

THE TRANSITION TO FALL TESTING
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

▪ **Have testing dates been set yet? Yes.**

Our testing “midpoint” for fall norms is October 22nd. This means testing must be completed in the window of time encompassed by the two weeks before October 22nd and/or the two weeks after October 22nd.

▪ **Will we have to buy new student booklets and/or answer documents for each grade?**

For grades 3 – 8 you will use the same student booklets and answer documents. Remember, 1st and 2nd grade student booklets are consumables and must be purchased new each year.

▪ **Will our test scores drop?**

Obviously there are no guarantees, but most likely the answer is “no”. We will be using a different “norming” group that was based on a comparison of students testing in the fall. Simply put, this means students do not have to get as many items correct to score the same as they would in the spring. For example; at the 3rd grade level, to achieve a score in the 50th percentile in Reading Comprehension in the spring the student must answer twenty-two questions correct. Using fall norms, students achieve a score at the 50th percentile by getting only seventeen correct. Here are some additional examples:

Fall and Spring Norms-ITBS
Raw Score Required to Attain the 50th%tile

Grade Level/ Subtest	Fall 50% Raw Score	Spring 50% Raw Score
Grade 3		
Reading Comprehension	17	22
Vocabulary	14	19
Math Concepts	16	20
Grade 5		
Vocabulary	17	22
Reading Comp.	23	27
Math Concepts	20	24
Grade 8		
Vocabulary	25	28
Reading Comp.	31	33
Math Concepts	29	32

We switched from 2000 norms to 2005 norms with the new testing cycle which began spring of 2008.

▪ **Should we test in the Spring and the Fall when we make the transition?**

While you are not mandated to test in both the spring and the fall, it is highly recommended. If you choose not to test in spring, you will not have student achievement scores on your students for over one academic year. Your scores will arrive in November, after the fall testing. Due to the fact that the CogAT is only given in odd numbered grades, some students will not have ability scores for a period of over three years. The Testing Committee strongly recommends testing in the spring and the fall of your transition year in order to keep student achievement and ability scores as current as possible.

▪ **What Test Levels will we be using?**

Grade	ITBS/	CogAT Level	Academic Time Frame - Year/Month
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K Option	Level 5	K.1 - 1.5
1 st	Level 6 CogAT 1	K.7 - 1.9
2 nd	Level 7	1.7 - 2.3
3 rd	Level 9 CogAT A	
4 th	Level 10	
5 th	Level 11 CogAT C	
6 th	Level 12	
7 th	Level 13 CogAT E	
8 th	Level 14	

▪ **If we test in Spring and Fall, what will be our additional monetary costs?**

For schools that operate on a fiscal year beginning July 1, there would be no effect on the school’s annual budget to test in spring and fall. You are not actually purchasing additional materials. The timing of when you pay for them will need to be adjusted in the school’s plans.

▪ **How do I market Fall testing to parents?**

Inform yourself, your staff, and your parents as soon as possible. (If you have not attended one of the informational seminars given by our Riverside Publishing representative Will Gray at the LEC, be sure to do so.)

First, we need to inform parents that the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was originally designed to be administered in the fall. It was only after the implementation of Title I and the marriage of federal funding to test results, that public schools were more or less forced to convert to spring testing. The unintended result has since become known as “high stakes” testing and is not as effective at assessing student achievement.

Second, we need to educate parents that it is no longer possible for private schools to accurately compare their standardized achievement scores with those of the public schools. Comparing ITBS scores to the public school’s CAT6, is like comparing apples to oranges. While the ITBS and CAT6 are both standardized achievement assessments, they are different in both design and purpose.

Third, fall testing allows teachers the best opportunity to diagnose student’s strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles, and in turn, apply this information to adjust instructional methods and curriculum. As the educational community continues to move closer to a differentiated learning model, Fall assessment will become vitally important.

Educate your parents about this information through informational handouts, weekly/monthly school newsletters, parent/teacher conferences, parent nights, Back to School nights, PTF Meetings, etc.

▪ **What if I do not want to switch to fall testing?**

To remain/become a member of the PSD testing consortium, your school will need to adopt a fall cycle of testing. If your school decides to opt out of the PSD testing consortium and remain with spring testing, you will not have the benefit of reduced pricing or special packaging of materials. You can continue to use the ITBS but will have to make arrangements with Riverside Publishing on an individual basis.

▪ **What about using the fall testing scores as a marketing tool for my school?**

A standardized test score is a valid and reliable tool indicating student academic growth and school performance in a comparison between students nationally and students in your school. When and how these

scores are released to the public is entirely up to the administration of your school. It does not make them any less valid that the test was taken in fall as opposed to spring.

- **If we give placement tests to our students at the beginning of the year, why should we test with the ITBS in the fall?**

It is important to understand the differences in critierion-referenced assessments and norm referenced assessments. Assessments given by classroom teachers at the beginning of the year for group placement or to determine where to begin with instruction in certain areas of the curriculum are criterion-referenced assessments. These compare the child's current abilities to the established curriculum and adopted texts of each individual school. This type of assessment involves comparing students' scores with a subjective standard of performance rather than with the performance of a norming group, i.e. ITBS. Deciding whether a student has mastered a skill or demonstrated minimum acceptable performance for a particular school involves a criterion-referenced interpretation usually using percent-correct scores. The tests on the ITBS were not developed primarily for criterion-reference purposes. Although the ITBS can be used in this way, before doing so, a school must painstakingly establish some performance standards or (criterion levels) against which comparison can be made. For example, based on your curriculum, you need to decide how many math estimation questions students need to answer correctly before you regard their performance as acceptable. This is not an easy task and most school will find that it is easier to use their own placement tests self-designed or designed by a textbook publisher. The ITBS was designed to provide for norm-referenced - comparing a student's score with the scores other students obtained on the same test. How much a student knows is inferred form the student's standing or rank within the reference group.

- **What is best practice in effectively using the test scores?**

Classroom teachers should use the Riverside Publishing web site to access the Interactive Abilities Index Profile System to link this assessment to classroom instruction. This score is found on the student report. Characteristics of the student and instructional suggestions are given to help teachers plan effective educational practices. Strengths and weaknesses are both discussed in the instructional suggestions. Parents can also access this to help understand their student's abilities. To utilize this tool, visit www.CogAT.com. Click Benefits, then Ability Profile System. Input the stanine and profile letters or numbers and then input strengths and weakness, if applicable. Finally click on search and the child's profile will appear. Teachers will find an incredible resource in interpreting student strengths and weaknesses by downloading "A Short Guide for Teachers" on the CogAT website.

We also strongly recommend the use of the iRM. This is a highly effective tool that can be utilized to collect student achievement data. Will Gray has held many webinars on using the iRM effectively. He can be contacted directly to schedule training for individual schools. Please email him at will.gray@harcourt.com.

- **Appropriate Purposes**

At all test levels, the ITBS has been designed to fulfill three main purposes: (1) to obtain information that can support instructional decisions made by teachers in the classroom, (2) to provide information to students and their parents for monitoring the student's growth from grade to grade, and (3) to examine the yearly progress of grade groups as they pass through the school's curriculum.

- **Inappropriate Uses**

The press, media, and professional literature have furnished countless examples of how results from standardized achievement tests have been used in inappropriate ways. Many of the common misuses stem from depending on the scores from a single test or test battery to make an important decision about a student or a class of students. Those who try to make interpretations of test scores should be made aware of the intended uses of the scores, the limitations of the scores, and the most common misunderstandings about them. The following are some inappropriate uses of the results from batteries like the ITBS.

1. Using scores from a single test or battery to select students for special instructional programs.
2. Using scores from a single test or battery to decide whether to retain a student at a certain grade level.
3. Using only the scores from a single achievement test or battery to evaluate the effectiveness of the entire instructional program.
4. Using only the scores from a single achievement battery or test to screen children for first-time school enrollment.
5. Using the scores from a single achievement battery or test to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction of a certain teacher.
6. Using only the scores from a single test or battery to identify the “best” schools in a region or state.
7. Using the questions on a certain test to decide which particular pieces of knowledge should be taught at a certain grade level.