



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JACK O'CONNELL, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
(916) 319-0800

1430 N Street Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

RUTH E. GREEN, President
(916) 319-0827

June 15, 2005

The Honorable Raymond Simon
Deputy Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Deputy Secretary Simon:

In keeping with your guidance issued on May 10, 2005, we are hereby providing you with the additional information requested in Section III of your Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Addendum Worksheet. This includes information about, and a timeline for, activities to improve our assessments for the full range of students with disabilities, in particular, alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards and based on alternate achievement standards.

Technical Quality of the Alternate Assessments for Students With the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

The California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) is administered to students in California with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The CAPA Technical Report, Spring 2004 Administration, addresses the technical characteristics of the CAPA. This document is included as an attachment to this e-mail.

Criteria and Guidance for Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams Regarding Identification of Students With the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities and for Setting Appropriate Proficiency Expectations for Those Students

The state has provided IEP teams with guidance to determine if students are eligible to take the CAPA. The CAPA Participation Criteria document, which provides guidance regarding test eligibility, is available on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/documents/partcrtra.asp> and is also included as an attachment to this e-mail. IEP teams also are directed to consider each student's previous year's CAPA results when determining if the student will continue to be assessed with the CAPA.

Policies are in Place to Ensure Inclusion of All Students in the Assessment System, as Required by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001

California *Education Code* sections 60640(b) and 60851(b) require that each school district, charter school, and county office of education assesses each of its pupils in second through eighth grade, inclusive, and tenth grade. The standards-based achievement test (California Standards Tests or CSTs) are used in second through eighth grade, and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) is used in tenth grade for this purpose. Individuals with exceptional needs are included in the testing with appropriate accommodations in administration where necessary, and those individuals with exceptional needs who are unable to participate in the testing, even with accommodations, are given the CAPA. The test coordinator directions for both the CSTs and CAHSEE reinforce these requirements. IEPs may include only how students will participate in the state's assessments, not if they will participate. IEPs may specify that a student will take the general assessments with no accommodations, or with accommodations or modifications, or that a student will be assessed with the CAPA.

Training Provided to IEP Teams on State Assessment Guidelines and Policies, as Required Under IDEA and NCLB Regulations

Training on Writing Individualized Education Programs (IEP) Based on State Standards is an available self-paced Web training module to assist the learner in understanding the IDEA and the components of a performance objective. It provides information on how to write IEP goals tied to standards that are student focused and measurable. The training is designed to guide professionals through the challenge of writing IEP goals and objectives that are based on California's academic content standards including the State assessment guidelines. It provides a pre-test, post-test, and a certificate of completion. The module lists the special education teacher preparation program standards and Education Specialist Credential Program Standards that the module addresses. In 2003-04 over 5,800 individuals accessed this free online training over a nine-month period. The module will be updated soon to the new requirements of the IDEA, as amended in 2004, and the State assessment guidelines and policies as authorized under NCLB and adopted by the State Board of Education. Frequently asked questions will be developed and posted on the CDE Web site during the next year addressing issues on IEP teams and state assessment guidelines and policies, as well as related issues.

The CDE won a second State Improvement Grant (SIG) from the federal government in the amount of \$2.079 million dollars a year for three years for professional development

activities. The work of the new SIG supports improving special education services in California in numerous areas: the quality and the number of teachers and other personnel who work with students with disabilities; the coordination of services for students with disabilities; the behavioral supports available for students with disabilities; academic outcomes, especially in the area of literacy; the participation of parents and family members; and the collection and dissemination of data. The grant has a significant site-based component that will make use of an entire network of educators who have been trained through the first SIG to assist schools in implementing research-proven behavioral approaches.

The CDE has developed an alternate assessment for children with disabilities who cannot take part in general statewide assessment programs with accommodations or modifications. This test is the CAPA. The CDE provides training to IEP teams on state assessment guidelines and policies for the CAPA, as required under the IDEA and NCLB regulations, in part, through Statewide training efforts (digital versatile disc [DVD] distribution, training by DVD, training of trainers, Statewide Web based training). The CDE Web site provides information on the following:

- The set of California Academic Content Standards appropriate for students with significant cognitive disabilities
- Curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities
- Core adaptations allowable to ensure a student's optimal performance
- Participation criteria that provide assistance to IEP teams in determining how a student should participate in state assessments

Teacher Training on Instructional Interventions, Including Special Education Teachers and General Education Teachers With Subject Matter Expertise, on How to Work Together, Provide Access to the General Curriculum, and Use Data to Improve Student Achievement

The CDE worked with the Sacramento County Office of Education to provide nine live web-based trainings using the high bandwidth California Research and Education Network, (CalREN) that were distributed to 11 county offices representing the 11 California county superintendents' service regions. These trainings address English-language arts, mathematics and science curriculum. Additional topics include "Curriculum Access for Students with Disabilities," designed to provide educators with a comprehensive view of standards, assessments and standards-based IEPs. Educators

are given strategies and examples needed to understand standards-based education. They are also provided the "Formative Assessment for CAPA," a formative assessment tool developed to measure student progress on the acquisition of skills that will be measured by the CAPA.

Outreach to Parents of Students With Disabilities to Explain State Testing Policies

In order to inform parents about the need for an alternate assessment for their children who are unable to participate in Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program by taking the CSTs, the CDE developed a parent-training video to address the question, "Why provide an alternate assessment and who should participate in CAPA?" This parent training was also provided in the form of an interactive DVD. Teams of parent trainers also offered training/information sessions on a regional basis. These sessions were designed to train local representatives from the Parent Training and Information Centers and Family Empowerment Center to provide information to parents at the local level. This information is available for streaming from the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/capa.asp>

Scores of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities Incorporated Appropriately Into the State Reporting and Accountability System

Students with disabilities within the grades tested (second through eighth and tenth) currently participate in California's statewide assessment program by taking either the general assessment with or without accommodations/modifications or the alternate assessment. The vast majority of students with disabilities participate in the general assessment, but those with the most significant cognitive disabilities are eligible to participate in the CAPA.

California treats the five CAPA performance levels as equal to the five performance levels used for the CSTs and CAHSEE for summarizing local educational agency (LEA) and school performance. In other words, a score (performance level) on the alternate assessment holds the same value as a score (performance level) for the general assessments.

Consistent with federal regulations, the State gives any LEA that exceeds the one percent cap on the application of alternate standards and assessments the opportunity to request an exception. The exception is based on criteria similar to those that the United States Department of Education (ED) uses to evaluate state requests for

exception. If the State does not grant the request, it adjusts the results of the LEA by treating the appropriate number of scores as "not proficient" for accountability purposes only. This does not affect the individual student report received by parents.

Submission of All Alternate Assessments for the Department's Peer Review Process for Standards and Assessments

The CAPA will be included in the documents being submitted for the ED's peer review process. We anticipate that California's review will be scheduled during spring of 2006.

Assurances

In addition to the above steps, California hereby provides an assurance that we will complete the steps bulleted below:

- Develop and formally approve or adopt modified academic achievement descriptors.
- Build a framework, including purpose and scope of alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards, that addresses key questions and issues (e.g., portfolio or multiple choice) and is informed by stakeholder and technical advisory committee input.
- Contract for the development of valid alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards for students with disabilities who need to take a modified assessment (as well as students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, if applicable).
- Establish (with diverse stakeholder involvement) and formally approve or adopt modified achievement standards with "cut scores" that differentiate among achievement levels and are aligned with State content standards.
- Document the technical quality of the alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards.
- Demonstrate that policies are in place to ensure inclusion of all students in the assessment system, as required by the IDEA and NCLB.

To begin the complex and comprehensive process to improve our assessments for the full range of students with disabilities and address the assurances as stated above, the CDE asked the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the current contractor for the state's STAR Program, to assist us in preparing a plan for developing a new alternate assessment for students with moderate cognitive disabilities who have been assessed with the CSTs using modifications. Since these modifications change the constructs being assessed, results for these students have been included in AYP calculations as not proficient. An assessment developed for these students will provide information that schools can use in better identifying the students' academic strengths and needs and modifying instructional programs to meet those needs.

California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)

CAPA is the instrument that measures the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities and has performance levels like those produced by the STAR CSTs. CAPA began as a response to the IDEA requirements and now requires board-approved blueprints and linkage to California Academic Content Standards by grade level. As a result of this plan, CAPA will be revised as needed to meet NCLB requirements. Blueprints will be revised as necessary. No new item development, assessment reviews, or standard setting will occur for the 2006 administration. Instead, planning activities will focus on linking the standards and revising the blueprints and revising the test and item specifications, which will proceed through several reviews and revisions.

Alternate Test Based on Modified Achievement Standards

ETS will work with the CDE to recruit both special education experts and content-specific specialists to share their expertise and give advice on blueprint details for this new assessment. Further, focus groups will assess the viewpoints of parents of the children who are moderately cognitively disabled and their teachers and administrators as well as special education specialists. All this knowledge will help ensure that the final blueprints and standards are appropriate for the students, the NCLB requirements, and California's desire for high standards and appropriate measures of performance. The new assessment will address the standards currently in the STAR CSTs, but with a breadth, depth, and complexity appropriate to the target population.

Depending on availability of funding, the CDE may authorize the contractor to develop items for field-testing both for CAPA and the Alternate Test for the 2007 administration. Field-test development would require item-writing training and several reviews. Further,

the items could be formatted and placed into the CDE item bank, ready for developing stand-alone field tests in 2006 or as part of the 2007 administration. The timeline presented below is tentative and represents only the work of our current STAR contractor.

Planned Tasks

Tasks	Timeline
Create blueprints for Alternate Test	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to grade-level standards and draft blueprint (overlaps with CAPA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overall standards/strands in three content areas: ELA, Science, Math ○ Link of CAPA to grade-level standards ○ Link of Alternate Test to grade-level standards 	May – August 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss linked version with CDE, SBE liaisons 	July 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-day meeting on linking to grade-level standards (overlaps with CAPA); • Discuss purpose and scope of alternate “2%” test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recruit Assessment Review Panel members 	August 8 – 9, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summarize meeting and revise blueprints 	May 16 – May 27, 2005
	August 10 – 16, 2005
CAPA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise test specifications for CAPA 	August – September 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise item specifications for CAPA 	August – September 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss blueprints, specs with CDE, SBE liaisons 	September, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-day CAPA Assessment Review Panel (ARP) to review revised specs, sample items 	October 4 – 5, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize blueprints, specs with CDE, SBE liaisons 	October 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present revised CAPA blueprints to SBE 	November 9, 2005
Alternate Test	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft test specifications 	August – September 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft item specifications 	August – September 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss blueprints, specs with CDE, SBE liaisons 	September 2005

Tasks	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-day Alternate ARP to review blueprints, specs 	October 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise blueprints, specs, create sample items 	October – November 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three two-hour parent and community leaders dinner focus groups in northern, central, and southern California 	November 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three two-hour teacher, administrator dinner focus groups in northern, central, and southern California 	November 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share focus group findings with CDE 	November 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDE provides feedback findings 	December 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise blueprints, specs 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-day Alternate ARP meeting to review revised blueprints, specs, and sample items based on stakeholders' feedback. 	January 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise blueprints, specs 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss blueprints, specs with CDE, SBE liaisons 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present blueprints to SBE 	March 2006
Three-day CAPA Item writer workshop	April 2006
Two-day Alternate Item writer workshop	April 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAPA ARP to review CAPA items 	May 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternate item writing 	April – June 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edit and format Alternate items 	April – June 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statewide Pupil Assessment Review (SPAR) Panel of CAPA items 	June 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-day Alternate ARP to review Alternate items 	July 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare items for field testing 	August 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enter items in item bank 	August 2006

The CDE is currently preparing a Request for Submissions (RFS) for a new contract for the state's STAR Program. Provisions for continuing work on both the CAPA and the new alternate assessment will be included in the RFS that is scheduled for release during July 2005. This new contract is scheduled to begin in January 2006. Therefore, additional timelines and activities will be determined when the new contract is granted.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide meaningful accountability for our students with disabilities, while maintaining high expectations and raising their achievement levels.

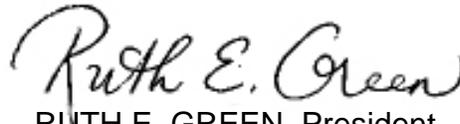
The Honorable Raymond Simon
June 15, 2005
Page 9

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns so that we may have an opportunity to work together to resolve them. You may contact Deb Sigman, Director, Standards and Assessment Division, (916) 445-9441 or by e-mail at dsigman@cde.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



JACK O'CONNELL
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



RUTH E. GREEN, President
State Board of Education

JO/RG:dr
Attachments