

STAAR Alternate 2

Local Education Agency Explanation and Assurances Summary

Over the past few years, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has requested a waiver from the United States Department of Education (USDE) regarding the 1.0 percent state cap on the number of students statewide who participate in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) Alternate 2. The latest waiver request is available on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Resources](#) webpage.

Based on spring 2019 data (the latest data available), TEA identified 783 local education agencies (LEAs) out of over 1,200 Texas public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools with participation rates exceeding 1.0 percent. As a part of Texas' plan to make progress on assessing only students with significant cognitive disabilities, these LEAs were notified and required to complete an explanation and assurances form using their STAAR Alternate 2 participation data. Out of the 783 LEAs identified, 765 LEAs provided responses, which informed TEA's plan to make substantial progress toward meeting the requirement to assess no more than 1.0 percent of students statewide with an alternate assessment.

The explanation and assurances form required each LEA exceeding the 1.0 percent rate to report primary disability information for the students who were assessed with STAAR Alternate 2. Table 1 shows the number of students assessed in each disability category as reported by LEAs.

Table 1. Primary disability information for students assessed with STAAR Alternate 2

Primary Disability	Number of Students Assessed with STAAR Alternate 2
Auditory Impairment	281
Autism	14,070
Deaf-Blindness	92
Emotional Disturbance	339
Intellectual Disability	25,685
Other Health Impaired	4,236
Orthopedic Impairment	634
Specific Learning Disability	181
Speech Impairment	220
Traumatic Brain Injury	314
Visual Impairment	378

Section 1 of the form asked LEAs to indicate how all members of the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee have been trained on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Participation Requirements](#) for assessment decisions for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

LEAs responded to this question by indicating the training opportunities that were provided to school personnel and parents regarding state assessment decisions for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Some LEAs reported that multiple trainings were provided. This information helps TEA understand what training resources should be developed in the future. Table 2 describes the number of LEAs who reported they had

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conducted particular types of training, the audience for the training, and the mode in which the training was delivered.

Table 2. STAAR Alternate 2 training provided to LEA staff and parents

		Target Audience			
		School administrators	Special education staff	Parents	Related service staff
Training Mode	Face-to-face training	658	717	330	538
	Web-based resources	359	401	134	298
	Provided guidance documents	562	575	505	503
	No training provided	4	2	74	47

LEAs were given the opportunity to describe other training that was provided to school staff that did not fit into the categories above. Twenty-eight LEAs indicated that reviewing the STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirement questions and assurances served as training during the ARD committee meeting. Six LEAs included information specifically related to the STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements that is provided to evaluation specialists. Three LEAs commented that related service professionals are contracted through outside sources and receive their training by entities outside of the LEA. One LEA specifically described training that is provided to general education teachers, and one LEA described STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirement training for foster and surrogate parents.

Section 2 of the form required LEAs to indicate the primary justification for assessing more than 1.0 percent of its student population with STAAR Alternate 2.

Justification 2a. The small district/charter school size results in a greater impact on participation rates (for example, a district size of 180 student total enrollment with 2 students with significant cognitive disabilities results in a higher than 1.0% participation rate).

Of the LEAs responding, 484 (63.3%) indicated that small student population was the primary contributing factor in having more than 1.0 percent of its students participate in STAAR Alternate 2. Respondents were given number ranges to choose from for their small student enrollment. Table 3 shows the student enrollment ranges for the LEAs that chose small district/charter school as its primary justification.

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Table 3. Student enrollment for LEAs exceeding the 1.0 percent STAAR Alternate 2 participation rate

	Total Student Enrollment						
	0–250 students	251–500 students	501–750 students	751–1000 students	1001–1250 students	1251–2000 students	2001+ students
Number of LEAs	96	96	82	52	47	67	44

Justification 2b. The district or charter school includes school, community, or health program(s) that draw large numbers of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

TEA acknowledges that some LEAs include special programs within its attendance zone that attract students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and their families. Out of the 765 LEAs that responded, 195 (25.5%) indicated that a nearby school, community, or health program is the primary contributing factor to having more than 1.0 percent of its students participate in STAAR Alternate 2. Table 4 shows the number of LEAs that indicated having a particular type of special program in its area.

Table 4. Special program impacting STAAR Alternate 2 participation rates

Number of LEAs	Type of special program reported
46	The district/charter school area contains group homes, residential facilities, children’s homes, regional day schools, or state schools.
20	The district/charter school area contains special medical or mental health facilities for children with significant cognitive disabilities.
25	The district/charter school provides access to social services for children with significant cognitive disabilities based on its location in proximity to surrounding rural areas.
61	The district/charter school has a unique approach to special education services and special programs that attracts families to their schools.
14	The district/charter school area contains a military facility that includes children with significant cognitive disabilities as a part of the Exceptional Family Member Program.
29	The district/charter school describes other reasons for drawing larger numbers of families with students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Justification 2c. The ARD committee lacks the necessary knowledge to effectively use the participation requirements when defining a student as having a significant cognitive disability.

When given an opportunity to choose this justification, no LEA identified this as the primary reason for assessing more than 1.0 percent of its students with STAAR Alternate 2. The lack of response for this justification provides

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evidence that LEAs are feeling more confident in their knowledge of the STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements.

Justification 2d. None of the situations above apply.

LEAs were provided an opportunity to describe the circumstances that impact its population of students with significant cognitive disabilities if the other justifications did not apply. One LEA responded that its proximity to prison systems increase its numbers, five LEAs reported that nearby foster care facilities increase its numbers, and three LEAs reported that proximity to state supported living centers increase its numbers. One other LEA reported that it is located in a high poverty area and cited lack of prenatal care results in more children with significant cognitive disabilities. Ten LEAs also reported that they are responsible for providing specialized programs based on shared services arrangements with other LEAs.

Section 3 of the form required LEAs to review and certify each of the following assurances.

- Your district or charter school implements clear and appropriate guidelines, consistent with the STAAR Alternate 2 Participation Requirements, to use in determining when a student's significant cognitive disability justifies participation in the alternate assessment.
- Your district or charter school will address any disproportionality in the percent of students in any subgroup taking STAAR Alternate 2.
- Parents are informed when their student will be assessed based on alternate achievement standards, including information about the implications of participation in STAAR Alternate 2.
- Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are included, to the extent possible, in the general curriculum and assessments aligned with that curriculum.
- Your district or charter school disseminates information and promotes the use of appropriate accommodations to increase the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are tested against grade-level academic achievement standards.
- General and special education teachers and other appropriate staff are knowledgeable about the administration of assessments, including making appropriate use of accommodations for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Each superintendent or chief administrative officer acknowledged the assurances by signature.

The STAAR Alternate 2 Explanation and Assurances form can be found on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Resources](#) webpage.