more likely to thrive in the general education setting, reducing the need for more restrictive interventions.
18.	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.

Objective

To enhance instructional effectiveness and student outcomes in elementary ESE classrooms by implementing a Structured Teaching Program that promotes consistency, predictability, and supportive routines.

Key Activities

- Establishment of a Dedicated Structured Classroom Team to partner with schools in implementing structured teaching practices.
- Hands-On Training and Modeling: Providing direct support to educators through demonstrations of effective instructional strategies.
- Consistent Use of Structured Supports: Including visual aids, structured schedules, environmental arrangements, token economy systems, and routines.
- Empowerment of Model Teachers: Identifying and supporting peer leaders who offer observation opportunities and ongoing mentorship to colleagues.
- Preventative Support for At-Risk Students: Using structured environments to reduce behavioral disruptions and promote success in general education settings.

Progress Monitoring Activities & Data Sources

| Monitoring Activity	Data Source
Classroom observations	Observation checklists, fidelity rubrics
Feedback collection from school teams	Surveys, focus groups, interviews
Evaluation of student outcomes	Academic performance data, behavioral incident reports, attendance records
Monitoring implementation fidelity	Structured Teaching fidelity checklists, coaching logs
Peer support engagement tracking	Logs of peer observations, mentoring sessions
Review of referral rates for Access services	ESE referral data, pre-referral intervention documentation

Responsible Personnel

Robin Meyers, ESE Director
 Jean Grady, Staffing Specialist

Responsibilities include overseeing implementation fidelity, analyzing progress data,

	coordinating feedback loops with school teams, and making data-informed adjustments to the plan.
19.	What professional learning will your staff complete for the 2025-26 SY? **District ESE-Focused Professional Development Calendar (2025–2026)** This document outlines professional development topics for the 2025–2026 school year (August–May), organized by provider. Sessions are scheduled flexibly to meet district needs. **District-Led Trainings** • Structured Classroom Overview - Introduction to designing and maintaining structured environments that support student success. • Executive Functioning - Strategies to support students with planning, organization, and self-regulation challenges. • Classroom Management and Behavior Interventions - Practical tools and techniques to promote positive behavior and reduce disruptions. • Communication Support Systems - Enhancing student communication through AAC, visual supports, and other tools. • Visual Schedules - Using visual schedules to increase independence and reduce anxiety in students. • Environmental Arrangement in the Classroom - Designing classroom spaces to support engagement, accessibility, and behavior. **FDLRS-Led Training** • IEP Data-Driven Goal Writing - Best practices for writing measurable, standards-based IEP goals aligned with student needs. **SEDNET-Led Trainings** • Reward Systems - Creating effective reinforcement systems to motivate and support student behavior. • Behavior Plans - Developing individualized behavior intervention plans based on data and student needs. • Alternatives to Suspension - Exploring proactive and restorative approaches to discipline that keep students engaged. • Replacement Behaviors - Teaching appropriate behaviors to replace challenging ones through targeted instruction. • Understanding Behaviors - Analyzing behavior functions and applying interventions that address root causes. • Trauma-Informed Practices - Understanding the impact of trauma and implementing supportive, responsive strategies.

|	
	Implementation Support • PLC Integration: Encourage follow-up discussions in Professional Learning Communities. • Flexible Delivery: Offer sessions in-person, virtually, or hybrid to accommodate staff.
20.	What other additional actions does your LEA plan to implement to ensure the reduction of the percentage of students participating in the FAA? **Strict Adherence to Eligibility Criteria** The district is reinforcing the use of clearly defined eligibility criteria for FAA participation. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, as verified by standardized assessments or approved district procedures, are considered eligible. This helps prevent over-identification and ensures that only appropriate students are assessed via FAA. **Enhanced IEP Team Decision-Making** IEP teams are being trained to use structured decision-making tools, such as the Checklist for Course and Assessment Participation, to guide discussions about assessment options. These tools help ensure that decisions are based on documented evidence and not assumptions.

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.
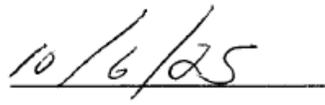
10/6/25
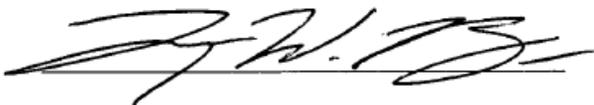
Signature of Superintendent   Date

10/6/25
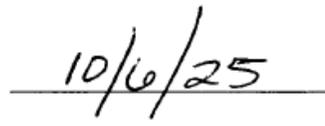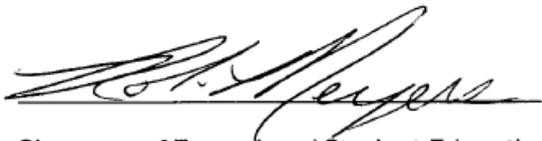
Signature of Exceptional Student Education
Director   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Director of Data   Date