



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

October 27, 2023

The Honorable Elsie Arntzen  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
P.O. Box 202501  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Superintendent Arntzen:

We are writing regarding the Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI's) percentage of students taking the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) 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 reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) recognizes that this was a new requirement starting in the 2017-2018 school year and that most States previously assessed more than 1.0 percent of students with the AA-AAAS. We understand that States needed time to adjust their systems to reduce AA-AAAS participation rates and that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted many plans in States in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

For the 2021-2022 school year, OPI submitted information to the Department via *EDFacts* that showed the following AA-AAAS rates:

**Reading/language arts:** 1.07%      **Mathematics:** 1.07%      **Science:** 0.91%

Let us start by congratulating OPI for being below 1.0 percent in science, which is an important accomplishment. Because OPI had rates of AA-AAAS participation greater than 1.0 percent in reading/language arts and mathematics and had assessment participation rates that were less than 95 percent for students with disabilities in reading/language arts and mathematics, the Department is requesting that the State submit a plan for reducing the rate of AA-AAAS participation in future years in order to meet the 1.0 percent requirement. Please submit this plan by email to the Department at [ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov) within 30 calendar days of the date of this letter.

If the State continues to have an AA-AAAS participation rate over 1.0 percent in future years, the Department may take additional action. This is particularly true if the State is unable to demonstrate that it is making progress reducing the percentage of students taking the AA-AAAS.

400 MARYLAND AVE., SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20202  
[www.ed.gov](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.*

The Department continues to support Montana and all States in meeting this critical ESEA requirement. In September, the Department hosted a conference on State assessments that focused, in part, on helping States further address this issue. We shared lessons learned from States that have been successful reducing their overall AA-AAAS rates. Materials from the conference are available at: <https://apps1.seiservices.com/2023SSA/Materials.aspx>.

We 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 Department staff at [ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov).

Sincerely,



Adam Schott  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Policy and Programs  
Delegated the Authority to Perform the  
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education



Glenna Wright-Gallo  
Assistant Secretary  
Office of Special Education and  
Rehabilitative Services

cc: Cedar Rose, OPI  
Patrick Cates, OPI