

## Testing Q & A



### **What impact does testing have on children?**

Although testing may be stressful for some students, testing is a normal and expected way of assessing what students have learned. The purpose of state assessments required under *No Child Left Behind* is to provide an independent insight into each child's progress, as well as each school's. This information is essential for parents, schools, districts and states in their efforts to ensure that no child--regardless of race, ethnic group, gender or family income--is trapped in a consistently low-performing school.

### **Will student results be made available to parents?**

Yes. State assessments will produce reports on each student that will be given to parents.

### **Will the results of a child's tests be private?**

Absolutely. Only the parents and school receive the results of an individual child's tests. Individual student scores will not be made public. They are not a part of student achievement data on report cards issued by districts and states.

### **On what subjects are students tested and when?**

*No Child Left Behind* requires that, by the 2005-06 school year, each state must measure every child's progress in reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12. In the meantime, each state must meet the requirements of the previous law reauthorizing *ESEA* (the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*) for assessments in reading and math at three grade spans (3-5; 6-9; and 10-12). By school year 2007-2008, states must also have in place science assessments to be administered at least once during grades 3-5; grades 6-9; and grades 10-12. Further, states must ensure that districts administer tests of English proficiency--to measure oral language, reading and writing skills in English--to all limited English proficient students, as of the 2002-03 school year. Students may still undergo state assessments in other subject areas (i.e., history, geography and writing skills), if and when the state requires it. *No Child Left Behind*, however, requires assessments only in the areas of reading/language arts, math and science.

### **How is testing handled for children with disabilities? How is it handled for those with limited English proficiency?**

*No Child Left Behind* requires that all children be assessed. In order to show adequate yearly progress, schools must test at least 95 percent of the various subgroups of children, including their students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. States must provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities or limited English proficiency. For the latter, accommodations may include native-language versions of the assessment; however, in the area of reading and language arts, students who have been in U.S. schools for three consecutive years will be assessed in English. For more information on accommodations in Iowa, contact the Iowa state education agency.

**Some say that testing causes teachers to teach to the test. Is that true?**

State assessments are expected to measure how well students meet the state's academic *standards*, which define what students should know and be able to do in different subject areas at different grade levels. Under the previous reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* in 1994, states were required to develop or adopt standards in mathematics and in reading or language arts; *No Child Left Behind* requires states to do the same with science standards by 2006. Curriculum based on state standards should be taught in the classroom. If teachers cover subject matter required by the standards and teach it well, then students will master the material on which they will be tested--and probably much more. In that case, students will need no special test preparation in order to do well.

**Nevertheless, state assessments sound like they could take a lot of time and effort. What will be gained?**

The point of state assessments is to measure student learning. A key principle of quality management is the importance of measuring what is valued (e.g., production rates; costs of materials, etc.). Such measures enable an organization to identify where and how to improve operations. In the same manner, if schools and school systems are to continuously improve, they must measure growth in student achievement. After all, the core of all activity in schools and school systems is teaching and learning, and the key question is: Are the students learning?

**Do tests measure the progress of schools?**

Annual state assessments required under *No Child Left Behind* produce data on student performance at individual schools; and this information is used to gauge whether each and every school is meeting the state's standard of "adequate yearly progress." Parents can check progress made in improving student performance at their child's school by checking the annual district report card. If their school is *not* making adequate yearly progress and has been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring, *No Child Left Behind* requires that districts notify parents and offer options.

**How does testing help teachers?**

Annual testing provides teachers with a great deal of information. For example, overall poor results could indicate that the curriculum needs to be reviewed and aligned with the content upon which state standards are based; poor results could also mean that teachers need to modify their instructional methods. Another likely indicator of the same problems would be if teachers saw poor performance by their students in certain areas. Test results could also help teachers to clarify those areas in which they may need professional development. Finally, teachers gain a great deal of information about the performance of individual students that enables them to meet the particular needs of every child.

**How does testing help principals?**

Annual tests show principals exactly how much progress each teacher's students have made. They can use this information to guide decisions about program selection, curriculum arrangement, professional development for teachers and school resources they might need. Tests also show principals the strengths and weaknesses of students--in terms of the whole school, various subgroups and as individuals--and enable them to make plans that bolster strengths and address weaknesses.

### **How can parents find out if their child's school uses information gathered from testing to improve teaching and learning?**

Parents can ask the principal how their school makes decisions about teaching and learning. They can ask such questions as: Does the faculty meet regularly; review performance data; and identify weaknesses to be targeted? Do programs and curricula follow state content standards defining what students should know and be able to do in a given subject, at a given grade level? How is the school using test data to guide decisions about teaching and learning (e.g., how do those data influence professional development, tutoring, and selection of materials)? Is there a schoolwide plan that uses testing to evaluate performance, determine areas of strengths and weaknesses in instruction and respond to targeted needs of students? Have test data revealed weaknesses at the school (e.g., low math scores in the fifth and sixth grades)? What are the teachers and principal doing to assess such problems and address them? These are important questions for parents to ask about how their child's school is using testing and the data obtained from it.

### **What about the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?**

Since 1969, NAEP has been the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what American students know and can do in major academic subjects. Over the years NAEP has measured students' achievement in many subjects, including reading, mathematics, science, writing, history, civics, geography and the arts. Since 1992, the current NAEP reading assessment has been given in four different years (1992, 1994, 1998 and 2000) to a nationally representative sample of fourth-grade students. NAEP provides a wealth of data about the condition of education in the United States.

Under *No Child Left Behind*, as a condition of receiving federal funding, states are required to participate in the NAEP math and reading assessments for fourth- and eighth-grade students every two years, beginning in 2002-03. Resulting data will significantly increase information that parents--and others--can use to compare the performance of children in one state with that of children in another state. To carry it one step further, NAEP data will highlight the rigor of standards and tests for individual states: If there is a large discrepancy between children's proficiency on a state's tests and their performance on NAEP, that would suggest that the state needs to take a closer look at its standards and assessments and consider making improvements.

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