



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

FEB 03 2011

The Honorable Theodore R. Mitchell  
President  
California State Board of Education  
1430 N. Street, Suite 5111  
Sacramento, California 95814

The Honorable Tom Torlakson  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
California Department of Education  
P.O. Box 944272  
Sacramento, California 94244-2720

Dear President Mitchell and Superintendent Torlakson:

Thank you for submitting assessment materials for peer review under the standards and assessment requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*, as amended. We appreciate the efforts that were required to prepare for the peer review that occurred in May 2010.

The May 2010 review was the second peer review of California's alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards for grades 3 through 5 in reading/language arts and mathematics and for grade 5 in science. It was the first peer review of California's alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards for grades 6 through 8 in reading/language arts, grades 6 through 7 in mathematics and grade 8 in science. Additionally, the May 2010 review was the second review of California's general science assessment and its alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards in science (collectively, general and alternate science assessments). Based on the results of that review, and considering the feedback of outside peer reviewers, I have determined that these assessments do not yet meet all the statutory and regulatory requirements of section 1111(b)(1) and (3) of the ESEA. Specifically, I cannot approve these assessments due to the lack of adequate documentation related to the requirements for technical quality, alignment, inclusion and reporting.

The enclosed lists provide greater detail about the evidence California must submit to the Department to demonstrate full compliance for the assessments that were reviewed in May 2010. In addition, I have also enclosed detailed comments from the peer review teams that evaluated California's submissions, which I hope will help you in gathering the additional, required evidence.

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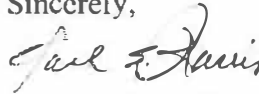
*The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*

With respect to the overall status of California's standards and assessments system, as you know, in a letter dated February 6, 2008, former Assistant Secretary Kerri Briggs notified you that, in light of certain significant issues with California's 8th grade mathematics assessment, California's standards and assessment system was designated *Approval Pending*. Until the issues with California's 8th grade mathematics assessment that were identified in Dr. Briggs' February 6, 2008 letter are resolved, California's standards and assessment system will remain designated *Approval Pending* and the condition on California's Title I, Part A grant award will continue.

I urge you to continue your work on California's general and alternate science assessments and California's alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards and to submit additional evidence regarding those assessments for peer review as soon as feasible.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues addressed in this letter further, please do not hesitate to contact Grace Ross (Grace.Ross@ed.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,



Carl Harris, Ed.D.  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
for Policy and State Technical Assistance

Enclosures

cc: Deborah V. H. Sigman

**SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT CALIFORNIA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR CALIFORNIA'S ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT BASED ON MODIFIED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS FOR GRADES 3 THROUGH 5 IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/READING AND MATHEMATICS AND GRADE 5 SCIENCE.**

**2.0 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS**

1. Documentation of an independent alignment study that demonstrates the alignment between California's grade-level academic content standards and the modified academic achievement standards.

**3.0 FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

1. Documentation of the alignment of the California Modified Assessment (CMA) with the content standards and how the cognitive load differs for the California Standards Test (CST).

**4.0 TECHNICAL QUALITY**

1. Evidence that the State has ascertained that the CMA assessments are measuring the knowledge and skills described in its academic content standards and not knowledge, skills, or other characteristics that are not specified in the academic content standards or grade-level expectations.
2. Evidence that the State has ascertained that its assessment items are tapping the intended cognitive processes and that the items and tasks are at the appropriate grade level.
3. Evidence that the State has ascertained that the scoring and reporting structures are consistent with the sub-domain structures of its academic content standards (i.e., are item interrelationships consistent with the framework from which the test arises).
4. Evidence that the State has ascertained that test and item scores are related to outside variables as intended (e.g., scores are weakly correlated, if at all, with irrelevant characteristics, such as demographics).
5. A plan and a timeline to produce a study of the intended and unintended consequences of the CMA.
6. Documentation of a process for monitoring whether accommodations decisions are consistent with instructional decisions for students with disabilities and ELL students.
7. A plan to conduct a study that shows that the accommodated scores allow for valid inferences for students with disabilities and ELL students.
8. Evidence that those accommodations that invalidate the CST will also invalidate the CMA.

**5.0 ALIGNMENT**

1. Documentation of an alignment study for the CMA tests and a plan with timelines for how gaps will be addressed.

## **6.0 INCLUSION**

1. Evidence that the accommodations for the CST and CMA are comparable.
2. Evidence that the State has monitored implementation of clear and appropriate guidelines for developing IEPs that include goals based on content standards for the grade in which a student is enrolled.
3. Evidence that the State has ensured that students who are assessed based on modified academic achievement standards have access to the curriculum, including instruction, for the grade in which the students are enrolled.

## **7.0 REPORTING**

1. Documentation that the State reports participation results for all students and for each of the required subgroups in its reports at the school and LEA.
2. Copies of the final CMA reports with school level information.

**SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT CALIFORNIA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR CALIFORNIA'S ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT BASED ON MODIFIED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS FOR GRADES 6 THROUGH 8 IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/READING AND GRADES 6 AND 7 IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE IN GRADE 8.**

**2.0 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS**

1. Documentation that the State formally approved/adopted modified academic achievement standards descriptors for grades 6-8 in English language arts, grades 6 and 7 in mathematics, and grade 8 in science.
2. Documentation that the State has ensured alignment between its grade-level academic content standards and the modified academic achievement standards for grades 6-8 in ELA, grades 6 and 7 in math, and grade 8 in science.

**3.0 FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

1. Evidence of an independent alignment study between the CMA and the content standards to show that the State's assessment system involve multiple measures, that is, measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding of challenging content.

**4.0 TECHNICAL QUALITY**

1. Evidence that the State has ascertained that the CMA assessments are measuring the knowledge and skills described in its academic content standards and not knowledge, skills, or other characteristics that are not specified in the academic content standards or grade-level expectations.
2. Evidence that the State has ascertained that its assessment items are tapping the intended cognitive processes and that the items and tasks are at the appropriate grade level.
3. Evidence that the State has ascertained that the scoring and reporting structures are consistent with the sub-domain structures of its academic content standards (i.e., are item interrelationships consistent with the framework from which the test arises).
4. Evidence that the State has ascertained that test and item scores are related to outside variables as intended (e.g., scores are weakly correlated, if at all, with irrelevant characteristics, such as demographics).
5. A plan and a timeline to produce a study of the intended and unintended consequences of the CMA.
6. Documentation of process for monitoring whether accommodations decisions are consistent with instructional decisions for students with disabilities and ELL students.
7. A plan to conduct a study that shows that the accommodated scores allow for valid inferences for students with disabilities and ELL students.
8. Evidence that those accommodations that invalidate the CST will also invalidate the CMA.

## **5.0 ALIGNMENT**

1. Evidence of an alignment study for the CMA tests and a plan with timelines for how gaps will be addressed.

## **6.0 INCLUSION**

1. Evidence that the accommodations for the CST and CMA are comparable.
2. Evidence that the State has monitored implementation of clear and appropriate guidelines for developing IEPs that include goals based on content standards for the grade in which a student is enrolled.
3. Evidence that the State has ensured that students who are assessed based on modified academic achievement standards have access to the curriculum, including instruction, for the grade in which the students are enrolled.

## **7.0 REPORTING**

1. The finalized grades 6-8 CMA reports provided for the student, class, school, district, and state level for ELA, math, and science.
2. Documentation that parents are provided with information about how student results for the CMA assessments relate to the state academic content and modified achievement standards.

## **SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT CALIFORNIA MUST SUBMIT TO MEET ESEA REQUIREMENTS FOR CALIFORNIA'S GENERAL AND ALTERNATE SCIENCE ASSESSMENTS**

### **3.0 FULL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

1. Plan and timeline to address the higher-order thinking skills noted in the alignment study for grade 10 science.

### **4.0 TECHNICAL QUALITY**

- I. Plan for the entire assessment system that includes a range of studies over time to monitor the consequential validity of the California assessment system.
2. Results of the proposed studies of LEP accommodation and literature analysis that demonstrate the accommodations provided allow for valid inferences about these students' knowledge and skills and can be combined meaningfully with scores from non-accommodated administration circumstances.
3. Evidence that the State monitors to ensure that the allowable accommodations are provided and appropriately administered and that these accommodations are used as necessary to yield accurate and reliable information about what LEP students know and can do.

### **5.0 ALIGNMENT**

1. Detailed plan with timelines to address the following deficiencies found in the CST alignment studies:
  - The Range of Knowledge (ROK) in the Investigation and Experimentation standard is weak in the grade 5, 8, and 10 science tests.
  - The Depth of Knowledge (DOK) in the Ecology and Physiology standard is weak in grade 10 science.
  - The Categorical concurrence criteria did not meet the criteria in the Chemistry of Living Systems and Investigation and Experimentation standards for grade 8 science and in the Investigation and Experimentation standard for grade 10 life science.
2. Detailed plan with timelines to address the weak ROK in Levels I, III, IV, and V found for the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) science in the alignment studies.

### **6.0 INCLUSION**

1. Evidence that the State has documented that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are, to the extent possible, included in the general curriculum.

## **7.0 REPORTING**

1. Documentation that the State reports participation results for all students and for each of the required subgroups in the school and LEA reports.