

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Texas Assessment Program

Frequently Asked Questions About Texas Assessments
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Page 1 of 40

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program

Questions Related to General Test Administration	3
School Emergencies during Testing	3
Testing Schedule.....	3
Test Booklet or Answer Document Issues.....	3
Highlighters and Other Aids	5
Temporary Disabilities.....	6
Homebound Students	7
Test Materials.....	7
Large-Print Test Booklets.....	8
Preparing Materials for Scoring.....	8
Make-up Testing	9
Test Security/Irregularities.....	9
Rewards for Performance on Assessments	11
Charter School Participation in Statewide Assessment Program	12
Access to Assessments for Private School or Home-Schooled Students	13
Use of Mentors as Test Administrators	13
Dyslexia Bundled Accommodations.....	13
Louisiana Testing.....	15
Questions Related to Equating of Tests	16
Questions Related to English Language Learner Assessments	21
Years in U.S. Schools Unknown.....	21
General RPTE and TOP Questions.....	21
Language Proficiency Assessment Committee Questions.....	25
Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT).....	26
Questions Related to Alternative Assessments.....	28
Test Selection.....	28
Field Tests.....	29
Accommodations	29
General Questions about TAKS-Inclusive.....	33
Implications for Graduation, Retention, and Program Exit	34
Locally Determined Alternate Assessment (LDAA).....	35
Reporting and Accountability	36
Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Who Receive Special Education Services	37
Student Success Initiative	39

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Questions Related to General Test Administration

School Emergencies during Testing

1. **Question:** A fire alarm just sounded and we are testing. What should we do?

Answer: If school emergencies such as fire alarms or bomb threats occur, the school should have students leave their tests where they are and follow the normal school procedures related to such emergencies. The test administrators must closely monitor their testing groups to make sure that no one discusses the test. The students should resume testing once the building has been cleared for re-entry. If there is an actual building fire or other school emergency that prevents students from resuming testing, the campus coordinator should contact the district coordinator, and the district coordinator should contact the Student Assessment Division at 512-463-9536 for guidance.

Testing Schedule

2. **Question:** What should a campus do if a student has not finished testing by the end of the day?

Answer: A campus or district is not required to extend testing beyond the regular school day, but the district may choose to do so. If such a situation arises, the campus coordinator should consult the district coordinator for a determination. Districts are encouraged to develop and communicate to campuses policies regarding testing beyond the regular school day before test administrations begin.

3. **Question:** If a student is marked absent at 10 A.M. and arrives at school later, should she be allowed to take the test even though she has been marked as absent?

Answer: Districts may establish starting times for testing. A student who arrives after testing has begun may be tested if sufficient time remains in the day and if the student has not had contact with students who have already completed testing. If the student tests, the answer document should be marked S for Score. (The absence marked on the school's roll is for purposes of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for funding purposes and is not necessarily related to testing. However, it is advisable that the district keep documentation on the discrepancy between attendance reported for ADA and for testing in case of an audit.)

Test Booklet or Answer Document Issues

4. **Question:** A seal was broken accidentally or was broken when it arrived in our shipment. What should we do?

Answer: The campus coordinator or test administrator should simply tape that section until the student is authorized to view it. It is not necessary to file an incident report with

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

the Security Task Force in the Student Assessment Division if it is determined that the seal was broken accidentally.

5. **Question:** A student accidentally started filling out the wrong section on the answer document (e.g., during a math test, he/she marked answers in the science section of the answer document). What do we do?

Answer: Determine how far into the test the student has gotten. If he is not very far, instruct him to erase his answers from the wrong section and direct him to the correct section. If he has completed or almost completed the section, give the student a new answer document and ask him to transcribe his answers from the old answer document. Void the old answer document by writing “VOID” in large bold letters across the student information grids and save the voided answer document, which must be placed under a Voided Answer Document Identification Sheet and returned with the scorable materials. Remember that the test administrator or campus coordinator will need to grid in the student’s demographic information on the answer document.

6. **Question:** A student who is already halfway through the reading section of his test accidentally tears his answer document (or Grade 3 scorable test booklet) while erasing. What should we do?

Answer: The student may not continue to use the torn answer document or scorable test booklet because the tear might interfere with machine scoring. The test administrator should give the student a new answer document or test booklet and instruct him to begin marking his answers on the new document at the point where he left off on the unusable document. **Note: A new scorable test booklet must have the same form number as the booklet it replaces.** When the student turns in his new answer document or test booklet, the test administrator will need to transfer verbatim the student’s responses and all the demographic information from the unusable answer document or test booklet to the new one. The test administrator must write “Transcribed by (NAME) because (REASON)” at the top of the new document. Transcription must be done in No. 2 pencil.

If a replacement scorable test booklet with the same form number is not available, please contact the Student Assessment Division.

If the student tested on a previous day, the test administrator will need to transfer the student’s responses for that test as well. The test administrator should then void the unusable answer document. When the campus coordinator returns the scorable materials to the district testing coordinator, he or she should submit the student’s voided document with any other voided documents and the new answer document with the scorable answer documents.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

7. **Question:** A student who has already begun testing discovers that there is a page missing from her test booklet. What should we do?

Answer: If the student was using a **nonscorable** test booklet (Grades 4-10 and exit level), try to identify a new test booklet with the same form number that is not defective and provide the new booklet to the student. **The new booklet must have the same form number as the original booklet; otherwise, the student's answers will not be scored correctly.** If a non-defective replacement booklet with the same form number is not available, please contact the Student Assessment Division.

If a **scorable** test booklet (Grade 3) is defective and a non-defective replacement booklet with the same form number is available, the test administrator should give the new booklet to the student and have the student begin bubbling in her answers in the new booklet at the point where she left off in the defective booklet. When the student turns in her new test booklet, the test administrator will need to carefully transfer the student's answers from the defective booklet to the new booklet without making any changes. The test administrator must void the defective booklet and write "Transcribed by (NAME) because (REASON)" on the front of the new test booklet. When the campus coordinator returns the scorable materials to the district, he or she should submit the defective test booklet with the voided test booklets and the new test booklet with the scorable test booklets.

8. **Question:** The test administrator noticed that a student had not recorded his answers in the answer document. What should we do?

Answer: At any time during testing, the test administrator may remind all students with the following general statement: "Please check to be sure you have filled in all of your answers on the answer document." If this general statement does not help, then the test administrator, before the end of the testing session, should address the student directly in the following way: "You have not recorded all of your answers on the answer document. Please do so now." If the student has already turned in his or her testing materials, the materials should be returned so that the student may record his or her answers as instructed. If the student has finished testing and left the testing location, call the Student Assessment Division.

Highlighters and Other Aids

9. **Question:** Are students allowed to bring and use highlighters on the test?

Answer: Students in grades 4-10 and exit level may use highlighters in the test booklets to emphasize important information on any subject-area test. Third graders may not use highlighters, crayons, or colored pencils in their test booklets because the residue from these instruments could interfere with the machine scoring of the booklets. Third graders may use No. 2 pencils to underline important information in their test booklets, but should avoid making stray marks near the answer bubbles.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

A student served by special education who is taking Grade 3 TAKS may use a highlighter in the scorable booklet if the student's individualized education program (IEP) requires the use of a highlighter. After testing, the test administrator must transcribe the contents of the original test booklet onto another scorable test booklet with the same form number. For further information, see "Transcribing—Scorable Test Booklets and Answer Documents" on page 153 of the 2006 *DCCM*.

10. Question: What is the rule regarding cell phone use during testing?

Answer: The use of cell phones or other telecommunication devices during testing is not permitted. Districts are required to develop a policy for cell phone use that is compatible with local policy while preserving the security and confidential integrity of the testing program.

11. Question: I have heard that I am required to provide one dictionary and one thesaurus for every five students. Is this true?

Answer: When dictionary and thesaurus use is allowed, districts are required to provide access to them. *When appropriate*, there should be at least one dictionary for every five students testing; it is also *recommended* that there be one thesaurus provided for every five students testing, *if possible*. Students may use a separate dictionary and thesaurus or a dictionary/thesaurus combination.

Temporary Disabilities

12. Question: A student just came in with a broken arm/hand. He is about to take a test, and we are not sure how to handle it.

Answer: If he can use his other hand, that's an option. If that is not possible, there is an allowable accommodation described on page 33 of the 2006 *DCCM*. If an examinee has a temporary or permanent disabling condition that interferes with his or her ability to record machine-scorable responses, the examinee may respond orally to test items, mark responses in the test booklet, type responses, or record responses on a dry erase board, chalkboard, or scratch paper. An individual administration may be necessary for this type of accommodation. The test administrator must record these responses verbatim on a scorable answer document and write "Transcribed by (NAME) because (REASON)" at the top of the answer document. Transcription must be done in No. 2 pencil. **Test responses cannot be scored unless they appear on the answer document.**

13. Question: A student became ill during the test administration and went to the nurse's office. If he feels better, may he complete the test that day?

Answer: If he feels better and has not discussed the test with others, he may complete the test. The school or district should determine whether the student's answer document

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

should be coded S for score or O for other, depending on how far the student was able to get on the test before getting sick. The student should be properly monitored while in the nurse's office. Because this child has seen the test, he will not be allowed to take the make-up test.

Homebound Students

14. Question: How do districts handle testing of homebound students?

Answer: Testing of homebound students is handled in the same manner as any other enrolled students and must adhere to the testing calendar in effect, except that a trained test administrator must go to the student's home to administer the test. If on the day of testing the student is too ill to take the test, the student may be administered the assessment on the make up day (for applicable grades and subjects). Otherwise, the document should be marked A for absent. If the student begins the test and becomes too ill to finish, the document should be marked O for other, just as would be done for any other student. [For students in serious condition who are too ill to attempt the assessment, the answer document may be coded O for other.](#)

Test Materials

15. Question: I can't find any science rulers for the grade 5 science TAKS. Where are they?

Answer: The 20-centimeter rulers for the grade 5 science TAKS can be found in the campus box and the district overage box.

16. Question: We don't have an adequate number of test materials. What should we do?

Answer: It is important that you inventory all the materials in all boxes well before the week of testing to ensure that you have enough materials for testing. If you discover materials are missing or you do not have enough materials, then if time allows, you should order more materials from Pearson Educational Measurement through the online ordering system. However, if you discover the day before or the day of testing that your inventory of materials is inadequate, then you should contact other schools or school districts in your area to see if they have extra materials that you can use. If materials are not available, call the Student Assessment Division.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Large-Print Test Booklets

17. **Question:** We would like to order large-print test booklets for all of our students. Is that allowable?

Answer: Large-print test booklets are a testing accommodation for students with visual impairments and the decision to use a large-print test should be made in accordance with the procedures on page 43 of the 2006 *DCCM*. These booklets are intended for students who routinely use enlarged materials in classroom instruction.

18. **Question:** I ordered a large-print test, but it has not arrived (and this is test day). Is it allowable for the campus to enlarge a regular test booklet?

Answer: If there is no time for Pearson Educational Measurement to overnight a large-print test and the test coordinator cannot obtain a large-print test from a neighboring campus/district, the test may be enlarged according to the following instructions.

- An accommodation request form must be submitted to the attention of the Accommodations Task Force. The form is available in the coordinator manual and as a separate document online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/accommodations.pdf>.
- The test must be enlarged within the district (i.e., not at Kinko's or other type of copy center).
- If a math or science test is enlarged, the corresponding chart must be enlarged using the same scale as the test. If this does not occur, the ruler will not provide an accurate measure for items that require measurement.
- The person who copies the test must be certified or under the supervision of someone who is certified. This does not mean that the certified person must observe the copying; only that the certified person will be held accountable for test security.
- The photocopied test must be returned in the district's scorable shipment.

During or just prior to testing, approval for enlarging may be given over the telephone provided the district faxes the accommodation request form on the same day of the call.

Preparing Materials for Scoring

19. **Question:** How do I code a student who took the TAKS math test in our school district but then withdrew from our school district the next day before he took the TAKS reading test?

Answer: Score the student's math test and leave the score code field blank for the reading test. TEA will default the score code for the reading test to O for other and will indicate this on the data file.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

20. **Question:** If the student took the test using a large-print booklet in reading but not in math, do I turn in two separate answer documents so that I can indicate “Large-Print?”

Answer: No, use one answer document and leave the “Large-Print” bubble blank.

21. **Question:** A student took the State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II) last year but will take TAKS this year. How do we code this student?

Answer: This student will be coded as if he is any other student taking TAKS; i.e., there is no need to indicate anything special on the answer document.

Make-up Testing

22. **Question:** A student was suspended from school and was absent on the day of testing. Can he/she participate in a make-up test?

Answer: Since the student is enrolled in school and was absent on the regular test day, he or she can be tested on the make-up day.

23. **Question:** A student was enrolled the day after the math administration; may he participate in the make-up test for math?

Answer: In this situation, the campus where the new student is enrolling should contact the sending district to determine whether the student was already tested in the applicable subject. If the student was not tested in the district from which he/she moved, the present school should test the student on the make-up day.

24. **Question:** A student who started testing on the regular testing day became ill and was not able to complete testing. Can this student take a make-up for the test he was unable to finish?

Answer: The student is not eligible to take a make-up test. Make-up testing is allowed only for students who were absent on the regular day of testing. The score code on the student’s answer document should be O to indicate that the student was not able to complete testing.

Test Security/Irregularities

25. **Question:** A teacher witnessed a student passing a note to another student during the test, but the teacher stopped the note before it reached the other student. What should the district do?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: It is up to the district to determine if any cheating occurred or if the test was compromised in some way. If the teacher or test administrator believes that he or she caught the students before any cheating took place, the students may be allowed to continue testing. Disciplinary action is at the discretion of the school. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force if it is determined that no cheating took place. If cheating did take place, an incident report should be filed and the answer documents for the students involved should be coded O.

26. **Question:** If a student refuses to take the test or is obviously bubbling in answers randomly, how do I code his answer document?

Answer: First, inform the district coordinator and ask an authority (e.g., district coordinator, campus coordinator, principal, teacher) at the school to encourage the student to take the test seriously. If the student still refuses to take the test, inform his/her parent or guardian to see if he/she is willing to encourage the child to take the test. Finally, if the student still will not take the test, use score code S on the student's answer document. Documentation of these events should be kept locally.

27. **Question:** A student was taking the math test and then opened the reading section of the test and started working on it. What do we do?

Answer: The student will not be allowed to take the reading test on the following day, when it is scheduled. The student's answer document for reading will be coded O and documentation of these events should be kept locally.

28. **Question:** A test administrator gave the TAKS test to a student who should have been administered an SDAA II test. Can the school correct the situation by giving the SDAA II test to the student?

Answer: An incident report must be filed with the Security Task Force at TEA. If this was a district or test administrator error, the student will be allowed to take the correct test on the make-up day (if applicable) or on that same day if there is time, but first the district or school must request permission from the student's parent or guardian.

29. **Question:** If our school erred by giving an SDAA II student the wrong instructional level test, what do we do? Can we give the correct test?

Answer: An incident report must be filed with the Security Task Force at TEA. If this was a district or test administrator error, the student will be allowed to take the correct test on the make-up day (if applicable) or on that same day if there is time, but first the district or school must request permission from the student's parent or guardian.

30. **Question:** Can a teacher use or discuss the prompt from the test after it has been administered?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: Districts may retain a copy of each student's composition and open-ended responses for TAKS and SDAA II administrations **but not for field tests**. Reading or discussion of student responses to the compositions must not occur prior to the date specified for each administration on the calendar of events in the 2006 *DCCM*.

31. **Question:** We gave a student the wrong test on the wrong day. (We were supposed to give the mathematics test, but we gave the science test).

Answer: An incident report should be filed with the Security Task Force at TEA. TEA will decide on a case-by-case basis whether the school will be given permission to administer the appropriate test on another day.

32. **Question:** A seal was broken intentionally by someone at our campus. What should we do?

Answer: If the seal was broken intentionally by a student before he or she was instructed to do so by the test administrator, the booklet and answer document should be taken away and the booklet scored O. However, an incident report must also be filed with TEA if someone other than a student intentionally broke a seal.

Rewards for Performance on Assessments

33. **Question:** Our district would like to have an awards ceremony or provide some kind of reward for our students who passed or achieved commended performance on TAKS. Is this allowable?

Answer: Districts must maintain the confidentiality of student test scores under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student records. The Texas Education Agency has received informal advice from the Family Policy Compliance Office in the U.S. Department of Education, which is responsible for FERPA enforcement, that school districts that wish to reward students for performance on state assessments should do so in a confidential manner. TEA encourages districts to recognize the efforts of *all* students to avoid any potentially detrimental effects on students who did not perform as well on the state assessments.

The federal guidelines relating to FERPA can be found at the following website
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/parents.html>.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Charter School Participation in Statewide Assessment Program

34. Question: Are charter schools required to administer state assessments?

Answer: Yes. Charter schools, just like all Texas public schools, are required to administer all appropriate assessments to students.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Access to Assessments for Private School or Home-Schooled Students

35. Question: Do private schools and home schools have access to the TAKS assessments?

Answer: Yes. TEA will make available for administration to private schools and home schools the secure TAKS tests at a per-student cost that does not exceed the cost of administering the same test to a Texas public school student. To obtain a copy of the agreement packet for this assessment, contact Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM) at (800) 252-9186. Private schools and home schools may also administer any tests that have been released to the public. These may be downloaded free of charge from the TEA website.

Use of Mentors as Test Administrators

36. Question: Can an after school mentor participate in testing or serve as a test administrator?

Answer: In general mentors are not eligible to serve as test administrators because they do not meet the criteria outlined in the *2006 District and Campus Coordinator Manual – Campus Coordinator Responsibilities – Activity 3* (page 99). Certified and non-certified paraprofessionals may serve as test administrators, monitors, or assistants provided they are currently employed by the district and they routinely work with students.

Districts and campuses are strongly encouraged to give careful consideration of all testing personnel selected to participate in the state assessment program. Test administrators should be professionals or under the supervision of professionals who hold valid education credentials such as Texas teacher certificates and permits.

Also, remember that all test administrators and monitors (including any paraprofessional serving in any of these capacities) must be trained in test administration procedures prior to each administration.

Dyslexia Bundled Accommodations

37. Question: If a student begins testing with the dyslexia bundled accommodations on day one and testing proceeds rapidly, may we continue and administer the day two portion of the test on the same day?

Answer: No, the test administrator must adhere to the two-day schedule specified for the dyslexia bundling. The directions in the TAKS test administrator manual must be followed exactly as written. Research findings have indicated that students who need these accommodations require the two days because of the fatigue factor associated with the student's reading difficulties at the isolated word level.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

38. **Question:** Are there special security measures that must be in place for a test that extends over a two-day period?

Answer: While there are no special security procedures outlined by the state for tests that extend over two days, it is the responsibility of districts and campuses to put measures into place to ensure that the test content remains secure. One such measure would be to close the sections of the booklet from day one with a paper clip in preparation for day two testing.

39. **Question:** Are students who are absent on the first day of the dyslexia bundled accommodations administration eligible to take a make-up test?

Answer: In February, districts may administer make-ups as long as they maintain the ship date for scorable materials. In April, districts may administer make-ups as long as they maintain the regular testing schedule and the ship date for scorable materials. In June, no make-ups are allowed.

40. **Question:** Will students receiving special education services be permitted to receive the dyslexia bundled accommodations on the SDAA II tests?

Answer: The dyslexia bundled accommodations are only available for the TAKS reading tests in English and Spanish for grades 3-5. **Students taking SDAA II cannot receive these bundled accommodations.** The dyslexia bundled accommodations are designed for students who have been identified as dyslexic by their school districts and who routinely use accommodations in the classroom that are directly related to their difficulties with decoding words in isolation. Students do not have to be using all of the specific accommodations in the bundle, but they do need to be receiving similar accommodations in the classroom. These accommodations need to be documented by the school in the student's Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP), IEP, or appropriate school records for students who do not receive services through Section 504 or special education. Students receiving special education do not need to be specifically identified as dyslexic to receive this accommodation; however, the student's IEP should address the student's difficulty in decoding words in isolation and reflect specific accommodations the student is receiving in the classroom to compensate for these difficulties.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Louisiana Testing

41. **Question:** If a Louisiana student enrolled in grades 10-12 has already taken Louisiana's Graduate Exit Exams (GEEs), must he/she also take TAKS at the appropriate level?

Answer: Yes, according to Texas Education Code 39.023, all students who are enrolled in Texas public schools must participate in the Texas assessments, unless exempted under one or more of the provisions specified in TEC 39.027.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Questions Related to Equating of Tests

What the scores mean and how can they be used

42. **Question: How do I know if a student passed the TAKS test?**

Answer: Students who take the TAKS tests are classified according to three performance categories based on how well they did on the test. The performance categories are *Did Not Meet Standard*, *Met Standard*, and *Commended Performance*. Students in the *Met Standard* or the *Commended Performance* categories have passed the TAKS test. The TAKS scale score achieved determines whether a student passed and which performance category he/she is in. For example, a third grade student who takes the English version of the TAKS reading test in spring 2006 will need to obtain a scale score of at least 2100 to be in the *Met Standard* category and a scale score of at least 2400 to be in the *Commended Performance* category.

43. **Question: How were the passing scores on the TAKS tests determined?**

Answer: The State Board of Education established the official scale scores (or “performance standards”) needed to reach the *Met Standard* and *Commended Performance* levels on the TAKS tests after getting input from many committees. Those committees are called standard-setting committees. Committees included Texas teachers, administrators, community members, and parents. Committee members were chosen based on recommendations by the Texas Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency staff, and school-district personnel. Members were chosen specifically because they possessed considerable knowledge about the work of students in schools. Most committees set standards on one test in one grade (e.g., Grade 5 Reading). Some committees reviewed standards across many grades.

44. **Question: Do the scale scores needed to pass the TAKS test stay the same from year to year?**

Answer: The scale scores of 2100 for *Met Standard* and 2400 for *Commended Performance* that represent the Panel Recommended standards will not change for the duration of the TAKS program.

Based on a recommendation of the standard-setting committees, the State Board of Education approved a phase-in period for these performance standards to allow time for students and teachers to become familiar with the new testing program. This phase-in period took place from 2003 to 2005 for most grades and allowed for the performance standards to be somewhat lower in 2003 and 2004 than the *Panel Recommended* performance standards. The phase-in standards were called *2 SEM*, *1 SEM*, and *Panel Recommended*. The *SEM* stands for *Standard Error of Measurement*. For grades 3 through 10, the *2 SEM* standard was used in 2003, the *1 SEM* standard was used in 2004, and the *Panel Recommended* standard was used in 2005. The *2 SEM* standard is less

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

difficult than the 1 SEM standard, and the 1 SEM standard is less difficult than the Panel Recommended standard.

For example, the 2003 standard for the TAKS Reading test in grade 3 was 2 SEM or scale score of 2029; the 2004 standard was 1 SEM or a scale score of 2064; and the 2005 standard was the Panel Recommended or a scale score of 2100. Beginning in 2005, the Panel Recommended performance standards, Met Standard (2100 scale score) and Commended Performance (2400 scale score) were used for all grades except exit level.

For exit level, the phase in of the standards is based on the school year in which a student was first enrolled in Grade 10. The standard stays with that student regardless of the number of times he or she takes the exit level TAKS.

- Students enrolled in Grade 10 in 2002-2003 are held to the 2 SEM standard.
- Students enrolled in grade 10 for the first time in 2003-2004 are held to the 1 SEM standard.
- Students enrolled in Grade 10 in 2004-2005 and beyond, are held to the Panel Recommended standard.

The standard at which each student is held remains the same regardless of the year in which the student graduates.

45. Question: Will a student's score on a Texas assessment change if he or she takes the test again?

Answer: Many things are likely to contribute to a student's test score. If a student is ill, hungry, sleepy, or is not trying his or her best, it may affect test performance. If such a student retakes the test while not ill, hungry, etc., the test score might change. However, assuming that the test is taken under the same circumstances each time, only small changes in scores would be expected. Much effort has been put into making the Texas assessments as reliable as possible. A test is considered reliable if students would receive scores that were the same or nearly the same if they were to take the same test twice under the same conditions. A reliable test is one that consistently does a good job of measuring students' achievement.

One example of when we would not expect test scores to be the same is for students who retake a test after a period of accelerated instruction (as in the case of Student Success Initiative grades 3 and 5). Students would, of course, be expected to improve their test scores in this situation. The test and retest in this situation are not considered to be taken under the same circumstances, because the retest was given after the extra instruction, or remediation.

46. Question: What does the total number of points a student gets on a test tell about how much that student has learned?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: The total number of points a student gets on a test (or raw score) simply indicates how many questions a student answered correctly out of the set of questions he or she was given on a test. For example, if there were 36 questions on a test and a student answered 28 of those questions correctly, the raw score would be 28. The total number of points provides information about how students performed on the specific set of test questions.

47. **Question: Why can't the total number of points earned (or raw scores) be compared year to year?**

Answer: Adjustments need to be made to account for slight changes in the difficulty level of the test from year to year. The questions on the TAKS test change from year to year and from one test administration to the next. This means that no two versions (or forms) of the TAKS test are the same. The set of questions on one test may be slightly easier or slightly harder than the set of questions that were on another test. Since the overall difficulty of the tests may vary, the raw scores cannot be directly compared to indicate differences in student performance.

For example, a fifth grade student who takes the TAKS test one year and answers 28 out of 36 items correctly has a raw score of 28. The next year, another fifth grade student who takes the TAKS test and answers 28 out of 36 items correctly also has a raw score of 28. If we compared raw scores, we would assume that these two students demonstrated the same level of performance. However, if the set of questions on the second student's test were more difficult than the set of questions on the first student's test, the conclusion that the two students had the same level of achievement would be incorrect. Because of slight differences in the difficulties of the two tests, the raw scores from two different tests cannot give accurate information about how two students who took a grade level test in different years compare in performance. Comparing scale scores (see next question) for two students who took a grade level test two different years is the better way to compare those students' performances.

48. **Question: Should I tell students that they only need to answer a certain number of questions right to pass the test?**

Answer: You should always encourage students to do their best and to answer as many questions correctly as possible. Telling students to strive for a certain number of questions right would be misleading because the number of correct answers needed to meet the standard may vary from one year to the next. As explained in the example above, the raw scores needed to achieve a passing standard may change slightly based on the difficulty of the questions on each year's test. When the questions are slightly less difficult, students need to answer more correctly to reach the same standard. When the questions are slightly more difficult, students need to answer fewer correctly to reach the same standard. Because the raw scores may change, you will not always know each year the exact number of raw scores that will be needed to reach the standard. The best advice

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

you can give to students is to tell them to work hard on every question, and answer correctly as many questions as possible.

49. Question: Do the performance standards and raw scores on the retests differ from the primary administration?

Answer: The performance standards (2 SEM, 1 SEM, and Panel Recommended) and their associated scale scores for the primary administrations and for the retests do not change. However, the raw scores that correspond to the performance standards may change if the difficulties of the tests are not exactly the same year to year. Retests are treated just as other forms of the tests, so the same conditions are applied to the retests. Students who take the retests are held to the same high standards as students who were tested during the primary administration. If the items that make up a retest are slightly harder or easier than the items that make up the regular test, the raw score associated with the standard may change to maintain the same performance standard.

For example, the Panel Recommended standard for grade 3 reading TAKS is a scale score of 2100. In 2005, a raw score of 23 is associated with the Panel Recommended scale score of 2100. The Panel Recommended standard, a scale score of 2100, will be the same for all retests. However, it is possible that one retest might be slightly more difficult than the test used for the primary administration. The raw score for a slightly more difficult retest might be 22 or 21. It is also possible that another retest might be slightly less difficult than the primary test, resulting in a student needing to answer 24 or 25 items correctly to meet the standard.

50. Question: What does a student's scale score tell about his or her performance?

Answer: A scale score is a conversion of the raw score onto a "scale" that is common to all test forms for that specific grade and subject area. The scale score takes into account the difficulty level of the specific set of questions. It tells us about a student's performance relative to the Met Standard and Commended Performance standards on the TAKS test. Also, unlike raw scores, scale scores do allow direct comparisons of student performance between specific sets of test questions from different test administrations. However, these comparisons can only be made for test administrations in the same grade and subject area. For example, scale scores are comparable for students who take the Grade 6 TAKS tests in 2004 and 2005. A scale score of 2100 indicates the same level of achievement for those Grade 6 students in 2004 and 2005. Scale scores are not comparable across consecutive grades, such as a student's scale scores in grades 3 and 4 (see question below). For TAKS, the scale scores range from approximately 1000 to 3200 for each test. Beginning in 2005 (with the exception of the exit level tests, which have a different phase-in period), a scale score of 2100 to 2399 indicates that the student has Met Standard and a scale score of 2400 or above indicates that the student has demonstrated Commended Performance on a test.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

51. **Question: Why is it not meaningful to directly compare students' TAKS scale scores across two different grades?**

Answer: Scale scores from tests in different grades are on different scales. It is not meaningful to subtract or directly compare scale scores or average scale scores from different grades. As an example, it would not make sense to subtract two temperatures if one of those temperatures was on the Celsius scale and the other was on the Fahrenheit scale, such as subtracting 35^oC from 50^oF. The resulting number, 15^o, would not be meaningful. Comparing students' TAKS scale scores from two different grades is similar to this. Although it might look like the numbers are on the same scale, they are not. Subtracting or directly comparing scale scores for one student or for groups of students across grades will not result in meaningful numbers.

52. **Question: If it is not meaningful to directly compare scale scores across two different grades, why should we use the Texas Growth Index (TGI)?**

Answer: Although the Texas Growth Index uses scale scores from two consecutive years to indicate growth, it does not directly compare scale scores from one year to the next (i.e., it does not take a simple difference). For example, the TGI does not compare the average scale score for 5th grade students in a particular subject area at Campus A one year to the average scale score for 6th graders the following year on that campus. Rather the TGI compares the actual scale scores of 6th grade students to predicted scale scores for those students. Predicted scores are calculated based on how those students performed the year before in 5th grade. The resulting TGI indicates whether 6th grade students performed better, the same, or worse than what was predicted for them given their performance in 5th grade. The method for calculating predicted scores does not require that the scores from one year to the next be on the same scale.

53. **Question: Why does the number of raw score points for achieving *Met Standard* and *Commended Performance* change from year to year?**

Answer: The determination of whether a student *Met Standard* or demonstrated *Commended Performance* is based on the student's scale score and not on the raw score. This maintains fairness to all students—regardless of the specific set of questions answered. Equating adjusts test forms for small differences in difficulty. The result of this adjustment may be a slight difference in the number of points (or raw score) needed to achieve the performance standards.

54. **Question: Why does Texas scale and equate its assessments?**

Answer: Texas uses scaling and equating on its assessments to help make sure every student is assessed fairly. This process helps ensure that same-grade students taking different test forms and testing in different years will receive scale scores that can be directly compared. Without scaling and equating, this would not be possible.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Questions Related to English Language Learner Assessments

Years in U.S. Schools Unknown

55. **Question:** A student from another country has just enrolled in our school and we are not sure how many years the student has been in U.S. schools.

Answer: It is important for this information to be supplied accurately and consistently from year to year. It is used for instructional planning, in determining eligibility for limited English proficient (LEP) exemptions, and in determining performance standard requirements in NCLB adequate yearly progress (AYP) and annual measurable achievement objective (AMAO) accountability measures.

The campus coordinator should collaborate with the student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) to obtain this information. Instructions for officially determining and documenting this information are included in the "Documentation Requirements" section of the TEA publication titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*, which is available on the Student Assessment Division website.

General RPTE and TOP Questions

56. **Question:** Why are LEP students who will be administered TAKS in English also required to take RPTE?

Answer: NCLB legislation requires that LEP students take annual English language proficiency tests in listening, speaking, reading, and writing until they are no longer classified as LEP. When a LEP student is no longer eligible for a LEP exemption from TAKS but is still developing proficiency in English, RPTE results can help schools examine to what extent the student's TAKS performance may be affected by a limited understanding of the English language. This information helps in planning instructional interventions that appropriately address the student's linguistic and academic needs.

57. **Question:** Last year a LEP student in his first school year in this country took RPTE and scored Advanced. Does he have to take both RPTE and TAKS this year?

Answer: Students who are identified as LEP must continue to take RPTE annually until they meet state exit criteria and are reclassified as non-LEP. Students who score at the Advanced level of RPTE in their first year may, in certain cases, still qualify for a LEP exemption from TAKS the next year. The language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) should review all of the criteria outlined in the LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program (Grades 3-12) to determine if the student meets the required criteria for a LEP exemption in the spring of the student's second year.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

58. **Question:** Will LEP students stop being assessed using RPTE and TOP once they attain a rating of Advanced High?

Answer: Not necessarily. Students are required to participate in RPTE and TOP as long as they are designated as LEP. When students meet the state criteria for exiting bilingual/ESL programs and are redesignated as non-LEP, they will no longer take RPTE and TOP.

59. **Question:** A LEP student enrolled on our campus during the TELPAS testing window. Do we need to assess this student using RPTE and TOP?

Answer: In this situation, the campus where the new student is enrolling will need to communicate with the sending district to see if the student has already been assessed with RPTE and TOP. If the sending district has already administered RPTE and TOP to the student, the receiving district should not submit an answer document for the student. The sending district should submit the student's answer document. If the district did not administer RPTE to the student, the receiving district should do so. If TOP was not administered and the student has been present on the new campus long enough, a TOP rater should assess the student. Students who are not enrolled long enough for raters to conduct a valid observation should be coded EC for extenuating circumstances in the domains for which a rating cannot be determined.

60. **Question:** Is it required that all LEP students in grades K-12 be rated using TOP in the domain of writing?

Answer: All students identified as LEP in Grades K-12 are required to be assessed annually in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students in K-1 are rated in each of these domains using the Texas Observation Protocols. While it is not required that student writing collections be assembled for these grade levels, these students are still required to be rated.

61. **Question:** Who may a district assign as a TOP rater?

Answer: A student's TOP rater is the teacher designated to be the official rater of the student's English language proficiency for TOP. The TOP rater must have the student in class, be knowledgeable about the student's ability to use English in instructional and informal settings, and hold valid education credentials such as a teacher certificate or permit. TOP raters are required to be trained annually. For more information about TOP rater credentials, see page 341 of the *2006 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. For raters of students in Gr. 2–12, see also the next question.

62. **Question:** Is it required or optional for raters of students in Gr. 2–12 to complete the TOP online qualifying activities this spring?

Answer: The spring 2006 TOP online qualifying activities are required, not optional.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

63. **Question:** We have received word that TEA has made a change in TOP administration procedures for spring 2006. What specifically has changed?

Answer: Based on concerns brought forth by a teacher association, for spring 2006 TEA will not require districts to implement the procedure by which certified raters provide second ratings of the writing collections of individuals whom districts assign as raters but who do not meet the online qualifying requirements. TEA does recommend, however, that districts implement local procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the rating process. This change was communicated in a February 1, 2006, TEA letter to districts and education service centers. The letter is available on the TEA Student Assessment Division website in the “Letters to Districts” section and was mailed to districts in hard copy.

64. **Question:** In reference to the question above, is it permissible for a district to implement the original procedure as it is outlined in the test administration manuals?

Answer: Yes. This procedure is no longer a state-level requirement for spring 2006, but it may be implemented as a district option.

65. **Question:** What other types of local procedures for ensuring rating validity and reliability might a school district or campus opt to use for this type of assessment?

Answer: A few examples (not an exhaustive list) of other types of procedures follow:

- A district or campus could have a qualified rater provide an additional rating of the collections of an assigned rater who did not meet the online qualifying requirements. If the first and second ratings differ, another qualified rater or team of qualified raters could provide a resolution rating.
- A district or campus could implement a procedure by which raters who did not meet the online qualifying requirements consult or collaborate with a lead, qualified rater/trainer or team of qualified raters when determining their students’ ratings. This type of assistance could be made available to all raters.
- A district or campus could implement a procedure to provide more than one rating of students’ writing collections regardless of the raters’ qualification status. This verification process could include all writing collections or a percentage of the collections and could be conducted for selected grades or all grades. If the first and second ratings of a writing collection differ, a qualified rater or team of qualified raters could provide a resolution rating.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

66. **Question:** Does TEA plan to have qualifying requirements for TOP raters in future years? Will raters who qualify this year need to requalify next year?

Answer: TEA plans to continue to have qualifying requirements for TOP raters in future years. TEA does not plan to require raters who qualify in spring 2006 to qualify again next year.

67. **Question:** May raters collaborate with each other during the online qualifying process?

Answer: No, as stated in the test administration manuals and online user's guide for TOP rater qualification, raters are required to complete the online qualifying component independently. The collections, ratings, and annotations contained in the online qualifying system are secure and are not permitted to be discussed or otherwise shared before, during, or after the qualifying activity. While collaboration among raters is very much encouraged during the actual TOP administration, collaboration during the online qualifying activity would not provide accurate information about an individual rater's ability to apply the rating rubrics.

68. **Question:** Are raters allowed to have any materials with them when qualifying online?

Answer: Yes, during the online qualifying activity, raters may refer to the TOP Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) for Gr. 2–12 writing and other TOP training materials that were issued this school year. They may also refer to the optional TOP practice collections and annotations recently posted to the TEA Student Assessment Division website. The optional practice collections and PLDs for Gr. 2–12 writing may be accessed from the *What's New* box at www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment.

69. **Question:** How long do districts have to collect TOP student writing samples?

Answer: TOP student writing samples may be collected beginning February 1, 2006. Writing assigned on or after February 1, 2006, may be included in the collections. The samples in the writing collections must be assembled in time to assign the student ratings, complete verification procedures, and meet established dates for shipping TOP materials back for scoring.

70. **Question:** What is the window for rating TOP writing collections?

Answer: TEA has established a TOP administration rating window of March 6–31, 2006. Districts may establish a shorter rating period within this time frame or allow ratings to be assigned throughout the window.

71. **Question:** Can we use a paraprofessional to verify that the TOP writing collections have been assembled correctly?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: Yes, as long as the campus coordinator (in conjunction with the district coordinator and principal) considers the individual suitable to carry out the verifying tasks. The individual must be trained to perform the verifying tasks and receive training in TOP administration procedures. As part of the duties of a testing coordinator, the campus coordinator is responsible for supervising this verification activity.

72. Question: Will there be an audit of the TOP writing collections this spring?

Answer: Yes. The spring 2006 writing audit will include a substantial number of writing collections from across the state. Feedback from the audit will be provided to education service centers and selected districts. Information from the audit will help TEA, education service centers, and districts monitor rating accuracy and training needs.

Language Proficiency Assessment Committee Questions

73. Question: A new immigrant student has just enrolled. Due to time constraints, the school has not been able to officially designate the student as limited English proficient or obtain all of the necessary information to make appropriate testing decisions. How should the LPAC proceed?

Answer: When a new immigrant student enrolls just before testing, the LPAC should make every effort to obtain the appropriate information from the student's prior school or district. Ultimately, the LPAC will need to make an educationally sound assessment decision using the information available. The LPAC should maintain careful documentation of both the effort it has made to obtain the information and the reasons for the assessment decision. This information should be kept in the student's permanent record file. (Please see the FAQ section of the *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*.)

For new immigrants at the exit level, the LPAC should determine whether the student qualifies for a one-time LEP postponement (according to 19 TAC §101.5 in Appendix C of the 2006 *DCCM*) of the initial administration of the Exit level TAKS test. The LPAC is responsible for documenting the postponement decision in accordance with the procedures in the *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual.

74. Question: If the LPAC made the decision to administer the TAKS test in Spanish in a grade and subject that is included under the Student Success Initiative (SSI) and the student did not meet the standard on the first administration, is it possible for the LPAC to change the recommendation and have the student take the second administration in English?

Answer: Only in rare circumstances would such a change be permissible. If the LPAC feels that such a change is warranted and has thorough documentation to justify the

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

change, it is permissible for the LPAC to make a new recommendation after careful consideration and documentation. (Please refer to the scenario on page 41 of the *Grade Placement Committee Manual*.)

Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT)

75. **Question:** May a test administrator preview a TAKS test in preparation for a LAT administration?

Answer: No. The previewing process for LAT that was in place in the 2004-2005 school year has been discontinued. Test administrators are not allowed to look at a LAT test booklet in preparation for the administration.

76. **Question:** If a student uses a locally developed bilingual glossary during a LAT administration, does the glossary need to be shipped to the state after testing??

Answer: No, the glossary may be kept for use as an instructional tool. However, if the glossary is written on during the test administration, it must be destroyed at the end of the test session. Materials created during a LAT administration to assist a student (pictures, translations, etc.) must be destroyed at the end of the test.

77. **Question:** Some of the explanations of the linguistic accommodations say that the accommodation, such as translation assistance or reading assistance, can be provided “at the request of the student.” Do students in a LAT administration whose allowable accommodations include a bilingual glossary or bilingual dictionary have to request that accommodation each time they need it?

Answer: No, test administrators will tell students who are eligible for these accommodations that they will be allowed to use a bilingual glossary (or bilingual dictionary) to look up words they do not understand. The glossary or dictionary can then be issued to the student for use during the administration. All dictionaries and glossaries must meet the criteria of not providing explanations, definitions, pictures, or examples of mathematics terms.

78. **Question:** Are students permitted to use a hand-held translating device, bilingual Internet dictionary, or other types of electronic bilingual dictionaries?

Answer: District and campus test coordinators will determine the viability of such devices in cooperation with other knowledgeable personnel. However, just as with paper bilingual dictionaries, if the device is comprehensive enough to provide examples, pictures, explanations, or definitions of mathematical terminology, it will not be permitted. In addition, concerning the use of an *Internet* bilingual dictionary, district and campus coordinators will need to discuss whether they will be able to ensure that students do not access other Internet sites or resources. Remember also that *only* linguistic accommodations used routinely in the student’s classroom instruction and testing are

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

permitted during LAT administrations.

79. **Question:** What should a test administrator do if a student asks for a translation of a word that the test administrator does not know?

Answer: If a test administrator who speaks the student's native language is administering the LAT test and does not know the appropriate translation of a word, the test administrator may use a bilingual dictionary to look it up. If the student has documented accommodations in addition to translation (e.g., linguistic simplifications), the test administrator will have other options to assist the student with the unknown word if an appropriate translation is not known or able to be found.

80. **Question:** Is it possible to administer a TAKS test with linguistic accommodations to a LEP student with a parental denial?

Answer: Only LEP-exempt students may take a LAT administration. Students who are not participating in a bilingual or ESL program because of a parental denial are not eligible for a LEP exemption and, therefore, are not eligible for a LAT administration. For additional information on LEP exemptions, reference the manual titled *LPAC Decision Making for the Texas Assessment Program*.

81. **Question:** A student receiving a LAT administration starts but is unable to complete the test. What should we do?

Answer: Make sure that the L for LEP-exempt is bubbled in the score code field on the mathematics answer document or scorable test booklet for this student. Bubble in I for Incomplete in the LAT Info field on the answer document or scorable test booklet to indicate that the test was not completed. The O for Other in the SCORE CODE field **should not** be marked.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Questions Related to Alternative Assessments

Test Selection

82. **Question:** Are students who receive special education services permitted to take TAKS in some academic areas and TAKS-Inclusive (TAKS-I), SDAA II, or a Locally Developed Alternate Assessment (LDAA) in others?

Answer: Yes. Each assessed subject area must be considered separately. The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee's decision should be based on two considerations: the level of the TEKS curriculum at which the student is receiving the majority of his or her instruction and the testing accommodations needed by the student.

83. **Question:** Why does SDAA II span Instructional Levels Kindergarten through 10?

Answer: SDAA II takes into account the varied instructional levels of individual students receiving special education services. The multiple instructional levels of SDAA II allow ARD committees to choose the most appropriate assessment to measure individual student progress in the TEKS curriculum.

84. **Question:** Are there SDAA II Exit level tests?

Answer: No, there are no SDAA II exit level tests. However, Grade 11 students can take exit level TAKS or TAKS-I without any accommodations or with allowable accommodations, as documented in the IEP. Note that the TAKS-I exit level administrations are **not** state-mandated graduation requirements for students receiving special education services. The ARD committee's role has not changed; the ARD committee will continue to determine a student's graduation requirements. The term *exit level* is used in reference to TAKS-I to avoid confusion and remain consistent with the corresponding TAKS administrations. If the ARD committee determines the student cannot take an exit level TAKS or TAKS-I, then the committee must choose an appropriate LDAA.

The ARD committee is responsible for determining what assessment will be used for the LDAA and what mastery criteria will be expected for each student.

85. **Question:** Is the SDAA II available for science and social studies?

Answer: No, there is no SDAA II for science or social studies. Grades 5, 8, and 10 students can take the TAKS or TAKS-I science test, and Grade 8 and 10 students take the TAKS or TAKS-I social studies test with or without allowable accommodations, as documented in the IEP. If the ARD committee determines the student cannot take TAKS or TAKS-I in science or social studies, then the committee must choose an appropriate LDAA.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

86. Question: Who can set or change a student’s instructional level for SDAA II?

Answer: Only the ARD committee can set or revise the student’s instructional level as documented in the IEP. Any changes in the student’s instructional level must be documented in the IEP and reported to the campus testing coordinator for the purpose of ordering test booklets. This information must be reviewed annually or more frequently if necessary.

87. Question: Can a student in Grades 3–11 take a different test this year than he or she took last year?

Answer: Each year the ARD committee must determine the most appropriate assessment in the assessed subject areas (reading, mathematics, writing/ELA, science, and/or social studies) for students in Grades 3–12. The assessment decision may change from year to year. For example, the ARD committee may determine that a student should take SDAA II in mathematics in fifth grade, but if the student makes significant academic growth in the mathematics TEKS curriculum, the ARD committee may determine that the student should take the TAKS mathematics test the following year in sixth grade.

Field Tests

88. Question: Why is there a separate SDAA II field test every year?

Answer: The population of students who take SDAA II is small compared to the population of students who take TAKS. Because the number of students taking SDAA II is so small, a separate field test is required to yield field-test data that are valid and reliable.

89. Question: Who must participate in the SDAA II field test?

Answer: All students assessed by SDAA II in a particular subject area must participate in the SDAA II field test for that subject area.

Accommodations

90. Question: Who determines the accommodations required for a student receiving special education services to participate in the Texas Assessment Program?

Answer: The ARD committee makes decisions regarding the assessment participation of students receiving special education services, including the accommodations. The ARD committee should refer to the accommodations sections of the ARD manual for TAKS (pages 59–65) and for TAKS-I and SDAA II (pages 66–70).

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

91. **Question:** May students use manipulatives, assistive devices such as calculators, and mathematics charts for SDAA II and Exit level TAKS-I mathematics and science tests?

Answer:

SDAA II Instructional Levels K–8

Students may use manipulatives, assistive devices such as calculators, and mathematics charts in addition to the charts provided by the state only if documented in their IEPs and routinely used in instruction and testing. A mathematics chart other than the chart provided by the state must meet each individual student's needs. In addition, a mathematics chart must be a tool and not a source of direct answers. To request permission to use specific accommodations not addressed in the *2006 DCCM*, submit to TEA the Accommodation Request Form found on the TEA website at www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment. Requests must be submitted **at least two weeks prior to testing** to ensure a response before testing begins.

SDAA II Instructional Levels 9 and 10, and TAKS-I Exit level

Students may use manipulatives or assistive devices only if documented in their IEPs and routinely used in instruction and testing. However, districts **must provide** each student with a graphing calculator for use throughout the mathematics test.

92. **Question:** May students use reference books such as dictionaries for SDAA II?

Answer:

English-language dictionaries and thesauruses **must be provided** for the following assessments.

- Written composition portion of the SDAA II Instructional Levels 5, 6/7, and 8/9 writing tests
- SDAA II Instructional Level 9 reading test
- Reading and written composition portions of the SDAA II Instructional Level 10 ELA test

English-language dictionaries or other reference materials **may not be used** for the following assessments, unless this accommodation is specifically documented in the student's IEP.

- SDAA II Instructional Levels K/1, 2, and 3/4 writing tests and Instructional Levels K–8 reading tests
- revising and editing portion of the SDAA II Instructional Levels 5, 6/7, and 8/9 writing tests
- revising and editing portion of the SDAA II Instructional Level 10 ELA test

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

93. **Question:** What are the policies/procedures for the use of reference materials?

Answer: Reference materials policies/procedures are as follows.

- There should be at least one dictionary for every five students testing; it is also recommended that there be one thesaurus for every five students testing, if possible.
- The use of foreign-language reference materials is not permitted, but an English as a second language (ESL) dictionary, which uses simple English and pictures to define words, may be provided for limited English proficient (LEP) students.
- Students may use a separate dictionary and thesaurus or a dictionary/thesaurus combination.
- The Instructional Levels 5, 6/7, and 8/9 writing tests and the Instructional Level 10 ELA test contain two sealed sections. The first section of the IL 5, 6/7, and 8/9 writing tests includes the written composition portion and the first section of the IL 10 ELA test includes the reading and written composition portion of the test. The second section for all of these tests is for the revising and editing portion. After a student completes the first sealed section of any of these tests, the test administrator will collect the student's dictionary and thesaurus. The student can then break the seal on the second sealed section and begin the revising and editing portion of the test.

94. **Question:** When is reading aloud a TAKS or TAKS-I exit level English language arts test permitted?

Answer: An oral administration is not allowed for these assessments, with the exception of the writing prompt.

95. **Question:** When is reading aloud an SDAA II reading test permitted?

Answer: Reading aloud an SDAA II reading test is permitted only for Instructional Level K and portions of Instructional Level 1. These tests were specifically designed to be read aloud to students, as this is developmentally appropriate. For these instructional levels, reading the test questions aloud is standard administration procedures, and IEP documentation of oral administration or reading assistance **is not** necessary.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

96. **Question:** When is reading aloud permitted on a TAKS or TAKS-I mathematics, social studies, or science test?

Answer: Only students served by special education or Section 504 may receive an oral administration of the TAKS or TAKS-I mathematics, social studies, and science tests. A test administrator may read aloud or sign the test questions and answer choices for mathematics, social studies, and/or science tests to

- o a student identified as having a disability that affects the student's reading and who regularly receives this accommodation in the classroom; or
- o a student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and whose IEP requires the signing of daily instruction.

97. **Question:** When is reading aloud an SDAA II mathematics test allowed?

Answer:

Instructional Levels K, 1, and 2

The test administrator is instructed to read aloud the SDAA II mathematics test at Instructional Levels K, 1, and 2. These tests were specifically designed to be read aloud to students, as this is developmentally appropriate. The test administrator may read aloud the test questions and answer choices as many times as necessary. For these instructional levels, reading the test questions aloud is a part of standard administration procedures, and IEP documentation of oral administration or reading assistance **is not** necessary.

Reading Assistance

SDAA II mathematics reading assistance is appropriate for Instructional Levels 3–10. As an accommodation, test administrators may provide assistance by reading any word, phrase, or sentence in an SDAA II mathematics test question or answer choice on which a student is experiencing difficulty. Numbers, however, may not be read to students. Mathematics reading assistance is permitted for students who request it during test administration, as long as it is routinely used in the classroom and is documented in the student's IEP for Instructional Levels 4–10. IEP documentation is not required for students taking Instructional Level 3 SDAA II mathematics.

Oral Administration

As an accommodation, a student may receive an oral administration of an entire SDAA II mathematics test at Instructional Levels 3–10. In an oral administration, both the test questions and answer choices are read aloud to the student. A student may receive an oral administration of the mathematics test only if this accommodation is routinely used in the classroom and is documented in the student's IEP. At any time during testing, the student may ask the test administrator to change the degree of reading support being provided. For example, if the test administrator is currently reading aloud all test questions and answer choices, the student may ask that the test administrator read only words or numbers that the student finds troublesome. Refer to the test administrator manuals for guidelines on reading aloud various types of mathematics test items.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

98. **Question:** When is reading aloud an SDAA II writing test permitted?

Answer: Reading aloud an SDAA II writing test is permitted only for Instructional Level K/1. This test was specifically designed to be read aloud to students, as this is developmentally appropriate. For this instructional level, reading the performance tasks aloud is part of standard administration procedures, and IEP documentation of oral administration or reading assistance **is not** necessary.

For Instructional Levels 2, 3/4, 5, 6/7, and 8/9 writing, and 10 ELA, the test administrator is instructed to read the writing prompt. The revising and editing section, though, is not to be read aloud.

99. **Question:** Will large-print tests be allowed for students with visual perception disabilities or other disabilities as well as students with visual impairments?

Answer: Yes, but this request is considered only on a case-by-case basis through an Accommodation Request.

100. **Question:** Since the accommodations that are part of the TAKS-I tests are generally format adaptations, what do districts do for a student who requires a Braille version?

Answer: Districts should provide the Braille version of the TAKS test to these students. Districts may contact the Student Assessment Division to discuss individual cases that may warrant special considerations related to the length of time needed to test.

101. **Question:** Can students use devices such as whisper phones and PVC pipes during testing in a group setting?

Answer: No, such devices are not allowed in group testing settings because the possibility exists that another student could overhear or be disturbed by the use of the device. Such devices are allowed, however, under individual administration conditions.

General Questions about TAKS-Inclusive

102. **Question:** How is TAKS-Inclusive different from TAKS?

Answer: Although the content of TAKS-Inclusive is the same as TAKS, there are several important differences. First, with the exception of ELA, the TAKS-I tests are shorter due to the fact that field-test items have been omitted. Second, the font and formatting have been modified in ways similar to SDAA II. For example, the type size is larger, and there is more white space on each page. Finally, the testing accommodations allowed for TAKS-I are similar to those allowed for SDAA II, and these accommodations are often handled through an Accommodation Request Form.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

103. Question: How is “near grade level” defined operationally?

Answer: “Near grade level” refers to students who are instructed at grade level but who may need accommodations to access the curriculum that would invalidate TAKS. Ultimately, the decision as to which test is appropriate for a given student rests with the student’s ARD committee.

Implications for Graduation, Retention, and Program Exit

104. Question: What are the graduation implications for special education students who do not take exit level TAKS?

Answer: The ARD committee determines the graduation requirements for the student receiving special education services and documents those requirements in his IEP. A special education student who completes the graduation requirements prescribed in his IEP but who does not take exit level TAKS because it is not required by his ARD committee will receive a Texas public high school diploma. The student’s transcript will reflect whether or not the student took the exit level TAKS tests.

105. Question: Can a student who takes and passes the TAKS-Inclusive exit level administration graduate on the recommended graduation plan?

Answer: Yes, a student receiving special education services whose ARD committee determines TAKS-I is the appropriate assessment and who passes the exit level TAKS-I assessments may graduate on the recommended graduation plan. However, it is important to understand that there are not retest opportunities for the TAKS-I administrations. ARD committees need to weigh the benefits of establishing TAKS-I as a graduation requirement for a student on a case-by-case basis with the understanding that TAKS-I retest opportunities are not available. In addition, the TAKS-I exit level administrations are **not** state-mandated graduation requirements for students receiving special education services. The ARD committee’s role has not changed; the ARD committee will continue to determine a student’s graduation requirements. The term *exit level* is used in reference to TAKS-I to avoid confusion and remain consistent with the corresponding TAKS tests.

106. Question: Can students who receive special education services be retained based on their performance on TAKS, TAKS-I, or SDAA II?

Answer: The ARD committee makes decisions about promotion and retention. If the student is enrolled in a grade that is affected by the Student Success Initiative (SSI), refer to the Student Success Initiative section of the ARD manual or the GPC manual.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

107. **Question:** Can student performance on state assessments be used to dismiss a student from special education services?

Answer: No. State assessments should not be used by themselves. However, the ARD committee may use testing information in conjunction with other information typically used in making dismissal decisions.

Locally Determined Alternate Assessment (LDAA)

108. **Question:** When and where should LDAA performance information be reported for each student?

Answer: The ARD committee is responsible for determining what assessment will be used for the LDAA and what mastery criteria will be expected for each student. LDAA performance information should be recorded on an appropriate SDAA II or TAKS-I answer document. Districts should return these answer documents with their scorable materials. LDAA information will be coded as “TEKS-based” or “Functional” curriculum and whether the student met the ARD expectation.

109. **Question:** What if a student is absent on the day his or her LDAA is administered?

Answer: Because an LDAA can be administered on dates other than the state-mandated test dates, districts should administer the LDAA when the student returns to school. ARD committees may consider documenting a window of time that would be appropriate for administering an LDAA. However, LDAA performance must be recorded on the corresponding SDAA II or TAKS-I answer documents prior to returning the scorable materials. Page 7 in the ARD Manual gives specific LDAA reporting deadlines.

110. **Question:** Can an LDAA be administered on the same day as TAKS or SDAA II?

Answer: Yes. LDAA performance must be recorded on the corresponding SDAA II or TAKS-I answer documents prior to returning the scorable materials.

111. **Question:** What if the ARD committee sets a schedule for an LDAA administration that results in the assessment being administered after the date on which results must be reported to the TEA?

Answer: The ARD committee must reconvene to determine a new testing schedule. Page 7 in the ARD Manual gives specific LDAA reporting deadlines.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

112. **Question:** Does LDAA information need to be reported for Grade 12 students who did not meet expectations for an LDAA in Grade 11?

Answer: No. Grade 11 students whose ARD committees determine that TAKS is inappropriate must take an LDAA. Once the LDAA information is reported, the testing requirement has been fulfilled. In other words, students who do not meet their ARD expectation on the LDAA in Grade 11 have already fulfilled the testing requirement for student assessment purposes. However, the ARD committee must then consider if the student has met the ARD expectations and must decide if additional testing is still required at the local level.

Reporting and Accountability

113. **Question:** How will SDAA II results be used for accountability?

Answer: SDAA II results are incorporated in the state accountability system (both standard and alternative education accountability procedures) and the federal adequate yearly progress (AYP) system. For detailed information about the use of SDAA II in the state accountability system, refer to the Texas Education Agency Performance Reporting Division website (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/>). For detailed information about the use of SDAA II in AYP, refer to the Adequate Yearly Progress page of the TEA website (www.tea.state.tx.us/ayp).

114. **Question:** How will TAKS-I results be used for federal accountability?

Answer: TAKS-I results will not be used for federal accountability because TAKS-I fulfills IDEA 2004 requirements and assesses grades and subjects that are not currently a part of the calculation of adequate yearly progress (AYP). For more information regarding accountability, see the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ayp>.

115. **Question:** Will there be a way to compare one student to another student using the results of SDAA II?

Answer: The purpose of SDAA II is not to compare one student to another. SDAA II is designed to provide information both on the progress each individual student is making toward mastering the TEKS curriculum and on the effectiveness of instructional programs and special education services at the campus and district levels.

116. **Question:** Will there be a certain score that determines whether students pass or fail SDAA II?

Answer: No, there will not be a single predetermined score that indicates passing or failing on SDAA II. According to Section 39.024 of the TEC, the ARD committee will determine the ARD expectation considered to be satisfactory for each individual student.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

117. **Question:** Is there a report showing the number of students receiving special education services tested at each instructional level, including achievement level percentages?

Answer: Yes, summary reports are produced for reading, mathematics, and writing. (See the TEA website: www.tea.state.tx.us.)

Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Who Receive Special Education Services

118. **Question:** Is there a Spanish version of SDAA II?

Answers: No, a Spanish version of SDAA II is not available.

119. **Question:** Are LEP students who are eligible for SDAA II but receive instruction in a language other than English required to take SDAA II if they no longer qualify for a LEP exemption?

Answers: Yes. LEP students who are eligible for SDAA II are required to take SDAA II in English if they no longer qualify for a LEP exemption. The ARD committee should select the instructional level that is best matched to the instruction received and most appropriate for evaluating annual growth.

120. **Question:** Are LEP students who receive special education services required to take RPTE?

Answer: Yes, unless the student's special education needs would prevent appropriate measurement of growth in English reading proficiency as determined by the ARD committee and documented in the IEP. For more information, see page 56 of the ARD manual.

121. **Question:** If a LEP student receiving special education services takes RPTE, is that student also required to take the SDAA II reading test?

Answer: Yes, in many cases the student is required to take the SDAA II reading test. SDAA II is administered to all LEP students in special education who are not eligible for a LEP exemption and who are eligible for SDAA II rather than TAKS.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

122. **Question:** May immigrant LEP students receiving special education services be exempted from SDAA II based on their limited English proficiency?

Answer: Yes. The state LEP exemption policy applies to immigrant LEP students whether or not they receive special education services. These students may be exempted as long as they meet the state LEP exemption criteria delineated in the TEA publication titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program (Grades 3–12)*. Both the LPAC and the ARD committee will document the reason for the LEP exemption in the student's permanent record file.

123. **Question:** Is the ARD committee responsible for making assessment decisions for LEP students who receive special education services?

Answer: Yes. The ARD committee makes assessment decisions for students served by special education, including those who are classified as limited English proficient. A member of the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) must be included on the ARD committee to ensure that issues related to the student's special education needs and language proficiency are carefully considered.

124. **Question:** Does the ARD committee need to document in the IEP whether a LEP student served by special education should be observed and rated in the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP) assessment process?

Answer: Yes. The decision to include the student in the TOP process or grant an exemption in one or more domains should be addressed by the ARD committee and documented in the student's IEP.

125. **Question:** Can a LEP student receiving special education services take RPTE at a level other than the enrolled grade?

Answer: No. Because the span of reading ability on RPTE is very broad and the purpose is to measure annual growth in English acquisition, all LEP students must take RPTE at their enrolled grade level.

126. **Question:** Are LEP-exempt recent immigrants served by special education enrolled in Grades 3–8 and 10 eligible to participate in LAT mathematics administrations?

Answer: These students may participate in a LAT administration of TAKS at their enrolled grade, or they may take an LDAA in mathematics at their instructional level, as determined by their ARD committee and documented in their IEP. For more information, see page 55 of the ARD manual. More detailed information about the LAT assessment process is included in the test administration manuals and the annual update of the TEA publication titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program (Grades 3–12)*, which is available on the TEA Student Assessment Division website.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Student Success Initiative

127. Question: What is a parental waiver request, and does it apply to students receiving special education services?

Answer: A parent or guardian may request that a student not participate in the third testing opportunity considering the individual needs of the student. Documentation must be provided that specifies the student's need and other appropriate information. If a parental waiver is granted, the student **must** still participate in all required accelerated instruction. Parents of children receiving special education services may request a waiver for the third administration of any assessment that is required under SSI. (See the sample waiver form in the appendix of the *Grade Placement Committee Manual for Grade Advancement Requirements of the Student Success Initiative*.)

128. Question: What assessment information must be documented in the IEP for SSI requirements?

Answer: The following assessment information must be documented in the IEP for SSI requirements.

- Appropriate TEKS-based formal or informal assessment to be used for additional administrations if student does not meet the ARD expectation level set for SDAA II.
- The mastery level for the TEKS-based formal or informal assessment.
- An accelerated instruction plan prior to additional test administrations.
- ARD committee decisions regarding grade placement.
- Appropriate test accommodations to be provided for each test based on the accommodations that the student receives routinely in the classroom.

129. Question: Since SDAA II is only administered once, how does the student taking an SDAA II assessment have three opportunities to perform satisfactorily?

Answer: All students, regardless of whether they take TAKS or SDAA II, must be given three opportunities to meet the grade advancement requirements of the Student Success Initiative for grades 3 and 5.

For students who take an SDAA II test, the three opportunities are

- the April administration of SDAA II; and
- two other TEKS-based formal or informal assessments, selected and scheduled by the ARD committee.

SDAA II will be administered in April 2006 to all students served by special education who are not taking TAKS or an LDAA. It is important to note that ARD committees have the option to provide a testing opportunity prior to the SDAA II administration, using a

Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

TEKS-based formal or informal assessment. If the student performs satisfactorily on this prior assessment, the student meets SSI grade advancement requirements but still takes SDAA II in April as required by his or her IEP. If the student does not perform satisfactorily on this prior assessment, the student must receive appropriate accelerated instruction and take SDAA II in April as the second testing opportunity required under SSI.

130. **Question:** Since SDAA II does not have a state-mandated passing standard, how is satisfactory performance determined on an SDAA II reading and/or mathematics test?

Answer: The determination of whether the student performed satisfactorily on SDAA II or a TEKS-based formal or informal assessment must be made by the ARD committee in their responsibility to monitor student progress for the student's IEP. When the test results are received, a Grade 3 or Grade 5 student who took SDAA II and who met the ARD committee's expectations will have satisfied the requirements for grade advancement under SSI.

131. **Question:** If the student does not pass the Grade 3 or 5 TAKS reading and/or mathematics tests, can the ARD committee choose a different assessment?

Answer: Yes. However, if a new assessment is chosen, the ARD committee must address what instructional changes are anticipated or have been implemented to justify changes in the chosen assessment.

132. **Question:** Is a student who is served by special education subject to the automatic retention requirements of the SSI?

Answer: The grade advancement requirements stipulate that a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing the tests required under SSI or, if the student does not pass and a parent appeals the retention, by unanimous decision of the GPC. Although all of the SSI requirements apply to students who take TAKS or SDAA II, retention and promotion decisions for students receiving special education services are made by the ARD committee. The ARD committee serves as the GPC for students who receive special education services and have not passed TAKS or met achievement expectations on SDAA II.

133. **Question:** Since the ARD committee serves as the GPC for students served by special education, do promotion decisions made by the ARD have to be unanimous?

Answer: No. The ARD committee decision regarding promotion does not have to be unanimous but must follow the general rules governing ARD committee decision making as set forth in 19 TAC 89.1050.