

Changes to the State's Assessment System

Report to the Legislature



Randy I. Dorn
State Superintendent of
Public Instruction

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Changes to the State's Assessment System

As directed by Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5414

Prepared by
Joseph L. Willhoft, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent
Assessment and Student Information

Assessment and Student Information
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Joseph L. Willhoft, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent

Randy I. Dorn
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Ken Kanikeberg
Chief of Staff

Alan Burke, Ed.D.
Deputy Superintendent, K-12 Education

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Progress has been made in the area of formative assessments. Section 1 of ESSB 5414, in part, requires that the state Superintendent, “in consultation with the State Board of Education, shall begin design and development of an overall assessment system that meets the principles and characteristics described in this section.” Those principles and characteristics include “instructionally supportive formative assessments.”	
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Section 2 of ESSB 5414 requires the Superintendent to review legislatively approved alternatives, provide an analysis of the appeals, review process, and make recommendations regarding the alternate assessment system. This section of this report provides:	
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Executive Summary

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5414 (ESSB 5414), passed during the 2009 legislative session, includes the reporting requirements listed below. This document is divided into three parts: each part addressing the required reporting areas in order.

“By December 1, 2009, the Superintendent shall report to the Legislature regarding the changes, including a cost analysis of the changes” pertaining to redesigning the state’s accountability tests;

“Beginning December 1, 2009, and annually thereafter, the Superintendent and State Board shall jointly report to the Legislature regarding the assessment system, including a cost analysis of any changes and costs to expand availability and use of instructionally supportive formative assessments”; and

“By December 1, 2009, the Superintendent shall make recommendations to the Legislature for improvements” related to the state’s alternative assessments, appeals for high school assessments, and the alternate portfolio assessment for students who are severely cognitively impaired.”

Part I describes the changes being implemented with the 2010 assessments, consistent with the legislative direction to “[r]evise the number of open-ended questions and extended responses in the statewide achievement assessment in Grades 3 through 8 and 10 to reduce the cost and time of administering the assessment while retaining validity and reliability of the assessment and retaining assessment of critical thinking skills.” The Superintendent has accomplished this task by reducing to no more than 25 percent the proportion of points on the reading, mathematics, and science tests that are from open-ended, constructed-response items. Part I provides details of the quality control strategies being employed to assure continued reliability and validity of the assessments. A cost analysis is also provided, demonstrating a savings across the biennium of almost \$11 million, representing a reduction in assessment costs of more than 14 percent.

Part II provides an update of activities with instructionally supportive formative assessments. The Superintendent has established a department of Classroom Assessment Integration, and has staffed it with director-level leadership. Staff members have also collaborated with the Department of Early Learning to establish a position in the agency for the development of an early kindergarten assessment. A technical advisory committee has been established and has met to help guide the agency’s efforts on formative assessment. The first assessments are scheduled for release to schools and districts in the upcoming fall. These will first be targeted at providing instructionally supportive assessments aligned to the new third through eighth grade mathematics testing.

Part III discusses three topics pertaining to non-standard assessments:

- Details of the impact of the legislatively approved options available for students to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement;
- An analysis of the feasibility of authorizing appeals at the local level; and
- A summary of the findings and recommendations of a work group convened to develop recommendations to improve or alter the state’s alternate assessment, the Washington Alternate Assessment System Portfolio (WAAS-Portfolio).

The legislatively approved alternatives have been in place for three years, with the Class of 2008 being the first class affected by them. The Class of 2009 represents the second graduating class that has had access to these options and we have now had enough experience with the options to begin to see some trends. The report displays the number of students who used each option for reading, writing, mathematics, and provides a cost summary of the more resource-intensive options.

At the time that the legislatively approved options were enacted, the Superintendent was authorized to establish rules governing waivers for students who do not meet standard due to “special, unavoidable circumstances.” During 2007-2008, the Superintendent developed rules for a “Special, Unavoidable Circumstances Appeal,” which includes an application process, eligibility criteria, and a process to be followed by an appeals board. ESSB 5414 requested an analysis of the feasibility of these appeals decisions being made at the local level. The Certificate of Academic Achievement Options Technical Advisory Committee, (CAA Options TAC), was presented with the history and current procedures of the appeals process and asked to provide recommendations. The CAA Options TAC recommended the appeals continue to be heard at the state level. The primary rationale for this was concerns about equal application of the appeals criteria, which would raise significant fairness and equity concerns.

During the last legislative session, the Superintendent, in collaboration with the Washington Education Association, formed a WAAS-Portfolio Work Group, charged with reviewing the state’s assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities, and recommending improvements and/or changes to the assessment. The Work Group convened over the late spring and summer and submitted a report to the Superintendent with ten recommendations. Chief among the recommendations is that a legislatively approved alternative to the WAAS-Portfolio should be authorized in a parallel fashion to what is available for students in the general education program. Currently, any student with a severe cognitive disability will not be able to receive a high school diploma if he/she does not meet standard in reading and writing on the WAAS-Portfolio. Although the performance standard on the WAAS-Portfolio is less rigorous than the WASL, the assessment requirement is more stringent for these students. A second recommendation, also of critical importance, is a request that the agency develop a clear definition of the population for whom the WAAS-Portfolio is intended.

Part I: Changes to the Summative Reading, Mathematics and Science Tests

Summary of Changes to Test Design

Substantial changes have been incorporated into the reading, mathematics, and science tests for 2010, consistent with the ESSB 5414 requirement to:

“Revise the number of open-ended questions and extended responses in the statewide achievement assessment in Grades 3 through 8 and ten to reduce the cost and time of administering the assessment while retaining validity and reliability of the assessment and retaining assessment of critical thinking skills. By December 1, 2009, the Superintendent shall report to the Legislature regarding the changes, including a cost analysis of the changes.”

Before providing details about the particulars of reducing the number of open-ended items, the cost savings that have been realized, and the effect on the reliability and validity of the assessment, an overall review of the changes is presented below.

What follows are a series of eight tables, providing an overview, in order, of the Grades 3 through 8 “Measurements of Student Progress” (MSP) in reading; the Grades 3 through 8 MSP in mathematics; the Grades 3, 5, and 8 MSP in science; the “High School Proficiency Exams” (HSPE) in reading; the HSPE in mathematics; the HSPE in science; and the MSP and HSPE in writing for Grades 4, 7, and high school.

Table 1a: Grades 3-8 MSP Reading

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Reading MSP aligned to current reading content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments
Reduced Testing Time	Gr 3-5: Single testing session; about 75 min. Gr 6-8: Single testing session; about 90 min.
Shorter Passages	Passages have word count of about 100 words/grade level
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
New Item Types	Introduction of 1-point "Completion" items in 2011 Introduction of "Stand Alone" multiple-choice items in 2011
Later Test Window	5-week window for online Gr 6-8 Reading MSP (May 3-June 4) 2 1/2 week window for paper/pencil Reading MSP (May 12-28) Student score reports to districts Aug 16

Table 1b: Grades 3-8 MSP Mathematics

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Math MSP aligned to new (2008) math content standards New cut scores and scales established by State Board in Summer 2010
Reduced Testing Time	Gr 3-5: Single testing session; about 75 min. Gr 6-8: Single testing session; about 90 min.
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
New Item Types	Introduction of 1-point "Completion" items in 2010
Later Test Window	5-week window for online Gr 6-8 Math MSP (May 3-June 4) 2-1/2 week window for paper/pencil Math MSP (May 12-28) 2010 score reports delayed due to standard setting

Table 1c: Grades 5 and 8 MSP Science

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Science MSP aligned to old (2008) content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments 2011 Science MSP will align to new (2009) content standards
Reduced Testing Time	Gr 5: Single testing session; about 75 min. Gr 8: Single testing session; about 90 min.
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
New Item Types	Introduction of 1-point "Completion" items in 2011
Later Test Window	2-1/2 week window for paper/pencil Science MSP (May 12-28) Student score reports to districts Aug 16

The MSP for reading (Table 1a) is designed to assess Washington’s academic content standards for reading, that is, the same content standards as the WASL. The scores on the MSP for reading will have the same meaning and characteristics as the WASL (e.g., a score of 400 will be needed to meet standard; the Basic scores will range from 375 to 399, etc.) However, the MSP will have design features that are substantially different from the WASL. Namely, the overall testing time will be substantially reduced, with recommended testing times of 75 minutes for Grades 3 through 5 and 90 minutes for Grades 6 through 8. The reading passages will be shorter; the tests will have fewer constructed response items, with no four-point “extended response” items, and with no more than 25 percent of the total points coming from two-point “short answer” items. Two new item types will be added in 2011 – one-point completion items that require a single-word or short phrase response and multiple-choice stand-alone items that are not associated with a reading passage. The elimination of four-point items and the reduction in the number of two-point items shortens the amount of time needed to score the tests. This shorter turnaround time permits a later testing window, with the same return date for results – an option overwhelmingly supported by the schools and districts as opposed to the same testing window with earlier results.

The MSP for mathematics (Table 1b) is designed to assess students’ knowledge and skills against the state’s new academic content standards for mathematics in Grades 3 through 8, which were first released in April 2008. These will be the first tests to assess those standards. The cut scores for performance levels on the tests will be established in August 2010 by the State Board of Education (SBE). Like the MSP for reading, the math MSP is shorter and takes less time to administer than the WASL. There are no four-point items on the math MSP but the new completion items will appear in the 2010 tests.

The MSP for science in Grades 5 and 8 (Table 1c) is designed to assess the same science academic content standards as the science WASL for Grades 5 and 8. The state’s new science standards will be assessed in Grades 5 and 8 with a new assessment in spring 2011. Similar to the reading and mathematics MSPs, the science MSP is shorter and takes less time to administer than the WASL. There are no four-point items; completion items will first appear with the tests aligned to the new standards in 2011.

Table 2a: High School HSPE Reading

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Reading HSPE aligned to current reading content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments
Reduced Testing Time	Total testing time of about 120 min. May be given in one or two sessions (single-day testing)
Shorter Passages	Passages have word count of about 1,000 words
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
New Item Types	Introduction of 1-point "Completion" items in 2011 Introduction of "Stand Alone" multiple-choice items in 2011
Test Window	Reading HSPE given as paper/pencil test on March 16 No 9th grade testing Student scores before June 10 (Seniors before earliest graduation)

Table 2b: High School HSPE Mathematics

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Math HSPE aligned to old math content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments End-of-Course tests begin in 2011; will be aligned to new content stds
Reduced Testing Time	Total testing time of about 120 min. May be given in one or two sessions (single-day testing)
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
Test Window	Math HSPE given as paper/pencil test on April 13 No 9th grade testing Student scores before June 10 (Seniors before earliest graduation)

Table 2c: High School HSPE Science

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 and 2011 Science HSPE aligned to old science content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments 2012 Science HSPE will align to new standards
Reduced Testing Time	Total testing time of about 120 min. May be given in one or two sessions (single-day testing)
Fewer Constructed Response Items	No 4-point constructed response items Limit of 25% of points from 2-pt items
Test Window	Science HSPE given as paper/pencil test on April 15 No 9th grade testing Scores reports to districts Aug 16

The HSPE in reading, mathematics, and science (Tables 2a, 2b and 2c, respectively) assess the state's academic content standards in those content areas, which are the same as assessed on the WASL. As such, the scales and scores will have the same meaning on the HSPE as on the WASL. The state's new mathematics standards will be assessed using end-of-course exams

beginning in spring 2011 and the state’s new science standards will first be assessed in high school in 2012. As with the MSP in reading, mathematics, and science, the HSPE for those content areas will be shorter and take less time to administer than the WASL. They also will not use four-point items and will have fewer two-point items than before. The test windows will remain the same for the HSPE as for the WASL in order to still accommodate the early return of results – results for seniors on the reading, writing, and mathematics HSPE will be transmitted to districts on June 1, 2010, and student score reports for HSPE in Grades 10 through 12 will be in districts before June 10. Because the science assessment is not yet a graduation requirement for students currently in high school, the scores on those tests will be reported later in the summer.

Table 3a: Grades 4 and 7 MSP Writing

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Writing MSP aligned to current content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments
Test Length Unchanged	Gr 4 and 7: Two Writing Sessions; about 120 min. each
Later Test Window	2-1/2 week window for paper/pencil Writing MSP (May 12-28) Student score reports to districts Aug. 16
Online testing	Gr. 7 online testing researched in 2009-10 Voluntary online testing in Gr. 7 in 2011

Table 3b: High School HSPE Writing

Alignment to Content Standards	2010 Writing HSPE aligned to current writing content standards Scores and scales have same meaning as previous assessments
Test Length Unchanged	Two Writing Sessions; about 120 min. each
Test Window	Writing HSPE given as paper/pencil test on March 17 & 18 No 9th grade testing Student scores before June 10 (Seniors before earliest graduation)
Online testing	No online testing with HSPE until 2011 Online testing of Writing HSPE will be voluntary in 2011

The MSP and the HSPE for writing in Grades 4, 7, and high school have the same test design characteristics as was used for the WASL writing tests of those grades. Washington’s writing assessments at each of those grade levels are direct writing tests in which a student responds to two prompts. Shortening the writing tests by removing one of the prompts was judged to be technically unsound, as it would seriously reduce the test’s reliability, and would substantially change the construct of the test, thus jeopardizing its validity.

Details of Number of Items and Points on MSP and HSPE

Tables 4a through 4c provide more detail about the shortening of the state’s assessments. Those tables show the changes to reading, mathematics, and science, respectively, from 2006 to 2011, and illustrate the 2009 reduction in test size, in accordance with ESHB 3166, and the

further shortening in 2010 consistent with ESSB 5414. In each table, “MC-Link” refers to Multiple Choice items that are linked to a passage or scenario. “MC-Alone” are Multiple Choice stand-alone items. “SA” are two-point Short Answer items requiring a written response. “ER” are four-point Extended Response items requiring a written response and “CP” are one-point Completion items that require a numerical or very short text response.

Table 4a – Items and Points on Statewide READING Tests; 2006 - 2011

Reading -- 2006 through 2008							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link	20	20	22	22	24	24	26
SA	6	7	7	8	8	9	9
ER	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total Items	28	29	31	32	34	35	37
Total Points	40	42	44	46	48	50	52
Reading -- 2009							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link	24	24	24	24	26	26	26
SA	6	6	7	7	7	7	9
ER	0	0	0	2	2	2	2
Total Items	30	30	31	33	35	35	37
Total Points	36	36	38	46	48	48	52
Reading -- 2010							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link	26	26	26	30	30	30	35
SA	4	4	4	5	5	5	5
Total Items	30	30	30	35	35	35	40
Total Points	34	34	34	40	40	40	45

Table 4a (continued)

Reading – 2011							
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link							
MC-Alone	26	26	26	30	30	30	35
CP							
SA	4	4	4	5	5	5	5
Total Items	30	30	30	35	35	35	40
Total Points	34	34	34	40	40	40	45

Table 4b – Items and Points on Statewide MATHEMATICS Tests; 2006 - 2011

Math -- 2006 through 2008							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Alone	23	21	21	27	27	27	27
SA	12	11	11	11	11	11	11
ER	0	3	3	4	4	4	4
Total Items	35	35	35	42	42	42	42
Total Points	55	55	55	65	65	65	65
Math -- 2009							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Alone	22	22	22	32	32	32	27
SA	8	8	8	8	8	8	11
ER	0	0	0	2	2	2	4
Total Items	30	30	30	42	42	42	42
Total Points	38	38	38	50	50	50	65
Math -- 2010 and 2011 (except HS in 2011 is End-of-Course)							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Alone	20	20	20	25	25	25	35
CP	6	6	6	5	5	5	0
SA	4	4	4	5	5	5	5
Total Items	30	30	30	35	35	35	40
Total Points	34	34	34	40	40	40	45

Table 4c – Items and Points on Statewide SCIENCE Tests; 2006 - 2011

Science -- 2006 through 2008							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link MC-Alone			21			28	28
SA			10			11	11
ER			2			3	3
Total Items			33			42	42
Total Points			49			62	62
Science -- 2009							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link MC-Alone			21			28	28
SA			8			7	11
ER			0			2	3
Total Items			29			37	42
Total Points			37			50	62
Science -- 2010 (2011 in Gr 5 & 8 and 2012 in HS are TBA with New Standards)							
Item Type	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
MC-Link MC-Alone			26			30	35
CP			0			0	0
SA			4			5	5
Total Items			30			35	40
Total Points			34			40	45

Reduction in Test Administration Time

ESSB 5414 requires the Superintendent to reduce the length of the 2010 assessments. This has been accomplished by following design principles:

- No more than 25 percent of the points on a test will come from constructed response (SA) items;
- Reading passages will have approximately 100 words per grade level (e.g., a Grade 5 reading passage will be about 500 words long);
- Test length will allow each test to be administered in a single session (75-minutes for Grades 3 through 5; 90-minutes for Grades 6 through 8; 120-minutes for high school); and

- Industry guidelines of one-minute per multiple choice item, five-minutes per two point item, five minutes per reading passage and ample time for pilot items will be used to estimate testing time.

One of the motivations for shortened tests was to reduce the amount of time that testing takes away from direct instruction. The following two tables compare the number of testing sessions (Table 5a) and recommended testing times (Table 5b) for 2008, 2009, and 2010.

Table 5a – Number of Testing Sessions in 2008, 2009, and 2010 by Subject Area

READING -- Number of Testing Sessions							
Year	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
2008	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2009	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2010	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
MATHEMATICS -- Number of Testing Sessions							
Year	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
2008	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
2009	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2010	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
SCIENCE -- Number of Testing Sessions							
Year			Grade 5			Grade 8	HS
2008			3			2	2
2009			2			2	2
2010			1			1	1

Table 5b – Recommended Testing Time in 2008, 2009, and 2010 by Subject Area

Reading -- Suggested Total Testing Time (from Test Coord. Manual)							
Year	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
2008	2:20	2:20	2:20	3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00
2009	2:20	2:20	2:20	3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00
2010	1:15	1:15	1:15	1:30	1:30	1:30	2:00
MATH -- Suggested Total Testing Time (from Test Coord. Manual)							
Year	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	HS
2008	4:30	4:30	4:30	3:00	3:00	3:00	4:00
2009	2:20	2:20	2:20	3:00	3:00	3:00	4:00
2010	1:15	1:15	1:15	1:30	1:30	1:30	2:00

Table 5b (continued)

SCIENCE -- Suggested Total Testing Time (from Test Coord. Manual)					
Year		Grade 5		Grade 8	HS
2008		4:30		3:00	3:00
2009		2:20		3:00	3:00
2010		1:15		1:30	2:00

Tables 5a and 5b clearly show that the tests have been substantially reduced in their administration times. Much of this reduction is due to the removal of four-point “extended response” items from the tests. Each one of these items can take fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

Reduction in Costs of the Assessment Program

The shortening of the tests was also motivated by a desire to reduce the overall cost of the state’s assessment system. That goal has been accomplished, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 – Contract Costs for Grades 3-8 and HS Reading, Math, Writing, and Science Before and After Repricing of Shortened Tests

Contract Year		Contract Cost
7/1/09 –	(before)	\$37,763,154
6/30/10	<u>(after)</u>	<u>\$30,255,239</u>
	<i>difference</i>	-\$7,507,915
7/1/10 –	(before)	\$38,963,960
6/30/11	<u>(after)</u>	<u>\$35,493,481</u>
	<i>difference</i>	-\$3,470,479
7/1/11 –	(before)	\$39,382,378
6/30/12	<u>(after)</u>	<u>\$36,945,618</u>
	<i>difference</i>	-\$2,436,760
TOTAL		
7/1/09 –	(before)	\$116,109,492
6/30/12	<u>(after)</u>	<u>\$102,694,338</u>
	<i>difference</i>	-\$13,415,154

Table 6 shows cost reductions of a little more than 14 percent for the biennium, realized as a nearly 20 percent for 2010, and about nine percent for 2011. The reductions across the three remaining years of the contract are 11.6 percent. These are savings associated with the two

main contracts for the state’s assessment program: Educational Testing Service (ETS) for item and test development and psychometric services; and Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) for test production, administration, scoring, and reporting – and include tests in Grades 3 through 8 and high school in reading, math, writing, and science, including all high school retests. The savings are net of the combination of savings associated with shortening of the tests and costs associated with development and phased-in implementation of online testing, discussed in more detail below. The changes in test design did not have an impact on costs associated with either the Washington Alternate Assessment System Portfolio or the Collection of Evidence.

Retaining Validity and Reliability and the Assessment of Critical Thinking Skills

A cautionary note that is well documented in the assessment literature is the relationship between a test’s overall length and its reliability. As tests get shorter, they tend to get less reliable. ESSB 5414 acknowledged this concern by directing the Superintendent to implement reductions in assessment costs and administration times while “retaining...reliability of the assessment...”

The diminished reliability of the test is a technical matter that can be mitigated to some extent by good item selection and test form design. Table 7 shows the impact that the shortening of the 2009 tests had on the reliability of those tests. Fortunately, the test design used for the shortened 2009 tests successfully dampened the effect of reduced reliability, and all 2009 tests had reliability coefficients above 0.84, with a median reliability of 0.87. The median change in reliability was only -0.02. The same design principles used to stabilize the reliability of the 2009 tests (e.g., reviewing “test characteristic curves” at test build to check for estimated conditional reliabilities) have been applied to the design of the 2010 tests.

Table 7 – Number of Points and Total-test Reliabilities (Cronbach’s Alpha) for 2008 and 2009 tests

Reading								
		Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	HS
2008	# Pts	40	42	44	46	48	50	52
	<i>Rel.</i>	0.89	0.88	0.87	0.87	0.88	0.88	0.87
2009	# Pts	36	36	38	46	48	48	52
	<i>Rel.</i>	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.87	0.88	0.86	0.86
Mathematics								
2008	# Pts	55	55	55	65	65	65	65
	<i>Rel.</i>	0.88	0.90	0.89	0.90	0.92	0.92	0.91
2009	# Pts	38	38	38	50	50	50	65
	<i>Rel.</i>	0.87	0.87	0.86	0.90	0.91	0.89	0.91

Table 7 (continued)

Science						
2008	# Pts		49		62	62
	<i>Rel.</i>		0.88		0.92	0.89
2009	# Pts		37		50	62
	<i>Rel.</i>		0.84		0.87	0.91

The reliability of a test captures the level of measurement imprecision that is inherent in the particular assessment. This is an important characteristic of a test and industry standards require test developers to attend to this property of their tests. More important than reliability, however, is a test’s validity. Test validity can best be defined as the extent to which decisions or inferences drawn from test results can be counted on as being reasonable and appropriate. ESSB 5414 recognized the importance of the test validity issue by requiring that the test changes be implemented “while retaining validity...of the assessment and retaining assessment of critical thinking skills.”

Several mechanisms are already in place to monitor the validity of the state’s assessments. Although Washington has used these validity checks for many years, they are now part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requirements for the quality of state assessment programs known as “Peer Review.” Federal peer review requires each state to submit documentation of the technical quality of its assessments for evaluation by a panel of assessment experts (the “peers”). Washington’s assessment program was determined to be “fully approved” by the US Department of Education in August, 2008. The changes implemented with the 2010 tests will require resubmission to the department for the technical quality of the state’s tests. That resubmission will include the results of the 46 “comparability studies” shown in Table 8, all designed to evaluate the validity of the MSP and HSPE.

One of the peer review elements that helps establish test validity and fairness is known as “equating”. Equating is a statistical procedure that assures that the level of knowledge and skills required to meet standard in one year is the same as the knowledge and skills required in any other year. Equating supports a fundamental fairness of a test by establishing that students are held to the same performance standard regardless of which year they take the test. In a “typical” year, Washington would conduct 17 equating studies: one each for the reading, math, and science tests in Grades 3 through 8 and high school. In 2010, eleven equating studies will be conducted for the ten reading and science tests plus the high school math test. (Because the Grades 3 through 8 math tests will be new tests aligned to new math standards, there will be no equating; instead, there will be an initial standard setting where the test scales will be developed. All future Grades 3 through 8 math tests will be equated back to the 2010 scales.) The eleven equating studies for 2010 are shown in Table 8 as the top (shaded) row for the reading and science tests and as the top cell for the high school math test.

Table 8 – Comparability Studies for 2010 Assessments

	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	HS
READ	Equate 2010 to 2009	Equate 2010 to 2009	Equate 2010 to 2009	Equate 2010 to 2009			
				Equate Online to P/P	Equate Online to P/P	Equate Online to P/P	
	Align MSP to Content Stds	Align MSP to Content Stds	Align MSP to Content Stds	Align HSPE to Content Stds			
MATH	Build new '10 scale and cuts	Build new '10 scale and cuts	Build new '10 scale and cuts	Build new '10 P/P scale and cuts	Build new '10 P/P scale and cuts	Build new '10 P/P scale and cuts	Equate 2010 to 2009
				Equate Online to P/P	Equate Online to P/P	Equate Online to P/P	
	Align new MSP to Content Stds	Align new MSP to Content Stds	Align new MSP to Content Stds	Align HSPE to Content Stds			
	Concordance betw. '09 and '10	Concordance betw. '09 and '10	Concordance betw. '09 and '10				
SCI			Equate 2010 to 2009			Equate 2010 to 2009	Equate 2010 to 2009
			Align MSP to Content Stds			Align MSP to Content Stds	Align HSPE to Content Stds

In a typical year, the equated tests can be assumed to carry the same test validity as the tests used in preceding years. With the redesigned MSP and HSPE tests, however, validation of the tests' alignment to the content standards must be re-established. Table 8 shows the 17 alignment studies that are being conducted to evaluate the alignment between the state's academic content standards and the new tests. Those are displayed as "Align MSP to Content Stds" or "Align HSPE to Content Stds" for reading, science, and high school math, and as "Align New MSP to Content Stds" for Grades 3 through 8 math. The peer review process requires that the alignment studies be conducted independent of those involved in item and test development, to avoid possible conflicts of interest. As such, an assessment firm independent of both OSPI and of ETS has been contracted to conduct the alignment studies. The alignment studies represent an important test validation procedure. If scores on the tests are going to be used to judge whether or not students have met the state's academic content standards, then the degree to which the tests are aligned to those content standards needs to be evaluated. The legislative requirement that the tests be redesigned while "retaining the assessment of critical thinking skills" will be judged by the extent to which the tests align with the critical thinking skills called for in the academic content standards.

Twelve comparability studies are uniquely associated with the new Grades 3 through 8 math tests. First, there are the six studies to establish the scale on the new tests. This is implemented through the standard setting procedure. The Legislature requires the Superintendent to work in collaboration with the SBE on a standard setting process, and has authorized the State Board to set cut scores for the various proficiency levels on the state's tests. Standard setting on the new Grade 3 through 8 math tests will be conducted in July and August after the tests have been scored, (i.e., after "raw" scores have been calculated for students), and will establish the "scale" scores for the tests. Once the new tests have been scaled, a second set of six "concordance" (or bridge) studies will be conducted. The concordance studies will link the new 2010 math scale to the old 2009 math scale. In the transition year from an old test to a new test that uses a new scale, it is common to build a set of concordance tables that show how a student's score on the new test would compare to a score on the old test. This is not only helpful for parents and teachers to interpret the scores on the new test, it is also necessary for the calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress for schools and districts. The new tests require establishing a new Uniform Bar that is the target Percent Meeting Standard for schools, districts and the state. The Uniform Bars for elementary and middle school grade levels were based on the WASL standards and new Bars need to be calculated for the new math tests. The concordance studies establish the "bridge" between the old Uniform Bars and the new ones.

Finally, six comparability studies will be conducted to equate the scores on the online forms of the tests to the paper-and-pencil forms. The state's transition to online testing in 2010 is discussed in more detail below. From a validity perspective, it is important to establish that scores on the tests are independent of the mode in which the test is taken. That is, a student should not be either advantaged or disadvantaged by taking the test using the online or the paper-and-pencil mode. Some states that have

implemented online tests have found that there is no mode effect and can use the same raw-to-scale score tables for both modes. Other states have found that there is a mode effect for their tests and use separate raw-to-scale score tables to ensure fairness. Washington will conduct mode-effect tests by equating the online tests to the paper-and-pencil tests and evaluating the impact of mode on the raw-to-scale tables.

Online Testing

In 2010, the state’s assessment program will begin a transition to online testing. Once fully implemented, online testing will be more cost effective than paper-and-pencil tests, with substantial cost savings in the printing, distribution, scanning, and storage of test booklets. Additionally, turnaround time can be reduced by the electronic submission of student responses. In the first few years, however, online testing requires additional resources for software development, additional data analysis, and minimal savings on booklet printing and shipping.

In this first year, the reading and mathematics tests in grades six through eight are available as online tests. Schools can volunteer at the grade and school level to participate in online testing (e.g., ABC Middle School: Grade 6 Math only; or XYZ Middle School: Grade 6 and 7 Math and Grade 7 and 8 Reading). There is an anticipated participation rate in 2010 of about 25 percent of the students in the state, expanding to about 80 percent in 2011 for grades six through eight. The online testing rollout will expand to other grades and subject areas so that by 2012 all tests will be available in an online mode.

Table 9 – Cost Differentials Between Redesign and Online Testing

Contract Differentials	2010	2011	2012
	-		
Test Redesign	\$10.2M	-\$6.3M	-\$6.0M
Online Transition	+\$2.7M	+\$2.8M	+\$3.6M
Net	-\$7.5M	-\$3.5M	-\$2.4M

Table 9 shows the cost impact through July 1, 2012, of online test development and implementation. The net savings of \$7.5 million, \$3.5 million, and \$2.4 million are the same as shown in Table 6.

Part II: Instructionally Supportive Formative Assessments

Section 1 of ESSB 5414 states that:

“The legislature finds that a statewide student assessment system should improve and inform classroom instruction, support accountability, and provide useful information to all levels of the educational system, including students, parents, teachers, schools, school districts, and the state.”

That section continues with an expectation that the Superintendent, “in consultation with the State Board of Education, shall begin design and development of an overall assessment system that meets the principles and characteristics described in this section.” Those principles and characteristics include “instructionally supportive formative assessments.”

Not much time has transpired since the passage of this legislation. A lot of time and energy have been diverted to addressing the impact of the state’s budgetary situation on the assessment program and to implementing the substantial redesign of the state’s summative accountability tests. Nevertheless, progress has been made in the area of formative assessments.

The Superintendent has established a new department of “Classroom Assessment Integration” (CA Integration), within the Division of Assessment and Student Information. That department has been resourced with director-level leadership and that position has been filled. The CA Integration department is responsible for developing and implementing a new formative assessment system in the state. The first deliverable will be formative assessments linked to the state’s new mathematics standards, with a target implementation date of fall 2010. The CA Integration department will also be the point of OSPI coordination for early kindergarten assessments. The Department of Early Learning, OSPI, and Thrive By Five are partnering on this project and a newly established position of coordinator of kindergarten assessment has been created. That position is partially grant funded and has been filled.

Since 2006, the Division of Assessment and Student Information has met regularly with a technical advisory committee (TAC) established specifically to advise the state on the legislatively-approved options for the Certificate of Academic Achievement, (CAA Options.) Now that the CAA options are well underway, the Division has re-purposed the CAA Options TAC to be a Formative Assessment TAC. This group is extremely well-suited to this task, as the membership of the CAA Options TAC was originally formed from individuals with expertise in classroom-based assessments. The members of the Formative Assessment TAC are:

- Dr. Barbara Plake, Emeritus, University of Nebraska;
- Dr. James Popham, Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles;

- Brian Rick, District Assessment Coordinator, Bellingham School District;
- Dr. Joe Ryan, Emeritus, Arizona State University;
- Nancy Skerritt, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Tahoma School District; and
- Dr. Michael Trevisan, Washington State University.

The Formative Assessment TAC has already met once since the beginning of the fiscal year and has several more meetings scheduled for the winter and spring, including a statewide symposium on formative assessment, aimed at engaging a broad array of stakeholders from across the state in helping set priorities to identify areas that would be most fruitful for the initial implementation of formative assessments.

Two elements identified by the Legislature for formative assessments spoke to issues of equity, stating that the assessments should:

“(g) Be culturally, linguistically, and cognitively relevant, appropriate, and understandable to each student taking the assessment;” and

“(i) Provide a way to analyze the assessment results relative to characteristics of the student such as, but not limited to, English language learners, gender, ethnicity, poverty, age, and disabilities;”

In September, OSPI was awarded a competitive Enhanced Assessment Grant by the federal Department of Education’s Institute for Educational Studies (IES) to investigate ways to enhance the validity of the state’s English language proficiency test, the Washington Language Proficiency Test II (WLPT-II). This grant was awarded to Washington as the lead state, in partnership with four other states and several research institutions. Although the WLPT-II is not a formative assessment, our participation in this grant opportunity will greatly expand the knowledge and sophistication of agency staff to issues of test validity for students in diverse populations. The CA Integration department will be fully engaged in the activities of this 18-month grant.

The broader context for formative assessments is somewhat in flux at this time. Nationally there are conversations about states collaborating to adopt common core content standards. Because formative assessments are most effective when they have a strong connection and alignment to the state’s content standards, some degree of caution should be exercised as long as the final direction about common core standards is not clear. That said, the Superintendent has made clear his expectation that formative assessments will begin to be made available for schools next fall. Staff will continue to update the Legislature as these efforts continue to develop.

Part III: Summary of Legislatively Alternatives, Analysis of Appeals Process and Review of the Alternate Assessment System

Section 2 of ESSB 5414 requires the Superintendent to “[r]evisit the alternative assessments, the appeals process, including considering authorizing local school districts to determine the outcome of an appeal by a student to demonstrate that he or she has the level of understanding of a content area assessed on the WASL necessary to meet the state standard but was unable to demonstrate that understanding on the assessment or an alternative assessment, and the WAAS-Portfolios for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. By December 1, 2009, the Superintendent shall make recommendations to the Legislature for improvements.” This section of this report provides:

- Details of the impact of the legislatively approved options available for students to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement,
- An analysis of the feasibility of authorizing appeals at the local level, and
- A summary of the findings and recommendations of a work group convened to develop recommendations to improve or alter the state’s alternate assessment, the WAAS-Portfolio.

Summary of Legislatively-Approved Alternatives

A variety of legislatively-approved options to earning a Certificate of Academic Achievement have been in use for the Classes of 2008 and 2009. These options have now been in place long enough for an interim report of their use to policymakers. Because the Class of 2008 was the first class of students required to meet assessment proficiency standards, the numbers from that class may not be reliable indicators of use patterns. The numbers from the Class of 2009 are probably more stable, and are presented below. It should be noted, however, that the use patterns from the Classes of 2008 and 2009 are actually very similar.

Table 10a shows the number and percent of students who met standard on the reading, writing, and mathematics requirements by means of the various options. For reading and writing about 94 percent and 95 percent, respectively, of the students in the Class of 2009 met the standards, with about 88 percent and 90 percent, respectively, meeting the standard via the state assessment, and about six percent and five percent by using options. For mathematics, even though students could meet graduation requirements without meeting the state standard, (by earning two additional mathematics credits after their 10th grade year), about 74 percent met standard by some means, with about 63 percent meeting standard on the assessment, and another 11 percent by using one of the options. For the Class of 2009 (and for the Class of 2008), we see that more than half of the students who did not meet the reading and writing standards are students for whom there is no test score whatsoever, and that only about two percent of the students who were tested did not meet standard in some fashion.

Table 10a – Class of 2009: Summary of Students Meeting Assessment Requirements by WASL and Options

	READING		WRITING		MATHEMATICS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Met Standard	63,386	94.40%	63,680	94.84%	49,593	73.86%
Via Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	59,417	88.49%	60,438	90.01%	42,071	62.66%
Via Washington Alternate Assessment System (Sp. Ed.)	2,654	3.95%	2,324	3.46%	2,593	3.86%
Via Certificate of Academic Achievement Options	559	0.83%	199	0.30%	4,168	6.21%
Via Special Waiver	756	1.13%	719	1.07%	761	1.13%
Tested: Not Met Standard	1,390	2.07%	1,062	1.58%	15,073	22.45%
No score	2,370	3.53%	2,404	3.58%	2,480	3.69%
TOTAL	67,146	100.00%	67,146	100.00%	67,146	100.00%

Table 10b – Class of 2009: Detail of Students Meeting Assessment Requirements by WASL and Options

	READING		WRITING		MATHEMATICS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Met Standard	63,386	94.40%	63,680	94.84%	49,593	73.86%
Via Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	59,417	88.49%	60,438	90.01%	42,071	62.66%
Via Washington Alternate Assessment System (Sp. Ed.)	2,654	3.95%	2,324	3.46%	2,593	3.86%
WASL- Basic	1,081	1.61%	1,130	1.68%	336	0.50%
WAAS Developmentally Appropriate WASL (DAW)	1,043	1.55%	442	0.66%	1,676	2.50%
WAAS Portfolio	453	0.67%	455	0.68%	447	0.67%
Locally Determined Assessments	77	0.11%	297	0.44%	134	0.20%
Via Certificate of Academic Achievement Options	559	0.83%	199	0.30%	4,168	6.21%
Collection of Evidence	296	0.44%	51	0.08%	3,000	4.47%
PSAT/SAT/ACT/AP	254	0.38%	142	0.21%	839	1.25%
WASL/Grades Comparison	9	0.01%	6	0.01%	329	0.49%
Via Special Waiver	756	1.13%	719	1.07%	761	1.13%
Out-of-State Waivers	737	1.10%	699	1.04%	741	1.10%
Awareness Level Waivers (Special Education)	9	0.01%	12	0.02%	12	0.02%
Special Circumstance Appeals	10	0.01%	8	0.01%	8	0.01%
Tested: Not Met Standard	1,390	2.07%	1,062	1.58%	15,073	22.45%
No score	2,370	3.53%	2,404	3.58%	2,480	3.69%
TOTAL	67,146	100.00%	67,146	100.00%	67,146	100.00%

Table 10a also shows that about 2,500 students in the Class of 2009 across subject areas take advantage of the options available for students with disabilities.

Table 10b provides a detail of the summaries shown in Table 10a. Three thousand of the roughly 3,550 students who met an assessment standard using the Collection of Evidence did so in mathematics. Likewise, the college exam and WASL/Grades Comparison options are used for mathematics much more frequently than in reading or writing. This is likely due to the fact that the reading and writing tests have such high pass rates. Overall, the legislatively-approved options appear to be used by a few students in reading and writing, and by many students in mathematics. The Alternate Assessment System appears to be used by about the same number of students in each of the three content areas.

Of all the options, the Washington Alternate Assessment System Developmentally Appropriate WASL (WAAS-DAW) and the Collection of Evidence require the most resources. (The WAAS-Portfolio requires substantial resources, too. Strictly speaking, however, it is not a “legislatively-approved option, as it is part of the overall NCLB testing for the state. The WAAS-Portfolio costs about \$315 per student during the 2008-2009 school year. The costs of the WAAS-DAW was reduced in 2009 by using grade span tests for reading and mathematics, (an Elementary form, using the third grade booklet, and a Middle level form using the sixth grade booklet), which reduced printing and scoring costs. Nevertheless, the WAAS-DAW uses lower-level test booklets from a previous year, which have already been scaled to the WASL scale scores, requiring a separate print order and scoring set-up. The per-student cost of the WAAS-DAW is about \$33 for each content area. With about 12,000 students in Grades 11 and 12 participating across all subjects, the total cost of the WAAS-DAW is about \$400,000. The cost of the Collection of Evidence is partitioned into two parts: the cost for processing, scoring, and reporting and the district reimbursement cost that is built into the Collection of Evidence program. The processing/scoring/reporting cost, which includes overhead costs for program maintenance, is about \$245 per test. The program also provides a reimbursement to the districts of \$300 per collection. This reimbursement was built into the original budget request for the Collection of Evidence and was established in recognition of the fact that compiling a collection required supervision and guidance of certificated personnel at the school level. The numbers shown in Tables 10a and 10b are for students who needed to use the Collection of Evidence to meet standard. Many more students take the Collection of Evidence and either do not meet standard, or simultaneously take the state assessment, and meet standard using the standard test mode. (To avoid duplicated counts, Tables 10a and 10b only report students in a single row.) A total of about 9,400 students took the Collection of Evidence in 2008-2009 with a total contract cost of \$2.3 million and a reimbursement cost of about \$2.8 million. The 2009 Legislature ceased the use of the Collection of Evidence for mathematics, until it becomes a graduation requirement for an entering eleventh grade class. Since most of the Collections were for mathematics, this should reduce the cost of this program.

Analysis of Appeals Process

In response to legislative direction to review assessment alternatives and appeal processes, staff brought the proposal of transferring appeal situations to the local districts to the Certificate of Academic Achievement Options Technical Advisory Committee (CAA Options TAC). The CAA Options TAC is a committee specifically convened to advise staff thinking in regard to the state's alternative assessment designs and processes. The CAA Options TAC is made up of three national assessment experts, one state university professor, and two school district administrators – one a director for Teaching and Learning, the other a District Assessment Coordinator. For this meeting, one of the national expert members was unable to attend. Staff briefed the CAA Options TAC on the procedures used in implementing the appeal process and responded to inquiries regarding program statistics and processes.

RCW 28A.655.065 reads, in part, that “[b]y January 1, 2007, guidelines and appeal processes for waiving specific requirements in RCW 28A.655.061 pertaining to the certificate of academic achievement and to the certificate of individual achievement for students who: (i) Transfer to a Washington public school in their junior or senior year with the intent of obtaining a public high school diploma, or (ii) *have special, unavoidable circumstances.*” (italics added.) The Special, Unavoidable Circumstance Appeal process (codified in WAC 392-501-600 through 606) was first implemented in the spring of 2008. The purpose and function of this specific appeal process was to give consideration to cases where students while in twelfth grade, had experienced situations precluding them from taking an approved state assessment or an approved alternative through which the students could fulfill the state's graduation requirements.

The Special, Unavoidable Circumstance Appeal process requires the submission of an application, with supporting narrative of the situation and evidentiary-type information that is used in evaluating a student's petition for waiver of the state's graduation requirements linked to assessment. The review of the petition requires two stages of review:

- A. First, determining that the student's situation meets the eligibility criteria for the process. Specifically:
 - i. Was the student a current twelfth grader when the situation occurred; and
 - ii. Was the situation an unavoidable circumstance that precluded the student from taking an annual state-approved assessment?
- B. Second, for appeals requests that meet eligibility criteria, evaluating if the student's supporting academic records (e.g., transcripts, other standardized test results, etc.) provide evidence of mastery of the requisite skills in the applicable content areas.

In early spring 2008, staff began recruiting for membership on the Special, Unavoidable Circumstance Review Panel. State organizations linked to the experiential aspects of ideal candidates were approached, specifically principal and teacher organizations.

Multiple candidates were approached about membership with six individuals being willing and able to accept appointment to the panel. The membership of the current panel includes two former principals, one current assistant principal, (and former district assessment coordinator), two former classroom teachers, and one former superintendent. A chairperson is elected by panel members, and by procedure must be a current or former principal; with the existing panel membership, one of the former principals was elected chair.

The panel's first meeting was scheduled for three work sessions, Day 1 convened on May 13, 2008, with Days 2 and 3 following on May 20 and 22, respectively. The Day 1 work session began with general orientation training of the panel members, which included review of the governing WACs, a question-and-answer period for members to clarify any issues, and a walk-through of the processes to be used in evaluating and deliberating student cases. During the orientation period, the Assistant Superintendent for Assessment and Student Information, and the agency's representative from the Attorney General's Office (AG) participated to ensure the panel's charge and the understanding of the legal authority was understood by all. When Day 1 work moved into the initial case reviews, both the Assistant Superintendent and the AG liaison remained until the lunch break to ascertain the fidelity of the process.

The work of this initial convening of the panel proceeded through the two stages described above: Each narrative that was submitted and the student's application was read; panel members evaluated the merits of the narrative in contrast to the eligibility criteria; and circumstances that were deemed adequate against the criteria moved on to the second stage, while circumstances less than aligned with the criteria were dismissed as insufficient in the meeting the eligibility requirements. The second stage was then a review of the academic records submitted in the application, typically an evaluation of the student's transcript to determine if a student revealed enough content mastery through a four-year high school career.

Upon reviewing each case's relevant data and exchanging questions and insights regarding interpretation of submitted information, panel members are asked to vote by the panel chair. The panel operates under a consensus decision model; in instances where less than consensus was apparent, prior to a vote the panel deliberates further on the information to ensure clarity and understanding are complete. The result of each vote turns into a recommendation to the Superintendent either to approve or decline the petition to waive the state's assessment requirements for the applicant in the relevant content area(s).

Panel sessions subsequent to the initial convening have had the two-stage process modified. Recognizing that the eligibility criteria are well defined, the stage 1 evaluation was removed from the Appeals Panel workload, and moved to both a district assessment coordinator review before applications are sent forward to the state and an OSPI staff review before applications are sent to the panel. This allows local and state staff to identify shortcomings or missing elements in applications and have them

completed before the panel needs to convene; it has also reduced the amount of time the panel needs to meet for the stage 2 evaluations – the critical element of reviewing the academic records by credentialed educators to make determinations of student mastery of skills. With increased familiarity of the process among field administrators and the modified stage 1 process, Panel time has been reduced to three to four hours versus multiple days involved in case evaluations.

In the two years of implementing the special, unavoidable circumstance appeal process, the panel has been convened on five occasions, three in calendar year 2008 and two in calendar year 2009. After the first year, the governing WACs were revised to remove the August review cycle, as no cases were brought forward in August 2008. In those five sessions, a total of 206 appeals have been reviewed. The statistics are shown in Table 11, below. (The numbers in this table do not perfectly align with those in Tables 10a and 10b because some appeals were for more than one content area.)

Table 11 – Approved and Declined Special Circumstance Appeals – 2008 and 2009

Session Cycle	Total Appeals	Approved Appeals	Declined Appeals
May 2008	162	116	46
August 2008	0	0	0
October 2008	14	11	3
May 2009	28	24	4
October 2009	2	2	0
TOTAL	206	153	53

The experience of the program and the procedures described above were presented to the CAA Options TAC, posing the question of the feasibility of a locally-administered appeals process in lieu of the process currently used. CAA Options TAC members raised the following points; there was consensus among members that these are areas of concern requiring due consideration when evaluating potential modifications:

- Members could find no technical concerns with the procedures currently in place as outlined.
- The step in the application process for district review, (by the district assessment coordinator), added after the 2008 sessions, has ensured a smoother process.
- It would be very difficult to assure that multiple local panels would consistently apply the same criteria for their judgments, particularly across time as panel memberships changed from year to year.
- A locally-managed student appeals process would not be able to establish or validate equity across the state. The receipt of a high school diploma has been viewed as a property right that a state cannot deny without due process. For the state assessment requirement, this necessitates a system in which all students are treated fairly and judged against the same criteria. Perceptions of lack of fairness or equal application of the criteria from locale to locale could jeopardize the integrity of the graduation requirement and/or lead to legal entanglements.

- Having the appeal process administered outside the districts alleviates pressure to make compensations for students known within the local school system; it removes the perception of potential conflicts of interest. The opportunity or temptation to do what is expedient versus what is appropriate is mitigated.
- District representatives, specifically, were appreciative of having the determination responsibilities residing outside the district, and shared generic case histories known to them that had unfolded as intended with the current process.

It was the consensus opinion of the CAA Options TAC that the current appeal process was sound in its technical implementation and that it mitigated concerns of equity and due process, relieving pressures on local education authorities in making graduation determinations for the handful of students who find themselves in situations needing decisions regarding graduation rendered on information other than assessment performance. Staff concurs with this finding and recommends that the Legislature not establish a local appeal procedure.

From a cost effectiveness perspective, each convening of the panel expends approximately \$750 in resources. There have been no disputes to-date over any of the Panel's decisions.

Review of the Alternate Assessment System: The WAAS-Portfolio Work Group

A WAAS-Portfolio Work Group was established in spring 2009 to consider improvements or changes to the state's alternate assessment, the WAAS-Portfolio. Under NCLB, each state is required to develop an assessment that is an alternate to the standard assessment. One of the alternate assessments a state can develop is an assessment for students with "severe cognitive impairments." Assessments for these students should be designed to assess a student's attainment of what NCLB refers to as "alternate achievement standards," that is, achievement standards that are not at the same performance level as the state's regular assessment. In 2001, Washington began use of the WAAS-Portfolio that records, compiles, and submits a student's body of work documenting progress across the year on "targeted skills." Since that time, the Portfolio has gone through several changes to come into compliance with NCLB peer review requirements. Although Washington's WAAS-Portfolio has been fully approved through the NCLB peer review process, it is by no means the only approach to assessing students with severe cognitive disabilities. Additionally, the portfolios themselves are labor intensive. In recognition of these factors, the Superintendent and his staff collaborated with the Washington Education Association to convene the WAAS-Portfolio Work Group, which was charged to:

"...forward recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction for changing, modifying or maintaining the WAAS-Portfolio component of Washington's alternate assessment system. The recommendations shall be consistent with the current federal requirements for assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities and shall consider other approaches to Washington's current alternate assessment. The recommendations shall

consider fiscal, programmatic, and instructional issues in the design, implementation, and the scoring of the alternate assessment.”

The Work Group comprised a broad representation of stakeholders from classrooms, school districts, Educational Service Districts, and the community at-large who were knowledgeable in the education and assessment of students with severe cognitive disabilities.

The Work Group met on four occasions for a total of five work days from March to August. Meetings included numerous presentations from education and testing professionals at both the national and state level, intended to provide foundational elements for all work groups members. Each meeting also addressed one or more particular tasks intended to guide efforts to the objective of generating the recommendations for the Superintendent.

The activities from all the meetings included uncovering participant concerns with the existing assessment program, identifying program themes linked with both serving the target student population, meeting the requirements and intent of state and federal legislative mandates, giving attention to critical elements of the existing program, (specifically graduation requirements and learning standards extensions, where focused modifications could improve program implementation), and engaging in dialogue with external educational professionals, (i.e., other states’ education agency staff and one testing company with a long history of working with the target population), about existing programs in use.

The Work Group then took all the information from these four meetings, worked through an iterative authoring process and met one final time to brief the Superintendent on the efforts of the group. Below is the list of recommendations from the Work Group to the Superintendent.

1. Establish the Special Education Assessment Advisory Committee.
2. Clarify the characteristics of students who are appropriate to be assessed against alternate achievement standards.
3. Continue to use the current WAAS-Portfolio, while developing extensions of the state’s academic content standards that reach deeper to better address the variety of performance levels of students with significant cognitive disabilities.
4. Reduce workload demands associated with the implementation of the alternate assessment.
5. Devise equitable legislatively-approved alternatives to the state-level graduation assessment requirements that are comparable to those available for the general education population.
6. Integrate functional and life skills with academic skills in the assessment of students with significant cognitive disabilities.
7. Develop an assessment for less cognitively impaired students based on modified achievement standards, (often referred to as the “2 percent test”).

8. Establish additional funding to train, implement, and administer the alternate assessment.
9. Develop a funding model that enhances educator knowledge of the assessment system that assists with both initial and advanced teacher preparation efforts.
10. Work with other state superintendents to request a federal review of the validity of assessments of alternate achievement standards in use across states.

It should be noted that the above recommendations, though presented by the Work Group to the Superintendent, have not been fully vetted within OSPI and should not be viewed as an intended legislative agenda for the upcoming session. Nevertheless, the Superintendent has directed staff to develop draft legislation that might address recommendation 5. Currently, students with severe cognitive disabilities can only acquire a diploma by meeting standard on the WAAS-Portfolio. The Legislature has recognized for general education students that there are some students who are not able, for whatever reason, to demonstrate their knowledge and skill on the state's standard assessment. For these students the Legislature has established "legislatively-approved alternatives" to the standard assessments. Recommendation 5 suggests that a parallel situation exists for students with severe cognitive disabilities, and that there should be an opportunity for students to demonstrate their individualized level of knowledge and skill beyond the WAAS-Portfolio.

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building
P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200

For more information about the contents
of this document, please contact:
Cheryl Cervantes, OSPI
E-mail: Cheryl.Cervantes@k12.wa.us
Phone: (360) 725-6334

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Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building
P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200
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