

# Montana

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## Office of Public Instruction

### MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in State Assessments



Effective February 2021

The OPI Assessment Unit supports teaching and learning in Montana’s public and accredited non-public schools through the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS), which includes a suite of required state assessments aligned to Montana’s academic content standards. Data literacy and its direct influence in guiding instruction, alongside a balanced approach including the use of formative and interim strategies ensures all children have fair and equitable opportunities to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic content standards. The “MontCAS Policies and Procedures for Participation in State Assessments” guidance describes the policies and procedures required to participate in state assessments in the state of Montana. These requirements fall under the authority of both state and federal laws and regulations which are defined further throughout this manual.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose .....	3
Chapter 1: State Participation Overview .....	4
Which Schools are Required to Test? .....	4
What Programs Rely on Achievement Data? .....	5
What Students are Expected to Test? .....	6
How is Student Eligibility to Test Determined? .....	7
What Special Circumstances Exist for Test Registration and Participation? .....	7
Chapter 2: Policies and Procedures for Participation .....	8
Civil Rights Obligations .....	8
What Does Participation to the Fullest Extent Mean? .....	8
Needs-Based Selection of Test Settings .....	9
Including Students with Disabilities .....	9
Including English Learners .....	10
Participation During the Pandemic - Instructional Setting Explained .....	10
Montana Medical Exemption Policy .....	11
What Qualifies in Montana as a Medical Exemption? .....	11
General Medical Exemption Guidelines .....	11
What level of documentation is required for a medical exemption? .....	12
Standard Medical Reasons and Examples .....	12
COVID Reasons and Examples .....	13
Reporting Medical Exemptions .....	13
Chapter 3: Facts about State Selected Assessments .....	15
Smarter Balanced .....	15
Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) .....	15
ACT with Writing (ACT) .....	15
Montana Science Assessment (MSA) .....	16
Alternate Montana Science Assessment (AMSA) .....	16
ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 (or WIDA) .....	16
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) .....	16
Chapter 4: State mass Student test registration process .....	18
Frequently Asked AIM and TDS Student Data Upload Questions .....	20
Q: Can students learning remotely qualify for medical exemption? .....	20
Q: What does the OPI upload to the online TDS portals? .....	20
Q: When does the OPI upload? .....	20
Q: How does the OPI student upload occur? .....	20
Q: What if a student is missing in the TDS portal? .....	20
Q: What if a student is missing his/her IEP designation in a TDS portal? .....	21
Q: What if a student is missing in an alternate TDS portal? .....	21
Q: What if a student is still appearing as enrolled? .....	21
References .....	23
Appendices .....	24

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to explain the Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) policies and procedures for participation in state assessments and how students are registered within the vendor-owned Test Delivery Systems (TDS) as contracted under the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) program. Readers are encouraged to supplement this guidance with the MontCAS student eligibility and participation guidelines and the [Six Things Stakeholders Should Know About Participation and Testing in Montana](#).

## CHAPTER 1: STATE PARTICIPATION OVERVIEW


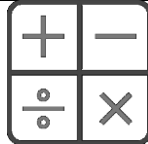
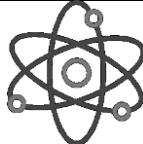

The landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. ESSA requires that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic content standards. A key purpose of ESEA-ESSA is to promote educational excellence and equity so that all students graduate high school with college and workforce readiness. Further requirements for administering state assessments in Montana can be found under the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) and the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM). ESEA-ESSA requires that Montana must assess students in the content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Montana must also annually assess the English language proficiency (ELP) of identified English Learners and participate in the biennial grade 4 and 8 reading and mathematics assessments under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). State assessments serve as the primary means through which Montana and its local schools and districts measure and report student achievement and growth.

### Which Schools are Required to Test?

Administering the annual state standardized assessments is required under [federal](#) and [state law](#). The Montana Board of Public Education (Board) recognizes that the primary purpose of assessment is to serve learning. A balanced assessment system includes formative, interim, and summative assessments that are aligned to the Montana Content Standards in order to provide an integrated approach to meeting both classroom learning needs and school and state level information needs. A balanced assessment system is structured to continuously improve teaching and learning (ARM 10.56.101).

In Montana, under the authority of §20-2-121(11) MCA and ARM 10.55.603, the Board adopts rules for state-level assessment in all public schools and accredited non-public schools. The Superintendent of Public Instruction has general supervision of school districts and supports compliance with the student assessment rules through implementation of policies and technical assistance (§20-3-106, MCA). Under the Chapter 56 assessment rules, schools may only administer state assessments approved by the Board, and each school district must annually administer state assessments to all students in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations that meet the following specifications:

**Table 1.** The Board’s Content Area and Grade Expectations

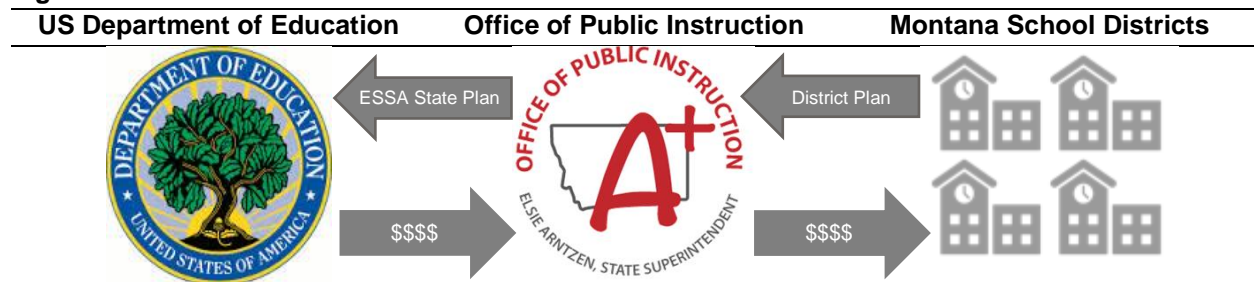
Content Area	English Language Arts (ELA)	Mathematics	Science	English Language Proficiency (ELP)
				
<b>Adopted Standards</b>	<a href="#">10.53.501–517</a>	<a href="#">10.53.401–413</a>	<a href="#">10.53.801–810</a>	<a href="#">10.53.301–311</a>
<b>Tested Grades</b>	3–8 & 11	3–8 & 11	5, 8, 11	K–12

### What Programs Rely on Achievement Data?

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) released a template for the consolidated state plan under ESEA-ESSA Section 8302. The purpose of the consolidated state plan is to provide parents with quality, transparent information about how Montana will meet all ESEA-ESSA requirements for each federal program. Below is a graphic illustration to show the exchange of information from the Department, to the OPI, then to local education agencies (i.e., school districts) regarding Montana’s implementation of the consolidated state plan. Montana submitted to the Department the [ESSA State Plan](#) which was approved in 2018 in order to receive state allocations. Montana’s [ESSA State Plan](#) sets the expectations for school districts regarding the implementation of the testing, accountability, and reporting provisions under ESEA-ESSA.

In accordance with these expectations, each school district submits district plans to the OPI through the [Continuous School Improvement Plan \(CSIP\)](#) (ARM 10.55.601) or other school improvement plans and submits assurances through the [E-Grant Application](#) for the OPI to allocate funds. State assessments have various stakeholders, data users, and numerous grants and other programs that rely on student participation in state tests. In some instances, the data from these assessments are used to make school determinations and/or allocate funding, such as Accreditation, Special Education, or Perkins Grants. Federal formula grants, such as Title I, Part A, require that school districts participate in the annual state assessment to receive funding.

**Figure 1.** State and Federal Consolidated State Plan Information Flow



Because Montana is a “local control” state, school district trustees must adopt policies to implement or administer the testing requirements in accordance with the assessment rules and state accreditation rules (see §20-3-323 MCA). In this respect, the OPI has selected the following six state assessments through the state procurement process to fulfill these state and federal grade/subject testing requirements (§18-4, MCA). Additional information on each of these state selected assessments can be found in [Chapter 3](#).

**Table 2.** Montana Selected State Assessments

<u><a href="#">Smarter Balanced</a></u>	<u><a href="#">MSAA</a></u>	<u><a href="#">ACT</a></u>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>SBAC</b></p> <p>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium</p> </div> <p>General math and reading/language arts assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 3–8.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>MSAA</b></p> <p>Multi State Alternate Assessment</p> </div> <p>Alternate math and reading/language arts assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 3–8 and 11 for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SwSCD).</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>ACT</b> with Writing</p> <p>American College Testing</p> </div> <p>General math, reading/language arts, and science assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grade 11.</p>
<u><a href="#">MSA</a></u>	<u><a href="#">AMSA</a></u>	<u><a href="#">ACCESS for ELLs 2.0</a></u>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>MSA</b></p> <p>Montana Science Assessment</p> </div> <p>General science assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 5 and 8.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>AMSA</b></p> <p>Alternate Montana Science Assessment</p> </div> <p>Alternate science assessment for academic achievement reporting in Grades 5, 8, and 11 for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SwSCD).</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>ACCESS for <b>ELLs</b></p> <p>English Language Learners</p> </div> <p>English Language Proficiency assessment for academic achievement reporting for English learners in Grades K–12.</p>

### What Students are Expected to Test?

Both state and federal law require all students in accredited schools to participate in state testing. The school districts must annually assess all students, and in instances of special circumstances, student participation may not fall below 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas (i.e., mathematics, reading/language arts, and science assessments) (see ESEA-ESSA Section 1111(c)(4)(E)). Montana must also adhere to the 1.0 percent student cap for the total student population identified as eligible to participate in the alternate assessment(s) (see ESEA-ESSA Section 1111(b)(2)(D)).

The state factors the requirement for 95 percent student participation in mathematics and reading/language arts assessments into the statewide accountability system. Students who meet participation requirements and who do not test are assigned a score of “Novice” and designated as a non-participant for accountability purposes (see [ESSA State Plan](#) and [Six Things Stakeholders Should Know about Participation and Testing in Montana](#)).

### **How is Student Eligibility to Test Determined?**

Montana’s procedures for determining which students are eligible to test uses the current fiscal year school records that begins on July 1 and ends on June 30 of each year (see §20-1-301 MCA). The OPI expects all students enrolled in accredited schools with “primary” educational service type records in the State Student Information System (i.e., Achievement in Montana (AIM)/Infinite Campus System) to test (see [Appendix D–E](#) for more details on this test registration process). Only student records in AIM/Infinite Campus for primary enrolled students are provided to the OPI’s test delivery contractors.

The accountability and state assessment participation expectations are set from several OPI determined collections published in the OPI’s [AIM/Infinite Campus Collection Schedule](#). Any student enrolled on the test count date and during the OPI’s [Published Test Windows](#) are expected to participate in the state summative assessments. If the student is enrolled in an accredited school in AIM/Infinite Campus with a primary enrollment and also included in MAEFAIRS for purposes of determining the Average Number Belonging (ANB), then the OPI expects the student to participate in state assessments. For more details on the school district’s obligations for state testing, accountability, and reporting, read the OPI’s [ESSA State Plan](#). **Table 2** provides an overview of content areas and tests that meet each requirement (see [Published Test Windows](#)).

### **What Special Circumstances Exist for Test Registration and Participation?**

There are special circumstances and educational situations that do not fall under the typical accredited school and primary enrollment criteria for student registration within the online test delivery systems. The rules for hours of pupil instruction per school year come from §20-9-311, MCA, and the rules for minimum aggregate hours stem from §20-1-301, MCA. For further information and guidance on these special circumstances, see [Appendix H: Special Circumstances for Test Registration and Participation](#).

## CHAPTER 2: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR PARTICIPATION

All students, including students with disabilities and English Learners, are required by state and federal law to take part in the state assessments with or without accommodations. Generally, if a student can receive instruction then they are also able to participate in state assessments; however, the health and well-being of students should take priority in determining whether they can safely participate. All students enrolled in accredited schools are expected to take part in state assessments in one of three ways:

1. Participate in the general education assessments without accommodations.
2. Participate in the general education assessments with accommodations.
3. Participate in alternate assessments when the [participation criteria](#) are met.

Students may only be exempted from testing under certain, limited conditions. In these rare and unique instances, a student may be unable to participate in any part of the assessment due to a significant and documented medical reason. In these cases, the school is not penalized for that student's absence due to the documented significant medical emergency. Therefore, when determining the percentage of students taking an assessment, the OPI does not have to include a student with a significant medical emergency in the participation rate calculation for accountability purposes. Non-participation for any other reason will negatively impact the participation rate calculation.

In Montana, there is no “opt out” law, and state law requires all students in public and accredited non-public schools to participate in state testing. In accordance with ESEA-ESSA Section 1112(e)(1)(B)(ii), parents may refuse to have their child participate in state assessments; however, under Montana's compulsory school attendance laws this refusal reason does not exist (see §20-5-103, MCA). Schools must administer state assessments with or without accommodations based on individual student needs consistent with all state and federal laws and regulations (ARM 10.56.104). Procedures to notify families and manage participation reasons for students whose families refuse should be determined at the local level (see ARM 10.56.102(6) and [MontCAS Parent Corner Page](#)).

### Civil Rights Obligations

Schools are obligated to ensure equal access to educational services and programs including inclusion in a safe environment free from discrimination. Every child has the right to an education and must be afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers (§20-9-309, MCA). The law protects individuals from discrimination or harassment based on the following nine protected classes: sex, race, age, disability, color, creed, national origin, religion, or genetic information. Schools must take affirmative steps to ensure all students can meaningfully participate in the provided educational programs and services; therefore, Montana school districts and the OPI must work in partnership to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to participate in state assessments. This joint responsibility is important to ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic content standards. It is never allowable to exclude students based on expected performance, difficulty in administering the test, disability, or English Learner status.

### What Does Participation to the Fullest Extent Mean?

MontCAS policies and procedures are designed to ensure student inclusion to the fullest extent possible and to provide clear and consistent information on the program-specific test registration processes. The



OPI conducts desk and site monitoring to ensure that standardized test administration procedures are implemented with fidelity across school districts which includes ensuring appropriate assessments, with or without accommodations, are selected for all students with disabilities and for English Learners. In addition to the ESEA-ESSA participation requirements there are extensive laws, regulations, and policies to support the meaningful participation and inclusion of special population students in state assessments. The OPI has specific guidelines for school districts to follow in order to equitably serve students with disabilities and English Learners with their participation in state assessments.

### **Needs-Based Selection of Test Settings**

The selection of accessibility tools (i.e., universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations) or test settings is a systematic, data-based process made by educators familiar with individual student needs. For students being served with English Learner plans, IEPs, or 504 plans, supports should be discussed at planning meetings. The supports and accommodations that are provided on state assessments must be familiar to the student and match those that are provided during classroom instruction and assessments throughout the school year. Student's parents/guardians should be knowledgeable about the supports and accommodations planned for their student to ensure parents/guardians are aware of the conditions under which their child will participate in the assessment. Each vendor-owned TDS collects the test settings so every child can meaningfully participate in state assessments.

### **Including Students with Disabilities**

In general, all school-aged children who are students with disabilities as defined by Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are entitled to free appropriate public education (FAPE) which includes the opportunity to participate in state testing regardless of the educational setting (ARM 10.16.3121). Decisions about how to assess students with disabilities must be made by a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team under IDEA, the placement team under Section 504, or the individual or team designated by a district to make that decision under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as applicable, based on each student's individual needs (ARM 10.56.104).

The passage of IDEA prompted the creation of a range of test participation options making it possible for students with even the most significant disabilities to be assessed on a test aligned with general education content standards. Each student who receives special education services must have a written IEP that documents how the student will participate in state assessments. As described in the assessment rules, state assessments must be administered with or without accommodations based on individual student needs. In addition, IEP teams for a student shall determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria for the statewide alternate assessment based on the alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). The decision to move a special education student to an alternate assessment has significant implications for the path that a student will take in their K–12 school career. It means the student is not able to participate in the general education curriculum even when provided with accommodations. A student who participates in an alternate assessment requires a modified curriculum (see [Eligibility Guidelines for MontCAS Alternate Assessments](#) document).

In Montana, the AIM/Infinite Campus collects test settings which describe the testing needs for students with IEPs using an individualized, needs-based approach to select accommodations and supports for state assessments (see the [AIM/Infinite Campus IEP Editor Flyer](#)). For both IEP and Section 504 students these student supports and accommodations need to be identified prior to assessment administration.

### Including English Learners

In addition to the ESEA-ESSA participation requirements, English Learners must be served under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA). English Learners are school-aged children whose English proficiency, or lack thereof, affects their ability to achieve academic excellence and to equally participate in academic programs like mathematics, reading/language arts, science, and social studies. Under federal law, all school districts are required to identify students who are eligible for language assistance. School districts must use the [“English Learner Guidance for School Districts”](#) to identify English Learners and annually monitor individual progress in acquiring academic English consistent with all state and federal laws and regulations (ARM 10.56.104).

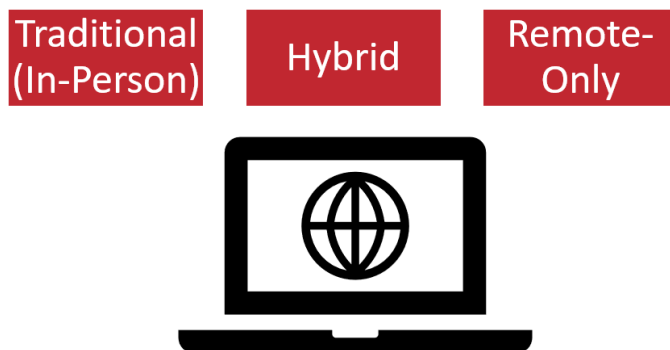
Decisions about how to assess English Learners should be made by an educator or team designated by a district who is familiar with the student’s needs, as well as those supports that the student has been using during instruction and for other assessments to make test setting decisions (ARM 10.56.104). Supports need to be identified prior to assessment administration. For additional information on student eligibility and identification for English Learners, see the [Eligibility and Identification Criteria for English Learners](#).

### Participation During the Pandemic - Instructional Setting Explained

Note that remote learning, homebound services, and homeschooling are all unique and distinct modes of learning that have specific individualized policies and guidelines that are determined by the state. In Montana, remote learning is an alternative learning setting that is being utilized in schools across the state in various ways as a result of the pandemic. In spring 2020, Montana’s Governor granted schools the flexibility to provide remote or offsite education in order to protect students and teachers from the spread of COVID-19 ([Directive 2020](#)). The [“COVID-19: Standardized Testing Guidance”](#) is resource specific to the pandemic as a result of key needs that school districts have shared with the OPI Assessment Unit.

The noted guidance presents some challenges for test administration within the given three settings: (1) traditional (in-school), (2) hybrid (blended), and (3) remote-only settings (see **Figure 2**). The guidance is split into (1) in-school or (2) remote-only test administration strategies. For the 2020-2021 school year, any students that are in either hybrid or remote-only setting are expected to be provided the opportunity to participate in state assessments through in-person services. If the child cannot participate due to COVID reasons, then the child may qualify for a medical exemption under the one-year exemption.

**Figure 2.** 2020-2021 Simplified Instructional Models



### Montana Medical Exemption Policy

In 2004, the Department granted states flexibility in participation rate calculations for the purpose of determinations under the ESEA-ESSA accountability process (see ESEA-ESSA Section 1111(c)(4)(E)). The participation rate must be calculated separately for each subject (i.e., reading/language arts, mathematics, and science). With regard to the published test windows, the OPI has selected test windows that are wide enough that if a student misses an assessment, the student will likely have the opportunity to “make-up” the test on a different date. This test “make-up” would count positively towards the school’s participation rate. When a student cannot be tested at any time throughout the published test windows they are counted as a non-participant unless the reason is due to a significant medical emergency (e.g., a student is hospitalized due to an accident). Students with short-term, minor illnesses, or injuries should participate in state assessments.

Students may receive a medical exemption if they cannot participate in a state assessment during the testing window (including make-up dates) due to a significant qualifying medical event. System Test Coordinators or School Principals must record the medical reasons a student did not take the state assessment for any child who was enrolled in the school during the [Published Test Window](#) (see [MontCAS Collection Schedule](#)) before June 1st of each academic year. Anything not considered a medical exemption will be reported as non-participation for both state and federal accountability purposes.

### What Qualifies in Montana as a Medical Exemption?

Each year, students with serious and chronic medical, or other conditions, can and do participate successfully in state assessments. However, there are rare and unique situations in which a student is unable to participate in state assessments due to a documented, significant, and incapacitating condition or an emergency that extends across the entire (or remaining) test window. In these instances, school districts may request an exemption from testing the student. Federal regulations allow exceptions to participation in such situations; however, these exceptions must be made with the utmost care and restraint.

### General Medical Exemption Guidelines

If the student can participate in learning activities and education, either in their school, home, or outplacement facility, then he/she is able to participate in state assessments. The decision to test or not test a student should never depend solely on the outcome of the exemption request, nor is it allowable

to exclude students based on expected performance, difficulty in administering the test, disability, or English Learner status. It is incumbent upon the requesting district to provide the OPI with enough compelling evidence to warrant each medical exemption request and justify the non-participation reported status.

***What level of documentation is required for a medical exemption?***

School district trustees must determine what policies will be adopted to implement these medical exemption testing procedures under the participation assessment rules. The medical exemption should be documented by a student’s medical provider. The OPI has provided a sample form for use to document the medical reasons at the provider and family level. School districts are encouraged to retain the medical reason documentation locally for a period of three years as the OPI reserves the right to audit districts to ensure compliance with the requirement to retain signed copies of all applicable forms for up to three years.

***Standard Medical Reasons and Examples***

Examples of a significant medical emergency include a serious car accident, hospitalization, severe trauma, mental health crisis that is dangerous to self or others, or placement in hospice care. Generally, if the student can receive instruction during the testing window, the student should be able to participate in assessment. An injured student can often participate in a state assessment with accommodations.

**To apply for a medical exemption, districts must gather documentation that the student meets two criteria:**

1. The student’s situation is so severe that the child cannot participate in any learning or educational activities in any setting (e.g., home, school, or outplacement facility); and
2. The student cannot participate in any tests, even with adjustments (e.g., accommodations or supports) that could allow them to participate.

**Table 3.** Medical Exemption Definitions

<b>Minor Illness or Injury</b>	Students with short-term minor illnesses or injuries should participate in state assessments.
<b>Medically Fragile – Students with IEPs</b>	IEP Teams document how the student will participate in state assessments. All medically fragile students are expected to participate in state assessments unless a significant and documented medical emergency exists in addition to medical fragility.
<b>Serious Illness</b>	Montana defines a serious illness as one that prevents the student from receiving instruction and participating in assessment for the entirety of the testing window.
<b>Medical Emergency</b>	Montana defines a medical emergency as an incident involving a medical condition, injury, or crisis requiring hospitalization, clinical care, or treatment in response to the incident. Typically, a medical emergency prevents the student from receiving instruction and from participating in assessment for the remainder of the testing window. Medical emergencies should be documented in writing by a licensed medical provider and kept on file by the local district.

<b>Concussion</b>	Due to the specialized care concussions require, even with accommodations or supports, the student may not be able to participate fully in instruction or in state assessments. Because of the nature of concussions and how important it is to care for a concussion correctly, this injury is the exception to the rules outlined. The exemption request process must be followed.
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**Conditions that may not qualify for exemption:**

- Short-term illnesses, minor injuries, or broken arms.
- Certain mental health conditions that permit students to receive instruction.
- Pregnancy.

**COVID Reasons and Examples**

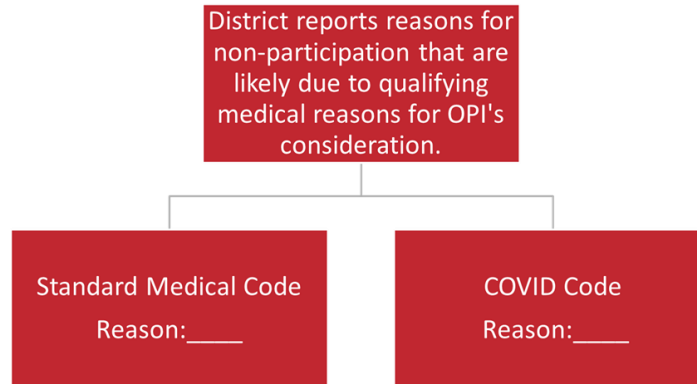
The pandemic continues to pose significant challenges for states, districts, and schools and as the impact continues to increase it affects educational systems across Montana in very different ways. The OPI consulted with many school districts over the course of the 2020-2021 school year and learned that there are specific participation scenarios that make it impossible for children to participate safely in the state assessments due to either personal or family COVID-related reasons. A COVID medical exemption is a one-year, non-participation option for school districts. Under the non-participation reporting collection in the MontCAS Application, the OPI will review the reasons and determine whether each specific case will be approved as a COVID-related reason.

*It is never allowable to exclude students based on the difficulty in administering the test (e.g., remote learners). Each child must be provided the opportunity, but if they are unable to participate in the test due to either a personal or family COVID-related reason the one-year medical exemption for COVID-related reasons may qualify (see Appendix A–C for more instruction and guidance).*

**Reporting Medical Exemptions**

Each reason for non-participation (due to medical reasons) is handled by the OPI on a case-by-case basis. Subsequently, the examples provided within this manual are not illustrative of an exhaustive list of all the possible situations or scenarios and are intended as guidance to inform school districts of examples that may or may not be considered as a medical exemption (see **Table 4**). Non-participation decisions must be determined in consultation with the student, family, medical provider (where appropriate), and the school district before they can be reported to the OPI in the [MontCAS Application](#). As such, the medical exemption process is considered a local decision. School districts are encouraged to use the OPI’s sample forms and appendices to establish local parameters for what constitutes sufficient evidence for an exemption (see [Appendix A–C](#)). The OPI reserves the right to handle these non-participation reports on an individualized basis and will use the [MontCAS Application](#) exemption reason to determine whether or not the situation reported qualifies for an OPI-approved medical exemption (see [MontCAS User Guide](#)).

**Figure 3.** Simplified MontCAS Application Non-Participation Data Collection



To report medical exemptions to the OPI, the school district should make sure it has first conducted a consultation and has the necessary documentation to be prepared to submit a reason as shown in **Figure 3**. All medical exemptions (COVID-related or not) require a reason (or explanation). To support school districts with this process, the OPI has prepared [Appendix A](#) as a sample form that can be used with the school district to consult the medical professional and [Appendix B](#) as a sample form which can be used with the school district to consult the family. After consultation, the district reports the reason (or explanation for non-participation) to the OPI within the [MontCAS Application](#) for each state assessment that the child is unable to participate in due to medical reasons. The OPI has prepared [Appendix C](#) to illustrate the reporting steps within the [MontCAS Application](#) and process if 10 or more students are being reported. See **Table 4** for additional guidance on how to prepare a reason (or explanation). Each reason should include information to support Parts 1–3. Part 4 of **Table 4** is new information to address medical exemptions for COVID reasons. Explanations should be brief (under 500 characters) and should not contain any personally identifiable student information or sensitive information that would violate FERPA or HIPAA (see [Student Privacy on FERPA and COVID-19 Guidance](#)).

**Table 4.** Relevant Parts of a Medical Reason or COVID Explanation

Relevant Parts	Suggested Information to Clarify Reasons to the OPI
<b>Part 1) Medical Exemption =</b>	Clear in the explanation that the reason relates to documented illness or injuries and/or treatment or prevention.
<b>Part 2) Consultation =</b>	It is evident that reason was determined through consultation with the student, family, medical provider (where appropriate), and the school district.
<b>Part 3) Reason =</b>	Clear in the explanation that the fact or situation explains why the non-participation reason is justifiable/happened.
<b>Part 4) COVID =</b>	Clear in the explanation that it relates to the virus or pandemic in some way.

### CHAPTER 3: FACTS ABOUT STATE SELECTED ASSESSMENTS

Student participation in state assessments is predominately funded through the federal grant for state assessments (i.e., Title I Part B) and partially funded by the federal IDEA funding and the Office of Commissioner of Higher Education’s Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant (see [Assessment Overview 2021](#)). Under the assessment rules, the obligation for funding state assessments is the responsibility of the state (see ARM 10.56.101).

#### Smarter Balanced

Note that federal law requires 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas. The Smarter Balanced assessment is used to determine student progress in grades 3–8 toward Montana’s Content Standards in ELA and mathematics. The test is administered online, is adaptive, and has a ten-week administration window that starts in March. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for K–8 schools to calculate academic achievement and growth over time. For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Profile](#).

#### Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)

Note that federal law requires 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas. The MSAA has a nine-week administration window that begins in March. The assessment is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measure academic content that is aligned to Montana’s Content Standards in ELA and mathematics. The MSAA is the alternate version provided in place of the Smarter Balanced and the ACT for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SwSCD). This assessment contains built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. The assessment is computer based with multiple options for student interaction, including print options to allow for paper-based administration per the student’s IEP or 504 Plan. This assessment has a seven-week test window that starts in March. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the alternate assessment. Students eligible for the alternate assessment will be included within Montana’s accountability system for K–8 schools under the SBAC achievement categories and for high schools under the ACT achievement category. For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [MSAA Assessment Profile](#).

#### ACT with Writing (ACT)

Note that federal law requires 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas. The ACT with Writing assesses the content areas of English, writing, reading, science, and mathematics. This assessment is given to all grade 11 students as the statewide accountability assessment for mathematics, ELA, and science. The test is delivered via paper with ACT allowable accommodations and starting in 2019 the option for online testing. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for schools with grades 9–12 to calculate academic achievement. For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [ACT Assessment Profile](#).

### **Montana Science Assessment (MSA)**

Note that federal law requires 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas. The MSA is aligned to the Montana Content Standards in science (2016). The MSA is an online adaptive test and has an eight-week test window that starts in March. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the inclusion of all eligible students for this important statewide accountability assessment. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for K–8 schools to calculate the Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) indicator. For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [MSA Assessment Profile](#).

### **Alternate Montana Science Assessment (AMSA)**

Note that federal law requires 95 percent for all students or 95 percent for student subgroups (consisting of 10 or more students) in the required content areas. The AMSA is designed to assess Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SwSCD) and measures academic content that is aligned to Montana’s Content Standards in science (2016). The AMSA is the alternate version provided in place of the MSA. This assessment contains many built-in supports that allow students to use materials they are most familiar with and communicate what they know and can do as independently as possible. The assessment is computer based with multiple options for student interaction. This assessment has an eight-week test window that starts in March. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for the alternate assessment. Student performance within Montana’s accountability system will use results from this assessment for K–8 schools to calculate the STEM indicator. For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [AMSA Assessment Profile](#).

### **ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 (or WIDA)**

Note that federal law requires 100 percent of English Learners participate in the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment for development of English language proficiency. The ACCESS for ELLs (or WIDA) is a large-scale English language proficiency assessment aligned to the WIDA English language development standards (2011). Subtests include the domains of listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The ACCESS for ELLs is given annually to monitor English Learner progress in acquiring academic English. There is an Alternate ACCESS for ELLs for students who are English Learners and have significant cognitive disabilities. It is important that registration information within AIM be as accurate and complete as possible for the appropriate identification of students eligible for this assessment. Montana’s accountability system uses results from this assessment for all schools with ten or more English Learners to calculate the “ESSA EL Progress”. To be considered proficient in English, students must, at a minimum, reach a 4.7 overall composite score on the ACCESS for ELLs assessment. Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (SwSCD) testing on the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs must reach, at a minimum, a proficiency level of P2 (see [English Learner Guidance for School Districts](#)). For more information on this state selected assessment, read the [WIDA Assessment Profile](#).

### **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**

NAEP, better known as “Nation’s Report Card,” is the only national perspective on American education. NAEP is a congressionally mandated project overseen by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to monitor knowledge, skill, and performance of the nation’s children and youth over time. NAEP measures and reports on a regular basis what America’s students know and can do in core subjects like



reading, mathematics, writing, and science. From 1969 through 2002, participation in NAEP was voluntary. As of the 2003 administration, participation in mathematics and reading at grades 4 and 8 became a requirement in all states and school districts receiving Title I funding. With over a decade of trend in these grades/subjects, the biennial NAEP state-level administration is a vital data collection for Montana and it helps inform policymakers of what Montana students know and can do in these various subjects/grades. For more information on this national assessment, visit the [Nation's Report Card](#).

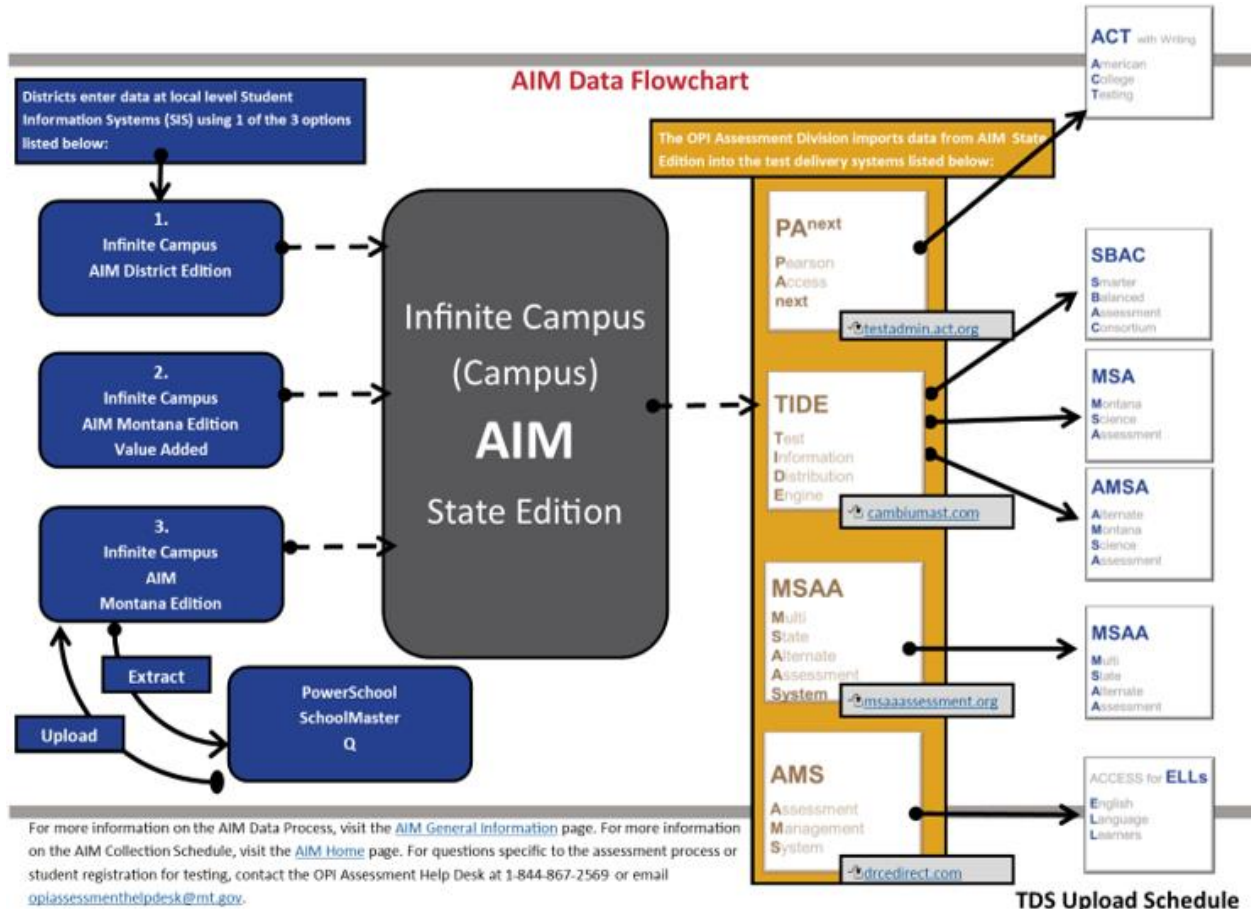
#### CHAPTER 4: STATE MASS STUDENT TEST REGISTRATION PROCESS

The ability to identify students for assessments is a critical element of the testing process from formative, to interim, to the state summative. The contractor-owned online test delivery systems (or TDS) require student information to manage and deliver online and paper-based assessments. The AIM/Infinite Campus allows school districts to submit required student information electronically. AIM/Infinite Campus provides the state of Montana, federal entities, and education communities with timely and accurate information about students, school districts, and the state (see [AIM Policy References](#)). The [AIM Data Flowchart](#) further depicts how school districts' student information (or data) flows to the OPI.

After the first school district submission (or sync) to the state, which occurs no later than the [AIM October Count Date as published in the AIM Collection Schedule](#), the OPI sends records for primary enrolled students from AIM/Infinite Campus to these online test delivery systems. These student data are reported to the test delivery contractors on a regular basis as published in the upload schedules (e.g., [TDS Student Data Upload Schedule](#)). Students must have a record in AIM/Infinite Campus to participate in state assessments.

The OPI uses data from AIM/Infinite Campus to identify and register students for state assessments. Per the published [AIM Collection Schedule](#) and the [TDS Student Data Upload Schedule](#), a student data file is shared with the test delivery contractors to add, update, or remove student records from the online TDS portal. The goal with this continuous process is to keep the portals as synced as possible given that each school district submits data to AIM/Infinite Campus on a district-defined schedule. **Figure 4** depicts the MontCAS flowchart adapted from the AIM flowchart to illustrate how students are mass registered to the online test delivery systems by the OPI.

**Figure 4.** MontCAS State Assessment Registration Process



In the event that a student with primary enrollment is enrolled in multiple school districts in AIM/Infinite Campus, the resolution process requires finding out which district should be reporting the student as primary and which should be reporting as non-primary. The enrollment record(s) must then be synced to AIM/Infinite Campus. This cannot be resolved by the OPI alone and may require staff from multiple districts to contact one another directly to resolve the issue. As such, the OPI strongly advises school districts to create firm enrollment policies to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to participate in statewide assessments.

For more information on reporting in AIM/Infinite Campus, visit the [AIM User Guide Page](#), [AIM Collection Schedule](#), and/or contact the AIM Help Desk at (877) 424-6681 or [OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov](mailto:OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED AIM AND TDS STUDENT DATA UPLOAD QUESTIONS

### **Q: Can students learning remotely qualify for medical exemption?**

**A:** Possibly. The district must provide the opportunity to the student and family, but if the family refuses due to COVID reasons, or the district is unable to safely accommodate the child on campus due to COVID reasons, the district may be eligible to indicate non-participation using the COVID reason this school year.

### **Q: What does the OPI upload to the online TDS portals?**

**A:** This answer depends on the assessment. However, for the Smarter Balanced, MSA, and AMSA [Appendices D–F](#) depicts the data elements submitted in the state student registration process.

### **Q: When does the OPI upload?**

**A:** Smarter Balanced, MSA and AMSA enrollments are uploaded to TDS System as described in **Figure 4**. Throughout the school year until the testing window, student data are uploaded twice a week; and once the testing window opens, uploads occur on a daily basis.

ACCESS enrollments are uploaded to the DRC TDS System as described in **Figure 4**. The initial upload occurs in late October and then a final upload immediately prior to the December test window opening.

MSAA enrollments are uploaded to the MSAA TDS System as described in **Figure 4**. The initial upload occurs three weeks before the testing window opens. Then uploads occur once a week on Friday mornings.

ACT enrollments are uploaded to the PANext TDS System as described in **Figure 4**. The initial upload occurs in December and then a second upload in January. Newly enrolled students are uploaded locally by districts via the PA<sup>next</sup> portal.

### **Q: How does the OPI student upload occur?**

**A:** All student data uploads occur using a query to pull student information directly from the AIM database. The query then goes through a quality review process with OPI staff prior to being saved as a .csv file placed on a shared secure server with the TDS portal that integrates the file virtually into their test management system.

### **Q: What if a student is missing in the TDS portal?**

**A:** All calls about a missing student in an assessment portal go through a series of steps per the [MontCAS Data Privacy Policy](#). To troubleshoot the issue, the Assessment Unit uses a routine protocol. For illustration purposes the routine TDS Data Protocol steps are as follows:

1. Confirm the local data exists as all AIM data originate at the local level.
2. Use AIM search tools to identify whether the missing student exists as a record in AIM/Infinite Campus.
3. Involve AIM Unit Specialists as necessary, as the front-end access to AIM/Infinite Campus is limited.

4. If the student is not in AIM/Infinite Campus, is enrolled in two different schools, or there are any other number of visible discrepancies, the issue is referred to the AIM Help Desk at (877) 424-6681 or [OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov](mailto:OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov).
5. If the student is present in AIM/Infinite Campus, then Assessment Unit Specialists investigate the student file generation query logic to troubleshoot.

**Note:** The large majority of enrollment issues stem from the local input or AIM/Infinite Campus syncing process. Once the changes are made in AIM/Infinite Campus, corrected enrollments will sync within 24 hours or as published in the [TDS Student Data Upload Schedule](#).

#### **Q: What if a student is missing his/her IEP designation in a TDS portal?**

**A:** All calls relating to whether a student is missing his/her IEP or 504 Plan in a TDS portal go through a series of steps per the [MontCAS Data Privacy Policy](#). To troubleshoot the issue, the Assessment Unit will use these routine protocol steps in conjunction with the Special Education Division to provide support:

1. Using the TDS portal search tools, the Assessment Unit Specialists attempt to identify whether the student exists as a record and identify the associated student IEP/504 demographic flag details.  
**Note:** Visibility over these sensitive education record flags is limited at the OPI.
2. If the student exists in the TDS portal, a referral to troubleshoot the AIM/Infinite Campus IEP/504 data is made to OPI's Student Support Services Division for Special Education Specialists.
3. Once the AIM/Infinite Campus changes are made, the IEP/504 designation data typically syncs within 24 hours or as published in the [TDS Student Data Upload Schedule](#).
4. The Assessment Unit Specialists will involve Special Education Specialists as necessary as the front-end access to AIM/Infinite Campus is limited.
5. If the student is not in AIM/Infinite Campus, is enrolled in two different schools, or there are any other number of visible discrepancies, the issue is referred to the AIM Help Desk at (877) 424-6681 or [OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov](mailto:OPIAIMHelp@mt.gov).
6. If the student is present in AIM/Infinite Campus, then Assessment Unit Specialists investigate the student file generation query logic to troubleshoot.

#### **Q: What if a student is missing in an alternate TDS portal?**

**A:** A student requires the alternate flag in AIM/Infinite Campus to be marked in order to be eligible for the alternate assessments. Students eligible to participate in alternate assessments make up approximately 1% of the total student population. The decision to move a special education student to an alternate assessment has significant implications for the path that a student will take in their K–12 school career. It means the student is not able to participate in the general education curriculum even when provided with accommodations. A student who participates in an alternate assessment requires a modified curriculum (see [Eligibility Guidelines for MontCAS Alternate Assessments](#) document).

If a student is not showing up in the alternate TDS portal, it is assumed that the alternate flag is not checked and the Assessment Unit Specialists will implement the Special Education TDS Data Protocol as these sensitive data are restricted and only visible to a select group of staff in the Student Support Services Division.

#### **Q: What if a student is still appearing as enrolled?**

**A:** For the Smarter Balanced, MSA, and AMSA Testing Portal, the student record in a school persists in the TDS portal until that school reports, via AIM/Infinite Campus, that the student has exited. Once an exit

date is reported for a student, the student’s record will be sent with a “delete” indicator to TIDE, and the record will no longer be visible or editable in TIDE by the district that reported the exit date.

## REFERENCES

1. [AIM/Infinite Campus IEP Editor Flyer](#)
2. [AIM October Count Date as published in the AIM Collection Schedule](#)
3. [ARM Chapter 55](#)
4. [ARM Chapter 56](#)
5. [COVID-19: Standardized Testing Guidance](#)
6. [COVID-19: Accessibility and distance learning options for students with disabilities \(ed.gov\)](#)
7. [Directive 2020](#)
8. [Eligibility Guidelines for MontCAS Alternate Assessments](#)
9. [Eligibility and Identification Criteria for English Learners](#)
10. [English Learner Guidance for School Districts](#)
11. [Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities \(2010\). U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights](#)
12. [Indiana Department of Education: Assessment Policy Manual \(19-20\)](#)
13. [MCA §20-2-121](#)
14. [MCA §20-3-323](#)
15. [MCA §20-5-103](#)
16. [MCA §20-7-111](#)
17. [MCA §20-9-309](#)
18. [MontCAS Collection Schedule](#)
19. [MontCAS Data Privacy Policy](#)
20. [MontCAS Application User Guide](#)
21. [National Association of State Directors of Special Education \(NASDSE\): Brief Remote Learning vs. Homebound vs. Homeschool](#)
22. [New Mexico Department of Education: Request for Medical Exemption from Statewide Assessments](#)
23. [OPI Published Testing Window](#)
24. [Oregon Department of Education: Exemptions from Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
25. [OSEP Memo on Educational Expenses for Children in Private Residential Facilities 2005](#)
26. [Pennsylvania Department of Education: Guidance for Medical Exemptions from State Assessments](#)
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28. [Rhode Island Department of Education: Assessment Exemptions](#)
29. [Six Things Stakeholders Should Know About Participation and Testing in Montana](#)
30. [State's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education's Assessment Peer Review Process \(2018\)](#)
31. [Student Privacy on FERPA and COVID-19 Guidance](#)
32. [Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities \(March 21, 2020\) - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)

## **APPENDICES**

- [Appendix A: Medical Exemption Medical Professional \(Sample Form\)](#)
- [Appendix B: Medical Exemption Parent-Family \(Sample Form\)](#)
- [Appendix C: Medical Exemption MontCAS Application Reporting Instructions](#)
- [Appendix D: TIDE Student Data Upload Process](#)
- [Appendix E: ACT Student Data Upload Process](#)
- [Appendix F: MSAA Student Data Upload Process](#)
- [Appendix G: ACCESS for ELLs Student Data Upload Process](#)
- [Appendix H: Special Circumstances for Test Registration and Participation](#)