

Student Assessment Advisory Committee Report Fall 2008

The Student Assessment Advisory Committee (SAAC) met for the third time on October 23, 2008. After the April 2008 meeting of this committee, a commitment was made to meet in fall 2008 to provide updates to topics previously discussed and to address additional student assessment topics that were of most concern to the participants. The goals of the October 2008 meeting were to discuss timed assessments and current statute related to the state assessment program. In addition, the committee received updates on field testing, the growth model, the vertical scale for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the online testing readiness survey, changes to TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt), and college readiness in the end-of-course testing program.

For each of the discussion topics, Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Pearson staff provided background information and an overview of the topic. Committee members offered comments on the topics and then the committee, TEA, and Pearson discussed possible next steps. The following sections summarize the overview and main discussion points as well as next steps on each topic.

Field Testing Update

In March 2007 the SAAC addressed district concerns about field testing and made recommendations to the Commissioner regarding possible actions that the state might consider for reducing burden on districts. Subsequently, a field-testing plan was produced that addressed the Commissioner of Education's actions and included a component calling for an independent review of field testing procedures. In early fall 2008, the independent review was conducted by Dr. George McCabe, the Associate Dean of the College of Science at Purdue University. Dr McCabe was selected because of his demonstrated expertise in sampling procedures and because he had no prior work history with Texas assessments or with TEA's contractor for the Texas Assessment Program. Dr. McCabe was asked to review the field testing plan and answer specific questions posed by the state. Dr. McCabe's report was presented to the October 2008 committee and will be incorporated into a full report on field testing that will be provided to the Texas Legislature on December 1, 2008.

Overall, the SAAC supported the findings of Dr. McCabe's report; however, the SAAC requested further evaluation of the feasibility of moving to a fall field-testing window. Additionally, the SAAC recommended that the agency review the plan for releasing test items. They noted the importance of releasing the most difficult items to assist with targeting instruction to higher performance levels. TEA provided a description of how the subset of items to be released was selected, and a recommendation was made that such procedures continue to be followed in future years.

Growth Model Update

After presenting various growth model plans to both the SAAC in April 2008 and to a special committee convened to advise TEA regarding various growth models, it was determined that the proposed 2009 Texas growth projection model submitted to the United States Department of Education (USDE) would be a multi-level regression-based model predicting student performance separately in reading/English language arts and mathematics in the next high-stakes grade (5, 8, and 11). On October 15, 2008, a growth proposal was submitted to USDE.

After the SAAC reviewed the information regarding the proposed growth model, they made recommendations regarding several aspects of the model. The committee asked TEA to consider the possibility of providing predictions for student performance in both English and Spanish in future years for students testing in Spanish. As the equations are different for English and Spanish, the committee stated that only predicting to the grade 5 Spanish assessments may not provide districts with sufficient data as assessment decisions are made for students currently taking Spanish versions of tests.

Update on Changes to TAKS–Alt

Significant changes have been made to the TAKS–Alt assessment in response to federal policy directives to effectively monitor the alignment of assessment activities to grade-level standards, to the process of scoring, and to the verification of training. In addition, changes were made to the assessment based on feedback provided from various advisory groups from across the state. The following key changes have been made to the 2008–2009 TAKS–Alt assessment:

- Four state-required essence statements are required and provided for each subject. In previous years there have been six essence statements required (three state-required and three teacher-selected).
- Standardized assessment tasks of varying levels of complexity have been developed from state selected prerequisite skills. The teacher will no longer be creating instructional activities for students.
- Three state-developed predetermined criteria are provided for each assessment task. Predetermined criteria are observable and measurable academic behaviors that directly measure the student's performance on a targeted skill.
- Online scoring is automated, based on teacher observation input. Teachers will evaluate student performance after assessment observations and answer scoring questions in the system. The system will then automatically score the student's assessment task for each essence statement.

- The assessment system has been streamlined and documentation will be collected and kept locally. This will result in less time in the system while still collecting pertinent assessment information.
- TAKS–Alt online training is now mandatory, with each module containing a qualification activity to verify understanding of the content.

The committee had the opportunity to view a demonstration of the updated TAKS–Alt assessment system. The committee supported the changes made to the system. There was a request made to investigate the possibility of providing additional access to a student’s assessment record so that district/campus personnel, in addition to the teacher of record, have the opportunity to enter assessment data in the system. It was also requested that the assessment scoring information that is entered in the system be made available to the district testing coordinators prior to the end of the assessment window. TEA assessment staff agreed to consider these recommendations relative to 2010 testing.

Vertical Scale Update

Under Section 39.036 of Senate Bill 1031, TEA was required to develop a vertical scale for assessing student performance on the TAKS assessments in reading and math for grades 3 through 8. A vertical scale refers to a conversion of a raw score onto a scale that is common to all assessments that measure a similar content domain (e.g., mathematics) across different grades. With a vertical scale, a student’s scale score in one grade can be compared to that student’s scale score in another grade to understand how much the student has progressed in that content area. The main advantage of a vertical scale is the ability to interpret year-to-year growth as demonstrated by scale score changes. Vertical scales were developed for TAKS English reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8. A vertical scale for TAKS Spanish is also available for reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 6. TAKS writing, science, social studies, and the high school assessments will not be transitioning to the vertical scale. For any TAKS assessment that is not transitioning to a vertical scale, the assessment will be reported on the standard scale with the 2100 and 2400 cut points. For TAKS assessments that will not be transitioning to a vertical scale, a student will still need a 2100 to pass the assessment. For TAKS assessments that will be reported on a vertical scale, each grade and subject will have its own passing score. For TAKS assessments that will be reported on a vertical scale, the final passing score for each grade and subject has yet to be determined.

The committee recognized the challenges faced by the state in implementing a vertical scale for TAKS grades 3–8 reading and mathematics (3–6 reading and mathematics in Spanish) while maintaining the current horizontal scale for the grades and subjects not included in the vertical scale. These challenges are further compounded by the growth measure that will be reported at the same

time. It was recommended that a high level of transparency be added to the reporting system to assist district personnel in explaining these new scores. Furthermore, committee members stressed the importance of training and clear communications around the new scales. Suggestions included the reporting of raw scores, horizontal scale scores, and vertical scale scores on the raw score-to-scale score conversion tables. An additional suggestion included providing information to assist with the interpretation of the vertical scale (and all reporting). Additionally it was requested that the state determine how many years back it would be feasible to convert previous scores to the vertical scale. The committee also recommended that information be shared on how the vertical scale and the growth projection model work together to provide data to schools and families that is meaningful and that will be interpreted in the manner in which it was intended. It will also be important to provide clearly worded information that will explain to parents in a meaningful way the various scores that will be reported beginning with the spring 2009 administrations.

Technology Survey Update

TEA is supervising a partnership between Pearson, the Education Research Center (ERC) at Texas A&M University, and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to evaluate the readiness for online testing of all districts and campuses in the state. TEA will be presenting the results and its recommendations in a report to the Texas Legislature on December 1, 2008.

The committee requested that the state consider issues of technical support, electrical infra-structure, bandwidth, and logistics during testing windows.

Research Findings Concerning Timed Assessments

The April 2008 SAAC requested that research be provided regarding options for administering timed assessments. Currently the Texas assessment program assessments are un-timed; however, students must complete the assessment in one day (unless they have an approved accommodation for extended time). After reviewing the findings of EOC testing times as determined by analyses from both the 2007 and 2008 EOC administrations, the committee requested additional information regarding the average duration for an ELA exit level online administration as the data provided were only for multiple-choice items. It was also requested that information be provided on the distribution of time and performance to better ascertain if more time is associated with a higher level of proficiency demonstrated on the assessment. After the presentation and follow-up discussion, it was the recommendation of the committee that high stakes assessments should not have time limits imposed on them.

College Readiness Update

An overview was provided regarding the statutory roles and responsibilities for the assessment of college readiness. TEA, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the State Board of Education have responsibilities associated with the assessment of college readiness. TEA has been working with THECB to establish and support these roles and responsibilities and to actively pursue the implementation of these statutory requirements. TEA and THECB had a joint meeting in September 2008, where expert panelists were convened to discuss the assessment of college readiness on future End-of-Course assessments. After this meeting, TEA will draft a college readiness plan that will be sent to the panelists and to the THECB for review.

The SAAC members encouraged TEA to play a pivotal role in defining and setting the policy around college readiness. It was also noted that there is a need for vertical curricular alignment through K–12 into college curricula and that this alignment is necessary for assessing college readiness.

Current Statute Related to the State Assessment Program

A review of current statute was addressed and information from the Select Committee on Public School Accountability was shared. SAAC members suggested that more parents and community members take an active stance in driving changes in current statute, especially as the 2009 legislative session begins.

After reviewing general recommendations of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability, the members suggested that the new accountability plan be evaluated by TEA, and those areas that may present challenges be further reviewed and discussed by the SAAC committee.

**Student Assessment Advisory Committee Meeting
October 23, 2008**

Attendees

Sara Arispe, Director of Assessment and Accountability, Fort Worth ISD
Carolyn Brown, District Testing Coordinator, Port Arthur ISD
Cathy Bryce, Superintendent, Highland Park ISD
Judy Buchanan, Assistant Superintendent-Curriculum and Instruction, Plainview ISD
H.D. Chambers, Superintendent, Stafford ISD
Susan Dewese, Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Garland ISD
D.S. Elliff, Superintendent, Corpus Christi ISD
John Folks, Superintendent, Northside ISD
Joe Garrison, District Testing Coordinator, Tyler ISD
Keith Haffey, Executive Director of Accountability and Assessment, Spring Branch ISD
Roland Hernandez, Superintendent, Waco ISD
Rick Howard, Superintendent, Comanche ISD
Richard Middleton, Superintendent, North East ISD
Kaye Orr, Coordinator of Accountability, Region 18 ESC
Pat Schmitz, District Test Coordinator, San Antonio ISD
Rod Schroder, Superintendent, Amarillo ISD
Don Stockton, Superintendent, Conroe ISD
Sue Thompson, Director of Assessment, Research, Evaluation and Accountability, Ysleta ISD
Leland Williams, Superintendent, Dickinson ISD

Non-attendees

David Anthony, Superintendent, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

Other Attendees

Sandra Poth, Director of Testing and Evaluation, Northside ISD