

Comments to Senate Committee on Education
Electronic Assessment Delivery
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October 4, 2006

PROS

When online assessment works, students seem to like it and it engages their attention. I have never seen a student actually taking a state assessment online with his/her head down and eyes closed.

Computerized test administration eliminates large amounts of paper and the time and effort associated with moving it around and accounting for it. The elimination of test booklets that can be lost or stolen makes testing more secure. The elimination of answer documents that can be lost, misplaced or misread by the computer improves the completeness results and accuracy of student scores.

The eventual adoption of computer adaptive testing techniques should reduce testing time significantly. I understand that computer adaptive techniques are planned for the online version of RPTE II. I'm looking forward to expanded use of this technology to reduce testing time and regain time for instruction.

In a similar vein, the eventual adoption of online computer scoring of essays and short answer responses will reduce the time required to return scores for complex types of questions. This is not futuristic technology; it exists now and should become part of how we do assessment in Texas.

Immediate feedback of results is an important benefit of online assessment. I saw teachers really excited during an early pilot of an online TAKS test that included them being able to download a report of their students' scores within a few minutes of completing the testing.

CONS

When online assessment doesn't work, it can be very frustrating and disheartening to both students and staff. The December, 2005 experience with the online exit retest has been hard to overcome with both students and staff. I saw students become despondent after repeated efforts to log in and begin testing were unsuccessful.

Computerized assessment introduces new workloads for technology staff, campus assessment coordinators and teachers, who must learn to use the technology for administering and managing online tests. For campus assessment coordinators especially, this comes on top of all the other requirements for managing an ever-expanding and increasingly complex state assessment program.

The client-server approach currently used for computerized state assessment presents problems for large-scale implementation. It seems as if the current system was designed on the assumption that the tests would be given on desktop computers in fixed computer labs where adults control the computers. In an environment where students are issued their own laptop computers, which they take from class to class and from school to home, it is extremely difficult for staff to insure that each computer has the latest version of the client software loaded and that all settings are in compliance with the requirements of the client.

The advantages to be gained from virtually instantaneous feedback to students and reporting of scores to teachers are currently lost because of the post-equating used to align online and paper-pencil versions of the assessment.

Presenting paper-and-pencil assessments via computer merely changes the format of the assessments. It does not take advantage of the power of the computer to reduce testing time and increase the precision of the assessment. We should be going beyond mere format change, toward a true technological transformation of our state assessment programs.