



Parent Guide: Assessments and Accountability for Students with Disabilities

Why do we have statewide assessments?

State and federal laws require districts to be accountable for the progress and achievement of all students. Under the federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements, school and district accountability is based on student performance from the statewide assessments, which are aligned to California Academic Content Standards. Student results are merged to prepare grade level reports by subject for each school, district, county, and the state. Teachers, parents, and students use individual results on statewide assessments to monitor each student's academic progress.

The results are used with other information to help make decisions about ways to improve student learning and school programs. The achievement of all students on the statewide assessments is reflected in the school's Academic Performance Index (API) for state accountability purposes. The federal accountability required under *No Child Left Behind* is measured as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and includes both the participation levels and achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. Monitoring the progress of students with disabilities is an integral part of the accountability system.

What are the statewide assessments?

In California, the statewide assessments for students in grades 2-11 are called the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program.

The STAR has four components:

- **California Standards Tests (CSTs)** measure individual student progress in achieving the California Academic Content Standards. Parents receive a report that includes the percentage of questions their child answered correctly and the performance level for their child. The performance levels are *advanced*, *proficient*, *basic*, *below basic*, and *far below basic*. The levels indicate how well students met California Academic Content Standards for each subject area assessed. The CSTs are given in grades 2-11.
- **California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6)** is a nationally standardized assessment that compares student achievement with other students. Scores are reported as percent correct and national percentiles. A national percentile compares the student's results with the scores of students across the nation in the same grade who were assessed at the same time of the school year. CAT/6 is given in grades 3 and 7 only.



- **California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)** is designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Tasks are aligned to a subset of the California Academic Content Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics that reflect important life skills. Performance levels are designated as *advanced*, *proficient*, *basic*, *below basic*, and *far below basic*. The CAPA is given in grades 2-11.
- **Standards Based Test in Spanish (STS)** is administered to Spanish-speaking English Learners who have been enrolled in a United States school less than 12 months or are in a Spanish Bilingual Education Program. The STS is a new assessment that will be given in grades 2, 3, and 4 beginning in Spring 2007. During the next few years, subsequent grade levels will be phased into the system.
- **California Modified Achievement Test (CMA)** is in development. It will provide an alternative to a small number of students who are progressing in the California Academic Content Standards but at a level significantly below their grade level peers. The CMA is given in grades 2-11.
- **Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP)** is a new required assessment for preschool students. Observational data is collected two times per year to measure the child's progress in health and safety, learning, social-emotional development, motor skills, and communication. Your child's IEP team will determine if adaptations are needed to enable your child to participate.

In addition, the **California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)** is given to students starting in 10th grade. Additional opportunities to take the CAHSEE are provided to students who do not achieve a passing score of 350 on both the English/Language Arts and Math sections. Beginning with the class of 2006, students must pass both the English/Language Arts and the Math sections of the CAHSEE to receive a high school diploma.

Why should my child take the statewide assessments? Hasn't my son or daughter been assessed enough already?

Assessment information is collected to see whether your child is eligible for special education services. To continue meeting your child's needs, on-going assessments is needed. It is important that all students at the school participate in the statewide assessments to assist your child's teachers in planning classroom instruction and to enhance your child's educational experience. Results are also used at the school and district level to make adjustments to special education programs as needed to improve student achievement.

But won't my child be at a disadvantage?

Students with disabilities can be appropriately included in statewide assessments. Most students with special needs can take assessments under the same conditions as their non-disabled peers. Accommodations, which change the way an assessment is given but do not alter what is being measured by the assessment, are provided if



required for the student to access the assessment and demonstrate his or her knowledge. Accommodations include additional time, Braille, large print-text, revised assessment directions, the use of special equipment or aids, etc.

Modifications may be required for a smaller number of students with disabilities. Modifications, such as using a calculator or word processor, change the mastery level of the California Academic Content Standard being measured by the assessment. The scores of students who take the assessments with modifications are not included as participating in the assessment program for federal accountability purposes.

Who decides whether my child needs an accommodation or modification?

Your child's IEP team, of which you are an important member, makes the decision (the assessments are not given in K, 1st, and 12th grades) on how your child should participate in the assessments. Accommodations or modifications used in the classroom should be used on assessments, if appropriate. The goal is to "level the playing field" and not give an unfair advantage. Accommodations or modifications should be based on the individual student's needs and help students with disabilities show what they can do.

How do I know my child has had the opportunity to learn the California Academic Content Standards?

Schools are required to provide curriculum and teacher training aligned to the California Academic Content Standards. In addition, your child's IEP team should determine what additional instruction on the California Academic Content Standards is needed for your child. Your child's IEP should reflect the California Academic Content Standards for special emphasis in his or her goals and program supports.

Should my child take the alternate assessment (i.e., CAPA) instead?

The CAPA is designed to measure the achievement of students with significant cognitive disabilities. Students who take the CAPA require substantial adjustments to the general curriculum, which focus on functional applications, such as basic independent living, community, and vocational skills. The IEP team should first consider if the student could participate in the statewide assessments with appropriate accommodations or modifications. The decision to participate in the CAPA should not be based on excessive or extended absences; sensory disabilities; significantly lower achievement than the student's peers; or language, cultural or economic differences.

Can the IEP team exempt my child from participating in state or district wide assessments?

No. The role of the IEP team is to determine how your child can participate most appropriately in the assessments. Currently, California Education Code allows



parents/guardians to submit a written request to the principal of the child's school if they do not want their child to take any or all parts of the STAR assessments. Parents of children with disabilities must follow the regular school process to exercise this option. Parents cannot exempt their child from the CAHSEE. However, there are potentially significant consequences for your child's school if students do not participate in the statewide assessments. You should fully discuss the accommodations and/or modifications with the other members of the IEP team to enable your child to participate in the statewide assessments.

How can I help my child do better on the statewide assessments?

The statewide assessments are based on the California Academic Content Standards that students are learning throughout the school year. It is important for parents to make sure their children are in school every day, unless they are ill, and complete class assignments and homework on a daily basis. Parents can help their children do better on statewide assessments by encouraging them to do their best, making sure they have plenty of rest, and providing a good breakfast on assessment day. On-going communication with your child's teacher is also critical.

Where can I find more information on statewide assessments?

For further information contact your child's teacher, principal, or the director of special education for the district. Additional information is also available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr>.