



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Honorable Carmen I. Ayala
Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

July 17, 2020

Dear Superintendent Ayala:

I am writing to follow up on a letter I sent you on June 4, 2019, regarding the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities taking an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). As you know, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), limits the percentage of students that a State may assess with an AA-AAAS to no more than 1.0 percent of all assessed students in a State for each subject. In that letter, I noted that Illinois had exceeded the 1.0 percent threshold in the 2017-2018 school year in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science based on data submitted to the Department of Education (Department) via the *EDFacts* reporting system.

I recognize that the limit on the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who may be assessed with an AA-AAAS was a new requirement starting in the 2017-2018 school year, and understand that many States needed time to provide training and guidance to reduce their AA-AAAS participation rates. Because ISBE had rates of AA-AAAS participation that were greater than 1.0 percent in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science without a waiver, the Department placed a grant condition on the State's fiscal year 2019 Title I, Part A award. This condition required that the State submit a plan for reducing the rate of AA-AAAS participation in future years in order to come into compliance with the 1.0 percent requirement. The condition also required that the State submit assessment participation data (including AA-AAAS participation) via *EDFacts* for the 2018-2019 school year by October 1, 2019. Thank you for providing both the plan and data that were requested in the June 4, 2019 letter.

In reviewing ISBE's 2018-2019 data, it appears that AA-AAAS participation rates are still above 1.0 percent. As a result, the grant condition on ISBE's Title I, Part A grant award will continue. In order to satisfy this condition, ISBE must:

1. Provide, not later than October 1, 2020, assessment participation data in reading/language arts, mathematics and science and an update on the progress it has made in implementing its plan.
2. Provide evidence that it is assessing less than 1.0 percent of its students on an AA-AAAS for each subject.

I appreciate the plan Illinois developed and submitted in summer 2019 to address this issue and look forward to seeing the results of your implementation of this plan over the next year.

The Department continues to support Illinois and all States to ensure all students are being assessed using the right assessments. Over the past two years, the National Center on Educational Outcomes has facilitated a variety of technical assistance activities for States working to meet the 1.0 percent threshold. I note that ISBE has participated in some of these activities. You may find resources from these activities available at https://nceo.info/Assessments/alternate_assessments.

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<http://www.ed.gov/>

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

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I appreciate the work you are doing to improve your schools and provide a high-quality education for students. If you have any questions, please contact my staff at ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Frank T. Brogan
Assistant Secretary
for Elementary and Secondary Education

cc: Sean Clayton, Director of Assessment

