

Parent Guide to Achievement Testing

Why do we have statewide testing?

State and federal laws require districts to be accountable for the progress and achievement of all students. Under the federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements, student achievement is based on performance on statewide assessments that are aligned to standards. Teachers, parents, and students use individual results on statewide assessments to monitor each student's academic progress. Student results are merged to prepare grade level reports by subject for each school, district, county, and the state. The results are used with other information to help make decisions about ways to improve student learning and school programs. The achievement of all students as reflected on the statewide testing is reflected in the school's Academic Performance Index (API) for state accountability purposes. The federal accountability required under *No Child Left Behind* is measured as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and includes both the participation levels and achievement of students. Monitoring the progress of students with disabilities is an integral part of the accountability system.

What are the statewide assessments?

In California, the statewide assessments for students in grades 2-11 are called the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. The STAR has four components:

- **California Standards Tests (CSTs)** measure individual student progress in achieving the academic content standards. Parents receive a report that includes the percentage of questions their child answered and the performance level for their child. The performance levels are *advanced*, *proficient*, *basic*, *below basic*, and *far below basic*. The levels indicate how well students met state academic content standards for each subject area tested.
- **California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6)** is a nationally standardized test that compares student achievement with other students. Scores are reported as percent correct and national percentiles. A national percentile compares the student's results with the scores of students in the same grade who were tested at the same time of the school year.
- **California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA)** was designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Tasks are aligned to a subset of the California academic content standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics that reflect important life skills. Performance levels are designated as *advanced*, *proficient*, *basic*, *below basic*, and *far below basic*.
- **Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE)** is administered to Spanish-speaking English learners who have been enrolled in California public schools less than 12 months. It is optional for students who have been enrolled in California public schools 12 months or more. Students also take the CST and CAT/6 at the appropriate grade level. SABE scores are reported as percentiles.

In addition, the **California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)** is administered to students in 10th grade. Additional opportunities to take the CAHSEE are provided to students who do not achieve a passing score of 350 on both the English/Language Arts and Math sections. Beginning with the class of 2006, students must pass both the English/Language Arts and the Math sections of the CAHSEE to earn a high school diploma.

Why should my child take the tests? Hasn't my son or daughter been tested enough already?

Assessment information was collected to see whether your child was eligible for special education services. To continue meeting your child's needs, on-going assessment is needed. It is important that all children at the school participate in the statewide assessments to assist your child's teachers in planning classroom instruction. Results are also used at the school and district level to make adjustments to special education programs as needed to improve student achievement.

But won't my child be at a disadvantage?

Students with disabilities can be appropriately included in statewide tests. Most students with special needs can take tests under the same conditions as their non-disabled classmates. Accommodations, which change the way a test is

administered but do not alter what is being measured by the test, are provided if required for the student to access the assessment and demonstrate his or her knowledge. Accommodations include additional time, Braille, large print tests, revised test directions, the use of special equipment or aids, etc. Modifications may be required for a smaller number of students with disabilities. Modifications, such as using a calculator or word processor, change the content standard being measured by the test.

Who decides whether my child needs an accommodation or modification?

Your child's IEP team, of which you are an important member, makes the decision each year on how your child should participate in the assessments. Accommodations or modifications used in the classroom should be used in testing, if appropriate. The goal is to "level the playing field" and not give an unfair advantage. Accommodations or modifications should be based on the individual child's needs and help students with disabilities show what they can do.

How do I know my child has had the opportunity to learn the content standards?

Schools are required to provide curriculum and teacher training that are aligned to the state standards. In addition, your child's IEP team should determine what additional instruction on the standards is needed for your child. Your child's IEP should reflect the standards for special emphasis in his or her goals and program supports.

Should my child take the alternate assessment (CAPA) instead?

The CAPA is designed to measure the achievement of students with significant cognitive disabilities. Students who take the CAPA require substantial adjustments to the general curriculum, which focus on functional applications, such as basic independent living, community, and vocational skills. The IEP team should first consider if the student could participate in the statewide assessments with appropriate accommodations or modifications. The decision to participate in the CAPA should not be based on excessive or extended absences, sensory disabilities, significantly lower achievement than the student's peers, or language, cultural or economic differences.

Can the IEP team exempt my child from participating in state or districtwide assessments?

No. The role of the IEP team is to determine how your child can participate most appropriately in the assessments. Currently, California Education Code allows parents/guardians to submit a written request to the principal of the child's school if they do not want their child to take any or all parts of the STAR tests. Parents of children with disabilities must follow the regular school process to exercise this option. Parents cannot exempt their child from the CAHSEE. However, there are potentially significant consequences for your child's school if a large number of students do not participate in the assessments. You should fully discuss the accommodations and/or modifications to enable your child to participate with the other members of the IEP team.

How can I help my child do better on the statewide assessments?

The statewide assessments are based on the content standards that students are learning all through the school year. It is important for parents to make sure that students are in school every day, unless they are ill, and complete class assignments and homework on a daily basis. Parents can help their children do better on statewide assessments by encouraging them to do their best, making sure they have plenty of rest, and providing a good breakfast on testing day.

Where can I find out more about statewide assessments?

For further information contact your child's teacher, principal, or the director of special education for your district. Additional information is also available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/resource.htm>.