

# STAAR Alternate 2 Participation Requirements

## Frequently Asked Questions



Based on the 2023–2024 updated participation requirements for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) Alternate 2, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is providing the following frequently asked questions and responses.

### BACKGROUND ON UPDATES TO THE PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

**1. Why did TEA update the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 in the 2023–2024 school year?**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) prohibits states from administering an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards to more than one percent of the state’s student population. Beginning with the 2017–2018 school year, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has granted waivers to states, including Texas, for this one percent limit. In March 2023, however, USDE informed TEA that Texas’s request to exceed the federal one percent limitation for students participating in STAAR Alternate 2 was denied. This denial required action by TEA to ensure that the STAAR Alternate 2 participation requirements guide admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees in making the most appropriate assessment decisions for students. The updated participation requirements, Texas’s one percent waiver information, and USDE’s denial letter are available on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Resources](#) web page.

**2. Who helped update the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

Special education teachers, special education advocates, regional education service center representatives, and other stakeholders from across the state assisted the TEA Student Assessment Division, in coordination with the TEA Department of Special Education, in the development of the updated participation requirements.

**3. Did the state’s definition of “most significant cognitive disability” change?**

No. However, updates to the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 clarify that the assessment is only for students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities. A student could be determined to have a significant cognitive disability but not meet the participation criteria as a student with the most significant cognitive disability. The state’s definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disability is a student who exhibits significant intellectual and adaptive behavior deficits in his or her ability to plan, comprehend, and reason and who indicates adaptive behavior deficits that limit his or her ability to apply social and practical skills across **all** life domains. Additionally, the student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and needs substantial supports that are neither temporary nor specific to a particular content area.

**4. How do the STAAR Alternate 2 prerequisite skills align with the TEKS curriculum standards?**

All students must have access to the same grade-level curriculum standards that are the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). One of the ARD committee’s responsibilities is to determine how to provide access to the enrolled grade-level TEKS for students with disabilities while considering the student’s unique needs. Some students require content to be modified, which typically refers to a reduction of the amount or complexity of the TEKS. When considering access to enrolled grade-level TEKS, it is important for ARD committees and teachers to review the vertical alignment of the TEKS within that content area. For STAAR Alternate 2, prerequisite skills are the student expectations in earlier grades that provide access points to a student’s enrolled grade-level TEKS. In other words, prerequisite skills are the foundational skills needed to learn and master more complex skills. Refer to the TEKS Vertical Alignment and Curriculum Framework documents on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Resources](#) web page for more information.

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**5. Are local educational agencies (LEAs) penalized if they have more than one percent of their students participate in STAAR Alternate 2?**

No. The one percent limitation is imposed on each state, not on each LEA. As part of the state's commitments that all students receive access to enrolled grade-level academic curriculum standards and that there are high expectations for all students, the state is responsible for ensuring that LEAs understand that an alternate assessment exists for students who meet the criteria as students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and who are taught alternate academic curriculum standards aligned with their enrolled grade-level standards. Just as an ARD committee uses the student's data to drive the development and implementation of all other components of the student's individualized education program (IEP), the ARD committee reviews the student's data to determine the most appropriate assessment within the context of the definitions and criteria set by the state. When an LEA has more than one percent of its student population participating in STAAR Alternate 2, federal requirements mandate the collection of information from the LEA assuring that testing decisions were made in accordance with the law and with the state's criteria, as well as justification statements as to why it was necessary for the LEA to exceed the one percent threshold.

### **PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS**

**6. How does an ARD committee determine if a student meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

ARD committees should use a variety of data sources as they walk through the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2. Key sources of data include the student's full and initial individual evaluation (FIE) or reevaluation, present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), annual academic and functional goals, and progress toward those goals. Other data may include current parent and teacher observations and information. The participation requirements allow the ARD committee to analyze the student's data to make the appropriate choice at each step of the form. Additionally, the ARD committee should consider the chronological age of the student and the generalized expectations of that age group when making determinations regarding age-appropriateness.

**7. Why do students who are identified with only a specific learning disability (SLD) or only a speech impairment (SI) not meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

These disabilities in isolation do not align with the state's definition of the most significant cognitive disabilities and the criteria for participation in STAAR Alternate 2. Similarly, an ARD committee should not determine assessment participation based solely on other disability categories (e.g., autism).

**8. Based on the phrases "ongoing adult assistance" and "need for ongoing, individualized, specialized supports," does a student who demonstrates some level of independence in functional tasks meet the participation requirements?**

It depends. The ARD committee must consider the adult and individualized supports that are required for the student to initiate, perform, and complete functional tasks such as self-care routines. If the student exhibits independence in all three of these functions—initiation, performance, and completion—without adult assistance or with minimal adult assistance, then the student likely does not meet the definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disability.

Adult assistance is not limited solely to physical assistance. If, on an ongoing basis, an adult must engage physically or verbally with a student or the student must use tools or other supports put in place by an adult based on the student's individualized needs to initiate, perform, and complete functional tasks, then the ARD committee must consider whether the student is truly exhibiting independence in these tasks.

The examples in the participation requirements form (identified by italicized text in parentheses) do not represent an exhaustive list of functional tasks. A student with the most significant cognitive disability will exhibit intellectual and adaptive behavior deficits that require substantial supports across all life domains.

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An ARD committee is not expected to document the independence level of every functional task; the committee should consider the extent of adult assistance required for initiation, performance, and completion of functional tasks and whether the adult assistance is consistently needed across all life domains.

In terms of academic needs, a student with the most significant cognitive disability will require extensive support across all content areas. When reviewing data and how extensively the student is supported by adult assistance, it is important to consider all content areas, not just those tested on state assessments.

Ultimately, it is the ARD committee's decision, after reviewing all student-level data, whether a student meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2.

**9. Why do the participation requirements indicate in Step III that students must have two short-term objectives or benchmarks for every annual goal in the student's IEP?**

The federal regulations for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 34 CFR §300.320(a)(2), describe the requirement for each student with an IEP to have measurable annual goals. The regulations further state that for students who take alternate state assessments, the goals must include short-term objectives or benchmarks. At least two objectives or benchmarks are required for each goal—including academic, functional, and related services goals—to adequately comply with the plural use of the terms used in the regulations. Refer to question 1.16 in the TEA document [Question and Answer Document: IEP Measurable Annual Goals](#) for more information.

**10. Can a student meet participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 in some but not all content areas?**

No. A student with the most significant cognitive disability requires extensive supports in **all** content areas and across **all** life domains. If a student does not meet all the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2, the student must participate in STAAR for all content areas.

**11. Does the student have to have a 1:1 adult to student ratio to meet participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

No. Staffing considerations for individual students are not part of the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2. The ARD committee must use the updated requirements to determine participation.

### ARD COMMITTEE ACTIONS

**12. If a student transfers from one LEA to another LEA within Texas with an IEP that indicates the student will participate in STAAR Alternate 2 based on the participation requirements, can the receiving LEA accept that determination?**

Yes. The ARD committee must adhere to 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) [§89.1055\(s\)](#) when a student transfers into a new LEA, which may include acceptance and implementation of the previous IEP within 20 school days after the new LEA receives a copy of the student's IEP that was in place at the previous LEA. Acceptance and implementation includes assessment decisions.

**13. How should an ARD committee document the rationale used in Step III of the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

The ARD committee will use data documented in the student's IEP to determine the appropriate boxes to check for each row in Step II of the form. Prior to reaching Step III, the committee has verified through Steps I and II that the student meets the criteria for a student with the most significant cognitive disability. The assurances provided in Step III confirm that the decision to administer STAAR Alternate 2 is being made in accordance with all other federal and state requirements. The rationale in Step III should describe why the student cannot participate in STAAR and why STAAR Alternate 2 is more appropriate. The rationale should also include a statement regarding any necessary accommodations.

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**14. What should the ARD committee do with the completed STAAR Alternate 2 Participation Requirements form?**

The participation requirements form must be included in the student's IEP as indicated in 19 TAC [§89.1055](#)(d)(2). Because the ARD committee is using data documented in the student's IEP to make these assessment decisions, the form serves as a summary of the decisions made during the ARD committee meeting. The remaining parts of the student's IEP should serve as the individual data points that led to the decisions.

### IMPACT OF CHANGES

**15. Can a student who no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 be "grandfathered" so that the student may continue to take STAAR Alternate 2?**

No. The ARD committee must review and determine student participation in state assessments for each school year. Federal law requires states to assess all students on enrolled grade-level academic curriculum standards except for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed with an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards. There are no other exceptions allowed under federal law.

**16. Does a student who no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 have to take STAAR online?**

Yes. Texas law requires all students to take STAAR online. However, the law also allows for two exceptions: (1) a special paper administration of an assessment for eligible students and (2) the LEA optional paper administration by request. Refer to the [Registration](#) section of the *District and Campus Coordinator Resources* for additional information on these two exceptions to online testing.

**17. If a student who no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 takes STAAR and does not achieve satisfactory performance, is the student required to receive accelerated instruction?**

Yes. Texas law requires that all students who do not achieve Approaches Grade Level or higher on STAAR be provided accelerated instruction. An ARD committee may be convened if the committee feels that the student's IEP needs to be modified based on the accelerated instruction requirements.

A parent may elect to modify or remove a requirement of accelerated instruction by submitting a written request to the administrator at the campus in which the student is enrolled. The student must have been administered and failed to perform satisfactorily on STAAR or must be administered a beginning-of-year assessment instrument aligned with the TEKS.

Refer to the [Accelerated Instruction](#) web page for questions and additional information.

**18. Can a student who no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 continue to receive modified instruction and content?**

Yes. The state assessment decision is only one of an ARD committee's duties. A student's ARD committee will continue to make special education and related services decisions based on federal and state requirements, including decisions on educational placement within the least restrictive environment. A student may have a significant cognitive disability and require modified instruction and content (i.e., accessing enrolled grade-level TEKS through prerequisite skills) without meeting the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2. The student's IEP, including the PLAAFP, goals, schedule of services, and educational placement decisions, would reflect these decisions.

**19. Is an LEA required to change the content of a course or the course service code for a student who no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2?**

The content of any course may be modified as outlined in the student's IEP regardless of which state assessment the student takes. The standard service ID codes must be used for all courses that students

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who take STAAR are enrolled in. For any course with a corresponding EOC assessment, unique service ID codes are available for students who receive alternate content and meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2.

**20. Are there any implications on graduation options for a student who previously participated in STAAR Alternate 2 but no longer meets the participation requirements?**

No. In accordance with 19 TAC [§89.1070](#), an ARD committee may determine that satisfactory performance on a required EOC assessment is not necessary for graduation.

**21. Do students who no longer meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 have to take STAAR EOC assessments for courses they have taken in the past?**

No. Students are responsible for complying with state testing requirements based on their ARD committee's decisions for that particular school year. Beginning with the 2023–2024 school year, students who no longer meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 must take STAAR EOC assessments for any courses they are enrolled in that have corresponding EOC assessments. As indicated in 19 TAC [§89.1070](#), a student's ARD committee may continue to determine that satisfactory performance on a required EOC assessment is not necessary for graduation.

Example: During the 2022–2023 school year, a student receiving special education services is enrolled in English I and meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2. The student complies with his state testing requirements by taking the STAAR Alternate 2 English I assessment. During the 2023–2024 school year, the student is enrolled in English II and no longer meets the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2. The student must take the STAAR English II assessment to comply with state testing requirements, and his ARD committee may determine that the student does not need to perform satisfactorily on the assessment to meet graduation requirements.

**22. What certification does a teacher need to ensure his or her students with disabilities have access to the enrolled grade-level TEKS?**

Teacher certification is not tied to the type of state assessment students participate in, but a teacher must be certified in accordance with the rules adopted by the State Board for Educator Certification. Refer to 19 TAC [Chapter 231](#) for a teacher assignment chart and 19 TAC [§231.701](#) for special education teacher certification requirements.

**23. If a teacher has been assigned to administer both STAAR and STAAR Alternate 2 this year, does the teacher need to be trained in administering both assessments?**

Yes. All test administrators who participate in state assessments or handle secure test materials are required to be trained at least once in test security and administration procedures for the applicable assessment. Test administrators must also be trained in how to properly implement accommodations if the students they are testing are eligible for accommodations.

**24. What training is available for STAAR Alternate 2?**

TEA has produced several trainings related to STAAR Alternate 2, including a specific training about the updated participation requirements. Links to these trainings are available on the [STAAR Alternate 2 Resources](#) web page.

**25. Will the state be developing a new test for students who do not meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate 2 but are receiving modified instruction through prerequisite skills?**

No. Federal law requires states to assess all students on enrolled grade-level academic curriculum standards except for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed with an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards. There are no other exceptions allowed under federal law.