

TEST ADMINISTRATION, COSTS AND DATA MANAGEMENT

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This session focused on a number of questions pertinent to writing assessment including: How is a writing test developed? What should the test look like? How are the tests rated? How are data collected and managed? What is the cost factor? While all of these questions were discussed, the following survey of responses was given by the workshop leader as a result of experience gained from the New York State Competency Test in Writing.

How is a writing test developed? The development of New York State's competency test in writing, which is a part of the secondary school graduation requirement, was made easier because of the State's 100-year history of Regents examinations. That experience told us that certain components are essential: the involvement of all those who will use the test in its development, even if only representatively; (perhaps accomplished by a committee or advisory panel, which should have input into the format of the test, its content, and its evaluation); all test items should be pretested in order to ascertain their soundness and the ability of students to accomplish the tasks.

What should the test look like? More than one writing sample in several discourse modes is preferable, even if the test includes a combination of objective tests and an essay.

How are tests rated? The literature on evaluation strongly suggests that papers can be reliably and efficiently rated through holistic scoring. Such a system minimally requires the development of a rating rubric, intensive training of raters, practice rating sessions, a score resolution procedure, a monitoring system, and opportunities for retraining when necessary. The cost of such a process must be assessed at the start.

New York State embarked on a massive training of raters prior to the first test administration. The State employs 30 raters three times a year, who work on a per diem basis; their primary responsibility is to reread papers which were rated initially at the local level. Each rater rates 200 papers per day during the rating period. This past year, the Department rated 125,000 papers in January, 48,000 in June, and 10,000 in August.

How are data collected and managed? Data collection and management are particularly important when writing samples are taken. In New York State each test is identified by number and a tracing system allows access to that paper any time during the process. Data are collected which can generate whatever information is needed, including performance on one task compared to another; one performance compared to another, group performance or individual performance.

We have found the most important factor in keeping

track of and filing the test material to be the use of the Basic Educational Data Systems (BEDS) code. This is a system of identification using a series of twelve digit numbers for every school in the state. Our first step in preparing for the test is to label a 5 x 8 card for each high school in the state and to file those cards in BEDS code order. The labels are printed with the school's BEDS code, name, address, and phone number. Schools are instructed to return their test material in envelopes with the student identification sheets in one envelope and student answer papers in another. When we receive the envelopes, which have the same identification labels as the 5 x 8 cards, we log them in by pulling the school's card from the BEDS file, stamping the date, noting it "Received," and filing the card in BEDS code order in the "Schools Received" file. The test material is then processed as follows: the papers are collated where necessary and the answers recorded on a separate score sheet identified with the school name and code. The test materials are then given to the raters who record their scores on the score sheet.

When the rating process is completed for each school, the identification sheets are marked pass or fail and prepared for shipment to the computer center. The identification sheet envelopes are packed in BEDS Code order in a pre-numbered box; the number of the box and the date shipped are noted on a tally sheet as well as the total number of identification sheets shipped per box. The score sheets are filed in BEDS code order in open boxes for easy access, and each school's card is pulled from the "Schools Received" file, stamped again with the date and the notation "CC" (for computer center) and mailing box number. The envelopes containing the answer papers are filed in BEDS code order.

When the identification sheets are returned by the computer center with the printed report for each school, the School Score Report is proofread using the score sheet and the Student Identification sheets. The SSR's are then mailed to the schools. The cards for each school are pulled from the "CC" file, stamped with the date, and marked "Mailed." They are then filed in the "SSR Mailed" file where they remain. Our two copies of the School Score Report are then filed in BEDS code order in open boxes for easy reference.

As you can see from the above, everything is filed using the 12 digit BEDS number. If for some reason, a school does not use the State Education Department's supplied labels, the code can be found on a master list alphabetized by school name. The 5 x 8 cards have the complete record of processing for each school, and a school's test materials or progress can be checked at any stage by referring to the card.

Cost. Specific questions relating to the cost of assessments were discussed. Participants agreed that strong administrative commitment for assessments is crucial to their success—including financial support.