

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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DATE: May 11, 2004

TO: Members, State Board of Education

FROM: Deborah Franklin, Education Policy Consultant

SUBJECT: Written Comments on the Proposed Performance Standards (Levels) for the Grade 5 California Standards Test in Science (Item 7)

Background

At the March 2004 meeting, the State Board directed that staff schedule three regional public hearings on the proposed performance standard (levels) for the Grade 5 California Standards Test in Science. Two of the regional hearings were held in April and a report on those hearings was included in the agenda materials. The final regional hearing will be held during the May 2004 State Board of Education meeting under Item 7.

In the announcement for the regional public hearings, interested members of the public were encouraged to send written comments regarding the performance standards. A mailing address and an email address were included on the announcement to facilitate receipt of written comments.

Report on Written Comments

State Board staff and CDE Assessment staff received six e-mail messages and one letter from members of the public. Three of the email messages did not include comments specific to the proposed performance standards. The comments were about testing and science instruction in general. One email message stated that the proposed performance standard for proficient was too low, but offered no alternative. The other two email messages also stated that the proposed performance standard for proficient was too low and suggested a specific percent correct for setting the proficient standard. One suggestion was at least 75 percent correct, and the other suggestion was 80 percent correct.

The letter raised issues related to the number of performance levels, the weighting of assessments in the API, and the reliability and validity of cut scores in the lowest ranges of the test. The letter also stated that the proposed performance standard of 17 correct (raw score) out of 60 items for below basic was too low and should be raised to at least 20 correct (raw score) out of 60 items.

Board Staff Recommendation

The test contractor, ETS, reports that the California Standards Tests (CSTs) were developed to measure the California Content Standards, and they meet professional standards for validity and reliability. The item development and review process for the CSTs is extensive, and each CST is rigorously reviewed by the subject matter experts who serve on the Content Review Panels. The

lower standard errors of measurement at the Basic and Proficient levels are appropriate given the purposes of the CSTs.

Board staff recommends adoption of the performance standards for the Grade 5 California Standards Test in Science as proposed by Superintendent O'Connell and presented in the agenda materials. The proposed performance standards are both challenging and psychometrically sound.

The CSTs have been developed to measure the California Content Standards and they meet professional standards for validity and reliability. The item development and review process for the CSTs is extensive, and each CST is rigorously reviewed by the subject matter experts who serve on the Content Review Panels. The standard errors of measurement at the various performance level cut points for the 2003 CSTs are published in the 2003 STAR Post Test Guide, and consistently indicate slightly more accurate measurement at the Basic and Proficient cut points than at the Below Basic and Advanced cut points. This is appropriate given the primary purpose of the CSTs. It is certainly possible to include proportionally greater numbers of easier items in the CSTs to improve measurement accuracy at the lower score range. However, this would come at the cost of longer testing times or decreased measurement accuracy at other score levels. In the end, the kind of individualized diagnosis that would be needed to accurately pinpoint individual student weaknesses at the lower end of the achievement range is not possible with either the CSTs or an NRT. To truly measure and track the skills of lower performing students, more diagnostic and individualized assessment tools must be used.