

# CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

The goal of the Texas assessment program is to measure student progress toward achieving academic excellence. The primary purpose of the state student assessment program is to provide an accurate measure of student achievement in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The test results are also used as a gauge for institutional accountability.

## STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN TEXAS

From 1980 to 1989, as required by state statute, Texas assessed minimum basic skills in reading, mathematics, and writing with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) tests (1980–1984) and then with the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) examinations (1985–1989). Changes in state law required the implementation, in fall 1990, of a criterion-referenced testing program, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The inclusion of end-of-course examinations as an option for meeting the graduation requirement was legislated in 1995 by the Texas Legislature and mandated in the Texas Education Code.

The implementation of TAAS shifted the focus of assessment in Texas from minimum skills to academic skills. The TAAS tests represented a more comprehensive assessment of the state-mandated curriculum. In 1999, legislation was passed calling for the development of a new, expanded, criterion-referenced testing program, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The TAKS testing program replaces the TAAS program beginning in the 2002–2003 academic year. State-mandated end-of-course tests will no longer be administered after spring 2002.

Since the implementation of the TAAS program, several shifts have occurred in the grades tested, and new assessments have been developed as a result of changes in legislative requirements or actions by the State Board of Education (SBOE).

- In fall 1990 and fall 1991, TAAS was administered to students in Grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 (exit level).
- The 1992–93 school year was a transition year for the testing program. TAAS was given to students in Grades 3, 7, and exit level in the fall of 1992 and to students in Grades 4, 8, and 10 (exit level) in the spring of 1993.
- In the spring of 1994, the TAAS reading and mathematics assessments were administered to students in Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 (exit level), and the TAAS writing tests were administered at Grades 4, 8, and 10 (exit level). Also, science and social studies assessments at Grades 4 and 8 and the end-of-course tests for Biology and Algebra I were benchmarked. During a benchmark administration, all eligible students are assessed and receive objective-level scores and a raw score for the total test; however, no pass/fail information is provided. The SBOE uses the benchmark test data in its standard-setting process.
- In December 1994 the Biology end-of-course examination was administered to students who had completed Biology at the end of the fall semester.
- In 1995 legislation was passed stipulating that end-of-course tests be administered to students completing classes in Algebra I, Biology, English II, and U.S. History.
- In the spring of 1995, TAAS reading, mathematics, and writing assessments were administered at the same grade levels as the previous year. Science and social studies were assessed at Grade 8 only. Also in the spring of 1995, the Biology end-of-course test was administered to eligible

students, and the Algebra I end-of-course exam was rebenchmarked as a more comprehensive and rigorous test. In the fall of 1995, these two end-of-course tests were administered to eligible students.

- In the spring of 1996, the Spanish versions of the TAAS Grades 3 and 4 reading and mathematics tests were benchmarked.
- In the spring of 1997, the Spanish versions of the TAAS Grades 5 and 6 reading and mathematics tests and the Grade 4 writing test were benchmarked.
- In the spring of 1998, the English II and U.S. History end-of-course examinations were benchmarked.
- In the fall of 1998, the U.S. History and English II end-of-course examinations were administered to students who had completed these courses.
- In the spring of 2000, the baseline Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) was administered. The baseline is the first “live” test from which data are collected about students to get individual measures for growth.
- In the fall of 2000, an RPTE study was conducted in order to gather further data to be used to develop a cohesive system documenting the annual progress of limited English proficiency (LEP) students.
- In the spring of 2001, the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) baseline was administered.
- In the spring of 2002, TAKS was field-tested in reading in Grades 3–9; mathematics in Grades 3–11; writing in Grades 4 and 7; English language arts in Grades 10 and 11; science in Grades 5, 10, and 11; and social studies in Grades 8, 10, and 11.
- In the spring of 2002, state-mandated end-of-course tests were administered for the last time in English II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History.
- In the spring of 2002, TAAS was administered for the last time in Grades 3–8. Exit level TAAS remains the graduation requirement for students who were in ninth grade or above during the 2000–2001 academic year.

## **TEXAS EDUCATION CODE AND TEXAS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE**

In November 2001 the SBOE adopted new rules for student assessment that reflect provisions enacted in Senate Bill 103, passed by the 76th Texas Legislature. In May 2002, Commissioner’s Rules concerning the Student Success Initiative were adopted that reflect provisions enacted in Senate Bill 4, also passed by the 76th Texas Legislature. These rules constitute the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 101. During the 2001–2002 school year, an individual was required to demonstrate satisfactory performance as determined by the State Board of Education (SBOE) on the assessments required for graduation as specified in the Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 39, Subchapter B. During the 2001–2002 school year, a sophomore was required to demonstrate satisfactory performance on each section of the exit level TAAS or on the end-of-course examinations in English II and Algebra I and either Biology or U.S. History to be eligible to receive a high school diploma. TAAS examinees have a total of eight opportunities to pass the test before graduation. The TAC states that no exit level student will be required to demonstrate subject area performance at a standard higher than the one in effect at the time the student was first eligible to take the test. Thus, the exit level TAAS tests will continue to be available for eligible students both in and out of school.

Newly adopted assessment provisions and graduation requirements reflected in Chapter 39, Subchapter B of the TEC and Chapter 101 of the TAC will be implemented through the TAKS testing program beginning in the 2002–2003 school year. Students who were in 8th grade or lower on January 1, 2001, must fulfill testing

requirements for graduation with the Grade 11 exit level tests in mathematics, English language arts, social studies, and science. Recently adopted assessment provisions relating to the promotion requirements of the Student Success Initiative are located in Section 28.0211 of the TEC.

Appendix 1 includes sections of the Texas Education Code that apply to student assessment, the Student Success Initiative, and the performance indicators for the accountability system.

Appendix 2 contains the version of Chapter 101 of the Texas Administrative Code that was in place beginning on November 15, 2001. It also contains the Commissioner's Rules for the Student Success Initiative adopted on May 26, 2002, and found in the Texas Administrative Code Chapter 101, Subchapter BB.

## SENATE BILL 103—TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS)

In 1999 the 76th Session of the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 103, which mandates that the exit level test be moved from Grade 10 to Grade 11. The new Grade 11 exit level test must, by law, assess students in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. To be eligible to receive a diploma from a Texas public high school, a student must pass all four of these subject area tests.

Senate Bill 103 further specifies that certain content must be assessed on the new Grade 11 exit level test.

- The English language arts test must include at least English III and writing.
- The mathematics test must include at least Algebra I and geometry.
- The science test must include at least biology and integrated chemistry and physics.
- The social studies test must include early American and U.S. history.

By law the new Grade 11 exit level test must be designed to address dual purposes. It must assess students' level of academic preparation for graduation from high school and their readiness to enroll in an institution of higher education. However, the law does not require that students demonstrate readiness to enroll in an institution of higher education in order to receive a high school diploma.

Senate Bill 103 further mandates that students will be assessed in mathematics at Grades 3 through 10; in reading at Grades 3 through 9; in writing, including spelling and grammar, at Grades 4 and 7; in English language arts at Grade 10; in social studies at Grades 8 and 10; and in science at Grades 5 and 10. As required by law, the first administration of this new assessment will be during the 2002–2003 school year.

In June 2001, the new assessment was named the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Information about the development and implementation of the TAKS testing program is found in Chapter 18.

## SENATE BILL 4—STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

In 1999 the 76th Session of the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 4, known as the Student Success Initiative, which mandates that satisfactory performance on the Grade 3 reading assessment, the Grade 5 reading and mathematics assessments, and the Grade 8 reading and mathematics assessments becomes a promotion requirement for Texas students. This law will affect the third-grade class of 2002–2003 and all subsequent classes.

The law requires that school districts provide each student who initially fails to perform satisfactorily on one of these assessments at least two additional opportunities to retake the test. The school district must provide accelerated instruction to these students in the applicable subject area(s). A student who fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment after at least three attempts will be retained at the same grade level for the next school year. However, a committee composed of the principal or the principal's designee, the student's parent or guardian, and the student's teacher can be convened to serve as a grade-promotion decision-making committee. Information about the development and implementation of the Student Success Initiative is located in Chapter 18.

## **TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS**

Beginning with the 1998–1999 school year, districts were required to use the new statewide curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), rather than the essential elements, as the basis for instruction. In September 1998 TEA distributed update booklets explaining to Texas educators how the TAAS and end-of-course tests are aligned with the TEKS. The booklets were provided for each TAAS and end-of-course test by grade level and subject area and contained test objectives and their corresponding TEKS student expectations statements. In 1998–1999, test items were matched to the TEKS, and TAAS assessed only areas common to the TEKS and the essential elements. The 1999–2000 school year marked the full integration of statewide testing with the TEKS. Items based on knowledge and skills not previously tested were added to the test. TEA published the *Educator's Guides to TEKS-Based Assessment* and *Educator's Guide* supplements to update educators and inform them about the new alignment.

## **APPROPRIATE USES FOR SCORES AND REPORTS**

As with any assessment instrument that records the progress of students in a snapshot, the scores from these assessment instruments must be used appropriately if they are to provide a valid indicator of student performance. As much data as possible should be incorporated when using individual or group test results. Likewise, the reports developed for use in an assessment program must be clear and understandable and must contain a broad array of information to facilitate their use.

State statute requires that the State Board of Education adopt a set of indicators for determining the quality of learning on a campus. Included in those indicators are test results from the statewide student assessment program. The TAAS and end-of-course tests are based on the following premises.

- The tests are grounded in the TEKS and reflect those skills in a manner consistent with sound instructional practice.
- Information about the content, level of expectation, and structure of the tests is based on judgments made by Texas educators, students, and the public.
- Texas educators participate in all phases of test development.
- Test results are useful for providing a snapshot of individual student performance, an indicator of areas in which further diagnosis is warranted, and a mechanism for providing a “level playing field” for comparing the performance of campuses and districts.

TEA designs the student performance data reports to provide information about student achievement. This information may be used in a variety of ways, some of which are outlined below.

- *Reporting results to parents of individual students.* The TAAS and end-of-course test reports contain information about the student's scores in relation to the passing standards, the content

areas in which the student may need instructional intervention, and the specific skills in which further diagnosis is indicated. This information can help parents more fully understand their child's achievement. RPTE and SDAA reports provide information about students' academic progress.

- *Reporting results to the local school board, school professionals, and the community.* Although individual students' scores are confidential by law, reports of group (aggregated) scores are considered public record. However, if the specific group (e.g., limited English proficient students) contains fewer than five students, scores are not included in reports to protect student confidentiality.
- *Evaluating student scores for use in placement decisions.* Instructional intervention is required by state law for students exhibiting difficulty with skills on the TAAS tests. Student test scores should also be used in conjunction with other performance indicators to assist schools in making placement decisions, such as whether a student should take a reading improvement course, be placed in a gifted and talented program, or exit a bilingual program.
- *Evaluating programs, resources, and staffing patterns.* Districts may use campus and district test scores in evaluating a particular program or a particular resource or staffing pattern. For example, a campus may use its scores to evaluate its improvement in an at-risk program or to assess the need to focus resources and staff on a particular group of students.
- *Evaluating district and campus instructional programs.* Since the tests are designed to measure the TEKS for reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, considering performance results by subject area and by objective may be helpful when evaluating instructional programs. Generalizations from student scores may be made to the specific content domain represented by the objective or set of objectives being measured on the exam. However, because the tests measure a finite set of skills with a limited set of item types, generalizations should be made about student achievement only as measured on a particular test.

## **ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS INVOLVED**

A number of groups and organizations are involved in the Texas assessment program. Each of the major contributors listed below serves a specific function, and their collaborative efforts contribute significantly to the program's success.

### THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

The Texas Education Agency's Student Assessment Division has the responsibility of carrying out the provisions of the Texas Education Code and the requirements of the Texas Administrative Code for the statewide assessment program. The Student Assessment Division oversees the planning, scheduling, and implementation of all major assessment activities and supervises the agency's current contract with NCS Pearson. TEA staff also conduct quality-control activities for every aspect of the development and administration of the assessment program and monitor the program's security provisions.

### NCS PEARSON

NCS Pearson has been TEA's primary contractor for the provision of support services to the statewide assessment program since September 1981. Because of the diverse nature of the services required, NCS Pearson employs subcontractors to perform tasks requiring specialized expertise. During the 2001–2002 school year, NCS Pearson's subcontractors were Harcourt Educational Measurement (HEM) for test development; BETA, Inc., for the development of the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) and reading and mathematics items for the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA); and Publisher's Resource Group (PRG) for the development of TAKS study guides.

During the 2001–2002 school year, NCS Pearson distributed test materials to approximately 1,200 school districts and charter schools in Texas (approximately 8,000 campuses) and was responsible for the security of more than 6 million test booklets. For each grade level and each major test administration, NCS Pearson printed more than 200,000 test booklets and more than 350,000 answer documents. NCS Pearson also produced ancillary testing materials, including test administration manuals and training videotapes, interpretive guides, report folders, scannable identification sheets, packing lists, report samples, report order forms, return shipping labels, freight bills, and security forms. NCS Pearson scored all student answer documents and prepared and distributed standard and optional reports.

Each August the TAAS and end-of-course tests administered during the previous school year are released, and NCS Pearson makes an initial shipment of these tests with their associated answer keys and scoring guides to school districts and education service centers. This initial shipment totaled 529,957 released test booklets during the 2001–2002 school year. NCS Pearson shipped an additional 1,348,203 released test booklets on demand.

During the 2001–2002 school year, NCS Pearson's Performance Scoring Centers conducted the hand-scoring of the TAAS written composition for Grades 4 (English and Spanish version), 8 and 10 (exit level), and of the written composition and short-answer reading responses for the English II end-of-course test. The written portions of the SDAA were also scored as were the essay portions of the TAKS field tests for Grade 4 writing (English and Spanish), Grade 7 writing, Grade 10 ELA, and Grade 11 exit level ELA. Short-answer reading responses were also scored for the Grade 9 reading, Grade 10 ELA, and Grade 11 exit level ELA TAKS field tests. NCS Pearson collaborated with TEA on all facets of the writing and reading assessments, including the development of writing prompts and short-answer reading questions. In addition, NCS Pearson recruited and hired scoring supervisors and scoring personnel, trained group leaders, coordinated shipping and handling of student responses, maintained security, and transmitted scoring data to the NCS Pearson Iowa City Scoring Center.

## HARCOURT EDUCATIONAL MEASUREMENT

Harcourt Educational Measurement (HEM) was first associated with the development of statewide tests in Texas beginning with TABS and then again with the TAAS program. As a subcontractor to NCS Pearson during the 2001–2002 school year, HEM worked with TEA staff members and other Texas educators to produce test items for the TAAS, end-of-course, and TAKS assessment programs. HEM also produced math and reading items for SDAA. In addition, HEM provided advice and guidance to the advisory committees that participated in item and data reviews and technical assistance to the assessment program as a whole. Separate from its association with NCS Pearson, during the 2001–2002 school year, HEM continued to work as sole contractor and distributor of the TEKS-based *TAAS Study Guides*, including Spanish versions of the guides for students in Grades 3 through 6 who currently take one or more Spanish-version TAAS tests.

## BETA, INC.

Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates (BETA), Inc., is a subcontractor of NCS Pearson for RPTE and SDAA. BETA provided services on these projects, including item development, blueprint specifications, and technical support. RPTE is described in Chapter 4, and SDAA is described in Chapter 5.

## TEXAS EDUCATORS

Texas educators, including classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and education service center staff, play a vital role in all phases of the test development process. Committees of Texas educators review the state-required curriculum to develop appropriate objectives for a specific grade and/or subject test and provide advice on a model for assessing the particular subject that aligns closely with good classroom instruction. Draft objectives are widely distributed for review by teachers, curriculum specialists, assessment specialists, and administrators. Texas educator committees assist in developing draft guidelines that outline the eligible test content and test item formats. TEA refines and clarifies these draft objectives and guidelines based on input from Texas educators. Following the development of test items by professional item writers, many of whom are Texas teachers, committees of Texas educators review the items to ensure that the content and difficulty are appropriate and to eliminate potential bias. Items are revised based on input from these committee meetings and are then field-tested. Texas educator committees then review each item and its associated data for inclusion in the item banks from which the test forms are built.

Between the implementation of TAAS in 1990 and July 2002, more than 13,000 Texas educators served on one or more of the educator committees involved in item development for the TAAS, the end-of-course tests, RPTE, SDAA, and TAKS.