

Technical Assistance Paper

Florida Department of Education
Division of Public Schools and Community Education
Bureau of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Assessment and Evaluation Section
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Standards for Implementation of Student Assessment Programs in Florida School Districts

Introduction

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Paper is to provide guidelines for the implementation of student achievement programs in Florida school districts. By understanding and implementing these guidelines, local district administrators, guidance counselors, testing coordinators, and teachers will be able to administer student achievement tests in a professionally competent and ethical manner. This will foster greater confidence in and understanding of the test results for students, their parents, citizens, and educational decision makers.

These standards are derived from many different sources, and a list of selected references has been provided at the end of the Technical Assistance Paper. The foundation work for this paper was drawn from two sources: an unpublished paper titled Model Standards for Comparable Testing Procedures developed in 1986 as part of the FACET Act, Chapter 84-336, Section 97, Laws of Florida, and the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, APA, NCME, 1985) that represents the psychometric community's concept of professional responsibilities for testing programs.

The Florida Legislature, the Commissioner of Education, educators, citizens, parents, and students all have an interest in having reliable and valid student achievement data. Achievement data that can be trusted can be the basis for informed decisions about educational matters. Data that are corrupted by inappropriate test administration procedures or cheating creates misunderstandings about the performance of schools and districts and inaccurate decisions regarding policies, practices, resource allocations, and evaluation. The guidelines in this paper are designed to foster the collection of accurate and dependable data, comparable across districts and schools in the state.

Guidelines

I. Adherence to the Code of Ethics of the Profession

Guideline 1.0. Florida educators shall adhere to The Code of Ethics and the Principles of Professional Conduct of The Education Profession in Florida in the implementation of student assessment testing programs.

Comments: The Florida Education Standards Commission defined and adopted The Code of Ethics and The Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession in Florida (Florida Education Standards Commission, undated). While The Code is broadly written to apply to many areas of an educator's professional activities, there are several portions that apply specifically to student assessment programs.

Educators:

1. "Shall not intentionally violate or deny a student's legal rights."
2. "Shall maintain honesty in all professional dealings."
3. "Shall not intentionally distort or misrepresent facts concerning an educational matter in direct or indirect public expression."
4. "Shall not submit fraudulent information on any document in connection with professional activities."
5. "Shall report to appropriate authorities any known allegation of a violation of the Florida School Code or State Board of Education Rules as defined in Section 231.28(1), Florida Statutes."

In summary, educators are expected to be ethical in all of their professional work, including responsibilities for assessing students' educational achievement. Teachers, counselors, administrators, or other educators who do not abide by the statutes, rules, and administrative procedures associated with the state and/or local district student assessment programs are not acting ethically or in a professional manner.

II. Adherence to State Statutes and Rules

Guideline 2.0. Florida educators who are responsible for the administration of state and district assessment tests shall abide by policies established in statute and rule regarding test security.

Comments: The Florida Legislature, from time to time, may establish statutes that give direction to the manner in which state and local school district assessment programs will be operated. Likewise, the State Board of Education may adopt administrative rules for the same purpose. While there are several statutes and rules in effect that provide

authorization for the state assessment programs and require districts to implement local assessments, only Section 228.301, F.S., addresses issues that establish requirements related to ethical behavior in the administration of such programs. The 1998 text of this statute is as follows:

Section 228.301, F.S. Test Security --

- (1) It is unlawful for anyone knowingly and willfully to violate test security rules adopted by the State Board of Education for mandatory tests administered by or through the State Board of Education to students, educators, or applicants for certification or administered by school districts pursuant to s. 229.57, or, with respect to any such test, knowingly and willfully to:
 - (a) Give examinees access to test questions prior to testing;
 - (b) Copy, reproduce, or use in any manner inconsistent with test security rules all or any portion of any secure test booklet;
 - (c) Coach examinees during testing or alter or interfere with examinees' responses in any way;
 - (d) Make answer keys available to examinees;
 - (e) Fail to follow security rules for distribution and return of secure tests as directed, or fail to account for all secure test materials before, during, and after testing;
 - (f) Fail to follow test administration directions specified in the test administration manuals; or
 - (g) Participate in, direct, aid, counsel, assist in, or encourage any of the acts prohibited in this section.
- (2) Any person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for not more than 90 days, or both.
- (3) A district superintendent of schools, a president of a community college, a president of a university, or a president of a private postsecondary institution shall cooperate with the Commissioner of Education in any investigation concerning the administration of a test administered pursuant to state statute or rule.

This statute is implemented through Rule 6A-10.042, Florida Administrative Code, the text of which is found in Attachment A to this Technical Assistance Paper.

This statute and its implementing administrative rule establish the broad parameters that define how test security will be maintained. There are three fundamental dimensions to the security issue. First, the tests must be maintained in a secure manner and not revealed to students or teachers prior to testing because to do otherwise would give some students an unfair advantage over those who had not seen the questions. Moreover, the test would no longer be examining students' achievement but would merely assess recall of answers to the specific questions that are on that particular form of the test.

Second, the students must not be given inappropriate assistance during the time they are taking the test (e.g., visual or audible clues that lead the students to the correct answer, materials on the walls or blackboards that assist students in finding correct answers, or explanations that lead the student to the correct answers) nor have their answers changed after the test has been administered. In either case, the test would no longer be an accurate measure of the students' skills.

Third, the test has to be maintained in a secure manner before and after administration because items are reused over time. Thus, it would create an unfair advantage if some students had access to the “old items” because some of those items could reappear on future form(s) of the test.

A more subtle issue is that teachers are not permitted to study, read, inspect, or copy the test either before, during, or after it has been administered. Again, this would give an unfair advantage to certain teachers and students when the test is next administered.

III. Adherence to Instructions in the Test Administration Manuals

Guideline 3.0. Florida educators responsible for administering district and statewide assessment tests shall adhere to the instructions found in the administration manuals for each test.

Comments: State and district assessment tests are designed to be “standardized” in that they are administered in all schools and districts under the same conditions and with the same procedures. Only by doing this can one be assured that all students are assessed in an equitable and fair manner.

The test administration manuals establish, among other things, the calendar for testing, the daily testing schedule, policies relative to who will and will not be tested, the instructions to be read to students, and how accommodations and modifications will be provided to students who need them. It is imperative that these instructions be followed correctly and completely.

IV. Training Test Administrators and Proctors

Guideline 4.0. Persons with test administration and test proctoring responsibilities will be appropriately trained.

Comments: Assessment results cannot be reliable and valid unless the tests are properly administered. Those administering the tests to students and proctoring the testing sessions must be trained to complete those responsibilities. The district and school test administrators must design and implement training programs for this purpose.

The training programs should, at a minimum, serve to teach test administrators and proctors the following:

1. the purpose of the assessment programs;
2. the meaning and importance of “standardized” test administrations;
3. the materials to be used;
4. how students’ identity will be checked;
5. how materials will be counted and securely stored;

6. how students are to complete the answer folders or sheets;
7. how to read the test administration script or directions;
8. how to handle unexpected interruptions or other difficulties;
9. how to monitor test-taking procedures and activities of students to prevent opportunities for cheating; and
10. how to document and report problems with materials, disruptive student behavior, cheating, or any unexpected/irregular incidents.

District student assessment coordinators are expected to attend training sessions conducted by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) and to communicate with Department staff, when necessary, concerning any difficulties that will interfere with the proper administration of the tests. Training for school-level test administrators and proctors should be conducted from one to two weeks prior to the testing date. Actual test materials should be given to classroom teachers who are responsible for testing only on the day of the test.

V. Providing Students with an Opportunity to Learn

Guideline 5.0 Students will be provided an opportunity to learn the material that will be assessed by standardized assessment tests.

Comments: In the Debra P. v. Turlington legal challenge to the High School Competency Test (HSCT), the court ruled that the State could deny a diploma to any student who had not passed the test by graduation day. However, implementation of such a “high stakes” testing requirement was contingent upon the State being able to substantiate that all students had been given instruction on the skills being tested. This concept is called “instructional validity,” and it generally means that students have been given the “opportunity to learn” the skills underlying the test.

The educational community is sometimes uncertain as to what practices legitimately contribute to the “opportunity to learn” as opposed to the more narrow concept of “teaching to the test.” The former is a positive endeavor meant to help students learn the desired skills and competencies whereas the latter activity is a negative approach that would provide students instruction only on items that are mirror images or clones of the items on the test.

A test is designed to generate a score from which the user wishes to draw an inference. The score itself carries the idea of “validity” in that the user can make either valid or invalid inferences about the student from the score. Typically, the educator or parent wants to use a test to determine how well the student is performing, for example, in a domain of interest such as mathematics computation. Test questions are written to sample the domain of interest that would, of course, vary from test to test.

If the student then is provided instruction in mathematics computation and earns a high score, one infers that he/she could do well on another test of items from the same domain.

If, on the other hand, the student had only been given instruction on the style of items on that particular test, the inference would be limited to the student's ability to perform again on that very instrument with that same style of items. As Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) note, it is inappropriate in most situations to "limit inferences about knowledge to the specific questions asked in a specific format."

It is, therefore, clear that "teaching the test" consists of those activities that will focus the students only on material identical to the design and content of a specific test. It is inappropriate to prepare students by using the actual test questions or items that are close mirror images of the actual test questions. Student instructional reviews using released forms of a previously administered test, as is done with the College Board's Scholastic Achievement Test, are acceptable practices only because every future form of the test is new and the domain of interest is very broad.

In the context of district national norm-referenced tests, it is inappropriate to allow students to practice with an alternate form of the test that is to be administered later in the year because the items on the alternate form may be close parallels to the test that will count and because the supply of alternate forms is usually very limited. Students, instead, should be provided a rich instructional program that includes the skills and competencies that will be sampled by the content on the assessment tests so that such targeted practice will not be necessary.

VI. Preparing Students for Testing

Guideline 6.0 Students will be prepared for the testing activities prior to the day of testing.

Comments: It is natural for educators to want students to do well on their assessment tests. If the test administrators know how to properly administer the tests, this will create the atmosphere for the students to best demonstrate their skills. However, if the student cannot handle or does not understand the test format or other materials associated with the administration, it is likely that the results will not reflect the student's true level of proficiency.

It is desirable for students to be given a certain amount of practice so they will be familiar with the format of the test questions and the materials that will be used with statewide and district assessments. The *Florida Writes!* and Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) assessments use different formats. The former is a 45-minute written essay on a single topic; the latter consists of many items, including short and extended response, gridded response, and multiple-choice. Students need to be given practice with these item formats in regular instructional activities so they will not be surprised when the assessment tests arrive. Such test preparation activities should be viewed as being a continual process, not something that is only done immediately prior to testing.

To prepare students for the future assessments, teachers can

- a. discuss with students how they can maintain a positive attitude, follow directions, and work efficiently through a test;
- b. help students understand that assessing their progress is a positive endeavor that will work toward their long-term benefit;
- c. have students practice taking short and extended response, gridded response, multiple-choice, and essay items so they will become familiar with the test formats;
- d. structure activities that require students to work against fixed time limits;
- e. help students practice with mark-sense answer sheets; and
- f. teach students how to proofread their written answers and check their work for accuracy.

These are activities that can be undertaken to help students become “test wise” without undermining the validity of the assessment scores. Helping students be familiar with the assessment formats and materials is acceptable; treating these activities as being separate from the regular instructional program is not productive.

VII. Providing Adequate Testing Conditions

Guideline 7.0 Test administrators will provide adequate test administration conditions.

Comments: In general, test administrators are responsible for providing the correct atmosphere within which students can demonstrate their skills through the assessment instruments. This implies that students are comfortable with the test materials and that the room conditions are adequate.

First, assessment materials may vary from being as simple as a booklet within which the student writes or marks all answers to a separate answer sheet or folder that requires the student to handle two sets of materials. As these assessments become more complex, it is not unusual to see students using hand-held calculators, small rulers, science materials, special maps, and so forth. The implication of this is that test administrators must be familiar with the materials; students must understand what materials will be used; and students must have adequate desk space to maneuver the materials without disrupting an adjacent examinee.

Secondly, the temperature of the room must be comfortable; the lighting must be adequate; and there should be few extraneous or disruptive sounds. Test administrators should review all testing facilities prior to the day of testing, consider the sources of all possible disruptions, and take steps to correct potential problem areas.

Test administrators must adhere to the instructions in the test administration manual regarding what assistance, if any, may be given to students as they take these tests. The

level of assistance will vary, depending on whether regular curriculum, exceptional education, or limited-English proficient (LEP) students are being tested.

Administrators and proctors must carefully monitor students to make certain students work independently. While a complete listing of possible ways students can cheat on tests is not possible, the more obvious ones are

- a. looking on another student's answer folder
- b. using a "crib" sheet
- c. hiding notes or test answers in the restroom
- d. using hand or facial signals
- e. stealing items or pages from the test booklet;
- f. arranging for another student to take the test in one's place and
- g. bringing answers into the room with a programmable calculator.

In addition, test administrators must take steps to minimize the possibility that an individual teacher, counselor, or other person will provide unwarranted assistance to a student or seek to change responses on an answer sheet after the tests have been completed. For example, information that will assist students in answering test questions should not be left on the classroom walls, and test administrators must not interpret test items for students so that they would be given an unfair advantage in answering the items. Proper test security measures and auditing test sessions will minimize these incidents.

VIII. Providing Test Accommodations and Modifications

Guideline 8.0. Students with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency will be provided appropriate test accommodations and modifications.

Comments: Students should be encouraged to participate in statewide and district assessment programs. For some students, test accommodations and modifications may be appropriate and, in such situations, are determined on an individual basis depending on the student's needs and disabilities. The test administration manuals outline the more common accommodations and modifications as well as the procedures for administering the test(s) under those conditions. In addition, the DOE has prepared Division of Public Schools and Continuing Education (DPS) memoranda which clarify policies and procedures in this area. See, for example, Accountability for Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessment Programs (DOE, 1998); Testing Modifications and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (DOE, 1997); Alternate Assessment (DOE, 1999); Accommodations for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students in the Administration of Statewide Assessments (DOE, 1996).

District and/or school personnel must offer LEP students who are served in approved LEP programs appropriate testing accommodations. The type of accommodations and/or

modifications and the guidelines for administering such accommodations have been specified by the DOE and disseminated to all districts.

From a measurement perspective, one must judge whether specific accommodations and modifications would alter that which is being measured. If, for example, the assessment seeks to determine whether a student can read, then having an audio version of the reading assessment would alter what is being measured. Further, if the fundamental mathematical operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are being measured, use of a hand-held calculator would alter the nature of the assessment. In the realm of nationally norm-referenced tests, providing additional time for students to respond may seem to be a reasonable accommodation, but it could jeopardize comparisons of the resultant student score with the national norm group because the national norms would have been based on a different, fixed test timing. By contrast, provision of additional test administration time may be permitted with criterion-referenced tests such as the High School Competency Test (HSCT).

There is a fine line of distinction between assisting a student to enable him/her to demonstrate, individually, the skills being assessed and in providing assistance that, in effect, provides or leads directly to test answers. In that instance, the student is not really doing the work. This can be particularly difficult when the test has high stakes associated with it, and/or educators become overly anxious for students to succeed.

IX. Accounting for All Students

Guideline 9.0. Test administrators will assess all students.

Comments: State and district assessment programs seek to provide information to students and their parents about the educational status and progress of both students and schools. Such information seeks to ensure that parents, guardians, policy-makers, and other stakeholders can make informed judgments about the quality of education being provided to our students. It is, therefore, important that all eligible students be included in these assessments.

Test administration manual(s) both describe the purpose of the assessment and generally identify which students are to be tested. These instructions should be carefully followed so all eligible students will be included. Records should be maintained to indicate which students are not being tested and the reasons why.

Through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) development process, districts make decisions about including students with disabilities on state and district assessments. Decisions should reflect consideration of the purpose of the test, allowable modifications, and each student's ability to address the skills assessed by the test.

Some students legitimately will be absent on the day of testing and may not be available for scheduled makeup tests. However, all other eligible students should either be tested,

with accommodations or modifications when appropriate, or identified as being exceptional education students who are not pursuing the path toward a regular high school diploma. Students should not be artificially shifted in their grade level classification simply to avoid being included in these assessments. In addition, if a student is retained at a grade-level that is scheduled to participate in these assessments (e.g., grade 5), that student is to be reassessed the following year since he/she is still classified as a fifth grader.

X. Communicating Test Results

Guideline 10.0. Test results will be communicated to appropriate audiences.

Comments: The results of the statewide and district assessments should be communicated, as appropriate, to various audiences in a timely manner. For the individual student and his/her parent(s), it is desirable to release the test scores as soon as possible. The results may be hand-delivered to the student or sent home by mail, depending on local district and school policies. With either approach, it is important that the student and parent(s) understand both how to read the score reports and the implications of them for the student's current and future educational progress. Communicating such information in languages other than English may be necessary.

Educators should be careful not to extend the meaning of test scores beyond that for which they were designed. For example, the HSCT has only been validated as a minimum skills test for graduation purposes; scores cannot be said to predict who will be successful later in life. Educators must strive to emphasize valid inferences from test scores.

In general, test results should be considered as public information with the exception that data for an individual student must be protected. Data for a school or some other sub-grouping should not be released if, because of the small numbers of students in the sub-group(s), it would be possible for someone to deduce the test scores for an individual student.

Reporters, citizens, business leaders, and others will have an interest in the test results for both the district and individual schools. These data are public and should be readily available through press releases and other special reports. It is preferable that these data be released with appropriate explanations and interpretations, as well as packaged in easily understood formats.

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Attachment A

Rule 6A-10.042, FAC, Maintenance of Test Security

- (1) Tests implemented in accordance with the requirements of Sections 229.053(2)(d), 229.57, 231.087, 231.0861(3), 231.17, 233.011, 239.301(10), 240.107(8), and 240.117, Florida Statutes, shall be maintained and administered in a secure manner such that the integrity of the tests shall be preserved.
- (a) Test questions shall be preserved in a secure manner by individuals who are developing and validating the tests. Such individuals shall not reveal in any manner, verbally or in writing, the test questions under development.
- (b) Tests or individual test questions shall not be revealed, copied, or otherwise reproduced by persons who are involved in the administration, proctoring, or scoring of any test.
- (c) Examinees shall not be assisted in answering test questions by any means by persons administering or proctoring the administration of any test.
- (d) Examinees' answers to questions shall not be interfered with in any way by persons administering, proctoring, or scoring the examinations.
- (e) Examinees shall not be given answer keys by any person.
- (f) Persons who are involved in administering or proctoring the tests or persons who teach or otherwise prepare examinees for the tests shall not participate in, direct, aid, counsel, assist in, or encourage any activity which could result in the inaccurate measurement or reporting of the examinees' achievement.
- (g) Each person who has access to tests or test questions during the development, printing, administration, or scoring of the tests shall be informed of specifications for maintaining test security, the provisions in statute and rule governing test security, and a description of the penalties for breaches of test security.
- (h) During each test administration, school district and institutional test administration coordinators and contractors employing test administrators and proctors shall ensure that required testing procedures are being followed at all test administration sites. Officials from the Department are authorized to conduct unannounced observations of test administration procedures at any test administration site to ensure that testing procedures are being correctly followed.
- (2) Test materials, including all test booklets and other materials containing secure test questions, answer keys, and student responses, shall be kept secure and precisely accounted for in accordance with the procedures specified in the examination program administration manuals and other communications provided by the Department. Such procedures shall include but are not limited to the following:
- (a) All test materials shall be kept in secure, locked storage prior to and after administration of any test.
- (b) All test materials shall be precisely accounted for and written documentation kept by test administrators and proctors for each point at which test materials are distributed and returned.
- (c) Any discrepancies noted in the number or serial numbers of testing materials received from contractors shall be reported to the Department by designated institutional or school district personnel prior to the administration of the test.

(d) In the event that test materials are determined to be missing while in the possession of an institution or school district, designated institutional or school district personnel shall investigate the cause of the discrepancy and provide the Department with a report of the investigation within thirty (30) calendar days of the initiation of the investigation. At a minimum, the report shall include the nature of the situation, the time and place of occurrence, and the names of the persons involved in or witness to the occurrence. Officials from the Department are authorized to conduct additional investigations.

(e) In those cases where the responsibility for secure destruction of certain test materials is assigned by the Department to designated institutional or school district personnel, the responsible institutional or school district representative shall certify in writing that such destruction was accomplished in a secure manner.

(f) In those cases where test materials are permitted by the Department to be maintained in an institution or school district, the test materials shall be maintained in a secure manner as specified in the instructions provided by the Department. Access to the materials shall be limited to the individuals and purposes specified by the Department.

(3) In those situations where an employee of the educational institution, school district, or contractor, or an employee of the Department suspects a student of cheating on a test or suspects other violations of the provisions of this rule, a report shall be made to the Department or test support contractor, as specified in the test administration procedures, within ten (10) calendar days. The report shall include a description of the incident, the names of the persons involved in or witness to the incident, and other information as appropriate. Officials from the Department are authorized to conduct additional investigations.

(4) Violations of test security provisions shall be subject to penalties provided in statute and State Board Rules.

Specific Authority 120.53(1)(b), 228.301, 229.053(1) FS. Law Implemented 120.53(1)(b), 228.301, 229.053(2)(d), 229.57, 231.087, 231.0861, 231.17, 233.011, 239.301, 240.107, 240.117 FS. History - New 7-5-87, Amended 10-26-94.