

STAAR Alternate 2

Local Education Agency Justification

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has requested a waiver from the United States Department of Education (USDE) regarding the 1.0 percent threshold on the percentage of students statewide who participate in alternate assessments aligned with alternate academic achievement standards during the 2018–2019 school year. The waiver request for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) Alternate 2 is available at: [Texas Waiver Request Regarding STAAR Alternate 2](#).

TEA identified over 700 local education agencies (LEAs) that assessed more than 1.0 percent of its students with STAAR Alternate 2 in spring 2018. As part of the waiver request, these LEAs were notified and requested to complete an explanation and assurances form. The justifying explanation and assurance statements are part of TEA’s plan to make substantial progress toward meeting the federal requirement for the state to assess no more than 1.0 percent of students with an alternate assessment. LEAs justifying explanations for the 2018–2019 school year are summarized below.

Question 1. Describe the training opportunities your district/charter school provides to ARD committees regarding making assessment decisions for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

LEAs responded to this open-ended question by describing the training opportunities the district/charter school provided to school personnel regarding state assessment participation requirements for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Some districts/charter schools reported that multiple trainings were provided; therefore, the percentages total more than 100 percent. Table 1 describes the different types of trainings that were reported and the percentage of 779 responding districts/charter schools that reported each type of training.

Table 1

Percent of districts/charters	Type of training reported by districts/charter schools
47.6%	(INTERNAL TRAINING) STAAR Alternate 2 test administrators received internal district/charter training on STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements by local personnel.
36.6%	(INTERNAL TRAINING) All school personnel who attend ARD meetings and take part in assessment decisions received internal district/charter training on STAAR Alternate 2.
47.1%	(INTERNAL TRAINING & REGION TRAINING) STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements training was provided to specific school personnel other than STAAR Alternate 2 test administrators with an emphasis on ARD facilitators, special education evaluation staff, and campus administrators.
38.9%	(REGION TRAINING) STAAR Alternate 2 training was provided from the regional education service center.
1.7%	(STATE-LEVEL TRAINING) District personnel attended STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements training via the Texas Assessment Conference, TCASE, T-SNAP, etc.
14.0%	(TEA WEB RESOURCES) Test administrators were provided guidance or training directly from TEA STAAR Alternate 2 website resources.
18.5%	(OTHER PERSONNEL TRAINED) Supplemental training was provided to support the STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirement process (e.g., STAAR Accommodations, Building an Effective PLAAFP, etc.).
2.8%	(PARENT) Parents received targeted training on STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements beyond the required conversations that take place during the ARD process.

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Question 2. Provide a justification for why your district/charter school has more than 1% of its students participating in STAAR Alternate 2. Complete all that apply.

Question 2a. My district/charter school has a small overall student population, and it takes only a few students participating in STAAR Alternate 2 to exceed 1%.

TEA acknowledges that there are numerous small districts/charter schools in Texas. Out of the 779 districts/charter schools that completed an explanation and assurances form, 487 (or 62.5% of the respondents) provided student population information indicating that its small student population was a contributing factor in the high number of its students participating in STAAR Alternate 2. Table 2a provides ranges for student population and the percentage of 487 responding districts/charter schools that reported student population within each range.

Table 2a

Percent of districts/charters	Student population reported by districts/charter schools
35.9%	0–500
27.9%	501–1000
23.6%	1001–2000
5.5%	2001–3000
2.9%	3001–4000
1.6%	4001–5000
2.5%	5001+

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

TEA acknowledges that some districts/charter schools contain specific programs that draw students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and their families. Out of the 779 districts/charter schools that completed an explanation and assurances form, 131 (or 16.8% of the respondents) indicated that having specific programs within its attendance zone was a contributing factor in the high number of its students participating in STAAR Alternate 2. Some districts/charter schools reported more than one type of special program; therefore, the percentages total more than 100 percent. Table 2b describes the different types of programs that were reported and the percentage of 131 responding districts/charter schools that reported each type of program.

Table 2b

Percent of districts/charters	Type of program reported by districts/charter schools
7.1%	The district/charter school houses the centralized special education programs for the shared services arrangement cooperative.
13.0%	The district/charter school has a unique approach to special education services and special programs that attracts families to their schools.
16.9%	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.
7.8%	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.

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26.0%	The district/charter school area contains group homes, residential facilities, children’s homes, regional day schools, or state schools.
16.2%	The district/charter school area contains special medical or mental health facilities for children with significant cognitive disabilities.
13.0%	The district/charter school reported a program other than those listed above.

Question 2c. Neither of the two situations above (2a or 2b) apply. List variables that may contribute to a high number of students in your district/charter school who participate in STAAR Alternate 2.

LEAs responded to Question 2c if the previous questions did not apply or if the LEA wanted to include additional information. Of the 779 districts/charter schools that completed an explanation and assurances form, 217 (or 27.9% of the respondents) provided variables that may have contributed to a high number of students participating in STAAR Alternate 2. Some districts/charter schools reported more than one variable; therefore, the percentages total more than 100 percent. Table 2c describes the different variables that were reported and the percentage of 217 responding districts/charter schools that reported each variable.

Table 2c

Percent of districts/charters	Variables reported by districts/charter schools
0.9%	The district/charter school reported a decreasing student enrollment but increasing special education population, which resulted in a higher participation rate.
1.4%	The district/charter school reported a surge in student population due to families displaced by Hurricane Harvey.
1.8%	The district/charter school reported special living conditions (e.g., foster families) for children with significant needs.
4.6%	The district/charter school reported a higher percentage of students with significant cognitive disabilities due to its “open enrollment” policy.
7.4%	The district/charter school reported that student placement and disability label indicated student should participate in STAAR Alternate 2.
10.6%	The district/charter school reported that its demographics (e.g., economically disadvantaged, parental drug/alcohol use, low income housing, and lack of prenatal medical care) resulted in a higher STAAR Alternate 2 participation rate.
12.4%	The district/charter school reported a large enrollment of students identified with significant cognitive disabilities (i.e., intellectual disabilities, and autism).
20.3%	The district/charter school reported a surge in student enrollment that led to more students with significant cognitive disabilities being enrolled into special education programs.
39.6%	The district/charter school reported that the ARD committee determined assessment decisions based on participation requirements.
4.1%	The district/charter school reported variables other than those listed above.