Felipe T. Alanis
Commissioner of Education

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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INFORMATION ONLY

March 14, 2003

TO THE DISTRICT TESTING COORDINATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: The optional use of highlighters by students during the administration of the state assessments

The purpose of this letter is to provide information regarding the optional use of highlighters by students during the administration of the state assessments.

Use of highlighters is an optional test administration procedure and is not considered an individual "allowable accommodation" in the Texas assessment guidelines. As a district option in administering the state assessments, students without disabilities in grades 4-11 are allowed to use highlighter pens in test booklets to emphasize important information on any subject area test. Highlighters have only been allowed for Texas students who receive special education services when specified in the student's individualized education program (IEP). State and federal special education rules only require the IEP to include testing accommodations that are not part of the standard assessment procedures.

To promote consistent administration of state assessments for all students, the Agency will no longer require admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee approval as a condition for optional use of highlighters in the state assessments.

Although it will no longer be necessary to document the optional use of highlighters in the IEP before they are used during the administration of state assessments, it is important to remember that the use of highlighters should be based on a student's need and prior experience using highlighters during classroom instruction. Providing highlighters during the state assessments for students with no instructional experience in their use may confuse the student during the administration of a state assessment.

It is the Agency's hope that this clarification will be helpful to schools and students and prevent the scheduling of ARD committee meetings prior to the administration of spring assessments to address this issue. If you have questions or require additional information, please contact the Division of Student Assessment at 512.463.9536 or the Division of Special Education at 512.463.9414.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Stolp
Director of Development and Administration
Student Assessment Division

CC: Special Education Director