

Chapter 3: Assessments for Students with Disabilities

Overview

In the 2007–2008 school year, the following assessment options were available for students receiving special education services.

- Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), including a TAKS (Accommodated) form
- Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Modified (TAKS–M)
- Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Alternate (TAKS–Alt)

The availability of separate assessments for each subject-area test gave admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees considerable flexibility in determining the most appropriate assessment for each subject area for each student receiving special education services. Each of these assessments is described in the following sections of this report.

TAKS, Including TAKS (Accommodated)

TAKS is an assessment that measures a student’s mastery of the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and is available for

- grades 3–9 reading (grades 3–6 in Spanish);
- grades 3–10 and exit level mathematics (grades 3–6 in Spanish);
- grades 4 and 7 writing (grade 4 in Spanish);
- grade 10 and exit level ELA;
- grades 5, 8, 10, and exit level science (grade 5 in Spanish); and
- grades 8, 10, and exit level social studies.

TAKS is the first assessment considered by the ARD committee when making assessment decisions. See [Chapter 6: Annual Test Development Activities](#) for more information regarding the development and test administrations of TAKS.

As part of the TAKS assessment program, an accommodated form was available to students who received special education services and met the eligibility requirements for specific accommodations.

In 2007–2008 the TAKS (Accommodated) form was available for all English and Spanish TAKS tests, including the linguistically accommodated test (LAT) versions taken by eligible English language learners (ELLs). The TAKS (Accommodated) form was provided for retest opportunities for the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grades and subjects (grades 3, 5, and 8 reading and grades 5 and 8 mathematics). Retest opportunities for exit level TAKS (Accommodated) assessments were offered beginning in July 2008.

The prominent features of TAKS (Accommodated) include the following:

- TAKS (Accommodated) forms consist of the same test items that appear on the TAKS tests.
- TAKS (Accommodated) forms do not contain embedded field-test items.
- TAKS (Accommodated) forms include format changes such as a larger font size and fewer items per page.
- TAKS (Accommodated) forms include accommodations specific to the needs of students receiving special education services.
- TAKS (Accommodated) uses the same TAKS Commended Performance and Met Standard cut scores.
- TAKS (Accommodated) forms are administered on the same date as the comparable TAKS assessments.

TAKS–M

Overview

The Federal Register Final Rule of April 9, 2007 ([34 CFR, Parts 200 and 300](#)) stipulates that an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards must cover the same grade-level content but may include less difficult questions. The modified academic achievement standards must be challenging for eligible students but may be less difficult than grade-level academic achievement standards. As further stated, these students may need a less difficult test to effectively demonstrate their knowledge of the grade-level content standards. In addition, a state may modify the same items that appear on the grade-level assessment by eliminating one of the incorrect answers in a multiple-choice test.

To assess students with disabilities who are eligible for an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards with a federally compliant system, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), supported by Pearson, developed TAKS–M, a modified version of the TAKS tests. TAKS–M covers the same grade-level content as TAKS, but TAKS–M tests have been modified in format (larger font, fewer items per page, etc.) and test design (fewer answer choices, simpler vocabulary and sentence structure, etc.).

Participation Requirements

The participation requirements that were developed as a result of recommendations from the TAKS–M steering committee and educator advisory committees assist ARD committees in determining which students should be assessed with TAKS–M. Once the ARD committee has determined that a student receiving special education services has a disability that significantly affects academic progress in the grade-level curriculum and precludes the achievement of grade-level proficiency within a school year, it must ensure that the student meets all state-mandated participation criteria to be eligible for TAKS–M. The ARD committee may decide that a student’s knowledge and skills are best assessed with TAKS–M if the student meets all of the following participation criteria:

- The student needs extensive modifications and/or accommodations to classroom instruction, assignments, and assessments to access and demonstrate progress in the grade-level TEKS.
- The student demonstrates academic progress in such a way that even if significant growth occurs during the school year, the ARD committee is reasonably certain that the student will not achieve grade-level proficiency as demonstrated by multiple valid measures of evidence.
- The student meets some but not all of the participation criteria of TAKS–Alt.
- The student requires an alternate form of TAKS that is more closely aligned with instructional modifications in order to demonstrate knowledge of the grade level TEKS.

Development Process

The test development process for TAKS–M followed as closely as possible the same procedures used for all statewide assessments in Texas, coupled with additional requirements specific to TAKS–M. For TAKS–M to be meaningfully reported in the accountability system, issues of validity, reliability, fairness, accessibility, and consistency in meaning were carefully considered as a part of the design and development.

Development of the TAKS–M Blueprints

The TAKS–M blueprints mirror the TAKS blueprints and indicate that the students taking TAKS–M are assessed on the same grade-level curriculum as general education students. The number of items on the TAKS–M blueprints was reduced from the number of items on the TAKS blueprints through a systematic process. The TAKS–M blueprints contain similar percentages of items per objective as are found in the TAKS blueprints. The Spearman Brown prophecy formula was used to study the relationship between reliability and test length. The TAKS–M blueprints were carefully reviewed by general education content experts to ensure that they reflect the full range of the TEKS curriculum.

For additional information regarding TAKS–M, see the *TAKS–M Technical Report 2007–2008*.

Administrations

During the October 2007 field tests, TAKS–M was administered to approximately 68,000 students receiving special education services who met participation requirements.

The first assessments developed for TAKS–M were those required by NCLB. These assessments include the following:

- reading at grades 3–8 and English Language Arts (ELA) at grade 10
- mathematics at grades 3–8 and 10
- science at grades 5, 8, and 10

LAT administrations of TAKS–M are available for eligible ELLs receiving special education services.

The first operational administration occurred in spring 2008, and data from this administration were used to set performance standards in August 2008. The performance standards were applied retroactively to the spring 2008 test scores.

These assessments were used in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations under the federal accountability system. For this first administration, only raw scores were included on a student's Confidential Student Report (CSR). A TAKS–M scale score system was implemented after the standards were adopted in August 2008. Once the scale score system was in place, a second set of reports was distributed with the standards and scale score system applied.

For more information regarding the development and 2007–2008 administrations, see the *TAKS–M Technical Report 2007–2008*.

TAKS–Alt

Overview

TAKS–Alt is a teacher-observation assessment that measures student progress on prerequisite skills that are linked to grade-level content standards.

The Federal Register Final Rule of December 2003 ([34 CFR, Part 200](#)) suggests using teacher observation and samples of student work produced during regular classroom instruction as options for alternate assessments. The observation for the assessment ratings takes place in the context of regular classroom activities linked to the grade-level TEKS curriculum. TAKS–Alt is an authentic instrument for teachers to use in assessing and documenting their students' skills, knowledge, and academic accomplishments.

The only students who may be assessed with TAKS–Alt are those with the most significant cognitive disabilities and who meet all of the TAKS–Alt participation requirements. More

than 1 percent of the tested population may be assessed with TAKS–Alt, although only 1 percent will be counted as being proficient for AYP reporting purposes.

TAKS–Alt has been developed for the following grade levels and content areas:

- reading grades 3–9
- mathematics grades 3–10 and 11
- writing grades 4 and 7
- English language arts (ELA) grades 10 and 11
- science grades 5, 8, 10, and 11
- social studies grades 8, 10, and 11

Development Process

To provide guidelines on which students will be assessed with TAKS–Alt, TEA and Pearson conducted a review of how several other states were defining students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In addition, suggestions from the TAKS–Alt steering committee (a statewide advisory group that includes state and national experts, parents, advocacy group representatives, related service providers, administrators, Texas regional Education Service Center (ESC) professionals, and faculty at Texas universities) and input from special education experts were used to describe this group of students in Texas. Participation requirements have been developed to assist ARD committees in determining which students should be assessed with TAKS–Alt. Once an ARD committee determines that a student has a significant cognitive disability, it then may decide that a student’s knowledge and skills can best be assessed with TAKS–Alt if the student meets all of the following participation criteria:

- requires supports to access the general curriculum that may include assistance involving communication, response style, physical access, or daily living skills
- requires direct, intensive, individualized instruction in a variety of settings to accomplish the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of skills
- accesses and participates in the grade-level TEKS through activities that focus on prerequisite skills
- demonstrates knowledge and skills routinely in class by methods other than paper-and-pencil tasks
- demonstrates performance objectives that may include real-life applications of the grade-level TEKS as appropriate to the student’s abilities and needs

To link the TAKS–Alt with the grade-level content standards used on TAKS, a vertical alignment was created using the TEKS curriculum from pre-kindergarten through exit level. The TEKS Curriculum Framework for TAKS–Alt documents were developed using the alignment materials as the underlying foundation. The curriculum framework

documents list the specific objectives, knowledge and skills statements, and student expectations tested by TAKS in each grade and subject. Each TAKS objective, knowledge and skills statement(s), and student expectation(s) was summarized into an essence statement that serves as the connection between the grade-level TEKS curriculum and the online instrument.

The vertical alignment and curriculum framework documents were used to develop instructional activities (that is, test items) in which students receiving special education services could participate to successfully demonstrate proficiency of appropriate objectives linked to grade-level content. TAKS–Alt example instructional activities were developed for each grade level and content area. Each instructional activity is explicitly linked to a TEKS curriculum knowledge and skills statement through the essence statement. The essence statement will appear on the rating portion of the assessment. Four instructional activities were developed for each essence statement. The first activity is a general education instructional activity, and the three remaining activities, based on the general education activity, are access activities that may be appropriate for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These instructional activities are example activities that a teacher may or may not choose to use as part of the assessment. If a teacher decides neither to use nor modify one of the example activities, the teacher may develop his or her own instructional activity.

In spring 2006 example instructional activities were developed at internal instructional activity review meetings, with participants from TEA and Pearson in attendance. During external educator review meetings held later that spring, TEA and Pearson personnel presented the instructional activities for comments and feedback to teachers with content expertise and special education expertise. Teachers completed an Instructional Activity Judgment Form on which they provided feedback concerning the quality of the instructional activities. Participants also completed the Recommendation for State-Selected Essence form on which they provided feedback concerning which essence statements should be state-required. Both documents were published in the *2005–2006 Technical Digest*, which can be found online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/techdigest/>.

The TAKS–Alt submission window was April 14–May 2, 2008, with the final submission of teacher ratings due approximately the same day as the general education students took the TAKS tests. Teachers reviewed the collection of documentation for each instructional activity and completed the ratings for that activity. At least one piece of documentation was required to support the rating for each essence statement. Teachers used the TAKS–Alt online testing interface to store and track multiple pieces of documentation but were required to designate the primary piece of documentation used as supporting evidence for each rating. Generalization documentation was provided if the student generalized the skill. The teacher had access to the TAKS–Alt online testing interface throughout the school year but was able to finalize the assessment ratings for each activity only during the submission window.

TAKS–Alt Online Testing Interface

A prototype of the TAKS–Alt online testing interface for grade 3 reading was completed in January 2006. TEA collected feedback on the prototype from teachers through a usability study, and modifications to improve the functionality of the system are continuously being implemented. Using the prototype model, other grade levels and subjects were incorporated into the online system in fall 2006.

Some functions of the online system were revised for the operational administration in the 2007–2008 school year to clarify components of the assessment (e.g., generalization of skill in a different context), and additional functions were added as a result of administrator and teacher requests from TAKS–Alt meetings, training sessions, and surveys.

TAKS–Alt Standard Setting

During September 2007, TEA and Pearson convened ten standard setting panels to recommend performance standards—specifically, Commended Performance and Met Standard—for TAKS–Alt for the following grades and subjects:

- reading at grades 3–9;
- writing at grades 4 and 7;
- English language arts at grades 10 and 11;
- mathematics at grades 3–11;
- science at grades 5, 8, 10, and 11;
- and social studies at grades 8, 10, and 11.

The ten, three-day standard-setting meetings included sessions in which panelists (1) were provided with an overview of the assessment, (2) became familiar with the TAKS–Alt performance level descriptors, and (3) applied a “body of work” procedure (Kingston, Kahl, Sweeney, & Bay, 2001) to set recommended cut points. During the body of work procedure, panelists reviewed the content of student folders, engaged in small group and whole group discussions, and considered the impact on students when making their cut-score recommendations.

Approved Cut Scores

- The approved cut score for Commended Performance is 39 out of a possible 42 points.
- The approved cut score for Met Standard is 24 out of a possible 42 points.

For additional information regarding the 2007–2008 administrations of TAKS–Alt, see the [TAKS–Alt Technical Report 2007–2008](#).

Training

Prior to the TAKS–Alt administration, teachers responsible for assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities must be trained in administration procedures. For the test results to be comparable across students, classrooms, campuses, and school districts, the procedures for the TAKS–Alt administration and the training were standardized. Because TAKS–Alt is a new state-developed assessment that features specifically developed materials, unique administration requirements, and an online reporting system, teacher training on TAKS–Alt was extremely important. TEA and Pearson created four web-based training modules to standardize teacher training across the state and to aid teachers in effectively implementing TAKS–Alt.

To further standardize the statewide training, TEA offers additional modes of training via the Texas Education Telecommunication Network (TETN), on-site training as requested by school districts and regional ESCs, and slide presentations on the TEA website that can be downloaded and used for individual or group training sessions.

TAKS–Alt Online Training Modules

The TAKS–Alt Training Center is the Internet gateway to the TAKS–Alt online training modules. Users can track their progress and access online training courses and training certificates that can be provided to administrators. For administrative monitoring, the training center tracks and reports the completion status for each user on each of the four TAKS–Alt training modules.

To assist teachers in effectively implementing TAKS–Alt, web-based training courses were developed to illustrate how teachers can

- create assessment activities that link to the grade-level TEKS, allowing students with significant cognitive disabilities to access the general curriculum,
- observe students according to preset guidelines,
- score student performance using the TAKS–Alt rubric, and
- enter scores and supporting evidence into an online tool.

Although the TAKS–Alt web-based training is geared toward special education teachers, the following people may also access it:

- regional ESC personnel
- district and campus administrators
- principals, special education directors, and counselors
- district and campus testing coordinators
- parents

The administrative groups can access the TAKS–Alt web-based training to further their understanding of the TAKS–Alt assessment requirements. Parents also may access this

training so they can understand the federal assessment requirements and how they apply to their children. Although the content can be informative for these secondary audiences, the training modules were designed specifically for the primary audience of special education teachers.

The training modules that can be accessed from the TAKS–Alt Training Center are described below.

Module 1: Accessing the General Curriculum

Topics covered in this training module include defining and explaining the TAKS–Alt participation guidelines, defining access to the grade-level curriculum, and a step-by-step process for accessing grade-level content and standards.

Module 2: Conducting an Observation

Topics covered in this training module include recording anecdotal notes and samples of student work, making fair observations, time management strategies, and effective planning for focused classroom observation.

Module 3: Using the TAKS–Alt Rubric

Topics covered in this training module include the TAKS–Alt scoring rubric, rating and expectations of students, evidence or data to be collected for the observation evaluation, and guidance on how to document observations.

Module 4: TAKS–Alt Online Instrument

Topics covered in this training module include descriptions of how to use the TAKS–Alt online assessment system through the application of training simulations.

When users have completed all four modules, a certificate of completion is generated from the Learning Management Site. The user’s name, course title, date, and number of training hours are automatically entered on this certificate. TEA, district testing coordinators, and campus testing coordinators receive monitoring reports listing the users who have accessed the training modules.

Operational Administration

The first TAKS–Alt assessment was administered in spring 2008. The TAKS–Alt window was October 1, 2007–May 2, 2008, and the submission window for TAKS–Alt scores was April 14–May 2, 2008. Students were assessed on six essence statements (three state-required and three teacher-selected) per subject area based on their enrolled grade.

For additional information regarding the 2007–2008 administrations of TAKS–Alt, see the *TAKS–Alt Technical Report 2007–2008*.

