

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN TEXAS

Over two decades ago, the state of Texas instituted a statewide testing program that, through periodic changes in legislation and policy, has grown in size, scope, and rigor. 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).

In 1990 the implementation of another criterion-referenced testing program, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), shifted the focus of assessment in Texas from minimum skills to academic skills. Initially, tests were administered in the fall to students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Between 1994 and 2002 TAAS was administered every spring to students in grades 3–8 and 10 in reading and mathematics, grades 4, 8, and 10 in writing and grade 8 in science and social studies. Content-based end-of-course examinations were offered between 1995 and 2002 as an option for meeting graduation requirements, and Spanish language TAAS tests for the elementary grades were first incorporated into the testing program in 1996.

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), designed to evaluate the progress of limited English proficient (LEP) students, were first administered in spring 2000. The following spring marked the introduction of the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA).

In the 2002–2003 school year, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced the TAAS as the primary state assessment program. A criterion-referenced assessment, the TAKS is designed, by legislative mandate, to be more comprehensive than any of its predecessors and encompasses more of the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), at more grade levels than the TAAS. The high school level assessments, administered in grades 9, 10, and 11, are grounded in the high school TEKS curriculum. By law, students for whom TAKS is the graduation testing requirement must pass exit level tests in four content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) in order to graduate from a Texas public high school.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI), adopted by the Texas Legislature in 1999, 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 be a promotion requirement for Texas students. This law affects the third-grade class of 2002–2003 and all subsequent classes.

For additional historical information about the TABS, TEAMS, and TAAS testing programs, see Chapter 11, Standards.

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE AND TEXAS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

State law pertaining to the statewide student assessment program is found in the Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 39, Subchapter B. Assessment provisions relating to the promotion requirements of the Student Success Initiative are located in Chapter 28, Section 28.0211 of the TEC. The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) includes the State Board of Education (SBOE) and commissioner's rules adopted to address the legislative requirements of the TEC. 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.

Assessment provisions and graduation testing requirements reflected in Chapter 39, Subchapter B, of the TEC and Chapter 101 of the TAC were first implemented through the TAKS testing program in the 2002–2003 school year. Although TAKS is now the graduation testing requirement, the TAC also 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. Therefore, the exit level TAAS tests will continue to be available for eligible students both in and out of school. Additional rules clarifying high school graduation testing requirements were adopted in February 2003.

Legislation passed in June 2003 amends Chapter 39.023 of the TEC to include the addition of a grade 8 science test in the state-mandated TAKS testing requirements. By law, the grade 8 assessment must be implemented no later than the 2006–2007 school year.

Appendix 1 includes sections of the Texas Education Code that apply to student assessment and the Student Success Initiative. Appendix 2 contains Chapter 101 of the Texas Administrative Code.

TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Beginning with the 1998–1999 school year, districts were required to use the statewide curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), as the basis for instruction. The 1999–2000 school year marked the full integration of statewide testing with the TEKS. The alignment of the TAKS program to the TEKS was an integral part of the TAKS development process. TAKS test items are designed to measure student understanding of the knowledge and skills found in the TEKS student expectations that are eligible for testing under the umbrella of TAKS objectives. The SDAA and RPTE testing programs are also aligned with the TEKS.

TAKS Objectives and the corresponding TEKS student expectations that are eligible for testing are located in Appendix 3.

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. All statewide tests in Texas 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 TAKS 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. SDAA reports provide information about students’ academic progress and RPTE reports provide information about students’ English-language development in reading.
- *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 TAKS 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 the improvement of students 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 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 Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM). 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.

PEARSON EDUCATIONAL MEASUREMENT

Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM) 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, PEM employs subcontractors to perform tasks requiring specialized expertise. During the 2002–2003 school year, PEM's subcontractors were Harcourt Educational Measurement (HEM) and Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates, Inc. (BETA) for test development activities and Publisher's Resource Group (PRG) for the development of TAKS study guides.

During the 2002–2003 school year, PEM 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 7 million test booklets. For each grade level and each major test administration, PEM printed more than 250,000 test booklets and more than 350,000 answer documents. PEM 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, grade 3 on-line reports, security forms, and CD-ROMs with shipping instructions. PEM scored all student answer documents and prepared and distributed standard and optional reports.

In June 2003 the TAKS tests administered in spring 2003 were released. PEM made 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 517,440 released test booklets. In addition to the initial shipment, PEM printed approximately 1.6 million released test booklets for shipment to school districts on demand.

During the 2002–2003 school year, PEM's Performance Scoring Centers conducted the hand-scoring of the exit level TAAS written composition, the written portions of the SDAA, the written composition and short-answer reading responses for the TAKS grade 10 ELA, and grade 11 exit level ELA, and the written composition portions of the TAKS grade 4 and grade 7 writing tests. PEM also coordinated the scoring of the TAKS grade 9 reading short answer responses. PEM collaborated with TEA on all facets of the writing and reading assessments, including the development of multiple-choice test items, writing prompts and short-answer reading questions. In addition, PEM 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 PEM's 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 PEM during the 2002–2003 school year, HEM worked with PEM personnel, TEA staff members, and other Texas educators to produce science, social studies, mathematics, and reading items for TAKS and reading and mathematics items for SDAA with their subcontractor BETA, Inc. In addition, HEM provided advice and guidance to the educator committees that participated in item and data reviews and technical assistance to the assessment program as a whole.

BETA, INC.

Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates (BETA), Inc., is a subcontractor of PEM for RPTE and SDAA. BETA provided services on these projects, including item development, blueprint specifications, and technical support. BETA has also provided technical support and developed items for the SDAA II assessment program that will be implemented in 2004–2005.

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 and help 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 the curriculum and good classroom instruction. Draft objectives with corresponding TEKS student expectations 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 current or former 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. In addition to reviewing items, educators are asked to review instructional support materials such as information booklets and study guides to ensure that the materials are both appropriate and effective.

In the 2002–2003 school year, 1593 educators served on one or more of the educator committees involved in item and data review, item development, and study guide review for the TAKS, SDAA, and RPTE.