

# **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Texas Assessment Program**

*Frequently Asked Questions About Texas Assessments*  
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## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

### Questions Related to General Test Administration

#### *School Emergencies during Testing*

1. **Question: A school emergency has occurred and we are in the middle of testing. What should we do?**

**Answer:** If school emergencies such as fire alarms, power outages, or bomb threats occur, local staff should have students leave their tests where they are and follow the normal school procedures related to such emergencies. The safety of students and staff should be the first consideration. If at all possible, secure the test materials. The test administrators should closely monitor their testing groups to make sure that no one discusses the test. The students can resume testing once the building has been cleared for re-entry. If there is a building fire or other school emergency that prevents students from resuming testing, or if the situation prevented personnel from maintaining confidential integrity, 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.)

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

### *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 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 and all other information if the student took a test on the previous day(s).

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.

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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.

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:** Student should be reminded periodically, either as a group or individually, to bubble their responses on the answer document. At any time during testing, the test administrator may speak the following general statement: "Please check to be sure you have filled in all of your answers on the answer document." Before a student leaves the testing room, the test administrator must check the completed answer document to be sure the student has bubbled in his or her answers as instructed. If the student has not done so, the test administrator should say, "You have not recorded all of your answers on the answer document. Please do so now." The testing materials should then be returned so that the student may bubble in his or her answers as instructed. If the student has finished testing and left the testing location, call the Student Assessment Division.

Test administrators should look at answer documents only to see whether responses are recorded. They may not examine or comment on individual responses. Test

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administrators supervising administrations in which scorable test booklets are used should regularly remind students to respond to every question. They may quickly look through scorable test booklets after the students are finished to ensure that all items have been answered, but they may not look at answers to individual items.

### *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.

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" in the *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

**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.**

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

**Answer:** If he can use his other hand, that's an option. If that is not possible, there is an allowable accommodation described in the *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. 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. If the student is unable to complete the test, the school or district should determine whether the student's answer document 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 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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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.

### *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 in the *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. 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 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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

### *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.

20. **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*

21. **Question:** When is make-up testing allowed?

**Answer:** Make-up testing is allowed for TAKS and SDAA II tests for subjects and grade levels that included in the calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. These include reading at grades 3 through 8, English language arts at grade 10, and mathematics at grades 3 through 8 and 10. Make-up testing for TAKS-Spanish version tests in these subjects is included in this policy. Make-up tests are provided for only the first two administrations of the reading and/or mathematics tests at the SSI grades.

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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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. If the student is unable to complete the test, the school or district should determine whether the student's answer document should be coded "S" for score or "O" for other, depending on how far the student was able to get on the test before becoming ill.

### *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?

Answer: It is up to the district to determine if any cheating occurred or if the test was compromised in some way. Disciplinary action is at the discretion of the school. If the teacher or test administrator believes that he or she was able to intervene before any cheating took place, the students may be allowed to continue testing.

If the district determines that cheating has occurred, the answer documents for the students involved should be coded "O". It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force; however, it is strongly recommended that the district maintain documentation at the local level.

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: If the student began working on the reading section, he or she 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. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

If the student did not view any reading test content, the reading section of the booklet should be taped shut so the student can take the reading test the next day. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force.

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 as indicated in the 2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual. 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 should receive permission to administer two tests in one day to the student 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 and supporting documentation must be filed with the Security Task Force at TEA as indicated in the 2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual. 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?

**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 or make-up 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 *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

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?

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

**Answer:** If someone other than a student intentionally broke a seal on a test booklet, the district should investigate and determine whether any unauthorized viewing has taken place. If an irregularity occurred, an incident report and supporting documentation must be filed with the Security Task Force at TEA as indicated in the 2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual.

### Online Testing

**33. Question: Does my district have to participate in online testing opportunities as they are offered?**

**Answer:** Districts are not required to offer test administrations online such as TAKS and end-of-course exams. However, districts are required to participate in mandatory online testing activities such as certain field test administrations. As the state moves to more online testing, districts are encouraged to take advantage of every opportunity to test online.

**34. Question: If my district wants to participate in online testing administrations, do all campuses and students have to participate in all subjects offered online?**

**Answer:** Districts that want to participate in online testing opportunities that are not mandatory may choose: 1) which campuses will participate, 2) which students within a campus will test online and which will test on paper, and 3) which subjects will be tested online. Because administrations are being offered in both paper and online formats and because districts may choose which students to test in either mode, districts will receive appropriate paper testing materials for all eligible examinees. Students who currently participate in testing using Braille or large-print forms must take the paper version of a test. Examinee results for online testing will be provided at the same time as the results for paper testing.

**35. Question: If we are administering a test online and encounter technical problems, should we switch to testing on paper?**

**Answer:** If technical issues arise that make accessing tests online impractical for a given administration, students should be moved to paper to ensure they have the opportunity to complete the test. Districts will receive appropriate paper testing materials for all eligible students to ensure that paper tests are available if such problems occur. Contact the Student Assessment Division for information about how to handle the answer documents for students who start a test online and finish it on paper.

**36. Question: How does my district register for an online testing opportunity?**

**Answer:** Announcement letters or e-mails will be sent to district superintendents and district testing coordinators prior to the opening of registration for any online testing

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opportunity. The registration method will be noted in the announcement letter. Typically, registration will be handled via a registration survey filled out online, and the link to that survey will be included in the announcement letter. Only district testing coordinators can register for an online administration.

Online administration announcement letters will also be posted on the Pearson Texas Assessments Resources webpage at <http://etest.pearson.com/Customers/Texas/eoct/txeoct/resources/htm>.

### *Rewards for Performance on Assessments*

- 37. 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:** The Texas Education Agency (TEA) encourages district to recognize the efforts of all students. 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. TEA 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. In the event of a breach in student confidentiality, the district must notify TEA by filing an incident report and supporting documentation as indicated in the 2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual.

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

### *Charter School Participation in Statewide Assessment Program*

- 38. 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.

### *Access to Assessments for Private School or Home-Schooled Students*

- 39. 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

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have been released to the public. These may be downloaded free of charge from the TEA website.

### *Use of Mentors as Test Administrators*

40. **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 *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual – Campus Coordinator Responsibilities*. 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 to the selection of all testing personnel participating 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*

41. **Question:** Who is eligible to take a TAKS reading test with the bundled accommodations?

**Answer:** Both students with dyslexia and special education students who have a severe reading disability that causes them to have difficulty reading words in isolation are eligible to take TAKS reading with these accommodations if they 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 annually by the school in the student's Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP), in the Individual Education Program (IEP), or in 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 with dyslexia 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.

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

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**Answer:** The dyslexia bundled accommodations are available only for students taking the TAKS reading tests in [English and Spanish at grades 3–6](#) or in [English at grades 7–8](#). **Students taking SDAA II cannot receive these bundled accommodations.**

43. **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.

44. **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.

45. **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.

46. **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 3-8. **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 works 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

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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.

### *Louisiana Testing*

47. **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. [Testing waivers for Louisiana students are no longer allowed.](#)

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

48. **Question:** [Where can I find out about the National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)?](#)

**Answer:** For information on NAEP, visit the Texas NAEP website at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/naep/naep.html>. Here you will find recent NAEP results for students in Texas and links to other NAEP-related sites.

### Questions Related to Equating of Tests

49. **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.

50. **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*

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

*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.

**51. 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 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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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

52. **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.

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

**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.

54. **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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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.

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

56. **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

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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.

**57. 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.

**58. 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°C from 50°F. The resulting number, 15°, 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.

**59. 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 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in a particular subject area at Campus A one

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

year to the average scale score for 6<sup>th</sup> graders the following year on that campus. Rather the TGI compares the actual scale scores of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to predicted scale scores for those students. Predicted scores are calculated based on how those students performed the year before in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The resulting TGI indicates whether 6<sup>th</sup> grade students performed better, the same, or worse than what was predicted for them given their performance in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The method for calculating predicted scores does not require that the scores from one year to the next be on the same scale.

60. **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.

61. **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.

## Questions Related to English Language Learner Assessments

### *Years in U.S. Schools Unknown*

62. **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*.

### *General RPTE and TOP Questions*

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

63. **Question:** Why are LEP students who will be administered the TAKS reading test 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 not 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.

64. **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.

65. **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.

66. **Question:** Is it required that all LEP students in grades K-1 be rated in all TOP domains?

**Answer:** Yes, all students identified as LEP in grades K-12 are required to be assessed annually in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While K-1 are required to be rated in writing, it is not required that writing collections be assembled for them.

67. **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

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

class, be knowledgeable about the student's ability to use English in instructional and informal settings, hold valid education credentials such as a teacher certificate or permit, [and be appropriately trained as required by the 2006-2007 holistic rating training materials and test administration manuals](#). For more information about TOP rater credentials, refer to the *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. For raters of students in Gr. 2–12, see also the next question.

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

[Answer:](#) Raters who trained and qualified online in the spring or fall of 2006 are not required to qualify again in spring 2007. They will complete an online refresher course this spring prior to rating their students. Prospective raters who have not yet qualified must go through training and complete the spring 2007 online qualification activities before they can be assigned as TOP raters.

69. **Question:** [How will districts document the TOP procedures for ensuring validity and reliability implemented this spring?](#)

[Answer:](#) Campus testing coordinators are responsible for maintaining documentation of the validity and reliability procedures implemented. This documentation should be kept for one calendar year following the TELPAS administration. A form for this purpose is not provided; districts should determine the best way to document this information.

70. **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.

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

**Answer:** Yes, during the online qualifying activity, raters should refer to the TOP Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) for grades 2–12 writing and other TOP training materials that were issued this school year. They may also [look back at the TOP online course they have completed, as well as](#) refer to the practice collections and annotations on the ELL Assessment Information page of the TEA Student Assessment Division website.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

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

**Answer:** TOP student writing samples may be collected beginning February 1, 2007. Writing assigned on or after February 1, 2007, 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.

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

**Answer:** TEA has established a TOP administration rating window of March 5–30, 2007. Districts may establish a shorter rating period within this time frame or allow ratings to be assigned throughout the window.

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

**Answer:** No, the TOP writing collection verifier may be an LPAC administrator, school counselor, teacher, or other suitable designee but may not be a paraprofessional or a TOP rater. The individual must also be trained to perform the verifying tasks and receive training in TOP administration procedures. District may choose to use the online course “Assembling Writing collections” as part of administration procedure training on assembling and verifying writing collections.

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

**Answer:** Yes, the spring 2007 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 district training entities. Information from the audit will help TEA, education service centers, and districts monitor rating accuracy and training needs. Districts that have been selected to participate in the audit will receive a notification letter by April 28, 2007.

76. **Question:** Are LEP students served by special education required to take TELPAS?

**Answer:** Yes. The No Child Left Behind Act requires all LEP students in grades K-12 be tested annually for English language proficiency. In rare cases it may be necessary for the ARD committee to exempt a LEP students served by special education from one or more TELPAS domains (listening, speaking, reading, or writing). For more information, see the TEA publications entitled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* or the *ARD Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*.

77. **Question:** A TOP rater assigned to rate the writing of LEP students receiving special education services will rate students whose IEP instructional levels are not

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

all within the same grade cluster. In which cluster should this rater train and qualify?

Answer: The rater should train and qualify in the grade cluster in which most of the students are serviced. The rater should collaborate with other qualified raters when rating students outside that cluster.

78. Question: Do we collect TOP writing samples for a LEP students enrolled in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who is at the K instructional level?

Answer: The student's enrolled grade determines the need for a TOP writing collection and the need for rater qualification. Writing samples should be collected for students enrolled in grades 2-12, regardless of the students' instructional levels.

### *Language Proficiency Assessment Committee Questions*

79. **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 manual entitled *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 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.

80. **Question:** If the LPAC made the decision to administer the TAKS test in Spanish in a grade and subject that is included in 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 a change in the language of the test be permissible. If the LPAC feels that such a change is warranted and has thorough documentation to justify the change, it is permissible for the LPAC to make a new

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

recommendation after careful consideration and documentation. (Please refer to the scenario in the *2007 Grade Placement Committee Manual*.)

### *Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT) of TAKS Mathematics*

81. **Question:** The LAT math instructions say that certain accommodations, such as translation assistance or reading assistance, are to be provided “only at the request of the student.” Is this also the case with the accommodations allowing use of a bilingual dictionary or glossary?

**Answer:** No, students eligible for these particular accommodations will be issued the bilingual glossary or dictionary for use throughout the test. All dictionaries and glossaries must, however, meet the criteria of not providing explanations, definitions, pictures, or examples of mathematics terms.

82. **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 permitted during LAT administrations.

83. **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 LPAC committee has documented the student’s need for linguistic accommodations in addition to translation (e.g., linguistic simplification), 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.

84. **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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

For additional information on LEP exemptions, reference the manual entitled *LPAC Decision Making for the Texas Assessment Program*.

85. **Question:** A student receiving a LAT math 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 students’ mathematics answer document or scorable test booklet. 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.

### *Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT) in Reading and English Language Arts*

86. **Question:** Where can I find information about the new LAT reading and English language arts testing requirements?

**Answer:** Information about this new federal policy directive can be found in the November 13, 2006, TEA letter to districts, the December 2006 ESC training materials, and the 2006-2007 manual titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program (Grades 3–12)*. More information will be provided in a test administration materials supplement that will be available on the TEA Student Assessment Division website at the end of January 2007. The supplement will also be in the test materials shipment scheduled to arrive in districts the week of March 12, 2007.

## Questions Related to Alternative Assessments

### *Test Selection*

87. **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 (TEKS-based 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. The only exception is TAKS-Alternate (TAKS-Alt) which must be given for all subjects if the student meets the participation requirements. Due to the pervasive nature of students with cognitive disabilities, TAKS-Alt would be the appropriate assessment for all subjects.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

**88. 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 and are available for primary administrations only. 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 TEKS-based LDAA.

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

**89. 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 TEKS-based LDAA.

**90. 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.

### *Accommodations*

**91. 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 and for TAKS-I and SDAA II.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

92. **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 *2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*, submit to TEA the Accommodation Request Form found on the TEA website at [www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment](http://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.

93. **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

94. **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.

95. **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. [However, the writing prompt may be read aloud to a student if s/he requests it.](#)

96. **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.

97. **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

- a student identified as having a disability that affects the student's reading and who regularly receives this accommodation in the classroom; or

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

- o a student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and whose IEP requires the signing of daily instruction.

### 98. **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 a SDAA II mathematics test at Instructional Levels 3-10. Oral administration includes different levels of reading support for each student. This may include reading only a few words or phrases, reading multiple sentences throughout the test, or reading the test in its entirety (test questions and answer choices). A student may ask the test administrator at any time to change the level of support in an oral administration. It is the decision of the ARD committee to define the level of oral administration support needed in the student’s IEP.

Students who receive any type of oral administration may need to be tested individually so that other students will not be disturbed or distracted. However, a test may be orally administered to a small group if there are not enough test administrators available for individual administrations. It is the responsibility of the school to determine the most appropriate way to administer each assessment to students who are receiving different levels of oral administration. Refer to the test administrator manuals for guidelines on reading aloud various types of mathematics test items.

The information regarding oral administration applies to students who are eligible for an oral administration on TAKS or TAKS-I as well. Please refer to the 2007 District and Campus Coordinator Manual, pages 46-47 for more specific information.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

99. **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.

100. **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.

101. **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:** If a student needs a braille version of TAKS-I, a braille version of the TAKS test should be ordered since adaptations of the TAKS-I test specifically address format issues. If an individual student warrants special considerations related to the length of time needed to test, please contact the Student Assessment Division.

102. **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 (TAKS-I)*

103. **Question:** How is TAKS-I different from TAKS?

**Answer:** Although the content of TAKS-I 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

**104. 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.

### General Questions about TAKS-Alternate

**105. Question:** What is TAKS–Alt?

**Answer:** TAKS–Alt is an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Unlike other statewide assessments in Texas, TAKS–Alt is not a traditional paper-and-pencil or multiple-choice test. Instead, the assessment involves teachers observing as students complete teacher-designed activities that link to the grade-level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. Teachers then score student performance using the TAKS–Alt rubric and submit results and evidence through an online instrument.

**106. Question:** How do I know if my students can participate in TAKS–Alt?

**Answer:** TAKS–Alt will be used to assess students receiving special education services who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and are unable to participate in the other statewide assessments, even with substantial accommodations and/or modifications.

**107. Question:** What types of supports does the TAKS-Alt student require?

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 1: The student requires supports to access the general curriculum that may include assistance involving communication, response style, physical access, or daily living skills.

The student needs academic help as well as help throughout the day in areas such as

- expressing his or her wants and needs
- participating in classroom instruction
- getting from place to place
- eating lunch and/or taking care of personal needs

**108. Question:** What type of instruction does the TAKS-Alt student require?

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 4: The student demonstrates knowledge and skills routinely in class by methods other than paper-and-pencil tasks.

**109. Question:** What type of access to the TEKS is required for the TAKS-Alt student?

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued**

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 2: The student requires direct, intensive, individualized instruction in a variety of settings to accomplish the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of skills.

The student needs specialized techniques over a period of time to ensure that he or she can learn, retain, and transfer skills to other settings.

TAKS–Alt students will continue to learn the skills they need to be as independent as possible in adulthood, as outlined in their IEP. In addition, they’ll participate in activities that are linked to the grade-level curriculum but that have been adapted in scope, complexity, materials/methods of presentation, and response styles appropriate for their needs. The content of the activities may focus on prerequisite skills or real-life applications, but the link to the grade-level TEKS should be clear.

**110. Question: What type of access to the TEKS is required for the TAKS-Alt student?**

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 3: The student accesses and participates in the grade-level TEKS through activities that focus on prerequisite skills.

The student may sometimes need individualized activities that focus on prerequisite skills. For example, the student may not be able to answer written questions about a grade-appropriate text but can demonstrate basic understanding by pointing to pictures that identify the characters.

**111. Question: How does the TAKS-Alt student demonstrate knowledge and skills?**

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 4: The student demonstrates knowledge and skills routinely in class by methods other than paper-and-pencil tasks.

The student may not be able to write but can indicate his or her responses through means such as blinking, eye gaze, manipulation of objects, or activation of a switch.

**112. Question: What types of performance objectives are in the TAKS-Alt student’s IEP?**

**Answer:** Participation Requirement 5: The student demonstrates performance objectives that may include real-life applications of the grade-level TEKS as appropriate to the student’s abilities and needs.

The student may demonstrate academic skills by applying them in environments where the need for the skill may naturally occur, such as using calculation skills to make purchases in a restaurant.

**113. Question: What are the benefits of providing activities that are linked to grade-level curriculum and used on TAKS–Alt?**

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: Accessing the general education curriculum and TAKS–Alt benefits everyone—teachers, students, administrators, and even parents.

### Benefits for Students:

- Provides them with access to the grade-level curriculum that their peers are studying
- Enriches their learning
- Lets them be more a part of the overall school culture
- Allows them to form relationships with other students

### Benefits for Teachers:

- Provides more support in the form of resources, equipment, and professional development
- Increases collaboration with general education teachers
- Allows opportunities to embed assessment activities during instructional time
- Allows tracking of student progress over time
- Streamlines the process for collecting and reporting assessment data online

### Benefits for Administrators:

- Helps ensure that the general education curriculum is being taught to all students
- Streamlines the process for collecting, reporting, and verifying assessment data online

### Benefits for Parents:

- Ensures access to the general education curriculum for their children
- Provides official grade-level reports comparable to those received by other parents

**114. Question: How can my students be tested with TAKS-Alt on grade level curriculum?**

Answer: By working with teachers, TEA has developed a process by which teachers can use the same activities they developed for instruction as assessment activities, both of which are linked to grade-level curriculum.

1. Review the TEKS Vertical Alignment document for the subject being assessed.

To start, look at the TEKS Vertical Alignment document for the subject being assessed. This document will give you a good overview of how the knowledge and skills statements and student expectations in this subject area progress from pre-kindergarten through exit level.

2. Review the grade-level TEKS Curriculum Framework document and select an essence statement.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Now go to the grade-level TEKS Curriculum Framework documents for a specific subject to find out more about the skills to be assessed. In the TEKS Curriculum Framework document, you will find

- the TAKS tested objectives
- the knowledge and skills statements and the student expectations for that objective
- an essence statement that provides a summary of the knowledge and skills statement
- prerequisite skills for that essence statement that show a direct link to the TEKS

### 3. Create an instructional activity for each selected essence statement.

Then you may want to consult with a grade-level general education teacher to get an idea of a grade-level activity that addresses the knowledge and skills statements/student expectations. In addition, you may also refer to the TEKS-Based Examples of Instructional Activities document that provides grade-level examples. Three access activities that are linked to the essence statement are available as additional examples. You may want to refer to the Example Instructional Delivery/Response Methods document for help in determining appropriate supports to use during the activity.

#### 3a. Directly demonstrate the essence statement.

Next consider the general education activities that the general education teacher described or that you found in the TEKS-Based Examples of Instructional Activities. This process should help you generate some ideas about how you could modify these activities so that your student could directly demonstrate the essence statement.

#### 3b. Link through a prerequisite skill.

If the student cannot directly demonstrate the essence statement even with modifications, you can consider the prerequisite skills listed in the TEKS Curriculum Framework document and the access activities described in the TEKS-Based Examples of Instructional Activities document. This process should help you generate some ideas about how you could modify these activities so that your student could demonstrate the prerequisite skill.

### 4. Ensure the activity is linked to the grade-level TEKS.

If you create your own activity, you will need to confirm that it links to the grade-level TEKS. Refer to your TEKS Curriculum Framework document and make sure you can see a clear link to the essence statement or to a prerequisite skill.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

115. **Question: How can I teach the life-skills activities in my student's IEP and also teach grade-level activities that may not be as meaningful for the student?**

**Answer:** All students have the right to be exposed to the general education curriculum. You are not taking away from the individualized education program that was developed by the ARD committee. You are addressing the additional focus of grade-level linked instruction that is meaningful for the student.

It may be possible to combine IEP goals and objectives with real-life applications of grade-level linked instruction.

116. **Question: Can I use my own observational data sheets or do I have to use the TAKS-Alt forms provided by TEA?**

**Answer:** You are not required to use the data sheets provided by TEA; however, it is recommended that you do so. The data sheets provided by TEA contain sections to record all the needed information to insure that your observation is clear and measurable. This includes TAKS objective, TEKS Knowledge and Skills Statement, essence statement, prerequisite skill, activity description/delivery method, and data. If you use your own data sheets, you must make sure that all the needed information is provided and that your data is easily interpretable by others. All the forms on the website currently have a watermark across the page, since these forms are for viewing only. When the TAKS-Alt online instrument becomes available in January, the forms will be available to be downloaded or to be used within the system.

117. **Question: What can I measure using the data collection forms for TAKS-Alt that the state has provided?**

**Answer:** The data collection forms located on the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/index.html#forms> will help you record the following types of data to document demonstration of the predetermined criteria. The following types of data can be measured: latency; time intervals; or frequency for an event, duration, or rate. Task analysis and anecdotal reports can also be used to record demonstration of predetermined criteria. These completed forms can be submitted as documentation for the score the student has received for the observation. Videos, work samples, photographs and audio tapes can be submitted electronically as evidence also, but they must be accompanied by the state form that requires the teacher to describe and link the evidence to the appropriate TEKS information and essence statement.

118. **Question: I use a different hierarchy of cueing and prompting system in my classroom. Is this OK?**

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

Answer: No. Because the language used for scoring and comparisons must be consistent across the state to maximize inter-rater reliability, anyone conducting a TAKS–Alt observation must use state provided cueing and prompting hierarchies.

**119. Question: What happens if a student requires additional cueing or prompting during a TAKS-Alt observation?**

Answer: Additional cueing and prompting beyond what is provided as part of the original supports for the assessment activity will affect the rubric score and must be recorded on the observational data sheet for the observation.

**120. Question: What is the difference between supports and accommodations that a teacher plans to use during the TAKS-Alt activity and prompts and cues added after the activity begins?**

Answer: Prior to the observation, the teacher will describe the supports and accommodations that the student needs. The supports and accommodations should mirror the types of accommodations the student routinely uses for instruction and should be documented in the student’s individualized education program (IEP). Any unplanned cues and prompts the student needs during the activity (as described in the “Hierarchy of Cueing and Prompting” document) should be noted, since they will affect scoring.

**121. Question: How can visual cues or visual graphics be considered a cue or a prompt when it is part of the materials I use with my students during the TAKS-Alt observation?**

Answer: Teachers routinely use visual supports for students with cognitive disabilities due to the effectiveness of these supports. For any type of visual support that is provided to a student and pre-planned as part of the TAKS–Alt teacher-created activity, no prompting or cueing needs to be noted on the observational data sheets. A student is allowed to use any accommodations and supports that the teacher has previously determined that the student needs in order to be successful. These supports are very individualized and are based on the unique needs of each student. The “Example Delivery/Response Methods” TAKS–Alt resource document lists many examples of allowable accommodations and supports that students may need.

However, if a teacher has to provide additional visual or other supports after the observation begins, it is the additional supports that will need to be recorded on the data forms. For example, if a student is doing a step-by-step activity for which a visual schedule was provided in the past and the teacher feels the student no longer needs that support, the teacher may decide not to include the graphic in the activity. However, if the student begins to struggle to complete the observational activity, the teacher may have to provide the visual graphic. In this instance, prompting will have to be noted since a visual

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued**

graphic was used after the observation began. This student may have demonstrated all the pre-determined criteria but needed prompting to do so, which will affect the student's rating. The teacher will then need to rely on his or her professional judgment to decide whether the observation is an accurate representation of the student's ability or whether another observation is necessary.

**122. Question: What is the difference between physical gesture, gesture assist, and physical assist when conducting TAKS-Alt observations?**

Answer: Alerting a student by touch to begin or continue a task (physical gesture) and pointing to an object or place to indicate where to begin or continue are considered cues, since no direct information is given to the student on what the student is expected to do. If a student cannot perform the expected action without the teacher's repeatedly pointing to the next step (gesture assist) or providing a hand-to-hand manipulation (physical assist), then the teacher has done more than just cue a student to continue. The teacher is now directly showing the student what to do throughout the entire activity, which is prompting.

**123. Question: My students need a lot of directions from me to complete activities. How will I know if the verbal information I give them is considered a verbal direct cue, a verbal indirect cue, or a verbal direction when I administer TAKS-Alt?**

Answer: If the teacher had planned to make oral directions a part of the activity, then any pre-planned instructions to the student are considered accommodations and supports, not cues or prompts. If the student is not performing as expected and needs more verbal input than the teacher anticipated, then the level of cueing or prompting must be noted on the observation data sheet. If the teacher has to give the student a short verbal redirection that tells the student specifically what to do, that is considered a verbal direct cue and requires notation on the data sheet. If the teacher gives a hint to the student that indirectly tells them what is expected (such as "Where do you think that goes?" or "Do you remember what we usually do with that card?"), an indirect cue has been provided to the student and must be noted on the observation data sheet. If in order to get a response the teacher has to resort to a step-by-step narration of what the student must do to complete the activity, then the teacher has prompted the student with verbal direction and will need to record this information.

**124. Question: What can I do if the prerequisite skills listed in the TAKS-Alt Curriculum Framework documents are still not appropriate for my student?**

Answer: If you cannot find an appropriate prerequisite skill in the TEKS Curriculum Framework document for the student, here are your options.

1. If the selected essence statement is not a state-mandated one, review and consider other essence statements in the subject area that may be more appropriate for your

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

student.

2. Select the closest prerequisite skill and task-analyze the process needed to demonstrate the skill. By looking at the beginning stages of the task analysis, you may get an idea for an appropriate activity. Be sure there is a clear link to the curriculum framework.
3. Consult with a general education teacher for additional ideas on how to teach the skill and/or for additional instructional activities addressing the same essence statement.
4. Contact the low-incidence disability specialist in your district or region for assistance.
5. Contact other life-skills teachers in your district or region for assistance.
6. Call TEA for additional guidance.

### 125. **Question: How will I have time to do all these observations for TAKS-Alt?**

Answer: Many of the activities may be combined. For example, if your student had an essence statement for expanding vocabulary in reading and an essence statement in math for solving problems using operations, you might use a recipe activity for both reading and math.

Other individuals that work with the students may be able to assist you with the instruction and/or record keeping involved in the TAKS–Alt process.

TEA has provided additional resources to assist you with time management.

### 126. **Question: What is the role of the ARD committee in making decisions for TAKS-Alt?**

Answer: 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-selected 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 state will be setting the standard after field testing.

### 127. **Question: How does the state know better than I do what my students can do?**

Answer: It goes without saying that teachers know their students better than the state does. That’s why TAKS–Alt has been designed to allow teachers to create individualized activities to meet each student’s needs.

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued**

Remember, the state selects some essence statements, but teachers get to choose the rest. The teacher will select and create the activities for the assessment, adding individualized supports that are unique to the student.

### **128. Question: How can a teaching assistant or support staff help me with TAKS-Alt?**

Answer: The student can be instructed by anyone after the teacher has designed the activity. Depending on the activity, the best person to provide the instruction may be the speech therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, auditory or visual impairment instructor, or a teaching assistant. Others may also take notes or tallies as the teacher instructs; however, it is the primary teacher's responsibility to record, score, and submit the information on the online instrument.

### **129. Question: Do I have to conduct an ARD meeting to change a student's statewide assessment from an LDAA to TAKS-Alt?**

Answer: Parents and local education agencies (LEA) may agree not to convene an ARD committee meeting to make changes to the student's IEP and instead may develop a written document to amend or modify the child's current IEP. Upon request, a parent shall be provided with a revised copy of the IEP. The IEP must include a statement of any accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the student on statewide and district-wide assessments. If the ARD committee determines that the student shall take an alternate assessment on a particular statewide assessment of student achievement, the IEP must contain a statement of why the child cannot participate in the regular assessment and why the particular alternate assessment selected is appropriate for the child.

### **130. Question: Why must I eliminate extraneous instructional elements during a TAKS-Alt observational assessment?**

Answer: Extraneous instructional elements are important in teaching and often help a student to understand the concept or skill being taught. Many times, however, these elements are not critical to the specific skill being taught and are no longer needed after the student has acquired the concept or skill. During an observational assessment you want to be observing only those skills that are essential to the task. Your predetermined criteria should be very specific and should not include extraneous instructional elements. For example, reading a math equation before or after the student completes the problem is good practice and may help the student understand the overall operation better. However, this skill would not be considered a crucial part of a calculation activity as targeted by the predetermined criteria for a TAKS-Alt observation on solving number operations.

### **131. Question: What if my student cannot access the general curriculum?**

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

**Answer:** According to the federal mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act, all students **MUST** access the general curriculum. If you need assistance, please refer to the document entitled “Suggestions for Finding Appropriate Access Activities” on the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/index.html#forms>.

**132. Question: What is a “fair” observation for TAKS-Alt?**

**Answer:** A fair observation is any observation that the teacher feels is a good reflection of the student’s abilities and performance.

**133. Question: What are the factors I should consider when trying to decide whether another TAKS-Alt observation is needed?**

**Answer:** Teachers are advised to consider the amount of instruction the student has received on the skill, the amount of time allotted for the activity, the attentiveness of the student, the amount of response time the student routinely requires, environmental conditions during the observation, and the level of cueing or prompting that occurred during the activity.

**134. Question: What happens if I cannot elicit any observable measurable behavior from my student while conducting a TAKS-Alt observation?**

**Answer:** First the teacher should consider whether the activity was appropriate for the student. If the teacher feels it was not, he or she could refer to the “Suggestions for Finding Appropriate Access Activities” document located on the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/index.html#forms>. When all possibilities have been exhausted and the teacher is still not able to get an observable response for any activities in a subject area on TAKS–Alt, the teacher can select the Cannot Be Observed option for submission. The student’s circumstance must match one of the two options indicated in the drop-down box on the online instrument. The two reasons are (1) No observable change in affect or movement and (2) Ongoing medical condition resulting in no observable state change in breathing or heart rate.

**135. Question: What happens if a student has completed some of the needed observations for TAKS–Alt but then becomes ill and misses the remainder?**

**Answer:** In extreme cases, an incomplete submission will be necessary. In order to use this option, the student’s circumstance must match one of the three options indicated in the drop-down box on the online instrument under Incomplete. The three reasons are (1) Student moved from the state before assessment could be completed. (2) Student moved into the state a few weeks prior to submission window. (3) Student had a medical emergency (for example: trauma resulting in reduced capacity; progressive illness or injury; temporary emergency requiring hospitalization).

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

136. **Question: Should I be concerned if the student can only complete the TAKS-Alt activity I have created using a hand-to-hand prompt?**

**Answer:** The teacher has the responsibility to create an activity that will allow the student to respond as independently as possible. If a student can only complete the task with the most invasive level of prompting, the teacher may want to reconsider the difficulty level of the overall task or redefine the predetermined criteria for the student.

137. **Question: What are the factors I need to consider when setting up a TAKS-Alt observation?**

**Answer:** The teacher will need to consider the most appropriate activity, the most suitable setting, the supports that the student will need, the level of independence the student can demonstrate, the time frame for the activity, the people that might be able to assist during the observation, and the best method of recording the data.

138. **Question: Do all students who take TAKS-Alt get an opportunity to be scored on Generalization of Skill on essence statements?**

**Answer:** No. For purposes of TAKS–Alt, only students who receive a rubric score of 2 or 3 on Demonstration of Skill and a score of 2 or 3 on Level of Support earn the opportunity to be scored on Generalization of Skill. An additional point may be added to these students' rubric scores if generalization is observed. Documentation that supports the student's score must be submitted for students who earn the opportunity to be scored on generalization.

### *Implications for Graduation, Retention, and Program Exit*

139. **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.

140. **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

141. **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.

### TEKS-based Locally Determined Alternate Assessment (TEKS-based LDAA)

142. **Question:** When and where should TEKS-based LDAA performance information be reported for each student?

**Answer:** The ARD committee is responsible for determining what assessment will be used for the TEKS-based LDAA and what mastery criteria will be expected for each student. TEKS-based 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” only for 2006-2007. Students who have traditionally taken “Functional LDAA” assessments will participate in the mandatory TAKS-Alt field test. No notation needs to be made on answer documents for these students since the TAKS-Alt Online Instrument will track these students.

143. **Question:** What if a student is absent on the day his or her TEKS-based LDAA is administered?

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

144. **Question:** Can a TEKS-based LDAA be administered on the same day as TAKS or SDAA II?

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

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

145. **Question:** What if the ARD committee sets a schedule for a TEKS-based 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. The ARD Manual gives specific TEKS-based LDAA reporting deadlines.

146. **Question:** Does TEKS-based LDAA information need to be reported for Grade 12 students who did not meet expectations for a TEKS-based in Grade 11?

**Answer:** No. Grade 11 students whose ARD committees determine that TAKS is inappropriate must take a TEKS-based LDAA. Once the TEKS-based LDAA information is reported, the testing requirement has been fulfilled. In other words, students who do not meet their ARD expectation on the TEKS-based 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*

147. **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](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ayp)).

148. **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>.

149. **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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

150. **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.

151. **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](http://www.tea.state.tx.us).)

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

152. **Question:** Is there a Spanish version of SDAA II or TAKS-I?

**Answer:** A Spanish version of SDAA II is not available. [TAKS-I is offered in Spanish for grades at which TAKS is offered in Spanish. Currently, TAKS-I is offered in Spanish for grade 5 science only.](#)

153. **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?

**Answer:** 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.

154. **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, refer to the ARD manual.

155. **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

156. **Question:** May immigrant LEP students receiving special education services be exempted from SDAA II or TAKS-I 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.

157. **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.

158. **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.

159. **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.

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

**Answer:** LAT administrations are available for TAKS mathematics but not SDAA II mathematics. LAT administrations are available for both TAKS and SDAA II reading. For more information, refer to the section titled “Provisions for LEP Students Served Through Special Education” in the 2006-2007 manual titled *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program (Grades 3–12)*.

## Questions Related to the Student Success Initiative

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

161. **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*).

162. **Question:** If a student has been retained, which assessment should the student take?

**Answer:** Every student takes the assessment administered in his/her enrolled grade level.

163. **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.

164. **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 2007 to all students served by special education who are not taking TAKS or a TEKS-based LDAA. It is important to note that ARD

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

committees have the option to provide a testing opportunity prior to the SDAA II administration, using a 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.

- 165. 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.

- 166. 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.

- 167. 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.

- 168. 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.

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Texas Assessment Program, continued

### Questions Related to Reading the Writing Prompt Aloud

169. **Question:** If several grade 4 students in a class ask to have the writing prompt read aloud, should the test administrator have the other students wait to begin working on their compositions until the prompt has been read to each student who has made the request?

**Answer:** No. If several grade 4 students want the writing prompt read aloud, the TA should instruct the other students that they may begin working on their compositions. The TA should then read the prompt to each student who has requested it, being careful to disrupt the other students as little as possible. Note that this direction will not be appropriate for students in grades 7, 10, or 11 because additional directions must be read aloud to the entire room after addressing the writing prompt. At these grades, students do not begin work on the essay immediately after hearing the prompt. The TA must read the prompt to any student who has requested it. Then the TA continues with the rest of the directions that the whole room must hear before students begin to work on the test.

170. **Question:** If all or most of the students in a classroom request that the prompt be read aloud, may the test administrator read the prompt to the entire class instead of to each student individually?

**Answer:** No, the test administrator must not read the writing prompt aloud to the entire class as a group. The reason is that during this year's field test, students within one classroom had different prompts, so reading aloud a prompt to the entire room during the field test was not appropriate; a field-test prompt could be read only to individual students who requested it. For the actual (live) test, the prompt will be the same for all students across the state at a particular grade level, as it has always been. However, the live test administration procedures must be the same as the field test administration procedures.

171. **Question:** If a test administrator is asked by a student to read the writing prompt aloud, should the TA read aloud all of the information on the page, including the "reminder box"?

**Answer:** No. The test administrator should read **only** the writing prompt, being careful to disrupt the other students as little as possible.

172. **Question:** Since test administrators are now instructed to read the prompt aloud only to students who request it, does this mean that on the live test, students will no longer be responding to the same prompt statewide?

**Answer:** No. There has been no change in the way the TAKS writing and ELA tests are constructed. On the live test, all students across the state in a particular grade will be responding to the same prompt; i.e., all grade 4 students will be responding to the same grade 4 prompt, all exit level students will be responding to the same exit level prompt, etc.