

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS SERVED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION\***

\*The Frequently Asked Questions section of the TEA Student Assessment Division website has additional information that is updated periodically.

*Frequently Asked Questions about Assessments for Students Served by Special Education  
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# Frequently Asked Questions about Assessments for Students Served by Special Education

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# Test Selection

## **Are students who receive special education services permitted to take TAKS in some academic areas and TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, and TAKS–Alt in others?**

Yes, in most cases. Each assessed subject area must be considered separately. The ARD committee's decision should be based on the amount of support needed to access the general curriculum and the accommodations needed by the student. The exception would be students who meet the participation requirements for TAKS–Alt. They must take TAKS–Alt in all subjects tested at their enrolled grade.

## **Will there be different instructional and achievement levels for TAKS–M like there were in SDAA II?**

No. NCLB regulations do not allow states to provide off-grade-level, or out-of-level, assessments for any student. Texas has developed an assessment called TAKS–M which is based on grade-level curriculum but is modified in content and format to make it more accessible to students with disabilities. Unlike SDAA II, the ARD committee will not make decisions about achievement levels for TAKS–M. Standards will be set by the state beginning in fall 2008.

## **Does an ARD committee need to reconvene to make assessment decisions concerning TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M?**

- An ARD meeting is not needed to change the name of TAKS–I to TAKS (Accommodated). The name change can be addressed at the next scheduled ARD meeting or it can be done through an amendment.
- If the IEP states that the student will take SDAA II, then an ARD meeting needs to be held to determine the most appropriate assessment.
- An ARD meeting does not need to be convened if the IEP states that a student will take a modified assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. The IEP does not have to identify the assessment as TAKS–M. This change can be made at the next scheduled ARD meeting. It is important to note, though, that the ARD committee must review the participation requirements for TAKS–M and determine that the student meets these requirements.

# Accommodations

## **Who determines the accommodations for a student receiving special education services?**

The ARD committee makes decisions regarding testing accommodations for the student based on supports the student routinely uses in classroom instruction. The ARD committee should review the allowable accommodations for the recommended assessment. Allowable accommodations can be found in the *2007–2008 Accommodations Manual* available at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/AccommManual\\_2007\\_08\\_tagged.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/AccommManual_2007_08_tagged.pdf).

## **Are students taking TAKS–M and TAKS (Accommodated) allowed to use a calculator or mathematics chart?**

If a student's disability affects mathematics calculation but not reasoning, a calculator or other assistive device (e.g., abacus) may be used. If a student's disability affects long-term memory retrieval but not reasoning, a supplemental aid (e.g., a multiplication chart) may be used. Any calculation device or supplemental aid used must be a tool and not a source of direct answers. It is important to determine whether the use of a calculation device or supplemental aid is a matter of convenience or a necessary accommodation. Calculators may be adapted with large keys or voice output (talking calculators). In some cases, an abacus may be useful as it serves as a paper and pencil for some students with visual impairments.

When the student is being assessed with TAKS (Accommodated), a graphing calculator must be provided at grades 9, 10, and exit level. A student may also use a four-function calculator or his/her own calculator in conjunction with the graphing calculator. See page 168 in the *2008 District and Campus Coordinator Manual* for further information on calculator use. Calculators may be provided at grades 7 and 8 only if an Accommodation Request Form that specifically states why the student needs this accommodation is submitted to TEA and approved. Supplemental aids may be used at any grade for TAKS (Accommodated) if an Accommodation Request Form specifically stating why the student needs this accommodation is submitted to TEA and approved.

When the student is being assessed with TAKS–M, a graphing calculator must be provided at grades 9, 10, and 11. A student may also use a four-function calculator or his/her own calculator in conjunction with the graphing calculator. Please refer to page 168 in the *2008 District and Campus Coordinator Manual* for further information on calculator use. Calculators may be provided at grades 7 and 8. Calculators may also be provided at grades 3–6, however an Accommodation Request Form that specifically states why the student needs this accommodation must be submitted to TEA and approved. Districts do not need to submit an Accommodation Request Form for students who use supplemental aids on TAKS–M.

**Will the accommodations and modifications that a student used last year for TAKS, TAKS–Inclusive (TAKS–I), and SDAA II continue to be allowed on the new assessments?**

The use of accommodations that were routinely used on TAKS–I and SDAA II (calculators, mathematics charts, spell check, etc.) may not be allowed on TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M in all cases. Allowable accommodations are specifically listed and explained for each assessment in the *2007–2008 Accommodations Manual*. This manual is posted on the TEA Student Assessment Division website and will be sent to districts as a printed final version by December with the *2008 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

Those accommodations that have always been allowed on TAKS will continue to be allowed on all assessments.

# Implications

## **Can a student take a different test this year than he or she took last year?**

Each year the ARD committee must determine the appropriate assessment in the subject areas (reading, mathematics, writing/ELA, science, and/or social studies) for students. The assessment decisions may change from year to year or within a school year. For example, the ARD committee may determine that a student should take TAKS–M in mathematics in grade 5, 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 (Accommodated) or TAKS mathematics test the following year in grade 6.

## **What are the graduation implications for students who do not take the TAKS exit level tests?**

Students who complete graduation requirements but do not take the TAKS exit level tests receive the same diplomas as students who pass the TAKS exit level tests. A student's transcript will reflect whether or not the student took TAKS. The student's ARD committee uses assessment results and other school records to determine whether the student has met graduation requirements.

## **Can students who receive special education services be retained based on their performance on TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, or TAKS–Alt?**

The ARD committee makes decisions about promotion and retention for students receiving special education services.

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 *Revised ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual or the *Grade Placement Committee Manual*. In 2007–2008 only, TAKS–M will not be part of the SSI grade advancement requirements since passing standards will not be set until fall 2008. TAKS–Alt will not be part of the SSI grade advancement requirements since the testing window is from the beginning of the school year through April 18, 2008, and multiple testing opportunities are already part of the TAKS–Alt process.

## **Can student performance on state assessments be used to dismiss a student from special education services?**

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 dismissal decisions.

# Reporting and Accountability

## **How will TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, and TAKS–Alt results be used in 2008 for state and federal accountability?**

Information about state and federal accountability ratings is available in the September 19, 2007, letter from TEA regarding “Assessments for Students Served by Special Education for the 2007–2008 School Year.” The letter is posted on the TEA website at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/letters/2008/070919\\_Special\\_Ed\\_Assessments\\_Letter\\_with\\_AttachmentA.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/letters/2008/070919_Special_Ed_Assessments_Letter_with_AttachmentA.pdf).

## **Will there be a certain score that determines whether students pass or fail TAKS–M or TAKS–Alt?**

A standard-setting committee will be convened to review test data from those students eligible for the assessments and to set an appropriate passing standard. The standards for TAKS–Alt will be set in fall 2007 based on field test data and the standards for TAKS–M will be set beginning in fall 2008 and will be based on operational test data.

## **Is there a cap on how many students can take TAKS–M or TAKS–Alt?**

The ARD committee must determine which assessment is appropriate for each student. There is no limit to the number of students who can take an alternate assessment; however, for federal adequate yearly progress (AYP) proficiency calculations, only 2% of the tested population will be counted as proficient for TAKS–M and only 1% of the tested population will count as proficient for TAKS–Alt.

# LEP Students Served by Special Education

## **Who is responsible for making assessment decisions for LEP students who receive special education services?**

Assessment decisions for students served by special education who are limited English proficient are made collaboratively by the LPAC and ARD committee.

## **Is there a Spanish version of TAKS–M or TAKS (Accommodated)?**

TAKS (Accommodated) will be offered in Spanish in the same grades and subjects as TAKS. TAKS–M will not be offered in Spanish.

LEP-exempt students may be eligible for a LAT administration of TAKS–M or TAKS (Accommodated).

Students receiving special education services who are not LEP-exempt will take TAKS, which includes TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, or TAKS–Alt.

## **Are LEP students who receive special education services required to participate in TELPAS?**

Yes. Unless a student's special education needs would prevent appropriate measurement of growth in English proficiency as determined by the ARD committee in conjunction with the LPAC, he or she is required to participate in TELPAS. For more information, see the section of the *Revised ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual titled "Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Receiving Special Education Services."

## **Does the ARD committee need to document in the IEP whether a LEP student served by special education will participate in TELPAS?**

Yes. The decision to include the student or grant an exemption in one or more domains should be addressed by the ARD committee in conjunction with the LPAC. It should then be documented in the student's IEP by the ARD committee and the student's permanent record file by the LPAC.

## **Can a LEP student be assessed or rated at a level other than the enrolled grade?**

No. The No Child Left Behind regulations do not allow states to provide out-of-level, or off-grade-level, assessments for any student.

**May immigrant LEP students receiving special education services be exempted from TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, and TAKS–Alt based on their limited English proficiency?**

Yes, with the exception of TAKS–Alt. A student may be exempted as long as he or she meets the state LEP-exemption criteria outlined in the TEA publication titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*. The reason for the exemption, as specified in the LPAC manual, must be documented in the student’s IEP by the ARD committee and in the student’s permanent record file by the LPAC.

There is no exemption from the TAKS–Alt assessment because observational activities can be developed using any language or other communication method routinely used with the student.

**Are LEP-exempt recent immigrants served by special education and enrolled in grades 3–8 and 10 eligible to participate in LAT administrations?**

Yes. LAT administrations in TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated), and TAKS–M will be available.

**Are LEP students who are eligible for TAKS–M but receive instruction in a language other than English required to take TAKS–M if they no longer qualify for a LEP exemption?**

Yes. LEP students who are eligible for TAKS–M are required to take TAKS–M in English if they no longer qualify for a LEP exemption. Students who receive instruction in a language other than English should also receive instruction in English.

# Student Success Initiative

## **What action must the school take if a student does not meet expectations on the first administration of an assessment required under the SSI?**

A student who has not met expectations on the first administration must be provided appropriate accelerated instruction to help prepare the student for the second testing opportunity if that student was administered TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated). (For more information, see the *2007–2008 Grade Placement Committee Manual* available through your school district or online at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/2008\\_GPC\\_Manual\\_FrontMatter\\_tagged.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/2008_GPC_Manual_FrontMatter_tagged.pdf).)

## **What are the specific SSI responsibilities of the GPC (ARD committee) if a student does not meet expectations on the second administration of an assessment required under the SSI?**

The GPC (ARD committee) must meet if the student does not pass on the second TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) opportunity. The GPC will

- review parental waiver request for the third testing opportunity, if applicable;
- review assessment options for students who take TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) for the third administration. These options include taking TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) during the July administration or, for grade 3 reading, taking an alternate SSI assessment from the state-approved list (if adopted as an option within local board policy). The decision to take an alternate SSI assessment (not to be confused with TAKS–M or TAKS–Alt) **must** be determined by the ARD committee; otherwise, the student must take TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated).
- determine the accelerated instruction plan (AIP) for the student as required by TEC §28.0211.

## **What is a parental waiver request, and does it apply to students receiving special education services?**

A parent or guardian may request that a student not participate in the third testing opportunity due to potential harm to the student. Documentation must be provided that specifies the potential harm, 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 GPC manual.)

**What action must the school take if a student fails to pass or waives the third administration of an assessment required by SSI?**

The GPC (ARD committee) must convene for any student who does not meet achievement expectations on the third administration of an assessment required under SSI. The committee is responsible for making promotion decisions and determining an accelerated instruction plan for the upcoming school year, whether the student is retained or promoted.

**What assessment information must be documented in the IEP for SSI requirements?**

The SSI requires documentation of the following in the IEP:

- an accelerated instruction plan prior to additional test administrations;
- ARD committee decisions regarding grade placement; and
- appropriate test accommodations to be provided for each test based on the accommodations that the student receives routinely in the classroom.

**If a student does not pass the TAKS grade 3 reading or TAKS grade 5 or 8 reading and/or mathematics test, can the ARD committee choose a different assessment?**

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.

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

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 SSI requirements apply to students who take TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated), retention and promotion decisions for students receiving special education services are made by the ARD committee.

In 2007–2008, TAKS–M will not be part of the SSI grade advancement requirements since no passing standard will have been set.

TAKS–Alt will continue to not be part of the SSI grade advancement requirements since the testing window is from the beginning of the school year through April 18, 2008, and multiple testing opportunities are already part of the TAKS–Alt process.

**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?**

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.

**Will the requirements of the SSI apply to students who take TAKS–M?**

Since standard-setting will begin on TAKS–M in fall 2008, after the spring 2008 operational assessment, SSI requirements will not apply to students who are eligible to take TAKS–M in an SSI grade and subject. Therefore, there will not be multiple administrations of those grades and subjects and districts will not be required to assess further. More information regarding SSI for TAKS–M in the 2008–2009 testing year will be forthcoming.

# TAKS (Accommodated)

## **What is the difference between TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated)?**

TAKS includes a form called TAKS (Accommodated) for students served by special education who meet the eligibility requirements for certain specific accommodations. The TAKS (Accommodated) form includes format accommodations (larger font, fewer items per page, etc.) and contains no embedded field-test items. TAKS (Accommodated) will be available for all English and Spanish TAKS tests beginning in spring 2008. Retest opportunities for TAKS (Accommodated) exit level assessments will be offered beginning in July 2008.

## TAKS–Modified (TAKS–M)

### **Do students who receive special education services need specific goals and objectives that address the grade-level curriculum documented in their IEPs?**

Yes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all students with disabilities have an IEP that reflects access to the general education curriculum. In addition, the 2% regulations of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) require that students who take TAKS–M have standards-based IEPs. Consequently, all students served by special education should have specific goals and objectives that address each student’s progress towards the grade-level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Additional guidance is expected from the TEA Division of IDEA Coordination.

### **What is the readability of the TAKS–M reading passages?**

Due to the inconsistency between different readability programs, TEA will not assign a specific readability level for each grade level TAKS–M passage. Instead, TEA content experts as well as educators from across the state have reviewed and edited each TAKS–M passage that will be presented to students on the operational test. Also, according to the guidelines by which all passages and items were modified for TAKS–M, each passage was simplified in the following ways:

- Pre-reading text that will be orally presented to students by a test administrator has been added prior to all passages.
- The paragraphs have been separated into parts according to the content of the passage and items associated with that content.
- Extraneous information has been deleted when appropriate.
- Difficult concepts, sentence structure, and vocabulary have been simplified.
- Visual complexity in the graphics (such as websites, book covers, letters, etc.) has been reduced.

### **Will the TAKS–M social studies, writing, and grades 9 and 11 field tests fulfill a student’s 2008 state-mandated testing requirement in those grades and subjects?**

Yes. The field tests for grades 8, 10, and 11 social studies; grades 4 and 7 writing; grade 9 reading and mathematics; and grade 11 ELA, science, and mathematics will be administered on the same date as the primary TAKS administration for those same grades and subjects. Students will not have to take any other assessment for the grade and subject(s) in which they took TAKS–M. The TAKS–M field tests will have fulfilled their state-mandated testing requirement(s).

**Will a locally determined alternate assessment (LDAA) continue to be an assessment option for students whose ARD committee has determined that TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, and TAKS–Alt, are not appropriate?**

No. LDAA will no longer be an assessment option after October 2007. These situations will be addressed on a case-by-case basis by contacting the Student Assessment Division of TEA at 512-463-9536.

**When and how will the passing standard be set for TAKS–M?**

Standards will be set based on the data from the operational administration of each grade and subject. Standard-setting committees will be convened in fall 2008 to review test data from those students eligible to take this assessment; the committees will then set appropriate passing standards.

**When will TAKS–M be released to the public?**

This will be determined at a later date and posted to the TEA Student Assessment Division website at that time.

# TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt)

## **Does TAKS–Alt replace any existing assessments?**

For students with significant cognitive disabilities, TAKS–Alt replaces either the State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II) or the locally determined alternate assessments (LDAA) in the 2007–2008 school year.

## **What is the role of the ARD committee in making decisions for TAKS–Alt?**

By using the participation requirements provided by the state, ARD committees will determine which state assessment is appropriate for a specific student. If the committee selects TAKS–Alt, it may review the state-required essence statements for a given subject and grade and give input into the additional essence statements chosen by the teacher.

**NOTE:** ARD committees will not select a passing standard or expectation for students taking TAKS–Alt, since the standards are set by the state.

## **How do I know if my students can participate in TAKS–Alt?**

TAKS–Alt assesses students receiving special education services who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and who are unable to participate in the other statewide assessments, even with **substantial** accommodations and/or modifications. Once the ARD committee has determined that a student is significantly cognitively disabled, it must ensure that the student meets all requirements in the Participation Requirements document in order to take TAKS–Alt. This document can be found on the TEA website at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/training/participation\\_requirements\\_july\\_2007.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/training/participation_requirements_july_2007.pdf).

## **Who can view my assessments in the TAKS–Alt online instrument?**

The teacher is the only person who can edit an assessment; however, campus, district, and designated TEA and Pearson staff can view the assessment.

## Other

### **Are charter schools required to administer state assessments?**

Yes. Charter schools, just like all Texas public schools, are required to administer state assessments.

### **Do private schools and home schools have access to the assessments developed by the state?**

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's Austin Operations Center at 800-252-9186.

Private schools and home schools may also administer any tests that have been released to the public. These also may be ordered from Pearson or may be downloaded free of charge from the TEA Student Assessment Division website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/release/>.