



# NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Maurice "Mo" Green, Superintendent of Public Instruction

www.dpi.nc.gov

March 17, 2026

**TO** LEA Superintendents  
Charter School Directors

**FROM** Michael Maher, Chief Accountability Officer  
Division of Accountability and Research

Kinge Mbella, Acting Director  
Office of Testing

Carol Ann Hudgens, Senior Director  
Office of Exceptional Children

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## JUSTIFICATION REQUIRED FOR EXCEEDING 1.0 PERCENT PARTICIPATION IN THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are eligible to take an alternate assessment aligned with the alternate academic achievement standards (see the attached NCEXTEND1 eligibility criteria and *North Carolina Alternate Assessment Decision Making Flow Chart*). Public school units must provide sufficient training so that school staff who participate as members of an Individualized Education Program team understand the eligibility criteria and implement the guidelines established by the state so that all students are appropriately assessed.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) requires states to ensure that the total number of students who are instructed on the *Extended Content Standards* and assessed in each subject using the NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment does not exceed 1.0 percent of the total number of all students assessed in each subject. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has reviewed the participation data for the NCEXTEND1 assessment in 2024–25 and found at the state level that over 1.0 percent of students in North Carolina participated in mathematics and English Language Arts/reading at grades 3–8, and science at grades 5 and 8 of the NCEXTEND1. Additionally, data showed that there are public school units that exceeded the 1.0 percent participation in the alternate assessment during the 2024–25 school year.

Based on the 2024–25 school year participation data, the NCDPI anticipates the state will exceed the 1.0 percent cap on alternate assessment participation in mathematics and English Language Arts/reading at grades 3–8, and science at grades 5 and 8 for the 2025–26 school year.

TABLE 1. North Carolina Alternate Assessment Participation for the 2024–25 School Year

Subject and Grade(s)	Numerator	Denominator	Percent
Mathematics Grades 3–8*	7,826	694,897	1.1%
Mathematics Grade 11	1,051	106,628	1.0%
ELA/Reading Grades 3–8*	7,841	695,258	1.1%
ELA/Reading Grade 10	1,159	118,767	1.0%
Science Grades 5 & 8*	2,579	231,870	1.1%
Science Grade 11	1,052	107,509	1.0%

\*Subject areas that exceed 1.0 percent of test population.

As required by ESSA, the NCDPI must notify public school units that are identified (based on 2024–25 school year participation data) as being likely to exceed 1.0 percent of students who are instructed on the Extended Content Standards and assessed in a subject area (i.e., Reading, Mathematics, Science) on the NCEXTEND1 for the 2025–26 school year. These identified public school units must provide the NCDPI with a justification of the need to assess more than 1.0 percent of its students on the NCEXTEND1 in any assessed subject. Public school units that did not exceed 1.0 percent in 2024–25, but anticipate exceeding in 2025–26, must also submit a justification.

To assist in this process, assessment participation data for public school units is located on the secure shell at 2025/ALTPARTXXX.xls (XXX is the public school unit code). Superintendents and school directors must review this data and determine if participation on the NCEXTEND1 in any subject (i.e., reading, mathematics, science) may possibly exceed the 1.0 percent participation in the alternate assessment for the 2025–26 school year.

If it is determined the participation is anticipated to exceed 1.0 percent, ESSA requires the public school unit to complete and submit a justification form. As a part of the justification form, the Disproportionality Excel document (attached) must be used to assist with answering the questions in the last box of the Assurances section of the justification form. Justification forms will be reviewed by the NCDPI and follow up action(s) will be determined based on the information provided in the justification document. Exceptional children staff and testing and accountability staff within a public school unit should collaborate to complete the justification form. A copy of the justification form and images of the Disproportionality Excel document are attached to this memo, and electronic copies for submission are posted on the Testing News Network (TNN) home page under the Administrative Documents section. (District and charter school test coordinators have access to TNN.)

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The completed justification document must be signed by the superintendent or charter school director, exceptional children's director or coordinator, and public school unit test coordinator. The document must be completed electronically and submitted in NCTest Admin by July 6, 2026. Per ESSA, the justification documents must be made publicly available. As such, the document must not contain any personally identifiable student information. The NCDPI will notify public school units via email if further information is needed and will include next steps. For questions, please contact your public school unit exceptional children director or regional accountability office.

As always, thank you for all you do for our schools and for ensuring that we appropriately instruct and assess all students in North Carolina.

MM:KKM:CAH:mb

c: Maurice "Mo" Green, State Superintendent  
Maria Pitre-Martin, Deputy State Superintendent  
Stacey Wilson-Norman, Chief Academic Officer, Division of Academics  
Ashley Logue, Director, Office of Charter Schools  
Curtis Sonneman, Acting Director, Office of Accountability  
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Shannon Jordan, Section Chief, Testing Policy and Operations  
Molly Britt, Education Testing and Accountability Consultant, Testing Policy and Operations  
Regional Accountability Coordinator  
District Exceptional Children Director  
Charter School Exceptional Children Coordinator  
Public School Unit Test Coordinator

Attachments (4)

# 1.0 Percent Participation Justification Form 2025–26

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* requires each public school unit (PSU) to complete and submit a justification when it anticipates exceeding 1.0 percent of students assessed in a subject area (i.e., reading, mathematics, and/or science) utilizing the NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment. Justification forms from each PSU will be reviewed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and follow up actions will be determined based on the information provided in this form. Staff from the exceptional children and accountability and testing departments in each PSU should collaborate to provide the requested information on this form. Responses to Sections 1–4 and the designated signatures are required. After these forms are received from each PSU, this justification form will be publicly available. As such, the document **must not contain any personally identifiable information**. If necessary, additional pages may be attached to this form.

## Section 1: Contact Information

Enter contact information for the primary public school unit staff member responsible for overseeing the completion of the justification form.

<b>3-Digit PSU Code:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Contact Name:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Contact Phone No.:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>PSU Name:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Contact Title:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Contact E-Mail:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.

## Section 2: Analyzing Contributing Factors

Did the Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams utilize the alternate assessment [eligibility criteria](#) and the [North Carolina Alternate Assessment Decision Making Flow Chart](#) to make alternate assessment participation decisions?

- Yes                       No

Describe how exceptional children case managers have been informed and trained on the *Alternate Assessment Eligibility Worksheet* and *Assurance document* included in the Every Child Accountability and Tracking System (ECATS).

Click or tap here to enter text.

Does the PSU have any student(s) participating in the alternate assessment with the primary eligibility areas of: Specific Learning Disability, Orthopedic Impairment, or Speech Language Impairment?

Yes                       No

If yes, explain the criteria the IEP team used to determine how the students met the criteria for participation in the alternate assessment.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Does the PSU have a small overall student population that increased the likelihood of exceeding the 1.0 percent threshold?

Yes

No

If yes, explain your answer below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

### Section 3: Assurances

What data sources are used to determine eligibility for students participating on the *Extended Content Standards* that align with the alternate assessment?

Provide your response below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Describe the PSU’s process for generating and utilizing the [Case Management Report](#) in ECATS to monitor placement of students instructed towards the *Extended Content Standards*.

Provide your response below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Describe the PSU’s process for transitioning a student’s instruction from the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study* to the *Extended Content Standards* or from the *Extended Content Standards* to the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study*.

Provide your response below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

In the PSU, how are parents or guardians directly informed annually about the implications of the *Extended Content Standards* in relation to not earning a high school diploma?

Provide your response below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Describe the process for auditing Exceptional Children Individualized Education Program records for students instructed on the *Extended Content Standards* and participating in the alternate assessment.

Provide your response below:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

After completing the Disproportionality Excel document, answer the following guiding questions.

1. In reviewing the data, what subgroups in your PSU have the largest discrepancy between participants on the general assessment and the alternate assessment?

Click or tap here to enter text.

2. When looking at subgroup discrepancies, what hypotheses can be formed?

Click or tap here to enter text.

3. What problem-solving actions will the PSU take to address the identified hypotheses?

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Section 4: Resources and Technical Assistance**

What resources and technical assistance does the PSU need from the NCDPI to ensure that students are being assessed using the appropriate assessment?

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Signatures**

Superintendent or Director \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Exceptional Children Director or Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

PSU Test Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The completed justification form must be signed by the superintendent/ director, exceptional children’s director or coordinator, and public school unit testing coordinator. This form must be submitted in NCTest Admin by July 6, 2026.

The NCDPI will notify public school units in writing if further information is needed and will include next steps. For questions, please contact your exceptional children director or regional accountability office.

**Note:** The following additional information can be included with the justification form, but is not required:

- Evidence that all educators who administer the alternate assessment meet the requirements for test administrators and have received test administration training prior to administering the alternate assessment.
- Evidence that all students have appropriate access to accessibility features on statewide tests.
- A review of the percentage of students taking the alternate assessment at grade 3 versus grades 4–7 versus grade 8 versus high school and an explanation of how Individualized Education Program` teams are making consistent participation decisions across grade levels.
- A review of data to determine if students are moving from the alternate assessment to the general assessment or vice versa and an explanation for grade levels where this action is more prevalent.
- Evidence that the district is providing appropriate supports and services to students with disabilities to assist in meeting the same graduation requirements as their non-disabled peers.
- An evaluation of students instructed using the Extended Content Standards, but who are spending more than eighty percent of their day in the general education setting.
- Evidence of data-driven team decisions to determine appropriate instruction and assessment.
- An assessment of varying practices across a district and/or between different schools.
- An explanation of special programs or populations that are served by the district or charter school that may contribute to the alternate assessment participation rate.

# Disproportionality Excel document Screenshots

This fillable disproportionality excel document and this memo is available on TNN.

2024–25 Data Reading Grades 3–8 (Combined)									
	Male Subgroup Percentage	Female Subgroup Percentage	Economically Disadvantaged Subgroup Percentage	Hispanic Subgroup Percentage	American Indian Subgroup Percentage	Asian Subgroup Percentage	Black Subgroup Percentage	White Subgroup Percentage	Multiple Subgroup Percentage
Percent of NCEXTEND1 participants									
Percent of general participants									
Percentage difference (+/-)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Notes:</b> 1. The <b>green</b> and <b>red</b> percentages in row 6, the goal is to have those percentages be as close to 0% as possible. 2. <b>Red</b> percentages may indicate over identification of students participating on the alternate assessment compared to the students participating on the general assessment. 3. <b>Green</b> percentages may indicate under identification of students participating on the alternate assessment compared to the students participating on the general assessment.					<b>Guiding Questions:</b> 1. In reviewing the data, which subgroups in your public school unit have the largest discrepancy between participants on the general assessment and the alternate assessment? 2. When looking at subgroup discrepancies, what hypotheses can be formed? 3. What problem-solving actions will the public school unit take to address the identified hypotheses?				

2024–25 Data Mathematics Grades 3–8 (Combined)									
	Male Subgroup Percentage	Female Subgroup Percentage	Economically Disadvantaged Subgroup Percentage	Hispanic Subgroup Percentage	American Indian Subgroup Percentage	Asian Subgroup Percentage	Black Subgroup Percentage	White Subgroup Percentage	Multiple Subgroup Percentage
Percent of NCEXTEND1 participants									
Percent of general participants									
Percentage difference (+/-)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Notes:</b> 1. The <b>green</b> and <b>red</b> percentages in row 6, the goal is to have those percentages be as close to 0% as possible. 2. <b>Red</b> percentages may indicate over identification of students participating on the alternate assessment compared to the students participating on the general assessment. 3. <b>Green</b> percentages may indicate under identification of students participating on the alternate assessment compared to the students participating on the general assessment.					<b>Guiding Questions:</b> 1. In reviewing the data, which subgroups in your public school unit have the largest discrepancy between participants on the general assessment and the alternate assessment? 2. When looking at subgroup discrepancies, what hypotheses can be formed? 3. What problem-solving actions will the public school unit take to address the identified hypotheses?				

## NCEXTEND1 Eligibility Criteria

To determine participation in any of the NCEXTEND1 alternate assessments, the following eligibility requirements must be met:

- The student must have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- The student must have a significant cognitive disability.
  - The student's disability significantly impacts cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviors, defined as those skills which are essential for someone to live and function independently.
  - The student requires extensive and repeated individualized instruction and support to make meaningful gains.
  - The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways.
- The student must be instructed using the North Carolina Extended Content Standards (i.e., reading, mathematics, and science).
- The student must be enrolled in grades 3–8, 10, or 11, according to the NC Student Information System. Only those students enrolled in 11th grade for the first time are required to take the NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment at grade 11.

The vast majority of students with disabilities do not have a significant cognitive disability.

The NCEXTEND1 is **not** appropriate for students who

- are being instructed in any or all the assessed general grade- or course-level content standards of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (i.e., reading, mathematics, and science);
- demonstrate delays only in academic achievement;
- demonstrate delays only in selected areas of academic achievement;
- demonstrate delays attributed primarily to behavioral issues; or
- if in high school, are pursuing a North Carolina high school diploma (including students enrolled in the Occupational Course of Study pathway).

Evidence for the decision to participate in NCEXTEND1 is **not** based on:

- a disability category or label;
- poor attendance or extended absences;
- native language, social, cultural, or economic differences;
- expected poor performance on the general education assessment;
- academic or other services the student receives;
- educational environment or instructional setting;
- percent of time receiving special education services;
- English Learner status;
- low reading level or achievement level;
- anticipated disruptive behavior;
- impact of student scores on the accountability program;
- administrative decisions;
- anticipated emotional distress; or
- need for accommodations to participate in the assessment process.

The IEP teams may use the following *North Carolina Alternate Assessment Decision Making Flow Chart* to aid in decision making regarding the NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment for students.

# North Carolina Alternate Assessment Decision-Making Flow Chart— Guidance Provided for IEP Teams

