

## Grade Level Testing

### Kindergarten - Grade 2

Children's growth is uneven and idiosyncratic in the primary years, and skills needed for school success are rapidly changing. Over-emphasis on academics and pencil and paper activities is inappropriate, and implications of failure in these years can be devastating.

In keeping with Divine council, it is imperative that educational experiences for the young child be developmentally appropriate. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), strongly believes that no standardized testing should occur in the primary grades, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has also called for an end to K-2 testing.

**Therefore, it is recommended by the NAD and Columbia Union that there be no standardized testing of grades K-2.**

### Grades 3-10

**It is recommended by the NAD and the Columbia Union that norm referenced, standardized testing be administered in grades 3 through 10 a minimum of every other year. (See Columbia Union Education Code 2.6.07)**

### Grades 11-12

Students in grades 11 and 12 usually take one or more standardized tests such as the PSAT, the SAT and the ACT. In addition to these tests, 12<sup>th</sup> graders may also take advanced placement tests in specific curricular areas. Student performance on these tests qualifies the student for significant academic scholarships and awards. SAT and ACT scores also play a key role in students being accepted by the college/university of their choice. Performing well on these standardized tests clearly holds the promise of more tangible and meaningful rewards for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Test publishing company assessment specialists are also of the opinion that students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades do not take norm referenced tests as seriously as students in the lower grades. In fact, informal surveys indicate that current practice in many Adventist secondary schools is to not administer the ITED tests in grades 11 and 12.

**Therefore, it is recommended by the NAD and Columbia Union that there be no norm referenced standardized testing of grades 11 and 12.**

## Uses of ITBS scores

### Appropriate Uses:

1. To determine the developmental level of each student so that teachers can adapt instructions to individual needs and abilities.
2. To diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the pupil's educational development.
3. To determine the student's readiness skills to begin instruction.
4. To provide progress reports to parents.

### Inappropriate Uses:

1. To select or exclude students for special instructional programs.
2. To determine retention, promotion or graduation.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the entire instructional program.
4. To screen children for first-time enrollment.
5. To evaluate teacher effectiveness.
6. To compare students with other students and schools with other schools to determine who is academically successful and who is not.
7. To determine the scope and sequence of the adopted curriculum.
8. To replace the teacher's judgement regarding the academic success and aptitude of students.

### Issues & Concerns:

1. Standardized test scores are only one measure of academic success.
2. There are built-in cultural biases in the test that can affect student scores.
3. Tests are designed to favor students with the ability to acquire knowledge and experiences outside the classroom.
4. Test results are not generally being utilized to plan instructional improvement.
5. There is inadequate communication of appropriate uses and limitations of scores to parents and school boards.
6. Questions arise as to whether the benefits derived from testing outweigh the time and financial investments.
7. Some students are better test takers than others. Some students excel at verbal expression, presenting projects, or through writing.
8. Test scores can be affected by many outside factors present in a student's life on the day of testing, i.e. stress, tiredness, illness, etc.

## Recommendations

### Administrators

Administrators communicate test results to three main target groups: the school staff, the school board, and the community or constituency. Communication with each group should include a presentation and analysis of the data, and recommendations as to what actions might be considered.

1. Administrators should familiarize themselves thoroughly with *The Iowa Tests Interpretive Guide For School Administrators* to facilitate presentations and analysis to the various groups.
2. Administrators should regularly in-service teachers on the proper interpretation and use of data in planning and improving instruction.

### Teachers

Teachers are the main source of communication of student progress to the parent and student. The information from the ITBS & ITED scores should be combined with other evaluation tools to accurately make a judgment of student learning. Adjustments to instructional approaches should be determined and applied from the analysis of the total assessment.

1. Teachers should familiarize themselves thoroughly with *The Iowa Tests Interpretive Guide For School Teachers and Counselors* to enhance interpretation skills.
2. Teachers will analyze tests results and adjust instruction to meet the individual needs and abilities of the students.
3. Teachers will communicate individual progress and areas of strengths and weakness to parents and students, as well as collaboratively setting goals for improvement. (See Part 6 of *Interpretive Guide*)

***All children have skills, knowledge and talents that tests cannot measure. A single test does not tell you everything about a child.***

## Purpose

*TESTS* has been developed to help identify the role of **standardized tests** in Columbia Union schools and to provide parents, teachers, and administrators with a guide for using test scores appropriately.

### Standardized Tests

There are two types of standardized tests: criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests. Due to the complicated process and the prohibitive cost to develop criterion-referenced tests to match our curriculum, the North American Division (NAD) and the Columbia Union use the norm-referenced, standardized Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) as one of several ways to measure student progress and instructional effectiveness.

The primary purpose of norm-reference, standardized testing is to provide external information, independent of a school's own assessments, that can be used to improve instruction. *Standardized tests cannot and should not replace teacher observation and classroom assessment*, instead they should provide supplementary information that contributes to decisions about learning. Rather than measuring actual knowledge, norm-referenced tests compare student performance with other students of similar grade placement and age taking the test at the same time of year. (e.g. a 65 percentile ranking means that the student scored higher than 64% of all students having taken the same test, at the same time, in the same grade, and that the student scored lower than 34% of this norm-group)

### Rationale for Fall Testing

Information derived from test scores is best used by teachers for improvement of instruction and curriculum planning. For these scores to be of the greatest value, they must be available during the first semester of the school year. In addition, testing in the fall decreases the tendency to tie student results to teacher performance.

Testing within the first month of school may compromise the quality of the test scores. Teachers need time for establishing rapport with classes. Students need time to adjust to the new classroom and surroundings. Four weeks gives sufficient time for this to be accomplished.

**Therefore, the NAD and Columbia Union recommend that ITBS testing be administered after the fourth week of school.**

**Q** What can I expect to learn about my child from the test scores?

**A** ▶Your child’s percentile (% ile) ranking or score is how he/she compares to other students in the same grade nationwide who have taken the same test at the same time of year. The percentile score is not the same as a percent score. The 50<sup>th</sup> % ile (with a 10-15 point range on each side) is to be considered as average for that test. A percentile score of 50 would indicate that the student scored higher than half of the students taking the test.

▶From these scores, you along with the teacher can evaluate your student’s strengths as well as areas that may need more attention. Remember, the teacher spends a considerable amount of time with your child. His/her observation and evaluation help complete the picture. No one test can cover the curriculum or evaluate all your child knows and has learned. Working with the teacher as a team, your child will benefit in his/her educational journey.

#### References

*Report of the North American Division Committee on Assessment*, North American Division Office of Education, Silver Spring, MD, December 2002

*Journey to Excellence, A Focus on Adventist Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, North American Division Office of Education, Silver Spring, MD, 2003

*The Iowa Tests Interpretive Guide for School Administrators, Forms A and B*, Riverside Publishing, 2003

*The Iowa Tests Interpretive Guide for Teachers and Counselors, Form A*, Riverside Publishing, 2003

Hammond, Carol H. “Are Standardized Tests Being Used Appropriately?” *The Journal of Adventist Education*, (December 2003, January 2004), 21-27

Kohn, Alfie, *The Case Against Standardized Testing*, (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 2000)

*This is Not a Test*, Southern Union Conference Office of Education, Atlanta, GA

## Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Iowa Tests of Educational Development



# The Effective use of Standardized Test Scores

## Philosophy

Adventist education seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.

To assess the degree to which students achieve these objectives, Columbia Union schools use a variety of meaningful ways to plan curriculum and improve classroom instruction.

## Rationale

Assessment plays a vital role in education. It provides an answer to the question, "What does a student know and what is that student able to do?" Measuring student achievement helps determine the:

- ▶ level of student mastery of skills
- ▶ validity of the curriculum of courses of study
- ▶ effectiveness of instructional practices
- ▶ effectiveness of schools and school systems

Because the role of assessment is so varied, no single method of measurement is sufficient. Multiple measures must be used to provide a complete picture of individual student growth. These include:

- ▶ traditional written assessments
  - a. true/false
  - b. multiple choice
  - c. essay/short answer
- ▶ standardized tests
  - a. criterion referenced
  - b. norm referenced
- ▶ performance-based assessments
  - a. demonstrations and performances
  - b. peer assessments
  - c. portfolios
  - d. products
  - e. rubrics
  - f. self-assessments
  - g. simulations
  - h. student-led conferences

## *As a parent, I have a Few Questions. . .*

**Q** *Why is more frequent testing (fall and spring) not recommended?*

**A** Additional testing is hard to justify, considering the limited benefits and the time and cost involved. Over-exposure to the tests can lead to invalid results if students become too familiar with the tests. Greater emphasis on testing can result in too much emphasis on test scores with all their limitations.

**Q** *Why is testing not recommended in the lower grades?*

**A** Young children grow and develop at vastly different rates, as evidenced by growth rates, mastery of skills such as talking and riding a bike. Children need time to develop the small muscle skills as well as the abstract thinking skills that are emphasized in standardized tests. Studies confirm that "burn-out" in middle grades can be traced many times to too much emphasis on academics too soon.

**Q** *I hear a lot about "teaching to the test", what's wrong with that?*

**A** Standardized tests, due to their paper and pencil format, are able to assess only a small part of the total curriculum. Teaching to the test seriously limits student learning to a small portion of what is considered a complete education.

**Q** *How can I help my child do better on tests?*

**A**

- ▶ Read, read, read to your child throughout the year.
- ▶ Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep.
- ▶ Make sure your child eats a good breakfast. (Yes, this can affect scores!)
- ▶ Discuss with your child the importance of doing his/her best without being too anxious or putting undue stress on your child.
- ▶ Assure your child that this is only a "snapshot" of his/her ability.
- ▶ Don't judge your child on the basis of one test score.

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