ACTION REQUESTED

July 7, 2006

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Online Training Technology Requirements – Texas Observation Protocols (TOP) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Alternate (TAKS-Alt)

This letter provides important information regarding technology requirements for the online training components of TOP and TAKS-Alt. These two assessment systems have resulted from federal testing requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Overview of TOP Web-based Training Courses

As explained in the April 4, 2006, TEA letter to districts on TOP training for the 2006–2007 school year, two main types of training will be provided for TOP raters: fall face-to-face training of individuals not trained in the 2005–2006 school year and spring online refresher training courses. In conjunction with TOP training, there will be two online qualifying rounds in the coming school year. A brief description of TOP online activities follows:

- **Fall Online Qualifying Round (August 14–November 3)**
  Following the face-to-face training sessions that will occur August 7–October 27, trainees will have an opportunity to complete the online rater qualification component of their training. The process that raters use to access the qualification website will be similar to the process used last spring. Rater access codes for each campus will be provided to district testing coordinators by July 24 in both a pdf format and a format that can be exported into a spreadsheet. User guides for district testing coordinators and raters will be distributed at the summer training-of-trainers sessions in Austin and will also be available online by July 18 at http://k12testing.tx.ncspearson.com/tx_dist_guides.htm#TopRater1.

- **Spring Online Qualifying Round (January 29–March 2)**
  This qualifying round will be available for raters of students in Grades 2–12 who have not previously met qualification requirements. Updated user guides will be provided.

The online refresher courses that follow include activities that will be scored and monitored electronically. Districts will have electronic access to this information to ensure that raters complete the training requirements. Each online course will be divided into several modules so that raters can complete sections of the courses over time at school or from home.

- **TOP Rater Training for Grades 2–12: Level 1 Refresher Course**
  This course, which will be available online by December 11, 2006, is designed for individuals who were trained last school year but have not yet met TOP rater qualification requirements. The course covers all rating domains and includes knowledge-check activities and a practice in rating student writing collections. This is the most thorough of the refresher courses and takes approximately 3–4 hours to complete. This course should be completed by the end of January because individuals take this course in preparation for the spring online qualification activity.

- **TOP Rater Training for Grades 2–12: Level 2 Refresher Course**
  This course, which will be available online from January 29–March 2, is a refresher training course for qualified raters of students in Grades 2–12. This course provides a review of the holistic rating process for each domain. Training in the writing domain focuses on practice in rating students who are near the border between two proficiency levels or who exhibit less typical language characteristics. The course takes approximately 2–3 hours to complete. *Please note that previously qualified raters who will be assigned to assess students in a different grade cluster this year will take this refresher course in the new cluster. These individuals are not required by TEA to attend training sessions this fall or qualify in the new cluster.*

- **TOP Rater Training Refresher Course for Kindergarten and Grade 1**
  This course, which will be available online from January 29–March 2, is a refresher training course for K–1 raters who were trained in the 2005–2006 school year. It is also recommended for K–1 raters who attend fall 2006 training sessions. This course takes approximately 1–2 hours to complete.

Overview of TAKS-Alt Web-based Training

As previously noted in the letter sent on April 28, 2006, Flash-based, online training will be provided for all aspects of implementing TAKS-Alt through a series of training modules that will be appropriate for any personnel involved in the education of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The initial training will assist districts in developing individualized education programs (IEPs) so that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can access the general curriculum that will be assessed by TAKS-Alt. Training modules dealing with the instructional and assessment decisions will be followed by a fourth training module devoted to using the TAKS-Alt online system itself. A more detailed description of each module is outlined below.

Module 1: Access to the Grade-Level TEKS Curriculum
Available in August 2006

- Define and explain TAKS-Alt participation guidelines
- Define access to the grade-level curriculum
- Stepwise process to access grade level content and standards

Module 2: Observing Student Performance
Available in September 2006

- Recording anecdotal notes and samples of student work
- Making fair observations
- Time management
- Effective planning for focused classroom observation

Module 3: Scoring
Available in October 2006

- Rubric
- The rating and expectations
- Evidence or data for the observation evaluation
- Documentation of observations

Module 4: Online Assessment Training
Available January 2007

- User interface information
- Administrator information

Web-based Training Technology Requirements

Optimum Computer Configuration

The following table represents the standard personal computer (PC) and Macintosh configurations tested for the Web-based training. Hardware items recommend a minimum computer configuration. Software items indicate standards that have been used in the development and testing. Please note that the requirements for the TestNav online testing system for the 2006–2007 school year will not exceed the requirements for the Web-based training which are listed below.

	Personal Computer (PC)	Macintosh*
Hardware		
Processor	Pentium-based 800 MHz PC	800Mhz G4
Memory	128 MB RAM	256 MB RAM
Software		
Operating System	Microsoft Windows 2000/XP	Mac OS X 10.3
Browser	Internet Explorer 6.0 or Firefox 1.0.7	Safari 1.3.2
Common to both PC and Macintosh		
Internet Connection	High speed (DSL, T1, etc.)	
Plug-ins: Depending on the computer's operating system and configuration, all or some required Plug-Ins might already be installed. Users can install or upgrade Plug-Ins themselves if they have administrative rights to their computer. Otherwise, installation should be facilitated through the local computer support staff.	• Adobe Acrobat 5.0 (www.adobe.com) • Macromedia Flash Player 7.0 (www.adobe.com) • Sun Java Virtual Machine version 1.5 (fall TOP qualification ONLY) (www.java.com)	
Monitor	• 15-inch VGA Color • 16-Bit Color Depth	
Screen Resolution	800 x 600	
Sound	16-bit sound card/speakers	

Other Supported Configurations

	Personal Computer (PC)	Macintosh
Processor	Pentium-based 400 MHz PC	333 Mhz G3
Common to both PC and Macintosh		
Internet Connection	Minimum 56K dial-up **	

** For fall 2006, Macintosh computers are not supported for the TOP online qualification component. Options are being explored to support Macintoshes for the spring 2007 TOP online qualification component.*

*** The Web-based training will be designed to support delivery over varying bandwidths. At lower bandwidths the user may optionally disable rich media to improve performance.*

Funding Options

Title III, Part A administrative funds may be used for TOP training.

Federal special education Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)-Part B funds may be used to support the implementation, including training, of TAKS-Alt. More specific information is available on the Division of IDEA Coordination's web page at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/funding/taks-alt.html.

Planning

Please use the information in this letter to plan for the implementation of TOP and TAKS-Alt training in your district. You are encouraged to share this information as appropriate throughout your school district with teachers, principals, curriculum directors, bilingual/ESL directors, special education directors, information technology staff, and parents.

If you have questions, please contact the Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536, or address TAKS-Alt training questions to alternate.assessments@tea.state.tx.us and TOP training questions to ell.tests@tea.state.tx.us.

Sincerely,

Susan Barnes
Associate Commissioner for Standards and Programs

cc: Education Service Center Executive Directors
Education Service Center/District Test Coordinators
Education Service Center/District Special Education Coordinators
Education Service Center/District Bilingual Education/ESL Coordinators
Education Service Center/District Information Technology Staff