

December 13, 2002

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Performance Standards for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

This letter is to provide you with an important update on the performance standards set recently by the State Board of Education (SBOE) for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Please note that additional information is available on the agency website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment>.

As mandated by Senate Bill (SB) 103, 76th Texas Legislature, 1999, a new statewide testing program, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), has been developed and is to be implemented in the 2002-2003 school year. The new assessment is directly aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the state-mandated curriculum, which outlines what all students are expected to know and be able to do. Planning and development of the TAKS began in the fall of 1999 and has included extensive review and input from Texas educators and other stakeholders in Texas education. Attachment I provides a history of the development and implementation of the TAKS. Attachment II provides an overview of the grades and subjects of the new testing program.

State law charges the SBOE with the responsibility to establish performance standards for TAKS. Since standard setting is such a critical component of the development of a new test, the SBOE adopted a plan in January 2002 authorizing a series of research and training activities over the last year to ensure that the board is fully informed in establishing standards that meet the needs of the State of Texas. These activities included creating broad-based advisory standard-setting panels, each comprised of 15-22 people who are stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, community and business leaders, parents, and others. These panels, convened for every grade and subject area tested, received thorough training in the standard-setting process, discussed the performance standards in a systematic way, and recommended specific performance standard(s) to the SBOE. In addition, a national Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was assembled to advise the board on standard-setting issues related to TAKS; this committee was composed of prominent educational testing experts with experience in standard-setting for other major testing programs across the country.

These activities culminated at the SBOE meeting on Friday, November 15, 2002, when the SBOE adopted performance standards for the TAKS. The board adopted two cut points that will result in three student performance categories:

- Commended Performance
- Met the Standard
- Did Not Meet the Standard

For each standard, the board accepted the recommendations of the advisory panels, which are shown along with projected impact, in attachment III. However, in adopting passing standards, the SBOE established a two-year phase-in period for the "Met" performance standard and followed the national TAC's recommendation to use the standard error of measurement (SEM) statistic to determine the standards during the phase in period. For 2003, the passing standard will be set at two SEM below the panels' recommendations, moving up to 1 SEM below the next year, and then to the panels' recommendations in the 2004-2005 school year. The number of correct items needed to meet each of these standards during the phase-in period, is also shown in attachment III. The board also approved the recommendation to equate future test forms following the initial administration in spring 2003.

In general, this transition plan means students would need to answer three to six fewer questions correctly the first year than when the plan is fully implemented. For example, Grade 3 students will be required to correctly answer 20 of 36 questions on the English reading exam to meet the standard in March 2003. Subsequent grade 3 reading tests will be equated to the March 2003 test in order to ensure that the difficulty of the test forms remains the same. The standard required in 2004 will then be equivalent to achieving a score of 22 of 36 questions on the spring 2003 test and the standard required in 2005 will be equivalent to achieving a score of 24 of 36 questions on the spring 2003 test. Statewide field test results show that at the initial phase-in level, 238,000 third-grade students, or 85 percent, are expected to pass the English reading exam on their first attempt in March 2003, while 42,000, or 15 percent, are expected to fail the test. In comparison, 87 percent of Texas third-grade students passed the English TAAS reading exam in the spring of 2002. Impact data for the Spanish TAKS as well as other subjects and grades is contained in attachment III.

At the November meeting, the board also approved the Commended performance standard at the panels' recommended levels effective for the spring 2003 administration. There is no phase-in period for the "Commended" standard. In addition, the board agreed to meet following the first live administration of the TAKS to review the student performance data. At that time, the SBOE will consider whether to revise the established phase-in schedule.

This year's 10th grade students will be the first students who must pass the exit-level TAKS, in addition to completing their course work, in order to receive a high school diploma. During the transition period, high school students will be held to the passing standard that was in place when they entered the 10th grade. Members of the Class of 2005, who are now sophomores, must meet the two-SEM level in order to meet the testing requirement for graduation. Members of the Class of 2006, today's freshmen, will be required to meet the one-SEM level in order to meet the graduation requirements. Members of the Class of 2007, or today's 8th grade students, will be the first class required to meet the fully implemented standards. Attachment IV shows by grade, through the 2008-2009 school year, the standards each cohort of students will need to meet. Attachment V provides a one-page summary of the 2003 TAKS passing standards.

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The move to a new assessment program is the culmination of several years of effort, beginning with the revision of and adoption of a new more challenging state curriculum in 1997. A tool kit designed to assist districts explain the move to higher standards was distributed to districts earlier in the fall. In the spring of 2003, when district and campus results are reported in late May, in addition to the usual reports showing performance on the TAKS, the agency plans to provide districts with additional data and reports intended to assist in communicating to parents and the public the level of increased challenge associated with the transition from TAAS to TAKS.

Several additional resources for teaching the TEKS are available on the agency website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us> under the Curriculum section and through the regional Education Service Centers. Additional information on TAKS and the standards is available under the Texas Assessment Program section of the website. Please contact the Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536 if you have any questions or comments about the implementation of the performance standards for TAKS.

Sincerely,

Ann Smisko
Associate Commissioner
Curriculum, Assessment, and Technology

cc: TAKS Coordinators

Enclosures