

## **TAKS PRACTICE**

*TAKS Practice* is designed to provide test-taking experience and serve as both a diagnostic and a teaching tool. Assessment is crucial for reading and mathematics achievement (NCTM, 2000). By 2005-2006, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) mandated that all states give assessments measuring mathematics and reading standards in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12. Test results can diagnose a student's learning needs and identify specific areas that need improvement.

Pressure to improve test scores has increased. Headlines in newspapers or the breaking news on television are written or stated to grab the attention of the public. Nothing appears to capture public attention like the test scores of schools. As the critical issue of accountability continues to move across our nation, more students are being tested. The state assessment scores are used to measure adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all public schools. All students' scores are part of the AYP measure, including students with disabilities and limited English proficiency (NCLB, 2001).

Schools continue to be compared. Test scores appear to be the barometer that measures the success of the educational environment of a campus or that of a district. Analysis of test results provides valuable feedback to campuses and school districts (e.g., a measurement of student progress and the identification of deficit areas). Testing information helps administrators purposefully allocate resources to improve instruction and plan professional development. Test results enable teachers to adjust classroom instructional strategies, to form instructional groupings across the grade level, and plan interventions for small groups or individual students.

The need for higher quality assessments is well established. Studies show teachers spend as much as one-third to one-half of their time involved in assessment-related activities (Stiggins and Conklin, 1992). For instruction to be effective, classroom assessments must reflect quality.

Teachers have to assess subject matter accurately so accurate information can be collected about student achievement. Assessment results help make sound decisions for the purpose of improving student achievement. Most teachers are unprepared to meet the assessment challenges they face today. Licensure does not say that teachers have to show assessment competence yet much of their time is spent in assessment-related activities (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992; Trevisan, 1999). Teachers must have help in accurate assessment.

Mentoring Minds sought to develop assessment products in mathematics and reading to assist teaching and learning. An item-by-item analysis for each student is offered to maintain accurate and useful data. By using the Item Analysis Chart teachers can determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students. The chart helps identify the specific areas where students need additional practice to master skills before taking the actual TAKS. The listed TEKS on the Item Analysis Chart correlate to Motivation Math and Motivation Reading Student Edition pages and test questions. A study of the student data allows for individualization of instruction to better meet the needs of students.

*TAKS Practice* is a diagnostic assessment for levels 2-6 (2-6 for mathematics and 2-5 for reading). Reading and Mathematics Level 2 assessments are available in forms A and B. Levels 3-6 have three forms. The assessments are TAKS formatted and cover all tested TEKS for each level. *TAKS Practice* focuses on the skills students are expected to demonstrate on the TAKS test. Each order includes student assessments, teacher instructions, an Item Analysis Chart, and an Answer Key. Both content area assessments are in English and Spanish.

“Assessment plays a critical role in all aspects of teaching and learning mathematics” (NCTM, 2000). In the publication compiled from numerous writers, “What We Know About Mathematics, Teaching, and Learning,” from North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 1996) it was reported that evaluation tools which closely align with the objectives are usually more beneficial for diagnosing and revising instructional needs. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) stated, “Beginning no later than the 2005-2006 school year, each state must administer annual assessments in reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8...” Therefore, *TAKS Practice* provides teachers with diagnostic information to determine a student’s misunderstandings in reading and mathematical concepts as well as a student’s firm grasp of knowledge in the these two content areas.

Teachers must ensure that varied and repeated opportunities are provided for students to learn important content skills in the areas of reading and mathematics. Evidence from research demonstrates that a successful academic program must include time for students to practice what they are learning and experiences to perform the tasks for which they are to demonstrate competence. Often, students appear to spend more time on rote learning rather than on concept development, problem solving and higher-order thinking abilities (Boaler, 1998; Stigler and Hiebert, 1997; Wood and Sellers, 1996, 1997).

In the late 1990’s, a move toward national and state standards began. A report, issued by The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), identified skills and instructional methods pertinent to reading achievement. The five areas found essential to effective reading instruction were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension of text.

Based on these findings, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) established the Reading First program under Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). This initiative advocates that all children read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Achievement of this goal is being accomplished with high-quality reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade by focusing on the five essential components identified in research.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2000) developed national educational standards and principles for mathematics. This document, entitled, *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (2000), indicated a concern that students in the United States were not mathematically literate. In addition, the document shared that students in the United States often fail to see the relationship between mathematics learned in school and those in real-life situations.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002), the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, challenged schools to offer assessments reflecting state and/or national standards. Furthermore, the challenge included that students score

favorably and continually reach adequate yearly progress on state assessments. Therefore, there exists a critical issue to improve reading and mathematics instruction and meet the accountability outlined by the NCLB legislation.

The Mentoring Minds' Product Development Team recognizes state academic content standards and assessments play an important role in supporting instruction in the classroom. The team sought to develop assessments that align with the state standards of Texas. The resulting products, *TAKS Practice in Reading* and *TAKS Practice in Mathematics*, are designed to reflect the structure, format, rigor, and number of items that students encounter on the TAKS as outlined in the TAKS Information Booklets. The TAKS materials are available in the following products: Classroom Assessment Packs, Classroom Transparency Packs, Classroom Projection CD Packs, and Student Assessment Packs. The *TAKS Practice* products allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, provide data to show improvement in testing skills or test scores, and give a measure of student progress against established standards.

### **Bibliography for TAKS Practice**

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