

August 29, 2008

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Assessments for Students Served by Special Education for the 2007–2008 and the 2008–2009 School Years

This letter provides important updates regarding assessment options for students served by special education. Changes that are being made to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Alternate (TAKS–Alt) are described and TAKS–Modified (TAKS–M) standards and reporting information is included. Details concerning the use of the state assessments in the state and federal accountability are also provided.

The chart below outlines the assessment options.

Federal Requirements for the Assessment of Students with Disabilities	Texas Options for the Assessment of Students with Disabilities
General assessment with or without accommodations	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Includes TAKS (Accommodated)
Alternate assessment based on modified grade-level achievement standards	TAKS–Modified (TAKS–M) Available for all grades/subjects tested on TAKS <i>All tests are operational in the 2008–2009 school year, including SSI retests in grades 3, 5, and 8 reading and grades 5 and 8 mathematics.</i>
Alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards	TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt) Available for all grades/subjects tested on TAKS

TAKS, which includes TAKS (Accommodated)

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) measures a student’s mastery of the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). TAKS includes a form called TAKS (Accommodated) for students served by special education who meet the eligibility requirements for certain specific accommodations. TAKS (Accommodated) will be available for **all** English and Spanish TAKS tests, including retest opportunities for TAKS (Accommodated) SSI grades and subjects and exit level assessments. For further information regarding eligibility for TAKS (Accommodated), please see the publication titled *Revised Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*, which will be posted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website in September 2008.

TAKS–M

General Information

TAKS–M is an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards that is intended for a small number of students served by special education who meet participation criteria. **The decision to administer TAKS–M to a student must be made by the student’s ARD committee; it cannot be based solely on disability category or placement setting, nor**

can it be determined administratively for accountability purposes. TAKS–M is based on the grade-level TEKS curriculum, but the assessment itself is simplified. Spanish versions of TAKS–M are not available. Additional information regarding TAKS–M may be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksm/index.html>.

Fall 2008 TAKS–M Reporting

Standard-setting committees met in August 2008 to review test results from the spring TAKS–M test administrations for grades and subjects (reading, mathematics, and science at grades 3–8 and 10) required under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and to set appropriate passing standards for TAKS–M. Because standards have only recently been set, each student who took TAKS–M in an NCLB-required grade and subject in the spring of 2008 received a report in May 2008 showing only his or her raw score (the number of items the student answered correctly on each subject-area test). A student who took a combination of TAKS and TAKS–M assessments received a TAKS Confidential Student Report (CSR) with TAKS–M raw score information included.

Updated TAKS–M assessment performance information with the standards applied for NCLB-required grades and subjects will be provided to districts this fall. On September 19, 2008, online assessment reports will be available, and on September 26, 2008, paper reports will be delivered to districts. Reports will include a CSR, a Confidential Student Label, a Confidential Roster–All Students, a Summary Report, and a data file. All reports (except student labels) will be provided online, and the CSR and student labels will be provided on paper. Reports will be organized by campus and based on the campus where the student tested in spring 2008. There will be a TAKS–M Explanation of Student Results Brochure included. This brochure, which will be available in both English and Spanish, will be formatted so that districts can easily reproduce it.

2009 TAKS–M Assessments

In spring 2009 all grades/subjects tested on TAKS, except Spanish versions, will be available for TAKS–M; and all tests will be operational. TAKS–M retests will be available for the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grades. However, there will be no grade 11 retest opportunities. Make-up tests for reading/ELA and mathematics will be offered using only the primary form at grades 3–8 and 10 for AYP purposes. The *Revised ARD Committee Decision-Making Manual for the Texas Assessment Program* will provide guidance on addressing these testing issues for the 2008–2009 school year.

2009 TAKS–M Reporting

Because TAKS–M standard setting for non-NCLB required grades and subjects (grades 4 and 7 writing; grade 8 social studies; grade 9 reading and mathematics; grade 10 social studies; and grade 11 English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) will occur after the spring 2009 administration, each student who takes these assessments in spring 2009 will receive a report showing his or her raw score only. Following standard setting in summer 2009, updated assessment performance information will be provided to districts. Please note that the TAKS–M assessments administered in spring 2009 for the NCLB-required grades and subjects administered in spring 2009 will be reported with performance information at the same time as the corresponding TAKS assessment.

TAKS–M Standards

During August 2008, TEA convened eight standard-setting panels to recommend cut points that would define performance standards—specifically, *Did Not Meet Standard*, *Met the Standard* and *Commended Performance*—for TAKS–M. The panels recommended cut points in the following

grades and subjects: mathematics at grades 3-11; reading at grades 3-9; English language arts at grades 10 and 11; and science at grades 5, 8, 10, and 11. During the standard-setting process, panelists reviewed the content assessed by the test items, engaged in group discussions, and considered the impact on students when making their cut-score recommendations. After the standard-setting meetings, the commissioner of education approved the raw score cut points presented in Attachment A. Although several TAKS–M standard setting panels recommended phasing in the passing standards, after discussions with the United States Department of Education (USDE), it was decided that it would not be advisable to implement a phase-in. If the TAKS–M assessment fails to receive USDE approval, TEA would be prevented from using TAKS–M results for AYP participation and performance and would be ineligible to apply to use a growth measure in AYP in the future.

TAKS–Alt

TAKS–Alt was administered for the first time in the 2007–2008 school year. In November 2007, TAKS–Alt was submitted to the United States Department of Education (USDE) for its review and approval to meet the statutory and regulatory requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by NCLB. In the review process, USDE determined that TAKS–Alt does not meet all of the statutory and regulatory requirements of ESEA. Therefore, changes to meet these requirements must be made to TAKS–Alt for the 2008–2009 school year, and the scope and timing of these changes are based on requirements specified by USDE. TEA has entered into a formal agreement with USDE, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which stipulates TAKS–Alt modifications that will be made for 2008–2009.

In addition to the requirements outlined by USDE, TEA has received a number of comments and recommendations from educators and advisory committees. Suggested changes from school districts have been reviewed, and additional modifications are being implemented whenever possible.

The main changes include the following:

- The number of essence statements required has been reduced from six per subject area to four per subject area.
- State-required essence statements are provided. Teachers will no longer choose the essence statements to use.
- Teachers will select from three state-developed assessment tasks of varying complexity provided for each essence statement. The pre-determined criteria for the tasks are also now standardized.
- Online scoring is automated based on teacher observations. Teachers will answer a series of questions online about a student’s performance rather than assigning a score.
- Documentation of the assessment-task observation will no longer be entered into the TAKS–Alt online system. Documentation will be retained by the school district.
- TAKS–Alt online training is now mandatory. Each training module contains activities that must be completed successfully in order for the teacher to independently assess students through the TAKS–Alt system.
- The interrater reliability study sample following the 2008-09 TAKS–Alt administration will be expanded to include additional students.

More detailed descriptions of the changes to TAKS–Alt for the 2008–2009 school year are provided in Attachment B.

TAKS–Alt Important Dates

Events	Dates
TAKS–Alt test administrator online training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 1: Overview of the New TAKS–Alt Assessment • Module 2: Implementing the TAKS–Alt Assessment • Module 3: The TAKS–Alt Online Instrument 	Beginning 11/3/2008
Testing coordinators access TAKS–Alt online assessment system	Beginning 11/17/2008
Test administrators access TAKS–Alt online assessment system	Beginning 1/5/2009
TAKS–Alt test administration window	1/5–4/10/2009
Districts receive TAKS–Alt Standard and Optional Reports	5/15–5/22/2009

Accommodations Manual

The revised accommodations manual will be posted to the Student Assessment Division website in September 2008. When the manual is posted, districts will be alerted via broadcast e-mail and listserv announcements. Printed copies of the manual will be distributed with the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual* in December. The purpose of the *Accommodations Manual* is to provide guidance to teachers, ARD committees, language proficiency assessment committees (LPACs), Section 504 planning committees, administrators, and district- and campus-level assessment staff in selecting, administering, and evaluating the use of accommodations in instruction and assessment for all students. This year’s manual addresses accommodations available for eligible English language learners.

Revised Manual—ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program

The purpose of the revised ARD manual is to provide districts and ARD committees with information about the available assessments for students served by special education. The revised ARD manual will replace the current ARD manual. This document will be available on the TEA website by September 2008. When the manual is posted, districts will be alerted via broadcast e-mail and listserv announcements.

Use of Assessments in State and Federal Accountability

State Accountability

Similar to the 2007–2008 school year, the TAKS and some TAKS (Accommodated) results will be combined for use in the state accountability ratings for both standard and alternative education accountability (AEA) procedures. Specifically, the following TAKS (Accommodated) grades and subjects will be included in the 2009 state accountability ratings: science (grade 5 English, grade 5 Spanish, grades 8, 10, and 11); social studies (grades 8, 10, and 11); English language arts (grade 11); and mathematics (grade 11). The remaining TAKS (Accommodated) grades and subjects will be included in the state accountability ratings in the 2009-2010 school year. Neither

the TAKS–M nor the TAKS–Alt test results will be used in the state accountability ratings in 2009. The timing and methodology for the inclusion of the TAKS–M and TAKS–Alt results in the state accountability ratings will be reviewed with accountability advisory groups in spring 2009.

The state accountability standards for 2009 are published in Chapter 17 of the *2008 Accountability Manual*.

Federal Accountability

The 2008 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status for all districts and campuses will be based on the reading/ELA and mathematics results for grades 3–8 and 10 from the TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), TAKS–M, and TAKS–Alt assessments. Districts will receive their confidential preliminary data tables on the TEASE site on Thursday, October 2, 2008. The public release of the preliminary data tables will occur on Wednesday, October 8 and will include the preliminary 2007–2008 AYP status and the corresponding 2008–2009 School Improvement Program (SIP) status. Detailed information about the release schedule for the 2008 AYP results can be found online in the *2008 AYP Guide*.

Attachment C provides an overview of the state assessments that will be used in the state and federal accountability systems in the 2008–2009 school year.

We hope this information will help facilitate planning for the 2008–2009 school year. As always, we appreciate your efforts on behalf of Texas students and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that the statewide testing program encourages all students to grow, to learn, and to demonstrate their best performance.

If you have questions about assessments for students served by special education, please contact the Student Assessment Division. Questions about the state or federal accountability systems can be directed to the Division of Performance Reporting.

Assessment Contact Information

Texas Education Agency

Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Data Quality, Criss Cloudt, Associate Commissioner

Student Assessment Division, Gloria Zyskowski, Deputy Associate Commissioner

Special Education Assessments, Cari Wieland, Director

(512) 463-9536

alternate.assessments@tea.state.tx.us

Accountability Contact Information

Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Data Quality, Criss Cloudt, Associate Commissioner

Division of Performance Reporting, Shannon Housson, Director

(512) 463-9704

performance.reporting@tea.state.tx.us

Attachment(s)

cc: Education Service Center (ESC) Executive Directors
ESC and District Testing Coordinators
ESC and District Special Education Coordinators