

## **Updates to *Frequently Asked Questions***

- 04/02/09 Question #88a was added under "Questions Related to the Student Success Initiative (SSI)"
- 04/06/09 Question 67 was revised so that the first sentence reads: "Only students served by special education, Section 504, or identified as dyslexic receive an oral administration."

# **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Texas Assessment Program**

**Texas Education Agency  
Student Assessment Division  
512-463-9536**

**<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/index.html>**

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## Questions Related to General Test Administration

### *School Emergencies During Testing*

1. **Question:** A school emergency has occurred, and we are in the middle of testing. What should we do?

**Answer:** If school emergencies such as fire alarms, power outages, or bomb threats occur, local staff should have students leave their tests where they are and follow the normal school procedures related to such emergencies. The safety of students and staff should be the first consideration. If at all possible, secure the test materials. The test administrators should closely monitor their testing groups to make sure that no one discusses the test. The students can resume testing once the building has been cleared for re-entry. If there is a building fire or other school emergency that prevents students from resuming testing, or if the situation prevented personnel from securing test materials, the campus coordinator should contact the district coordinator, and the district coordinator should contact the Student Assessment Division at 512-463-9536 for guidance.

### *Testing Schedule*

2. **Question:** What should a campus do if a student has not finished testing by the end of the day?

**Answer:** A campus or district is not required to extend testing beyond the regular school day, but the district may choose to do so. If such a situation arises, the campus coordinator should consult the district coordinator for a determination. Districts are encouraged to develop district-wide policies regarding testing beyond the regular school day and communicate these policies to campuses before test administrations begin.

3. **Question:** If a student is marked absent at 10 a.m. and arrives at school later, should she be allowed to take the test even though she has been marked absent?

**Answer:** Districts may establish starting times for testing. A student who arrives after testing has begun may be tested if sufficient time remains in the day and if the student has not had contact with students who have already completed testing. If the student tests, the answer document should be marked "S" for Score. (The absence marked on the school's roll is for purposes of Average Daily Attendance [ADA] for funding purposes and is not necessarily related to testing. However, it is advisable that the district keep documentation on the discrepancy between attendance reported for ADA and for testing in case of an audit.)

### *Test Booklet or Answer Document Issues*

4. **Question:** A seal was broken accidentally or was already broken when it arrived in our shipment. What should we do?

**Answer:** The campus coordinator or test administrator should simply tape that section until the student is authorized to view it. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force in the Student Assessment Division if it is determined that the seal was broken accidentally and confidentiality was maintained.

5. **Question:** A student accidentally started filling out the wrong section on the answer document (e.g., during a math test, he marked answers in the science section of the answer document). What should we do?

**Answer:** Determine how far into the test the student has worked. If it is not very far, instruct him to erase his answers from the wrong section and direct him to the correct section. If he has completed or almost completed the section, give the student a new answer document and ask him to transcribe his answers from the old answer document. For further information, see “Transcribing—Scorable Test Booklets and Answer Documents” in the 2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual. Remember that the test administrator or campus coordinator will need to record the student’s demographic information on the new answer document, as well as all other test responses if the student took a test on the previous day(s).

6. **Question:** A student who is already halfway through the reading section of his test accidentally tears his answer document or scorable test booklet while erasing. What should we do?

**Answer:** The student may not continue to use the torn answer document or scorable test booklet because the tear might interfere with machine scoring. The test administrator should give the student a new answer document or test booklet and instruct him to begin marking his answers on the new document at the point where he left off on the unusable document. **Note: A new scorable test booklet must have the same form number as the booklet it replaces.** When the student turns in his new answer document or test booklet, the test administrator will need to transfer verbatim the student’s responses and all the demographic information from the unusable answer document or test booklet to the new one. For further information, see “Transcribing—Scorable Test Booklets and Answer Documents” in the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

If a replacement scorable test booklet with the same form number is not available, please call the Student Assessment Division for guidance.

If the student tested on a previous day, the test administrator will need to transfer the student’s responses for that test section as well. The test administrator should then void the unusable answer document. When the campus coordinator returns the scorable materials to the district testing coordinator, he or she should submit the student’s voided document with any other voided documents and the new answer document with the scorable answer documents.

7. **Question:** A student who has already begun testing discovers that there is a page missing from her test booklet. What should we do?

**Answer:** If the student was using a nonscorable test booklet (grades 4–11/exit level), try to acquire a new test booklet that is not defective and provide the new booklet to the student. **The new booklet must have the same form number as the original booklet; otherwise, the student’s answers will not be scored correctly.** If a non-defective replacement booklet with the same form number is not available, please contact the Student Assessment Division.

If a **scorable** test booklet is defective and a non-defective replacement booklet with the same form number is available, the test administrator should give the new booklet to the student and have the student begin recording her answers in the new booklet at the point where she left off in the defective booklet. When the student turns in her new test booklet, the test administrator will need to carefully transfer the student's answers from the defective booklet to the new booklet without making any changes. For further information, see "Transcribing—Scorable Test Booklets and Answer Documents" in the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. When the campus coordinator returns the scorable materials to the district, he or she should submit the defective test booklet with the voided test booklets and the new test booklet with the scorable test booklets.

8. **Question:** The test administrator noticed that a student had not recorded his answers in the answer document. What should we do?

**Answer:** At any time during testing, the test administrator may remind all students with the following general statement: "Please check to be sure you have recorded all of your answers on the answer document." If this general statement does not help, then the test administrator, before the end of the testing session, should address the student directly in the following way: "You have not recorded all of your answers on the answer document. Please go back and record your answers on it now." If the student has already turned in his testing materials but has not left the testing area, the materials should be returned so that the student may record his answers as instructed. If the student has finished testing and left the testing location, please call the Student Assessment Division for guidance.

Test administrators should look at answer documents only to see whether responses are recorded. They may not examine or comment on individual responses or point out individual skipped responses. Test administrators supervising administrations in which scorable test booklets are used should regularly remind students to respond to every question. They may quickly flip through scorable test booklets after the students are finished to ensure that responses have been recorded, but they may not look at answers to individual items.

#### *Cell Phones*

9. **Question:** What is the rule regarding cell phone use during testing?

**Answer:** The use of cell phones or other telecommunication devices during testing is prohibited. Districts are required to develop a policy for cell phone use that is compatible with local policy while preserving the security and confidentiality of the testing program.

#### *Temporary Disabilities*

10. **Question:** A student just came in with a broken arm/hand. He is about to take a test, and we are not sure how to handle it.

**Answer:** If he can use his other hand, that is the best option. If that is not possible, there is an allowable accommodation described in the *2008-2009 Accommodations Manual*. If a student has a temporary or permanent disabling condition that interferes with his ability to record machine-scorable responses, the student may respond orally to test items, mark responses in the test booklet, type responses, or record responses on a dry erase board, chalkboard, or scratch

paper. An individual administration may be necessary for this type of accommodation. The test administrator must record these responses verbatim on a scorable answer document and write “Transcribed by (NAME) because (REASON)” at the top of the answer document. **Transcription must be done in No. 2 pencil. Test responses cannot be scored unless they appear on the answer document.**

11. **Question:** A student became ill during the test administration and went to the nurse’s office. If he feels better, may he complete the test that day?

**Answer:** If he feels better and has not discussed the test with others, he may complete the test. If the student is unable to complete the test, the school or district should determine whether the student’s answer document should be coded “S” for Score or “O” for Other, depending on how much of the test the student was able to complete before becoming ill. The student should be properly monitored while in the nurse’s office. Because this child has seen the test, he will not be allowed to take a make-up test if applicable.

#### *Homebound Students*

12. **Question:** How should districts handle testing of homebound students?

**Answer:** Testing of homebound students is handled in the same manner as other enrolled students and must adhere to the current testing calendar, except that a trained test administrator must go to the student’s home to administer the test. If on the day of testing the student is too ill to take the test, the student may be administered the assessment on the make-up day (for applicable grades and subjects). Otherwise, the document should be marked “A” for Absent. For students with a serious condition who are too ill to attempt the assessment, the answer document may be coded “O” for Other.

#### *Test Materials*

13. **Question:** We don’t have an adequate number of test materials. What should we do?

**Answer:** Districts are notified in advance of the quantity of materials to be sent for each administration. You should verify that the quantities will be sufficient and order additional materials at that time if needed. It is also important that you inventory all the materials in all boxes well **before** the week of testing to ensure that you have enough materials for testing. If you discover materials are missing or you do not have sufficient amounts, you should order more materials from Pearson through the online ordering system if time allows. However, if you discover the day before or the day of testing that your supply of materials is inadequate, then you should contact other schools or school districts in your area to see if they have extra materials that you can use. If materials are not available, please call the Student Assessment Division for guidance.

### *Large-Print Test Booklets*

14. **Question:** We would like to order large-print test booklets for all of our students. Is that allowable?

**Answer:** In most cases, large-print tests should be ordered only for students with visual impairments. Specific requirements concerning eligibility and decision-making authority are delineated in the *2008-2009 Accommodations Manual*. In general, large-print tests should not be ordered for an entire class.

15. **Question:** I ordered a large-print test, but it has not arrived (and this is test day). Is it allowable for the campus to enlarge a regular test booklet?

**Answer:** If the test coordinator cannot obtain a large-print test from a neighboring campus/district, the test may be enlarged according to the following instructions:

- An accommodation request form must be submitted to the attention of the Accommodations Task Force and approved. The form is available in the coordinator manual and as a separate document online at:

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3696&menu\\_id3=793](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3696&menu_id3=793)

The test must be enlarged within the district (i.e., not at a commercial copy center).

- If a math or science test is enlarged, the corresponding chart must be enlarged using the same scale as the test. If this does not occur, the ruler will not provide an accurate measure for items that require measurement.
- The person who copies the test must be certified or under the supervision of someone who is certified. This does not mean that the certified person must observe the copying, only that the certified person will be held accountable for test security.
- The memory of the photocopier must be cleared after the test is copied.
- The photocopied test must be returned in the district's scorable shipment.

**During or just prior to testing, approval for enlarging may be given over the telephone** provided the district submits the accommodation request form as soon as possible after the call.

### *Preparing Materials for Scoring*

16. **Question:** How do I mark the score code of a student who took the TAKS math test in our school district but then withdrew from our district the next day before he took the TAKS reading test?

**Answer:** Mark the student's math test "S" for Score and leave the score code field blank for the reading test. The score code for the reading test will default to "O" for Other, and the state's testing contractor will indicate this on the data file.



### *Make-up Testing*

17. **Question:** A student was suspended from school and was absent on the day of testing. Can he participate in an eligible make-up test?

**Answer:** Because the student is enrolled in school and was absent on the regular test day, he can be tested on the make-up day if applicable.

18. **Question:** A student was enrolled the day after the math administration. Can she participate in an eligible make-up test for math?

**Answer:** In this situation, the campus where the new student is enrolling should contact the sending district to determine whether the student was already tested in the applicable subject. If the student was not tested in the district from which she moved, the school where the student is currently enrolled should test the student on the make-up day.

19. **Question:** A student who started testing on the regular testing day became ill and was not able to complete testing. Can this student take a make-up for the test he was unable to finish?

**Answer:** The student is not eligible to take a make-up test. Make-up testing is allowed for specified tests only for students who were absent on the regular day of testing. If the student is unable to complete the test, the school or district should determine whether the student's answer document should be marked "S" for Score or "O" for Other, depending on how much of the test the student was able to complete before becoming ill.

### *Test Security/Irregularities*

20. **Question:** A test administrator witnessed a student passing a note to another student during the test but intercepted the note before it reached the other student. What should the district do?

**Answer:** It is up to the district to determine if any cheating occurred or if the test was compromised in some way. Disciplinary action is at the discretion of the school. If the test administrator believes that he or she was able to intervene before any cheating took place, the students may be allowed to continue testing.

If the district determines that cheating has occurred, the answer documents for the students involved should be marked "O" for Other. Any disciplinary action taken against a student for cheating on a state assessment, such as invalidation of the student's test or suspension, **must** be reported to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). An online form, "Locally Determined Disciplinary Actions Form" has been developed for submitting this information and can be accessed and completed via the TEA Student Assessment website.

21. **Question:** If a student refuses to take the test or is obviously recording answers randomly, how should I mark his answer document?

**Answer:** First, inform the district coordinator and ask an authority (e.g., district coordinator, campus coordinator, principal, teacher) at the school to encourage the student to take the test seriously. If the student still refuses to take the test, find out if his parent or guardian is willing to encourage the child to take the test. Finally, if the student still will not take the test, mark the student's answer document "S" for Score. Documentation of these events should be kept locally.

22. **Question:** A student was taking the math test and then opened the reading section of her test and started working on it. What should we do?

**Answer:** If the student began working on the reading section, she will not be allowed to take the reading test on the following day when it is scheduled. The student's answer document for reading will be marked "O" for Other, and documentation of these events should be kept locally. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force in the Student Assessment Division.

If the student did not view any reading test content, the reading section of the booklet should be taped shut so the student can take the reading test the next day. It is not necessary to file an incident report with the Security Task Force.

23. **Question:** A test administrator gave the TAKS test to a student who should have been administered the TAKS–M test. Can the school correct the situation by giving the TAKS–M test to the student?

**Answer:** The student may be allowed to take the correct test on another day or on that same day if there is time, if permission is granted by TEA. In addition, the district or school must receive permission from the student's parent/guardian to administer two tests in one day or to test the student twice. **An incident report must be filed with the Security Task Force for this type of testing irregularity.**

24. **Question:** Can a teacher use or discuss the writing prompt from the test after it has been administered?

**Answer:** Since 2009 is a designated release year, districts may retain a copy of each student's TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), and TAKS–M composition and/or open-ended reading responses for assessments administered during the 2008–2009 testing cycle (October 2008 through July 2009). See the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*, page 179, for more details. For specific dates for review, distribution, and discussion, see the Calendar of Events on pages 8–9 of the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

25. **Question:** We gave a student the wrong test on the wrong day. (We were supposed to give the mathematics test, but we gave the science test instead.)

**Answer:** An incident report and documentation should be filed with the Security Task Force in the Student Assessment Division. TEA will decide on a case-by-case basis whether the school will be given permission to administer the appropriate test on another day.

26. **Question:** A seal on a test booklet was broken intentionally by someone at our campus. What should we do?

**Answer:** If someone other than a student intentionally broke a seal on a test booklet, the district should investigate and determine whether any unauthorized viewing has taken place. If an irregularity occurred, an incident report and supporting documentation must be filed with the Security Task Force as indicated on pages 21–25 in the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

*Charter School Participation in Statewide Assessment Program*

27. **Question:** Are charter schools required to administer state assessments?

**Answer:** Yes. Charter schools, just like all Texas public schools, are required to administer all appropriate assessments to students.

*Access to Assessments for Private School or Home-Schooled Students*

28. **Question:** Do private schools and home schools have access to the TAKS assessments?

**Answer:** Yes. TEA makes the secure TAKS tests available for administration to private schools and home schools at a per-student cost that does not exceed the cost of administering the same test to a Texas public school student. To obtain a copy of the agreement packet for this assessment, contact the state’s testing contractor, Pearson, at 800-252-9186. Private schools and home schools may also administer any tests that have been released to the public. These may be downloaded free of charge from the TEA website at <http://etesttx.com/released>.

*Use of Mentors as Test Administrators*

29. **Question:** Can an after-school mentor participate in testing or serve as a test administrator?

**Answer:** In general, mentors are not eligible to serve as test administrators because they do not meet the criteria outlined in the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*—Campus Coordinator Responsibilities. Certified and noncertified paraprofessionals who are currently employed by the district and routinely work with students in the classroom may serve as test administrators, monitors, or assistants, provided they are under the supervision of a certified professional on the same campus. These paraprofessionals must be trained in test administration procedures prior to each administration.

Districts and campuses are strongly encouraged to give careful consideration to the selection of all testing personnel participating in the state assessment program. Test administrators should be professionals or under the supervision of professionals who hold valid education credentials, such as a Texas teacher certificate.

Also, remember that all personnel who will be serving as test administrators must be trained in test administration procedures prior to each administration.

*Dyslexia Bundled Accommodations*

**30. Question: Who is eligible to take a TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) reading test with the bundled accommodations?**

**Answer:** Students with dyslexia and students receiving special education services who have a severe reading disability that causes them to have difficulty reading words in isolation are eligible to take the TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) reading tests with these accommodations if they routinely use accommodations in the classroom that are directly related to their difficulties with decoding words in isolation. Students do not have to be using all of the specific accommodations in the bundle, but they do need to be receiving similar accommodations in the classroom. These accommodations need to be documented **annually** by the school in the student's individual accommodation plan (IAP), in the individualized education program (IEP), or in appropriate school records for students who do not receive services through Section 504 or special education. Students receiving special education services do not need to be specifically identified with dyslexia to receive this accommodation; however, the student's IEP should address the student's difficulty in decoding words in isolation and reflect specific accommodations the student is receiving in the classroom to compensate for these difficulties.

**31. Question: Will students receiving special education services be permitted to receive the dyslexia bundled accommodations on the TAKS–M reading tests?**

**Answer:** There are no dyslexia bundled accommodations for TAKS–M because similar accommodations are built into the TAKS–M reading assessment.

**32. Question: If a student begins testing with the dyslexia bundled accommodations on day 1 and testing proceeds rapidly, may we continue and administer the day 2 portion of the test on the same day?**

**Answer:** No. The test administrator must adhere to the two-day schedule specified for the administration of the dyslexia bundled accommodations. The directions in the TAKS test administrator manual supplements must be followed exactly as written. Research findings have indicated that students who need these accommodations require a two-day administration because of the fatigue factor associated with the student's reading difficulties at the isolated word level.

**33. Question: Are students who are absent on the first day of the dyslexia bundled accommodations administration eligible to take a make-up test?**

**Answer:** In March districts may administer make-ups as long as they maintain the shipping date for scorable materials. In April districts may administer make-ups as long as they maintain the regular testing schedule and the shipping date for scorable materials. In July no make-ups are allowed.

## Questions Related to Scoring and Equating of Tests

**34. Question: How do I know if a student passed the TAKS test?**

**Answer:** Students who take the TAKS tests, which include TAKS (Accommodated) for students receiving special education services, are classified according to three performance categories based on how well they did on the test. The performance categories are *Did Not Meet Standard*, *Met Standard*, and *Commended Performance*. Students in the *Met Standard* or the *Commended Performance* categories have passed the TAKS test. The TAKS scale score achieved determines whether a student passed and which performance category he or she is in. For example, a grade 3 student who takes the English version of the TAKS reading test in spring 2008 will need to obtain a scale score of at least 2100 to be in the *Met Standard* category and a scale score of at least 2400 to be in the *Commended Performance* category.

**35. Question: How were the passing scores on the TAKS tests determined?**

**Answer:** The State Board of Education established the official scale scores (or “performance standards”) needed to reach the *Met Standard* and *Commended Performance* levels on the TAKS tests after receiving input from many committees. Representatives of these committees, called standard-setting committees, included Texas teachers, administrators, community members, and parents. Committee members were chosen based on recommendations by the Texas Legislature, the State Board of Education, TEA staff, and school-district personnel. Members were chosen specifically because they possessed considerable knowledge about the work of students in schools. Most committees set standards on one test in one grade (e.g., grade 5 reading). Some committees reviewed standards across many grades.

**36. Question: Do the scale scores needed to pass the TAKS test stay the same from year to year?**

**Answer:** The scale scores of 2100 for *Met Standard* and 2400 for *Commended Performance* represent the Panel Recommended standards for TAKS.

Based on a recommendation of the standard-setting committees, the State Board of Education approved a phase-in period for these performance standards to allow time for students and teachers to become familiar with the new testing program. This phase-in period took place from 2003 to 2005 for most grades and allowed for the performance standards to be somewhat lower in 2003 and 2004 than the Panel Recommended performance standards. The phase-in standards were called *2 SEM*, *1 SEM*, and *Panel Recommended*. The *SEM* stands for *Standard Error of Measurement*. For grades 3 through 10, the *2 SEM* standard was used in 2003, the *1 SEM* standard was used in 2004, and the *Panel Recommended* standard was used in 2005. The *2 SEM* standard is less difficult than the *1 SEM* standard, and the *1 SEM* standard is less difficult than the *Panel Recommended* standard.

For example, the 2003 standard for the TAKS reading test in grade 3 was *2 SEM* or a scale score of 2029; the 2004 standard was *1 SEM* or a scale score of 2064; and the 2005 standard was the *Panel Recommended* or a scale score of 2100. Beginning in 2005, the *Panel Recommended* performance standards, *Met Standard* (2100 scale score) and *Commended Performance* (2400 scale score) were used for TAKS at all grade levels except exit level.

For exit level, the standards are based on the school year in which a student was first enrolled in grade 10. The standard stays with that student regardless of the number of times he or she takes the exit level TAKS.

- Students enrolled in grade 10 in 2002–2003 are held to the 2 *SEM* standard.
- Students enrolled in grade 10 for the first time in 2003–2004 are held to the 1 *SEM* standard.
- Students enrolled in grade 10 for the first time in 2004–2005 and beyond are held to the *Panel Recommended* standard.

The standard at which each student is held remains the same regardless of the year in which the student graduates.

**37. Question: Why can't the total number of points earned (or raw scores) be compared from year to year?**

**Answer:** Adjustments need to be made to account for slight changes in the difficulty level of the test from year to year. The questions on the TAKS test change from year to year and from one test administration to the next. This means that no two versions (or forms) of the TAKS test are the same. The set of questions on one test may be slightly easier or slightly harder than the set of questions on another test. Because the overall difficulty of the tests may vary, the raw scores cannot be directly compared to indicate differences in student performance.

For example, a grade 5 student who takes the TAKS test one year and answers 28 out of 36 items correctly has a raw score of 28. The next year another fifth grader who takes the TAKS test and answers 28 out of 36 items correctly also has a raw score of 28. If we compared raw scores, we would assume that these two students demonstrated the same level of performance. However, if the set of questions on the second student's test were slightly more difficult than the set of questions on the first student's test, the conclusion that the two students had the same level of achievement would be incorrect. Because of slight differences in the difficulties of the two tests, the raw scores from two different tests cannot give accurate information about how two students who took a grade-level test in different years compare in performance. Comparing scale scores (see q. 44) for two students who took a grade-level in test two different years is the better way to compare those students' performances.

**38. Question: Should I tell students that they only need to answer a certain number of questions right to pass the test?**

**Answer:** You should always encourage students to do their best and to answer as many questions correctly as possible. Telling students to strive for a certain number of correct answers would be misleading because the number needed to meet the standard may vary from one year to the next. In addition, students have no way of knowing how many questions they have answered correctly. As explained in the example above, the raw scores needed to achieve a passing standard may change slightly based on the difficulty of the questions on each year's test. When the questions are slightly less difficult, students need to answer more correctly to reach the same standard. When the questions are slightly more difficult, students need to answer fewer correctly to reach the same standard. Because the raw scores may change, you

cannot know the exact raw score that will be needed to reach the standard in a particular year. The best advice you can give to students is to tell them to work hard on every question, and correctly answer as many as possible.

**39. Question: Do the performance standards and raw scores on the retests differ from the primary administration?**

**Answer:** The performance standards (*2 SEM*, *1 SEM*, and *Panel Recommended*) and their associated scale scores for the primary administrations and for the retests do not change. However, the raw scores that correspond to the performance standards may change if the difficulties of the tests are not exactly the same from year to year. Retests are treated just as other forms of the tests, so the same conditions are applied to the retests. Students who take the retests are held to the same high standards as students who were tested during the primary administration. If the items that make up a retest are slightly harder or easier than the items that make up the regular test, the raw score associated with the standard may change to maintain the same performance standard.

For example, the *Panel Recommended* standard for grade 3 reading TAKS is a scale score of 2100. For the February 2007 grade 3 reading administration, a raw score of 23 is associated with the *Panel Recommended* scale score of 2100. The *Panel Recommended* standard, a scale score of 2100, will be the same for all retests. However, it is possible that one retest might be slightly more difficult than the test used for the primary administration. The raw score for a slightly more difficult retest might be slightly lower. For example, a scale score of 2100 translates to a raw score of 22 for the June 2007 grade 3 reading administration. It is also possible that another retest might be slightly less difficult than the primary test, resulting in a student needing to answer 24 or 25 items correctly to meet the standard.

**40. Question: What does a student's scale score tell about his or her performance?**

**Answer:** A scale score is a conversion of the raw score onto a "scale" that is common to all test forms for that specific grade and subject area. The scale score takes into account the difficulty level of the specific set of questions. It tells us about a student's performance relative to the *Met Standard* and *Commended Performance* standards on the TAKS test. Also, unlike raw scores, scale scores do allow direct comparisons of student performance between specific sets of test questions from different test administrations. However, these comparisons can be made only for test administrations in the same grade and subject area. For example, scale scores are comparable for students who take the grade 6 TAKS tests in 2006 and 2007. A scale score of 2100 indicates the same level of achievement for those grade 6 students in 2006 and 2007. Scale scores are not comparable across consecutive grades, such as a student's scale scores in grades 3 and 4 (see next question). For TAKS, the scale scores range from approximately 1000 to 3200 for each test.

41. **Question:** Why is it not meaningful to directly compare students' TAKS scale scores across two different grades?

**Answer:** Scale scores from tests in different grades are on different scales. It is not meaningful to subtract or directly compare scale scores or average scale scores from different grades. As an example, it would not make sense to subtract two temperatures if one of those temperatures was on the Celsius scale and the other was on the Fahrenheit scale, such as subtracting 35°C from 50°F. The resulting number, 15°, would not be meaningful. Comparing students' TAKS scale scores from two different grades is similar to this. Although it might look like the numbers are on the same scale, they are not. Directly comparing scale scores for one student or for groups of students across grades will not result in meaningful numbers.

42. **Question:** Why does Texas scale and equate its assessments?

**Answer:** Texas uses scaling and equating on its assessments to help ensure that every student is assessed fairly—i.e., that same-grade students taking different test forms and testing in different years will receive scale scores that can be directly compared. Without scaling and equating, this would not be possible.

## Questions Related to the Assessment of English Language Learners (ELLs)

### *Years in U.S. Schools Unknown*

43. **Question:** A student from another country has just enrolled in our school, and we are not sure how many years the student has been in U.S. schools.

**Answer:** The campus coordinator should collaborate with the student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) to obtain this information. Instructions for officially determining and documenting this information are included in the "Documentation Requirements" section beginning on page 50 of TEA's 2008–2009 *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual.

It is important for this information to be supplied accurately and consistently from year to year. It is used for instructional planning, in determining eligibility for limited English proficient (LEP) exemptions, and in determining performance standard requirements in NCLB adequate yearly progress (AYP) and annual measurable achievement objective (AMAO) accountability measures.

### *Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)*

44. **Question:** Why are LEP students who will be administered the TAKS reading test in English also required to take the TELPAS reading test?

**Answer:** NCLB requires that LEP students take annual English language proficiency tests in listening, speaking, reading, and writing until they are no longer classified as LEP. English language proficiency tests indicate how well the students are learning English. TELPAS reading results can help schools examine to what extent the student's academic performance on



TAKS may be affected by a limited understanding of English. This information helps schools plan instructional interventions that appropriately address the student's language and academic needs.

45. **Question:** A LEP student enrolled on our campus during the TELPAS testing window. Do we need to administer TELPAS to this student?

**Answer:** For information regarding the testing of students who move into or out of your district or campus, please refer to the TELPAS Student List Instructions located at:

[http://etest.pearson.com/Customers/Texas/eoct/ResourcePDFs/2009\\_TELPAS/TELPAS\\_StudentList.pdf](http://etest.pearson.com/Customers/Texas/eoct/ResourcePDFs/2009_TELPAS/TELPAS_StudentList.pdf).

46. **Question:** What is the procedure for a student who is absent on the reading test day?

**Answer:** Every effort should be made to administer the TELPAS reading tests to students who are absent on a given day of testing. If students are not present for the online test session for which they were originally scheduled, they should be moved to another online test session later in the testing window. See Reading Test Administrator Activity 4 in the TELPAS Manual for Raters and Test Administrators for instructions on how to move a student to a different test session. A student should be moved to a different session, NOT removed from a test session, if the student's ratings have already been entered. A student's ratings data will be lost if a student is removed from a test session rather than moved to a different test session.

47. **Question:** Who may a district assign as a TELPAS rater?

**Answer:** A student's TELPAS rater is the teacher designated to be the official rater of the student's English language proficiency for the TELPAS holistically rated assessments. The TELPAS rater must have the student in class, be knowledgeable about the student's ability to use English in instructional and informal settings, hold valid education credentials such as a teacher certificate or permit, and be appropriately trained as required by the 2008–2009 holistic rating training materials and test administration manuals. Raters of students in grades 2–12 must also complete rater qualification requirements. For more information about TELPAS rater credentials and qualification requirements, refer to the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual* or the spring 2009 *TELPAS Manual for Raters and Test Administrators*.

48. **Question:** How do districts document procedures they implement for ensuring validity and reliability of TELPAS holistically rated assessments?

**Answer:** Campus testing coordinators are responsible for maintaining documentation of the procedures implemented. A form for this purpose is not provided; districts develop local processes for documenting this information. More information appears on pages 255–256 of the *2009 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*.

49. **Question:** May raters collaborate with each other when completing online qualifying activities or online course rating practice activities?

**Answer:** No, as stated in the test administration manuals and online user guides, raters are required to complete these activities on their own. It is important for training participants to know how well they are able to independently apply the rubrics. This information is used to determine the need for supplemental training. Note that collaboration among raters is very much encouraged during the actual TELPAS administration.

50. **Question:** Are raters allowed to have any materials with them when qualifying online or completing rating practice activities within the online courses?

**Answer:** Yes. Raters should refer to the TELPAS Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) and other TELPAS training materials, such as the online training courses, warm-up writing collections and annotations, and training PowerPoint presentations.

51. **Question:** Can we use a paraprofessional to verify that the TELPAS writing collections have been assembled correctly?

**Answer:** No. The TELPAS writing collection verifier may be an LPAC member (other than the parent), school counselor, teacher, or other suitable designee but may not be a paraprofessional or a teacher assigned as a TELPAS rater for the current year's administration. The individual must also be trained to perform the verifying tasks and receive training in TELPAS administration procedures. Districts may choose to use the online course "Assembling and Verifying Grade 2–12 Writing Collections" as part of administration procedure training.

#### *Spanish Versions of TAKS*

52. **Question:** Do the English and Spanish versions of the TAKS tests contain the same test questions?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. The English and Spanish tests are field-tested and constructed separately. The two tests may contain some of the same questions in mathematics, reading, and science. The writing tests are unique. The English and Spanish versions have the same total number of questions and the same number of questions per objective. For more information about the development process for the Spanish versions of TAKS, please see the *Technical Digest* for the Texas Student Assessment Program, which is updated annually.

53. **Question:** Who determines whether a student should take TAKS in English or Spanish?

**Answer:** Decisions regarding the language of testing are based on several factors, including the student's language of instruction, and are to be made by the student's LPAC. For more information, please see the *2008–2009 LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual, pages 11–12.

*Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) Questions*

54. **Question:** A new immigrant student has just enrolled. Due to time constraints, the school has not been able to officially designate the student as limited English proficient or obtain all of the necessary information to make appropriate testing decisions. How should the LPAC proceed?

**Answer:** When a new immigrant student enrolls just before testing, the LPAC should make every effort to obtain the appropriate information from the student's prior school or district. Ultimately, the LPAC will need to make an educationally sound assessment decision using the information available. The LPAC should maintain careful documentation of both the effort it has made to obtain the information and the reasons for the assessment decision. This information should be kept in the student's permanent record file.

55. **Question:** If the LPAC made the decision to administer the TAKS test in Spanish in a grade and subject that is included in the Student Success Initiative (SSI) and the student did not meet the standard on the first administration, is it possible for the LPAC to change the decision and have the student take the second administration in English?

**Answer:** Only in rare circumstances would a change in the language of the test be permissible. If after careful consideration the LPAC feels that such a change is warranted and has thorough documentation to justify the change, it is permissible for the LPAC to make a new decision. (Please refer to the 2008–2009 *Grade Placement Committee Manual* for more information about grade placement committee procedures.)

*Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT) Administrations of TAKS*

56. **Question:** The LAT instructions say that certain accommodations, such as translation assistance or reading aloud a word or phrase, are to be provided “only at the request of the student.” Is this also the case with the accommodations allowing use of a bilingual dictionary or glossary?

**Answer:** No. Students eligible for these particular accommodations will be issued the bilingual glossary or dictionary for use throughout the test. All dictionaries and glossaries must, however, meet the criteria of not providing explanations, definitions, pictures, or examples of mathematical or scientific terms. Please note that dictionaries and other reference materials are not allowed on the revising/editing portion of the grade 10 ELA test.

57. **Question:** Are students permitted to use a hand-held translating device, bilingual Internet dictionary, or other type of electronic bilingual dictionary?

**Answer:** District and campus test coordinators will determine the viability of such devices in cooperation with other knowledgeable personnel. However, just as with paper bilingual dictionaries, if the device is comprehensive enough to provide examples, pictures, explanations, or definitions of mathematical or scientific terminology, it is not permitted. In addition, concerning the use of an Internet bilingual dictionary, district and campus coordinators will need to discuss whether they will be able to ensure that students do not access other Internet sites or resources. Remember also that **only** linguistic accommodations used routinely in the student's classroom instruction and testing are permitted during LAT administrations.

58. **Question:** What should a test administrator do if a student asks for a translation of a word that the test administrator does not know?

**Answer:** If a test administrator who speaks the student's native language is administering the LAT test and does not know the appropriate translation of a word, the test administrator may use a bilingual dictionary to look it up. If the LPAC has documented the student's need for linguistic accommodations in addition to translation (e.g., linguistic simplification), the test administrator will have other options to assist the student with the unknown word if an appropriate translation is not known or cannot be found.

59. **Question:** Is it permissible to administer LAT to a LEP student with a parental denial?

**Answer:** Only LEP-exempt students may take a LAT administration. Students who are not participating in a bilingual or ESL program because of a parental denial are not eligible for a LEP exemption and, therefore, are not eligible for a LAT administration. For additional information about LEP exemptions, refer to the 2008–2009 *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual, pages 14–32.

60. **Question:** Are the LAT forms of Spanish and English TAKS interchangeable with the regular Spanish and English TAKS tests?

**Answer:** No. Students who qualify for LAT must take the LAT forms of TAKS, not the regular TAKS forms.

61. **Question:** Do first-year LEP-exempt recent immigrants take LAT reading?

**Answer:** No. LEP-exempt students in their first school year in the United States take only the TELPAS reading test to fulfill federal AYP accountability requirements.

## Questions Related to Alternate Assessments

### *Test Selection*

62. **Question:** Are students who receive special education services permitted to take TAKS in some subject areas and TAKS (Accommodated) or TAKS–M in others?

**Answer:** Yes. Each assessed subject area must be considered separately. The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee's decision should be based on two considerations: the amount of support needed to access the TEKS curriculum and the testing accommodations needed by the student. The only exception is TAKS–Alt, which must be given for all subjects if the student meets the participation requirements. Due to the pervasive nature of significant cognitive disabilities, TAKS–Alt would be the appropriate assessment for all subjects.

**63. Question: What is the difference between TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated)?**

**Answer:** TAKS includes a form called TAKS (Accommodated) for students served by special education who meet the eligibility requirements for certain specific accommodations. TAKS (Accommodated) is not an alternate assessment. It is the TAKS test with format accommodations (e.g., larger font, fewer items per page) and no embedded field-test items. TAKS (Accommodated) is available for all English and Spanish TAKS tests beginning in spring 2008.

**64. Question: Can a student in grades 3–11 take a different test this year than he or she took last year?**

**Answer:** Each year the ARD committee must determine the most appropriate assessment in the assessed subject areas (reading, mathematics, writing, ELA, science, and/or social studies) for students in grades 3–12. The assessment decision may change from year to year. For example, the ARD committee may determine that a student should take TAKS–M in mathematics in grade 5, but if the student makes significant academic progress in the mathematics TEKS curriculum, the ARD committee may determine that the student should take the TAKS (Accommodated) mathematics test the following year in grade 6.

**65. Question: What are the graduation implications for students who do not take the TAKS exit level tests?**

**Answer:** A student who completes graduation requirements but does not take the TAKS exit level tests receives the same diploma as a student who passes the TAKS exit level tests. A student’s transcript will reflect whether or not the student took TAKS. The student’s ARD committee uses assessment results and other school records to determine whether the student has met graduation requirements. For more information, please reference the flowcharts posted at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3697&menu\\_id3=793](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3697&menu_id3=793).

*Accommodations*

**66. Question: Who makes decisions about testing accommodations for a student receiving special education services?**

**Answer:** The ARD committee makes decisions regarding testing accommodations for the student based on supports the student routinely uses in classroom instruction. The ARD committee should review the allowable accommodations for the recommended assessment. Allowable accommodations can be found in the *2008-2009 Accommodations Manual*. Accommodation decisions for LEP students served by special education are made collaboratively by the LPAC and the ARD committee.

**67. Question: When is reading aloud permitted on a TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M mathematics, social studies, or science test?**

**Answer:** Only students served by special education, Section 504, or a dyslexia program may receive an oral administration. A test administrator may read aloud the test questions and answer choices for mathematics, social studies, and/or science tests to a student identified as having a disability that affects the student’s reading and who regularly receives this

accommodation in the classroom. In addition, a test administrator may sign the test questions and answer choices to a student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and whose IEP requires the signing of daily instruction.

Oral administration includes different levels of reading support for each student. This may include reading only a few words or phrases, reading multiple sentences throughout the test, or reading the test in its entirety (test questions and answer choices). It is the responsibility of the appropriate committee to document the level of oral administration support needed in the student's IEP or individual accommodation plan (IAP). A student whose committee has determined that student choice is appropriate may ask the test administrator at any time to change the level of oral administration being provided.

Students who receive any type of oral administration may need to be tested individually so that other students will not be disturbed or distracted. However, a test may be orally administered to a small group if there are not enough test administrators available for individual administrations. It is the responsibility of the school to determine the most appropriate way to administer each assessment to students who are receiving different levels of oral administration. Refer to the test administrator manuals for guidelines on reading aloud various types of mathematics test items.

The information regarding oral administration applies to students who are eligible for an oral administration on TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M. Please refer to pages 38-39 of the *2008 District and Campus Coordinator Manual* for more information.

**68. Question:** Will large-print tests be allowed for students with visual perception disabilities or other disabilities as well as students with visual impairments?

**Answer:** Yes, but this request is considered only on a case-by-case basis through an accommodation request.

**69. Question:** Will braille tests be available for TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M?

**Answer:** Yes. For TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M, braille test booklets are available for eligible examinees in all grades and subject areas tested in English and Spanish. Braille test booklets are not available for field-test administrations.

#### *General Questions about TAKS–Alternate*

**70. Question:** What is TAKS–Alt?

**Answer:** TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt) is an assessment designed for students receiving special education services who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and are unable to participate in the other statewide assessments even with substantial accommodations and/or modifications. Unlike other statewide assessments in Texas, TAKS–Alt is not a traditional paper or multiple-choice test. Instead, the assessment involves teachers observing as students complete state-designed assessment tasks that link to the grade-level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. Teachers then answer a series of questions in the online instrument to evaluate student performance.

**71. Question: How do I know if my students should participate in TAKS–Alt?**

**Answer:** TAKS–Alt assesses students receiving special education services who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and are unable to participate in the other statewide assessments, even with *substantial* accommodations and/or modifications. Once the ARD committee has determined that a student is significantly cognitively disabled; it must ensure that the student meets all the requirements in the Participation Requirements document in order to take TAKS–Alt. This document is located on the TAKS–Alt Resource page of the TEA Student Assessment Division website at

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/training/Descriptors\\_for\\_participation\\_requirements\\_july\\_2007.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/taksalt/training/Descriptors_for_participation_requirements_july_2007.pdf).

ARD committees should also consult the *2008–2009 Revised ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* at

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ard/2008\\_2009\\_ARD\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ard/2008_2009_ARD_Manual.pdf).

Students qualifying for special education services with a specific learning disability are not eligible for TAKS–Alt because this disability category rules out a cognitive disability.

**72. Question: What happens if I cannot elicit any observable measurable behavior from my student while conducting a TAKS–Alt observation?**

**Answer:** The teacher should consider if the supports provided to the student in the assessment tasks are appropriate. The teacher should review the presentation supports, materials, and response modes implemented to ensure the student has the opportunity to demonstrate what has been learned. If, after careful consideration, the teacher is still not able to get an authentic response from the student, the teacher can select the “No Response Observed” designation for that essence statement. Once one essence statement for a subject has been submitted as NRO the online system will automatically apply the NRO designation to the remaining essence statements for that subject.

**73. Question: What happens if a student has completed some of the needed observations for TAKS–Alt but then becomes ill and misses the remainder?**

**Answer:** In extreme cases, a Partial Score may be necessary for some students. The “Partial Score” option might be appropriate if a student moves into the district after March 27, 2009 or if the student has a medical condition or emergency that results in an incomplete assessment. At least one task must be evaluated in the online instrument for this option to be applied to that subject area. Teachers cannot submit an assessment as “Partial Score.” The online instrument will automatically designate an assessment as “Partial Score” on the last day of the assessment window (April 10, 2009) if at least one essence statement for a subject has been evaluated.

74. **Question:** Can students who receive special education services be retained based on their performance on TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M?

**Answer:** The ARD committee makes decisions about promotion and retention for students receiving special education services. If the student is enrolled in a grade that is affected by the Student Success Initiative (SSI), refer to the SSI section of the ARD manual or the 2008–2009 *Grade Placement Committee Manual*.

75. **Question:** Can student performance on state assessments be used to dismiss a student from special education services?

**Answer:** No. State assessments should not be used by themselves for this purpose. However, the ARD committee may use testing information in conjunction with other information typically used in making dismissal decisions.

## Questions Related to ELLs Who Receive Special Education Services

76. **Question:** Who is responsible for making assessment and accommodation decisions for LEP students who receive special education services?

**Answer:** Assessment and accommodation decisions for LEP students served by special education are made collaboratively by the LPAC and the ARD committee.

77. **Question:** May recent immigrant LEP students receiving special education services be exempted from TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M based on limited English proficiency?

**Answer:** Yes. The state LEP exemption policy applies to recent immigrant LEP students whether or not they receive special education services. These students may be exempted as long as they meet the state LEP-exemption criteria delineated in the *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual. However, to meet federal assessment and AYP requirements, students in grades 3–8 and 10 who are LEP-exempt are required to participate in linguistically accommodated test (LAT) administrations in reading/ELA, mathematics, and science. LEP-exempt students are not required to be assessed in other subjects or grades.

78. **Question:** Are LAT administrations available for all state assessments designed for students served by special education?

**Answer:** LAT administrations of TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M, are available for LEP-exempt students served by special education. LEP-exempt students for whom a TAKS (Accommodated) form is appropriate will take a LAT version of TAKS.



**79. Question: Are there Spanish versions of TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS–M?**

**Answer:** TAKS (Accommodated) is offered in Spanish for grades 3–6, the grades and subjects for which TAKS is offered in Spanish. A Spanish version of TAKS–M is not available. A Spanish-version LAT form is available for students eligible for a LAT administration of TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated).

**80. Question: Are LEP students who are eligible for TAKS–M and receive instruction in a language other than English required to take TAKS–M if they do not qualify for a LEP exemption?**

**Answer:** Yes. LEP students who receive instruction in their native languages are also required to receive instruction in English. If they are recent immigrants, they may be considered for a LEP exemption for up to three school years. During the LEP exemption period, these students are required to participate in LAT administrations to meet federal testing regulations in designated grades and subjects. After that time, LEP students served by special education are required to take non-LAT administrations of TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M. The ARD committee in conjunction with the LPAC determines which assessment to administer in accordance with the participation criteria for each assessment.

**81. Question: Are LEP students served by special education required to be assessed with TELPAS?**

**Answer:** Yes. NCLB requires all LEP students in grades K–12 to be assessed annually for English language proficiency. In rare cases it may be necessary for the ARD committee and LPAC to determine that it is not appropriate for a LEP student served by special education to be assessed in one or more TELPAS domains (listening, speaking, reading, or writing). For more information, see pages 77–78 of the 2008–2009 *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual or pages 29–30 of the 2008–2009 *ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* manual.

**82. Question: Is IEP documentation needed concerning a LEP student’s participation in TELPAS?**

**Answer:** Yes. Documentation of the decision to participate or not participate in each TELPAS language domain is required. The ARD committee must document the decision in the student’s IEP, and the LPAC must document the decision in the student’s permanent record file.

**83. Question: What accommodations are allowable for LEP students served by special education during TELPAS reading tests for grades 2–12?**

**Answer:** With the exception of braille versions and dyslexia bundled accommodations, the accommodations available during TAKS reading tests are available during TELPAS reading tests. For more information, refer to the 2009 TELPAS manual for raters and reading test administrators at:

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3300&menu\\_id3=793](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3300&menu_id3=793), and

the *2008-2009 Accommodations Manual* at:

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3696&menu\\_id3=793](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3696&menu_id3=793)

## Questions Related to the Student Success Initiative (SSI)

84. **Question:** What assessment information must be documented in the IEP for SSI requirements?

**Answer:** The following assessment information must be documented in the IEP for SSI requirements:

- an accelerated instruction plan prior to additional test administrations;
- ARD committee decisions regarding grade placement; and
- appropriate test accommodations to be provided for each test based on the accommodations that the student receives routinely in the classroom.

85. **Question:** What action must the school take if a student does not meet expectations on the first administration required in the SSI?

**Answer:** A student who has not met expectations on the first administration must be provided appropriate accelerated instruction to help prepare the student for the second testing opportunity if that student was administered TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M. For more information, see the *2008–2009 Grade Placement Committee Manual* at:

[http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/GPC\\_Manual\\_2009.pdf](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/GPC_Manual_2009.pdf)

86. **Question:** What is a parental waiver request, and does it apply to students receiving special education services?

**Answer:** A parent or guardian may request that a student not participate in the third testing opportunity due to potential harm to the student. Documentation must be provided that specifies the student’s individual situation and/or needs. If a parental waiver is granted, the student **must** still participate in all required accelerated instruction. Parents of children receiving special education services may request a waiver for the third administration of any assessment that is required under SSI. A sample waiver form is available on the TEA website at

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/sampleforms/Form3R16.doc>

87. **Question:** Is a student served by special education subject to the automatic retention requirements of SSI?

**Answer:** The grade advancement requirements stipulate that a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing the tests required under SSI or, if the student does not pass and a parent appeals the retention, by unanimous decision of the grade placement committee.

Although all SSI requirements apply to students who take TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M, retention and promotion decisions for students receiving special education services are made by the ARD committee.

TAKS–Alt is not be part of the SSI grade advancement requirements because the testing window is from the beginning of the school year through April 10, 2009, and multiple testing opportunities are already part of the TAKS–Alt process.

**88. Question:** Because the ARD committee serves as the grade placement committee for students served by special education, do promotion decisions made by the ARD have to be unanimous?

**Answer:** No. The ARD committee decision regarding promotion does not have to be unanimous but must follow the general rules governing ARD committee decision-making as set forth in 19 TAC §89.1050.

**88a. Question:** Can the ARD committee determine that SSI retests are not required for a student who takes TAKS-M?

**Answer:** For students taking TAKS-M in the SSI grades and subjects, the ARD committee can determine that the student does not have to participate in retesting opportunities. In these cases, fill in the “ARD Decision” bubble on the answer document for the second administration. For 2009 testing, if there is insufficient time to hold an ARD committee meeting prior to the retest, prepare documentation regarding why the student should not participate in the retest. For 2010 testing though, the ARD committee would need to determine whether the retest opportunities would be required.

However, students taking TAKS (Accommodated) must participate in at least two administrations of SSI grades and subjects before the ARD committee can waive the final retest.

**89. Question:** If the student does not pass the TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS–M grade 3, 5, or 8 reading test and/or the grade 5 or 8 mathematics test, can the ARD committee choose a different assessment?

**Answer:** An alternate assessment is available for the third testing opportunity only for the grade 3 TAKS reading test.

## Questions Related to Reading the Writing Prompt Aloud

**90. Question:** If several grade 4 students in a class ask to have the writing prompt read aloud, should the test administrator have the other students wait to begin working on their compositions until the prompt has been read to each student who has made the request?

**Answer:** No. If several grade 4 students want the writing prompt read aloud, the test administrator should instruct the other students that they may begin working on their compositions. The test administrator should then read the prompt to each student who has requested it, being careful to disrupt the other students as little as possible.

Note that this direction will not be appropriate for students in grades 7, 10, or 11 because additional directions must be read aloud to the entire room after addressing the writing prompt. At these grades, students do not begin work on the essay immediately after hearing the prompt. The test administrator must read the prompt to any student who has requested it. Then the test administrator continues with the rest of the directions, which the whole room must hear before students begin to work on the test.

91. **Question:** If all or most of the students in a classroom request that the prompt be read aloud, may the test administrator read the prompt to the entire class instead of to each student individually?

**Answer:** No, the test administrator must not read the writing prompt aloud to the entire class as a group. The reason is that beginning with the 2007 field test, students within one classroom had different prompts, so reading aloud a prompt to the entire room during the field test was not appropriate; a field-test prompt could be read only to individual students who requested it. For the actual (live) test, the prompt is the same for all students across the state at a particular grade level, as it has always been. However, the live-test administration procedures must be the same as the field-test administration procedures.

92. **Question:** If a test administrator is asked by a student to read the writing prompt aloud, should the test administrator read aloud all of the information on the page, including the “reminder box”?

**Answer:** No. The test administrator should read **only** the writing prompt, being careful to disrupt the other students as little as possible.

93. **Question:** Because test administrators are instructed to read the prompt aloud only to students who request it, does this mean that on the live test, students will no longer be responding to the same prompt statewide?

**Answer:** No. There has been **no** change in the way that the TAKS writing and ELA tests are constructed. On the live test, all students across the state in a particular grade will be responding to the same prompt; e.g., all grade 4 students will be responding to the same grade 4 prompt, all exit level students will be responding to the same exit level prompt, etc.