

ITBS/ITED Testing Program

Testing and Processing Documents for Special Circumstances

In view of the reporting requirements for NCLB put in place by the Iowa Department of Education (DE), assessment reporting requirements of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and the score reporting specified in Chapter 12 of Iowa code, the policies and practices regarding who gets assessed and what gets reported from assessments in your district might need to be reviewed. This leaflet addresses issues associated with who is tested, how testing takes place, and how scores are reported for students with special circumstances. These special circumstances include:

- students in special education programs with IEPs,
- students who are English Language Learners (ELLs),
- students who were not conscientious when taking the test (marked randomly or in patterns), and
- students who receive instruction outside of their residing district.

The purpose of this leaflet is to review some of the issues to be considered in making decisions about these circumstances when giving the *ITBS* or *ITED* so that your school will be in compliance with federal law and Iowa Department of Education regulations.

Students with IEPs

Perhaps the first matter to address is who should be tested. In the past, some school districts have not tested or not scored all students in the special education programs, *i.e.*, students with IEPs. Federal law (IDEA) has taken care of this decision, in part, by requiring all students to be assessed, either with a district-wide assessment or an alternate assessment, regardless of disability. (See also the DE website for information on implementing alternate assessments.)

How students with IEPs should be tested with the *ITBS* or *ITED* is another matter to address. Should they be given some accommodations because of their disabilities? Does the assessment need to be modified in some fashion to reduce the interference of the disability in assessing achievement? For most students, their IEP should provide answers to these important questions. In cases where the IEP has not been updated to address these assessment issues, the IEP team will need to make such judgments. Accommodations are changes made in the way an assessment is administered so that a student's disabilities will not interfere with the results of the assessment. Accommodations do not change the assessment tasks themselves. Ideally, an accommodation neutralizes the effect of the disability on the assessment process so that a truer picture of the student's achievement can be obtained. See the section in the *Directions for Administration* booklet regarding permissible accommodations.

The next question centers on the way the documents of students with IEPs ought to be handled in the scoring process so that the results for buildings and the overall school district will be most useful to the school. Several points should be considered in making this decision. First, in most cases it seems best to include the document (answer folder or scorable booklet) of a special student with those of all other students in the same grade. If the student was given an accommodation (*e.g.*, extra time or parts were read to them), we expect the accommodation to remove the effect of the disability, not to give the student some kind of advantage over other students. Therefore, it would be best practice to "mainstream" the answer document just as the student was likely included in the instructional classes of students who have no IEPs.

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Out-of-Level Testing. If a student has been tested out of level, we do not (nor does the Iowa Department of Education) regard this action as an accommodation. It merely means that an assessment was chosen for the student that most appropriately fits the instructional program the student has experienced most recently. That is, when a student in the fifth grade is given an *ITBS* test designed for grade 3 students (Level 9), that decision should have been made because that student is really working in most curricular areas with objectives, assignments, and exercises that are generally dealt with by students in grade 3. It would not be logical to give such a student a Level 11 test, the one typically given to students in grade 5. We already know how the student is likely to perform on such a test, so the results would not provide any information that would be useful for instructional purposes. (Using the same rationale, we might occasionally give a fifth grader a test designed primarily for grade 6.)

When we give a fifth grade student a third grade test, that student's answer folder should be put with those of his/her fifth grade classmates for scoring. Then the alphabetical List of Student Scores will include the student's scores along with those of all the others in that teacher's class. The percentile ranks for the student will thus be based on comparisons with fifth graders, not third graders. And because the third grade test would be easier than the fifth grade test, the student would have to get more right on the former than on the latter to get a certain grade equivalent score on any one of the tests.

There was a change several years ago in state policy regarding the use of out-of-level testing in the NCLB reporting grades. (This change now applies to grades 3-8 and 11.) All students in these grades who are given a lower level test than is typically used in their grade will be assigned to the Low achievement level (not proficient) automatically when the Achievement Levels Report is created. Regardless of the score obtained on the out-of-level test, the student's performance will be regarded as Low or "not proficient." Of course, this new regulation does not affect any other score reports you might get, and it does not apply to students in other grades who are tested out-of-level. Obviously, this change in policy only impacts the results of the small number of students who are tested out-of-level who obtain a national percentile rank higher than 40 in reading comprehension, math, or science. (Most who need out-of-level testing will score below 40.) If the student is thought to be "borderline", an on-level test should be given.

Processing Answer Documents. Once a student with an IEP has been tested, the answer document should be coded, as requested by the Department of Education, to show that the student has an IEP. Separate directions that describe how this coding should take place indicate that field 18, "Program – SE", should be coded "1" (=yes) on your bar code file. When the documents for all such students are integrated with those of all other students for processing, the Building Summary and the System Summary will include all students.

What if you create artificial buildings for the special education students in each of your buildings (e.g., Hoover B, Taft B) and include those buildings with Hoover A and Taft A in a single order with one pink order form? In this case you will get separate sets of school averages and achievement levels for the two Hoover groups and two Taft groups, and students from all groups will be combined in the System Summary. However, there will be no report that provides information for all Hoover students or all Taft students (A + B). Your district will need to merge the results for each school by hand to be in compliance with NCLB, Title I, and IDEA for reporting to the school board or completing an annual progress report for the state. (This method will work, however, for single-building systems.)

What if you put all special education students in a separate order, using a separate pink order form (OSS)? In this case you will get separate sets of school and district averages and achievement levels for the regular and special education groups, but you will not get any reports that combine the scores of the two groups at the school or system levels. Your district will need to merge the results by hand to be in compliance with NCLB, Title I, and IDEA for reporting to the community or AEA or for completing an annual progress report for the state.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

For students whose native language is not English and who have been in an English-only classroom for a limited time, two decisions need to be considered prior to testing. First, has their English-language acquisition developed sufficiently to warrant testing them, and second, should testing involve the use of any particular accommodations? In all instances, the guidelines in place in your district should be implemented in making these decisions. The purpose of using testing accommodations with ELLs is to be able to measure their skills and knowledge in the curriculum without significant interference from a limited opportunity to learn English or use it in the testing process. Thus, those just beginning instruction in English are not likely to be able to answer many questions no matter what types of accommodations are used. Consequently, such students probably should not be tested until their English language skills become developed more fully. For those in their second or third year of instruction in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program, the use of accommodations might be warranted to reduce the effect of their limited English proficiency on test performance.

Use of Accommodations. Although ELLs do not have IEPs, the decision making regarding the need for accommodations for such students parallels that for students with disabilities. The intent of the accommodation is the same—to neutralize the effect of the student’s limited language ability—and, consequently, the document processing and score interpretations are similar to what was described above. Of course, the types of accommodations that might be needed, or the types of modifications that might be used, are likely to be different. The *Directions for Administration* manual contains a section in Part 2 on using accommodations with ELLs.

ELLs might be tested out of level if their progress in the various subject areas of the curriculum warrants it. This decision should be made individually based on the curricular level at which each student is working rather than simply based on a limited facility with the English language. For some students, out-of-level testing with an accommodation or minor modifications may be most appropriate. (See the section above on out-of-level testing.)

There was a change several years ago in state policy regarding the processing and reporting of scores for ELLs. (This now applies to grades 3-8 and 11.) When such students have a valid score in reading comprehension, math total, and science, that score will be used to determine which achievement level to include the student in for the Achievement Levels Report. However, if the student has an answer document but does not have a valid score in one of these test areas, the student will be assigned to the Low achievement level (not proficient) in that area for the Achievement Levels Report. Thus, if the student did not take a test or answered too few questions to warrant providing them a score, the student would be counted as participating in testing but would be assigned to the Low level (“not proficient”).

Processing Answer Documents. Once a student who is an ELL has been tested, the answer document should be coded, as requested by the Department of Education, to show that the student is an ELL. Field 22, "Program – ELL", should be coded "1" (=yes) on your bar code file. When the documents for all such students are integrated with those of all other students for processing, the Achievement Levels Report, the Building Summary and the System Summary will include all students.

Students Who Mark Randomly

Students who do not take the test conscientiously, who mark randomly or in patterns, will not obtain a score that will be interpretable or useful as an indicator of their achievement. Consequently, their score cannot make a meaningful contribution to group averages or other scores for classes, schools, or the district. Their scores probably should be excluded from such reporting. Of course, your school needs to do what it can to prevent such test-taking behaviors, but once it has occurred with any student, the score should not be interpreted as though the student made a concerted effort. When such behavior is detected, the test administrator should make note of it and arrange for the student to be counseled and retested. The student's document from retesting might then be included with the others in processing.

Processing Answer Documents. When the document of a student who marked randomly is included among those of all other students, it is possible to code the student's document to show that the scores should not be included in computing group averages. In the "Test Administrator Use Only" area of the student's answer document, any circle in Column Z can be filled in to indicate the student should be excluded from group reports. In addition, the Order for Scoring Service (OSS) will need to be marked to show that there is at least one student in your order for which the exclusion has been requested. Once the coding is completed, any optional score reports for individual students will be provided for the student, but the student's scores will be excluded from group reports.

There also was a change several years ago in state policy regarding students whose scores have been identified for exclusion from group reports. (This now applies to grades 3-8 and 11.) These are students whose answer documents have been marked in Column Z. If these students have a valid score in reading comprehension, math total, and science, that score will be used to determine which achievement level to include the student in for the Achievement Levels Report. However, if the student does not have a valid score in any one of these test areas, the student will be assigned to the Low achievement level (not proficient) in that area for the Achievement Levels Report. If the student did not take a test or answered too few questions to warrant providing them a score, the student would be counted as participating in testing but would be assigned to the Low level.

Students Enrolled Outside the District

The state plan for NCLB requires that each district report on all of its students, even those who might receive services elsewhere. These circumstances would include students in grades 3-8 and 11 who are sent to a neighboring district for special education services, those who are attending a community college, or those at a state institution on a temporary basis. More information can be obtained from the Iowa Department of Education about the many situations to which these rules apply.

Generally for students in these circumstances, the district of residence is responsible for ensuring that the students are tested and that the scores are returned to the district from whichever agency provided oversight for the testing. Then it will be necessary to include the student's scores in the achievement levels data in the student's grade for the building in which the student ordinarily would have been enrolled and for the district overall. Details about the reporting requirements for these situations should be obtained from the Iowa Department of Education. (Tom Deeter, 515-242-5616, tom.deeter@iowa.gov)

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