

## Testing in California Public Schools (Part 2)

by Paul Giganti, Jr., CMC Math Festival Program  
pgiganti@berkeley.edu



Sometimes parents and guardians of students in the California public school system feel helpless in dealing with the information given through school testing in determining the future of their children. That is not the intent of the system. Teachers, administrators, and state officials want parents to be fully informed of our state testing system—the Standards Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program—and their rights within that system.

The March 2009 issue of the *ComMuniCator* (see "Testing in California Schools (Part 1)" on pages 16–18) contained the first part of this article about the STAR testing in California. This second part of the two-part article on the California STAR test provides some of the information that all parents and guardians should know about the tests, the results, and how those results are used.

### Must All Students Take the STAR Tests?

All students are required by law to take the STAR test, with the exception of students whose parents or guardians have submitted written requests to exempt them from STAR Program testing.

### How Can Parents or Guardians Excuse Their Child from the Tests in the STAR Program?

State law (Education Code Section 60615) allows a parent or guardian to excuse his or her child from the tests in the STAR Program. This request must be made in writing to the school. In addition, the request may specify:

- ✓ The test(s) from which the student is to be exempted (i.e., all or some tests);
- ✓ The length of time that the parent or guardian's request remains in effect (i.e., current year or longer).

### What Is Done to Assist Students with Disabilities?

Some students with disabilities may require testing variations, accommodations, and/or

modifications in order to be able to take the tests. These are listed in "Matrix 1: Matrix of Test Variations, Accommodations, and Modifications for Administration of California Statewide Assessments," which is available on the Student Testing web page [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/). The California Modified Assessment (CMA) does not allow for modifications since it is a modified test.

Test variations are allowed for any student who regularly uses these variations in the classroom. Accommodations and modifications must be specified in each student's individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan. The IEPs for students with significant cognitive disabilities, who are unable to take the California Standards Tests (CSTs), even with modifications, specify that they are to take the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA).

The IEPs for students with disabilities, who have been unable to demonstrate grade-level proficiency on the CSTs and other measures, may specify that the students take the CMA. Eligibility criteria, approved by the State Board of Education, are available on the STAR web page. The IEPs for these students must also identify the content area(s) to be tested with the CMA and which accommodations, if any, are to be used.

### What Is Done to Assist Students who are English Learners?

During testing, English learners may use English-to-primary language translation glossaries or word lists that are regularly used in the classroom and do not include definitions or formulas. This assistance may be provided for all subjects except English-Language Arts on the CSTs and CMAs and may not be provided in any subject on the Computer-adaptive Testing (CAT)/6 Survey. English learners may have test directions translated for them and ask clarifying questions in their primary language for all subjects tested on the CSTs, the CMAs, and the CAT/6 Survey. English learners also may be tested separately if such a setting is part of the regular classroom instruction or assessments. The variations allowed for English learners are

listed in "Matrix 2: Matrix of Test Variations for Administration of California Statewide Assessments for English Learners," which is available on the Student Testing web page.

### **When Do Parents or Guardians Get Their Child's Results?**

Student STAR Program results must be provided to parents or guardians within 20 working days after the school district has received them from the testing contractor. STAR Program reports usually are mailed by the school district to each student's home. With the exception of parents or guardians, all students' results are confidential and maintained only by the school district.

### **Can Results from the STAR Program Be Used to Determine if a Student Should Be Retained?**

A school district may use STAR Program results to help make decisions about student placement, promotion, retention, or other considerations related to student achievement. STAR test scores should never be used by themselves to make such important decisions. School districts should also consider local assessments, classroom tests, grades, and teacher recommendations in making these decisions.

### **Can Parents or Guardians See the Tests in the STAR Program?**

By law (Education Code Section 60616) the tests in the STAR Program are secure tests and cannot be seen by anyone other than the parties specified by law (i.e., school board members, legislators). This stipulation helps maintain the integrity of the tests and ensures that the rights of all students are protected. Each year, 25 percent of the test questions used in the CSTs are released and posted on the Internet for public viewing. The released questions show the content and types of questions that are included in the CST portion of the STAR Program. These released questions are available on the STAR web pages at [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/css05rtq.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/css05rtq.asp).

### **Do STAR Program Test Results Go on a Student's High School Transcript?**

Student results for tests in the STAR Program do not go on the high school transcript unless a parent or guardian signs a release or submits a written request allowing the school or school district to do so. Students, parents, or guardians may authorize the release of individual student results to colleges

or universities for the purpose of credit, placement, or admission (Education Code Section 60641).


### **How Should Schools Prepare Students for the Tests in the STAR Program?**

The best way to prepare students for the tests in the STAR Program is to provide classroom instruction and assessments that are aligned to the California content standards. Teachers are encouraged to talk with their students' parents or guardians about what the school district, school, and teachers are doing to make sure the content standards are being taught and tested.

### **Reporting STAR Program Results**

The CST and CAPA results are reported using the five performance levels (see March 2009 *ComMuniCator*, page 17). The percentages of students scoring at each performance level are reported by grade and subject for all students and for subgroups of students. The state target is to have all students score at the proficient level or above.

Parents and guardians of California students are not helpless when it comes to official state testing. However, every parent and guardian can benefit by knowing more about the STAR Program and their rights. We hope you find this information useful in your personal involvement in your child's education.

*This information is provided for Californians by our state government. For more information, and for school, school district, county, and state level results for the 2007 STAR Program, go to the California Department of Education's web site at [star.cde.ca.gov](http://star.cde.ca.gov).* 

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