

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
September 29, 2017

TO: School District Superintendents
School District Special Education Directors
Charter School Chief Executive Officers
Charter School Special Education Directors
Intermediate Unit Executive Directors
Intermediate Unit Special Education Directors
Approved Private School Chief Executive Officers
Approved Private School Special Education Directors

FROM: Ann Hinkson-Herrmann, Director
Bureau of Special Education

SUBJECT: Survey Regarding the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment's
Eligibility Criteria for Student Participation

In 2015, with the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the requirement changed for the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). ESSA reaffirmed that the alternate assessment is an appropriate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Rather than placing a cap on accountability proficiency rates for the alternate assessment, ESSA places a 1 percent cap on **participation** in the assessment. This means that the total number of students assessed in each subject using the alternate assessment does not exceed 1 percent of the total number of all students in the commonwealth who are assessed in that subject. Pennsylvania has exceeded the 1 percent cap of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participated in the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) during the 2016-17 school year, and it will request a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for all tested subjects, pursuant to ESEA Section 8401, for one year.

This shift in policy means that the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, local educational agencies, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams need to think carefully about which students should be included in the alternate assessment. This includes reviewing the PASA eligibility criteria used by IEP teams for determining eligibility for participation in the PASA to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in the PASA.

A survey has been created for the purpose of gathering feedback from Pennsylvania stakeholders pertaining to PASA eligibility criteria. Pennsylvania's waiver to the U.S. Department of Education for the 1 percent cap on participation on an AA-AAAS must include a plan and timeline by which it will improve the implementation of its guidelines for participation in the PASA, including by reviewing, and if necessary, revising its definition of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, so that the commonwealth meets the 1 percent cap in each subject for which assessments are administered in future school years.

To access the survey pertaining to Pennsylvania's PASA eligibility criteria and provide feedback, please click on <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PASAeligibility>. The survey will close on October 20, 2017 at midnight.