

Fact Sheet #2

Assessments

What does NCLB say?

Assessments and tests are necessary in order to find out whether or not students are being taught to the standards (See Fact Sheet on “Standards”). Under the previous version of the law, states only had to assess students once in elementary, middle, and high school.

Under the old system, teachers, parents and students could not judge whether students were making continuous progress toward meeting standards.

No Child Left Behind establishes new requirements for testing. Beginning in 2005-06, all schools will measure student achievement yearly in reading and math in grades 3–8, and at least once during the high school years.

Some educators complain that it is too much to test children every year. But most parents disagree. If they receive information that their fourth grader is not reading at grade level, they don’t want to wait another four years to find out whether their child has caught up!

Annual assessments allow teachers and administrators to keep better track of student progress and to intervene quickly to make changes in instruction to fix problems early on.

Although some states have implemented high stakes tests, these tests are **not** required by

NCLB. NCLB does not require that children pass any tests in order to go on to the next grade or to receive a diploma.

Why is this important?

Testing is important to a good education system because it provides information about how students are doing. The more we know, the better position we are in to fix problems when they occur.

Tests should be used to provide feedback to administrators, teachers, parents and students on the students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. This information is important for planning instruction because it highlights concepts and skills that students may need more help learning. Principals and teachers should also use this feedback to target areas where they may need additional professional development.

Since tests required by NCLB measure student progress toward meeting standards, results are generally reported in the form of the percentage of students in categories equivalent to Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Below Basic, although the terms vary by state. Information about how your state defines performance levels should be available at your school, district, or on the state department of education’s web site.

The purpose of instruction is to move students from the Below Basic and Basic categories into

the Proficient and Advanced levels. Given highly qualified teachers, challenging curriculum, extra time and lots of support, virtually all students can achieve at proficient levels. This is the whole purpose of NCLB!

What can I do?

Here are some questions you can ask to inform yourself about your state and district testing program.

- Are the tests aligned with state standards? Do they test the concepts, skills and knowledge contained in the state standards?
- Does the district have a curriculum that is aligned with the concepts, skills and knowledge required to do well on the tests?
- Do teachers receive test results on student performance in a timely fashion so that they can be used to improve instruction?
- Are test results reported to the students, parents and community in a timely fashion so that they can monitor student progress toward meeting standards?
- Are test results reported to parents and students in a way that is easy to understand?

Remember, one of the best ways to reduce test anxiety is to make sure students are well prepared with the concepts, skills and knowledge on which they will be tested.