

CHAPTER 1: STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN TEXAS

Texas Assessment Program

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

The state assessment program currently includes three main assessments: the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II), and the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS). In addition, an exit level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exam is available for high school students and out-of-school examinees for whom this test is a graduation requirement.

TAKS

TAKS is the primary state-mandated assessment. First administered in spring 2003, TAKS is given to students in mathematics at Grades 3–10 and at the exit level; in reading at Grades 3–9; in writing at Grades 4 and 7; in English language arts (ELA) at Grade 10 and at the exit level; in science at Grades 5 and 10 and at the exit level; and in social studies at Grades 8 and 10 and at the exit level. Spanish versions of TAKS are available at Grades 3–6.

SDAA II

SDAA II, offered in mathematics, English language arts, reading, and writing, is designed for students enrolled in Grades 3–10 who are receiving special education services and are being instructed in the state-mandated curriculum but for whom TAKS is an inappropriate measure of their academic achievement and progress.

TELPAS

TELPAS has two components: the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) and the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP). This assessment system measures the progress that English language learners—referred to as limited English proficient (LEP) students in state and federal law—make in acquiring the English language. As required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), TELPAS assesses the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

RPTE, administered since spring 2000 to students in Grades 3 through 12, measures the domain of reading. TOP assesses students in Grades 3 through 12 in the domains of listening, speaking, and writing, and students in kindergarten through Grade 2 in all four language domains. TOP was administered as a benchmark assessment in 2003–2004 and fully implemented in 2004–2005.

Historical Overview of Assessment in Texas

More than 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 1990, 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) tests (1985–1990).

In (1990), the implementation of another criterion-referenced testing program, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), shifted the focus of assessment from minimum skills to academic skills. Initially, mathematics, reading, and writing tests were administered in the fall to students in Grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Beginning in the 1993–1994 school year, TAAS was administered in the spring, and the primary administration of grades and subjects assessed was reconfigured. 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. Passing the exit level tests in reading, writing, and mathematics at Grade 10 was a requirement for graduation. 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 Grades 3 through 6 were incorporated into the testing program in 1996 and 1997.

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), designed to evaluate English language acquisition in reading, were first administered to limited English proficient (LEP) students in spring 2000. The following spring marked the introduction of the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA), which was administered to eligible students served by special education.

In the 2002–2003 school year, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced TAAS as the primary statewide assessment program. TAKS is designed by legislative mandate to be more comprehensive than its predecessors and encompasses more of the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), at more grade levels than TAAS did. The high school level assessments, administered at 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. The first cohort of students affected by this law was the third-grade class of 2002–2003. For the 2004–2005 school year, student performances on the Grade 5 reading and mathematics assessments were included.

In response to federal testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the Texas Education Agency developed the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment

System (TELPAS). This system has two components: the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), which have been administered since 1999–2000, and the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP), which have been administered since 2003–2004. Both components are designed to assess the progress that limited English proficient (LEP) students make in learning the English language.

Under NCLB, states' English language proficiency assessments must assess students annually in kindergarten through Grade 12 in four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Together, RPTE and TOP provide TELPAS performance data used to fulfill state and federal reporting requirements.

For additional historical information about the TABS, TEAMS, and TAAS testing programs, see Chapter 12: Standards.

Legislative and Administrative Provisions for Assessment

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 (SSI) are located in Chapter 28, Section 28.0211 of the TEC. Provisions relating to the additional intensive instruction districts must provide to students who do not perform satisfactorily on a state assessment are located in Chapter 28, Section 28.0213 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 rules for student assessment that reflect provisions enacted in Senate Bill 103, passed by the 76th Texas Legislature. These rules provide requirements for the development and administration of tests, testing for graduation, testing accommodations and exemptions, test security and confidentiality, reporting of test results, and the administration and reporting of group-administered achievement tests. These board rules are found in 19 TAC Chapter 101, Assessment, Subchapters A through E.

In September 2001, commissioner's rules concerning the participation of limited English proficient (LEP) students in the state assessment program were adopted. In May 2002, commissioner's rules concerning the SSI were adopted to reflect provisions enacted in Senate Bill 4, also passed by the 76th Texas Legislature. In February 2003, commissioner's rules concerning the implementation of the testing program were adopted to implement requirements for the new testing program as specified by Senate Bill 103 and to clarify transitional issues related to the implementation of the new testing program. These commissioner's rules are found in 19 TAC Chapter 101, Assessment, Subchapters AA through CC.

In fall 2004, the SBOE and commissioner's rules for student assessment were reviewed as part of a four-year rule review cycle for all state agency rules. During this review process, a number

of amendments were made to the SBOE and commissioner's rules for student assessment. The following major changes to the SBOE rules became effective in March 2005. The State-Developed Alternative Assessment was extended to include grades 9 and 10 as required by statute. The policy allowing foreign exchange students to waive the testing requirements if they are not seeking Texas diplomas was extended to include grades 9 and 10 as well as exit level.

The commissioner's rules concerning the participation of LEP students in the state assessment program were amended to comply with federal legislation and to provide clarification of state provisions regarding the assessment of LEP students. These changes included an amendment to reflect the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 for assessing the English language proficiency of students in additional domains and grades, an amendment to clarify the eligibility criteria for exempting immigrant LEP students from state assessments, and an amendment to clarify that LEP-exempt students must participate in assessments required by federal law and regulations.

Commissioner's rules concerning the SSI were amended to provide clarification on the conditions under which a student is subject to the automatic retention component of SSI; to clarify the requirements for campuses and districts to provide services required under SSI to out-of-district students; and to explicitly allow districts to consider past performance on state-mandated assessments, extenuating circumstances, and a student's ability to participate in regular instruction in the grade placement committee deliberations.

Revisions to the commissioner's rules concerning implementation of the testing program included an amendment to clarify the testing requirements for graduation and an amendment to implement the new science assessment at grade 8 as required by the TEC and require that students be assessed in any other subject and grade required by the federal government.

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.

Curriculum Guidelines for Assessment

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills were adopted by the SBOE in July 1997 and were implemented as the statewide curriculum for Texas in the 1998–1999 school year. The TEKS replaced the less comprehensive Essential Elements, which were implemented in 1984. The TEKS were developed to be more specific and focused than the Essential Elements, with emphasis placed on the knowledge and skills students were expected to learn rather than on the delivery standards expected of teachers.

In the 1999–2000 school year, the TEKS were integrated into the existing statewide testing program (TAAS). That same year work began on the development of the new TAKS testing program, as mandated by the 76th Legislature. Throughout the test development process for TAKS, attention was focused on ensuring a strong, direct, and effective link between the TEKS curriculum and the statewide assessments.

TAKS objectives and the corresponding TEKS student expectations that are eligible for testing can be found in Appendix 3.

The Relationship Between Curriculum and Assessment

With the introduction of the TAKS testing program, greater emphasis has been placed on the connection between the state curriculum, classroom instruction, and the state-mandated assessments. Throughout the initial test development process and as part of ongoing test development activities, a wide range of educators, content experts, and assessment and curriculum specialists worked together to ensure that the state assessments were fully aligned with the TEKS curriculum and designed to effectively support students' academic achievement and progress.

TAKS assesses more of the TEKS than did the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and asks questions in more authentic ways. TAKS was developed to better reflect good instructional practice and accurately measure student learning. In other words, TAKS was designed to strengthen the connection between what is tested on the statewide assessment and what students should know and be able to do to be academically successful. The Student Assessment Division and the Division of Curriculum at TEA worked together to help educators understand that the best preparation for TAKS is a coherent, TEKS-based instructional program that provides the level of support necessary for all students to reach their academic potential.

On each TAKS test, the critical knowledge and skills are measured by a series of test objectives. These objectives are not found verbatim in the TEKS curriculum. Rather, the objectives are umbrella statements that serve as headings under which student expectations from the TEKS can be meaningfully grouped. Objectives are broad statements that break up knowledge and skills to be tested into meaningful subsets around which a test can be organized into reporting units. These reporting units help campuses, districts, parents, and the general public understand the performance of students and schools. Test objectives are not intended to be rewordings of the TEKS. The objectives are designed to be identical across grade levels rather than grade specific. Generally, the test objectives are the same for third grade through eighth grade (an elementary/middle school system) and for ninth grade through eleventh grade (a high school system).

The 2003–2004 school year represented the last administration of SDAA. SDAA II was administered for the first time in spring 2005. Like TAKS, SDAA II emphasizes authentic questioning, good instructional practice, and a strong connection between what is tested and what students need to know and be able to do in order to be academically successful. SDAA II

is divided into the same test objectives as those used for TAKS. As with SDAA, SDAA II is designed to measure achievement at the instructional level of the student rather than achievement at the student's enrolled grade level.

In the 2004-2005 school year, an advanced high proficiency level was added to the RPTE reporting system to more closely align RPTE with the reading levels assessed on TAKS. Further modifications of RPTE are planned, and a second edition of RPTE is scheduled to be implemented in the 2007-2008 school year. The new edition of RPTE will add a Grade 2 assessment and expand the academic contexts in which English language proficiency in reading is measured. The redesigned assessment will address the NCLB goals for ensuring that English language learners develop the academic language proficiency in English that enables them to understand and process the academic language used in mathematics, science, and social studies reading materials.

Groups Involved

A number of groups 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 (TEA) Student Assessment Division has the responsibility of carrying out the provisions of federal legislation, 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 contract with Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM). TEA staff members 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 sometimes employs subcontractors to perform tasks requiring specialized expertise. During the 2004-2005 school year, PEM's subcontractors for test development activities were Harcourt Educational Measurement (HEM) and Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates, Inc. (BETA).

During the 2004-2005 school year, PEM distributed test materials to approximately 1,270 school districts and charter schools in Texas (approximately 8,000 campuses) and was responsible for the security of more than 11.8 million test booklets. For each grade-level test administered at Grades 3 through 11, PEM printed and distributed more than 450,000 test

booklets and more than 600,000 answer documents. PEM also produced and distributed ancillary testing materials, such as test administration manuals, interpretive guides, report folders, scannable identification sheets, packing lists, report samples, report order forms, return shipping labels, freight bills, online reports for Grades 3, 5, and exit level, and security forms. PEM scored all student answer documents and prepared and distributed standard and optional reports.

During the 2004–2005 school year, PEM’s Performance Scoring Centers conducted the hand-scoring of the exit level TAAS written composition, the writing portions of the SDAA II tests, the written composition and open-ended reading responses for the TAKS Grade 10 and exit level ELA tests, 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 open-ended responses and participated in all activities associated with the holistic rating of TOP writing assessments. PEM collaborated with TEA on all facets of the writing and reading assessments, including the development of multiple-choice test items, writing prompts, and open-ended reading questions. In addition, PEM recruited and hired all scoring personnel, trained scoring supervisors and readers, 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 2004–2005 school year, HEM worked with PEM personnel, TEA staff members, and other Texas educators to produce mathematics, reading, science, and social studies items for TAKS as well as reading and mathematics items for SDAA II with the subcontractor BETA, Inc. In addition, HEM provided guidance to the educator committees that participated in item and data reviews and technical assistance to the assessment program as a whole.

Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates

Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates (BETA, Inc.), is a subcontractor of PEM for the RPTE and the SDAA II tests. The services BETA provides on these projects include item development, item specifications, and technical support.

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. Whenever a new assessment is developed, committees of Texas educators review the state-required curriculum and help develop appropriate objectives for a specific grade and/or subject-area 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.

During the 2004–2005 school year, 1,577 Texas educators served on one or more of the educator committees involved in item and data review, prototype development, and/or support-materials review for TAKS, SDAA II, and TELPAS.