

# **Including Students with Disabilities in State and District-wide Assessment**

## **A Guide for IEP Teams**

Increasingly educators are being asked to be accountable for the learning of our nation's students. Questions are being raised as to the effectiveness of current educational programming in preparing students to be competent adults. In response to these concerns, educational reform efforts such as the Goals 2000 and Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have system accountability measures built into them including assessment of student academic progress. Many states across the country, including Utah, have also been mandated by their legislatures to develop formalized student assessment systems as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of public education. In many instances, students with disabilities have not participated in statewide assessments of academic achievement nor has there been any analysis of the performance of those students who have been included. System accountability for learner results has been limited for students with disabilities.

Until recently, special education regulations have not required states and local school districts to account for student progress, only procedural compliance with state and federal laws. In reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997, Congress addressed systems accountability for the educational progress of students with disabilities receiving special education services. The new federal law requires states to assess students with disabilities using the same measures of accountability that are used with students without disabilities. Progress of all students will be measured and reported to the public. Requirements of IDEA '97 related to inclusion of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments are as follows:

- Children with disabilities must be included in general state and district-wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations and modifications in administration if necessary.
- As appropriate, the state or local school district must develop guidelines for participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those students who cannot participate in state and districtwide assessment programs and conduct the assessments beginning no later than July 1, 2000.

As of July 1998, the IEP team for each student with disabilities is responsible for specifying how the student will participate in state and district assessments.

- IDEA '97 states that the IEP must include a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state and districtwide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the student to participate.
- If the IEP team determines that the students will not participate in a particular assessment or part of an assessment, a statement of why that assessment is not appropriate for the student and how the student will be assessed must be included in the IEP.

### Utah's Accountability System –

Utah's current accountability system includes two major testing programs that affect significant numbers of students in the state – the Stanford Achievement Test (Ninth Edition) and the Core Assessment Program. These two testing programs each have different purposes and yield different information about student performance throughout the state. Following is a brief description of each program:

- **Stanford Achievement Test.** The Stanford 9 is a commercially developed, group administered, **norm-referenced** test administered in grades 5, 8, and 11 statewide\*. The primary purpose of this program is to provide a regular check on the performance of the educational system in the state in the basic curriculum areas by comparing Utah students to a nationwide sample (i.e. the test's norm group). It is designed to be primarily a survey instrument giving a global picture of the performance of a student or school in comparison to a representative group- the norm group. Performance on these tests is not specifically tied to instruction, so a fall administration provides the needed information and does not interfere with core testing in the spring. Individual student results as well as group data are reported for this program. School district participation in this program is mandatory according to state statute.
- **Core Curriculum End-of-Level/End-of-Course Assessment.** This program uses **criterion-referenced** tests that have been developed by USOE specialists in evaluation/assessment and curriculum, Utah teachers, and other educators from Utah schools. The primary purpose of this program is to provide specific information to teachers, students, parents, and administrators about the extent to which students have mastered state Core Curriculum. Instead of being a general look at students' capabilities in a given subject, these tests are specific measures of the instruction students should have been receiving throughout the school year. The tests are administered in the spring as a measure of students'

mastery of the Core Curriculum for a given school year or course. Districts are mandated to assess student mastery of the Core Curriculum. The criterion-referenced testing program yields individual student reports as well as group data. End-of-Level Core Assessments are available in Grades 1-6, Math, Science, and Reading/Language Arts. End-of-Course Assessments are available in Grades 7-12, Math and Science, with Language Arts in development in the near future.

\* Your district may choose to test other grades on Stanford 9 and students with disabilities must be included in these administrations as well.

### **Norm-referenced Versus Criterion-referenced Tests**

Norm-referenced tests, such as the Stanford 9, are based on comparisons with a nationally representative group of students in the same grade. The meaning of the scores for norm-referenced tests is tied specifically to student performance relative to the performance of the students in the norm group under very specific testing conditions. If the testing conditions change in any administration from what they were for the norm group, the scores are no longer valid. Therefore, accommodations are limited to those that were provided to students when the test was normed.

Criterion-referenced tests, such as the end of level and end of course tests used in Core Assessment, measure performance against a specific standard (e.g. attainment or non-attainment of a specific curriculum objective), and the meaning of the scores is not tied to the performance of other students. Therefore testing conditions (accommodations) can vary without destroying the usefulness of the scores.

### **IEP Team Decision Making**

The IDEA '97 places the responsibility with the IEP team for deciding which assessments a student will take. The first decision is to determine if the student should participate in the regular assessment program (Stanford 9 and Core Assessment) or the alternate assessment. **Decision-making begins by determining the curriculum in which the student is receiving instruction.** In most instances, students with disabilities should be receiving instruction in Utah's core curriculum. Copies of the Utah Core Curriculum are available through the curriculum specialist in each school district or on the Utah State Office of Education web page. The following questions should guide the decision making process.

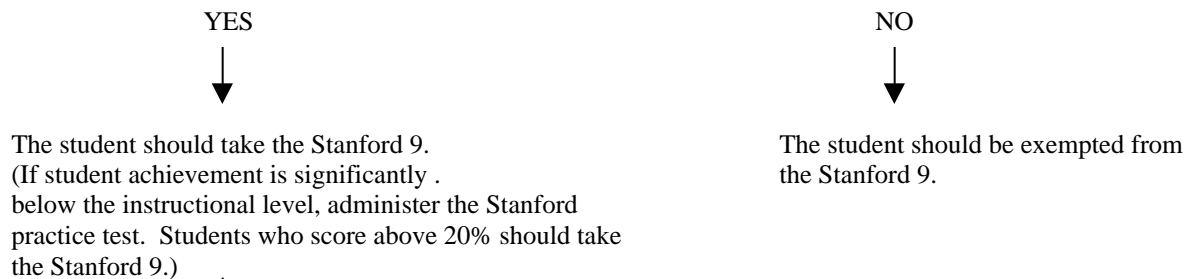
## For inclusion in state and district assessment-

Is the student receiving instruction in the Utah core curriculum/general curriculum?

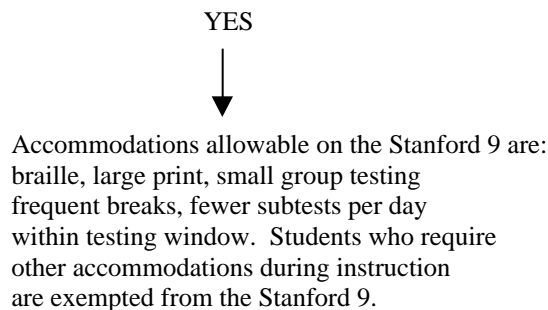


## For inclusion in the Stanford Achievement Test-

1. Is the student being **instructed**, in the core curriculum at their grade level in any or all of the content areas assessed by the Stanford 9?



2. Does the student receive **accommodations** during classroom instruction in the core curriculum?



## For inclusion in Core Curriculum Assessment-

3. Is the student being **instructed** in the core curriculum at grade level?



### **What core test should be used?**

At this time, the IEP team may not be familiar with the state's general/core curriculum making it difficult to decide which core test the student should take. The following steps will help determine which test should be administered.

1. Become familiar with the Utah Core Assessment Program by talking with the testing coordinator in your building or the district testing director.
2. Obtain a copy of the Utah Core Curriculum for the grade(s) and subject(s) you teach from the building principal or district curriculum director. The Utah Core Curriculum is also available to download and/or print from the USOE website (<http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/curr/>).
3. Look at the sample items from the Core Curriculum Assessment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition found in Appendix A of this document to match the test level with the student's instructional level.
4. Request appropriate test booklets from your building testing coordinator.
5. Clearly label test booklets of those students tested off-level for your testing coordinator.

### **Using Accommodations/Modifications With Core Assessment-**

As previously mentioned, accommodations and modifications are allowable during Core Assessment and should be the same as those used by the student during classroom instruction. **Accommodations** are strategies employed for the purpose of leveling the playing field for students with disabilities. The content of the test are not altered, the way the test is administered is altered. Accommodations should be provided for testing when they are routinely provided for the student during classroom instruction. Understanding the purpose of the test and what it is designed to measure is critical to determining which accommodations would be appropriate for the student on each part of the test. A **modification** fundamentally alters what is being tested. Providing a student with a test that is not on grade level is an example of a modification. Whatever decisions the IEP team makes regarding testing and accommodations/modifications **must** be documented on the IEP.

Accommodations generally fall into five broad categories as identified by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (1997). They are setting, presentation, timing, response, and scheduling. Examples of each follow:

### **Setting**

Administer the test in a small group.  
Provide special lighting.  
Provide adaptive furniture .  
Administer the test individually.

### **Timing**

Allow a flexible schedule.  
Tape record responses.  
Allow frequent breaks during testing.

### **Presentation**

Provide test on audiotape.  
Increase spacing between items.  
Increase size of answer bubbles.  
Highlight key words or phrases in directions.  
Provide reading passages with one complete sentence per line.

### **Reporting**

Test scores for students receiving special education services must be reported as part of the general school population (aggregated) and separately (disaggregated). This will be done automatically by USOE when the tests are scored. However, USOE is only able to disaggregate if the students are identified as receiving special education services in the school district database and on the data files from which the answer sheets are preprinted. Therefore, it is imperative that special educators let the building principal know about the testing decisions that were made for each student each year. Scores will not be disaggregated at the building or district level if student numbers for a particular test or grade level are less than 10 for any test or subtest.

Teacher report forms used for the Stanford 9 or the Core Curriculum Assessment, need to account for all students. These forms report the number of students who took the test and the number of students who did not, as well as the reason for the nonparticipation. The information from the teacher forms will be added together to form a building level report to be submitted by the building principal. The total number of tested and not tested students should add up to the building enrollment number. These data will be summed to create a district profile that will be compared to the October 1 count and the December 1 Special Education count to determine the number of students with disabilities who participated. This

### **Scheduling**

Administer the test in several sessions.  
Allow subtests to be taken in a different order.  
Administer the test at different times of the day.

### **Response**

Allow marking in the test booklet.  
Allow use of scribe.  
Enlarge answer sheet.

### **Other**

Provide manipulatives.  
Provide a dictionary.  
Student uses spell check.

information will then be reported to the public as required by the IDEA '97. Therefore it is critical that this information is gathered and submitted accurately.

### **Alternate Assessment**

The purpose of the alternate assessment is to have accountability for the learning of those students who are not being instructed in the core curriculum. It is intended for students with significant disabilities who are being instructed in a functional curriculum or for those students no longer being instructed in the core but who are focusing on preparing for adult life in community based settings. The alternate assessment is currently being developed by a group of Utah special educators and will be piloted during the 1999-2000 in selected sites. Teacher and administrator training is scheduled for spring, 2000. The alternate assessment requirement in IDEA '97 goes into affect July 1, 2000

### **Conclusion**

System accountability for the academic progress of **all** learners is an IDEA whose time has come. This new requirement places additional responsibilities on special educators and IEP teams to understand not only educational performance levels of students but also how the instructional program of each child fits into the Core Curriculum and state and district assessments. This presents a significant challenge but one that will enhance Utah's educational system as we strive to meet the needs of all students.

If you would like additional information please contact Donna Suter at (801)-538-7576 or e-mail at [dsuter@usoe.k12.ut.us](mailto:dsuter@usoe.k12.ut.us), or Hal Sanderson at (801)-538-7814 or e-mail at [hsander@usoe.k12.ut.us](mailto:hsander@usoe.k12.ut.us). If you need information regarding the braille version of the Stanford 9 please contact Gloria Skanchy at the Utah Schools for the deaf and Blind at (801)- 629-4700.